

VIRGINIA EPISCOPALIAN

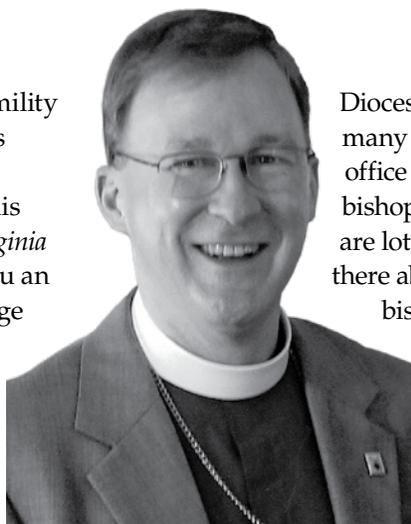
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OCTOBER 2009 + SPECIAL EDITION

A Letter from Bishop Johnston

Dear Diocesan Family,

With a great sense of humility and gratitude, I write this letter to you, my first as your diocesan bishop. This special edition of *The Virginia Episcopalian* will bring you an introduction to this change in diocesan leadership. You will also find the beginnings of a new vision for the Diocese of Virginia. Additionally, I hope to continue to introduce myself to a number of you.



Diocese." I have heard many questions about the office and ministry of a bishop. To be sure, there are lots of opinions out there about diocese and bishop. Whatever all of those might be, the plain fact remains that congregation—bishop—diocese are inseparable in the life and

ministry of the Episcopal Church. Raising this awareness, and deepening this interrelationship, will be a major focus of my episcopate.

I am keenly aware that there are still many congregations that I have not yet had the chance to visit officially. With the 2010 schedule now set [see www.thediocese.net] these long waits will be over and I will have been to all 181 Virginia congregations. If you belong to one of those missions or churches that I have not been able to visit yet, please know that I am eager to come to you

and happily anticipate those times.

While I am now officially your new diocesan bishop, the formal service recognizing me as such has been set to coincide with diocesan Council, January 29-30, 2010. The "Recognition and Investiture of a Bishop" will actually occur at 9 a.m. on Friday, January 29 at St. Paul's Church, Richmond. This service is open to all; you do not have to be a member of Council to attend. I hope you will come to this celebration of the beginning of our ministry together.

But first, save a date for a "Town Hall" meeting near you sometime during October or November. These meetings will be crucial for setting the vision for our way ahead in mission and ministry [see text box below]. After all is said and done, ministry in the name and in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is always the point of it all.

Blessings to you,

Town Hall Meetings

The Diocese will gather and share ideas for building a new vision for our communal ministry at these meetings. Please make plans to attend.

Town Hall Meetings

Saturday, Oct. 24, Grace, Kilmarnock, 2 p.m.
Monday, Nov. 2, Christ Church, Glen Allen, 7 p.m.
Saturday, Nov. 7, Holy Comforter, Vienna, 10 a.m.

Saturday, Nov. 21, St. Paul's, Ivy, 10 a.m.
Saturday, Nov. 21, St. Stephen's, Culpeper, 2 p.m.

Town Hall Meetings for Youth

For youth ages 14 and up, and their youth leaders.
Saturday, Oct. 24, Christ Church, Glen Allen, 10 a.m.
Saturday, Nov. 7, Holy Comforter, Vienna, 2 p.m.

Questions and Answers: Getting to Know Bishop Johnston

During the nearly two and a half years that you've spent as bishop coadjutor, what lessons have you learned that you will carry on to your episcopate as bishop of Virginia?

The first lesson that I learned is also a value that I brought in, and that is the need for listening. As bishop coadjutor, I had a lot to learn, and the best way to learn is to listen. I drove thousands of miles and had countless meetings to listen to clergy, regional councils, lay people and vestries. I had a great time doing all of that. It

is also important that I do everything I can to facilitate listening to one another. People sometimes forget the difference that listening intentionally can make.

A less fortunate lesson that I will carry into my ministry is the need for both education and outright conversion in the Diocese about financial stewardship. Our diocese is dead last in the Episcopal Church in percentage giving from congregations to the Diocese, and that was very surprising to me. Stewardship to our congregations from their households

is more often than not quite a bit less than it could be. We do have a great deal of personal commitment and resources in the Diocese, but we need to be sure that people understand how these contribute to the ministries that they proclaim and to the life of the Church they love. Stewardship doesn't mean taking care of something so that we can hold on to it. Rather, it is about learning how to take care of something so we can give it away in order to show the love and glory of God at work in human life.

