Who will be Elected 10th Bishop of Albany?

Fr. Geoffrey Ward
Fr. Jeremiah Williamson
Fr. Scott Garno
Fr. Neal Longe
Episcopal Diocese of Albany

Diocesan:
The Standing Committee of the Diocese of Albany
The Very Rev. Tom Malionek, President

Business Office:
580 Burton Road
Greenwich, NY 12834
Phone: (518) 518-692-3350
Fax: (518) 692-3352
Email: diocese@albanydiocese.org
Website: albanyepiscopaldiocese.org

Christ the King Center:
575 Burton Road
Greenwich, New York 12834
Phone: 518-692-9550
Fax: 518-692-8777
E-mail: info@ctkcenter.org
Website: www.ctkcenter.org

Albany Episcopalian Editor:
Cn. George J. Marshall
TAEEditor@albanydiocese.org

Director of Administration:
The Rev. Meaghan Keegan
diocese@albanydiocese.org

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A Preamble to the Election of the 10th Bishop of Albany

It all began January 31, 2021, the final day of the episcopacy of the then Bishop of Albany, The Rt. Reverend William H. Love. His resignation as the 9th Bishop of the Diocese, though not entirely unexpected, was still met with surprise.

The next day, February 1, 2021, the diocese was abruptly left without a Diocesan. The Standing Committee was then thrust into being the Ecclesiastical Authority and faced the arduous task of finding and electing the next Bishop of Albany.

The timing could not have been worse. It was now the height of the Covid 19 epidemic with a nation facing numerous deaths and hospitalizations, causing the elimination of large gatherings and mandated church closures. Every denomination, including the Episcopal Church and the Albany Diocese would not be immune to the decline that would ensue.

Adding to the turmoil was the issue of same sex marriage that continued to divide our nation. The world was changing, the church was changing, and the Diocese of Albany had become a diocese of diversity. How would this diocese – especially one without a bishop, ever seek and reach a satisfactory conclusion with all these factors in place?

For the Standing Committee - now the Ecclesiastical Authority of the Diocese, its mission remained perfectly clear – develop a prayerful process to seek and find candidates that could be elected, then after a successful election, ensure the consents of approval of a majority of Episcopal dioceses and bishops, in order to move on to Consecration and Installation. In “normal” times of transition from one bishop to another, such a process would often take up to 18 months, but these were not “normal” times. Preparation was not possible until after the departure of the 9th Bishop of Albany.

It is now 2 1/2 years since the process began. In a few weeks, on Saturday, September 9th, the special convention to elect a new Diocesan will be held at the Cathedral of All Saints, Albany.

While some feel that this search for a bishop has taken far too long, from this person’s perspective, as one who once Chaired a Profile and Search Committee in search of a bishop, one fact clearly remains - these are not “normal” times in our church. This process in electing a bishop may very well be the most challenging of all in the history of the Diocese. We give thanks to our Lord that the “drought” will soon come to an end, and that a new beginning and future lies ahead for the more than 8,000 members of the Albany Diocese.

Heartfelt thanks and deep appreciation go to the many people who have diligently and prayerfully led this process during these many months. Special thanks go to the Standing Committee, led by its President, Fr. Tom Malioneck, Sue Ellen Ruetsch, Chairperson of the Profile and Search Committee, and the many who have supported the various efforts in bringing this process, to what will be, a successful conclusion.

This feature of the Albany Episcopalian includes special commentary from Fr. Malioneck and Sue Ellen Ruetsch, on how this process came to fruition. Also featured are the bios of the Candidates for Bishop shown on the cover of this issue, and ending with a brief chronology of the process. If that isn’t enough, also included in this issue is an inspirational article from Den Lynne Curtis on her parish’s relationship with its sister church, St. Luke’s, Toliara, Madagascar, and regular submissions from Christ the King, Greenwich, and Beaver Cross Camp. May our readers enjoy this issue of the Albany Episcopalian.
The Holy Spirit, speaking through the Hebrew scriptures, led the first apostles to identify someone to be “counted as one of the apostles,” “to share in the ministry” of being “a witness of the Lord Jesus’ resurrection together” with them; to “take the position of responsibility” held by Judas Iscariot, who “went to his own place” (Acts 1:15 26). After identifying two who met fundamental criteria, they prayed, “Lord, you know the hearts of all. Show us which one of these two you have chosen to assume the task of this service and apostleship.” After this humble profession of receptivity, they relied on “lots” to manifest the Lord’s choice. Whether these “lots” were votes, or more like drawing straws, the principle is the same: the disciples knew that they were not doing the choosing. There was no matching of needs to skills, no calculus of investment and return. They were not seeking someone to suit themselves or benefit them. They were not hiring an executive they could count on to do their bidding or take care of them. They sought and accepted God’s choice, to do God’s work, for God’s purposes.

