



BETTER TOGETHER

**THE BUILDING BRIDGES STEERING COMMITTEE'S
2023 REPORT TO THE DIOCESES**



CONTENTS

We are Better Together.....	4
Introduction.....	5
Subteam Reports.....	10
Stewardship of Resources.....	10
External Conversations.....	16
Governance and Canons.....	18
Internal Conversations.....	19
Mission and Vision.....	22
Concurrent Conversations.....	24
Timeline of Next Steps.....	26
We Need Your Help.....	27
Resources from the BBSC.....	27
BBSC Team Members.....	28
Save the Date.....	28

WE ARE BETTER TOGETHER.

we are BETTER STEWARDS OF OUR RESOURCES.

- Honoring financial gifts by structuring and channeling funds for mission-based ministries both locally and diocesan-wide.
- Renewing our people by reducing duplication of roles and processes, freeing up time and talents among us.
- Fostering innovation by engaging creativity, technology, and new models of being community.

we are BETTER AT FORMING DISCIPLES OF JESUS.

- Equipping communities of faith and people of all generations to be Christ's presence on the ground, in their communities, and at home.
- Offering an expansive and contextual approach to calling and forming church leaders, collaborating with seminaries and other partners throughout The Episcopal Church.
- Engaging local, state-wide and global efforts to challenge and transform systems of injustice for the sake of all of God's children.

we are BETTER EQUIPPED TO GUIDE THE CHURCH FORWARD.

- Offering more diverse expertise, life-experiences, and cultures.
- Gathering a broader range of gifts and skills to faithfully address the challenges we face.
- Committing to speak the truth in love, helping name and break through inhibitive patterns and practices that exist within our individual dioceses.
- Navigating through storms, tapping our resilience, finding collective strength to speak prophetically to the church and the world.
- Leaning into the common prayer which unites us and embracing the best of what we all give to this Body.

INTRODUCTION

From 2014 to 2017, the Episcopal bishops serving in Michigan met regularly to prayerfully consider various possibilities for the future of The Episcopal Church in these peninsulas. The landscape was changing as membership numbers continued to decline, the number of struggling congregations was growing, and a clergy shortage had appeared the horizon. We weren't alone in this reality. Most Episcopal dioceses and other Christian denominations too were facing similar challenges. Bishops and other church leaders were acknowledging that simply carrying on was an insufficient response.

Episcopal dioceses (and congregations) had often functioned more like silos than Body, but the moment had begun to demand something more and different than that. There was and is a growing sense of needing one another, not just for survival but for renewal.

Is there a better way to configure our dioceses for long-term sustainability, more impactful mission, and renewed life in our church? Could our dioceses be called into new relationships with one another, into deeper, broader collaborations for the service of God's mission and vision? Could reducing the number of dioceses in Michigan actually *increase* the vitality of our presence, our mission, and ministries as disciples of Jesus? The conversations and faithful initiatives around these questions have continued to evolve and take hold.

In 2018, the Episcopal Dioceses of Eastern and Western Michigan began a process of more formally engaging various leadership bodies in this process. Eastern Michigan was in a

period of discernment between diocesan bishops, identifying hopes and priorities for their future. Our dioceses were sharing a staff person and there was overlap and robust collaboration already developing in a few areas of ministry. Clergy and lay leaders began to wonder aloud if we could be better together, functioning as one diocese rather than two. Among other steps taken during this phase, our Standing Committees met with the Rt. Rev. Sean Rowe who was leading a shared discernment process in the Dioceses of Northwestern Pennsylvania and Western New York. Bishop Rowe offered encouragement, support, and guidance in our very initial stage of discernment.

After hearing a report from the Standing Committee of Eastern Michigan, as an action of their 2018 Convention, Western communicated that "We welcome the calls for us to continue to find ways to walk and work together," and "commit ourselves to being open to and actively involved in working together with the Diocese of Eastern Michigan in whatever forms the future brings." The following week, Eastern Michigan's Convention invited Western "to a conversation around shared ministry,"



The 2018 diocesan convention of Eastern Michigan invited Western Michigan to "conversation around shared ministry," including the sharing of a bishop.



Delegates and clergy to the 2022 Joint Convention engage in discussion led by the Building Bridges Steering Committee.

including sharing a bishop.

In April 2019, following regional conversations, the Standing Committee and Diocesan Council of Western Michigan voted unanimously and enthusiastically to support the sharing of a bishop and accept the invitation from Eastern Michigan to join in a conversation around “deepened relationship between our dioceses.”

BUILDING BRIDGES

In early 2020, the Joint Standing Committees appointed a discernment committee which became known as the “Building Bridges Steering Committee” and tasked them with coordinating a discernment process across both dioceses and advising the ecclesiastical authorities (bishop or Joint Standing Committee) regarding “opportunities for collaboration and proposed canonical changes to the structure, governance, and episcopal oversight of the Dioceses of Eastern and Western Michigan.”

Building Bridges has been reporting regularly to the Joint Standing Committees, to the joint diocesan conventions, and more recently to the Diocesan Councils and other leadership bodies. While originally charged with submitting resolutions regarding juncture to the 2023 diocesan conventions, the committee received input through the early 2022 Listening Sessions and from

the Joint Standing Committee that more time would be helpful. The Joint Standing Committees extended the time frame and the Building Bridges Committee will submit recommendations and resolutions regarding juncture to a Joint Special Convention in March 2024. This will allow our dioceses time to still meet the goals of this process and, should juncture be the decision, to submit our “Application for Union” to the General Convention of the Episcopal Church in June.

Over the course of the several years our dioceses have collaborated in a variety of ways. In our “Season of Practice” we increasingly share many staff members and our Standing Committees and Councils meet jointly for most of their meetings. Congregations are engaged in “prayer partnerships” across our dioceses. We are gathering for our fourth Joint Convention. We have a range of paths toward ordination, offering formation through residential, online, and hybrid Episcopal seminaries, as well as our own program in collaboration with the Seminary of the Southwest. We have shared three joint clergy retreats and are coming together in bi-diocesan regional collaboratives to share experiences, best practices and mutual support across



The Rev. Jared Cramer, D. Min. of St. John's, Grand Haven celebrated the Eucharist with Grand Haven's Eastern Michigan congregational prayer partner, Holy Family, Blue Water.

diocesan lines. We see mission and ministry reaching across borders, whether directly encouraged by our governing bodies (like Dismantling Racism work) or taking place organically (like the Episcopal Church Women).

After almost three years of this committee's work and about a decade of prayerful conversation among various configurations of diocesan leaders, members of the Building Bridges Committee have come to hope that we will move in the direction of juncture. We have talked with and learned from other dioceses in similar processes of discernment. We have hosted Listening Sessions and meetings of diocesan leadership bodies. We have studied the financial situation and systems of both dioceses. We have reported regularly to our Joint Standing Committee and for the past year, we met monthly with them to respond to questions and receive input to this process.

