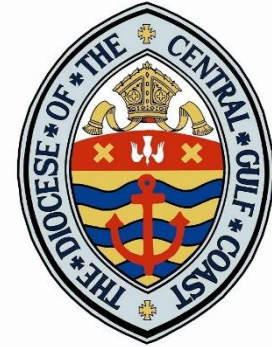


## THE SEAL OF THE DIOCESE OF THE CENTRAL GULF COAST

The rich history and natural beauty of the coastal south combine with symbols of the Gospel in our diocesan seal. The shield has a background of seven wavy bars alternating gold and blue (for the water, sand, and sun of the coast of the Gulf of Mexico). An anchor (red for summer's heat) is a nautical symbol of steadfast hope. Atop of the shield, a descending dove, symbol of the Holy Spirit, is flanked by St. Andrew's crosses (found on the flags of Alabama and Florida). A bishop's mitre is above the shield. The name of the diocese lettered within an elliptical band completes the seal.

In heraldic terms, the seal is *"Barrywavy of seven, or and azure, an anchor in pale gules; on a chief of the third, a dove descending proper between two saltires coupé of the first."*

At the request of Bishop George Murray, the seal was designed by Professor James Waring McCrady of the University of the South, Sewanee, and adopted by the Standing Committee in late 1971.



## HISTORY OF THE DIOCESE OF THE CENTRAL GULF COAST

When Bishop George M. Murray addressed the 1968 convention of the Diocese of Alabama, he described his vision of a new diocese which might be formed from counties in south Alabama and northwest Florida. He made his address immediately following Bishop C. C. J. Carpenter's announcement of his plan to resign at year's end after a thirty-year episcopacy. After his 15 years of assisting Bishop Carpenter in serving the more than 100 congregations in Alabama, Bishop Murray spoke of new possibilities. One of them was a new diocese.

His vision was as exciting as it was historic. Since 1830, the Diocese of Alabama had covered the state. The Diocese of Florida, formed eight years later, also covered the state (including congregations in Cuba for a few years) until 1888 when a new jurisdiction of South Florida was created. From time to time, dividing the Diocese of Alabama had been considered, but never decisively.

Throughout 1968 and 1969, Bishop Murray and Bishop Hamilton West of Florida worked with clergy and lay leaders in both areas. In early 1970, the conventions of both dioceses agreed to the new diocese. General Convention approved in the summer of the same year. Bishop West, senior of the two bishops, chose to remain where he was. Bishop Murray then chose to lead the new diocese.

The Primary Convention of the new diocese met December 3-5, 1970, in Christ Church, Pensacola. Bishop West preached from Exodus 14:15: *"The Lord said to Moses, 'Tell the people of Israel to go forward.'"* At his invitation, Bishop Murray presided over the sessions that organized the diocese. Before adopting canons, the convention adopted a motion *"that the new diocese should be structured so as to allow freedom to explore new ideas and to not be hampered by traditional concepts of either of the existing dioceses."* With this as the standard, canons were adopted for a relatively simple structure open to possibilities for creative mission and ministry. The convention named this new beginning the Diocese of the Central Gulf Coast.

The Diocese included 17,853 baptized members in 57 congregations 32 of which were missions (not self-supporting). The first budget was \$299,370 (97 percent came from the congregations). Of this budget, 26.5 percent was designated for diocesan administration; the remainder was designated for ministry within and beyond the diocese. There were 40 clergy at work in the diocese, including the bishop plus seven retired or non-parochial clergy. The only women clergy were two retired deaconesses who were, at the time, not officially counted as clergy. Of the 123 lay delegates in the primary convention, 18

percent were women. Bishop Murray established his office in Mobile in an unused building owned by the Diocese at Wilmer Hall Children's Home (a ministry of the Episcopal Church in Alabama since 1864). His staff included an administrative assistant, a secretary, and a bookkeeper. Lay persons and parish clergy took training as needed and served without diocesan compensation to lead several new ministries of the Diocese.

