

Standing Committee of the Episcopal Diocese of Milwaukee
April 14, 2020 -- 6:30 p.m.
Zoom Meeting

Present: Jana Troutman-Miller, Gary Manning, Andy Jones, Tammy Prather, Celia Fine, Marcus White, Scott Leannah, The Rt. Rev'd. Todd Ousley, The Rt. Rev'd. Steven Miller, Ann Hallisey, Sheryl Slocum

The purpose of this meeting was to discuss Bishop Miller's retirement plans. These plans, along with the Search Process leading to the election of the next Bishop of Milwaukee are now impacted by the global pandemic caused by COVID19. Bishop Miller stated that "now is not a good time to be in search, not a good time for the Standing Committee to be the Ecclesiastical Authority, and it's time for me to retire." This Bishop went on to explain he was inclined to stay with his originally published date of retirement, December 31, 2020...

In conversation with Bishop Ousley and Process Consultant Ann Hallisey, the alternative plan put before the Standing Committee was two-fold: suspending the present search process, and calling a Bishop Provisional who would be in place upon Bishop Miller's retirement.

Bishop Miller and Bishop Ousley both reported concerns about diocesan/parochial incomes as a result of the ongoing pandemic, with some dioceses predicting a 30% reduction in income. Bishop Miller noted his concern that churches may still be unable to resume public worship in June or July. Of course all of these particularities have implications for travel which, to date, have been constitutive of search processes.

Bishop Ousley noted that the calling of a Provisional would allow the Diocese of Milwaukee to do more with the necessary self-reflection/process work which has been delayed by the pandemic.

Bishop Ousley continued by stating the pandemic has accelerated issues before the Episcopal Church, "While presently there are all kinds of projections, which may or may not come to pass, what we do know is that the church is going to look much different after this long term experience of physical distancing. To take a pause seems prudent. It also seems prudent not to burden the Standing Committee with being the Ecclesiastical Authority during a pandemic."

Scott Leannah asked for a response from the Process Consultant. Ann Hallisey expressed her agreement with what had been said by the two bishops, stating, "A pause will give us space to consider who we are and what we need. This will be a broader conversation around the church (creative imaginings about leadership)...this is a time to stop and look at where you've come from...take a look of patterns that have been helpful/not helpful...this is an opportunity for naming the leadership needed for now."

Jana Troutman-Miller asked a process-related question concerning a Bishop Provisional: "Who does what here?"

Bishop Ousley responded: "A Bishop Provisional is someone who is already a bishop. This could be a retired bishop, or someone who is already serving and perhaps looking for a different ministry opportunity. To select a Bishop Provisional involves a process of collaboration between the Standing Committee and the Presiding Bishop's Office. I would identify people who would be possible candidates to be your Bishop Provisional. In many cases there is only one possibility, and then the Standing Committee would engage with me/and potential nominees to pick one person who would be nominated, and who would then be elected at a regular or special convention."

Scott Leannah asked, "We didn't budget for this, and so I would like to understand the finances. Our staffing situation is fluid right now. What kind of staff or support would a Bishop Provisional need? Would we have to move the person here? What are the models?"

Bishop Miller responded, "You didn't budget for a Provisional. We have a Search Process budget which would be suspended. In many ways it would be less expensive, depending on how you'd do it, and depending on who is elected a move may or may not be necessary."

Bishop Miller went on to note that while Canon Bean may be looking to retire sooner, Canon Huddleston, as well as Barb Klauber and Patty Jafke, plan to stay for another couple of years.

Andy Jones asked, "Is there a limited field of folks to be considered for this role/ministry?" To which Ousley responded, "Yes limited, but don't confuse 'limited' with thin, or scarce, or shallow." Bishop Ousley then outlined a number of different models of how to creatively deploy a bishop in varying circumstances.

Bishop Ousley's strong recommendation for the Standing Committee was to engage with a Bishop Provisional for a longer term period of work (2-5 years). There followed much discussion about the particulars of "how the process would work," and "how to procure buy-in" from the Diocesan community as a whole. Various scenarios were presented by Bishop Ousley.

Ann Hallisey called attention to the necessity of dealing with the work of the Search Committee, and pastorally informing them about the ways in which a decision to call a Bishop Provisional would necessarily impinge upon and/or change the direction of the Search Committee's labors. In addition, she laid out suggestions for how the Standing Committee could best communicate its decision toward calling a Bishop Provisional.

Bishop Miller indicated his desire that the communication from the Standing Committee be accompanied by an additional letter from him so that there was a unified and unifying message about this time of transition -- him transitioning to retirement and the Diocese transitioning to a Bishop Provisional.

Bishop Ousley offered that as communication was moving forward it would be helpful (particularly in the time of COVID19) to refrain from “target dates,” and instead speak in terms of “phases.”

Marcus White asked the question of how a convention to elect a Provisional Bishop would be accomplished in the age of COVID19. Bishop Ousley responded by noting that the question of “virtual conventions” was being actively discussed by Episcopal Chancellors across the country. Bishop Ousley then presented a scenario in which Bishop Miller resigns as of December 31, 2020, and prior to that time, the Standing Committee could call an “Assisting Bishop” to take ecclesiastical authority effective January 1, 2021. Then, following a period of time, and when an electing convention could be safely conducted, perhaps in late 2021 or early 2022, the Assisting Bishop could then be elected Bishop Provisional.

The Standing Committee and the Bishop agreed to meet again on April 21st to finalize matters around the new plan. Bishop Ousley and Ann Hallisey agreed to be a part of that meeting as well. Bishops Ousley and Miller departed the meeting. Ann Hallisey remained on the call with the Standing Committee for a few minutes of additional discussion.

Scott Leannah checked in with the entire Committee. Each person offered their particular perspective on this change of plans. Mostly those concerns related to process, finances, communication, and timing. All in all, the Committee was enthusiastic about the potential for creativity which would be opened up by an extended period of time to do the necessary process work ahead of us as a Diocese. There was additional discussion around a timetable for electing the Twelfth Bishop of Milwaukee, with Ann Hallisey noting she believed the process could be accomplished within three years, even with the continuing uncertainty of the situation with COVID19.

Following the check-in, there was a fair amount of discussion relative to the procedure of calling an Assisting Bishop, timing related to Bishop Miller’s retirement, and making sure everyone understood the Standing Committee’s role and responsibility in all of these matters.

The Standing Committee agreed to work on a draft letter to send along with Bishop Miller’s letter before the next meeting. The Standing Committee agreed to meet at 6:30 p.m. with Bishop Miller joining the meeting at 7:00 p.m.

Sheryl Slocum concluded the meeting with prayer at 8:42 p.m.