We on Building Bridges now experience members of "the other diocese" as colleagues and friends. We have been heartened by our dioceses' ability to navigate through recent storms, including the pandemic and two Title IV experiences with our bishops. We acknowledge the need for continued healing but also see a faithful resilience that will only serve us well as we move forward from here. We are encouraged by the differing gifts and experiences our dioceses bring to this moment and the various cultures that exist within each. We see ways we can be better stewards of our resources, the people, the finances, the properties, and the ideas given to us. We are inspired by the mission and vision revealed through our active bi-diocesan collaborations.

The ultimate question we have been tasked with discerning the answer to is, "Could we be better as one diocese?"

Our answer is **"YES! We are BETTER TOGETHER."**

There is a lot of work to do, a lot of church to be and, frankly, that's true whether we are one diocese or two. We believe that together we can meet this moment with greater strength, broader experience, and a wider range of gifts and abilities.

What follows are reports from the sub-teams of Building Bridges as well as next steps as we work with other leadership bodies to prepare the recommendations and resolutions that we will present to the Joint Convention next March. We offer these reports not merely to "show our work" for how we've arrived at our answer, but also to invite everyone in our bi-diocesan community to prayerfully consider this call as we look forward.

We continue our work prayerfully, with our hearts oriented towards the provisional Mission and Vision statements discerned through listening to the values, hopes, and dreams articulated by people throughout our bi-diocesan community over the past several years.

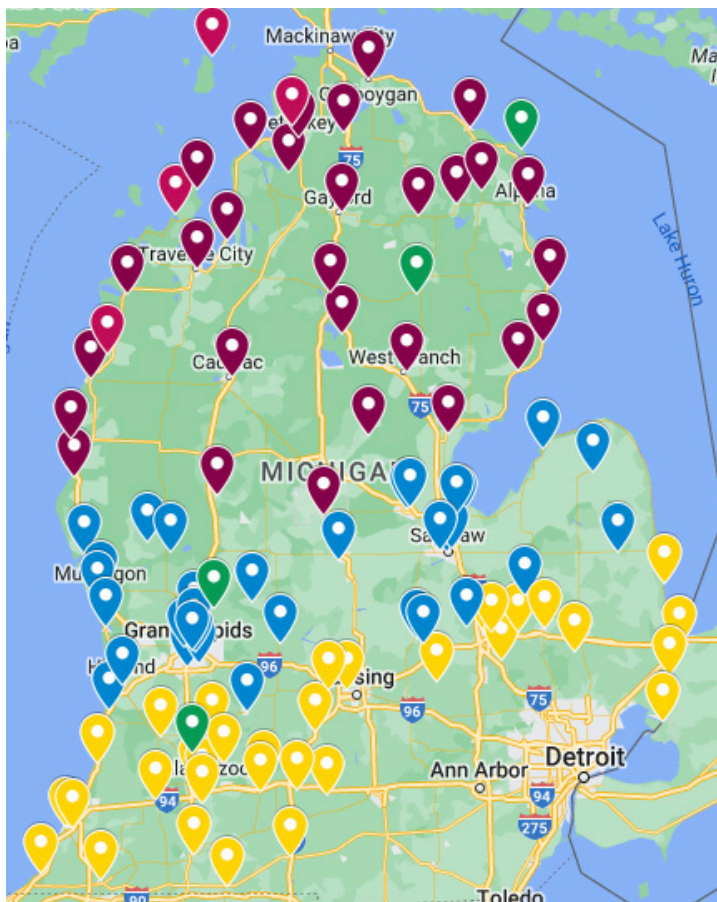
MISSION STATEMENT

Called by Christ to proclaim and embody God's boundless love for all creation, we grow:

- Collaborative communities of faith, walking the journey together;
- Innovative ministries, stretching beyond our walls;
- Courageous disciples, striving to transform systems of injustice.
- We nurture relentless hope for a world longing for mercy, restoration, and peace.

VISION STATEMENT

A world transformed, in which all God's children are unconditionally welcomed, cared for, and loved.



The faith communities of Eastern and Western Michigan, organized by bi-diocesan regional collaborative.

FROM SHORE TO SHORE

We worship and minister on land originally stewarded by the Odawa, the Peoria, the Mississauga, the Anishinabewaki, the Bodwéwadmí (Potawatomi), the Kaskaskia, the Myaamia, the Kiikaapoi (Kickapoo), the Meškawahki-áša'hina (Fox), and the oθaakiwakihihina (Sauk) tribes.

Congregations and clergy in the western part of the Episcopal Diocese of Michigan voted to form the Diocese of Western Michigan, largely due to their belief that the distances between them and the seat of the diocese made supporting their ministries too difficult. Transportation was a challenge in the late nineteenth century. The new diocese held its first convention in 1874, electing the Rt. Rev. George Gillespie as the first bishop.

The Episcopal Diocese of Eastern Michigan formed when it separated from the Diocese of Michigan in 1995, led by Assistant Bishop William J. Gordon, who helped to articulate the vision of a diocese formed on the values of shared leadership and an empowered laity. They held their first convention in 1996, electing the Rt. Rev. Edwin M. Leidel, Jr., as bishop. Bishop Leidel helped give shape to a diocese that blessed experimentation and the ability to take bold steps without fear of failure.

Eastern Michigan is composed of 26 counties totaling an area of 14,350 square miles with population centers in the Flint and Saginaw corridors. Western Michigan is composed of 33 counties totaling an area of 18,700 square miles with population centers in the Grand Rapids, Kalamazoo, and Traverse City corridors. Together, we would be 33,050 square miles across 59 counties with 94 active congregations.

For comparison's sake, the Diocese of Colorado has an area of 104,094 square miles with 93 congregations, the Diocese of Minnesota, 86,936 square miles with 111 congregations, and the Diocese of Nebraska, 77,358 square miles with 52 congregations. The state of Wisconsin whose dioceses will be voting on reunification this fall is 65,498 square miles and if they reunify, will have 94 congregations.

One of the questions often raised around juncture is whether we would be too large as one. Even as one diocese, we would not rank among the “larger” dioceses in The Episcopal Church by either geography or by numbers of congregations.

During this Season of Practice, our dioceses organized across diocesan lines into three collaboratives -- Southern, Central, and Northern -- with roughly 30 faith

communities in each. The Southern and Central Regions are currently staffed by a diocesan staff Canon. The search for the Northern Collaborative’s staff canon is ongoing while appointed coaches provide support for congregational development and pastoral care in the interim.

