



The Episcopal Diocese of Southwestern Virginia

The Right Reverend Mark A. Bourlakas, Bishop

The Sixth Sunday after Epiphany 2025

“In Christ we have obtained an inheritance . . . so that we, who were first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory.”

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ Jesus,

Our recent Diocesan Convention in January was an immense blessing pointing to the faith, commitment, and vitality of our mission to the Gospel of Jesus Christ here in Southwestern Virginia. This joy-filled annual reunion of clergy, lay leaders and guests has, over the past decade, become a visible expression of the harmony and love we share as the body of Christ throughout this diocese. Every year, the experience renews me.

Those of you who attended our Convention in Roanoke heard me speak openly of my current discernment, where God might be calling me to serve in the next stage of my ministry in our Church. The support and encouragement many of you expressed after my address points to the strong friendships we have built over these twelve years.

Before our Convention, some conversations I was engaged in were still in the early stages of my prayer and consideration. One of those conversations was with The Rt. Rev. E. Mark Stevenson, the Bishop of the Diocese of Virginia. Last week, Bishop Stevenson extended a call to me to become Assistant Bishop in that diocese.

After much prayer, reflection, and conversation with Martha and our daughters, I have decided to accept this new call. I will be based in Northern Virginia, and Martha and I will move to Alexandria in June. We are privileged to continue to serve in this Commonwealth that we have grown to love.

I've had several conversations with Presiding Bishop Sean Rowe and his office about this call and my impending resignation. I am excited for his leadership in this new season, and appreciate his following statement:

"Mark is a valued colleague in the House of Bishops and I give thanks for his leadership in Southwestern Virginia, which has been a time of deep reflection, exploration of Becoming Beloved Community, and commitment to spiritual renewal and formation. As he answers a new call in the Diocese of Virginia, the diocese is poised to go from strength to strength in this time of transition and discernment.

Bishop Sean is right, indeed, when he speaks of this diocese going from strength to strength. Employing the Mission Action Plan we developed over a decade ago as a missional guide, we have deepened our discipleship in Christ Jesus and increased our evangelical witness to the Gospel.

We built a diocesan staff to care for and resource our parish's formation needs. We raised up many new ordained and lay leaders for new missional efforts and creative alliances between our parishes. And we navigated the global pandemic, supporting each other while learning and adapting our mission to meet new challenges.

Throughout, we were striving to keep our hearts and minds on the creation of a beloved community where all of God's children are included and respected. This diocese now possesses all of the resources, love, and trust it needs to go forward in mission.

In the past few days, I've had organizing conversations with our chancellor, the president of our Standing Committee, and our diocesan staff. I met with the whole Standing Committee yesterday to begin the necessary preparations for the calling of the Seventh Bishop of Southwestern Virginia. Over the next couple of weeks, you will receive many more details as we begin planning the transition process.

In our years together, we shared laughter, some tears, and much honest conversation. We have prayed and broken bread together in the many sacred places of worship around this diocese, as we befriended each other in Jesus' name. Every Sunday, you welcomed me with generous hospitality. I have grown in my discipleship through the warmth and love I have received from each one of you. I will carry that affection and learning with me into this new ministry.

I pray that you will continue to set your hope on Christ and his Resurrection so that the forward mission of this diocese may continue to bless your lives together as well as those we, the baptized, are called to serve.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, starting with a cross symbol and followed by stylized cursive letters.

The Rt. Rev. Mark Allen Bourlakas