The Alabama Episcopalian
March/April 2014

Young people from around our diocese leading Compline on Friday evening. Photo by Blake Britton.

“This year, in an effort to ‘Sing to the Lord a New Song,’ we’re greatly reducing the number of resolutions,” Bishop Sloan told the delegates at our 183rd Annual Diocesan Convention. That allowed everyone to spend more time honestly and openly discussing issues and praying together rather than engaging in potentially divisive debates. Many of the presentations and group meetings focused on the convention theme “Inspire,” which prompted lively personal stories about “what it means to inspire and be inspired.” For more about convention, please see Bishop Sloan’s address on page 3, Bishop Marray’s address on page 8, and additional articles and photos on this page and pages 10, 15, and 24 as well as online at http://bit.ly/1prleU1.

For the second year in a row, young people from around our diocese participated in the Diocesan Convention Youth Lock-in and played an active role in the convention as delegates and worship leaders. Please read the reflections written by three of our youth leaders about their experiences on page 15.

The youth of our diocese will be very busy sharing God’s love with others this summer at special sessions and the rest of the “Best SUMMER CAMP EVER!!!” (please see page 18). Young People Paint Birmingham (page 16), the CREATE event at Bethany @ Camp McDowell (page 16), and Sawyerville Day Camp (page 19).

All young adults (age 23 and up) are invited to gather at Camp McDowell on April 25-27 for a spiritual retreat led by the Rev. Doug Carpenter. For more information please see page 22.

To find out how Bethany Village is continuing to progress “from dirt and dreams to reality,” please see page 22. Additional articles about the youth leaders’ role in the convention as delegates and worship leaders. Please read the reflections written by three of our youth leaders about their experiences on page 15.

For the second year in a row, young people from around our diocese participated in the Diocesan Convention Youth Lock-in and played an active role in the convention as delegates and worship leaders. Please read the reflections written by three of our youth leaders about their experiences on page 15.

The youth of our diocese will be very busy sharing God’s love with others this summer at special sessions and the rest of the “Best SUMMER CAMP EVER!!!” (please see page 18). Young People Paint Birmingham (page 16), the CREATE event at Bethany @ Camp McDowell (page 16), and Sawyerville Day Camp (page 19).

All young adults (age 23 and up) are invited to gather at Camp McDowell on April 25-27 for a spiritual retreat led by the Rev. Doug Carpenter. For more information please see page 22.

To find out how Bethany Village is continuing to progress “from dirt and dreams to reality,” please see page 22. Additional articles about the youth leaders’ role in the convention as delegates and worship leaders. Please read the reflections written by three of our youth leaders about their experiences on page 15.

For the second year in a row, young people from around our diocese participated in the Diocesan Convention Youth Lock-in and played an active role in the convention as delegates and worship leaders. Please read the reflections written by three of our youth leaders about their experiences on page 15.

The youth of our diocese will be very busy sharing God’s love with others this summer at special sessions and the rest of the “Best SUMMER CAMP EVER!!!” (please see page 18). Young People Paint Birmingham (page 16), the CREATE event at Bethany @ Camp McDowell (page 16), and Sawyerville Day Camp (page 19).

All young adults (age 23 and up) are invited to gather at Camp McDowell on April 25-27 for a spiritual retreat led by the Rev. Doug Carpenter. For more information please see page 22.

To find out how Bethany Village is continuing to progress “from dirt and dreams to reality,” please see page 22. Additional articles about the youth leaders’ role in the convention as delegates and worship leaders. Please read the reflections written by three of our youth leaders about their experiences on page 15.

For the second year in a row, young people from around our diocese participated in the Diocesan Convention Youth Lock-in and played an active role in the convention as delegates and worship leaders. Please read the reflections written by three of our youth leaders about their experiences on page 15.

The youth of our diocese will be very busy sharing God’s love with others this summer at special sessions and the rest of the “Best SUMMER CAMP EVER!!!” (please see page 18). Young People Paint Birmingham (page 16), the CREATE event at Bethany @ Camp McDowell (page 16), and Sawyerville Day Camp (page 19).

All young adults (age 23 and up) are invited to gather at Camp McDowell on April 25-27 for a spiritual retreat led by the Rev. Doug Carpenter. For more information please see page 22.

To find out how Bethany Village is continuing to progress “from dirt and dreams to reality,” please see page 22. Additional articles about the youth leaders’ role in the convention as delegates and worship leaders. Please read the reflections written by three of our youth leaders about their experiences on page 15.

For the second year in a row, young people from around our diocese participated in the Diocesan Convention Youth Lock-in and played an active role in the convention as delegates and worship leaders. Please read the reflections written by three of our youth leaders about their experiences on page 15.

The youth of our diocese will be very busy sharing God’s love with others this summer at special sessions and the rest of the “Best SUMMER CAMP EVER!!!” (please see page 18). Young People Paint Birmingham (page 16), the CREATE event at Bethany @ Camp McDowell (page 16), and Sawyerville Day Camp (page 19).

All young adults (age 23 and up) are invited to gather at Camp McDowell on April 25-27 for a spiritual retreat led by the Rev. Doug Carpenter. For more information please see page 22.

To find out how Bethany Village is continuing to progress “from dirt and dreams to reality,” please see page 22. Additional articles about the youth leaders’ role in the convention as delegates and worship leaders. Please read the reflections written by three of our youth leaders about their experiences on page 15.

For the second year in a row, young people from around our diocese participated in the Diocesan Convention Youth Lock-in and played an active role in the convention as delegates and worship leaders. Please read the reflections written by three of our youth leaders about their experiences on page 15.

The youth of our diocese will be very busy sharing God’s love with others this summer at special sessions and the rest of the “Best SUMMER CAMP EVER!!!” (please see page 18). Young People Paint Birmingham (page 16), the CREATE event at Bethany @ Camp McDowell (page 16), and Sawyerville Day Camp (page 19).

All young adults (age 23 and up) are invited to gather at Camp McDowell on April 25-27 for a spiritual retreat led by the Rev. Doug Carpenter. For more information please see page 22.

To find out how Bethany Village is continuing to progress “from dirt and dreams to reality,” please see page 22. Additional articles about the youth leaders’ role in the convention as delegates and worship leaders. Please read the reflections written by three of our youth leaders about their experiences on page 15.

For the second year in a row, young people from around our diocese participated in the Diocesan Convention Youth Lock-in and played an active role in the convention as delegates and worship leaders. Please read the reflections written by three of our youth leaders about their experiences on page 15.

The youth of our diocese will be very busy sharing God’s love with others this summer at special sessions and the rest of the “Best SUMMER CAMP EVER!!!” (please see page 18). Young People Paint Birmingham (page 16), the CREATE event at Bethany @ Camp McDowell (page 16), and Sawyerville Day Camp (page 19).

All young adults (age 23 and up) are invited to gather at Camp McDowell on April 25-27 for a spiritual retreat led by the Rev. Doug Carpenter. For more information please see page 22.

To find out how Bethany Village is continuing to progress “from dirt and dreams to reality,” please see page 22. Additional articles about the youth leaders’ role in the convention as delegates and worship leaders. Please read the reflections written by three of our youth leaders about their experiences on page 15.
Bishop Sloan’s Diocesan Convention Address

Almighty and everliving God, source of all wisdom and understanding, be present with us as we take counsel in the 183rd Convention of the Diocese of Alabama for the renewal and mission of your Church. Teach us in all things to seek first your honor and glory. Guide us to perceive what is right, and grant us both the courage to pursue it and the grace to accomplish it; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (Book of Common Prayer, page 818)

Y’all might want to get comfortable; this is the longest address I’ve ever given. The word count on my computer says it’s perilously close to 5,000 words. Well, I use some of them more than once, but still, that’s a lot of words, and a lot of listening, and I thank you in advance for your patience.

Every year when I write this, I am reminded of how very much we have to be grateful for in the Diocese of Alabama. The best part of our convention will not be this bishop’s address—it never is. As it is ever year, the best part of us coming together as the family of God and all those reports that people hear and see about what we are doing and what we will do by God’s grace. From Camp McDowell and Episcopal Relief and Development to Sawyerville Day Camp and the surprisingly un-boring report from the Diocesan Council and many more, we continue to tell the story of the love of God through Jesus Christ.

There are far too many people to thank for the work of our Church in this past year, and as sure as I start naming names I’m going to forget somebody we’ll all wish I had remembered. But still, I can never thank my brother Santosh and our diocesan staff enough for all the work they do and the loving, patient, and joyful way they do it. I thank God for all of them, for all of their work and support. I also thank Miss Tina and our children for their love and patience and for helping keep me real. One of our children is here as a delegate this year, but I’m not naming names because I’m not sure she’s ever forgiven us for singing her “Happy Birthday” when she turned 16.

I want to thank Norma McKittrick, the editor of The Apostles and The Alabama Episcopalian, who is leaving that position after 17 years of faithful service. And again, I want to thank Denise Servant for putting up with all of us for 30 years: seven bishops, hundreds of priests, thousands and thousands of greetings cheerfully given on the phone and at the door, and all with a genuine smile that shows us the love of God—just incredible.

There are way too many things that I need to bring to your attention—dates for your calendars, events for your consideration, and I won’t remember all of them either. But I do want to promote the Invite—Welcome—Connect Workshops coming up—you have this stand-up tent brochure on your tables with all the details. It’s an exciting way for us to welcome and incorporate visitors and newcomers.

I want to call your attention to the upcoming ONE Conference; there is also a brochure about it on your table with all the details. This is a cooperative venture between the Department of Christian Education, the Parish Leadership Training Event, and the Commission on Spirituality to offer a weekend for people to come together and learn about Christian education for adults. There will be speakers and activities for young and old—a Grand Time Will Be Had By All.

I want to welcome, and I hope you’ve seen, the Rev. Barry Vaughn, who served several congregations in our diocese before moving way out west to Las Vegas, Nevada. We’re glad Barry is here and that he brought with him copies of his history of the diocese.

We are stewards, you and I, of a wonderful part of God’s holy Church, and it’s appropriate to count ourselves blessed. Still there are things we need to do better—there always are. I recently heard somebody say that stewardship is always about more than money, but it’s never about less than money. If it is God’s work we are about, we can’t afford to be bashful about giving our people the opportunity to give. And we can’t afford to be bashful about expecting the parishes to support the diocese. We have to do our best if we hope to be good stewards of God’s Church.

We are at a point in our Church where we are holding fast to that which is good—and we have so much to hold on to—and at the same time we’re striving to sing to the Lord a new song. This is the challenge for the Episcopal Church in the decade to come. How can we be who we are and be more than we are?

The Commission on Ministry has reinvented the discernment process for people who feel a call to ordained ministry so that it’s richer and fuller, and they are working on a new process that will train people locally to become nonstipendiary or bivocational priests. I’m grateful to the Rev. Russell Kendrick, the chair of the Commission on Ministry, and to the good people on that commission who have committed their energy and enthusiasm to these projects.

We are starting a new ministry in Birmingham aimed at offering a fresh expression of our faith. It’s called The Abbey—there’s a booth out there, and we’ll see a video shortly. It’s a place for people to gather, a coffee shop, a bookstore, a place for faith, for exploration, conversation, and community. We have received a grant from the Episcopal Church, a First Mark of Mission grant, and I think it’s very exciting that we’re doing this, a new way to offer the grace of God through Jesus Christ to the 21st century. We’ll hear much more about The Abbey as it continues to develop, but for now I want to thank the Rev. Katie Nakamura Rengers for her vision and energy and leadership, the Rev. Rich Webster and St. Luke’s for their generosity with her time, making it possible for her to do a lot of
We’ve also received a grant to help start a program called Be the Change Alabama, a cooperation with the School of Theology at Sewanee and the Leadership Development Institute to empower and train parishes and seminarians to find systemic changes in local communities to address the needs of the economically disadvantaged, not just treating the symptoms but also addressing the causes. More to come—stay tuned.

We’ve also received a grant to help start a program called Be the Change Alabama, a cooperation with the School of Theology at Sewanee and the Leadership Development Institute to empower and train parishes and seminarians to find systemic changes in local communities to address the needs of the economically disadvantaged, not just treating the symptoms but also addressing the causes. More to come—stay tuned.

As we get closer to our diocesan convention every year people start asking me if there’s going to be any excitement—meaning, do we have anything to fight about? I remember asking bishops the same question when I sat out there with y’all, not that I wanted to be a part of any hullabaloo but because all those disagreements and all that sparring was just more entertaining than statistics, more interesting than pieces of paper filled with numbers in columns, as much as we love those.