CURRENT PAROCHIAL DATA

The Diocese of Eastern Michigan has 40 active congregations plus Camp Chickagami and the Ausable Inclusion Center. The Diocese of Western Michigan has 54 active congregations, four seasonal chapels, and two “cooperating ministries,” Plainsong Farm and the Order of Naucratus.

Average Sunday Attendance (ASA) in Western Michigan for 2022 was reported to be 2,199, down 43% over the past ten years but with an increase of 7.5% in the past year. ASA in Eastern Michigan for 2022 was reported to be 1174, down 46% over the past ten years but with an increase of 8.7% in the past year. Parochial Report data from 2022 indicates Eastern Michigan has 3,803 members and Western Michigan, 6,566.

Congregations in both dioceses vary in size



The Rev. Canons Sunil Chandy and Tracie Little, staff canons serving the Central and Southern Collaboratives, with the Rev. Jim Harrison (middle) on his last Sunday serving St. John’s, Midland.

from small to large in locations ranging from rural to urban.

In the last ten years, our diocesan communities have planted four New Episcopal Communities – Holy Family, Blue Water; Plainsong Farm and Ministry; The Order of Naucratus; and the Ausable Inclusion Center – and one new diocesan ministry – the St. Stephen’s Diaper Ministry in Plainwell. +

	Eastern Michigan	Western Michigan
Full-Time	6	15
Part-Time	12	19
Supply	12	4
Full-Time with Part-time Associate	0	2
In Search	10	12

This table is a snapshot of how many congregations currently have full-time, part-time, or supply clergy and how many are actively in a search process.

SUBTEAM REPORT:

STEWARDSHIP OF RESOURCES

TEAM MEMBERS

The Rev. Brian Chace

Retired, Frederic

Diocesan Treasurer, Eastern Michigan

The Rev. Jared Cramer, D. Min.

St. John's, Grand Haven

Diocesan Treasurer, Western Michigan

Gary Grinn

St. Paul's, Gladwin

Support from:

Katie Ong

Consultant for Building Bridges

Sara Philo

Chief Financial Officer

Eastern and Western Michigan

One of the important questions behind this discernment process is whether or not we would be better stewards of our financial resources if we were one diocese.

Could we keep more funds at the congregational level, spend less on administrative costs, and have more resources for formation and innovative ministries if we were one diocese?

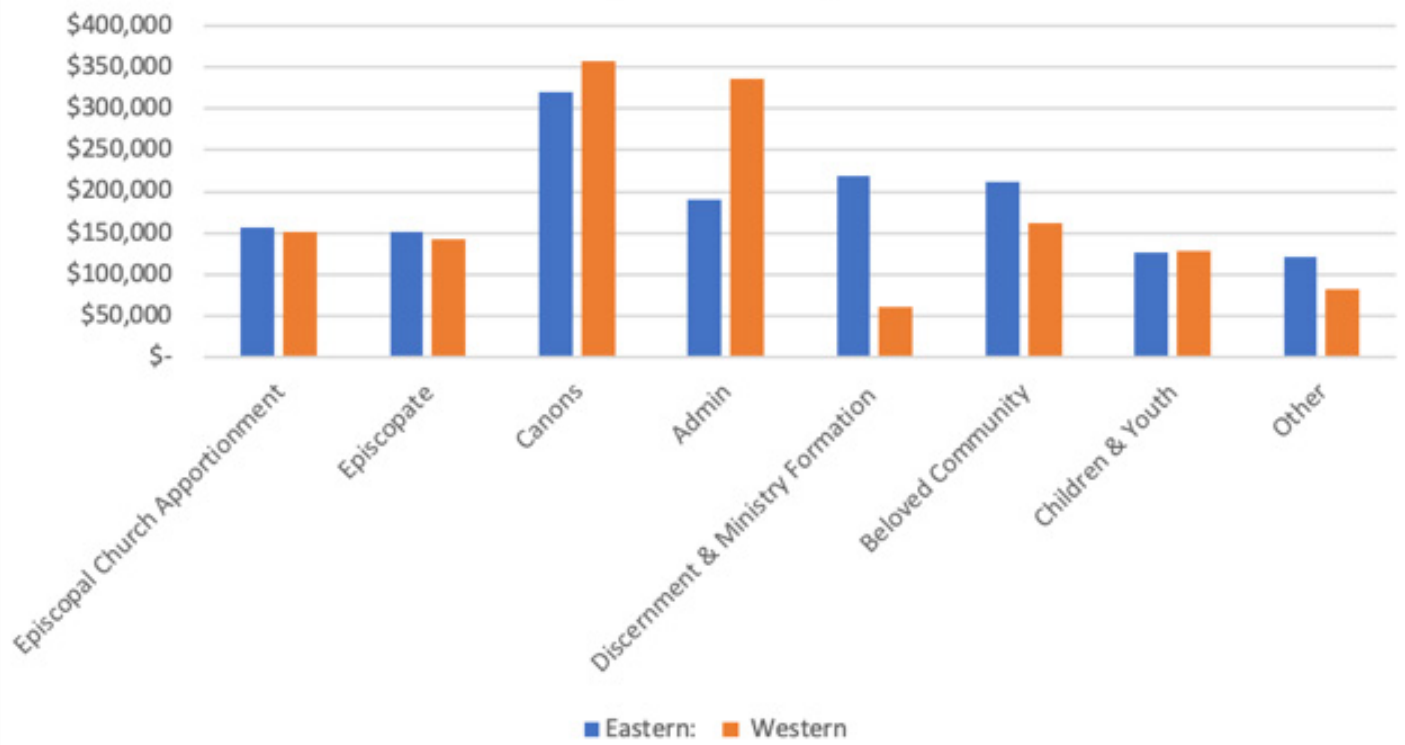
The Stewardship of Resources team has analyzed and compared recent annual budgets, income sources, and endowments of both dioceses as we ask this question.

