

A Letter from the Chair of the Search Committee

After twenty years as our spiritual leader, Bishop W. Michie “Mike” Klusmeyer has announced that he is nearing retirement and has called for the election of a bishop coadjutor for the Diocese of West Virginia. The Standing Committee established the Bishop Coadjutor Search and Nominating Committee just as the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic became obvious. It took a few months for the committee, advised by the Rev. Gary Butterworth, a veteran of other successful bishop searches, to develop a means of searching without actually meeting face-to-face. It has been an exciting and interesting endeavor for all involved and we eagerly anticipate the open nomination period that will introduce us to those God is calling to apply.

We, who make up the Diocese of West Virginia, live in interesting times even without the presence of the pandemic. We are faced with many challenges and we have enjoyed many successes, always feeling the help and presence of the Holy Spirit guiding and encouraging us as we move forward. We know that we have been blessed with a bishop who continually strives to fill our hearts and souls with joy and inspiration. We grieve with the realization that his presence among us is limited, but we are excited about what the future will bring us. We look forward to new ideas, new callings and ministries, and new challenges.

Indeed, we are faced now with many challenges. The membership continues to decline and we find there are many small parishes with dwindling resources. Our membership reflects the population of our state which also continues to age and to decline. We realize that it is becoming increasingly difficult to attract new priests. We continue to see enormous problems resulting in pain, suffering and death within our communities brought on by unemployment, hunger, limited health care, and the opioid crisis among other reasons.

But we see hope and are encouraged by the presence of the wonderfully dedicated, talented and resourceful folks who make up our parishes and inspire our diocese. Our parishes are dedicated to outreach and social justice issues and we are blessed with Episcopalians willing to stand up and be counted. Throughout the diocese, food insecurity is addressed daily with hot meals, food pantries and school backpack feeding programs. Reading programs have been available to encourage education and to develop a love of what books can give us. There are programs addressing the needs of the impoverished and many parishes are involved with Habitat for Humanity. When disaster strikes in whatever form be it floods or drug related, West Virginia Episcopalians have been among the first to respond and the last to remain. We take seriously God’s command for us to love our neighbor.

We believe we are special, not because we are particularly different or more talented or more dedicated, but because we feel God’s presence within us and working on us; because we are a community of believers and doers; because we feel blessed and strive to share that blessing; because we recognize the worthiness of all and the presence of Christ within each and every person we meet no matter who they are, whom they love, what they believe or what they look like. We seek a bishop who shares these values and beliefs and will dedicate himself or herself to the building of God’s Kingdom here in West Virginia.

Faithfully in Christ,

The Rev. Deacon Al Prichard, Chair