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A lesson I've learned that I'll continue to preach is the definitive importance of our corporate worship. Our worship is and has always been our best evangelism. This is not about "high church" or "low church." Whatever the style, worship needs to be carefully and beautifully done, in a manner that respects the traditions and rubrics of the Book of Common Prayer. And although there are 100 ways to do any one thing in liturgy, the important thing is to know it should be done well and for the glory of God and the inspiration of people.

One of the most exciting lessons is how the Diocese of Virginia emphasizes mission in ministry. In this day and age, international mission is extremely important, and the people of the Diocese of Virginia can absolutely count on me continuing to emphasize the importance of our world missions. But there's an awful lot that we can do with domestic mission as well. Local mission work gives more people the chance to participate in mission. I would very much like to see adolescents involved in direct, frontline mission trips that go beyond traditional models and build up personal, ongoing relationships.

You've mentioned that the diocesan-wide Town Hall Meetings will help "provide a tangible vision for our continued ministry together." How do you think these meetings will accomplish this goal?

The concreteness of hundreds and hundreds of people gathering together in seven meetings to offer their commitment to a new vision of ministries in our diocese speaks for itself. But, we must have the full range of our diocesan spectrum present and participating. Specifically, I refer to age, theological viewpoints, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, church tradition and geography of the Diocese. The ministries of the Diocese vary quite widely in those terms, but the ministry of the Diocese is one. If we can show how the Diocese gathers from its many different places and with its many different people to carry out ministries

that express one unified mission, we will have succeeded. I'm particularly pleased that the meetings will include two sessions just for youth (14 and older) and youth ministers of the Diocese. I want the youth to be very sure that they're not just ministered to but that they are taking initiative in being ministers in and for the Diocese.

At the 2009 Annual Council, you said that growing and defining the diocesan staff would be one of your top priorities. Why is this such an important goal, and what steps will you take to reach it?

This is an important goal because it's not possible for us to exercise and fulfill our ministry without the proper personnel resources needed for such a large and complex diocese. We do well with the resources we have, but there are many things that the Diocese cannot provide with our current resources. I would like to see us able to fulfill the potential of the incredibly gifted group of people we have now by giving additional resources to their work and by expanding our capabilities through additional staffing.

We've taken a great many steps to grow and define the staff. I've engaged a gifted and experienced consultant in Sandi Scanelli, who specializes in staff issues: recruitment, definition, retention, morale, transitions. Ms. Scanelli has helped us tremendously in shaping the conversation we're having about the kind of staff and structure we should work to realize.

We have identified some positions that we most need to stabilize. I promised to bring Buck Blanchard's position as world mission coordinator onto the diocesan budget. I'm very pleased to say that I think we are able to do that in 2010. Previously, Buck's position had been privately subscribed.

I also said that we needed to be able to support our congregations



Photo: Nancy Kuhn

During the annual Work Weekend at Shrine Mont, Bishop John Johnston lays the last stone on the newly constructed labyrinth. In the background is the Rev. Webster Gibson, whose great-uncle founded Shrine Mont.

better. Lindsay Ryland in our transitions office is doing now what used to be two jobs, so I wanted to bring in someone who could help her. I'll be able to combine support for Lindsay with another position that's extremely important for any diocese: canon to the ordinary. The canon's work would involve transition ministries in the congregation, supporting the work and the ministry of the bishop generally, disciplinary issues related to Title IV, and ordination, formation and discernment issues. I'm also sure that the canon will play a very significant role in the pastoral care and vocational issues for clergy and their families.

It's also important we bring a canon on board because we have no ordained people on the diocesan staff other than bishops.

We hope to have the canon in place by Annual Council 2010. This is possible through careful review of the budget and through restructuring salaries after some positions were vacated, leaving salary room to bring new people onboard.

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(Top) On a May 2008 trip to southern Sudan, Christ Church, Alexandria parishioner Russ Randle (far left) and Bishop Johnston consult with members of the Episcopal Church of Sudan.

Visits to the church schools were part of Bishop Johnston's agenda during his time as coadjutor. During a trip to Christchurch School, he visits with the Rev. Simon Mainwaring, chaplain; Dr. David Charlton, president of Church Schools; and Dr. Neal Keese, assistant headmaster.