In a world governed mostly by monarchs and dedicated to the principle of self-interest, this was revolutionary. The Church would receive bishops (successors to the apostles) identified by “lots” cast in an assembly of disciples, eventually consisting of several “orders,” but all subject to a will higher than their own. Nowadays, secular societies also mostly make decisions by “casting lots” (bal- in ballot means “cast (throw),” as in ballistic), even when following God’s will is not the goal. Unfortunately, this similarity in process suggests, to some, similarity in principle. In “The World,” governing bodies are expected to obey the will of an electorate or stakeholders. Choosing persons becomes, then, a referendum on policies. We expect organizations to run, not only for the benefit of constituents, but to their satisfaction. We seek secular officials to empower us; who seem poised to get us what we feel we need; who promise (in both senses of the word!) to share our views of what is good and right, and to act accordingly. In most cases, who is chosen depends, by design and in practice, on who, through campaigning and lobbying, can rally the greatest number of partisans. Alas, it sometimes also depends on whose supporters are loudest, most intransigent, or most intimidating.

The Church does need some features of a secular institution. Just as that first episcopal succession was not merely random, so too, now, there are requirements to be met and a world to interact with. But the Church is a living organism, Christ’s Body. We are members (in the sense of “limbs” or “vital organs”) of his Body, not because we choose God or Jesus, but because God chose us to play a unique part in accomplishing, not our own projects, but the...
Father’s plan (Ephesians 1:3-14). Both our destination and the path to it differ radically from what The World admires and pursues (to say nothing of The Flesh — our natural proclivities — or the Devil, who “casts asunder” (“diabolical” from the same root bol/-bal-, “to throw/cast”), pitting the members of the body against each other to prevent the full, abundant, excellent human life God has revealed). We do not choose where, when, or even whether to be born. We do not decide who God is, or what God does, or what God wants. Our life and identity as disciples is bestowed on us as gift. It is enough for us to recognize, in unity and harmony with one another, that this is the reality in which we live, move, and exist (Acts 17:28).

The Church is also likened to a flock under the care and guidance of the Good Shepherd (John 10:1-19) who appoints designates overseers, or bishops, as “under-shepherds” (John 21:15-19). And although we have a role to play in identifying who they are, the Body of Christ, the Church, the Flock thrives when the Holy Spirit fills us with love of God and God’s plan for creation. This love cuts through the preoccupations that focus us inward on ourselves. We love God, others, ourselves, and the Church best when the Holy Spirit weans us from attachment to preferred people and outcomes. We must ask God to open our eyes to perceive clearly the good of the entire Body, the whole Flock, for God’s purposes. We must ask for the will and heart to embrace, lovingly, whomever the Holy Spirit enables us to recognize who it is that God has revealed “to assume the task of this service and apostleship.” We must do more than merely want, think, or hope. We must discern: that is, we must be transformed into beings who tell the difference between God’s will, human will, and the will of the people of the World to which we are sent as witnesses.

Discernment is not a mechanical process. It cannot be engineered by clever reasoning or by exerting influence. It is a gift, a virtue, into which we can learn to live. It is nurtured by continuous repentance, humility, and reliance on the guidance and means of grace preserved for us organically within the Church itself. Here are some ways that Lay Deputations and clergy might lean into the work of discernment in preparation for the special meeting of Diocesan Convention on September 9. Keep praying. A rule of life that includes daily prayer is essential to maintain focus on the important spiritual work we are undertaking. Pray not only for a good outcome, but to become more free to discern. Fasting is also a time-honored discipline that disposes us to receive God’s grace. Pray alone; pray together with other deputies and clergy; with your parish; in your deanery. Ask prayer warriors to seek God’s protection against every divisive influence among us. The Daughters of the King have been interceding, asking God to give us whatever we need in order to discern well, for the sake the Kingdom of God and the Church that serves it.

