

# THE HEART OF THE DIOCESE

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With our headquarters in Richmond, and with so many congregations in that metro area, is the Diocese of Virginia “Richmond-centric”? Or, conversely, have we been too caught up in Northern Virginia for the last 25 years? Is our diocesan life dominated by big churches, or do we still hold to the ethos and personality of smaller congregations? “Why don’t we put a cathedral in Fredericksburg?” I’m often asked. “After all, that’s the center of the Diocese,” the rationale goes.

It all depends on just what you mean by “center.”

I know that, for many people, the practical center of the Diocese is their own particular congregation. I hasten to counter that, in the Episcopal Church, this is neither theologically nor historically true; this is not our ecclesiology – our theology and polity of the Church. Even so, I can understand this personal attitude. Your congregation is how you primarily experience the fullness of the Christian faith, and it is usually the most immediate means of expressing your Christian witness.

But consider that at some point local congregations got together to form a diocese (in our case, in 1785), subscribing to the fact that the authority for matters of faith and order resides in that larger, common body (the bishop and Council). And then the Diocese established or recognized other, new congregations. So, the “experiential” model of the local congregation being the center for diocesan life doesn’t really hold up. Besides, a true center must have a claim on the whole, as well as be validly claimed by all equally.

But neither does the “administrative” model hold up. Some might say that the center of this Diocese is Richmond, because of the location of our headquarters at the Mayo Memorial Church House. Administration – and this includes our Northern Virginia offices located at The Falls Church – could be said to be at the “head,” but it cannot properly be the center because administration is not its own authority; though essential, its authority is derivative. It is empowered by more primary authorities and exists to serve the purposes and needs of these originating authorities. To me, this is not the quality of a true “center.”

Ultimately, what I’m getting at is what is meant by “heart.”

Poetically, the heart has been identified with love and has been called the seat of the soul. Physiologically, it has been understood as the wellspring of our physical life. Using these senses of definition, I say that the Diocese of Virginia does indeed have a center, a heart, a heartbeat: Shrine Mont.

Shrine Mont is the place of our diocesan cathedral, the church for the whole Diocese. It is the official seat of the bishop who, among other things, is the personal symbol of unity as a diocese. The Cathedral Shrine of the Transfiguration is yours, wherever you normally worship on Sundays and regardless of where you live. This has been true ever since it was consecrated and dedicated as our cathedral in 1925. As an outdoor shrine, it is hardly a conventional cathedral. No, it is quite unconventional, gloriously so, for there is no other cathedral like it in the entire Anglican world! Make it yours in your personal life.



Photo: Sam Pinczuk

Shrine Mont is the setting for our Diocese’s signature ministries: our nine different summer camps on three sites. Under the direction of our diocesan director of Christian formation, Paris Ball, the camps are an essential part of our Diocese’s mission to provide Christian growth for our youth. One of our priests puts it this way: He

tells the parents of his congregation, “If you want your child to be a Christian, send him/her to camp at Shrine Mont.” Over 700 youth and young adults are served by our camps. I am totally committed to having even larger and better facilities. This is why I’m so excited by our study, “The Next Fifty Years,” now underway, to improve and expand our camps. We are exploring the possibility of a diocesan-wide capital campaign that will raise the money needed to secure the ministry of quality camping right here in our own Diocese. Part of this work includes a feasibility study and survey, which will be distributed electronically in July. I hope you will participate and share your feedback. Learn more on the diocesan website at [thediocese.net](http://thediocese.net).

But Shrine Mont is not only about the Cathedral Shrine and our camp ministries. It is truly a beautiful place set apart for rest, reflection and recreation. People come alone, in families or small groups, or with their larger congregational family to step back from their day-to-day lives and reconnect to the Spirit and Kingdom within. Some cottages are refreshingly rustic, others more modernized. In any event, you may come assured that you will be taken care of, well fed, and provided a comfortable place to stay – without the distractions and stressors that mark life as usual. Also a conference center, Shrine Mont offers a wide variety of programs for spiritual and intellectual life. Learn more about Shrine Mont at [shrinemont.com](http://shrinemont.com).

Shrine Mont itself is independent and self-supporting, not receiving any funds from our diocesan budget and, currently, it is not endowed. It is owned solely by the bishop of Virginia and governed by the bishop with the close participation and counsel of a Board of Directors. A most accomplished and dedicated staff, headed by Executive Director Kevin Moomaw, sees to the daily operations.

Shrine Mont. A matchless center, a heart, for the Diocese of Virginia. For one, for all. When you know it, you will fall in love with it. And then, come to know it as a seat for your soul and a wellspring of spiritual life. +