Now I’m standing up here, and it seems clear to me that we ought to be able to find better ways to entertain ourselves when we come together, a way that doesn’t have winners and losers, a more loving way. So this year, in an effort to Sing to the Lord a New Song, we are greatly reducing the number of resolutions. This might be a dumb idea—it won’t be the first dumb idea I’ve ever had, and I hope it won’t be the last dumb idea I have. This year we will gather in groups to worship this afternoon and to have conversations, conversations in which our best efforts will be to listen to each other, to really try to hear one another, without spending a lot of time and effort trying to win the conversation or figure out how to amend an amendment to the substitute resolution.

I’m not sure this is going to work, and we may never do it again. But I am very sure that fighting as a form of entertainment is not the best expression of the love and faith that makes us God’s holy Church. (Let the minutes reflect that I got an unsolicited “Amen.”)

As Santosh said last night, we’re in the second year of a three-year progression of themes for our diocesan conventions: Invite, Inspire, Transform. Last year, as a way for me to engage your imagination as we talked about inviting and being invited, I told you the story of the first time I went to summer camp, in 1971. I flatter myself to think you might remember something I said, but just in case you weren’t here—I was 15 years old, a friend talked me into signing up to be a volunteer counselor at the Episcopal Church Camp in Mississippi, my dad dropped me off hours before the session began, and one of the cool kids invited me to play cards. (That’s sort of the Readers’ Digest version of the story. I don’t want to punish the people who actually did pay attention.) That game of cards included me and changed my life.

Now I want to use your imagination again and tell you a story about being inspired. For me this is the story of my being inspired. After that inclusive, life-changing game of cards, the camp session I’d volunteered for went off just as they planned it: The training session got us all set, the campers came and had a great time, and so did I. For the first time in my 15-year-old life, I felt like I was part of something other than my family, part of a loving community. It wasn’t theological or especially deep—I just felt for the first time in my life that I wasn’t a misfit. What a gift it is to be accepted, what a gift it is to have a place to belong.

Toward the end of that session, the older counselors started talking about another session coming up, a session for people with mental and physical disabilities. They needed more counselors, they said, especially guys, they said. As they talked about the session and the campers who would be coming, they told stories. If they told stories about how sweet and loving and wise and wonderful these campers were, I don’t remember them now. The stories I remember were about the people who were scary and difficult and nasty. They told a story about a man in a wheelchair who had one arm that was withered up, but his other arm was as big as your leg, and if you got too close he’d reach out and grab you! They told another story about another camper, whose name was Marion, who was standing next to someone who’d caught a fish in the lake, and in the excitement of the moment, he took the fish
and bit it—on the dorsal fin on the back, so that its tail was doing this—but it so hard it broke the skin of the fish. They had to remove the fish scales from the guy's mouth!

And now they were looking for more guys to be counselors, they said, and they were looking at me and asking what I was doing in a couple of weeks. Yeah, right—sign me up for that!

But then one of the college students who worked there all summer long, one of the lifeguards—I still remember her blue bathing suit—and behold, she was fair to look upon. She invited me to come and be a counselor at the Special Session, and I was powerless before her. I was surprised to hear myself agreeing to come back in a couple of weeks.

That first Special Session I was scared to death. By the time the session director, whose name was Ralph, had gone through all the training and planning, we’d talked about Down syndrome, epilepsy, cerebral palsy, spinal bifida, and various other challenges and limitations. The word among the experienced counselors was that if a counselor got two or three campers, those campers would be relatively high functioning and not much trouble. But if a counselor got only one camper, that camper needed some experienced care and attention. It was my first time; I was actually a little too young to be there—the old hands guaranteed that I would be given easy campers.

The night before the campers arrived, the director handed out our assignments. It had been clouding up all afternoon, and by the time we came together after supper, the wind was blowing hard. It rained, there was lightning and thunder, the lights went out, adding to the drama of the moment. Ralph, the director, met us in the rec hall, a big screened-in porch kind of building, holding a candle from the chapel. The wind gusted through the screens, threatening to put out the candle and leave us all in the gloom. Ralph called out each counselor's name, and called out the campers that person was assigned, and gave each counselor the applications. By the time he worked his way down the alphabet to Sloan, it seemed like he’d been up there doing this for about a week. There was lightning, there was thunder—it could not have been any more frightening.

Finally he called my name and read out the name of the camper who I had been given, a young man named Neal. One camper. My imagination remembers a clap of thunder right at that moment. (I might have embroidered that memory a little.) He handed me the application form.

Neal has cerebral palsy and uses a wheelchair. The application showed he was 17 years old, difficult to understand, needed help eating, needed help in the bathroom. If you want to see a 15-year-old boy tighten up, just pucker up, tell him he’s going to be spending a week with someone who needs help in the bathroom. One of the other guys told me I’d have to pick him up and put him on the bed or in the chair. I was frantically trying to figure out what “help in the bathroom” might mean. More than anything else, I just wanted to go home.

One of the experienced guys saw my distress and asked me who I got. I couldn’t look at him; I was afraid I was going to cry. I whispered, “I got a guy in a wheelchair.” He looked at my application, he said, “Now, man, you got a lot more than that. Neal’s been here several times. He’s a great camper; he’s as smart as you or I. He’ll take good care of you.”

He convinced me to stay, and he was right. Neal took good care of me. He taught me how to drive a wheelchair, and after a couple of days I could tell what he was saying when most other people could not. All the girls on staff loved Neal and gave us much more time than they would have ever given me. They would come over and flirt with Neal, and I would just sort of lean into it.

After a while I relaxed and joined the wonderful and unique community that was being formed around me. There were about 60 campers, maybe 30 counselors, and around 15 adults: nurses, priests, other old people—each of us with our own set of disabilities. The guy with an arm as big as your leg was not there, but Marion was—the guy who bit the fish. He was very energetic, but he was actually a pretty good guy. It was an odd gumbo of the human condition with a wide variety of different zesty spices, but after we simmered in the July heat for four or five days, we melted and blended together into a strong, delicious dish. Neal taught me how to look past disabilities to find abilities; he taught me about dignity and respect. And I learned that there are no disposable people.

On the last full afternoon of the session, it was storming again, and we were all in the rec hall. I was sitting with Neal, watching everybody else as they tried to play dodgeball in a crowd, or did the rain dance, or did the Hokey Pokey (as if that’s what it’s all about), or just enjoyed hanging out. Somewhere in there Neal needed something, ice or a paper towel or something, and I stood up to get it. I saw the whole camp together—just as I’m seeing you now—and it occurred to me that it wasn’t worth the effort to sort everybody out into all those categories we use to understand each other. In that moment, everybody there looked and smelled and sounded just the same. It didn’t matter who drooled, who went to college, who had seizures, who played high-school football, who had trouble talking, who was a cheerleader; it didn’t matter who was a camper or who was on staff, who was old and who was young, who was white and who was black—it stopped being them and them and them and became for me us, all of us celebrating the love of God in this remarkable community. Right then and there I thought, “This is the Kingdom of God.”

Well, that’s pretty heady stuff for a 15-year-old kid. Now, more than 40 years later, if you could line up all the days of my life and point to the one that has the most to do with shaping and forming me, it would be that day when I first saw the Kingdom of God, surrounded by “all sorts and conditions of men and women,” in the most wonderful, diverse, unique, peculiar, frustrating, and loving community I’d ever been a part of.

I came back the next summer and the next, all through high school and college. When I came back from seminary I was invited to be on adult staff. When Ralph, the director, left the diocese, he asked me to direct the session, which I did for 11 years. I met Miss Tina at Special Session in 1986, and my life changed again. It was the last thing we did before she and I moved to Alabama in 1993. There are hundreds of Special Session stories; when the people of St. Thomas’ in Huntsville had heard enough, they were ready to help me start a Special...
Session at Camp McDowell. Now we’ve done 15 sessions there, each one bigger and better than the one before. It’s been a great privilege to pass along the gift I was given when I was 15 to my children and to yours. Every session before the campers come, we tell the staff to look for that moment when all the labels and categories and diagnoses don’t matter anymore, when we can see that we’re all sisters and brothers. **We call it Gumbo: when we’re all cooked and simmered together so well you can’t pick out the okra or the oysters, it’s the Kingdom of God.**

I have been inspired since then, but this precious moment has been the principal inspiration for most of my life, this recognition of the family of God that has so much to do with making me who I am today. It pushed me to seminary, and pulled me through, and stayed with me through happy times and sad, finally leading me to St. Thomas’ in Huntsville and guiding me through my time there. And now, for better and for worse and I pray by God’s grace, I am the Bishop of the Episcopal Church in Alabama. (It’s still real weird to say that out loud.) And I’m still looking for the Kingdom of God, still hoping to bring others along to see it with me. I hope you’ve had such a moment. I hope you have seen and felt God’s Kingdom.

A couple of years ago a high-school kid who was a counselor for the first time came up to me after I’d told the story of seeing the Kingdom of God and asked me a remarkable question: “Did anybody else see it?” I didn’t catch on right away so she spelled it out for me: “Did anybody else see the Kingdom of God that day when you were 15?” I’d never thought about it like that.

**It’s not enough to be in the Kingdom of God—you have to look for it. You have to want to see it.**

So let’s look around. **Look at these people you’re sitting with. Look at them. Look at this wonderful, diverse, unique, peculiar, frustrating, and loving community around you—and let go of your need to sort us into categories, who’s better or not so good, who’s successful or not so successful. Look around. It doesn’t matter—please don’t let it matter for just this precious moment—who’s white or black or old or young, who’s conservative or liberal, who’s poor or rich, who’s straight or gay. These are God’s children you’re looking at, your brothers and sisters in Christ—look around, at the Kingdom of God. Are some of these people more conservative than you are or more liberal? Of course they are! That’s what makes us wonderful, diverse, unique, peculiar, frustrating, and loving. But they are still God’s children, every bit as much as you or I.**

Now in the Diocese of Alabama we are embarking on a huge ambitious endeavor to build **Bethany Village**, inspired by several visions coming together, including this incredible idea that we are all God’s children no matter what our abilities or disabilities. I am deeply grateful to the people who’ve done so much work in bringing these dreams together and helping them become reality: thanks to my friends Mark Johnston, Pam Parker, Danielle Dunbar, Rich Webster, Ricky Bromberg, Phyllis Hall, David Meginness, and the other people I should have named and forgot—many others who are helping us to raise the money. Thanks to all the people who have already made contributions and to those who haven’t but will; thanks to the churches who have already pledged their contributions and to those who are still thinking about it. Bethany Village is being built now to include all people regardless of ability or disability; it will make Special Sessions much better in many ways, and it will improve and enhance and expand our abilities to have Environmental Education programs, the Alabama Folk School, our capacity to host many other gatherings, small and large, and other things we have not yet imagined.

We’ve raised a bunch of money, and we’re going to raise more. I believe that Bethany Village will show us how the world should be. My concern now is that you and your parish will want to be able to say that you helped make this place, this place we are going to be proud of for generations to come. I hope you’ll give a lot or a little; I hope you won’t choose to be left out. We are building Bethany Village on this holy ground that we own together. This is common ground for us, ground we can invite others to come to and look up from the busy-ness of life and see the Kingdom of God.

**Now in the Episcopal Church we are embarked on a huge ambitious endeavor to welcome and honor all of God’s children. In our Baptismal Covenant, at every baptism and confirmation, we declare before God and each other that with God’s help we will seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbors as ourselves, and that we will respect the dignity of every human being. There are no disposable people.**

At the 2012 General Convention, The Episcopal Church passed a resolution authorizing the blessing of same-sex unions with the guidance and permission of each diocesan bishop. I am on the commission that wrote and presented that resolution, and I voted for it. I know that angered some of you, and people we love left our Church because of it. I cannot adequately tell you how much it grieves me when somebody leaves our Church because of something I did or said, or how I voted. It is so contrary to my principal inspiration to bring all people into the Kingdom of God. Before that General Convention, I wrote a letter to you, to the whole diocese saying that I expected this resolution to pass and that I thought it would be damaging to the fabric of our diocese. Before that General Convention, I wrote a letter to you, to the whole diocese saying that I expected this resolution to pass and that I thought it would be damaging to the fabric of our diocese. Before that General Convention, I wrote a letter to you, to the whole diocese saying that I expected this resolution to pass and that I thought it would be damaging to the fabric of our diocese.
This is an incredibly complicated and difficult issue, and it has the potential to tear us apart. It’s a dispute that seems to bring out the worst in us; it quickly becomes a fight that we all want to win so that we insist that we are right and that people who disagree with us are wrong. And worse than wrong: stupid, unfaithful, unchristian, mean-spirited, homophobic, revisionist, liberal, conservative. All those labels, all that choosing sides and putting God’s children into categories—this is not the way to seek and find God’s Kingdom. This is not the way to be God’s Church.