Prepare. Take time to acquire a better understanding of God’s will for the order, office, and role of Bishop in the Church. You might want to familiarize yourself with some or all of these sources:

- the portion of the Book of Common Prayer related to the ordination of a Bishop (pp. 510-523)
- the Catechism in the Book of Common Prayer, particularly “The Church” (854-855); “The Ministry” (855-856); “The Sacraments” (857-858); “Other Sacramental Rites” (860-861)
- The 39 “Articles of Religion” starting on page 867, especially nos. XIX, “Of the Church”; XX “Of the Authority of the Church”; XXIII “Of Ministering in the Congregation”; XXVI “Of the Unworthiness of the Ministers, which hinders not the effect of the Sacraments”; XXXIV “Of the Traditions of the Church”; XXXVI “Of the Consecration of Bishops and Ministers”
- the “Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral 1886, 1888” beginning on page 876
- Saint Paul’s letters to Timothy and Titus
- the various materials on the Bishop Search page of the diocesan web site: https://albanyepiscopaldiocese.org/episcopaltransition/
In 2018, Bishop John Bauerschmidt of Tennessee published a very rich and helpful Pastoral Teaching on the role of the bishop. You can find it at https://edtn.org/on-the-episcopate/. Read it prayerfully and let your soul come to an appreciation of how God works in the church, even through the institutional structures we too often fail to value adequately.

The clergy and law deputies who will soon gather at the Cathedral have committed themselves to a solemn vocation. It will be no trivial matter to fulfill that call responsibly. We will be tempted and tested. Faith is what will enable us to resist, and faith must be nurtured by prayer and the Sacraments.

Parishes may want to acknowledge the seriousness of this commitment by taking time on Sunday, September 3, to formally commission and pray over Deputies, Alternates, and Clergy. We hope to have a sample liturgy and prayers for this posted soon on the diocesan web site.

I am deeply grateful to be part of a diocese that serves Christ so generously through participation in the councils of his church. I pray for you daily. God bless you, keep you safe, and grant you every grace and gift you need for this momentous task. And please keep praying for everyone involved in the ongoing work of the Church as we wait for the Lord to show us who will “assume the task of service and apostleship” as the Tenth Bishop of Albany.

- The Very Rev’d Tom Malionek
As the saying goes, “The journey of one thousand miles begins with a single step.” When the office of Bishop of Albany was vacated, preparation for the journey began. This has been a journey of discernment from start to finish. Deaneries met in convocation to discern and elect their clergy and lay representatives to the Profile and Search Committee. The Standing Committee met to discern and appoint the at-large members and the chaplain. The Profile and Search Committee was commissioned by the Right Rev. Michael Smith on August 14, 2021. I was nominated and elected to serve as the chair. We then stepped out on our journey. So, there we were – 23 people brought together in service to our God, His Church, and our diocese. Our mission was twofold: to facilitate the process of self-study and to discern a field of nominees for the Tenth Bishop of Albany. Two years later, we are on the brink of the election of Albany X.
We were given one year to complete the self-study resulting in our Diocesan Profile. Eight different work groups were formed to research and create the document that was published a year ago. Many of our God-given gifts enriched that process. By that time, we had engaged our secretary, Deacon Marian Sive – an incredibly gifted and faithful servant. We are proud of the booklet she designed to tell our story to each other and to the world.

Last year, we said good-bye to two of our founding members. Fr. Dale Van Wormer relocated to Florida. Dean Kenneth Hunter appointed The Rev. Laura Miller to take his place. Fr. Bill Hinrichs resigned due to the recommendation for nomination of his son-in-law, the Rev. Scott Garno. Dean Brad Jones appointed the Rev. Paul Hunter to take his place. Our thanks to Fr. Van Wormer and Fr. Hinrichs for their service on the committee, and especially for their work on the diocesan on-line survey. With the profile completed and published, it was time to point our steps toward the search segment of our journey. When we decided to engage a consultant, we determined that Canon Brian Nordwick’s wise and godly guidance would serve us well. He helped us structure a step-wise discernment process as we considered all who were recommended to us. First was a “paper review,” followed by Zoom interviews, and finally an intense in-person discernment retreat. We believe the Holy Spirit help us to name the “final four.” And now, as the Electing Convention approaches, the journey of the Profile and Search Committee is ending. We pray that the clergy and lay deputies will discern the one whom God has called to be the Tenth Bishop of Albany.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

- Sue Ellen Ruetsch
Chronology of the Search Process

February 1, 2021…

The sudden resignation of the 9th Bishop of Albany meant that the Standing Committee was now the Ecclesiastical Authority of the Diocese. A process was soon be put in place that would eventually lead to the election of the Diocese’s next bishop. Among its first actions was to plan and schedule elections from each of the eight deaneries to elect one lay person and one cleric from each deanery, along with six appointments from the Standing Committee with the intent to create a Profile and Search Committee.

