



The Rt Rev'd David E. & Helen R. Richards

# COLLEGE *for* BISHOPS

## **THE COLLEGE for BISHOPS STORY**

The day I became a bishop, a burden was laid on my shoulders for which it will be no easy task to render an account.

St. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo from 354-396  
(Sermon 340)

\*\*\*\*\*

“A bishop’s work and ministry are different from that of a priest.” An older bishop told him “when he first became a bishop he was really changing careers.”

The Most Rev. Michael Curry, Presiding Bishop  
ENS Newsletter, June 23, 2017

\*\*\*\*\*

“The day I was ordained, the color of my shirt changed.  
The day I was elected my life changed.”

The Rt. Rev. J. Neil Alexander  
Quoting another bishop, *Pathways*, Fall, 2011

\*\*\*\*\*

“The episcopate is a unique distinct and different, but not ‘superior’ order in the Church, functioning both individually and collegially.... A proper doctrine of the Church, or ecclesiology, thus depends upon a proper ministry of the episcopate.”

*The Ministry of Bishops*, at p. 29.

\*\*\*\*\*

How do you tell the story that finds its start in the very beginnings of Christianity? How do you report the positive changes that have occurred in response to changing times even while the concern for God’s mission to the Church for the sake of the world continues to remain the same? The story is not a recent innovation or one that has recently emerged to meet unmet needs of the Church, as some may think. The need for well-formed, faithful and equipped bishops is still the goal, and the College for Bishops mirrors the Church’s historic way of reaching it.

From a practical and existential view, the reality of the life and work of bishops is only known by bishops - those who have experienced it. Experienced bishops have the practical knowledge, existential perspective and internalized wisdom to train others for that work – its spiritual, physical, and emotional demands – to share and help new bishops live into the fullness of this ministry. While the specifics of the “internship” for new bishops has changed over the centuries as new challenges have appeared, new techniques have been developed and new methodologies explored, the House of Bishops for the Episcopal

Church has met the bishops' historic responsibility of formation and education for successor bishops in various ways. More recently, in 1993, those long-standing efforts became formalized through an arrangement between General Theological Seminary and the House of Bishops funded by The Church Pension Fund, The Episcopal Church Foundation, General Theological Seminary, and The Lilly Foundation. Those efforts led to the creation of The College for Bishops.

**The mission of the College is:**

“To provide opportunities for education and formation that will strengthen bishops in their personal lives, as diocesan leaders in God’s mission and in their vocation to God, as a community of bishop in service to The Episcopal Church”

From its earliest beginnings, the College has relied upon the members of the House of Bishops and their shared ministerial experience as primary sources for identifying subjects needed to meet the demands of formation and education for bishops in each new generation. It has also relied upon questionnaires, consultants, educational research, bishop spouses/partners and a variety of other sources in changing times and circumstances. As courses are developed, bishops and knowledgeable clergy and laity serve as instructors, depending upon the needed subject-matter and the expertise of the individual faculty members.

The New Bishops' Research Project is a classic example of the thorough and academically sound approach the College uses in developing its curriculum. Work began as a research project to identify and develop the resources and educational needs of bishops in the early years of their ministry. It was funded by a Louisville Grant of the Lilly Foundation and was a joint project with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA), with whom the Episcopal Church had entered into an agreement for full and shared Communion. It involved 12 newly elected Episcopal bishops and 9 newly elected ELCA bishops. The coordinators of the project were The Rev. Dr. Charles Kiblinger of Virginia Theological Seminary and the Rev. Roy M. Oswald, ordained Lutheran pastor and senior consultant for the Alban Institute. The two coordinators met with the newly elected bishops for three days every nine months for three years. They also held personal interviews with each individual bishop between the three-day sessions and then they evaluated their findings.

This research and testing led to the Living Our Vows Residency program. It is a five-day program for each of the first three years of a new bishop's episcopate that provides opportunities for new bishops to gather in a community of new bishops under the mentorship of a qualified faculty, to reflect on the gifts, responsibilities and authority of the episcopate, and to acquire resources to lead and serve dioceses effectively and faithfully. It has been expanded to include a Peer Coaching program that provides a three-year collegial relationship for a new bishop and an experienced bishop trained as a peer coach under the direction of a professional and licensed Life Coach. This part of the program supports spiritual health and personal development designed to equip new bishops with skills for transformative leadership. In the rare instance where a bishop has a problem that has not yet been covered in the Living Our Vows sessions and/or where the bishop's peer coach is not available for consultation, the bishop can email or call the College to receive assistance.

During the period, 2007 – 2017, Living Our Vows served 331 new bishops. Twenty-five of these were newly elected bishops from other Provinces of the Anglican Communion, including Canada, Cuba, El Salvador, Mexico, New Zealand, and Tanzania. This opportunity to engage with bishop members of the larger Anglican Communion has itself added to the education and formation of the newly elected bishops for a world-wide Church. The bishops were supported by 369 experienced Peer Coaches and a faculty that included 34 bishops, 23 clergy, and 55 laity. The annual New Bishops' and Spouses' Conference, designed to include support for the spouses/partners of newly elected bishops, served another 98 couples.

