

## Listen... And Be Heard

*Listening sessions on faithful sexuality and the blessing of same-gender unions*

By Emily Cherry

The Rt. Rev. Shannon S. Johnston will lead a series of listening sessions this fall to provide a period of sharing and listening on the subject of faithful sexuality and the blessing of same-gender unions. Clergy, lay leaders and parishioners from across the Diocese are encouraged to attend one of five "Listen...And be Heard" sessions.

"The time is ripe for fulsome sharing and listening on these topics," said Bishop Johnston. "I want to make clear that these gatherings are not intended to be crossfires or debates. Each session is designed so that every person present will have the opportunity to speak honestly and openly, and to be heard by each other and by the leadership of the Diocese." Bishop Johnston added, "It's our goal to have these sessions reflect the broad spectrum of perspectives in the Diocese."

In addition to time set aside for sharing and listening, the bishop

will present a reflection at each session. "I look forward to the chance to share my own thoughts and perspectives with the Diocese. But most importantly, I look forward to hearing your voices – your stories and experiences, your hopes and fears."

The bishop and the Rev. Canon Susan Goff, canon to the ordinary, collaborated with several regional deans on the planning and form of these events. The listening sessions will take place on the following dates:

**Wednesday, September 29**, Calvary, Front Royal, 7-9 p.m.

**Wednesday, October 13**, St. Paul's, Ivy, 7-9 p.m.

**Wednesday, October 27**, St. Alban's, Annandale, 7:30-9:30 p.m.

**Wednesday, November 3**, St. John's, Tappahannock, 4-6 p.m.

**Wednesday, November 17**, Christ Church, Glen Allen, 7-9 p.m.

These sessions come following a 2009 General Convention resolution, R-C056, which allows bishops, particularly those in dioceses affected by civil jurisdictions where same-gender marriage, civil unions or domestic partnerships are legal, to provide generous pastoral response to meet the needs of the members of the Church. "Since the District of Columbia's same-gender civil union law went into effect earlier this year, we have felt a very personal impact. Deciding how to provide an appropriate pastoral response to same-gender couples in our congregations is a very real issue in the Diocese of Virginia," said Bishop Johnston. "These listening sessions will help us equip our minds and hearts as we continue our important work of discernment." +

## Your Church on Facebook

Churches from across the Diocese are fostering a new point of contact with their parishioners through Facebook. Facebook can help churches reach out to different demographics; promote discussion; and even keep in touch with parishioners who've moved far away. Here are just a few examples of Diocese of Virginia churches in action on Facebook.

St. Paul's Church-on-the-Hill, Winchester posts photos from fellowship and worship events.

St. Mark's, Alexandria posts updates about news from mission teams, as well as guest preacher announcements.

At St. Peter's in the Woods, Fairfax Station, the Rev. DeDe Duncan-Probe, vicar, posted updates from her trip to Oxford.



### Help! What's Facebook?

In March 2010, Facebook became the first site to ever surpass Google as the most visited Web site in the United States; as of July 21, Facebook is home to 500 million users – more than the population of the United States, Canada and Mexico combined. For those who might not be in-the-know, Facebook is a social networking site that allows individuals and organizations to create their own "page" to post news, announcements, photos and more. Users subscribe to your page by "liking" it. When users like a page, they'll receive updates every time you add new information to that site. It's a great way to bring a community together in an online environment while promoting discussion and visibility for your church.

Is your church missing out on the Facebook revolution? Contact Emily Cherry (echerry@thediocese.net or 800-DIOCESE x21) if you're looking for assistance in creating a page for your church.