July 30, 2021…

Six months later, July 30, 2021, elections from each deanery were completed and so came the announcement of the recent elections and appointees to create the Profile and Search Committee. Shortly after their first meeting, the committee elected the highly respected Sue Ellen Ruetsch to be Chairperson. The following is a list of the elected and appointed members to comprise the Profile and Search Committee:

**Upper Hudson Deanery:**
The Very Rev. Thomas Papazaglokis, St. George’s, Clifton Park,
Sue Ellen Ruetsch, Calvary, Burnt Hills (elected Chair of the P&S by its members to lead the process)

**Hudson Valley Deanery:**
The Rev. John Thompson, St. John in the Wilderness, Copake Falls
David Palmquist, Christ Church, Hudson

**St. Lawrence Deanery:**
The Rev. Kathryn Boswell, St. Philip’s, Norwood
John Dietrich, Zion, Colton

**Metropolitan Deanery:**
Jennifer Firth, St. John’s, Troy

Southern Adirondack Deanery:
*The Rev. Tom Pettigrew, Church of the Holy Cross, Warrensburg
Barbara Breen, St. Mary’s, Lake Luzerne

Northern Adirondack Deanery:
Franny Preston, St. Luke, Saranac Lake
The Rev. David Sullivan, Good Shepherd, Elizabethtown

Susquehanna Deanery:
Helen Reilly, St. James, Oneonta
The Rev. Dale Van Wormer, St. Mathew’s, Unadilla

Western Mohawk Deanery:
Holly Chamberlin, St. John’s, Johnstown
The Rev. Jack Whritenour, Emmanuel, Little Falls

At-Large Members:
The Rev. Dcn. Jonathon Beck, Cathedral of All Saints (now Rector, Trinity, Potsdam)
Dcn Justine Guernsey, St. Stephen’s, Delmar
The Very Rev. David Ousley, Trinity, Plattsburgh
Pat Outhouse, St. John’s, Delhi
Keith St. John, Cathedral of All Saints, Albany
Judith Sweet, Calvary, Burnt Hills

Chaplain:
The Rev. Darius Mohallali, (Canonically Resident Priest)

*As noted in Ms Sue Ellen Ruetsch’s letter, two members would later resign. The Rev William Hinrichs, resigned due to the recommendation for nomination of his son-in-law, The Rev. Scott Gerno, to be bishop. Dean Jones then appointed The Rev. Paul Hunter to take his place.*
Chronology of the Search Process

August 2021– Spring 2022…
Throughout these months the committee remained steadfast in its determination to do things right, and right on the first try. There would be no room for error. Patience and prayer helped the process move forward in spite of unrelenting pressure from all corners of the Diocese to complete this phase sooner. One observer described the process as “an enormous challenge not unlike climbing Mt Everest in the heart of winter.”

The question most asked during this period was, “How long will it take to ultimately find and elect a bishop?” A valid question, for at this point in time, it is now two years without a Diocesan; people are growing impatient. It would take a summer of meeting people and gathering information to best understand their concerns. Thus came the next phase of activity…summer 2022.

Summer 2022…
In spite of Covid and other concerns, during the first half of 2022 a survey form was created, mailed to every household, and responses reviewed by the Committee. This was followed by a series of regional in-person and virtual listening sessions throughout the Diocese. It is important to note that the sole purpose in this phase was to gather information to better prepare everyone - including the next bishop - as to how best to lead the diocese in the years to come. At the same time was the on-going consideration that, whomever is elected, he/she must receive the consents of both the House of Bishops and majority of Standing Committees of the Episcopal Church before Consecration and Installation as the 10th Bishop of the Albany would occur.

Summarizing the input from these sessions, in the summer 2022, came the distribution of the long-awaited Diocesan Profile. Along with that Profile came the call for “recommendations for nominees” [for Bishop] to be filed by November 15th, 2022.

November 15, 2022…
The deadline for receiving recommendations for nominations for the 10th Bishop of Albany had now arrived. As noted in the Profile, “each person recommended would be considered for nomination, regardless of how many recommendations are received for any given individual.” On November 15th, nominations were closed and the nominees are The Rev. Scott Garno, The Very Rev. Neal Longe, The Rev. Geoffrey Ward and The Rev. Jeremiah Williamson. Their bios can be found in this issue of The Albany Episcopalian.