ANNUAL DIOCESAN BUDGETS

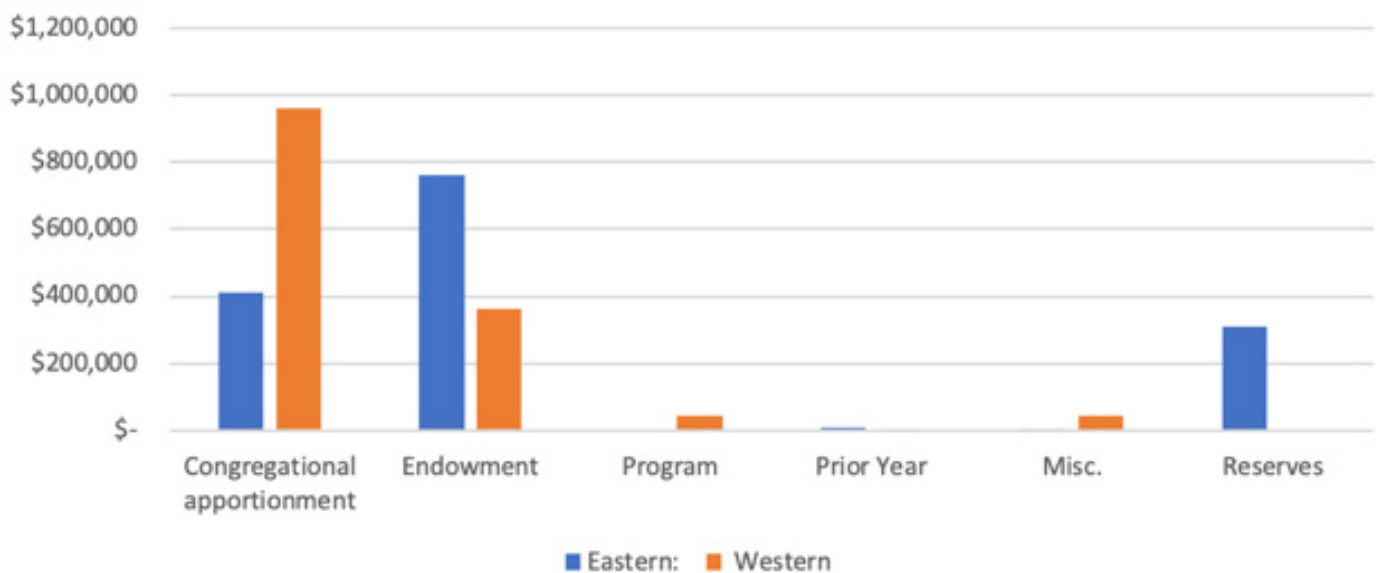
For 2024, the Total Proposed Budgets are extremely close for the two dioceses. Eastern Michigan's budget is \$1,498,000 and Western Michigan's is \$1,420,000, a difference of only \$78,000. The most significant difference between the two budgets is that Eastern Michigan has a higher percentage of the budget funded by endowment while Western Michigan has a higher percentage of the budget funded by congregational apportionment. These charts show the comparison of income and expenses by general category between the two dioceses.

Around congregational apportionment, Eastern uses a straight 10% apportionment rate for all congregations while Western uses a graduated approach. Draft recommendations on apportionment will be made to leadership bodies in November for

Dioceses of Eastern and Western Michigan 2024 Operational Expenses



Dioceses of Eastern and Western Michigan 2024 Operational Income Sources



their feedback. Then those recommendations will be shared with the wider dioceses this winter. Final recommendations will be made to the Joint Special Convention in March.

As a part of the decision making process on juncture, this group is preparing a model 2025 budget so that leadership has the opportunity to provide input on how funding would be structured for a new diocese. A draft Budget for 2025 would then be presented at the March 2024 special convention. If juncture is confirmed, a final budget would be presented at the first convention of the new diocese, in October 2024.

The budget processes for the 2024 calendar year proceeded as normal for both Eastern Michigan and Western Michigan, and included shared expenses for a number of staff positions. The proposed 2024 budgets are available on the diocesan websites with other convention materials.

STAFFING RESOURCES

The Dioceses of Eastern and Western Michigan began sharing staff in 2018, even before formally engaging the question of juncture. Over the last five years, we have drastically evolved our staff towards bi-

diocesan functioning; absorbing appropriate duplicative roles and attempting to establish ensuring manageable workloads across portfolios.

The resignations of Bishops Hougland and Singh and the circumstances surrounding those resignations significantly impacted us all and the staff of our dioceses incurred particular burdens. Since 2020, diocesan staff have experienced at least four different individuals or bodies serving in supervisory roles and have had to adapt to changing styles and expectations each time. In addition, most of the staff are serving in a bi-diocesan fashion which means that while our dioceses have the benefit of sharing the cost of those positions, the staff members themselves carry the responsibility of being knowledgeable about and sustaining two systems (rather than one) in many areas of diocesan life.

If we juncture, the staffing model (including the configuration of responsibilities within each staff position) will need to evolve in ways that are intentionally integrated as a dimension of the larger organization of the new diocese. We will need to establish greater clarity around roles and expectations for the sake of the staff and the leaders and people of the diocese too. We are committed to pursuing a shared staff structure that will be attentive to forward-thinking trends in our church, enable us to fully engage our mission, and aggressively support local congregational life and development. This structure will evolve if we juncture and over the next few years as we grow into our way of functioning as a new diocese. We plan to recommend next steps in the staffing process structure along with the proposed 2025 budget as an aspect of materials to be presented to the Special Convention in March.



Members of our full-time diocesan staff (and two reps. from the Joint Standing Committees) gathered in early October for a staff retreat at Camp Chickagami.

The current staff meets as one body with the majority working in hybrid (office-based and remote) or fully-remote roles.

We currently engage the following bi-diocesan positions:

- Since 2018, a full-time Canon for Evangelism and Networking
- Since 2018, a quarter-time Communications Assistant
- Since 2019, a full-time bishop (currently vacant)
- Since 2020, a full-time Director of Children, Youth, and Young Adult Formation, who also serves as Executive Director of Eastern Michigan's Camp Chickagami
- Since 2022, four less-than-quarter-time Regional Youth Missioners
- Since 2023, a full-time Canon for the Southern Collaborative and Adult Formation, who also serves as Co-Director of the Academy for Vocational Leadership
- Since 2023, a full-time Canon for the Central Collaborative and Digital Communities
- Since 2023, a full-time Chief Financial Officer and Benefits Administrator
- Since 2023, a part-time Coordinator of the College for Congregational Development
- We are actively searching for a full-time Canon for the Northern Collaborative and Beloved Community and Creation Care

Additional staff positions in Eastern Michigan include:

- Since 2015, a full-time Assistant to the Bishop who now holds some bi-diocesan responsibilities despite being compensated solely by one diocese
- Since 2022, a half-time Financial Assistant
- Since 2023, a (currently) quarter-time Ministry Developer for the Ausable Inclusion Center

Additional staff positions in Western Michigan include:

- Since 2020, a full-time Diocesan Administrator who now holds some bi-diocesan responsibilities despite being compensated solely by one diocese
- Since 2020, a quarter-time Data and Resource Coordinator for Dismantling Racism
- Since 2021, a less-than-quarter-time Safe Church Administrator
- Since 2022, a half-time Bookkeeper

Additionally, both dioceses are each served by a non-stipendiary Archdeacon. Both dioceses currently contract out for IT and other support, as needed.

