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## **College for Bishops Program Strengthens Episcopacy *New Bishops Gain Insight, Build Relationships with ‘Living Our Vows’***

By Carol E. Barnwell

More than three-dozen new bishops gathered May 18-22 in North Carolina for a special residency program sponsored by the College for Bishops. Living Our Vows is a three-year program designed to support spiritual health and personal development of new bishops and to equip them for transformative leadership. The two main elements of Living Our Vows are a series of three residential retreats and an ongoing peer coaching relationship with an experienced bishop.

“The episcopacy is a unique and demanding vocation with a steep learning curve,” said the Rev. Margaret Ann Faeth, Adjunct Professor at Virginia Theological Seminary and outside speaker at the retreat. “Over the past two years, I have been impressed with the commitment of the new bishops and their eagerness and receptivity to the program,” she said, noting the diverse and exceptional faculty who assist in the professional and personal development of those called to the vocation of bishop.

Thirty-seven bishops including five Canadians, one from Scotland and one from Ireland, joined six episcopal faculty members and 10 guest instructors at Lake Logan Conference Center in Canton to consider a wide range of topics.

“The College for Bishops is changing the culture of the House of Bishops,” participants noted in their evaluations. They said that the “substantial learning opportunities and honest friendships help equip us to be more effective leaders together for the whole Church.”

Worship and Bible study framed the bishops’ time and small group discussions on individual cases studies helped develop deeper working relationships. The retreat covered a holistic approach to communications strategies for the upcoming General Convention in Anaheim, July 7-18, as well as provided an intimate look at the bishop and the Book of Common Prayer.



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The bishops, in three classes according to their consecration date, attended sessions in media training and considered their new, more public roles. They studied the polity of the Episcopal Church with David Beers, chancellor to the Presiding Bishop and were brought up to date by Sally Johnson, Esq. on Title IV, the Church's disciplinary Canons of the Church. The bishops also considered their unique role as a visionary for their dioceses and how to support that with effective organizations. Third year bishops studied implementation of transformational leadership.

Newly consecrated bishops who attended for the first time said: "We can't imagine that there was a time without Living Our Vows. The topics and timing, with the focus on learning and fellowship, were perfect for us as we struggle with our new roles, identity and authority."

Other attendees called their time "invaluable" and said their deepening relationships allowed them to "learn from one another." They said, "What we learn, the relationships we build, the formation we [experience] cannot help but make us better bishops, which in turn builds a better and healthier Church."

Faculty members included: The Rt. Revs. Jim Cowan (British Columbia), Duncan Gray (Mississippi), Barry Howe (West Missouri), Clay Matthews (Office of Pastoral Development and Managing Director of the College for Bishops), Tom Shaw (Massachusetts) and Porter Taylor (Western North Carolina). In addition to Beers, instructors included: Bishop Neil Alexander (Atlanta), Sally Johnson (Church Pension Group) and Macky Alston (Auburn Media) among others.

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