



# The Diocese of Eau Claire

The Episcopal Church in Northwestern Wisconsin

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## For Immediate Release

### **Bishop Matthew Gunter nominated to become Bishop Provisional of the Diocese of Eau Claire**

Eau Claire, WI — July 15, 2020—For the past eighteen months, the Diocese of Eau Claire has been discerning its future in light of the certain knowledge that the Diocesan Bishop, The Right Reverend William Jay Lambert III, will retire from his episcopate by the end of this year. To that end, the 90th Convention of the Diocese of Eau Claire authorized and empowered several groups and individuals to explore any and all models available for episcopal and diocesan oversight. Over the course of several months, those groups, driven most particularly by the Episcopal Transition Committee (ETC), spent considerable time and effort to conduct internal interviews and listening sessions at each parish in the Diocese of Eau Claire as well as external interviews with individuals throughout the Church whose dioceses employ various episcopal structures. In November of 2019, at the 91st Annual Convention of the Diocese of Eau Claire, the ETC presented several possible structures, highlighting the benefits and drawbacks of each option. One option was to contract a Bishop Provisional. Another option was to search for a Bishop Diocesan to work on a part time basis, following the current structure. The final option was to share a bishop with another diocese. After several attempts to reach a majority consensus, that convention voted on a separate resolution to continue to study the various proposals until such time as a majority of the diocese could agree on which model serves and supports its parishes best.

However, given that Bishop Lambert will be retiring by the end of the year, it has become necessary for the Diocese of Eau Claire to contract a bishop to shepherd the diocese through its continued discernment. To that end, the Standing Committee, in consultation with members of the ETC, began to pursue available bishops who might be willing and able to serve as Bishop Provisional for the diocese when Bishop Lambert retires. For the sake of efficiency, diocesan leadership contacted the four geographically contiguous dioceses to consider the possibility of contracting the Diocesan Bishops of those dioceses as Provisional Bishop of Eau Claire. Following informal discussions with the leadership of each of those dioceses, it became clear that one of those potential candidates was not only willing and able to serve as our Bishop Provisional, but also had the full support of the leadership of his current diocese.

Following several weeks of more detailed discussions, on Saturday, July 11th, 2020, the Standing Committee of the Diocese of Eau Claire, with the advice and consent of the Executive Council and Bishop Jay Lambert, nominated the Right Reverend Matthew Alan Gunter, Bishop Diocesan of the Diocese of Fond du Lac to serve concurrently as Bishop Provisional of the Diocese of Eau Claire. The leadership of the Diocese of Fond du Lac has, in principal, agreed to provide the necessary leaves of duty to allow Bishop Gunter the requisite time to serve each diocese synchronously. It is the intent of the leadership of the Diocese of Eau Claire and of Bishop Gunter to spend the following months introducing Bishop Gunter to the people of the diocese and developing a covenantal agreement that describes the parameters of his service. This will be done in consultation with the Diocese of Fond du Lac. That covenantal agreement will be put before the 92nd Annual Convention of the Diocese of Eau Claire for consideration and approval in November of this year.

While it is appropriate to acknowledge that the Diocese of Fond du Lac and the Diocese of Eau Claire have, in the past, discussed various models of shared ministry, (including, but not limited to, a potential junctioning of the two dioceses in 2011,) it is important to note that the potential election of Bp. Gunter as the Bishop Provisional of Eau Claire, while concurrently serving as Bishop Diocesan of

Fond du Lac does not anticipate any particular outcome. It is the hope of the leadership of the Diocese of Eau Claire that this proposed agreement would provide episcopal oversight and guidance while the diocese continues to consider any number of possibilities for the future, while also giving both dioceses unmediated experience of the benefits and detriments of episcopal models involving "shared episcopates." While some future discussions may include the consideration of several shared ministry models between our dioceses, it is the expectation of the leadership groups of the Diocese of Eau Claire and the Diocese of Fond du Lac that over the course of the proposed relationship with Bp. Gunter the dioceses will remain fully separate, yet continue to walk alongside one another in ministry as we have for more than ninety years.

It is the conviction of the leadership of the Diocese of Eau Claire that the support and guidance of an experienced bishop with a vested interest in the peoples and ministries of the church in Northern Wisconsin is paramount to the immediate future of both of our dioceses. It is of increased benefit that the proposed relationship would also provide both the Diocese of Fond du Lac and the Diocese of Eau Claire with invaluable experience in new models of episcopal oversight.

"It is my hope," stated Bishop Gunter, "that as a bishop of the Church, I am able to guide and lead each diocese in a way that will strengthen the mission and ministry of the Church in living out the Good News. How each diocese does this will be different, but the goal of spreading the Gospel is the same."

Additional details will be communicated as determined.