

THE RIGHT REVEREND JAMES B. MAGNESS, D.Min.
Bishop Suffragan for Federal Ministries

In March 2010 the House of Bishops of The Episcopal Church elected James B. “Jay” Magness to be the VI Bishop Suffragan for Federal Ministries. In June 2010 at Washington National Cathedral he was consecrated as a bishop of the church. Bishop Magness’ span of responsibility is for Episcopal chaplains and their congregations in the Department of Defense, the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Federal Bureau of Prisons.

At the time of his election he was serving in the Diocese of Southern Virginia as the bishop’s Canon for Mission and Diocesan Administration in the Diocese of Southern Virginia, Norfolk, VA. Prior to that in 2007 Bishop Magness had been called to be the rector interim for Galilee Episcopal Church, Virginia Beach, VA. In this position he provided pastoral and transitional leadership to a parish of over 1200 members, enabling them to create a new and healthy vision for their future. In 2004 Bishop Magness joined the Diocese of Kentucky as the Canon to the Ordinary. His duties were to assist his bishop through being the director of diocesan staff, deployment/ transition officer and diocesan operating officer.

Bishop Magness retired from the U.S. Navy in 2003 in the rank of Captain, serving as command chaplain of U.S. Joint Forces Command and fleet chaplain for the U.S. Fleet Forces Command. Prior to those assignments, from 1997 to 2000 he was on the Navy Chief of Chaplains’ staff working as personnel manager of the Navy Chaplain Corps. Serving as a Navy chaplain, however, was not his initial career plan. Bishop Magness first joined the Navy as an enlisted person in 1966. During his enlisted service he was assigned aboard three Navy ships and spent one year serving in a logistics unit in the northern most port of South Vietnam.

After his initial naval service he returned to his hometown of Hendersonville, N.C., married his wife, Carolyn, and after one year quit his job at a GE factory so both could attend Western Carolina University on a full time basis. They graduated in 1974, she with a Bachelor of Science in early childhood education and he with a Bachelor of Science degree in psychology and sociology.

A lifelong Episcopalian, he became “very intentional” about the Christian faith during his undergraduate years when he began to sense a call to the ministry. After graduation while completing the ordination exploration discernment process in the Diocese of Western North Carolina, he worked for the Department of Labor as field director for two programs: Neighborhood Youth Corps and Operation Mainstream, a program for perennially unemployable disadvantaged adults. Later that year he commenced his initial theological studies at the Seminary of the Southwest in Austin, Texas, where he received a master of divinity degree in 1977.

Bishop Magness returned to North Carolina to serve in parish ministry in Edneyville and Flat Rock, N.C. At that time, he also joined the Naval Reserve as a chaplain. Three years later he returned to active duty in the Navy as a Chaplain Corp officer. In 1981 he completed a clinical pastoral education residency year at Walter Reed Army Medical Center. Later on he spent two years in an exchange program with the British Royal Navy, working as a chaplain and priest for the Church of England. In 1999, he earned a doctor of ministry degree with a concentration in Christian leadership from Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary.

He has been married to his wife, Carolyn for 40 years. During their relaxing moments he and Carolyn enjoy dancing the Carolina Shag. Jay also has a fondness for restoring classic cars, fly fishing and road running. They have two married daughters, Laurel and Rebekah, both of whom reside in Virginia.