PERSONNEL COMMITTEE

The bi-diocesan Personnel Committee was formed in 2023 to reconcile the differences between the personnel policies of the two dioceses and to contribute to conversations around staffing. The committee found that both diocesan policy manuals are in need of revision and updating and so simply combining them is not feasible. The committee will design new policies, based on best practices in the Church, to be used by one diocese if we juncture, or potentially by both dioceses if we do not. They are working with other leadership bodies (Joint Standing



The bi-diocesan College for Congregational Development is funded in part by endowment funds restricted to support work and formation around congregational development.

Committees, Diocesan Councils, Building Bridges Steering Committee) on a staffing chart to reflect the current structure of staff, reporting responsibility, and oversight as we continue proposals for potential juncture.

Some of the issues that the committee identified to address include: base medical plans, vacation and sick policies, short and long term disability, equitable and consistent sabbatical provisions, and life insurance coverage. The next steps are for the full committee to convene, review the potential benefit packages, and make recommended benefit offerings for a combined diocese. The group is mindful that proposed staffing will need to be in alignment with and in service of the mission and vision of a new diocese.

This committee is not part of the Building Bridges, though we remain connected to their work. Its members are the Rev. Jay Gantz, D. Min. (St. Andrew's, Flint), Janet Huff-Worvie (St. John's, Otter Lake; BBSC), Dr. Elizabeth Jordan (St. Paul's, Flint), the Rev. Tom Manney (St. Paul's, Flint), Marie McKendall (St. Mark's, Grand Rapids), Ellen McVey (St. John's, Midland; BBSC), the Rev. Diane Pike (Retired, Western Michigan),

and the Rev. Randall Warren, D. Min. (St. Luke's, Kalamazoo) with support from CFO Philo.

INDEBTEDNESS

Currently, there are five debts held by the dioceses:

- Eastern Michigan: a loan to St. Christopher's, Grand Blanc using Breaking New Ground funds
- Eastern Michigan: a three-year land contract, starting in 2023, for \$200,000 on the old Niagara Street diocesan office with True Visions, LLC, a counseling agency
- Western Michigan: holds the mortgage for Holy Spirit, Belmont, with the congregation paying the loan
- Western Michigan: a land contract starting in 2016 with Real Friend Bible Church for \$295,000 on the sale of the former St. Alban's, Muskegon property
- Western Michigan: a land contract starting in 2022 with Siraiano Realty for \$250,000, on the sale of the former St. Paul's, Dowagiac property



In the last several years, recognizing the majority of our diocesan staff works remotely or hybrid and that most in-person meetings take place in church buildings rather than the offices, both dioceses have downsized their office footprint, renting space from Episcopal congregations. Currently, the Eastern Michigan office is located within St. John's, Saginaw, and the Western Michigan office is located within Grace, Grand Rapids.

DIOCESAN ENDOWMENT FUNDS

There are numerous funds within both the Eastern Michigan and Western Michigan endowments, including a mix of restricted and unrestricted funds. The portfolio values of the two dioceses are very similar: on close of business September 29, 2023 (end of fiscal 3rd quarter) Eastern Michigan held \$10,530,411 and Western Michigan, \$9,065,595.

Most of the funds for Eastern Michigan are invested with Merrill Lynch Wealth Management except for three held by the Diocese of Michigan. Two of those funds are unrestricted and, after conversation with the bishop of Michigan, we understand that they present no issues if we join. The third fund is the McElroy Fund, where a portion of the fund's profits is given each year to Eastern

Michigan through an agreement created during their split from the Diocese of Michigan. The restriction is that funds must be used for "assisting worthy persons to study for/ enter into Episcopal ministry." We have been in conversation with the fund's trustees about our possible juncture, and will be working with them to determine how funds may be used should we become a new diocese.

Western Michigan's funds are managed by The Episcopal Church Foundation (ECF) and present no issues around juncture. If the two dioceses approve juncture, the Stewardship Sub-team recommends that all endowment funds be managed by one investment manager that is chosen based on performance, fees, resonance with the values we hold in The Episcopal Church, and ability to be a resource to the congregations of our diocese. +

SUBTEAM REPORT:

EXTERNAL CONVERSATIONS

TEAM MEMBERS

The Rev. Jen Adams
Grace, Holland

The Rev. Don Davidson
Canonically Resident, Eastern Michigan

Vicki Schroeder
All Saints, Saugatuck

This group focused on learning from other dioceses across The Episcopal Church: those engaged in similar conversations to ours and those engaging in innovative, future-focused ministry and governance.

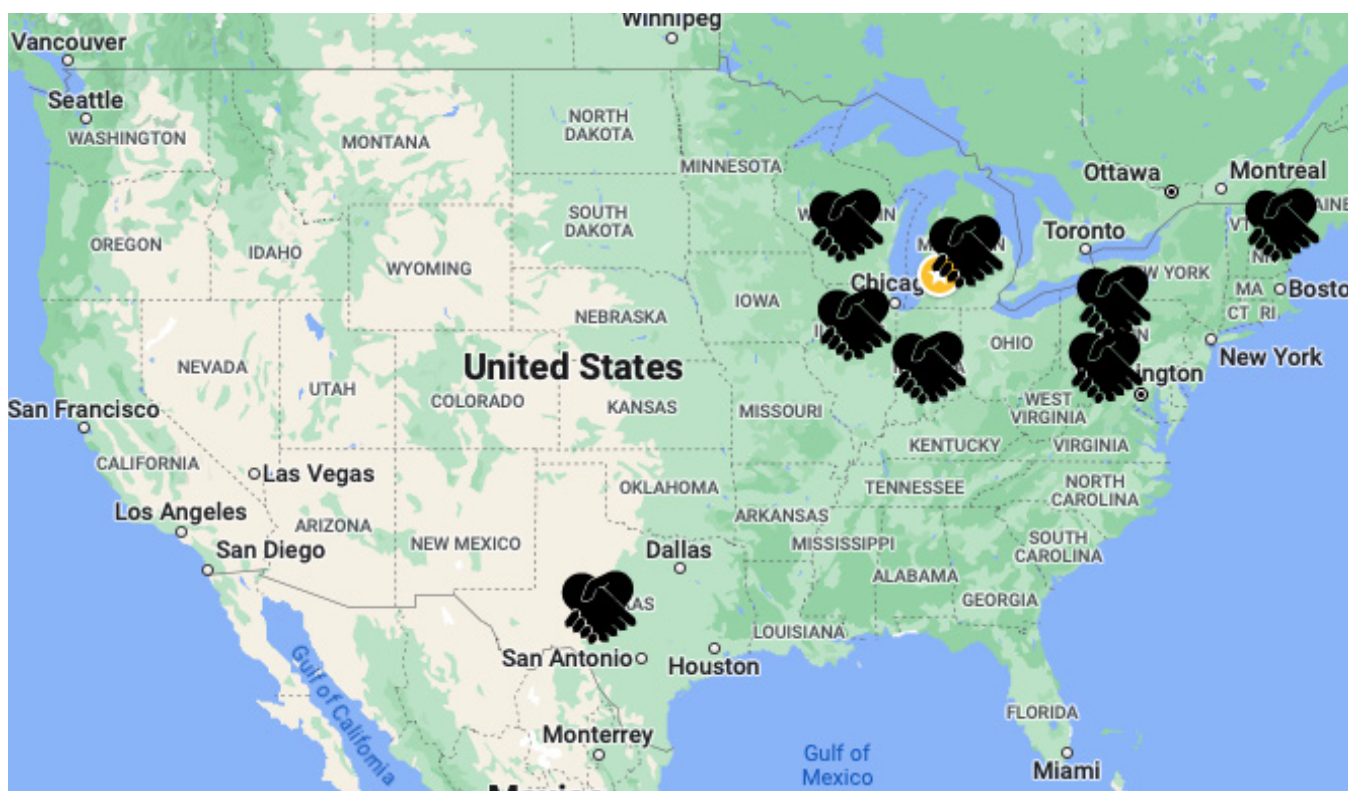
As said earlier in this report, our dioceses are not alone in considering juncture or “reunification,” the canonical term for dioceses who were previously one, separated, and decide to reunify. The dioceses of Duluth and Minnesota reunified in 1944, Chicago and Quincy in 2013, and Texas and Northern Texas (formerly Fort Worth) in 2022.