January 19, 2023…
On January 19th, 2023, the Standing Committee and the Profile and Search Committee, in a joint communication, announced a schedule for the rest of the process that hopes to conclude by early 2024 Here is that schedule, subject to change:

August 13–17, 2023 – “Candidates Excursions” – Regional gatherings to meet the candidates

Monday, August 14:
Christ the King Center: CLERGY ONLY
• 9:00 a.m. Holy Eucharist
• 10:30 a.m. Q&A
• Noon Lunch
St. Paul’s, Albany (Primarily targeting the Metropolitan and Hudson Valley Deaneries)
• 5:30 p.m. Doors open for registration
• 6:00 p.m. Informal Candidate Mixer
• 7:00 p.m. Q&A with the Candidates

Tuesday, August 15: (Primarily targeting the Susquehanna and Western Mohawk Deaneries)
Christ Church, Cooperstown
• 5:30 p.m. Doors open for registration
• 6:00 p.m. Informal Candidate Mixer
• 7:00 p.m. Q&A with the Candidates
Chronology of the Search Process

**Wednesday, August 16:** (Primarily targeting the Northern Adirondack and St. Lawrence Deaneries)

*Trinity Church, Plattsburgh*
- 5:30 p.m. Doors open for registration
- 6:00 p.m. Informal Candidate Mixer
- 7:00 p.m. Q&A with the Candidates

**Thursday, August 17:** (Primarily targeting the Southern Adirondack and Upper Hudson Deaneries)

*Church of the Messiah, Glens Falls*
- 5:30 p.m. Doors open for registration
- 6:00 p.m. Informal Candidate Mixer
- 7:00 p.m. Q&A with the Candidates

**September 9** – The Election Convention - A one day convention to elect the 10th Bishop of Albany, to be held at the Cathedral of All Saints, Albany.

**September – January 2024** – the period of receiving Consents of the newly-elected bishop from House of Bishops and other diocesan Standing Committees

**Early 2024** It is standard procedure that, only after written approvals and Consents from the House of Bishops and other diocesan Standing Committees are received, can the date of Consecration be announced. More on this to come.

Closing comments….

It is hoped that this issue of The Albany Episcopalian has shed some light on the challenges that these dedicated members of the Diocese have been facing since February 1, 2021. A special prayer, “Prayer in Time of Transition” was written especially for this search, and prayed by the many faithful who have helped in bringing to the Diocese, the 10th Bishop of Albany. We invite everyone to join in this prayer, as it contains the very words that all Episcopalians, both here and beyond, might ponder in the weeks and months to come:

**Prayer in Time of Transition**

*Heavenly Father, we praise and thank you for this, your diocese of Albany. Inspire and sustain us in this time of transition. Incline our hearts to do your will, and so direct us in your ways that the leader you are raising up to be our Bishop will find here joyful disciples, making disciples, united in faith, unflagging in hope, and steeped in mutual charity. In your mercy, accept our repentance, and grant us peace; look with patience on our enthusiasms; and pour rich gifts and grace upon all who are entrusted with the ongoing work of your church; so that, with diligence and charity, we may discern correctly and walk righteously in your ways. This we ask in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen*
Fr. Geoffrey Ward
Fr. Ward is Rector of St. Christopher’s Episcopal Church, River Hills WI (February 2017). He presently serves the Diocese of Milwaukee as Board President of Trustees of Funds and Endowments, and is also Board President for The DeKoven Center, an Episcopal Retreat and Archival Center in Racine, WI. Broader church involvement includes serving as CREDO Financial Faculty for The Church Pension Group (CPG).

Previous calls include a new church plant in Eagle River WI, (resultant from a congregational departure to ACNA), and Priest Associate of Christ Church Cathedral, Hartford CT. Fr. Ward’s missional background features urban feeding, open-air church, immediate need-fulfillment, wellness, literacy, employment facilitation and arts ministries.

Prior to full-time parochial ministry, Fr. Ward served as non-stipendiary clergy, holding a secular position as Chief Executive of the Pension Resource Centers (a MetLife Company), with oversite of 17,000 qualified retirement plans. As subject matter expert on ERISA regulatory matters, his responsibilities included collaboration with the firm’s Government Affairs Group in Washington D.C., sitting on committees and discussion panels of industry trade organizations, including ASPPA and SIFMA.

His financial professional credentials included Chartered Life Underwriter (CLU), Chartered Financial Consultant (ChFC), Accredited Investment Fiduciary (AIF), Certified Financial Planner (CFP®) and FINRA Registered Principal. (Series 7, 24). Fr. Ward also holds a Bachelor’s Degree from Viterbo University, Master of Fine Arts Degree from Trinity University, and Master of Theological Studies from Seabury-Western.

Other interests include fishing, canoeing, cross country skiing, and Wisconsin sports teams – Brewers, Packers, and Bucks. He and wife, Valerie have six children, five grandchildren, two yorkies (Banjo and Suzanna), and a new labradoodle puppy named Shadow.

Fr. Jeremiah Williamson
Fr. Jeremiah Williamson is the Rector of Grace and St. Stephen’s Episcopal Church, a large parish in downtown Colorado Springs. Before arriving there in February 2016, he served urban Episcopal Churches in Youngstown and Toledo, Ohio.

