Annual Council 2019: Nominees for Election

Deputation for the 80th General Convention of the Episcopal Church (2021)

We will clergy and lay deputies, as well as clergy and lay alternate deputies, to the 80th General Convention of the Episcopal Church to be held June 30th – July 9th, 2021, in Baltimore, Maryland. The Nebraska deputation will consist of four deputies of each order and one alternate deputy of each order.

Clergy Nominees

The Rev. Dn. Wes Agar, St. Martha’s, Papillion: I serve as deacon at St. Martha’s. I was honored to be among Nebraska’s deputation to the 2018 General Convention, where our deputation’s mutual support and focus on Jesus made us an effective presence. I’ve served in the Disciplinary Board. Currently, I am serving as Co-Chair of the Diocesan Disaster Preparedness Office, the Diocesan Safety Officer, Committee on Scouting and Camp Canterbury Staff.

The Rev. Dn. LaClaire Atkins, St. Andrew’s, Omaha: A 2019 graduate of Church Divinity School of the Pacific, I moved to Nebraska in September of 2012 to serve in Resurrection House, Omaha, a member program of the Episcopal Service Corps. After my intern year, I went on to serve five other Nebraska parishes before and during my time in seminary. I am currently a transitional deacon and am serving as the most recent Bishop’s Society Curate at St. Andrew’s, Omaha.

The Ven. Betsy Blake Bennett, Church of the Resurrection, Omaha: I serve as Archdeacon and at Church of the Resurrection. I was grateful to be among Nebraska’s 2015 and 2019 General Conventions deputations, where our mutual support and focus on Jesus made us effective. In 2019, I served on the Environmental Stewardship and Care of Creation committee at General Convention. I currently serve on diocesan Standing Committee and the VIR faculty. I’m on the Bishop Kemper School faculty, and serve as the BKSM Board President.

The Rev. Canon Liz Easton, Diocese of Nebraska: I’m grateful to have represented Nebraska at the last two General Conventions, most recently as deputation chair in 2018. In 2015, I served as an officer on the Rules of Order committee, and in 2018 I was vice-chair of the Governance and Structure committee. On a church-wide level, I chair the Board for Transition Ministry. I would be honored to continue representing the faithful witness of our Nebraska congregations, which I love so much.

The Very Rev. Katie Hargis, St. Mark’s Pro-Cathedral, Hastings: I have served as Dean of St. Mark’s Pro-Cathedral since 2017. I currently serve as a member of the Bishop & Trustees, B&T Finance Committee, as a member of the Advisory Board for the Benedictine Way, and as a counselor at Camp Canterbury. My goal as a DioNeb delegate, would be to help facilitate conversations about the realities of Midwestern Dioceses, and how we utilize the resources we have to embody God’s love for all.
The Rev. Thomas Jones, Church of the Holy Spirit, Bellevue: While Rector at Church of the Holy Spirit I have served: two terms on Executive Commission, 1 term on Bishop & Trustees, 8 years on Legislative Committee, two terms as Treasurer on Board of BKSM, and I have had the pleasure of leading youth on diocesan mission trips in the Dominican Republic and the Rosebud Reservation. Having attended General Convention as an alternate, I’d be honored to serve as a primary delegate at next General Convention.

The Very Rev. Craig Loya, Trinity Cathedral, Omaha: It is my great joy to serve as Dean of Trinity Cathedral. I am a native of North Platte, and was confirmed at St. Mark’s in Hastings. I have been a deputy to two General Conventions, and have served on several of its committees and task forces. I would be grateful for the opportunity to once again help bring the story of what God is doing in Nebraska to the work of the wider church.

The Rev. Steven King, Trinity Cathedral, Omaha: I have served at Trinity Cathedral since 2017. I’m grateful to have been elected to the 2012 and 2018 General Conventions. I currently serve on the Commission on Ministry. I am passionate about the ways our Midwestern dioceses are embodying ministry in the 21st century. It would be my great joy to represent the myriad ways the Holy Spirit is moving in life-giving, transformative ways in our diocese to the wider church.

The Rev. Marisa Tabizon Thompson, All Saints, Omaha: I want to make our church an embodiment of God’s dream for all creation, and see that goal in progress through General Convention. I have been responsible for drafting and managing structural equity resolutions, helping honor the dignity of all. As an officer of the TEC Task Force on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, and a leader on the Standing Commission on Structure, Governance, Constitution and Canons, I am an expert voice and advocate for DioNeb.