So, just for the record—
I am more liberal than some of you, and I am still your brother in Christ.
I am more conservative than some of you, and I am still your brother in Christ.

It’s right there, in the first prayer most of us ever memorized: “Our Father, who art in heaven ...” Our Father. We are all of us sisters and brothers in Christ because we all have the same Father in heaven.

How can we love all the children of God and bring them more fully into God’s kingdom? How can we love, include, and respect people who think we should bless the unions between people of the same sex and that we should have already done it long ago, and at the same time love, include, and respect people who think we should never do this and who believe that homosexuality is a sin?

With God’s help, we can do this. We are the children of God, and there is no limit to what people of goodwill can do together by God’s grace and in God’s mercy if we follow Christ and offer ourselves to the power of the Holy Spirit. There’s no limit to what the children of God can do by the power of God. As long as we really believe what we say we believe, we can love and include each other even though we disagree. We can do this without fighting, or name-calling, or running people away from their church, from our church, from God’s Church.

We need to design a process to consider how we as a diocese can allow for and bless loving and committed relationships between all people, while at the same time allowing those who find blessing same-sex unions immoral or unethical the freedom to not participate. I am proposing the beginnings of such a process that will be discussed and reviewed by a commission of people from across the diocese and from across the spectrum of theological assumptions, and that will be the subject of conversations open to all members of the Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Alabama in each of our convocations.

We Episcopalians are not set up so that the bishop rules by fiat, praise God; we left that part of the Church behind. We work best when the bishops consult with clergy and laypeople. To that end, we are going to form a commission of 12 people, the Bishops’ Commission on Generous Pastoral Response. It will be made up of one person from each convocation as nominated by the convocation deans, and five others selected by the bishops. Every effort will be made to ensure that we have a balanced group: laypeople and clergy, traditionalist and progressive, male and female, and so on.

We’re not interested in gathering people from way over there to toss words at people who are way over there. We’ve tried that for years—it doesn’t work, it’s not the Church. We want to gather people who understand that the unity of the Church is an obligation of ours and who want to find a way forward.

After the process is more fully designed with the help of this commission, we’ll have something to talk about in conversations across the diocese. We have some questions that we need to answer. Are we willing to love our neighbors as ourselves when we disagree? Are we willing to put aside our need to have it our way for the sake of the unity of the Church? How can we do something new and still be who we are?

I believe that the end result of all this will be a way forward so that we will be able to bless committed, monogamous unions among people and in places where they believe it to be just and proper, and that other people and places will not be forced to do something they think is wrong. We are not able to agree about same-sex unions right now, but we can agree that we are all called to be one in Christ, to love God and love each other—we can agree that this is something that we must do.

When I was 15, I was inspired. The wonderful, diverse, unique, peculiar, frustrating, and loving community I had fallen into became the Kingdom of God right before my eyes. I had already thought that I wanted to be a priest, but after that day I started to get an idea of what I wanted to do, what I want to do still: to bring people into deeper and fuller awareness of God’s Kingdom where we are. It doesn’t matter who drools and who’s a cheerleader—there are no disposable people. If it is our Father who art in Heaven, these are God’s children you’re sitting among, God’s children we’re talking about: our brothers and sisters.

In the moment I was first inspired to see the Kingdom of God, I saw through labels that divide us. We all looked and smelled and sounded the same. I look out at you this morning, and I see the Kingdom of God in us: in this wonderful, diverse, unique, peculiar, frustrating, and loving community. Surely as God sees and smells and hears us, we are all just the same: all of us sinful, all of us forgiven, all of us redeemed by our Lord Jesus Christ, all of us precious and beloved in the eyes of God our Father—all of us. All of us.

There’s a lot that I don’t know about this, a lot of questions to answer, a lot of details to work out, a lot of anxieties to ease. Our Church has authorized the blessing of same-sex unions, not marriages but unions, blessings, and we ought to be able to consider how the Diocese of Alabama can do that without tearing ourselves apart. This...
Bishop Marray’s Diocesan Convention Address

This year's focus is “inspire,” and the related question before us is “What inspires me about the Episcopal Church as an Episcopalian?”

Diocesan Convention is on the second tier of the overarching three-year focus on the theme “Invite, Inspire, and Transform.” Last convention we were challenged to reinforce the practice “invite,” one of the fundamentals of evangelism, as a critical component of Episcopal formation. This year’s focus is “inspire,” and the related question before us is “What inspires me about the Episcopal Church as an Episcopalian?”

As I was preparing this address, I was prompted to look up the gospel according to Wikipedia to get some inspiration on how the world perceives the term “inspire.” As expected, I discovered that it’s a universally acknowledged word applicable to several disciplines. However, in the ecclesiastical domain, according to Wikipedia, it means “to guide or arouse by divine influence or inspiration, to infuse or breathe life into or upon.” I find this definition particular exhilarating because it’s somewhat synonymous with the Hebrew word ruah in the Creation narrative, which means breath of God or Spirit of God. So it may be safe to launch out by locating this sampling of reasons for what inspires or breathes life in us Episcopalians from this optimum spiritual place.

Let me begin with a defining statement that I believe sets into context the biblical/historical shape and grounding of the Episcopal Church. In August 2013, the House of Bishops Ecclesiologies Committee developed a primer on the governing of the Episcopal Church and its underlying theology. The opening two sections of this document state:

Our Episcopal roots extend back a long way. Indeed, one could say that the Episcopal ethos can be found at the very beginning of Christianity in a city called Antioch. There an "encouraging" newcomer-turned-church leader named Barnabas and his bold apprentice, Saul of Tarsus, helped form something connected to, but distinct from, the church in Jerusalem. In the latter, Peter and the other apostles preached and healed but did so always in the shadow of the Jewish temple. Their group, the Way as it was known, was an inspiring, Spirit-filled community, but it was still a Jewish sect and its leaders still went daily to the temple where sacrifices were made.

Antioch was something else entirely where Greeks as well as Jews heard the Good News proclaimed and formed a faith community entirely separate from temple and sacrifices and intentionally diverse yet unified community. It was in Antioch, not in Jerusalem, that the disciples were first called Christians (Acts 11). And it was from Antioch that Barnabas and Saul (now Paul), a new breed of apostolic missionaries, were sent forth to plant communities of faith, love, and hope wherever they went. Again, these churches would be marked by diversity as well as unity: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, but all are one in Christ” (Galatians 3:28). It was rarely an easy task, for diversity is a nice word to say but a hard reality to appreciate. In places like Corinth, for example, the wealthier church members did not want to wait for those field workers and others on the lower socio-economic level before having their communal meal. The battle over recognizing the uncircumcised may now seem quaint, but then it was quite grim.

This for me is one of the more if not the most inspirational statements locating our Episcopal/Anglican faith within the body of early church heritage. Our history is rooted in the canons of Scripture, and, similar to the history of the Church through the ages, it is no secret that the Anglican/Episcopal tradition has had its fair share of turmoil, tribulation, and conflict, and yet it has emerged out of them stronger, more agile, better equipped for mission and ministry; immensely humble, and more grace filled than before. This character speaks to the inherent resilience of the faith community, saints like you. How much our culture of prophetic witness has relied on the work of the Holy Spirit to shape our destiny is a remarkable testament to the providential love of God so richly bestowed on this Church! The 100th Archbishop of Canterbury, Michael Ramsey (1961), was clear that Anglicanism is “not a system or a confession but a method, a use, a direction” so that “its greatest credentials are its incompleteness, with tension and travail in its soul. It is clumsy and untidy; it baffles neatness and logic. For it is sent not to commend itself as ‘the best type of Christianity,’ but by its very brokenness to point to the universal Church wherein all have died” (The Gospel and the Catholic Church). This reinforces the belief that the Communion we share is God’s gift, not something to be shaped or divided up according to our own preferences, but rather expressed through generosity and mutual responsibility.

I am inspired by the fundamental notion of baptism, which grounds our call to fellowship with Jesus in the very nature of his call to “be the beloved of God.” Jesus’ baptism in the River Jordan calls us Episcopalians into a similar relationship with God. Baptism is the primary initiation into the household of God. What does this invitation into the baptismal community represent? It is the defining moment in a person’s life and a gracious and powerful act of God: the summoning of the new people of God to gather around Lord Jesus Christ. It also demands radical discipleship and missionary responsibilities amid a hostile world (Matthew 5:16 and Romans 12:1-2).

I am inspired by the thought of how deliberate and intentional we are in acknowledging and embracing the fact that the risen Lord Jesus Christ before he ascended to heaven gave the apostles the Commission to “go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything (he has) commanded (them)” (Matthew 28:19-20). He entrusted them with his authority to evangelize and communicate to the whole humanity everything he had commanded them. The Episcopal Church has, therefore, always understood that the training and instructing of the faithful are inseparable from the evangelistic task. The process of becoming a Christian—the imparting of the essentials of the faith—is a chief concern of the Episcopal community from its earliest beginnings. The process of discipleship has evolved over time to represent a critical part of discipleship formation ministry. The Catechism, an orderly outline of the faith (Book of Common Prayer, page 845), is foundational, capturing the wide breath and comprehensive orthodoxy of this tradition. It embodies doctrine, discipline, and worship and aims to recommend a framework for making disciples and they would be faithful followers of Jesus Christ in today’s world. There is beauty and grace even as we nurture believers into disciples. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in his classic masterpiece The Cost of Discipleship, said, “Christianity without discipleship is always Christianity without Christ.”

To enable the community of faith to respond to Christ’s call, God has given to this Church the charism (gift) of shared ministry: the episcopate, the presbyterate, and the diaconate. The ordained ministry is exercised with, in, and among the whole people of God. The calling of laypersons is to represent Christ and his Church, to bear witness to him wherever they may be and according to the gifts given to them, to carry out Christ’s work of reconciliation in the world, and to take their place in the life, worship, and governance of the Church. The complementary gifts bestowed by the Holy Spirit on the community are for the common good and for the building up of the Church and the service of the world to which the Church is sent. Each is a disciple and an evangelist gifted to share the good news of the Gospel beyond the walls of the building. One related aspect of our catholicity is this seamless transition from “altar to street.” Every Sunday, the deacon or priest or a designated layperson sends us out into the world with these words or words similar, “Let us go forth into the world rejoicing in the power of the Spirit.” Our worship is both an ingathering and sending. Our worship in Word and Sacrament is to represent Christ and his Church, to bear witness to him wherever we may be and according to the gifts given to them, to carry out Christ’s work of reconciliation in the world, and to take their place in the life, worship, and governance of the Church. The complementary gifts bestowed by the Holy Spirit on the community are for the common good and for the building up of the Church and the service of the world to which the Church is sent. Each is a disciple and an evangelist gifted to share the good news of the Gospel beyond the walls of the building. One related aspect of our catholicity is this seamless transition from “altar to street.” Every Sunday, the deacon or priest or a designated layperson sends us out into the world with these words or words similar, “Let us go forth into the world rejoicing in the power of the Spirit.” Our worship is both an ingathering and sending out fashioned in the words of Hymn 528 “Lord you gave the great commission . . . for the work of ministry.”

By far there isn’t a more inspirational book complementary to the Bible than the Book of Common Prayer. The prayer book paradigm was a byproduct of the response from a Church under extreme persecution. Tradition has it that when monasteries were pillaged by rampaging zealots determined to eradicate Christianity, the monks in their wisdom, led by the Holy Spirit, codified sacred Scripture into forms of prayer for the believers to carry upon their hearts and profess with their lips part of the oral historical paradigm. This strategy later gave rise to different editions of the Prayer Book used by various worshipping traditions within Christianity. Ours is the Book of Common Prayer, whose architect was Archbishop Thomas Cranmer (69th Archbishop of
Cranbury, 1533). It is safe to say that between the Bible and the Prayer Book are contained all things necessary for salvation. The Prayer Book is the crucible of our ordered worship life from the Daily Office to the Great Thanksgiving to spiritual formation including ordinals for the administration of the Sacraments of the Church and occasional prayers. These two sacred texts is the chalice from which I drink each day.

When we think of how intimate we are with Christ, our Lord and Savior, because we participate in his sacramental life, I am reminded that his Spirit breathes in each of us, inspiring us to be bold in our conviction, knowing we are undergirded by power from above. We are sacramental people proud to espouse these characteristics. The Sacraments (seven) are seen as means of salvation and function as outward signs of inward and invisible grace and transformation. We have come to trust in them to the extent that they tend to occupy the whole sphere of Christian life.

