

WHEREVER I GO, THERE I AM

THE RT. REV. SHANNON S. JOHNSTON

Perhaps you will remember that in my letter for the Summer Issue of the *Virginia Episcopalian* magazine I wrote about Shrine Mont being what I called “the heart of the Diocese.” My perspective was based first on the fact that Shrine Mont is the location of our formally consecrated cathedral, the outdoor Shrine of the Transfiguration. Being our cathedral, the Shrine is the official seat of the diocesan bishop and it is a place of and for all of the people.

But, of course, the Shrine is hardly a conventional cathedral (which is a great part of its appeal to so many). Because it is open-air, it is effectually closed over the winter season because of the inclement weather conditions in the mountains over those months. And, just as unconventionally, the bishop does not preside at worship services there very often.

In a conventional cathedral arrangement, typically the bishop is present and presides during the cathedral’s celebrations of the Church’s “Principal Feasts” (such as Easter, Pentecost or All Saints) as well as other major holy days throughout the year. But, for our Diocese, all three bishops are routinely scheduled to be in our parish and mission congregations on those special occasions, even when the Shrine itself is “open.” This is because there is no regular, enrolled congregation at the Cathedral Shrine.

What I’m getting at is this: While the Shrine is in fact the formal seat of the bishop, it does not truly function as my “church home” in the usual sense. Indeed, I’m often questioned about which church I consider to be my own home church. Is there one in particular I attend when not otherwise scheduled? Or, is there a church that is commonly thought of as “the bishop’s church”?

The answer to both questions is “no.” You might think, then, that I am something of an ecclesial orphan—with no congregation to call home. Well, that’s not really true.

The fact that I don’t have any place to call my regular church home makes each Sunday’s visitations all the more substantive, all the more special, all the more personal for me. In short, I do very much feel that I have a



Photo: Emily Cherry

Bishop Johnston joins the Liverpool youth pilgrimage members at the diocesan offices.

church home – the one that is hosting my episcopal visitation on any given Sunday morning or afternoon.

This is very important to me, and I hope you take my words here quite literally. It doesn’t matter: In Richmond, or far away in the reaches of our Diocese, regardless of how large or small, whether urban, suburban or rural, liturgically high-church, low-church or middle-of-the-road, be it conservative, liberal or centrist, the church I feel is “home” is the one where I am the celebrant and preacher. Then and there, I do not feel like a guest!

This is why I enjoy our worship together so much; I get to be a part of one of your most personal experiences – being in the praise of God. This is why I enjoy the receptions following each service so much; I get to spend time talking with and getting to know my own church family (when my schedule allows, I’ve been known to be the one

who is just about the last to leave!). This is why I think it is important to meet with the vestry and other congregational leadership whenever possible; I get to work together with my colleagues in guiding the Church in our Diocese. This is why I so strongly regret that it takes me so long (usually three years) to get around to all of you, but I always cherish my memories of being with you in your place.

I say it again, but in another way. As bishop, my home church is yours! I am deeply blessed to have 182 “home churches.” Sunday in and Sunday out, morning and afternoon, I can’t wait to be at home with you. +