

A pastoral word to The Episcopal Church from the September 2026 gathering of the House of Bishops

*“We look for the resurrection of the dead
and the life of the world to come.”*

— The Nicene Creed

“See, I am making all things new.”

— Revelation 21:5

Dear People of God:

Grace and peace to you in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Introduction

The bishops of The Episcopal Church gathered from Sept. 22-28, 2026, at Camp Allen Conference Center in Navasota, Texas. Our gathering included 118 bishops and bishops-elect, representing 93 dioceses and special ministries across 17 countries and territories. Mindful of the pressures and challenges facing our world and our church, we are grateful for this time set apart for spiritual renewal and focused work. We leave this meeting with deepened relationships and renewed commitments to the ministry we share in Jesus Christ.

Reflections from our meeting

Over the course of our meeting, we held in constant tension a clear-eyed look at the realities of the present and a persistent hope for the future. We received the latest draft of Presiding Bishop Sean Rowe’s strategic framework: Our Courageous Witness. This vision for The Episcopal Church has three strategic priorities that will compel our church to proclaim a Christianity that is authentic, expansive, beautiful, and unafraid; connect, convene, and coordinate resources across the breadth of our church; and better organize and allocate our resources to support the work of the Gospel.

We spent time learning about the opportunities and challenges of artificial intelligence as we reflected on the theological and existential questions of what it means to be human. Our time with futurist Bob Johansen, from the

Institute for the Future, gave us the opportunity to engage in future-back thinking to help us better align our shared mission and ministry over the next decade.

As we have done in previous meetings, we continued to engage matters critical to the vitality of our church, including theological education, church planting, congregational redevelopment, and the ongoing dialogue toward a full-communion partnership with the United Methodist Church. We were joined by Mary Kate Wold, chief executive officer and president of the Church Pension Group (CPG), who shared the broad research being conducted by CPG to better align its services with the changing needs of the church.

A highlight of our time was our visit with the Most Rev. Sarah Mullally, who joined us on the six-month anniversary of her installation as the 106th archbishop of Canterbury. Echoing many of the themes of our week, Archbishop Mullally spoke of our call to grow in cultural competency and spiritual maturity, and encouraged us to nurture confidence in the Gospel as we move from fear to hope.

A call to embody God's new creation

Each time we gather as the House of Bishops, God meets us in word and sacrament, and we see God at work in one another. Our meeting has been marked by a holy vulnerability. We remember not only who we are, but who authors our lives and renews our hope. The ability to hope as bishops and as the church seems ever more important in our present circumstances.

Our ancestors faced seemingly insurmountable troubles, yet their hope for us and future generations was boundless. Hope is a gift given to us by a God who loves us completely. With God's grace, we meet all manner of circumstances with hope. Our hearts may tremble with fear, but with confidence we look for "the life of the world to come."

In the book of Revelation, we are given a glimpse of God's future, the promise of a new heaven and new earth (Revelation 21:1). The hope of this new creation frames, but does not erase, our present struggle.

The Apostle Paul holds this tension in his letter to the Romans. He does not deny that the sufferings of this present time are real but insists they are not worth comparing with the glory to be revealed (Romans 8:18). As we look for “the life of the world to come,” the whole creation groans in labor pains, and so do we. We groan in pain because the former things have not yet passed away. We also groan in hope because we know what is to come. Yet we do not groan alone. The Spirit intercedes for us and within us with sighs too deep for words.

We believe what God began in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, God will complete in the new creation. God will dwell with God’s people and wipe every tear from their eyes (Revelation 21:3–4).

As we move from fear to hope, we are called to live now as an embodied sign of God’s future. To draw near to those who weep. To bear the burdens of those who are suffering. To work for justice, healing, and reconciliation. To stand in confidence that God, not fear or death, will have the final word.