The second half of the Eucharistic liturgy is called the “Holy Communion.” The word “communion” (koinein in Greek) is one of the richest terms in the New Testament. It means sharing, participation, fellowship, belonging, togetherness, solidarity, unity, reciprocity, and mutuality. Communion is the reconciliation of differences into a common life. It means the opening up of self to others in a shared sense of identity. It brings together things that were once estranged. Communion describes not only what takes place in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, but also the heart of God’s own life and love for the world in the Trinity, in whose image we were created. Louis-Marie Chauvet said in his book The Sacraments: The Word of God at the Mercy of the Body (page 54), “Christ must be announced primarily as the sacrament of God. As a sacrament, that is to say, as the gratuitous gift of God and more precisely as Savior. He is our ferryman to God’s shore. We do not have to desperately run after him to join him: he himself comes toward us, as at Emmanuel, and takes us in his boat to carry us to the other shore. It is, before all else, this truth that the sacraments are witnessing to us, a pure gift from God deposited in our hands (the body of Christ, Amen)?” It is fitting that any attempt at beginning our rediscovery of Episcopal inspiration and identity begins there.

I am inspired by this Church that lives as an intercessor to a broken world scarred by sin preceding for the individual and corporate community, local and global, in the neighborhood and beyond, including her gathered and dispersed family known and unknown. The Prayers of the People are inclusive intercessions that remind us, in the midst of joy and happiness, that there is also pain and suffering, and we come before Almighty God for forgiveness and strength to overcome inherent shortcomings visited upon our mortality. The power of the presence of believers on the person who suffers may never be underestimated. Often, members of the community minister to those who are suffering most effectively simply by being present. God has created a world that is profoundly relational, and the practice of presence is rooted in the relational character of our world.

In our spiritual connectivity, being present could mean either physical presence or being present in spirit. By being present, by simply being there for the sufferer, we extend the presence of God. We bring God’s presence into the world of the sufferer. We minister by our presence. And speaking from personal experience, Episcopalians are genuinely sensitive and responsive to the needs of others, rivaling any other faith group I have come to experience. By our apostolic tradition of caregiving, we give honor and dignity to every human life because we see ourselves as part of a larger network of brothers and sisters. Doesn’t that inspire you?

What else inspires me? Our diagram of Christian identity is “structure.” What is the shape of this structure? Simply put, it is a whole of which each component is an integral part and in which each component finds value only by reference to the others. This convention is our synodical way of demonstrating that the decision-making process is collaborative, collegial, respectful for each other’s position within the discipline of sensus fidelium in which it is healthy and acceptable to disagree and yet live in community. This practice of governance tracks down into the various councils of the diocese, even at the local vestry. Authority is a shared phenomenon drawing inspiration from the spirit embodied in Benedictine monasticism; actually the essence of episcopalianism is benedictine. In this discipline, “to share authority means that those who are responsible for the group must arrive at common decisions, share a common wisdom, come to common commitment, and teach together in such a way that the community is united not divided by people chosen to lead it” (Joan Chittister, The Rule of Benedict, pages 135–136).

Our present design is rooted in authority that bubbles up from each and every delegate and/or congregation in this structure. Hence, it may be creditable to point that the strength, durability, sustainability, viability, and posterity of this Church (our diocese) reside in all congregations irrespective of size, geography, or resources. We pride ourselves in being a family of more than 93,000 plus worshiping congregations and faith-based communities existing in varying configurations, living out our Christian witness and mission in “one communion” under “one tent,” the Episcopal Diocese of Alabama. Our ecclesiology (framework) as a creedal church makes no allowance for parachurch or congregationalism. What this model demonstrates is that when one member of the family is hurting, all are experiencing the pain. And when another rejoices, all are joyfully celebrating because that’s how members in a family live. This institutional accountability we hold each other to is the very reason why all our decisions need to be carefully navigated, diligently weighed, prayerfully considered, and spiritually discerned.

As a missiologist, I am daily inspired by grace to be mindful how blessed I am to be in a diocese where mission is driving the message of churches in this vast vineyard of God. The primacy of mission is fundamental to Episcopal ethos. Our understanding is that God has a mission and God has a Church to incarnate this mission. Mission is the work of God—the mission dei—from creation to that consummation when Christ shall be all in all. Mission as an expression of that communion, in its giving and receiving, its coming and going, this is at the very heart of the Holy Trinity. To this end, our robust engagement in the Five Marks of Mission is highly commendable: to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom; to teach, baptize, and nurture new believers; to respond to human need by loving service; to seek to transform unjust structures of society; to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth. With this train of thinking you see why it’s so necessary for us to see “outreach” as an outdated term to describe our engagement in the mission dei—the mission of God. A more appropriate descriptive could be “partnership” because mission is transformational to both sides of the aide, the receiver of generosity and giver share the same experience of being “moved.” Dwight J. Zscheile, in his book People of the Way: Renewing Episcopal Identity (pages 77–78), advocates that as Episcopalians we are trained to offer hospitality to our neighbors but laments that “as followers of Jesus we must learn to be guests, to rely upon the hospitality of the neighborhood.” Just remember that the Word became flesh and moved into or pitched his tent in the neighborhood. After all, the very definition of mission is movement. One of the blessings of traveling the diocese is seeing firsthand how intentionally congregations engage mission. This witness always leaves me breathlessly inspired and proud to be Episcopalian.

Give thanks to God for the faith communities of our diocese where God’s mission is experienced. Such congregations are at the heart of God’s mission in the world. Such congregations have passion for people beyond their borders to be embraced and warned by the extravagant, prodigal, unconditional, reconciling love of God in Christ. Episcopalians are people of hope sharing hope in a culture of immoderate fear. For Episcopalians, it’s not committee work, but community where all gifts are allowed in everyone to help build community life and mission. And do remember, the prophetic ministry of the Church is not telling the future but living the present.

I end with some insightful words from one of our retired bishops. The Rt. Rev. Gordon Scruton, former Bishop of the Diocese of Western Massachusetts, urged the importance of letting go and trusting that we will be caught in the arms of a loving God; he called it “Trapeze Theology.” I trust we do, I pray that we joyfully celebrate our historic heritage as anchored Episcopalians, anchored in our historic/biblical/spiritual/ apostolic heritage informed by centuries of tested doctrine and faithful witness to Jesus. We do so inspired by our belief in the power of faith, hope, and love embodying the hospitality God’s grace offers. Let me reinforce this inspirational gift called Anglicanism/Episcopalianism. Be proud Episcopalians who authentically witness Jesus as reconciled reconcilers of Jesus who is reconciliation. St. Gregory once said, “It is neither what you are or what you have that God sees with his all merciful eyes but what you desire to be.”

If we listen carefully, we may hear God in Christ whispering words of inspiration to us, “I am here, and I will never leave you in time or eternity, and feel his Spirit nudging us to greater action!” Amen!!
Clergy Spouses Enjoy Special Luncheon

By Christina Hutson of Holy Apostles’ in Hoover; Photos by Blake Britton and members of Holy Apostles’

The members of Holy Apostles’, St. Thomas’, and St. Alban’s loved the opportunity to serve the clergy spouses of our diocese at our annual luncheon on Saturday, February 22. Tina Sloan, Lynn Marray, Susie Youngson, Patty Horn, and I served as cohosts of this year’s event, which was held at the Townhall in the Moss Rock Preserve community in Hoover.

The sunny, warm, early spring weather allowed us to use the porches of the facility, and we even left the doors open while we enjoyed our meal. Jim Morgan, owner of the local Roly Poly, provided the salad, and “Apostles with Fire,” Holy Apostles’ Cooking Ministry, prepared Pastalaya and Gluten-Free Veggie Chili.

Jane Elliot won the drawing for a $200 donation. She chose to give the money to the Krik? Krak! ministry.

People Elected To Serve Our Diocese

Photo by Blake Britton

Diocesan Council
Northern District—John Thornton
Middle District—Brad Sandidge
Middle District 1-year Term—the Rev. Josiah Rengers
Southern District—Sally Hudson

Standing Committee, At Large
Clerical Order—the Rev. Joe Gibbs
Lay Order—Heager Hill

Disciplinary Board, At Large
Clerical Order
The Rev. Geoff Evans
The Rev. Rich Webster
Lay Order
Reggie Hamner

General Convention Deputies
Northern District, Clerical Order
The Rev. Evan Garner
The Rev. Susan Sloan—1st Alternate
The Rev. Judith Comer—2nd Alternate

Northern District, Lay Order
Sarah Miller
Randall Byrd—1st Alternate
Barbara Meyer—2nd Alternate

Middle District, Clerical Order
The Rev. John Mark Ford
The Rev. Derrick Hill—1st Alternate
The Venerable Louise Thibodaux—2nd Alternate

Middle District, Lay Order
Virginia Hillhouse
Barbara Sloan—1st Alternate
Stan Herring—2nd Alternate

Southern District, Clerical Order
The Rev. Candice Frazer
The Rev. Matthew Grunfeld—1st Alternate
The Rev. Ben Alford—2nd Alternate

Southern District, Lay Order
Jimmy McLemore
Anne Kimzey—1st Alternate
Chris Turner—2nd Alternate

At Large, Clerical Order
The Rev. Lee Shafer
The Rev. Mark Waldo Jr.—1st Alternate
The Rev. Bob Hemmings—2nd Alternate

At Large, Lay Order
Marcellus “Mark” Smith
Wales Carpenter—1st Alternate
Rebecca Haller—2nd Alternate
Building Bridges Across Time, Generations, and Cultures

By the Rev. David Meginnis

Sometimes when I visit a church, I am struck by the foresight and faith of those who worked and sacrificed to build it so that not only they, but also generations after them, could have a place to worship our Lord in the beauty of holiness. And sometimes that common place forms a bridge across time.

A couple of years ago, a new member of our parish attended a presentation on the history of the stained-glass windows in our church, and he was delighted to learn that one of the windows he looked at every Sunday was given in memory of his own great-grandmother. Thus began their lifetime of ministry to college students, faculty, the children of Canterbury Kindergarten, the University of Alabama campus, the Tuscaloosa community, and the Diocese of Alabama, as well as work with the National Episcopal Church.

In the mid-1950s, Camp McDowell was fairly new, and five Gribbin children became regular campers for many years. Our mother loved Camp McDowell because of the “clergy conferences” with her many friends and because it meant several children were periodically out of the house during the summer. Dad loved everything camp! He served numerous times as a camp director and chaplain.

Dad always enjoyed people, whether at camp, on the University of Alabama campus, or at the many churches in our diocese. He was a counselor, healer, friend, and encourager. He always saw the good and was rarely discouraged. He was quick with a joke or to tell a story.

Our parents opened their home to many college students, each of them on their personal journey and some with no place to go. Our home was a secure shelter with warm food, and it was filled with laughter, love, and abiding faith.

My siblings and I have established the initial funding to build Gribbin House with the support of our children and a few grandchildren. Most importantly, many gracious friends also have been so generous in their support of this tribute to Elsie and Emmet.

I encourage everyone to pledge a gift to build Bethany. In our lifetime, Bethany will become a greater gift to all of us. Please give to the general campaign fund, and if Emmet or Elsie touched your life, consider designating your contribution for the Gribbin House construction.

Bethany was a town where friends of Jesus lived, and Camp McDowell is a place where friends of Jesus come to worship, work, and play. My wish is that Gribbin House at Camp McDowell will be filled with lots of laughter, love, and abiding faith.

My sisters, brothers, and I were pleased with the prospect of naming one of the lodges in Bethany Village “Gribbin House” in honor our parents, the Rev. and Mrs. Robert Emmet Gribbin Jr. (best known to many friends as Emmet and Elsie).

They met and were married in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, in 1942. In February 1954, the Gribbin family moved from Holy Trinity in Clemson, South Carolina, to Canterbury Chapel in Tuscaloosa, where my father had been appointed by Bishop Carpenter to succeed the Rev. George Murray. Thus began their lifetime of ministry to college students, faculty, the children of Canterbury Kindergarten, the University of Alabama campus, the Tuscaloosa community, and the Diocese of Alabama, as well as work with the National Episcopal Church.

In the mid-1950s, Camp McDowell was fairly new, and five Gribbin children became regular campers for many years. Our mother loved Camp McDowell because of the “clergy conferences” with her many friends and because it meant several children were periodically out of the house during the summer. Dad loved everything camp! He served numerous times as a camp director and chaplain.

Dad always enjoyed people, whether at camp, on the University of Alabama campus, or at the many churches in our diocese. He was a counselor, healer, friend, and encourager. He always saw the good and was rarely discouraged. He was quick with a joke or to tell a story.

Our parents opened their home to many college students, each of them on their personal journey and some with no place to go. Our home was a secure shelter with warm food, and it was filled with laughter, love, and abiding faith.

