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LEARNING HOW TO LOVE

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# Diocesan Convention

November 2026

The 189th Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Indianapolis convened last weekend with a great sense of renewal, hope, and enthusiasm for this moment in our common life.

This summer, our diocese made a commitment to our youth, launching a capital campaign with a target of raising over four million dollars specifically for youth programming, Waycross Camp and Conference Center, and to endow funding for a youth ministry position to continue long into the future. This commitment is an affirmative declaration about the role of youth ministry as an essential part of church's mission in the world, and one we are eager to support. This conviction is built on two principles our Diocesan youth minister, Heather Campbell speaks to regularly: 1) youth aren't just our future, they're our present and 2) if you have youth in your church, you have youth ministry. These two principles are clearly a response to the mistaken assumptions we frequently make in the church; that youth are not already full participants in the life of the church.

Several years ago, our diocese made a commitment to revitalize its youth ministry. This led to the calling of Heather Campbell, who has developed initiatives and resources to both engage our youth with retreats and mission trips,

and develop youth ministry at the congregational level all over the diocese.

We are witnessing a great revitalization of Waycross, both as a camp and as a conference center. This past summer, Waycross had the highest participation since before COVID and have added a session for next summer. Meanwhile, they have created retreats for people of all ages throughout the year to offer more opportunities for people of the Diocese to gather.

Several new initiatives have also launched to engage families and young adults. I am most excited by the work being done around families in our diocese. In partnership with a sociologist at Indiana University, a study of over one hundred parents in our diocese has given us important data revealing how the faith of children is being formed, what our priorities are, and what we feel is most needed for us to do our work of raising decent humans. Pairing this data with developing models of care and formation will hopefully provide more of us with the tools we need and a means for congregations to be supportive of those families.

The Rev. Ian Lasch, the Canon for Formation put it this way. If your child plays soccer, how much time are they at practice each week? Or, if your child plays the clarinette, how much time do they have at school and at home for practicing? The church is lucky if it gets an hour a week with our kids. This means it is really on those people who are with our kids every day. This is why parent involvement in the spiritual life of our children is essential.

We also learned about building a church community that is more neurodiverse, meaning that it is both more honoring of people who have all manner of cognitive disorders, such as autism and ADHD, and less reliant on what is called neurotypicality. The point isn't to think of this as opening the doors to "those people," but to understand that neurodivergent persons are in our churches and have always been here.

This language around neurodiversity may not be familiar to you, but it has been developed by scientists who study the brain and behavior to speak to how we describe a "normal" or baseline for how these function, how people learn and grow, and what we should expect. Diagnostic manuals, like the DSM-5 use the

language of disorder to describe a whole host of cognitive differences; many of which, like autism and ADHD, are strongly correlated with genetics, and others, come from environmental changes, trauma, or injury. Those who suffer from PTSD or who have survived a stroke experience cognitive change in the physiology of the brain which does lead to behavior consequences. Some of us who suffer from migraines can similarly attest to the variety and sometimes mysterious causes of our pain. As our presenter glibly described, 85% of us will experience sufficient cognitive decline or some other form neurological change; and the 15% who won't, won't because they have died before it happens! The point is that this is normal. And that what we describe as neurotypical, such as the ability to sit in one's seat quietly for an hour, absorbing information is more idealistic than it is normal and reinforces patterns of behavior for the church that run counter to the lived experience of many of our people. There are reasons our "pew aerobics" of standing, sitting, kneeling help keep us present! There was so much we discussed, so much that we are coming to understand about ourselves and what the future holds for the church!

### Resolution on Non-Therapeutic Animal Testing

We had one resolution which was filed and passed by the convention. It deals with non-therapeutic animal testing. It reads:

Be it resolved, that the 189th Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Indianapolis urge the members, congregations, diocesan offices, and camp/conference center of the diocese to avoid the purchase or use of any product tested on animals, apart from medical products, whenever possible, and be it further

Resolved, that this convention urge congregations and their members to contact elected legislators to oppose the use of government funds for non-therapeutic animal testing at any state institution of higher learning, laboratory, or research facility, and be it further

Resolved, that this convention urge congregations and their members to contact elected legislators to support legislation to make the breeding and/or sale of animals for nontherapeutic animal testing a criminal act.

## The Adoption of a New Constitution and Canons

The legal structure of the church is composed of two sets of laws, the constitution and the canons. We might think of this as not unlike the constitution of the United States versus the various federal statutes. The constitution reigns supreme, which means it needs to be harder to amend. Similarly, laws that we think ought to be more flexible should not be in the constitution precisely because, when the need arises, we may need to change them!

During the discernment process around unification with Northern Indiana, researching our C&C and theirs, looking at those C&C of other dioceses, we found that ours are not only deeply out of date, they are redundant, inefficiently ordered, and ill-equipped for the 21st century. The work done to develop a new set of C&C for a unified diocese of Indiana offered an excellent starting place for a new set of governing rules for the diocese.

Three things of note:

1. The new C&C primarily reorders our existing law into more suitable order and location. This means less of the constitution is taken up with the minutiae of the bishop's office and the makeup of convention: this has been moved to the canons. Also, the redundancy with law that is enumerated in the C&C of The Episcopal Church does not need to be repeated in our C&C.
2. The new canons provide for many more opportunities to develop communities of faith or to provide for collaborations between communities of faith. The existing canons have a very high barrier for entry, whereas the new ones seek to offer multiple pathways which will make the church more nimble in the coming years.
3. The adoption of new canons require a majority vote by orders. To adopt a new constitution requires votes at successive conventions without amendment. While both passed at this convention, the new canons are based on a constitution that needs another year to be fully adopted. So, for the time being, we are operating with the existing constitution and two sets of canons!

Grace and Peace,

The Rev. Andrew Downs