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How would you describe your leadership style?

The one word that describes my leadership style has been very consistent over my more than 20 years of leadership in ministry: collaborative. I picture my ministry as bishop being in the middle of a horizontal line, with the staff and congregations being with me securely to each side, and me squarely with them, where they are. This is not to say that I'm uncomfortable with a hierarchical leadership style, because my ecclesiology has always had a high doctrine of the episcopate. But I prefer making leadership decisions out of consultation and out of direct experience with and from other people.

What is your vision for developing the ministries at Roslyn and Shrine Mont?

These places really excite me. They are doing very new things even as they continue doing what they've

done so well for so long. At Roslyn, Kass Lawrence and her team do an excellent job of hospitality and personal service. Even so, I want to emphasize a larger scope of mission. I have scheduled an overnight retreat with the Roslyn Memorial Trustees and the members of the board to

collect and define a five-year plan for Roslyn's mission, which will build on a series of small-group meetings I conducted with all of the trustees and board members to learn about their understanding of Roslyn's history, present ministry and future mission. Our retreat will allow us to pull together the common strands to form the backbone of our mission. I'm eager to see what develops. I expect the results to address both short-term and longer-range purposes. The vision for Roslyn will certainly remain faithful to the terms of the bequest, addressing needs of clergy and their families, but it will also have a much broader view towards ministering to the needs of all people throughout the Diocese in new ways.

As for Shrine Mont, anyone who has been there in the last three years will see the positive impact Kevin Moomaw and his team are making. Kevin has advanced both the visionary and managerial sides of leadership. He is bringing about some modernization in facilities and some maintenance of the physical plant that Shrine Mont certainly needs. These changes will improve its present services as well as future prospects. At the same time it's clear that he is committed to Shrine Mont maintaining its traditional character—as am I.

We are very excited to have Kirk Gibson working as the new director for development. Kirk will go about building not only large gifts for present capital needs but also gifts that can produce a much-needed endowment.

In developing the ministry at Shrine Mont, we will continue to rely on our wonderful camping programs. The camps have accomplished leadership and great participation from all over, and they have proven to be one of the great life springs for the life of the Church in the Diocese of Virginia. At the same time, I'd like to see the development of more special programs and events at Shrine Mont, such as educational forums and even concerts.

How would you describe your understanding of the Episcopal Church in the world today?

That's a very sensitive question at this time since the last General Convention seems to have strained many people's understanding of the relationship of the Episcopal Church to the rest of the Anglican Communion. I am particularly concerned if some sort of compromise to our standing in the Communion affects our ability to carry out mission in the world with Anglican partners. The Episcopal Church has so much to offer to the rest of the Communion, and I know from experience that our partner provinces throughout the world have a great deal to offer to us. I would like to see the temperature and the precipitousness of our controversies roll back so that we might regain some perspective. The Anglican Communion is God's gift to us all.

My understanding of the Episcopal Church more broadly is that the Church should be able to show the world how to hold disagreeing points of view together for a common good. We should be able to show that our relationships are based on a commitment to each other and not to opinions. I think that we can show how "both/and" is almost always a better answer than "either/or." And I think that we can show how a "mainline" Church can offer a strong witness with respect to injustice, poverty and basic human dignity while also embracing evangelism across all spectrums of society.

All of these things are values that are sorely missed in our world today, and the Episcopal Church is uniquely positioned to have this kind of presence and voice, an influence that extends far beyond our physical numbers.

I think that we in the Episcopal Church tend to forget what unique qualities we have in being a Church that is both local and global, catholic and Protestant, ancient and modern. These are qualities that have been given to us through God's grace and it is our calling to nurture them so as to be able to offer all that we are to a world so badly in need of healing. +

Interview conducted by Emily Cherry.

The Rt. Rev. Shannon Sherwood Johnston: A Brief Biography

The Rt. Rev. Shannon Sherwood Johnston became the XIII Bishop of Virginia on October 1, 2009 after having been bishop coadjutor for two and one-half years. Consecrated bishop at the Washington National Cathedral on May 26, 2007, Bishop Johnston (he likes to be addressed as "Bishop Shannon") came to the Diocese of Virginia from Tupelo, Miss., where he had been rector of All Saints' Episcopal Church for 13 years. One of five nominees for the election of a bishop coadjutor on January 26, 2007, he was elected on the third ballot.