My siblings and I have established the initial funding to build Gribbin House with the support of our children and a few grandchildren. Most importantly, many gracious friends also have been so generous in their support of this tribute to Elsie and Emmet.

I encourage everyone to pledge a gift to build Bethany. In our lifetime, Bethany will become a greater gift to all of us. Please give to the general campaign fund, and if Emmet or Elsie touched your life, consider designating your contribution for the Gribbin House construction.

Bethany was a town where friends of Jesus lived, and Camp McDowell is a place where friends of Jesus come to worship, work, and play. My wish is that Gribbin House at Camp McDowell will be filled with lots of laughter, love, and abiding faith.

But Bethany Village is a shared project. It is an opportunity for our entire diocesan family. Bishop Sloan has asked every church—the large ones, the not-so-large ones, even the small ones—to participate. Some churches are hosting special events, and the Bethany Cabinet has folks who will help them do that. Some are making it a line item in their budgets. Some are having good old-fashioned fund drives. However they do it, every parish should do something 50 years from now, when our great-grandchildren walk around the beautiful new lake, or stay in a cabin named for their parish, or come to a farm education program with their school class and hear their classmates talk about what a cool place this camp that’s owned by their church is, or come to a folk school class and learn to play the guitar, they can feel those deep roots that connect them to us and help them realize we are all part of the faithful Body of Christ.
A Place for Relaxation and Recreation

By the Rt. Rev John McKee Sloan

The support for Bethany Village has been fantastic! I thank all of you who have given or pledged and all of you who are considering making a gift.

There’s a lot to be excited about: drawings, ideas, blueprints and plans; fundraisers, dinners, talks, and pledges; possibilities, potentials, programs, and dreams. I’m excited that this is something the people all over our diocese are doing together—what our friend Rich Webster has termed “a family project.” I hope you won’t choose to be left out. I hope that years from now when you come to Bethany Village at Camp McDowell you’ll be able to say, “I helped make this possible.”

In a few years Bethany Village will be up and running. The Farm School will be a wonderful expansion of our Environmental Education program. The Folk School will be bigger and better than it’s ever been. More Special Sessions, smaller and better, will be held there, and we’ll have other groups serving populations with special needs who will want to take advantage of our accessible facilities. More and more groups from around our diocese and elsewhere will be able to come to Camp McDowell—and be able to get from one place to another more easily.

And who knows what else might be going on there? If we do our work properly now, there’s no telling what we might be doing there in a few years. It’s fun to think about, though.

There will be meetings, to be sure, and schedules. People will come with agendas and goals, speakers, programs, and workshops. They’ll learn about Creation, maybe catch a fish in the lake, or eat a tomato grown in our garden. They will arrive excited and nervous and go home soothed—Camp McDowell is like that somehow. Camp is like that because surely one of the best parts of any retreat or workshop or conference is being able to sit in a rocking chair and visit with friends. Whatever other things may come, this will be a constant: Camp McDowell has always been a place set apart for us to come together for relaxation and recreation—Bethany Village will make it more possible for more of us to come to camp, to find a place to belong, to come to a place where we can look up from the busyness of life and look for the face of God in Creation and in God’s children.

Whatever other things may come, this will be a constant: Camp McDowell has always been a place set apart for us to come together for relaxation and recreation—Bethany Village will make it more possible for more of us to come to camp, to find a place to belong, to come to a place where we can look up from the busyness of life and look for the face of God in Creation and in God's children.

Many Thanks!

We are only able to build Bethany because the people of our diocese have been incredibly generous. Thank you! We are being assertive in our goals to also obtain funding beyond individual and parish gifts. To date we have been given $800,000 in grants from foundations, we have secured $1.6 million in New Market Tax Credits, and we are actively pursuing another $200,000 in grants.

Please continue to read Diggin’ Bethany in future issues of The Alabama Episcopalian and visit www.BethanyAtCamp.com; our Facebook page, Camp McDowell (official); or our Instagram account, CampMcDowell, for updates on the capital campaign. For more information, please contact Development Director Danielle Dunbar at 205/358-9234 or danielle@campmcdowell.com, the Rev. Mark Johnston at mark@campmcdowell.com, or the camp office at 205/387-1806.
**ECW Helps Grow the Bethany Garden**

*By Susan Ray*

Our diocesan Episcopal Church Women (ECW) President Brenda Mayhall loves nature and has chosen the theme “Keepers of the Garden” for this year. She wants to cast light on our fragile planet Earth and the fact that God created it and left us to take care of it. She believes we are all called to be good stewards of God’s creation.

When the diocesan ECW board members discovered that there was an opportunity to donate the greenhouses at Bethany, they jumped at the chance since it fits perfectly with the 2014 theme. The ECW has a long history of giving to Camp McDowell. In fact, in the past they presented camp with the quilt representative of all the parishes in Alabama that hangs in Stough Dining Hall.

The ECW finds it important to preserve Camp McDowell so it will be a vibrant ministry for generations to come as well as to help teach us how to take care of our collective garden, planet Earth. Camp McDowell has had a long and successful history of teaching about our environment during its 20 years of providing educational classes for schoolchildren and other groups at the McDowell Environmental Center. “Camp McDowell has such a deep purpose for life here on Earth,” emphasizes Brenda. “It’s so diversified and touches so many multiple facets of life. I am amazed at how the leadership has kept the camp so perfectly all these years.”

The diocesan ECW budget includes funds to be used toward donating a corporate gift each year, and this year’s gift will help support their commitment to the greenhouses. Several fundraisers and events are being planned to raise additional money for the greenhouses. At their recent retreat, the diocesan ECW board members formed a task force that has been charged with developing fundraising options for ECW groups at the parish as well as convocation level.

All Episcopal women are automatically members of the ECW, which encourages its members to get involved in the missions and goals of their parish and our diocese. The ECW’s mission is to empower women to make a difference. For more information please contact Brenda Mayhall at bmayhall@hospicemc.org or 256/878-1166.

---

**Many Thanks to Our Village of Saints**

*By the Rev. Mark Johnston, Vicar and Director of Camp McDowell*

It was a long day for the men from St. James’ in Alexander City. They started right after breakfast and continued their task until it was almost dark. Was it cold? Heck, yes—and it was windy too! Was it hard work? Yes—they were carrying 6 x 6 posts that were 16 feet long, and they were digging holes 4 feet deep, standing the poles straight in the holes, and mixing and pouring concrete around them!

These men are part of our dedicated Bethany Village of Saints. Under the able leadership of the Rev. Rob St. Germain-Iler and Larry McAnally, this crew of saints is building the accessible boat dock and pier at the lake at Bethany. What a wonderful contribution to the Bethany Village project! These men will be returning to Camp McDowell three or four more times to complete the dock and pier.

The dock will be accessible so that all of God’s children can get to the water to fish, boat, or simply enjoy the view and the company of friends. Part of the dock will be covered with a roof to provide some shade and protection from the elements. The walking trail that goes around the lake will also provide access to the dock.

It takes a Village of Saints for Camp McDowell to be “wonderful wonderful.” Bethany is rapidly becoming a reality because saints like you have contributed funds plus their time, energy, and talents. *Come to Camp McDowell soon and see for yourself the progress YOU are making!*
Thank You!

We thank all of our donors, the ones listed below as well as those who prefer to remain anonymous. We are most grateful for your generous gifts to help make Bethany at Camp McDowell a reality.

Note: This list includes donors who have contributed since the list published in the November/December 2013 Alabama Episcopalian.
Reflecting on Participating in Diocesan Convention

Before the lock-in, I had been to diocesan convention, but I did not realize the immense behind-the-scenes work the adults and Youth Department members put in to make everything a success. Things like the lock-in, Happening, Sawyerville, Special Session, etc., would not happen without everyone working together. It was eye-opening to me because it is truly a group effort that occurs between the youth and adults throughout our diocese. It surprised me because I had always believed the two ages were somewhat separated, but in so many ways they are working together to achieve success.

The most inspiring part was, no doubt, watching the Youth Department videos/interviews. I have to say that, as a group of teen Youth Department is really cool. Seeing the video made me realize how truly wonderful the youth of our diocese are. I already hold this community close to my heart, but to see what neat things we do, how much fun we have, and how accepting the Episcopal group is made me so proud to be a part of it. As a clip in the video read “God bless the Misfits,” I realized how applicable it was to our community. Despite the fact that the youth community includes such an array of different types of people with different backgrounds, at any Episcopal event you will be welcomed with open arms regardless if you are a misfit or not.

Overall, after playing grog, dancing at the convention, and spending time with my friends—and despite my lack of sleep, I had an amazing time at the lock-in. I ended up telling my mom that whenever I go to youth events, I walk away with a huge smile and wanting to go back! Thanks so much for putting all of this on! —Lucy Gardner, active member of the Diocesan Youth Community and St. Mary’s-on-the-Highlands in Birmingham

Less than 48 hours ago, the 183rd Diocesan Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Alabama came to a close. I’m still processing all that I experienced while I was there, but I can say that I love the Episcopal Church more than ever. To be honest, the first time I caught a glimpse of everything over the escalator, my 17-year-old self wanted to turn around and head back to Wetumpka.

Eventually though, these feelings of nervousness subsided, and by the time Compline rolled around, the exit escalator wasn’t even a thought in my mind. When I heard the hundreds of voices singing the “Song of Simeon” with me, I realized more than ever that this was exactly where I needed to be. In the words of Bishop Sloan, “It stopped being them, and them, and them . . . and started being us.”

Many people listed their families, communities, and the like as their source of inspiration, but I think I have something else to offer—Us. Our Church is inspirational. Not the buildings or budgets or stained glass, but the community between its people through God. After all, our God is an awesome God. I can only hope that everyone finds such inspiration in their family in Christ as I do. Diocesan Convention 2014 inspired me, and I have never been so glad to be an Episcopalian as I am today. —Miranda Therkelsen, Youth Department District Representative and Diocesan Convention Youth Delegate

This weekend at the 183rd Diocesan Convention, I was a delegate from my church, Holy Apostles’ in Hoover. As one of three youth representatives, it becomes very evident to me that as a youth it is very important for my voice to be heard. And contrary to my belief, adults valued my opinion as well—when I spoke, they listened.

I learned the process of selecting district representatives as well as at large members, which mirrored that of our process of selecting people for Youth Department. I was surprised by how interesting everything was. Bishop Kee Sloan gave a magnificent address that kept me laughing in some parts and tearing up in others. This year instead of people standing at the podium giving summaries and reports on their works, they made videos that showed pictures and included music. Although we voted quite a few times, we would break up the required process with a video. The videos were very good and kept me awake (lol). Each video helped me further my knowledge about the great works that our diocese is participating in from our companion diocese in Haiti to the life-changing summer camps in Sawyerville. After every video I was inspired to join these great things, and I just might.

Overall I am glad I was selected to attend this convention. I cannot put into words how proud I am of our diocese and the great things we do, and I am more honored to be a part of it. —Kelley Mills, Diocesan Convention delegate from Holy Apostles’ in Hoover and active member of the Diocesan Youth Community

Sharing Our Stories

By Susan Oakes, Our Diocesan Youth Ministries Coordinator

It’s important for youth ministers to be comfortable in sharing their faith journey with youth. One way we can do this is by sharing our stories about times when we have been aware of God’s power and presence working in our lives. In sharing our faith stories, we make ourselves available as real people who experience life just like everyone else and illustrate how we are connected to the people from the Bible and to God’s story. Just like the ancient people were inspired to join these great things, and I just might.

At our February meeting of diocesan youth ministers, Bishop Sloan joined us as our professional development facilitator on storytelling and ministry. It was a wonderful day filled with incredible stories. Each person shared a little something about themselves, and we all came away feeling more deeply connected to each other. While the bishop doesn’t join us for every meeting, it was great to have him join us for this particular one because he is such an incredible storyteller and helps us see how making ourselves vulnerable to God working in our lives gives others permission to do the same. Thanks be to God!

Each of our diocesan youth ministers meetings includes a continuing education/professional development component. Our last regular meeting will be held at All Saints’ in Birmingham on April 10 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., with lunch provided (always!). We will share our best (and worst) resources from the year, everything from games, books, programs, retreats/events, worship experiences, and more. All youth ministers (full-time, part-time, and volunteer) are invited to participate in these meetings. If you would like more information about how to connect with us, please contact Susan Oakes, Diocesan Youth Ministries Coordinator, at soakes@diosla.org.

Bishop Sloan joined our diocesan youth minister on February 6 for a day of continuing education about storytelling and ministry.
Christmas Conference . . . WOW!

