

**The Diocese of the Central States  
13th Synod, October 23, 2020  
The Ordinary's Annual Report**

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Good morning, Everyone!

Well, we tried! Give us some credit because we at least tried to have an in-person synod, but concerns about the virus (and everything related to those concerns) said it was wise for us to have an online synod this year.

It has been a difficult eight months since the epidemic invaded the U.S. in February/March. The additional issues that have piled on top of the virus hardships, all of which are still very much a concern, have us heading towards November and our presidential election as a troubled society with anxious neighbors all around us.

*Count it all a joy my brethren when you encounter various trials, knowing that that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.*

Many things are going on, but one thing is certain, God is testing us. All the scriptural insights, admonitions and advice in regards to responding to times of testing are in play as we move ahead. As the old preacher used to say: "God wants to make you better not bitter" ...more holy, more

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mature, more prayerful, more Christian as a result of these times of testing and as we reach for higher ground in responding to it all.

It is beyond sobering and challenging to recall that during the most difficult time of His life, and as the soldiers were nailing Him to the cross, Jesus prayed: "Father forgive them for they know not what they do!" Talk about higher ground! With the Holy Spirit's help, may even a little of that sentiment and orientation rise to the surface of our lives to affect those around us for good.

Since my installation service as Ordinary last October 2019 (Leesburg, Virginia) in preparation for the actual beginning of my duties on January, 1, 2020, I have been grateful for the ongoing expressions of support and prayer from many within the diocese. I am especially grateful for the trust you have placed in me as well as for the opportunity to serve our Lord as Ordinary.

Leading up to his retirement, and to this day, Bp. Morse has been a reassuring and encouraging voice throughout the transition. His friendship and advice have been invaluable. Please be sure to read Bp. Morse's greeting and update to us posted with our synod documents.

I am delighted that Presiding Bp Sutton is also with us this morning. I am always challenged and encouraged by his devotion to Christ and His

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Kingdom and to the REC. He has been more than generous with his time and wise counsel as I have adjusted to my new role in our Church. Thank you, my dear brothers, Bp. Dan and Bp. Ray!

This is our 13th diocesan synod. The MDCS covering 8 states officially began on January 1, 2008, with 12 parishes. There were 13 parishes represented at our first synod later that year. Today, October 23, 2020, there are 21 parishes and missions in the Diocese of the Central States which is a net gain of 8 since our inaugural synod...a good outcome headed in the right direction!

While COVID has scrambled my priorities for this first year as Ordinary, I have continued to focus on advancing and expanding certain areas of diocesan ministry and life.

1. Administration. We have relocated and connected the diocesan office to one of our parishes, Trinity, Mason, the obvious choice. I am in discussion with the vestry of Trinity regarding the possibility and timing of designating the Mason church as the Cathedral Parish of our diocese. I will certainly keep you posted.

I have worked with Bp. Morse in transferring the diocesan files and materials to the new location. Karla Malson has been added to our diocesan staff as "Administrative Secretary" providing the hands-

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on work in making the transition happen. Karla also works as parish secretary for Trinity Church. She and I have worked together for several years which has helped this new assignment run smoothly. Karla has done a fine job: purchasing filing cabinets, organizing documents and records, and coordinating electronic files. I meet with Karla at the church office one morning a week. I also contact Treasurer Mills at that time to keep the communication going between the three of us and to keep our administrative house in order.

2. Archdeacon. One of my first actions in January was to ask Fr. Scott Thompson to serve as Archdeacon for our diocese. My offer only affirmed what was already a reality given Fr. Scott's high profile within the diocese. He was the church planter for St. Jude's, Richmond, and has led the way for several other parishes to join the REC and our diocese. He assists me however needed in managing and developing our ministry as a diocese. Fr. Scott's specific assignments include leading our REC 100 projects, supervising our postulancy program, and coordinating the ministries of the Piedmont Convocation. His counsel and friendship have been invaluable.

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3. Communication. I have endeavored to contact every clergyman and build upon the relationships we have developed within the diocese over the years. The large geographic expanse of the DCS requires extra effort in developing a sense of unity and working together among clergy and parishes. With that in mind, I have built upon the two-convocation model started by Bp. Morse. The Piedmont Convocation consists of parishes within the states of VA, WVA, NC, and AL. The Ohio Valley Convocation consists of parishes within the states of OH, KY, IN, and TN.

In our initial discussions considering ways to improve diocesan communication and ministry, Fr. Scott and I agreed that our website was a critically important piece that needed some attention. Andy Figuero serves as our webmaster, and he has updated and refreshed our site. Andy has been ever ready and able to work with us in making changes, and I have been pleased with the results.

In addition to the challenges posed by the geographic stretch of our diocese, COVID has made meetings of any kind difficult this year. As things return to some sense of normalcy, my goal is for each convocation to hold quarterly or at least biannual clergy

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meetings, to plan pulpit exchanges, and to explore ways of adding more parishes to their region.

Finally, regarding communication, Fr. Edgerton produced a Diocesan Customary last year which has become a valuable tool to assist us in ministering to our parishes in a unified and effective way. I have made some changes and additions to the Customary in response to certain needs and questions that have arisen.

4. Parish health. While episcopal visits have been limited, I have been gradually returning to a more regular visitation schedule. I have three visits in the works before the end of the year.