Fr. Jeremiah discovered the Anglican tradition while completing his undergraduate studies in music at Greenville University and went on to receive his Master of Divinity from Drew Theological School. He then received a diploma in Anglican Studies at the General Theological Seminary in New York City and recently completed an Executive Certificate in Diversity and Inclusion from Cornell University.


Fr. Jeremiah currently serves on the Standing Committee, is one of the diocese’s General Convention Deputies, and is on the Advisory Committee for the Episcopal Church’s Development Office. He was a regional Dean in Ohio, formerly chaired the Colorado Commission on Ministry, and was a General Convention Deputy in 2012 and 2015. He has served on a number of community boards and is currently on the board of the Colorado Springs Downtown Partnership. He and his wife Jennifer, a United Methodist pastor, have two sons, Oscar (11) and Isaiah (9), and one mini-Schnauzer (2).
Candidates for Bishop

Fr. Scott Garno
A priest in the Diocese of Albany for 17 years, Fr. Garno currently serves as Rector of St. Stephen’s, Delmar. Prior to St. Stephen’s, he served 11 years as the Rector of St. Matthew’s, Unadilla, and, for six of those years, priest-in-charge of St. Paul’s, Franklin.

He represented the diocese at General Convention six times, twice as deputation chair, numerous times as a legislative committee member, a committee vice chair, and member of The Episcopal Church Taskforce on Communion Across Difference. He also served six years on the Standing Committee, serving the final two years of his terms as President of the Standing Committee.

Fr. Scott and his wife, Sarah, parented three children, Josiah (with the Lord), Samuel, Maria and Tobias. During his second year at seminary, and 12 weeks into Sarah’s first pregnancy, the Garnos faced a challenge that would forever define their lives and ministries. They were informed that their baby had a condition called anencephaly (similar to spina bifida but affecting the skull and brain). Their son, Josiah Donald, was born on February 3, 2005, living only 16 minutes.

“Therefore my 17 years of ministry, I have striven to provide that sense of hope, peace and comfort to the people to whom I have ministered, through biblical preaching, inspiring teaching, and spirit-led pastoral care.”  “I am diligently praying for the person whom God has already chosen to be our next bishop. While the next Bishop of Albany will have many challenges to address, they will also be blessed by a Diocese full of incredible natural beauty, Godly clergy, and inspiring laypeople. I have no doubt whatsoever that God continues to have plans for us and for his kingdom here in these 19 counties of upstate New York.”

Fr. Neal Longe
The Very Reverend Neal P. Longe was called to full-time ministry at St. Ann’s, Amsterdam on January 1, 2012. Born and raised in Johnstown, NY he was sponsored for ordination by St. John’s, Johnstown. He and Lisa, his wife, married in 2004, have 2 teenage children, Maria and Noah.

Fr. Neal holds a Master of Arts Degree in Theology from St. Mary’s Seminary and University in Baltimore, MD and a Diploma in Anglican Studies from Trinity School for Ministry in Ambridge, PA. He also holds a Bachelor of Music Degree in Music Education and Psychology from the Crane School of Music College at SUNY Potsdam, as well as an Associates degree in Nursing from Fulton-Montgomery Community College at Johnstown, NY. Fr. Neal is a Registered Nurse and has worked in the Emergency Department, the Intensive Care Unit, and Occupational Health.

Fr. Neal serves the parish in many ways, sharing the love of Jesus and connecting people to Christ, transforming people, families, and communities. Fr. Neal is passionate about preaching, leading bible studies, and teaching. Pastoral care is an integral part of all the ministries that he is involved in. In November 2013, Fr. Neal was appointed by the previous Bishop to serve as the Dean of the Western Mohawk Deanery. He also serves the Diocese in a variety of other leadership roles and currently serves as Secretary of the Trustees of the Diocese, Chair of the Christ the King Oversight Board, Chair of the Capital Finance Task Force, and Deanery Clergy Representative on Diocesan Council. Fr. Neal is blessed to serve as Priest-in-charge for St. Peter’s by the Lake Summer Chapel in Old Forge.