Christmas Conference 2013 . . . wow! It went by at like a hundred miles an hour and somehow kept that
perfect balance between high energy and relaxation.
Despite some weather curve balls, it cruised by smoothly.
I’m so sad it was my last—but also glad to go out with such a
bang. For those who didn’t make it (and those that did),
we hope to see you at Rites of Spring for another round!
—Adam Westfall, Youth Department At Large Representa-
tive from All Saints’ in Birmingham

My fourth and final year attending the annual Christ-
mas Conference was by far the most rewarding. Working
behind the scenes to help make the magic of such a special
event helped me see God’s work from many different
angles—and it was everywhere. From singing and dancing
with the wonderful music program to catching up with
friends you haven’t seen in a while. The big lessons of the
program, “Be kind, Be genuine, Be prayerful,” were simple
yet so meaningful, and they found me at a perfect time. It
was a beautiful and uplifting weekend, and I’m so thankful to
have been a part of it. —Julia Thiemonge, Youth Department
At Large Representative from St. Stephen’s in Huntsville

At Christmas Conference I experienced an over-
whelming sense of community and fun. I think that this
was one of the best Christmas conferences ever, and it was jam-
packed with fun activities and community time. —Sally
Fargason, Youth Department District Representative from
Holy Trinity in Auburn

I experienced a new kind of love this year at Christ-
mas Conference. Even though it was freezing and rainy
for an entire day, all of the campers rolled with it and
didn’t complain because they understood and respected
the work that was put into the activities.
I also saw a lot of really tight friend groups expanding
their boundaries to include new, shy, younger kids. I feel
that people don’t realize how big of a deal that is. Teen-
agers aren’t very good at changing their close group of
friends to include awkward strangers. Whether it was the
smiling, dancing, singing, or worshipping, God’s kind and
accepting spirit was felt throughout the entire weekend.
The program was phenomenal, giving us the idea sparks
we use to develop our own values and beliefs. This year’s
Christmas Conference was one for the books. —LB Passey,
Youth Department District Representative from St. Step-
hen’s in Birmingham

Christmas Conference 2013 was a roaring success, and
I couldn’t be happier with the way it turned out. Some
came up to me afterward and said it was “the best ever,”
and that’s something I’ll share with the Youth Department forever.
It was something that happened beforehand that I
keep coming back to, however. It was Friday night, the
day before the conference started, and most everyone was
in Eppes Hall. After a long day of rechecking schedules
and setting up small-group spaces, nobody wanted to go
out in the cold. As we were sitting there in front of the
fire talking about college and such, LB and Jess started
to play guitar. In that magical Camp McDowell way,
everyone grew quiet and started to sing along. Harmon-
ies came out of nowhere, 90’s chart-toppers surfaced,
and that infamously rock-hard Eppes carpet became an
excellent drum. As I lay there admiring our rainbow lights and
singing along, I saw God—I saw God in the way that we all sat
together and in LB’s face as she sang “Hallelujah, Mrs. Rowl-
ing.” I saw Him, and He was there, and that’s when I knew
Christmas Conference was going to be wonderful. After all, we
were at Wonderful, Wonderful Camp McDowell! —Miranda
Therkelsen, Youth Department District Representative
from Trinity in Wetumpka

Sign Up Now for Upcoming Events!

**YOUNG PEOPLE PAINT BIRMINGHAM**

**June 16-20**

Our diocese partners with the Joe Rush Center for Urban Ministry to provide
a one-of-a-kind local mission experience for rising 7th through 9th-grade youth.
We’re looking forward to a lot of growth and some exciting changes this year. Our
youth and adult staff will work scrapin and painting homes in Birmingham’s West
End neighborhood. Youth will also participate in programming to educate them about
poverty, food deserts, and our call as Christians to be better stewards of our resources
for ourselves and the world around us.

This year, we are excited to be expanding this ministry with a new role—peer
leadership for rising 11th through 12th graders to serve as high-school counselors. We
have eight openings for this role.

The registration fee is $225 for both the junior-high participants and high-school
peer leaders. For more information, please contact the event coordinator Caitlin Gil-
liam, Youth Director at St. John’s in Montgomery, at Caitlin@stjohnsmontgomery.org.
Online registration is currently open through April 24 at http://dioala.org/ministries/
youth_upcoming_events.html.

**CREATE**

**June 23-27 at Bethany @ Camp McDowell**

All rising 9th and 10th graders are invited to participate in this milestone first-ever event to be held at Bethany @ Camp McDowell!

God created humankind in God’s own image and calls us into relationship as col-
laborators in the ongoing work of Creation. We are called by God to CREATE! We
will explore what this idea means in many different ways at this new weeklong event
by working, worshipping, playing, learning, resting, singing, being in community, and
Building the Kingdom of God. With the intention of developing a mission opportu-
nity for this age group, we will spend a significant amount of time doing a variety of
jobs to CREATE at Bethany and the McDowell Farm School. The jobs may include
painting buildings, building fences and sidewalks, harvesting vegetables, and splitting
and gathering firewood for the winter.

Registration is now open at www.campmcdowell.com; the cost for the week is $280,
and scholarships are available. For more information, please e-mail event coordinator
Susan Oakes at soakes@dioala.org. To register or for payment questions, please contact
registrar Sarah Bee at folkschool@campmcdowell.com.

For and About Youth
The Church Across the Street

By Carolyn Price, a Member of St. John's in Decatur; Photo by Dodie Hall

“The church across the street,” answered the 5th-grader. Ms. Wanda Davis, the principal of Banks-Caddell Elementary School in Decatur, smiled and then asked for the third time, “But what’s the name of that church across the street?” Finally another boy spoke up, “St. John’s.” She clapped her hands and cheered, “Yes, St. John’s is the church across the street that paid for us to be here!”

We’d just finished lunch at Eppes Hall concluding the 5th-graders McDowell Environmental Center (MEC) experience. What Ms. Davis could have added was that we were here because of help from many sources: the school, parents, the church across the street, and the MEC. This is no longer just a partnership—it’s grown to be a BIG neighborhood project. And, just like Mr. Roger’s song, this was a lovely day in the neighborhood . . . our final day at Camp McDowell.

Forty 5th-graders, four teachers, and three parents came to the MEC. Ms. Davis drove her car just in case she had to return to school, but she didn’t—and we were all so glad. Her smiling face appeared at every meal, plus she bunked in with some of the children to be sure they made it to breakfast. Her soft-spoken guidance was visible the entire time. The teachers included Gina Stout, Kim Linley, Pattie Lewis, and Sarah Guarin, and the supporting parents were Roselyn Meadows, Patricia Diaz, and Antoinette Bentford. The students brought their special charm, and as Justin, one of the MEC teachers learned, they don’t hesitate to express gratitude for the ordinary things that kids often take for granted.

The opportunity for St. John’s to partner with Banks-Caddell School came when a parishioner gave the parish $6,000 to be used for an outreach program and the vestry decided to put this amount toward sending the 5th-graders to MEC. But the rector, the Rev. Evan Garner, declared that it must not be a one-time event. With this in mind, the scene was set. Representatives of the parish talked with Ms. Wanda and the teachers and found out that they knew other Decatur schools sent students to MEC and were enthusiastic about it. A few of the MEC staff’s preparation matched the student’s excitement. A few students needed flashlights—no problem, they had them. The staff came through with their wonderful classes, and when the students were asked on a survey what they would tell their friends who weren’t at MEC, 38 of the 40 said, “I liked the MEC teachers.” But it wasn’t just a popularity contest because 37 of the 40 kids also said that they “learned a bunch of cool stuff,” and 32 students said, “I want to go again.”

The MEC teachers are outstanding professionals who individualize classes and tailor the subject matter to the students’ level. This was borne out by the survey. Each of the nine program offerings received four or more votes as a Top Three Class Selection. Trust Swing and Canoeing were out in front as favorites. Amazingly only 6 of the 40 students indicated they had a class they did not like, which means 34 students liked all the classes and programs!

Prior to coming, 17 students wondered if the classes would be hard. At the end of the three days, only two students indicated that the classes were hard, which shows the MEC teachers’ outstanding ability and effort to teach to each student’s level.

As we were sitting in Eppes Hall that last day, Ms. Davis finished her final talk and then turned to me and asked if I would tell them about the surprise. Yes, even though we’re nearly ready to board the bus for Decatur there was one more detail: “You will all get a Camp McDowell T-shirt,” I told them. Eyes got wide, and all of the children burst into cheers, grinning from ear to ear and pumping their fists. Dozens of hugs were exchanged. It was a magical moment to see kids get so excited about getting a T-shirt! When I glanced across the table at Shannon, one of the MEC teachers, I saw her red eyes and tears. She said, “I’ve held them back for three days, and now I just can’t keep the tears away.”

After everybody selected a T-shirt, pulled it on, and walked uphill to The Fork In The Road, we took the group photo. The sun was shining brightly, everyone smiled, and cameras snapped capturing this special moment. It was our first MEC trip, but certainly not our last. As Ms. Davis said good-bye to the students on the bus and turned to walk to her car, she whispered to all of us adults, “There are no words . . .” We nodded as we wiped away our tears—there are no words.

Enjoy a “Taste of McDowell”!

By Margaret Wade Johnston, Director

Bring your friends and family and join our Camp McDowell crew on Mother’s Day weekend, May 9-11, as we raise funds for the McDowell Environmental Center’s Scholarship Fund. The weekend includes a “Taste of McDowell,” a sample of what we offer at camp—live music, hikes, canoeing, cookouts, movies under the stars, hayrides, storytelling, and a contra dance. Several different packages are available so you can spend anywhere from one day to the entire weekend laughing, learning, and playing with us!

Last year we awarded more than $21,500 in scholarships to schools and students who otherwise would not be able to come to the McDowell Environmental Center. We believe the magical experience at Camp McDowell can change lives, and that motivates us to work hard so that money does not inhibit a student’s opportunity to learn. With your help we will bring even more students to our strong, growing community and help them see the world around them in new ways! For more information and to register, please visit www.cmec.dioala.org or e-mail me at maggie@campmcdowell.com.
It's COMING!

By Susanna Whitsett, Summer Camp Coordinator

We can’t wait for the best SUMMER CAMP EVER! In only two short months, we will continue the long tradition of worship, work, and play in our Summer Camp for rising 1st through 12th-graders. Former campers will tell you that Summer Camp is a place where young people grow in independence, knowledge of the Church, and an abiding respect for the natural world while living in Christian community and having TONS of fun!

To register online, log on to www.campmcdowell.com and follow the link to Summer Camp & Events. For questions about registration, please contact Summer Camp Registrar Sarah Nee at folkschool@campmcdowell.com; for all other Summer Camp questions, please contact me at susanna@campmcdowell.com.

We can’t wait to see you during the BEST SUMMER CAMP EVER!!!

2013 Sawyerville Christmas Project

By Susanna Whitsett

“Every good and perfect gift is from above” (James 1:17).

A holiday gathering at the small, cinderblock community center in Sawyerville marked another event characterized by that unique and abiding affection between local residents and members of our diocese. The Sawyerville Christmas project, somewhat an extension of the Sawyerville Day Camp, has developed and evolved over the past several years and settled into the celebration and facilitation of four distinct ministry areas: food, fellow-

ship, expressions of gratitude, and meeting essential needs. Many individuals and parishes make this event possible, and it’s an outreach effort that touches campers and their families who reside in Sawyerville plus a group of 25 elderly Sawyerville residents and “Special Friends” of camp—the bus drivers.

This year’s gathering featured storytelling by a Camp McDowell Environmental Center staff member and the director of the Greensboro Library, as well as lively caroling with guitar accompaniment. The children enjoyed making holiday crafts, jumping in moonwalks, and playing games in the field by the community center. Local businesses donated clothing and toys to give away, and we provided a breakfast buffet. In addition, we distributed more than 300 red bags filled with school supplies and at least that many packages of beans and rice. We also collected and sent boxes of tissues and bottles of hand sanitizer to schools and community organizations. Individual sponsors provided gifts of clothes, personal items, and food for designated elderly residents and bus drivers. Pastor Kervin Jones, of 3rd Street Church of God in Greensboro, led us in prayer and helped deliver gifts and goods. Many thanks go out to everyone involved in this effort!

If you or a group in your parish would like to participate in the 2014 Sawyerville Christmas Project, please send an e-mail to sawyervillechristmasproject@gmail.com.
THANK YOU!

We raised almost $4,000 during our Christmas card fundraiser. Thank you all for donating and spreading the Sawyerville Day Camp message! Special thanks to Jamie Plott for getting the cards to our donors and Amanda Ennis for taking Carolyn Tweedy’s beautiful artwork and making a wonderful card. We hope you all experienced joy and peace in the holidays.

