



The Episcopal Diocese of Western North Carolina

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2021 Pledge Letter

Dear Friends in Christ,

I therefore, a prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.

Ephesians 4:1-3

Over the past year, I have found myself frequently reflecting on the Pauline invitation to the multi-cultural church, comprised of both Jewish and Gentile converts, in and around Ephesus. I recognize the similarities between that ancient community of faith and our present reality of being Church filled with all sorts and conditions of people. Truly, in all times - especially during hardship and challenge- we are called to honor the dignity of every human being and celebrate what makes each of us unique, transcend our divisions, and embrace the Gospel imperative of love and unity in Christ.

Truth be told, I had honestly hoped we would be further down the road of living into a new normal. As we now see and experience, the pandemic continues to impact our lives both in the church and out in the world. From faith formation classes to worship to fellowship, nothing is quite the same as what we enjoyed before 2020 and the daily patterns of our lives are changed. For me, I now consider the past nineteen months as a tremendous learning opportunity to nurture my capacity for resiliency and practice adaptation. I even have a new habit of marking any personal or work-related plans with pencil as things can and usually do need to be adjusted.

Today, all of us continue to be plagued by fierce social division and distrust while at the same time encountering grief and loss. In our diocese, these challenges have been particularly hard on our clergy and lay leaders as they go about the mission of Jesus Christ. I am grateful for the leadership of all our priests, deacons and lay leaders who have worked hard to model the steadfast love of God and the flexibility and creativity of the Holy Spirit.

And yet, even in the midst of grief, tragedy and setbacks, I also very clearly see the Holy Spirit working wonders in our diocese. In some of our parishes, there has been an increase in participation and attendance at both virtual and in-person worship and formation gatherings. Many churches are witnessing a generous increase in financial support and overall stewardship. All of our faith communities are demonstrating the love of Christ and as they reach out and serve those in need in new ways.

Last year, together with Executive Council and Fiscal Ministries, I remained diligent with the funds you entrusted us to steward. I can report that while we had planned on reduced income,

we actually experienced a generous increase in giving to the mission of the Diocese. With these funds we were able to:

- Provide substantial financial support for our conference centers and camps as they faced lost revenue due to the pandemic and equip them to remain vital resources of mission and ministry.
- Retire all of our debt to Lake Logan Conference Center
- Continue to build up our reserve savings for any future financial impacts and to ensure our diocesan ministries continue

Likewise, three of our missional areas which we have been focused on for the past four years are now bearing much fruit. First, we welcomed our second cohort of young adult interns to the Blue Ridge Service Corps earlier in August and we have established new workplace partnerships with Habitat for Humanity and Center for Spiritual Wisdom. Second, WNC Iona School for Ministry is successfully in its second year, having made significant adjustments to meet the needs of faculty and students alike during the pandemic as they look forward to welcoming a new class in 2022!

Third, one of the enduring priorities in this diocese remains a deep commitment to the work of becoming and building Beloved Community that seeks racial justice, equity, inclusion and belonging for all people of color in all areas of our common diocesan life. The Commission to Dismantle Racism and Build Beloved Community (CDR/BBC) have been hard at work since last year.

The CDR/BBC members have received additional training from the Absalom Jones Center for Racial Healing in Atlanta and are now offering dismantling racism training. Likewise, the commission worked with our Missioner for Communication and created the Barrier Breakers video series that highlights the voices of people of color across the diocese. Finally, commission members collaborated with diocesan staff to develop anti-bias training for Vestries and Discernment Committees in the Transition Process for new priests.

Similarly, we have expanded our mission to our Latino neighbors by enhancing lay leadership development for all of our Spanish speaking communities in Hendersonville, Newland, Spruce Pine and Morganton. Today, the multi-cultural center based at Church of the Epiphany in Newton is going to offer inaugural classes in English as a Second Language.

Finally, we are renewing our relationships with our brothers and sisters of the Eastern Band of the Cherokee on the Qualla Boundary. We have invited several guest speakers to our annual Diocesan Convention who will lead us in our common learning and honoring of the indigenous land we are blessed to live on, the Indigenous peoples who have called WNC home for millennia and to acknowledge and repent from the sin of the Doctrine of Discovery. Likewise, a new collaborative partnership is also underway between Lake Logan Conference Center, Camp Henry, Grace in the Mountains Episcopal Church and leaders from the Qualla Boundary that focuses on creation care.

Truly, even in midst of these challenges, we have in fact been *leading lives worthy of the calling to which we have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.*

Looking forward, as we enter into our centennial year, marking one hundred years as a diocese, let us live into our high calling and celebrate the character and spirit of the Diocese of Western North Carolina, especially our service to neighbors in need and our care of creation. I anticipate 2022 providing opportunities in other areas of our common life, namely leadership development, stewardship, evangelism, and creation care.

Clearly the path before us is set on a sure foundation of faith and hope. Trusting in the abiding presence of our Lord, Jesus Christ and the wisdom of the Holy Spirit, the Diocese of Western North Carolina is equipped and empowered to answer the calling of which we have been called.

I invite you to thoughtfully and prayerfully consider your church's giving to the Diocese in 2022. [You can follow this link to submit your 2022 Parish Pledge.](#)

Thank you and your congregation for all you do to serve in the name of Christ. I celebrate our shared ministry and look forward to what we will do together in the year ahead to build up the Kingdom of God.

Faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'José A. McLoughlin', with a stylized flourish at the end.

The Rt. Rev. José A. McLoughlin
Bishop