With a heart for First Responders, Fr. Neal serves as a Deputy Fire Coordinator – Chaplain with the Montgomery County Fire Service and Office of Emergency Management, as well as Chaplain to Montgomery County Sheriff’s Office, Amsterdam Fire Dept, Amsterdam Police Dept, and the Capital District Fraternal Order of Police. Fr. Neal holds a third degree black belt (III Dan) in Taekwon-Do. He enjoys spending time with his family, their two dogs, connecting with friends, and furthering his education by reading and listening to podcasts.
When I first met Bishop Todd MacGregor and Mother Patsy MacGregor at our Diocesan convention back in 2012, we became instant friends in Christ and we corresponded over the next few months. They asked if our parish of St Luke’s on the Hill would be interested in becoming a sister parish to one of the many churches in the Diocese of Toliara in southern Madagascar where they served. After discussing their invitation with our vestry, they eagerly agreed to enter a relationship with a sister church. They also asked if there was a St Luke’s in the Diocese of Toliara that we could partner with. To our delight there was – and it just happened to be a significant church to the MacGregors!

Bishop Todd had served as a missionary priest in Antananarivo, the capital of Madagascar, for several years in the early 2000’s. He and Mother Patsy then had the opportunity to serve as directors of a lovely retreat center in Kenya. They then moved with their two teen age daughters who were about to enter high school and could benefit from the more academic offerings available in Kenya.

Soon after their youngest daughter graduated, Bishop Todd, who was then still a priest, received a call from Madagascar asking him to return, and be consecrated as a bishop, then plant a new diocese hundreds of miles south of the Capitol in Toiliara.

In 2006, after much prayer the MacGregors answered God’s call and moved to a tiny apartment in a slum right next to St. Luke’s church, which at the time, had only walls but no roof. It was a couple of years before the roof was put on and St. Luke’s could then serve as Bishop Todd’s cathedral church. There he served until 2016 when the cathedral was finally built.

It should be noted that, when Bishop Todd first arrived in Toliara,
there were only 11 churches in the entire diocese. Many of them met underneath trees not in buildings. Over the years the lord has grown the diocese and it now has over 150 churches spreading over a large area encompassing a drought stricken area. This area has been identified as the one area in the world that drought and ensuing starvation has been caused solely by climate change and not by war or political upheaval.

The people of the diocese not only thirst for water and the ability to grow crops and raise their livestock, they also thirst for Jesus and the Good News of the Gospel message. Historically, they practice their Malagasy traditional religion led by a shamen or medicine man, but when they hear about Jesus and his redemptive love for them they eagerly burn all types of charms created by the medicine men. They now grow as disciples of Christ with hundreds being baptized each year and men and women being trained to be evangelists, deacons and priests.

Our sister parish of St. Luke’s is located in Ankilifaly, a city in the south of Madagascar, on the coast. Their rector, Rev Victor Osoro, is the rector of not only St. Luke’s parish which is comprised of 10 churches in the surrounding area, but also is rector of another parish comprised of 17 churches, many of which meet under trees, out in the open or in all kinds of make shift shelters, big and small. Since Rev Victor cannot reach all of them on his motor bike on any given weekend, he has trained his vestry to lead services and trained evangelists to lead services in all of his far reaching churches in his absence. All the parishes continue to grow and thrive with many people coming into life-giving relationships with Christ. They, too, become disciples making disciples. In March, 2016, my husband Clark and I along with Fr Chip Strickland and his wife Beth, were invited to attend the dedication of the diocese’s new cathedra which was only a couple of miles from St. Luke’s in Ankilifaly. While there, I had the blessing of preaching at their Sunday Service, as well as leading a women’s retreat and a VBS for about 70 children. In addition, St Luke’s rector I and I signed a covenant agreement linking St. Luke’s Ankilifaly with St. Luke’s on the Hill, Mechanicville.

Ever since that time we have stayed in touch via Zoom, text and e mail, sharing our news and supporting one in love and prayers. Additionally, as a way of staying connected, St. Luke’s on the Hill celebrates “Madagascar Sunday” on the third Sunday of every month when we not only especially pray for the needs of our sister parish. but also dance our offerings up to the altar as they do in Madagascar and come up for Communion, moving from the back to the front as we remember as our Mlagasy friends do, that the last shall be first and the first last. Our offerings that day are sent to our sister church on a quarterly basis so they can purchase church supplies, build permanent church structures, dig water wells or purchase rice for food during the time of famine. During the pandemic our gift helped pay the rector’s salary. Most recently , this spring, one of our vestry members wrote a grant to the national episcopal church for a grant of $20,000 to dig water wells and to build water storage containers for entire villages.

It was with great joy that we welcomed Rev. Victor to St. Luke’s on the Hill this past February for a long weekend visit. Although it was freezing cold and he had to borrow a ski parka, Rev. Victor was thrilled to experience snow for the first time in his life and to enjoy meeting the clergy and people of his sister church. Not only did he preach at all of our services, he also met with our vestry and clergy and learned much from him as to how the Lord has been working in and through him and his churches to spread the good news and bring many to faith in Christ, as they are baptized and then discipled. We all marveled at Rev Victor’s energy and enthusiasm in his challenging ministry to so many different churches, all the while having 3 young children at home along with his sister and her 2 young children who also live with them. Thankfully, he is well supported in love and prayer by his wife, Rev Nulavy, who was ordained 2 years ago as the first woman priest in all of Madagascar.