Lay Nominees

Dana “Woody” Bradford, All Saints, Omaha: I presently serve the Diocese and Chancellor. I have previously served as its Treasurer and member of two Bishop and Trustees committees. I am a member of All Saints parish, having served as a teacher, vestry member, and EfM mentor. I have been fortunate to have been elected to serve the Diocese as Lay Deputy at 14 General Conventions; during that time serving on the committees of Constitution, Social and Economic Justice, and Structure.

Marty Wheeler Burnett, Trinity Cathedral, Omaha: I lead a growing music ministry for all ages at your cathedral. As a seminary professor, and officer for national Episcopal organizations, and a diocesan program coordinator, I have served the wider church. Having visited almost every parish in Nebraska, I am deeply aware of the needs and issues facing congregations. I have attended five General Conventions, and I was an alternate deputy in 2018. I would be honored to serve as a deputy.
James “Vic” Culp, Church of the Holy Spirit, Bellevue: A long-time member of CHS in Bellevue, I have served in vestry roles including junior/senior warden and treasurer, chaired a rector search committee, and served on the former DioNeb Executive Commission. I have a range of organizational skills from 30+ years of military and government service, and currently work as office and facilities manager at All Saints. I have seen church life from many sides and would be honored to represent DioNeb at General Convention.

Charles Plantz, St. Matthew’s, Alliance: I am a lifelong Episcopalian and active in the Church - local, diocesan, and deanery levels - since 1973. I am a four-time Deputy and served on General Convention committees considering prayer book revision in 2015 and 2018. I am committed to the polity of the Episcopal Church and to the doctrine of the ministry of all the baptized, and hope to see current levels of equal lay authority continue.

Noelle Ptomey, St. Augustine of Canterbury, Elkhorn: I am a life-long member of the Episcopal Church, and an active member of this diocese, as well as my home parish, St. Augustine of Canterbury. I’ve served on various parish and diocesan committees and was elected as a Lay Deputy to the 78th and 79th General Conventions. The heart of my ministry is children and youth programming, and I currently serve as a co-director for the diocesan summer camp program, Camp Canterbury.

Standing Committee

We will elect two clergy persons and one lay person for terms to expire in 2022.

Clergy Nominees

The Rev. Tony Anderson, Church of the Resurrection, Omaha: I am a native Nebraskan and life-long Episcopalian. After attending seminary in Virginia, I was ordained a priest in 2017. I recently completed the second year of my three-year Bishop’s Society Curacy. After serving 18 months as a curate at St. Andrew’s, Omaha, I am now serving as the Priest in Charge at Church of the Resurrection, Omaha. I just celebrated 20 years of marriage to my wife Amy, and we have three amazing children together!

The Ven. Betsy Blake Bennett, Church of the Resurrection, Omaha: I serve as Archdeacon and also serve as a deacon at Church of the Resurrection in Omaha. In the Diocese, I’ve been a clergy member of Executive Commission, the Bishop Search Committee, the VIR faculty, and Standing Committee. I’m on the faculty for the Bishop Kemper School for Ministry, and currently serve as the BKSM Board President. Commuting between Hastings and Omaha, I enjoy time outdoors and being a grandparent.

The Rev. Dn. Colleen Lewis, St. Luke’s, Kearney: I have served as Deacon at St. Luke’s, Kearney, since my ordination in 1992; am an EFM graduate; attended Cursillo; represented the Diocese of Nebraska on the Province VI Team for Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation (JPIC);
served on the Kearney Jubilee Center Board of Directors; and was Diocesan Jubilee Officer. I also served on the diocesan Commission on Mission, Liturgical Commission, and DioNeb JPIC Committee, and currently serve on the Standing Committee.

**The Rev. Pam Williams, St. Andrew’s, Seward:** I was raised in the Roman Catholic Church, but became an Episcopalian when I married Cal. I taught Middle School, High School and College level classes and also worked as a book consultant for a publishing company. I have served as a counselor at Camp Canterbury for three years. I currently serve as the priest at St. Andrew’s, Seward, and pastor of Frieden’s Church of Christ in Goehner.