The new diocesan canons required the Standing Committee to be a colleague with the Bishop as the diocesan planning committee. Bishop and Standing Committee rose to the challenge. Within the first year, they decided, after considering other possibilities, to develop property on Weeks Bay, given in 1930 by Mrs. Charles M. Beckwith from the estate of her late husband, the IV Bishop of Alabama, into a diocesan camp and conference center. They decided, after extensive visits to all mission congregations which of them, within five years, could and should become parishes or, at least, self-supporting congregations. They also decided on and presented to convention a theology of financial stewardship for support of the diocese based on asking by the diocese for each congregation to pledge a percentage of its income. Because of Bishop Murray's strong support for clergy, the Diocese was soon among the top five Episcopal dioceses in the nation in clergy stipends based on cost-of-living. Bishop Murray led the first Cursillo weekend in 1978, and this movement continues to foster spiritual renewal in the Diocese.

After several capital improvements at Beckwith Lodge, the first summer youth camps in our Diocese began in 1973. At Wilmer Hall, the fourth and final new residential cottage for children was finished as was a new gymnasium and a renovated chapel.

In 1976, the General Convention of the Episcopal Church voted to permit the ordination of women and adopted a revised Book of Common Prayer (finally ratified three years later). Both decisions were controversial and resulted in a small loss of membership in the Diocese. In the nation, progress in the civil rights movement continued to be a struggle. Controversy intensified about the war in Viet Nam, and the unprecedented resignation of President Richard Nixon because of the Watergate scandal jolted the country. Locally, Hurricane Frederic wreaked major destruction in Mobile in September, 1979. Through all, the new diocese persevered in its vision.

In October, 1979, Bishop Murray announced his intention to resign and called for the election of his successor. On November 15, 1980, the Rev. Charles F. Duvall, Jr., of Spartanburg, South Carolina, was elected to become the second bishop of the Diocese. At the January, 1981, convention in Nativity, Dothan, our founding bishop was honored at a gala attended by Presiding Bishop John M. Allin. On April 11, 1981, the bishop-elect was ordained to this office and ministry in the Field House of the University of West Florida with a congregation of 3,500 present. This remains the largest diocesan gathering in our diocesan history.

Bishop Duvall began his episcopacy with a passion for church growth and development in membership and new congregations. In 1983, with the support of the Standing Committee, his second convention supported his call for participating in the Episcopal Church's *Venture in Mission* – a capital funds effort that produced over \$1.5 million for development at Beckwith; diocesan mission churches; seminary education for minorities; support of St. George's College, Jerusalem; Kanuga Conference Center; and the companion Diocese of Guatemala. A follow-up campaign, *Fulfilling the Vision*, raised, by 1995, over \$2.5 million for more development at Beckwith and of new congregations.

At Wilmer Hall Children's Home, the chapel was renovated to share with the congregation of St. Mark's for-the-Deaf. An alternative school was begun for resident children exceptionally challenged to function in the public schools. The director of this school was recognized at a White House reception by President George H. W. Bush as one of his "Thousand Points of Light."

After the convention of 1986 established a companion relationship with the Diocese of Guatemala, an exchange of visits from both dioceses followed as did medical and construction missions to Guatemala.

In 1988, the Standing Committee, on behalf of the people of the Diocese, presented Bishop Duvall a custom-designed gold and amethyst pectoral cross and chain. This served to replace his personal cross and chain which had been stolen. This cross and chain, made from gold and money given by the members of the Diocese, are among the diocesan episcopal insignia passed from each diocesan bishop to the succeeding diocesan bishop.

In the summer of 1989, by authority of the previous convention, the diocesan office was moved into the old Greyhound Bus Station in Pensacola. With this move, the bishop's office was an hour's drive closer to the eastern and northeastern portions of the Diocese.

In the Episcopal Church, there was growing debate on human sexuality and particularly on the place of gay and lesbian persons in the life of the church. In the 1995 diocesan convention, one congregation gave notice that it would contribute to the financial support of the Diocese only if its contribution would be restricted to use in the Diocese, with none going to The Episcopal Church. The convention voted by a strong majority against receiving restricted giving.

Later in this year, Hurricane Opal damaged Fort Walton Beach and the surrounding area.

In 1997, Murray House, an assisted living residence in Mobile, opened its doors as a new ministry of the Diocese and was named in honor of our Diocese's founding bishop.

In September of 1999, Bishop Duvall announced his intention to resign and called for the election of his successor. During the next two years, as the process of choosing nominees for his successor went forward, six priests and 1,384 baptized members in four congregations expressed dissatisfaction with the Episcopal Church by formally and publicly withdrawing from membership. Two congregations claimed church property; in both cases, the courts ruled for the Diocese.