We also raised more than $2,000 at the Sawyerville 5K sponsored by St. Paul’s in Greensboro last fall. The weather was glorious, and the community even brighter. We had a lot of fun. We appreciate the community of Greensboro, St. Paul’s parish, all the donors and vendors, and our runners! And a big thanks to Meg Rankin for once again coordinating this event. We are in the process of making some changes for 2014, including making the course an “official” race with the Tuscaloosa Track club.

In November, Sawyerville Day Camp participated in an online fundraising campaign called “Giving Tuesday.” We used all our social media tools to raise support and awareness. In the wake of Black Friday and Cyber Monday, it was a way for the giving community to invite and ask for donations and gifts. Donations from 27 individuals plus Trinity Church in Demopolis totaled almost $6,000. Thanks to everyone who participated!

This is a huge help, and we are so grateful for the many giving hearts that support Sawyerville Day Camp. Thank you all!

Answering the Call of Jesus
By Fran McKendree

Jesus calls us to love one another as he has loved us. I can think of no place where I see a response to this call lived out more fully than during the weeks of Sawyerville Day Camp. From the break of day to the waning hours of the hot Alabama summer nights, a team of high-school and college volunteers embodies the answering of this challenge, giving of themselves tirelessly . . . full of enthusiasm, hope, affirmation, and love. They are supported by an equally committed group of folks from around the state who provide meals, transportation, and logistic backing. And, maybe most telling about the integrity of Sawyerville Day Camp, is the large number of former campers who have returned as staff to mentor, guide, and shine their light for the ones who will follow in their footsteps.

I am a firm believer that the reign of God is happening all around us . . . when we open our eyes and hearts to the opportunities that God presents for us to participate fully, all our lives are enriched and deepened. I am grateful beyond measure for the ongoing work of Sawyerville Day Camp and for the loving, growing community that has emerged. In a world that most often seems to thrive on divisiveness and besieges us with a big “no,” Sawyerville Day Camp is the very essence of collaboration and faithfulness, a strong and vital “YES!” to God’s call. When you hear the whistle of the Gospel train, it is rounding a bend in Sawyerville . . . jump on, my friends!

How You Can Help

We invite everyone to help us make the 21st year of Sawyerville Day Camp a success. You can help provide meals and supplies, be a prayer partner, serve on staff—there’s a way for everyone to get involved. We will give you clear directions and help you or your parish volunteer in whatever way works for you. We have added a “Get Involved!” link to our Web site (www.sawyervilledaycamp.org) and an easy online form for you to fill out. If you haven’t already told us, please contact us today, and let us know how you want to help this summer. For more about Sawyerville Day Camp, please visit our new Web site, www.sawyervilledaycamp.org, and watch our new documentary!

Prayer Partners
“…And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart” (Luke 18:1).

As brothers and sisters in Christ, we are called to encourage each other along our journey. One of the most meaningful ways that we can do this, especially for our younger staff members, is to pray for them as they serve the Lord.

Would you join us in serving as a prayer partner for the Sawyerville Day Camp? Through your words of encouragement and daily prayers, you broaden and strengthen the network of support that will contribute to the success of the project. With well more than 300 staffers participating this year, we really need your help!

Prayer partners write four notes of encouragement to one of our youth or adult staffers during the three weeks of camp. You can choose to write notes by session, or pick up the last session as part of their Lenten discipline, and we invite you to do the same.

Anyone can participate even if you are on staff. It is a great activity for youth groups or Bible studies! In the coming days and weeks, you can gather your group together and write notes. You can request to pray for someone you know, or Linda Kennedy will assign you a staff member. This year’s Sawyerville Day Camp theme is “I AM . . . a child of God.”

We will give you a daily theme to focus on if you choose to write your notes in this way. Thanks for helping us collect new pool towels, new bathing suits, books, goggles, snacks, and all that we need for this year’s three camp sessions!

Sawyerville Day Camp Supplies
We are so grateful to Memily Colvin, who is a member of All Saints’ in Homewood, for her ministry over the last several years. She has done an amazing job as the supply drives coordinator, and we are thankful for her time and energy and all the ways she has served God and His precious children. Memily has stepped down from that position, and she now works on our new subcommittee Friends of Sawyerville. We have assembled a small team to fill Memily’s former position, and Amanda Ennis is the new contact person. You can still e-mail us at sawyervillesupplies@gmail.com, and we will be in touch. Thank you for donating and spreading the Sawyerville Day Camp message! Thank you all!
Just in the Nick of Time!

A Day in the Life of a Mother in Haiti

By Maggie Johnston and CJ Van Slyke

A young mother sat holding her two-year-old daughter in her lap, patiently waiting among the several hundred people who had come to see the visiting American doctor and our medical team. The child was barely responsive, with hugely swollen legs and arms and a bloated stomach—she was literally starving to death. The mother explained that she stopped breastfeeding when her daughter was a year old, but she had very little to feed her. She had walked for miles this morning to the Lespwa Timoun mobile medical clinic in Crochu, Haiti, to ask for help to make her little girl well.

**Nutrition is basic. Water is essential. Babies and mothers deserve a fighting chance to live. Not so in Crochu.**

**Why is Crochu so different from Alabama or even other areas in Haiti? In Crochu, many babies and children go hungry, and many of them die from starvation. Food is not something the people here can run to the grocery store and pick up. Here the mothers are often the sole providers for their children, and they spend a large part of each day walking down the mountain to the local spring to get water and then carrying the containers on their heads back up the mountain to their homes.**

For the past eight years, Carmel Valdema has provided the monthly Lespwa Timoun Nutrition Clinic program or other projects to help our sisters and brothers in Crochu, Haiti. She can tell many inspiring stories about starving infants returning to health once they started taking Plumpynut and Akamel, two of the nutritional supplements the clinic provides.

**But the Lespwa Timoun Nutrition Clinic has been out of funding for the past three months . . . no funds, therefore no nutrition clinics!**

Fortunately our medical team had brought 30 pounds of powdered milk with us that day, and the story of the little girl at our mobile medical clinic had a happy ending.

Without the milk, the child's chances for survival would have been very slim. The recipe for a successful, healthy outcome involved 10 teaspoons of sugar, 5 tablespoons of vegetable oil, 5 tablespoons of dry milk, and 1 quart of water. The mother was told to give this mixture to her little girl over a 24-hour period in small amounts and continue this process for seven days. When the mother brought the little girl back to the clinic the next week, her swelling was gone and she was more alert. **We had provided lifesaving help just in the nick of time!**

How much does it cost to run the monthly Nutrition Clinic on the mountain in Haiti? For $1,000 each month, hundreds of children will receive the supplements they need to survive. As one poignant Haitian proverb says, “An empty sack cannot stand up.” Without basic nutrition the children of Crochu will not be able to stand up . . . they will not be able to live.

**If you would like to help support the Lespwa Timoun Nutrition Clinic program or other projects to help our sisters and brothers in Crochu, Haiti, please contact CJ Van Slyke at cjvenslyke@aol.com or 205/914-3866. We welcome questions, donations, and offers of help!**

Camp Sunday at St. Stephen’s

By Jen Manning, Senior High Youth Minister

St. Stephen’s in Birmingham recently hosted “Camp Sunday,” a worship service that highlighted everything that happens at Camp McDowell. The goal was to help spread the word about Summer Camp and all of the other opportunities that Camp McDowell has to offer. During the “Camp Fire Sermon,” campers young and old told about why they think Camp McDowell is God’s Backyard.

**If your parish is interested in hosting a “Camp Sunday” event, please contact me at jen@sschurch.org or 205/967-8786 ext. 110 for ideas and ready-to-use materials.**

Join Us for Lenten Lunches

By Carla Reich

Lenten Lunches 2014 kicked off Ash Wednesday, March 5, at the Cathedral Church of the Advent in Birmingham with Bishop Sloan preaching. We invite everyone to come to the Advent each weekday at 12:05 p.m. for inspirational sermons by preachers from around the United States and Europe and stay afterward for “made from scratch” lunches prepared by women and men from the Advent and other local churches. All proceeds from Lenten Lunches benefit local outreach and missions.

Join us through April 18 and “fill up body and soul.” (Lunch will not be served on Good Friday.) To see a complete list of this year’s speakers, please visit www.adventbirmingham.org.
Giving Hope to the Hopeless

By the Rev. Deacon Judy Quick, Diocesan Representative

Deaf from a childhood bout with spinal meningitis, John Awinko is still able to speak and tell his powerful story. At the Anglican Woodworks Training Center for Persons with Disabilities in the Diocese of Tamale in Ghana, John told the pilgrims with Episcopal Relief & Development that ADDRO (Anglican Diocese Development and Relief Organization, Episcopal Relief & Development’s partner in Ghana) sent him to carpentry school to learn a skill so he could support himself. His parents died when he was very young, so this training was a godsend for him personally.

To demonstrate his gratitude, John returned to his village, opened a carpentry shop, and invited other disabled young men to join him. He has gone to families who have rejected their disabled sons and brought the young men to live in his shop. Space is crowded for the 30 residents, but they are most grateful for the opportunity to live with others and learn woodworking. John helps the young men, who are blind, deaf, or have other physical disabilities, make doors, beds, and cabinets, which they sell advocates with persistence and passion for the rights of the disabled, winning the 2 percent government benefit available for the young men.

This is but one of the many stories of transformed lives. May God continue to bless the devoted staff of Episcopal Relief & Development and ADDRO in Ghana, and may we continue to support these development programs as we live into our Gospel call to serve the poor and marginalized.

For more information on how you and your parish can become more engaged with Episcopal Relief & Development, please contact me at jgquick@bellsouth.net or 205/699-6862 or visit www.episcopalrelief.org (please note new website address).

Apply Now for Grants!

By Becki Rothrock, Department of Mission and Outreach Chair

May 1 is the annual deadline to apply for our diocesan Department of Mission and Outreach’s Parish-Based Outreach Grants. We offer these grants to encourage parishes to start new or expand existing outreach ministries that will become self-sustainable within three years. These grants are only for parish-based outreach and cannot be used for pass-through monies to other agencies or groups that do not directly involve parishes or parishioners. The department hopes that these grants will enable parishes to engage in new and creative ways of being Christ’s presence in Alabama.

If you are engaged in mission as an individual, called by God to serve domestically or globally, consider applying for a Mission Grant for Individuals. We offer these grants for individuals of any age who have a connection with our diocese and are directly involved in sharing God’s love with people in need in our diocese or elsewhere in the United States or outside the United States. These grants support short-term, one-year work.

Applications for individual grants may be submitted at any time throughout the year, and applicants may reapply.

To apply for a grant, download an application form from our diocesan website, www.dioala.org (click on Our Ministries/Mission & Outreach link) or contact me at Rebecca@cathedraladvent.com. Applications may be submitted online with an e-mail authorization from the rector or priest in charge and the vestry of your parish.

The Department of Mission and Outreach looks forward to receiving your grant application and your new parish outreach or individual local, domestic, or global mission ministries.