The three dioceses of Wisconsin will vote on moving forward with reunification at their diocesan conventions this fall with a final vote in spring of 2024. In Maine, Vermont, and New Hampshire, the bishops are diocesan in their home diocese and serve as assisting bishops in the other two while these three dioceses explore current and future possibilities. Northwest Pennsylvania and Western New York have been sharing a bishop and staff and entered into “Episcopal Partnership” while they collaborate in ministry and discern a path forward. The Dioceses of Bethlehem and Central Pennsylvania and the Dioceses of Northern Indiana and Indianapolis are in their own discernment processes exploring reunification.

Starting in 2020, members of this sub-team interviewed bishops and members of the discernment committees in several of these



The Rt. Rev. Sean Rowe, bishop serving the Episcopal Dioceses of Western New York and Northwest Pennsylvania addresses a joint diocesan convention.



Dioceses with recent experiences of joining together or exploring the possibility of joining or some other significant ongoing collaborative relationship.

dioceses to glean best practices, listen to advice, share challenges and offer mutual support. We have remained in conversation and are now being approached by other dioceses who want to learn from our experiences here.

In addition to other dioceses in discernment, we also interviewed the bishop and staff canon serving Minnesota. Minnesota is a vibrant, geographically large diocese with 111 congregations that are urban and rural, ranging from small to large, with diverse cultures. The diocese has one bishop, a strong staff, and structures designed in support of mission and vision. They were identified as a diocese from which we could learn. +



Deputies from the Dioceses of North Texas and Texas celebrate their reunification to a standing ovation in the House of Deputies during General Convention in 2022.

SUBTEAM REPORT:

GOVERNANCE AND CANONS

TEAM MEMBERS

The Rev. Jen Adams

Grace, Holland

The Rev. Don Davidson

Canonically Resident, Eastern Michigan

Bill Fleener, Jr.

Chancellor

Eastern and Western Michigan



Number of delegates to convention is one area in which we currently differ. EM provides for four per congregation; WM varies, determined by formula.

This team is working to prepare the draft constitution and canons for a new diocese; one piece of the proposal for juncture.

We have identified the areas in which our two sets of canons differ. Among those differences are the make-up of the Standing Committee and Diocesan Council, apportionment guidelines, and the budget preparation and approval process.

As we design new canons, our goal is not to “merge” our current canons or even to find compromise in every canonical area. We have found that in some cases, one of our dioceses has a better process in place and we think it should be adopted. In other areas, a combination of our two approaches will work best going forward as one. In some canonical areas where our dioceses differ, neither has functioned as well as is possible and so we have borrowed a best practice from another diocese or designed something new.

We have also sought to allow questions that require more adaptability to be left out of the structures of canonical requirement so that we can respond and discern together at the policy level as diocesan leaders.

The ultimate goal is that the constitution and canons we would adopt will facilitate and support mission and vision, while instilling accountability, collaborative coherence, and room to innovate faithfully within our systems.

We will gather with elected diocesan leadership bodies around these canonical and other draft recommendations for conversation and input on November 18th. Following this meeting, we will incorporate their feedback and share the updated draft canons and other recommendations with the larger dioceses for review and feedback later this winter and spring, in preparation for decision-making in March. +

SUBTEAM REPORT:

INTERNAL CONVERSATIONS

TEAM MEMBERS

The Rev. Jan Gockerman
St. Mark's, Grand Rapids

Janet Huff-Worvie
St. John's, Otter Lake

The Rev. Beckett Leclaire
St. John's, Dryden

Ellen McVey
St. John's, Midland

Alicia Miller
Holy Family, Midland

Support from:

Katie Forsyth
Canon for Evangelism and Networking
Eastern and Western Michigan

Katie Ong
Building Bridges Consultant

The Internal Conversations sub-team is focused on gathering feedback from the people of our dioceses and ensuring that information is shared back out.

The sub-team hosted another series of listening sessions in 2022-23, both online and in-person at various locations across both dioceses from December through February. Members of the Building Bridges Steering Committee facilitated each session. We learned a lot of valuable information from the comments that people across both dioceses shared about their priorities, what they value about our faith communities, and what issues they believe we need to address as we discern whether or not to pursue juncture.

This sub-team analyzed the responses from those sessions to identify emerging themes, which include:

- Many of the things we want to see happening are already taking place or are in the works but we may not be aware of them at the local congregational level.
- There is a strong desire to work together and the new bi-diocesan regional “collaboratives” instituted this earlier spring can provide a structure for much of that collaboration.
- Collaboration to promote lay leadership of congregations and ministries is a high priority. Our congregational prayer partner project is an extension of this as well as our renewed investment in training for congregational development.



Earlier this year, leaders from across the dioceses gathered in Lansing for a day-long LGBTQ+ Inclusion and Safety Workshop, hosted by the Office of Evangelism. Additionally, the dioceses subsidized faith communities' presence at local Pride Events, like this ecumenical group at Grand Rapids Pride, including Episcopalians from St. Andrew's, Grand Rapids; Two Churches, Kentwood; and Holy Trinity, Wyoming.