I have been particularly proud of our clergy in their response to the COVID crisis. They have proved to be capable and devoted under-shepherds of the Good Shepherd, genuinely concerned and ever-working for the welfare of their flocks. The Good Shepherd lays down his life, good under-shepherds do the same.

The Zoom conferences we held as COVID concerns were increasing everywhere were, by all accounts, helpful and important as clergy sought ways to lead and care for their parishes. I plan to continue having Zoom clergy conferences as another way of bridging the distance between our parishes.

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5. Clergy Development. We were able to fill two open pulpits: In September, Fr. Michael Fitzpatrick was installed as interim vicar for Christ Our Hope, Dayton/Fairborne, and Fr. Jonathan Kell was installed as rector of Church of Our Saviour, Leesburg. Welcome to the DCS, dear brothers!

In November 2019, I ordained Duane Veley to the diaconate; he is currently serving at both Christ Our Hope and St. Lazarus Mission in Ohio. And I learned yesterday that the examining chaplains have recommended Stuart Fitzpatrick for ordination to the permanent diaconate. Stuart serves at our mission parish in Asheboro, NC.

In addition, we received three new postulants since our last synod: Aaron Pelot (sponsored by Fr. Wayne McNamara), Tim Kline (sponsored by Fr. David Goodwin) and Jameson Lowery (sponsored by Fr. Paul Edgerton). I think they are all with us this morning. Another Jameson, Jameson Overton, has applied to serve an internship at Christ Our Hope, Westpoint. The details are currently being arranged, and Jameson is considering postulancy as well.

Related to this, we awarded our first Holy Nativity Scholarship in August to Matthew Hynd. Matthew is a member of Christ Our

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Hope, Westpoint, and is currently a student at RE Seminary in Blue Bell.

Late additional parish news: Holy Cross Mission, Midlothian, VA, purchased a building. Blessings to Fr. Ken Mills and his congregation. Holy Trinity, Fairfax, VA, also purchased a church building. Blessings to Fr. Josiah Jones and his congregation!

6. Challenges.

- a. Open or soon-to-be open pulpits: There are three: Trinity, Mason; Covenant, Roanoke; and Christ Our Hope, Westpoint. Jesus' exhortation that we "*Pray the Lord of the harvest to send laborers into the fields,*" certainly comes to mind. I'd like to stop and pray *For the Increase of the Ministry*, page 60, and hopefully encourage all of us to continue praying this prayer.
- b. Parish revitalization: ADN Thompson and I have made this a priority for the parishes within our diocese. COVID has been fighting us. We had to cancel Canon Mark Eldredge's scheduled presentation to our synod regarding church growth and revitalization as well as three other presentations he was scheduled to make within the diocese. However, I pray COVID will eventually be serving **us**, as people slow down, consider their mortality and turn their attention



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to more important things in response to the virus. Politics and politicians are not the answer—Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God are, **and transforming our neighbors and world into disciples of Jesus is what our parish ministry is all about.**

- c. Church Planting: Along with parish revitalization comes church planting. I am ever looking for areas that display potential for planting an REC parish: things like personal contacts, existing prayer meetings, and people displaying interest in what we have to offer. Join with me in being watchful for these opportunities to arise. Our REC 100 account contains nearly \$45,000; and the REC 100 program provides material and contacts to help us develop both our parish revitalization and church planting efforts.
- d. Parish Finances: Parish health is closely related to parish finances. Many of our clergy need second jobs in order to make ends meet. While this may be necessary for a time, we don't want such an arrangement to linger on indefinitely. Church growth is obviously the primary way to address this issue, but parish giving and financial priorities are also part of the mix. I have asked several clergy to work with me in examining our financial practices and consider

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ways in which we can gradually and intentionally move our parishes toward full-time pay for their rectors.

- e. Finally, as my predecessor and all REC Bishops following the lead of our beloved, departed Bp. Grote have always done, I direct that until the heinous practice of abortion on demand is abolished in this country, the Third Sunday in January, or the Sunday closest to Holy Innocents, be designated Sanctity of Life Sunday and observed in all our parishes. Furthermore, I direct our clergy to prepare and deliver a sermon on that theme at the worship services on that day.
- 7. Finally, thank-you again beloved brothers and sisters! I am grateful to everyone for what you have done to bring some very good things out of what has been a difficult year for the Church and for the world.

I especially thank my wife, Janice, our children and grandchildren. You are a constant source of encouragement, refreshment and joy to me. I thank Trinity Church; assisting priest, Fr. David Truax; the Trinity vestry and Karla Malson for their help and understanding especially during this transition season.

And finally, special thanks to Ds. Michelle Caldwell. Ds. Michelle did a lot of work preparing for the in-person synod which never came to be.

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Trinity Church would like to invite you back next year...which will only guarantee Dss. Michelle's journey to sainthood. She was already well on her way by performing the certified miracle of working with me; and now, with the added assignment of working with ADN Thompson, her future canonization is assured! Thank you, thank-you dear, beloved Deaconess!

*So, Count it all joy my brethren when you encounter various trials... rejoice in the Lord always, again I say rejoice...God loves a cheerful giver.*

May our endurance and perseverance under trial bear fruit bringing maturity, completeness, and the peaceful fruit of righteousness to our parishes and lives.

Yours in Jesus the Savior and Lord,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "+ Peter Manto". The signature is written in dark ink on a light background.

Rt. Rev. Peter Manto  
Ordinary