The Diocese of Toliara continues to invite and encourage other churches in our diocese to be linked with a sister parish so that they too might grow in knowledge and love of one another and support one another in prayer and learn from one another, and perhaps make a missionary trip to visit. So, please pray about this rich opportunity and contact me for further information. One of our parishes in Potsdam is already linked and two others in the capital region are in the process of being linked, but there are plenty of other churches, some of which are meeting under a tree, need support and prayer so they can grow and flourish as they spread Jesus’ good news to all they meet who hunger to know, love and serve Him.
Thank you to everyone who donated their time and treasure to make summer 2023 the success that it was!

Every year we look for new opportunities. We’ve held service days, Alpha groups, game nights, youth groups, & more. Follow us online to see what we are up to next or contact us with your own idea.

Here are a few photos of Rev. Osoro with members and guests of St. Luke’s, Madagascar...

The Rev. Lynne Curtis is Deacon at St. Luke’s on the Hill, Mechanicville, and a new contributor to The Albany Episcopalian
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Beavercrossministries.org
To register or for information on schedules, dates, menus, and more visit CTKCenter.org

Please join us for our upcoming events!

WEEKLY HEALING SERVICE
EVERY TUESDAY | 10 AM

Every Tuesday we also serve lunch following the service. Reservations are required. Attending the service is not required to come to lunch.

After lunch we offer different faith formation opportunities. These are typically free, and attending lunch is not required for participation. Please visit our website to see what the current sessions are about!

Attending to the Soul
AUGUST 24-26, 2023
Join us as we look into our own soul, not to self promote, but rather to promote spiritual formation that reflects more of the life of Christ in our lives.

Welcome Home Initiative© Events
All Veteran’s Retreat | October 30-November 1, 2023
The Welcome Home Initiative© ministers healing for military veterans who have served their country in combat or any other service context that has caused suffering in varying degrees from post-traumatic stress or moral injury, and are in need of soul repair. Spouses too are welcome and encouraged to participate.

ADVENT RETREAT
DECEMBER 1-2, 2023

Follow Us Online
To register or for information on schedules, dates, menus, and more visit CTKCenter.org

Other News
Thank you to our volunteers!
On June 17 we had a volunteer day. Thank you to those who attended and helped with things like planting flowers for our memorial garden.

Strengthen community!
With summer coming to a close it’s time for students to go back to school. Consider booking with us for a field trip to focus on building community. Students aren’t the only one’s that need this opportunity: we also book many adult groups too (staff teams, vestry retreats, parish groups, and more!)

Call us today or visit our website to learn about accomodations and available activities.

HOPE AND HEALING
in the name of Jesus
THE LORD HEALS SAVES DELIVERS
A JUDITH MACNUTT CONFERENCE
SEPTEMBER 14-16
This conference will explore Hope and Healing in the Name of Jesus, and unpack the wholeness Jesus desires for each of us in these main areas of Healing, Salvation and Deliverance.
Prayer in Time of Transition

Heavenly Father, we praise and thank you for this, your diocese of Albany. Inspire and sustain us in this time of transition.

Incline our hearts to do your will, and so direct us in your ways that the leader you are raising up to be our Bishop will find here joyful disciples, making disciples, united in faith, unflagging in hope, and steeped in mutual charity.

In your mercy, accept our repentance, and grant us peace; look with patience on our enthusiasms; and pour rich gifts and grace upon all who are entrusted with the ongoing work of your church; so that, with diligence and charity, we may discern correctly and walk righteously in your ways.

This we ask in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.
Amen.
The Diocese of Albany is One Church fulfilling the Great Commandment and Great Commission, moving from membership to discipleship; equipping, emboldening and sending disciples to make disciples.

- Diocesan Vision

Effective January 1, 2024
The Albany Episcopalian will be printed two times a year. Publication is scheduled in the months of March and December.

Submissions for consideration must be received prior to the first Monday of the month before publication. News items of diocesan interest are welcome, and should be sent to the Business Office at 580 Burton Road, Greenwich, NY 12834, in care of Editor or transmitted via e-mail to: TAEeditor@albanydiocese.org.

Diocesan Website
For the most up-to-date information about events in the diocese, parish and clergy directories, mission news, parish resources, and more, visit the diocesan website at www.albanyepiscopaldiocese.org. You can also visit us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/albanydiocese.