- Prioritizing ministry to people in the first third of life is critical and we continue to find ways to engage this demographic and learn about what is important to them.
- We need to continue to work on ensuring that information from the diocesan leadership gets to people in our congregations and that what is happening in our congregations gets back to diocesan leadership and other congregations; we have much to learn from each other.
- Although Creation Care did not surface in as many comments, it is gaining more traction. As we continue to collaborate in Holy Hikes Great Lakes and engage together in the ministry of Plainsong Farm and the Order of Naucratus, we may want to dig more deeply into how we collaborate around this area.
- The Episcopal Church's identity around LGBTQ+ inclusion is helping us grow, and, with that understanding, we can better engage and have a bigger presence in our local communities.
- Formation of lay people and clergy is highly important and we need to find new ways to form disciples in various baptismal callings. We recently took a step forward on a common understanding of the value of diverse processes for formation for holy orders.
- Finding new, authentic ways to worship is also crucial.
- Regarding justice issues, people value that the dioceses (and the Episcopal Church) stand for something, such as the joint work we continue to do with other faith leaders on addressing gun violence and our work on LGBTQ+ inclusion and safety.

- Continuing our work on racial reconciliation and healing for past injustices was also emphasized.
- Finally, there was much concern about how juncture would impact the relationships between a bishop and the local congregations, as well as concern about overworking the staff, although staff have noted that their workload is more manageable with increased collaboration between diocesan leadership bodies. The greater concern for staff is that while we are collaborating, they are having to maintain two diocesan administrative structures.

These themes directly informed the development of our emerging mission and vision statements, which are offered again on the right.

This group has also focused on maintaining sharable communications with the dioceses, including an ongoing “Season of Practice” video series published to our diocesan Facebook and YouTube channels focusing on various aspects of our collaboration including interviews with diocesan staff, archdeacons, and more.

Throughout the summer, the sub-team focused on keeping people in the congregations across both dioceses informed about what we learned from the listening sessions through a special Building Bridges section in each edition of the bi-diocesan newsletter, *The Feast Online*. That communication strategy has continued into the fall with articles about each sub-team and the work they are doing to determine how juncture might work. We have made this content available to parish leaders for further dissemination in parish worship bulletins, newsletters, and social media. +

MISSION STATEMENT

Called by Christ to proclaim and embody God’s boundless love for all creation, we grow:

- Collaborative communities of faith, walking the journey together;
- Innovative ministries, stretching beyond our walls;
- Courageous disciples, striving to transform systems of injustice.
- We nurture relentless hope for a world longing for mercy, restoration, and peace.

VISION STATEMENT

A world transformed, in which all God’s children are unconditionally welcomed, cared for, and loved.



The Rev. Radha Kaminski, rector of the Central Michigan Covenant and the Northern Youth Missioner, reads a story to kids who joined our recent Zoo Day for the Feast of St. Francis at Potter Park Zoo in Lansing.

SUBTEAM REPORT:

MISSION AND VISION

TEAM MEMBERS

The Rev. Jen Adams
Grace, Holland

Gary Grinn
St. Paul's, Gladwin

The Rev. Beckett Leclaire
St. John's, Dryden

Vicki Schroeder
All Saints, Saugatuck

Support from:

Katie Forsyth
Canon for Evangelism and Networking
Eastern and Western Michigan

Katie Ong
Building Bridges Consultant

After the Building Bridges team reviewed the analysis of comments coming out of the listening sessions from late 2022 and early 2023, the Mission and Vision sub-team crafted mission and vision statements, using the input heard from across both dioceses.

These mission and vision statements were presented to, discussed and affirmed for use during this Season of Practice during a joint meeting of our Diocesan Councils, Standing Committees, and staffs in April.

Again, those mission and vision statements are:

MISSION STATEMENT

Called by Christ to proclaim and embody God's boundless love for all creation, we grow:

- Collaborative communities of faith, walking the journey together;
- Innovative ministries, stretching beyond our walls;
- Courageous disciples, striving to transform systems of injustice.
- We nurture relentless hope for a world longing for mercy, restoration, and peace.

VISION STATEMENT

A world transformed, in which all God's children are unconditionally welcomed, cared for, and loved.

OTHER:

CONCURRENT CONVERSATIONS

These are conversations taking place during this Season of Practice that are not led by the Building Bridges Steering Committee but that have an impact on how we collaborate and reveal insights into potential juncture. As such, the BBSC keeps aware of their progress and tracks their work in our reporting to the Joint Standing Committees and convention.

CONGREGATIONAL DEVELOPMENT & CLERGY FORMATION

Responsible Body: Bishop/Ecclesiastical Authority, Commissions on Ministry, Diocesan Staff

This particular “Concurrent Conversation” on congregational development and clergy formation spans many of our leadership bodies. It also impacts all of our congregations and faith communities as we seek to call and equip lay and clergy leaders for a hurting world and a changing church.

The church needs leaders who know our tradition well. We need leaders who know the distinct theological and liturgical foundations of Anglican Christianity, while also having vision and skills for helping renewal take hold.

One of our responses to these challenges is the launching of the bi-diocesan College for Congregational Development (CCD), which focuses on “the development of congregations of all sizes, locations, and conditions into more faithful, healthy, and effective communities of faith.” Both dioceses have committed funds to this initiative and had congregations participate in last summer’s initial launch.

Through this program clergy and lay leaders,

“grounded in Christian faith and practice within a living Anglican/Episcopal tradition,” learn skills to develop “more vital, sustainable congregations capable of responding to cultural and community context and to the unique and changing opportunities and issues before them.”

Additionally, we sent a team of six lay and clergy leaders to Virginia Theological Seminary’s Thriving in Ministry program. This team were trained as coaches to work with congregations around areas of congregational development and ministry. More will be shared about this opportunity at the diocesan convention.

Through CCD, Thriving in Ministry, and other efforts we are forming leaders who will lead congregations that will shape a diocese.

Another challenge being faced in this ongoing conversation is clergy formation, an area of diocesan life to which Western and Eastern bring different strengths and emphases. Clergy formation was the topic of several intentional conversations that took place in 2023 in an effort to gain greater understanding and perspective. While there is more to do on all of this (whether there is juncture or not), important steps were taken.

Both dioceses’ Commission on Ministry consider a diversity of paths when it comes

to discerning the best program of formation for postulants for priestly ordination. While this has been true in both dioceses for a long time, this conversation is helping us hold that reality. We acknowledge the need for mechanisms which ensure quality of formation and a separate formation program for those preparing for the diaconate and those for priesthood.