Bishop Johnston now leads one of the largest dioceses of the Episcopal Church, with oversight of more than 450 clergy and some 80,000 parishioners in 181 congregations. Special responsibilities include leadership of the diocesan centers at Roslyn and Shrine Mont.

Bishop Johnston was born in Florence, Ala., on October 20, 1958. After attending public schools in Florence, he entered the University of the South in Sewanee, Tenn. He was elected to Phi Beta Kappa and Omicron Delta Kappa honorary societies and graduated *magna cum laude* in 1981 with degrees in both philosophy and music.

His first employment was in programming for young adults and youth, first at the University of North Alabama and then with the Boys' Club of Glynn (now the Boys' and Girls' Club) in Brunswick, Ga. In 1985 Bishop Johnston entered Seabury-Western Theological Seminary in Evanston, Ill. His studies included two terms of study at Westcott House Theological College at Cambridge University in England, where he engaged in independent research as well as the regular course curriculum. He returned to Seabury-Western in 1988 to receive the M.Div. degree, graduating first in his class.

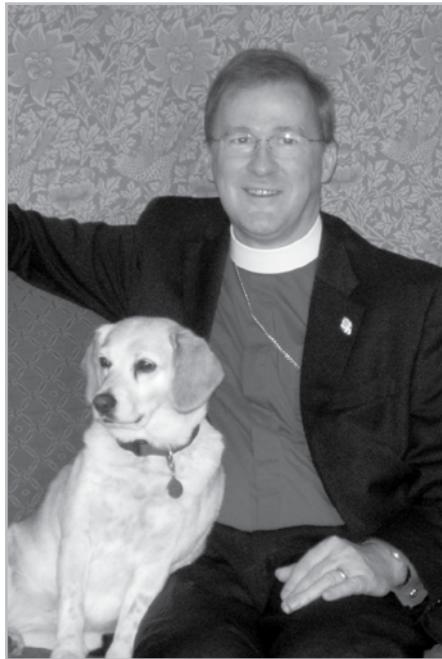


Photo: Emily Cherry

Bishop Shannon's beagle mix, Emma, is a Mayo House fixture.

Bishop Johnston was then ordained to the diaconate on June 11, 1988 and moved to Selma, Ala. where he became curate of St. Paul's Church. He was ordained to the priesthood on December 14 of the same year.

In 1990, Bishop Johnston accepted the call to become rector of Church of the Advent in Sumner, Miss. (in the Mississippi Delta region). Within a year, he led the establishment of the Kairos prison ministry at the nearby Parchman State Penitentiary. He was intensely committed to this work for the next four years, until his move to All Saints', Tupelo in 1994. There, he led significant congregational healing and growth. He also served in a variety leadership roles in the Diocese of Mississippi.

Over the years All Saints' became a leading presence in outreach ministries, most notably in an HIV/AIDS ministry and education program that won a national award. Bishop Johnston's diocesan ministries over the years included two terms on the Standing Committee (president), a term on

the Diocesan Executive Committee (vice-president) and nine years as a diocesan dean. He also served on the Commission on the Ministry, the diocesan Theology Committee and the faculties of the School for Deacons and the Leadership Program for Musicians (LPM). He served in the House of Deputies during the General Conventions held in 2000, 2003 and 2006.

Always maintaining a passion for liturgy and music, he has served on the faculties of two LPM national conferences. Bishop Johnston has also been featured in several roles for the annual Mississippi Conference on Church Music and Liturgy, a national conference directed since 1994 by Ellen Johnston who is a professional church musician and clinician. The Johnstons met at this conference in 1992 and were married on May 20, 1995.

In addition to his work in liturgy, Bishop Johnston promotes dialogue from classic and academic theology as a foundation for the Church's present doctrinal and theological debates. He serves the Episcopal Church nationally on the Board for Theological Education.

Bishop Johnston enjoys several hobbies, especially traveling with Ellen as time allows. They also support various animal welfare projects while spoiling their own house pets absolutely rotten. Bishop Johnston is an avid collector of recordings of classical music, stemming from his own days as a performing musician. An extensive personal library covering many interests only thinly disguises the fact that Bishop Johnston maintains his life-long obsessions with the Green Bay Packers and the Alabama Crimson Tide football teams.

Even so, both Seabury-Western and the Virginia Theological Seminary have bestowed honorary doctorates on Bishop Johnston. +

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