On January 6, 2001, the Very Rev. Philip M. Duncan, II, of Dallas, Texas, was elected to be third bishop of the Diocese. On May 12, 2001, he was ordained to this office and ministry in a service in the Pensacola Civic Center.

Bishop Duncan began his episcopacy in the midst of inherited controversy and unforeseeable crises ahead. Less than two weeks after his episcopal ordination, he was in court for the final and favorable settlement of a diocesan property dispute. Four months later, on September 11, terrorists flew passenger airplanes into New York's twin Trade Center towers, the Pentagon, and into a Pennsylvania forest. Over three thousand died that September morning. Countless more were wounded. Scars from that day have yet to heal.

More crises came from the church and the weather. The General Convention of 2003 approved the election and ordination of the first openly gay priest to be bishop of New Hampshire. Loss of membership and income in the Episcopal Church resulted. In August of 2004, Hurricane Ivan caused massive destruction in Pensacola and from there, eastward and northward. Included in the damage was the diocesan office, the bishop's home, and the homes of most members of his staff, as well as a number of churches in the Diocese. A year later, Hurricane Katrina severely damaged New Orleans, the Mississippi coast, and the Alabama coast. Recovery and rebuilding were major concerns for the next several years.

In the face of these crises, Bishop Duncan offered a calm and steady presence. In 2002, he called for establishing a vocational diaconate. The next year, he appointed a committee to study establishing a cathedral, and appointed a chaplain to retired clergy and surviving spouses. In April of 2005, the oldest parish in the diocese, Christ Church, Mobile, became the cathedral of the Diocese when the bishop was seated and the dean was installed in a festive liturgy in which the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Mobile and the Pastor of the First Baptist Church each brought greetings and prayers.

In 2006, the Diocese mourned the death of Bishop Murray and welcomed the election of the Most Rev. Katharine Jefferts Schorri as the first female Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church. All who knew and loved Bishop Murray knew that he would have been among those welcoming her election.

In 2008, a new companion relationship was begun with the Diocese of the Dominican Republic. Wilmer Hall Children's Home ended financial support from the State of Alabama in order to reclaim its original mission as a Christian home for children. A new ministry in the Alabama prisons north of Atmore resulted in the formation in 2009 of the congregation of St. Dismas as a mission congregation of the Diocese. In 2011, the first vocational deacons were ordained. Severe weather caused destruction on the evening of Christmas Day, 2012, when a tornado did massive damage to historic Trinity Church, Mobile.

On July 30, 2015, Bishop Duncan announced his intention to resign and called for the election of his successor. On February 21, 2015, the Rev. James Russell Kendrick of Birmingham, Alabama, was elected to be the fourth bishop of the diocese. On July 25, 2015, he was ordained to this office and ministry in Expo Hall of the Mobile Civic Center. A few weeks before, the Most Reverend Michael Curry had been elected by General Convention to be the 27<sup>th</sup> Presiding Bishop and the first African-American Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church. Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schorri was the principal celebrant of this service, and Presiding Bishop-elect Currie was present among the participating bishops.

Statistics reported in the 46<sup>th</sup> year of the Diocese show 18,351 baptized members in 63 congregations (22 of which are missions). The budget adopted for 2016 was \$1,282,988 (85 percent from congregations). There were 66 active clergy, including the bishop plus 74 additional priest, 10 deacons, and four bishops living in or canonically associated with the diocese. There were 29 women priests and seven women deacons among the clergy. Of the lay delegates and General Officers of the 2016 convention, 58 percent were women.

Most of the ministries of the Episcopal Church in south Alabama and the Florida panhandle are done through the congregations in our cities and towns. The official ministries of the Diocese include Wilmer Hall Children's Home (32 residents); Beckwith Camp and Conference Center (784 summer campers and 7,018 other guests in conferences, meetings, picnics and other gatherings in 2015); Murray House (with 40 residents in assisted living); prison ministry; annual medical and construction missions to the Dominican Republic; Cursillo; continuing ecumenical and inter-faith relationships, an expanding year-round youth and youth adult ministry; and the chaplaincy to retired clergy, spouses, and surviving spouses.

This Diocese is no longer new, although by comparison to many dioceses in the Christian world, it is. By contemporary American standards, it may have attained middle age. By any measure, it is vibrant and our story is still being written.