In collaboration with Episcopal seminaries and other partners, our dioceses have postulants and candidates in residential seminaries, hybrid seminary programs, and the Academy for Vocational Leadership.

The Academy is supported by both dioceses and a recently appointed bi-diocesan advisory board and offers a local three-year program of preparation, based on the Iona Collaborative developed and offered by the Seminary of the Southwest in Austin, TX.

This Conversation will be a journey as we continue to wrestle with questions being asked across The Episcopal Church.

We are on a steep learning curve, coming into this with different experiences and perspectives. Through this Conversation and the fruits already being revealed through it, we will better serve the breadth of congregations and ministries to which we have been called.

CAMP MINISTRIES

Responsible Body: *Diocesan Councils and staff of Plainsong Farm, Episcopal Youth Camp, and Camp Chickagami*

Discernment on the collaboration between and futures of these ministries began in 2022. Recognizing that these ministries deserved attention, that all come with layers of history and potentials too, Councils secured a consultant through Episcopal

Camps and Conference Centers to work with Plainsong Farm (Western Michigan) Episcopal Youth Camp (Western Michigan) and Camp Chickagami (Eastern Michigan) regarding future structure, staffing, and program for camp ministry. This conversation is ongoing.

HR POLICIES

Responsible Body: *Diocesan Councils, Personnel Committee*

We have tracked this work as a concurrent conversation and reported on this in the Stewardship of Resources Subteam Report.

STATUS OF EPISCOPATE

Responsible Body: *Joint Standing Committees*

The “Agreement for Union,” the canonical term for that which our dioceses will vote on at the Special Convention in March, will include among other things, “the manner of determining the Bishop Diocesan and other Bishops (if any).” The process of election will be included in the proposed Constitution and Canons of the new diocese and the timeline and details of that process will be determined by the Standing Committee in conversation with other leadership bodies. Building Bridges is working with the Joint Standing Committee to ensure that the Agreement for Union is consistent with their evolving plans.

The first phase of life as a new diocese will need to include intentional conversations around and reflection on the ministry of the Episcopate. There is healing to do. There is a mission and vision to engage as we “become one.” There are questions to ask together around what shape Episcopal ministry should take in this time and in this place. We look forward to calling a bishop diocesan to join us on this journey. We trust the Spirit will help us prepare to do so in a way that is faithful, life-giving and new.+

OTHER:

TIMELINE OF NEXT STEPS

OCTOBER '23

The Fourth Joint Diocesan Convention

NOVEMBER

Meeting with leadership bodies (Joint Standing Committee, Diocesan Councils, joint staffs, BBSC) to review the initial draft recommendations for canons, structure, finance, more.

DECEMBER

JANUARY '24

Feedback sessions for the wider dioceses on the specific content of the recommendations (canons, etc.)

FEBRUARY

Online Pre-Convention Meetings for clergy, delegates who will serve at the March Special Convention.

MARCH

Special Joint Convention on March 16th at St. Christopher's Episcopal Church in Grand Blanc.

APRIL

The following steps apply if juncture is approved by the dioceses...

(Spring) Finalize and submit proposal for the new diocese to the 81st General Convention of The Episcopal Church.

MAY

JUNE

General Convention gathers in Louisville, Kentucky; asked to vote to affirm our juncture.

JULY

The following steps apply if juncture is affirmed by General Convention...

(Summer) Start of the transition into the life and structures of the new diocese.

AUGUST

SEPTEMBER

OCTOBER

The first diocesan convention of the new diocese on October 18-19, 2024 at Soaring Eagle Casino and Resort in Mount Pleasant.

WE NEED YOUR HELP!

The next steps after the October Joint Convention are critical. Specifically, we need you, as convention delegates and clergy to:

- Pray for the Spirit's presence and guidance as we continue to discern and prepare.
- Share the information about Building Bridges and possible juncture that you have learned at convention with your congregations.
- Reach out to a member of Building Bridges with your questions.
- Serve again as a delegate or recruit others to serve as active, engaged delegates to the Special Convention this March 16th at St. Christopher's, Grand Blanc.
- Participate in mid-winter opportunities to learn about and give feedback on the recommendations towards juncture.
- Prepare yourself and your congregations for the March Convention.
- Turn your congregation's election forms in on time – the time-frame between annual meetings and the Special Convention is tight!
- PRAY some more - we need to feel and listen to the Spirit as we make this decision.

RESOURCES FROM THE BBSC

In addition to materials that will become available for review over the next several months, the following communications and resources from the last several years of our work are available.

- [Diocesan Historical Timelines](#)
- [ChurchLands Map](#)
- [Sharable communication series on Listening Session takeaways](#)
- [Sharable communication series on BBSC Sub-Teams \(ongoing\)](#)
- [Presentation to Leadership Bodies on the Draft Mission and Vision Statements](#)
- [BBSC Update](#) - August 30, 2021
- [Invitation to Affinity Group Conversations, Diocesan Convention](#) - February 17, 2022
- [Leadership Retreat Summary](#) - October 19, 2022
- [Invitation to Listening Sessions](#) - November 21, 2022
- [Invitation to Bi-Diocesan Congregational Prayer Partner Initiative](#) - June 7, 2023
- [Reflecting Back from Listening Sessions, BBSC Update](#) - July 6, 2023

Previous Communications

- [BBSC Original Appointment](#) - March 12, 2021

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED BY THE STEERING COMMITTEE:

Eastern Michigan Members

The Rev. Brian Chace
Retired, Frederic
Diocesan Treasurer

The Rev. Don Davidson
Resident, Eastern Michigan
Member, Standing Committee

Gary Grinn
St. Paul's, Gladwin

Janet Huff-Worvie
St. John's, Otter Lake

The Rev. Beckett Leclair
Deacon, St. John's, Dryden

Ellen McVey
St. John's, Midland

Alicia Miller
Holy Family, Midland

Western Michigan Members

The Rev. Jen Adams
Grace, Holland

The Rev. Jared Cramer, D. Min.
St. John's, Grand Haven
Diocesan Treasurer

The Rev. Jan Gockerman
Deacon, St. Mark's, Grand Rapids

The Rev. Anne Schnaare
Grace, Grand Rapids
Member, Standing Committee

Vicki Schroeder
All Saints, Saugatuck

*Appointment of new member to fill
vacancy is in-process*

Bi-Diocesan Members and Support

Katie Forsyth
Canon for Evangelism and Networking

Bill Fleener, Jr.
Chancellor and St. David's, Lansing

Katie Ong
Consultant to Building Bridges

Sara Philo
Chief Financial Officer

SAVE THE DATE!



Special Joint Convention to Consider Action on Juncture

Saturday, March 16, 2024
St. Christopher's Episcopal Church, Grand Blanc