



The Episcopal Diocese of Western North Carolina

September 26, 2022

Dear Friends in Christ,

Over the past year, as we have ebbed and flowed through the pandemic it has been clear to me that the people of this Diocese are as strong and resilient as ever in their faith. When thinking about the resiliency of the communities in our Diocese these past experiences of the past few years, I keep coming back to a particular passage from the Gospel of Luke:

That one is like a man building a house, who dug deeply and laid the foundation on rock; when a flood arose, the river burst against that house but could not shake it, because it had been well built. - Luke 6:48

One hundred years ago, our Diocese was built on a solid foundation that not only enabled us to thrive and survive for a century but has allowed us to weather any challenge with hope and grace.

While our ministries have evolved and adapted over the years to meet the needs of each parish and their community, the mission of our Diocese, to put our faith into action, has not changed. Our commitment to following in the Way of Jesus compels us to continue placing resources toward Building Beloved Community work, expanding Latino/Hispanic Ministries, developing additional ministry support for LGBTQ+, and Youth and Young Adult Ministries.

In January of 2022, we began to roll out in earnest our new Beloved Community Dismantling Racism Workshop, offering it first to members of Executive Council and Standing Committee. Later in March, we hosted a first conversation with four Indigenous leaders who shared their wisdom, insights and reflections so that we may continue to discern cultivating and nurturing relationships with our Cherokee and Catawba brothers and sisters.

Over the spring and summer, we hosted several gatherings specifically for families and our young people. In the spring, my staff led a young adult Racial Reconciliation Pilgrimage. In collaboration between the Diocesan Missioner for Youth and the Executive Director of Camp Henry, we welcomed a large group of families, including children, youth and young adults, for our very first LGBTQ+ Day at Lake Logan. Then, over the Labor Day weekend, our Latino missioners hosted our first retreat for Latino families.

Finally, last week we shared with the diocese a new initiative called Barrier Breakers, The Pilgrimage, which celebrates and amplifies the stories of historically black parishes in the Episcopal Diocese of Western North Carolina. The pilgrimage is part of the larger ongoing work of Becoming Beloved Community in the Episcopal Diocese of Western North Carolina.

Six years ago, in my first letter to you, I promised that *“my abiding mission as your bishop is to equip your parish and your people with all the necessary resources it needs to continue being bold examples of Christ’s love in action.”* This is as important to me today as it was six years ago, because I have seen what our parishes can accomplish when we focus on putting Christ’s love into action.

One of the many ways we equip and empower our congregations is by offering several different funding resources, including our Small Church Grants, Congregational Vitality Grants, and Justice and Outreach Grants. In 2022 we awarded eleven grants to small churches. These funds equipped several churches to call and retain extremely qualified clergy and to offer outreach ministries in their local contexts. We also awarded eight Congregational Vitality (CV) grants that focused specifically on improving technology.

As we emerge from the Covid-19 pandemic, most churches are continuing to provide hybrid worship offerings of both in-person and virtual. A couple of the Congregational Vitality grants allowed churches to purchase loop systems to assist hearing impaired parishioners. One CV grant helped a church build a brand-new playground that would benefit not just the families that attend, but more importantly the wider community in their town. Finally, we awarded several Justice and Outreach Grants that expanded and enriched feeding ministries in two deaneries.

Equally, four additional emerging areas of our common life require our discernment in 2023: lay leadership development, stewardship, evangelism and creation care. With the support of several lay and clergy leaders in the diocese, I hope to explore various ways to provide lay leadership development in multiple areas of congregational life.

As you can see, each of these areas, as well as many others, all contribute to the vitality of the whole diocese. 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 and Christ's love for neighbor and stranger alike. As we reflect on the past 100 years and look ahead to next 100 years, I invite you to prayerfully consider your giving to the Diocese. [You can find the pledge form by clicking on this link.](#)

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 build up the Kingdom of God.

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