Around Our Diocese

Bishops’ Visitation Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Bishop</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>April 13,</td>
<td>9:30 a.m.</td>
<td>Marray</td>
<td>St. Luke's, Decatur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Palm Sunday)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Grace</td>
<td>Sheffield</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10 a.m.</td>
<td>Sloan</td>
<td>St. James', Alex City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Marray</td>
<td>Grace, Birmingham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sloan</td>
<td>St. Andrew's, Birmingham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Marray</td>
<td>St. John's, Rainbow City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sloan</td>
<td>Nativity, Huntsville</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Marray</td>
<td>Ascension, Tuscaloosa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sloan</td>
<td>Holy Trinity, Highland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Marray</td>
<td>Holy Trinity, Birmingham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sloan</td>
<td>Ascension, Birmingham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Marray</td>
<td>St. Peter’s, Talladega</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sloan</td>
<td>St. James', Livingston</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Marray</td>
<td>St. Mary's-on-the-Campus, Decatur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sloan</td>
<td>St. Paul's, Selma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Marray</td>
<td>Holy Trinity, Montgomery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sloan</td>
<td>All Saints', Tuscaloosa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Marray</td>
<td>Epiphany, Leeds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sloan</td>
<td>Holy Trinity, Huntsville</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Marray</td>
<td>Holy Trinity, Birmingham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sloan</td>
<td>St. Mark's, Prattville</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 4,</td>
<td>9 and 11 a.m.</td>
<td>Sloan</td>
<td>St. Philip's, Fort Payne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9 and 11 a.m.</td>
<td>Marray</td>
<td>Advent, Birmingham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 7,</td>
<td>6 p.m.</td>
<td>Sloan</td>
<td>St. Philip's, Fort Payne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td></td>
<td>Marray</td>
<td>Advent, Birmingham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 11,</td>
<td>10 a.m.</td>
<td>Marray</td>
<td>St. Mary's-on-the-Highlands, Birmingham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sloan</td>
<td>St. John's, Montgomery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10:30 a.m.</td>
<td>Sloan</td>
<td>Nativity, Huntsville</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Marray</td>
<td>St. Luke's, Birmingham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 18,</td>
<td>10 a.m.</td>
<td>Sloan</td>
<td>Nativity, Huntsville</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday</td>
<td></td>
<td>Marray</td>
<td>St. Luke's, Birmingham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10:30 a.m.</td>
<td>Marray</td>
<td>St. Luke's, Birmingham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 20,</td>
<td>6:30 p.m.</td>
<td>Marray</td>
<td>Christ Church, Albertville</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sloan</td>
<td>Albertville</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 25,</td>
<td>10:15 a.m.</td>
<td>Marray</td>
<td>Ascension, Montgomery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sloan</td>
<td>St. Mark's, Prattville</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 1,</td>
<td>9:30 a.m.</td>
<td>Marray</td>
<td>Epiphany, Leeds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday</td>
<td>11 a.m.</td>
<td>Sloan</td>
<td>St. James', Livingston</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 4,</td>
<td>6 p.m.</td>
<td>Sloan</td>
<td>Resurrection, Rainbow City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td></td>
<td>Marray</td>
<td>Resurrection, Rainbow City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 8,</td>
<td>10 a.m.</td>
<td>Sloan</td>
<td>St. James', Alex City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday</td>
<td>10:30 a.m.</td>
<td>Marray</td>
<td>St. John's, Decatur</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Upcoming Events section contains detailed information about various workshops, conferences, and events. These include the 9th Annual Gumbo Gala, the Alabama Folks School Jam Camp, A Religion of One's Own conference, and a variety of workshops at Camp McDowell such as How Farms Work: A Hands-On Experience and the Young Adults Retreat. Each event is described with dates, locations, and contact information. Additionally, there is a mention of the Acolyte Festival, which is an annual event that involves honoring the ministry of acolytes and providing a space for young adults to gather and participate in a communal experience.
the Holy Spirit. The thoughtful narrative will help readers learn more about God’s love together.

**To Live with Christ by Bo Gieritz**

This collection features English translations of devotional writings by Swedish Lutheran bishop and novelist Bo Gieritz. These classic, Christ-centered devotions will help readers grow in their understanding of God’s grace, love, and forgiveness. Each day’s page includes a Bible reading, a meditation, and a prayer.

**Give Them Grace: Dazzling Your Kids with the Love of Jesus** by Elyse Fitzpatrick and Jessica Thompson

Mother-daughter team Elyse Fitzpatrick and Jessica Thompson offer this new perspective on parenting based on God’s grace instead of “rules.” They contend that in trying to be good parents who raise good kids most people base what is “good” on a set of standards similar to Old Testament Law, which cannot save or change us. They encourage parents to embrace the gospel message of God’s abundant, undeserved grace and to abundantly share that same grace with their children so that they will experience unconditional love and respond to Live with Christ by Bo Gieritz

**General Convention**

June 25-July 3, 2015, in Salt Lake City

**Sawyerville Day Camp Sessions**

June 14-20, June 21-27, July 6-12

**Special Session at Camp McDowell**

July 1-6

**Young People Paint Birmingham**

(7th-9th graders)

June 16-20

**April 13**

Le Chemin de la Croix (The Stations of the Cross) by Marcel Dupré performed by Dr. Frederick T. Teardo, Director of Music and Organist, at 3 p.m. at the Advent in Birmingham. For more information please contact Charles Kennedy at kennedy@cathedraladvent.com or 205/226-3505.

**April 26**

Spring Festival hosted by the ECW at Grace Church in Birmingham from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., featuring a silent auction of items from the estates of Father Maurice and Jane Branscomb and the late Rev. Deacon Adele Stockton, heirloom garden seedlings, children’s activities, arts and crafts, and a bake sale. For more information please e-mail geuw@bellsouth.net or call 205/395-4636 or 705-7313.

**99 Stories from the Bible**

Juliet David with illustrations by Elina Ellis

Each of the 99 memorable Bible stories Juliet David retells vividly comes to life with Elina Ellis’s vibrant illustrations. The book starts “At the Beginning” and includes stories of key people and events from both the Old and New Testaments, concluding with “One Day Jesus Will Return.”

**The Three Trees: A Traditional Folktale**

text by Elena Pasquali with illustrations by Sophie Windham

As three trees grow on a hill, each dreams of becoming something great and notable. One hopes to be fashioned into a regal throne; another wants to be a strong, seaworthy ship; and the third desires to keep on growing taller than any other tree. After they are cut down and their wood is crafted into a manger, a fishing boat, and a rugged cross, their dreams are fulfilled in ways they could not have imagined through the great and notable roles they play in the life of Jesus. The stylish artwork enhances this time-honored text, ensuring this book will become a family treasure to be enjoyed at Christmas, Easter, and throughout the year.

**The Easter Story for Children**

by Max Lucado, Randy Frazee, and Karen Davis Hill with illustrations by Fausto Bianchi

This simply told, beautifully illustrated retelling of the Easter story starts with the Last Supper, continues through Jesus’ trial, death, resurrection, and ascension, and ends with the gift of the Holy Spirit. The thoughtful narrative will help readers of all ages understand more fully the depth of God’s love and forgiveness.

**Around Our Diocese**

**What’s New/Noteworthy at the Episcopal Book Store**

By Cindy Funderburk, Manager

The bookstore is open Monday through Thursday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and Sunday from 8:15 a.m. to 12:15 p.m. For information about these and other books or to have the staff research and special order a particular book, please contact the Episcopal Book Store, 205 15th Street, Birmingham, AL 35203; 205/323-2959; chsinfo@episcobooks.com; or visit the bookstore online at www.episcobooks.com.

**Cursillo Weekends**

#192 April 10-13, #193 June 12-15, #194 September 4-7, #195 October 9-12

**General Convention**

June 25-July 3, 2015, in Salt Lake City

**Sawyerville Day Camp Sessions**

June 14-20, June 21-27, July 6-12

**Special Session at Camp McDowell**

July 1-6

**Young People Paint Birmingham**

(7th-9th graders)

June 16-20

**April 13**

Le Chemin de la Croix (The Stations of the Cross) by Marcel Dupré performed by Dr. Frederick T. Teardo, Director of Music and Organist, at 3 p.m. at the Advent in Birmingham. For more information please contact Charles Kennedy at kennedy@cathedraladvent.com or 205/226-3505.

**April 26**

Spring Festival hosted by the ECW at Grace Church in Birmingham from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., featuring a silent auction of items from the estates of Father Maurice and Jane Branscomb and the late Rev. Deacon Adele Stockton, heirloom garden seedlings, children’s activities, arts and crafts, and a bake sale. For more information please e-mail geuw@bellsouth.net or call 205/395-4636 or 705-7313.

**99 Stories from the Bible**

Juliet David with illustrations by Elina Ellis

Each of the 99 memorable Bible stories Juliet David retells vividly comes to life with Elina Ellis’s vibrant illustrations. The book starts “At the Beginning” and includes stories of key people and events from both the Old and New Testaments, concluding with “One Day Jesus Will Return.”

**The Three Trees: A Traditional Folktale**

text by Elena Pasquali with illustrations by Sophie Windham

As three trees grow on a hill, each dreams of becoming something great and notable. One hopes to be fashioned into a regal throne; another wants to be a strong, seaworthy ship; and the third desires to keep on growing taller than any other tree. After they are cut down and their wood is crafted into a manger, a fishing boat, and a rugged cross, their dreams are fulfilled in ways they could not have imagined through the great and notable roles they play in the life of Jesus. The stylish artwork enhances this time-honored text, ensuring this book will become a family treasure to be enjoyed at Christmas, Easter, and throughout the year.

**The Easter Story for Children**

by Max Lucado, Randy Frazee, and Karen Davis Hill with illustrations by Fausto Bianchi

This simply told, beautifully illustrated retelling of the Easter story starts with the Last Supper, continues through Jesus’ trial, death, resurrection, and ascension, and ends with the gift of the Holy Spirit. The thoughtful narrative will help readers of all ages understand more fully the depth of God’s love and forgiveness.
Our 183rd Annual Diocesan Convention
Setting Aside Resolution-Making and Focusing on Discussion and Prayer

By the Rev. Michael Rich; Photos by Blake Britton

The theme was "Inspire," and inspired was how hundreds of Episcopalians came away from our 183rd Annual Diocesan Convention held February 21-22 at the Wynfrey Hotel (Hyatt Regency) in Birmingham. This second in a three-year cycle of conventions called "Invite, Inspire, and Transform" was one of the most compact conventions yet—just one night and one full day. But it may have been one of the most prayer filled, with resolution-making set aside for discussion and prayer.

"This year, in an effort to ‘Sing to the Lord a New Song,’ we’re greatly reducing the number of resolutions," Bishop Kee Sloan told the delegates. He said he hoped that honest conversation could replace the traditional debate format. "I am very sure that fighting as a form of entertainment is not the best expression of the love and faith that makes us God’s holy Church," he said.

In his address to the convention (please see pages 2-7 and visit http://bit.ly/1prleUj), Bishop Sloan announced the formation of the Bishops’ Commission on Generous Pastoral Response. The 12-member commission will include both clergy and laypeople. Seven members will be nominated by our convocation deans, and five will be named by our bishops to ensure that the commission is balanced.

Bishop Sloan explained that the group will help design a process for conversation in our diocese about blessings of same-gender unions. The commission’s work will be the beginning, not the end, of the process, he emphasized. The issues are complex: How can we love, include, and respect people who think we should never do this, who believe that homosexuality is a sin? "We are not able right now to agree on same-sex unions," he notes, "but we can agree that we are called to be one in Christ, to love God, and to love each other—that we can and must do."

In his address to the convention, Assistant Bishop Santosh Marray (please see pages 8-9) looked at the history of Christianity and Anglicanism to remind us that decision-making in the Church is "collaborative, collegial, and respectful for each other’s position." The essence of our Church government, he said, is that "it is healthy and acceptable to disagree and yet live in community."

Youth from across our diocese participated in a convention youth lock-in. They provided some of the music and led a service of Compline on Friday evening as well as a mid-convention “energizer” on Saturday. In addition, the Youth Choir of St. Thomas’ in Birmingham sang during the closing Eucharist (please see page 7).

Much of the convention’s Saturday session was devoted to conversation set within the Holy Eucharist. The innovative closing Eucharist began with small groups of clergy and laypeople gathering to hear the Gospel and, in place of a sermon, discuss how the Church can be faithful to tradition while singing a new song. Those groups then gathered together in the convention hall to break bread together.

One way that a diocesan convention can take place in such a short period of time is to keep presentations on schedule. Again this year, all of the presentations by church organizations were presented on video, which means they all were entertaining, informative, and none ran over the allotted time. (You can see these stories about ministries throughout our diocese online at http://bit.ly/1prleUj).

The convention passed a balanced budget and elected diocesan officers and also deputies to the General Convention of the Episcopal Church scheduled to be held in Salt Lake City from June 25 through July 3, 2015 (please see page 10 and visit http://bit.ly/1prleUj).

A total of 108 clergy and 306 lay delegates representing our diocese’s 71 parishes and worshiping communities attended this year’s convention, which was hosted by Holy Apostles’, St. Alban’s, and St. Thomas’ in Birmingham. Christ Church in Tuscaloosa will host our 184th Annual Diocesan Convention next February.

Youth from around our diocese provided music and led daily worship, including Compline on Friday evening.

The Alabama Episcopalian

The Alabama Episcopalian is published six times a year (January/February, March/April, May/June, July/August, September/October, and November/December). For the most current news about recent and upcoming events, please visit our diocesan Web site, www.dioala.org. Please send stories and photographs (color, if available) to Editor Dave Drachlis at communications@dioala.org or 521 North 20th Street, Birmingham, AL 35203-2682; the submission deadline for each issue is the 1st of the month prior to publication. Postmaster, parishes, and individuals, please send all address changes or additions to Circulation Secretary Denise Servant at dservant@dioala.org or Carpenter House, 521 North 20th Street, Birmingham, AL 35203-2682.

Keep up with the latest news from around our diocese between issues of The Alabama Episcopalian on our diocesan Web site, www.dioala.org. If you are not already receiving our “Web Site Update,” you can sign up to receive a weekly e-mail containing headlines with links to the latest news, photos, and videos about and from around our diocese. Simply send an e-mail with your name and e-mail address to ddrchlis@dioala.org and put “Headlines” on the subject line. You can “opt out” anytime.