



## *The Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Western North Carolina*

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

As your bishop, I'm asking for your help in sustaining the future of our diocese. As we look to where we want to be in the coming years, I ask that you consider walking with me as a Partner in Mission.

I've spent the last two years traveling across our diocese. I have visited your communities, I have listened to you, I have worshiped with you, and I have prayed with you for a better tomorrow. We all have different ministries that are close to our hearts, and everything you do in Christ's name is important to our communities. But I have heard from you, and you have helped me discern, that there are some specific ministries that need our attention and focus.

I invite you to participate with me in three mission areas for the coming year.

First, we need to continue to **Empower Youth & Young Adults**. Our young people are a significant part of our vision in the diocese to "walk in the way, widen the walls, and wake up the world." Our youth, young adult and college campus programs are structured to supplement the youth and young adult ministry programs of local parishes.

Our young people are thriving where they find vibrant faith communities of their peers, but we know that too often something happens that disconnects them from the Church. We need to offer leadership opportunities for our youth and young adults at every level of church and diocesan life so they can contribute their voices to our mission and ministries and be empowered to make a difference in their communities.

We need to be a steadfast presence in their lives and we need to invite them to partake fully in our shared faith. Diocesan youth events, ministries at local colleges and universities and, young adult discernment and mission activities, these are all ways that we are already connecting with our youth and young adults. I am excited to see what they can do as we continue to put our faith and resources behind them.

My second area of focus is something that has personal meaning for me. As a bilingual speaker, I know that too often language is a barrier to people coming together in common worship.

Since the days of Bishop Johnson, continuing through Bishop Taylor's time at the diocese, we have made our **Spanish-speaking ministries** a focus in the diocese. Today, we have a vibrant Spanish-speaking ministry with mission sites across the diocese, numerous parishes serving their Spanish-speaking neighbors, and two full-time Latino missionaries. But we still have a long way to go to make our Spanish-speaking brothers and sisters truly a part of our community.

Christ knew too well the burden of being a stranger in a new land, one who is often not welcomed and even feared. Our Spanish-speaking brothers and sisters still experience undue hardships and intolerance that are the opposite of Christ's love, and we need to show them that our hearts—and our resources—are with them. My vision is that our diocese can become a standard for welcoming Spanish-speakers to the table – not just to worship in separate languages at separate places, but to become our friends, our partners, our leaders, our inspiration.

In Western North Carolina, we are blessed by an increasing multi-cultural society and God is inviting us to participate in building beloved community among "every language, people and nation." Every effort, including enhancing and expanding our Spanish-speaking ministries, re-envisioning an ecumenical partnership in Cherokee, honoring our historically black churches, and engaging in dismantling racism, are examples of Jesus' mission to widen the walls so every child of God can



## *The Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Western North Carolina*

participate at the Lord's table. It is only by listening to all people in our communities that we can speak as one voice to glorify our Lord.

Finally, the third mission priority is the way we form and support the men and women this diocese raises up for ordination as deacons and priests.

We do this first by offering additional formational opportunities for those individuals who are called to serve as priests in non-traditional settings, including bi-vocational priests in small congregations. The IONA School for Ministry is an Episcopal program that can be implemented and led at the local level. Through rigorous academic reflection and study, practicums and independent learning, postulants attend monthly gatherings with local diocesan faculty and mentors. IONA will also allow us to bring together those studying for the Diaconate and those studying for the Priesthood and form a more collaborative learning community. In addition, the IONA school for ministry will allow us to develop curriculum to train the lay leaders of our diocese.

Likewise, through our **Curacy** program, I want us to be intentional about how we encourage, place and support our newly ordained priests so that they can better enhance the life of the diocese, and so that they are better positioned to be successful and motivated to lead us into the future. By putting resources into this program, we can retain good clergy and provide the necessary post-graduation training and vocational development.

I hope hearing about these three areas of focus invigorates you as much as it does for me to talk about them. I'm truly excited about the future of the Episcopal Church in Western North Carolina and the many ways we are working together to build vital communities of faith and make a difference in our world.

I'm pleased to ask you to join me as a Partner in Mission. By focusing new resources on these mission areas, I am confident that we will have a growing, vibrant community of faith for many years to come. Please consider your contribution to become a Partner in Mission with me.

Finally, we are offering a Bishop José bobblehead with every gift of \$100 or more. My staff and I have had a lot of fun coming up with this playful memento of our partnership. I hope it can be a heartwarming reminder of how God delights in who we are and our faithful partnership in the mission of Jesus Christ.

I give thanks for you in my life and in the life of the Diocese of Western North Carolina.

Blessings,

Bishop José

[DONATE NOW](#) • [Watch the Video](#) • [Download this letter](#)