**Lay Nominees**

**Deena Kennel, Grace Church, Chadron:** A lifelong Episcopalian, I was baptized and raised at St. Matthew’s in Alliance and have been a member of Grace Church, Chadron since 1995. At Grace, I have served on the Vestry multiple times, many of which were as Senior or Junior Warden. As is typical in smaller parishes, I have also participated in a number of other ministries including ECW, Building and Grounds Committee, and Stewardship. I would be honored to represent Episcopalians in Western Nebraska on the Standing Committee.

**Nan Smutko, St. Mary’s, Blair:** I am excited to be considered for the Standing Committee. I have a very strong commitment to service for my community and my church, as reflected in my involvement with the Bishop and Trustees, parish Altar Guild and DOK chapter, Bridge hotline volunteer, and Northeast Nebraska Community Action Program board.

**Bishop and Trustees**

*We will elect one clergy person and one lay person for terms to expire in 2022.*

**Clergy Nominees**

**The Rev. Thomas Jones, Church of the Holy Spirit, Bellevue:** I Currently serve on Bishop & Trustees and would welcome the chance for serving a second term and continuing the work of this ministry. I bring to the team my experience as a rector, a member of the Legislative Committee, former Executive Committee member and Diocesan coordinator for Youth Outreach, and now my work as Co-Vicar for Mission.

**The Rev. Benedict Varnum, St. Augustine’s, Ekhorn:** Having served a first term as this board went through restructuring, I’d love the opportunity to help it live into its more agile, streamlined version. I believe our Bishop and Trustees board has an opportunity over these coming years to continue on the foundation of supporting parish-level ministry, while prayerfully discerning what resources the diocese can be offering for formation and outreach (loving God and loving neighbor) in broad ways for all in our diocese.
Lay Nominees

Jeff Chapman, Trinity Cathedral, Omaha: My wife, Melanie, and I just moved back to Omaha where we belong to Trinity Cathedral. I still serve as Assistant Treasurer and am rejoining the choir. When we previously lived in Omaha, I was Treasurer for four years. My primary accomplishments were restructuring the budgetary process, enhancing financial reporting, promoting transparency, and implementing the Strategic Plan. I am a Certified Management Accountant. At Union Pacific, I am responsible for intermodal operations strategy and planning.

Kristy Dietrich, St. Matthew’s, Alliance: I am a CPA and Wyoming native, and have lived in Nebraska for over 30 years. I was confirmed at St. Matthew’s in Alliance, where I still worship. I have served on the Vestry of St. Matthew’s and currently serve as treasurer and lay reader. I served on the Executive Commission and just completed a term on the Bishop and Trustees. My husband, Rick Deans, is a Chadron native and a convert to the Episcopal Church!

Disciplinary Board

We will elect one clergy person and one lay person for terms to expire in 2022.

Clergy Nominees

The Rev. Mavis Hall, St. Luke’s, Plattsmouth: I was confirmed an Episcopalian in 1978 and ordained a priest May 30, 2003. I served as assistant priest at St. Luke’s Plattsmouth and as rector since 2009. During my years in the Diocese, I have been active in youth ministry, serving on the former Youth Commission, and as coordinator for the Happening Weekend for 10 years. I currently serve as the committee chair for the Clyde E. and Rae E. Whitney scholarship committee.

The Rev. Benedict Varnum, St. Augustine of Canterbury, Elkhorn: When clergy require disciplining, our church’s response becomes a piece of either the healing or continued trauma of those impacted, and the way we undertake the work of holding a clergy member responsible requires real work to do as much care and restoration as is possible with everyone involved. I am willing to continue serving on this board, with hopes that we are never needed but preparation and resolve if we ever are.

Lay Nominees

Jamie Street Baker, St. Andrew’s, Omaha: I have my Bachelor’s in Social Work, a Master’s in Gerontology and I have my SW license in the state of NE. I have worked in the field of aging for over 14 years and I also stayed home for 14 years, raising our 2 girls. My passion is leading Conscious Aging workshops and occasionally leading retreats as well on the topics of Self-Compassion and Forgiveness. I served for one year on the Disciplinary Board, filling a term that was vacated.
Wayne Culp, St. Andrew’s, Omaha: I moved with my family to Omaha and the Diocese of Nebraska in 1991 and am a member of St. Andrew’s. I have served on vestries, as a parish treasurer, and consecutive terms on the Executive Commission. My spiritual formation grew significantly when I was EfM mentor for six years. I am retired and spend much of my time volunteering by preparing federal and state income taxes for older and lower income people.