

Report to St. Mary's Annual Meeting January 29 2017 on 222<sup>nd</sup> Annual Convention in Reston VA

Kitty Williams

Good Morning!

I hope I can communicate even a small fraction of the spirit and the resolve that permeated the Annual Convention of Episcopal Diocese of Virginia on Friday and Saturday. If I can, you will understand what an enormous privilege it was for me to join the St. Mary's Delegation in representing you, the people of St. Mary's.

Our rector Weezie Blanchard and associate rector Bob Hetherington, along with Betsey Rawles, Matt Rawls, Robin and I came away inspired, comforted, ready to "put on our Jesus shoes," and reach out to our neighbors, whoever and wherever they may be.

Thanks to Twitter, particularly #diovacon for taking my notes for me.

**Bishop Shannon Johnson** pastoral address set the tone with a call to activism, saying,

- "I am not willing to cede to the Alt Right – or the fringe left and rejecting polarization in the church and the country. We are a church of "both/and" not "either and he reminded us that "Fear driven isolationist nationalism with self interest as an idol is terrifying."
- He spoke about
  - ways the diocese is working to increase connect in the churches in the diocese
  - Redesigning episcopal visits to allow bishops to stay with each church community long enough to meet with vestries and other groups outside the services,
  - Intercultural ministries, and his pride in efforts of racial reconciliation, which were an urgent priority in 2016 and remain a priority.
- He powerfully affirmed that our bishops would be with ALL of our ethnically specific congregations in time of unease, saying unequivocally:
- "I will gladly suffer arrests for civil disobedience, because it's that important."
- He announced the formation of interfaith school for reconciliation and peace with Truro Church
- He reported growth: 24 of 180 churches maintained levels or grew; over 2014-5, 35 churches reported double-digit growth.

One of the high points of the whole event was the Keynote Address by Bishop **Robert Wright** of Atlanta who addressed the theme of the convention "Walk in Love" reminding us that

- Jesus never said "wait and welcome;" he said "go and make."
- "This is not a red or blue sermon. This is a baptized sermon." He quoted Dr. King: justice is love revolting against anything and everything that is not love.
- "Our church is going to have to walk towards young people more intentionally.
- "God left the gated community called heaven to walk among us.
- No one can do everything, but everyone can do something.

### **Bishop Susan Goff**

"This year...we have put on our gospel shoes; they have taken us to places where love is manifest & achingly needed." She too reiterated support of minorities threatened with discrimination and deportation.

"We strap on our Gospel shoes and walk in love because we are made by God, who loves us fiercely."

She reminded us that we are biased, she reminded us. And when people accuse us of being biased, we should embrace that because IT IS A JESUS BIAS!

She had many in tears.

**Bishop Ted Gulick** called us to discipleship –

- Quoting Presiding Bishop Curry " Get up from our knees and walk for Justice.
- "We are not going to divide the body of Christ based on the decisions we made on November 8."
- It is as difficult to build a mosque in Culpeper VA as it is to build a church in Saudi Arabia.
- I blame you our Bishop will risk arrest for civil disobedience to stand for all people You elected him!
- He reminded us that we are all crucial and that this is a crucial time.
- And he asked How will we baptized people be radical disciples for Christ?
- Let's get out there & love!

**Mission partners around the world** To Eastern Congo and Brazil and Jerusalem, Israel, West Bank, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, from England to Ghana to Sri Lanka to Guatemala @TheDioceseVA reaches far & wide to serve all people in Christ's love!

Buck Blanchard, (the director of Mission & Outreach for the Diocese): "We don't just 'walk in love,' we fly, we bike, we drive. Magic happens on the road!"

**Stories of the diocese** included

- A panel on interfaith relations and the polarization of politics with speakers from the left and right answering hard questions with honesty and civility.
- A group of third graders from St. Stephens/St. Agnes talked about using design thinking to make a difference with an intergenerational service project, prompting one tweeter to write “Takeaway from @SSSASsaints presentation during Stories of the Diocese: These kids will soon run the world”
- No parish is too small to feed the hungry. Amazing story from St. Mary's Whitechapel's River Road Food Pantry #
- The drum ministry from St Francis Korean Episcopal Church. #

**Resolutions** – expanding family leave benefits funded by the Church Pension Group; advocating wider healthcare for the poor in Virginia passed unanimously

**Reports** – alcohol policy, regional revisioning, ECW working to end human trafficking

Please see the St. Mary’s newsletter for instructions on how to find video links and transcripts