



THE STANDING COMMITTEE
EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF MILWAUKEE

April 29, 2020

An Open Letter to all members of the Episcopal Diocese of Milwaukee

Dear Friends,

As you may recall, at our last diocesan convention, the President of our Standing Committee, Fr. Scott Leannah, gave us a description of the process for calling the 12th Bishop of Milwaukee. Following convention, we got to work on this process. Here is what has taken place to date:

- ❖ We called the Rev. Dr. Ann Hallisey to work with us as a diocesan consultant. Her guidance, skill and experience have been real gifts to us and we anticipate a continuance of this strong partnership as we continue our work.
- ❖ We appointed a Standing Committee Liaison to the Search Committee to ensure close contact and communication through the process. Tammy Prather has taken on this responsibility and carried it out with great skill and attentiveness.
- ❖ We appointed the Search Committee that consists of 14 lay and ordained members from across the diocese and named the Rev. Ian Burch and Ms. Jan Watter as co-chairs.
- ❖ A retreat was held for the Search Committee and led by our consultant to orient them to the process and to set short and long term goals for their work.
- ❖ We created a working budget for the search process.
- ❖ We engaged in dialogue with our bishop about his retirement date and a separation package, and we sought his insight and vision about the process and timeline we were working to create.
- ❖ We engaged in dialogue and sought insight from the Rt. Rev. Todd Ousley, of the Office of Pastoral Development. Bishop Ousley's ministry in the broader church is to walk with and assist dioceses that are going through transitions just like we are.
- ❖ We agreed on a process and timeline for the calling of the 12th Bishop of Milwaukee.

...and then everything changed.

The Standing Committee, Bishop Miller, the search committee and our entire diocese now find ourselves living in a new reality, one that we could not have foreseen or imagined only a few short months ago. All of you reading this know only too well the many changes, obstacles, fears, uncertainties and unanswered questions that mark this time as we seek to be people of faith, hope and charity during these days marked by COVID-19.

In the same way that parish life, ministries throughout the diocese, scheduled events and virtually any plans involving a gathering of people have been affected by our desire to combat this virus and its effects, so the search process has also been affected.

When Bishop Miller announced his upcoming retirement in August of 2019, none of us could have imagined an event of this scale that would create so many unknowns in our diocese and our life together. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis, this issue has weighed heavily on all of our hearts, and through much discernment and prayer, Bishop Miller has decided that following his original timeline for his retirement is the best course for the diocese, and for him and his family. We on the Standing Committee are grateful for his careful consideration of these plans, and we want to honor his decision.

This has also prompted us to reevaluate what the search process for the 12th bishop of the diocese of Milwaukee will look like, and we have found ourselves in a situation that makes our previous plans for a thoughtfully carried out search process untenable. As such, we have come to the conclusion, in consultation and with the full support of Bishop Miller and Bishop Ousley, that we need to revise our plans moving forward.

We are envisioning celebrating the remainder of Bishop Miller's tenure, in whatever ways that may be possible, for the remainder of this year. At the same time, we are working with Bishop Ousley to name an Assisting Bishop who will be ready to "hit the ground running" on January 1, 2021.

This person will be vetted by Bishop Ousley's office, and their name will be submitted to the Standing Committee. We, in turn, will create an Agreement with them about their ministry and role among us. The plan of the Standing Committee is to assign to this Assisting Bishop the normal roles and responsibilities that any bishop has in a diocese and the Standing Committee will continue in our current roles and responsibilities while collaborating with the Assisting Bishop and their decisions.

This Assisting Bishop, after a certain amount of time (perhaps somewhere around six months), will hopefully then be elected for a limited term as "Bishop Provisional" in a special diocesan convention. This election will be a way for the diocese to affirm the decision made by the Standing Committee. This Provisional Bishop will then minister with us for a specific amount of time, with the built-in option for evaluation and, if both parties agree, continuation, of their ministry until the stipulated end date. At this point, we foresee this being a term of three years. Why would we want to have an election and transform this person's role from that of Assisting Bishop into Provisional Bishop? A Provisional Bishop has greater authority and almost a sense of "tenure" for the limited time during which they are called to serve. This lends itself to a more secure sense of their ministry with us and would also lend authority to decisions that this person will need to make on our behalf.

What has helped us make this decision is realizing that the additional time afforded to us by engaging the ministry of a Provisional Bishop will allow us to look at some of the issues in our diocesan life that need attention: who we are as a people, what are we looking for in our next bishop, and our own faith, gifts and passion as a diocesan community. This extra time will give the Search Committee more space needed to find creative ways to gather diocesan input, explore practices and lessons from the past, and give us all time to live into whatever new reality awaits us in a post-pandemic world.

And along with examining our life as a diocese, we feel that this time will offer us the space to explore an intentional dialogue with our neighboring Wisconsin dioceses. As demographics in the Episcopal Church change and as we confront possible fall-out from this pandemic, we are convinced that now would be a moment to begin prayerful discussions with our neighbors about ways we could share in life and ministry.

We understand that this decision may not be seen favorably by everyone, and we want you to know that we have made it carefully, prayerfully and with a sincere desire to do what is right and good for the Diocese of Milwaukee at this time. We commend Bishop Miller's recent letter to you as well, and we wish to take this opportunity to thank him for his on-going ministry among us. We ask for God's continued blessings upon Bishop Miller, his wife Cindy and their family. We look forward to finding creative ways to celebrate his episcopate from now until the end of the year, and we very much hope that there can be ways to celebrate with him in person!

Thank you for the opportunity to be of service to our diocese in these unprecedented times.

In Christ,

The Rev. Scott Leannah, President
Dr. Sheryl Slocum, Secretary
Ms. Celia Fine
Ms. Tammy Prather

The Rev. Jana Troutman-Miller
Mr. Marcus White
The Rev. Gary Manning
The Rev. Andy Jones