The Episcopal Diocese of Texas

The Second Sunday of Easter, April 24, 2022
A Pastoral Letter to the Episcopal Diocese of Texas
The Rt. Rev. C. Andrew Doyle

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ,
they are a new creation.
The old has passed away;
behold, the new has come.
2 Corinthians 5:17

In the fall of 2021, Bishop Scott Mayer, provisional bishop of The Episcopal Church in North Texas (ECNTX) called together a discernment group of clergy and lay leaders to begin the process of identifying and evaluating options for the future of the Episcopal Church in the 23 counties that make up that region. This group eventually concluded that exploring a relationship with The Episcopal Diocese of Texas (EDOT) made sense.

I, along with the leadership of EDOT, grieved in 2008, when Bishop Jack Iker led 62 parishes out of the Episcopal Church. We immediately reached out to The Church in North Texas (then called Fort Worth), and we have been a friend and ally of the remaining and missionary-minded group of Episcopalians in North Texas as they rebuilt. We invited their clergy to our clergy conferences, we opened Camp Allen to them, and we offered startup funds and other financial support as they needed.

When Bishop Mayer contacted me with the emerging thoughts regarding the special committee's discernment, I immediately told him we are family, we love you, and we are delighted to explore this with you.

In January of this year, the Discernment Group in North Texas sent a recommendation to their Standing Committee that The Episcopal Church in North Texas reunite with The Episcopal Diocese of Texas. Next, I spoke to our Standing Committee at our regular meeting, and then to the Executive Board in a private session, and I was assured of their support to continue the conversation. Earlier this month, attorneys for the Episcopal Church and our dioceses signaled that, though litigation with the Anglican Church in North America (ACNA) is not concluded, sufficient progress has been made to allow discernment to continue.

In the interim, I have worked with our chancellor, David Harvin, to ensure progress both legally and canonically; we have worked with the wider leadership of The Episcopal Church; I have worked with Bishop Mayer; our communications people are collaborating; and I am in consultation with our bishops, clergy, and lay leadership of the Diocese of Texas.

On Good Friday, in agreement with our chancellors, Bishop Mayer and I agreed we were ready to further engage in conversation with our respective diocesan leadership regarding potential reunification. This week our Standing Committee responded, along with our Executive Board, that we pursue reunification with ECNTX.

This past Wednesday, I met with 276 clergy by Zoom in two meetings, and I also met with representatives of some of the foundations. All asked similar questions and were very supportive of the movement forward.

Exploring Reunification

The Episcopal Diocese of Texas bishops and leaders recognize that this is an amazing opportunity to model Christian love. We believe that ECNTX must continue to discern new ways of regionalizing, sharing assets, and strategizing for mission to face the realities of a new mission era. The Episcopal Church in North Texas brings great gifts to the table in this regard. We are being welcomed into the region of North Texas as partners, with the mutual goal of sharing the message of God's unconditional love in 23 counties in North Texas. What a beautiful gift from God for both regions.

After reunion, ECNTX will become a region/convocation of EDOT, with an office, a regional bishop, and a staff. Bishop Mayer will continue to serve as bishop of the North Texas region, with his title changing from Bishop Provisional to Assisting Bishop of Texas. I will be asking our council to affirm this appointment at the Reunion Session of our 173rd diocesan council. Bishop Mayer will remain as Bishop Diocesan in Northwest Texas. This will be how we will lead regionally, while also engaging reunion.

Over the past 13 years, the Episcopal Church in North Texas has forged an identity of creativity and innovation, and sacrificial service – all while standing for full inclusion. God loves all. We are being welcomed gratefully and gladly into a region that shares our values.

If we approach our decisions with scarcity we will focus on money, if we focus upon God's abundant love and the power of the Holy Spirit we discern with greater clarity. We recognize that Christ invites us to be kin. We are invited to live a life of brother and sisterhood with one another. Our kin have asked us to join them in North Texas, and to see what God is doing, and how we might share in God's mission there. How could we reject such an amazing invitation?

What comes next?

Bishop Mayer has put together a group of individuals to work on the reunification. Likewise, we are doing the same. Our chancellor is working with theirs to create a reunification agreement. This will be presented to our elected leadership (Standing Committee and Executive Board) for agreement in advance of the Reunion Session of each diocesan meeting.

On April 29, Bishop Mayer will meet with the clergy and people of small congregations in the region. I, and other leaders from EDOT, will meet on May 4 and 5 with leaders in North Texas. Our plan is to create a FAQ document in advance of the council meeting and send that out to the parishes. We will also have a couple of Zoom meetings to answer questions, much like a pre-council meeting.

Once the legalities of reunion have been resolved to the satisfaction of both regions, we will hold a third session of the Diocesan Council to vote on reunion. The Episcopal Church in North Texas Diocesan Convention will also meet to vote on reunion. Once both regions have agreed, then the decision to reunite must be affirmed by a majority of the bishops and Standing Committees of The Episcopal Church. It will also take most of the year to continue the process of reunification.

What can you do?

Pray for me, Bishop Mayer, the clergy, and the lay leaders of our two regions. The decisions being made will shape the future of The Episcopal Church in this region of the country.

Reflect on your own experience in this diocese of mission. Mourn with our brothers and sisters in North Texas what has been lost and let us celebrate all that has flourished despite adversity. Invite God to prepare our hearts for what comes next.

Share your thoughts with your clergy and convention delegates.

In Thanksgiving

I am so proud and grateful for the bishops of The Episcopal Church in North Texas and now Bishop Mayer. I am grateful for the people of North Texas, for they exhibit to the whole church unconditional love, courage in the face of grief and loss, and resilience founded in a deep faith. They are a gift to the whole Church. I am excited to embrace our kin and to join with them in God's mission of evangelism and service in North Texas. God has a way of placing us where we belong, and I am grateful that we have traveled full circle and may soon be back together again.

As we move toward a new future together, we are unified by the Love of Christ Jesus who prayed for us – that we all may be one and we are thankful for this reunion. We are given in our unity, as Episcopalians and Anglicans, a blessing of baptism which shows resurrection comes from death and the ministry of the gospel comes from the Holy Spirit. Renew us now for you have prepared us for the coming of the Holy Spirit through your Word and Sacraments.

O God of unchangeable power and eternal light: Look
favorably on your whole Church, that wonderful and sacred
mystery; by the effectual working of your providence, carry
out in tranquillity the plan of salvation; let the whole world
see and know that things which were being cast down are being
raised up, and things which had grown old are being made
new, and that all things are being brought to their perfection

by him through whom all things were made, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

In Christ's most Holy Name,

+C. Andrew Doyle

C. Andrew Doyle, D.D.
IX Bishop of Texas