



## *The Episcopal Diocese of Western North Carolina*

September 21, 2020

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

*Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say that the Son of Man is?' And they said, 'Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.' He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.' – Matthew 16:13-16*

I have come to understand, after years of studying and reflecting on sacred scripture, that Peter's response is not simply a public profession of faith or a theological statement. The disciple's confession is also an assertion of his growing awareness of his own identity – of who he is called to be and what he is called to do.

Truly, in this present moment, as we confront the tragedies and challenges before us, it is vital that we engage Jesus' invitation, "who do you say that I am?" with all that we say and do. It is in such times as these that the Christian community is called to participate in the transforming movement of the Holy Spirit and renew our baptismal commitment to the Gospel imperatives of love, justice, mercy and joy. During this unique moment in human history, we are called simultaneously to go deep in our relationships with God, each other and ourselves as well as to go out in mission and service.

Now more than ever, I remain diligent with the funds you have entrusted me and diocesan leadership to steward. I am committed to ensuring that our resources are directed toward missional areas identified by diocesan leadership as priorities for 2021.

I am thrilled to share that two of our missional areas which we have been preparing for the past three years are now underway. We welcomed our first class of students to the WNC Iona School for Ministry, an educational program for bi-vocational priests and deacons. We also welcomed our inaugural cohort of young adult interns in the Blue Ridge Episcopal Service Corps just over three weeks ago.

Likewise, one of the enduring priorities in this diocese is a commitment to the work of becoming and building Beloved Community that embraces "a set of interrelated commitments around which Episcopalians may organize our many efforts to respond to racial injustice and grow a community of reconcilers, justice-makers, and healers."<sup>[1]</sup> While the pandemic has moderated the pace of our work, I want to assure you that our resolve remains steadfast. Building on the legacy of several living saints who initiated this work in the diocese, we have reconstituted our Commission to Dismantle Racism and incorporated new leaders from all across Western North Carolina in the mission. In collaboration with diocesan leadership and staff, the CDR will examine the intersection of our Baptismal Covenant and the holy work of racial justice, healing and equity. Together, they will not only oversee training

programs and workshops, they will also explore initiatives that deepen our spiritual lives for the purpose of dismantling systemic racism.

Similarly, we will expand our mission to our Latino neighbors by enhancing the ministry at La Capilla de Santa Maria in Hendersonville and inaugurating a multi-cultural center out of Church of the Epiphany in Newton to serve the eastern side of the diocese. Finally, we will remain connected to the Office of Indigenous Ministries in The Episcopal Church so that we may continue to faithfully consider ways to build relationships with our brothers and sisters of the Eastern Band of the Cherokee on the Qualla Boundary.

While, the coronavirus pandemic also tempered our efforts in 2020 to initiate programing in four other emerging areas of our common life, namely lay leadership development, stewardship, evangelism and creation care, we are dedicated to providing these opportunities in 2021. With the establishment of our Vestry Academy in 2018, along with our annual Vestry Leadership Day, we will explore additional ways to provide lay leadership development in multiple areas of congregational life. One small team of diocesan leaders will re-imagine ways to host pre-planned stewardship workshops in the next year. A second small team of clergy and lay leaders will resume conversations to discern and identify ways that the diocese can be a leader in creation care.

As you can see, each of these areas, as well as many others, not only contribute to the vitality of the whole diocese but, more importantly, guide us to faithfully answering Jesus' invitation, "who do you say that I am?" I believe that the journey of faith with Jesus is an adventure into God's bold, wildly imaginative, joyful, and merciful mission of redemption and reconciliation. In the year ahead, we will continue to participate in courageous ministry that is both a reflection of God's mission, Jesus' identity and Christ's love for neighbor and stranger alike. I invite you to thoughtfully and prayerfully consider your church's giving to the Diocese in 2021. [You can follow this link to submit your 2021 Parish Pledge.](#)

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

Faithfully,



The Rt. Rev. José A. McLoughlin  
Bishop

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<sup>[i]</sup> *Becoming Beloved Community, The Episcopal Church,*  
[https://www.episcopalchurch.org/files/becoming\\_beloved\\_community\\_summary\\_0.pdf](https://www.episcopalchurch.org/files/becoming_beloved_community_summary_0.pdf)