The College also offers other courses designed to provide each bishop with continuing education from the moment of election as bishop to the time the bishop retires. Those courses include: the 90-Day Companion Program that provides each bishop-elect an experienced bishop to assist in addressing many of the immediate, practical considerations for the transition period from election to ordination. The William and Sidney Sanders Conference on Orderly Transition provides an opportunity for bishops and spouses/partners to prepare for a smooth and healthy transition into their retirement years and thereby also helps their respective diocese make its way forward in its process of selecting and ordaining its next bishop.

In addition to these courses, the College also sponsors and funds independent research on subjects related to the ministry of bishops. Bishops, priests and members of the laity with relevant education and training, have participated in this research arm of the College. The papers generated have served to assist in the development of new courses.

Material used for formation and continuing education courses is regularly validated. Historically, the College has used seminary faculty and other knowledgeable clergy or laity familiar with the process of validation to perform these services. Questionnaires and other devices are used during the presentation of all courses, and they are reviewed following the conclusion of each course.

The ancient responsibility of bishops for the formation and education of successor bishops dates from the time of Jesus who called, modeled, and trained for ministry the first Apostles. From that time forward, the bishops, as direct successors of the Apostles, have done for those who follow them. This historic expression of Apostolic “succession” intends to safeguard the Church and its teachings, the very ministry to which bishops are called. This responsibility is clarified in the ordination rite for bishops in *The Book of Common Prayer*. And this particular, humbling, and significant responsibility has reached down through the ages to the House of Bishops and The Presiding Bishop in our place and time.

A part of this responsibility for the formation and education of bishops by bishops is codified in Canons III.12.1 and 12.2., which provide:

#### CANON III. 12: Of the Life and Work of a Bishop

##### Sec. 1. Formation

Following election and continuing for three years following ordination, new Bishops shall pursue the process of formation authorized by the House of Bishops. This process of formation shall provide a mentor for each newly ordained Bishop.

##### Sec. 2. Continuing Education

The House of Bishops shall require and provide for the continuing education of Bishops and shall keep a record of such education.

These canons were adopted as part of a six-year effort begun in 2000 by the Standing Commission on Ministry Development (SCMD) to revise all of Title III ministry canons “in light of sound criteria, based in a clearly articulated and comprehensive theology of ministry” (*Toward a Theology of Ministry*, page 28). As the SCMD reported to the 75<sup>th</sup> General Convention (2006), the inclusion of those two canons was not to create authority that did not already exist. They provided neither an evolution nor an expansion of the authority of bishops, of the House of Bishops, or of the Presiding Bishop. They made explicit a portion of what has been the case from the time of the Apostles.

Five years later (2010) the College for Bishops was incorporated as a non-profit corporation under the District of Columbia Non-Profit Corporation Act to assist in the College’s efforts to raise funds donated to support its formation and continuing education ministry for bishops, and to provide for the formation (in secular language, “training”) and education of bishops of the Episcopal Church. All

incorporation documents have been filed in the District of Columbia public records. Subsequent reports required by the District of Columbia have been timely filed, and the District of Columbia has issued a Certificate of Good Standing for the College. The College has been correctly placed under the Church's "umbrella" IRS tax exemption granted by Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, making all contributions to the College deductible under the tax laws of the United States. Proper arrangements for access to Intellectual Property have also been made.

Incorporation has given the College the ability to clarify the fact that all orders of ministry have opportunities to offer their insights in the formation and education of bishops. As the Catechism affirms, each order of ministry has a specific role to carry out as we share in the common ministry of all the baptized: to "represent Christ and his Church" according to the various ministries to which God has called us. (*Book of Common Prayer*, page 855-856) Through participation in the work of various subject-matter committees, professional guidance in developing curricula for courses, appointment on the faculty of Living Our Vows, among other ways, clergy and laity alike continue to provide valuable assistance to the bishops in the formation and education of bishops called to serve God and God's Church.

The College for Bishops continues to focus on formation and education opportunities grounded in historic Christian "doctrine, discipline, and worship" while being responsive to newer ways and means to share that information in changing times. A recent example is the addition of The Leadership Institute, an on-line information resource that provides access to articles concerning contemporary themes and issues, research studies, book reviews, podcasts, videos, interviews, blog posts, website links, and recommended resources for further study as part of each bishop's ongoing personal responsibility for continuing education.

The College develops and presents a wide range of successful curricula for the formation and education of present and future bishops. It utilizes current technology to help bishops stay abreast of the changing world that is the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. This is being accomplished by all orders of the Church through the College's system of participatory ministry. This integrated approach provides valuable assistance to the bishops as they discharge their ancient responsibility of providing formation and education of their successors.