Dear member of the Episcopal Diocese of North Dakota:

Your Diocesan Discernment Task Force (Task Force) was established by the Standing Committee in August 2019. They charged us “with coming up with a model of being the diocese – as a whole – that works, is sustainable with who we are becoming, rather than what we have been. You are being asked to answer the question, “What is God doing in North Dakota?” This isn’t simply a matter of electing a new bishop – but likely a plan that will be in place for a full generation of time and beyond.”

Since then we have met with and collected information/data from:
- the Diocesan Council and Standing Committee (August);
- the Diocesan Convention (November);
- meetings with the clergy of the diocese (January);
- the 21 congregational visits made between January and March of 2020; and
- the visitation notes from Bishop Whitmore.

We also commissioned and received an excellent research report about what other Episcopal dioceses in transition have done or are exploring from Mr. Joe Hubbard, a seminarian from North Dakota at the Virginia Theological Seminary.

The Task Force met multiple times, visited congregations, received all the information, and reviewed it during two Zoom meetings in March. We discussed each block of information, shared our own insights about the data and visits. We discovered that most of the data fell into 5 clusters of common themes (summarized below). Other important themes were also heard.

Please read through our findings and, we request, provide us with feedback or additional information through our **Follow-Up Survey**.

We are offering members of the diocese three ways to do this:

1. **ONLINE:** We prefer you to take the survey online at [https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/NDTaskForce](https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/NDTaskForce)
   The online survey link will be available until May 9, 2020.

2. **PAPER:** Paper surveys are also available at each congregation or for printing at [http://ndepiscopal.org/](http://ndepiscopal.org/) and should be mailed by May 9, 2020 to DDTF, EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF NORTH DAKOTA, 3600 25TH ST S, FARGO, ND 58104-6861

3. **PHONE:** In addition, you may phone our consultant, the Rev. Thad Bennett, who works with the
Presiding Bishop’s Office, to take the survey. Make a phone appointment by May 6th. He will confidentially take your answers and get them into the survey. He can be reached at 413-369-0119. All surveys are anonymous unless you choose to identify yourself. All surveys should be received by Saturday, May 9th, just before Mother’s Day!

After survey information is collected, the Task Force will use all the information to discern the best way forward (June). We will draft our initial report and recommendations for a meeting with the Standing Committee (July). Then, we will finalize the report for review by the Diocesan Council and Standing Committee (August). They will then prepare their report and resolutions for presentation at the Diocesan Convention. The Convention will decide the best way forward.

COMMON THEMES

A. Lack of Clear and Consistent Communication
   Almost universally, the congregations in our diocese expressed concern for the lack of clear and consistent communication within the diocese. This includes communication between the diocese and the parishes and communication among the congregations themselves. This situation has been exacerbated by the failure of the newsletter to reach all congregants and the outdated website. There is a perception of administrative chaos in the diocese.

B. Need for Leadership
   Another nearly unanimous concern was leadership. There has been a void in leadership at the diocesan level which has resulted in a feeling of abandonment by many and a lack of support for lay leadership. Congregational support, training, and connection are desired but found lacking. Clergy leadership is needed in many of the congregations who desire to have Eucharist at least once a month. Many have expressed dismay at not feeling like true Episcopalians without Eucharist. There is an urgent need to develop leaders within the congregations, but this can only be achieved by the diocese having a clear and consistent vision and plan.

C. Alternative Hierarchy
   The current hierarchical model of leadership is no longer working in North Dakota, as well as elsewhere in the Episcopal Church. There is desire for more direct contact with the leadership of the diocese and a stronger voice in the vision for the diocese. It is desired that our ministries and programs be originated at a grass roots and local level to be carried out by our leaders functioning as servants of the people. There is a need to find a leader or leaders who are more concerned with the people in the diocese than with being in leadership positions.

D. Intensity of Our Divisions
   The long-standing divisions in the Diocese of North Dakota have the ability to weaken us as a diocese and a faith community. There are many facets to the divisions including large versus small congregations, east and west, cultural differences of native, Sudanese and predominantly white parishes. The diversity of our diocese was identified as a strength. It also plays a role in negative consequences such as divisiveness and racism. There is a real need for reconciliation among the various groups in the diocese.

E. Relationships and Community
   Most of the congregations felt a strong desire for community within themselves and the diocese. Feelings of abandonment and isolation were common especially in the smaller parishes. Isolation
was attributed to the realities of geography but also to a lack of relationship with the diocese and its leaders. There was a lack of vitality and a sense of exhaustion in many of the churches. The deficiency of youth ministry was a strong concern across the diocese. There was disappointment in the lack of diocesan events or activities for youth and for training in youth ministry.

**OTHER THEMES**

**Youth ministry:** There was enthusiasm heard from some about what they do with youth and others who were unsure what to do. It was felt to be important for the church. How do we do youth ministry better?

**Pastoral care and connection:** Congregations were grateful for visits from Bishop Whitmore and his wife. How can clergy and lay leaders continue to feel connected and cared for?

**Lethargy:** Is caring about diocesan leadership worth it? There is a reluctance to get involved, for it has seemed that there is no movement forward, or that church politics saps our strength. How can the people of the diocese be encouraged to step-up for the next few years to get us moving?

**Transparency:** Are there activities in the church that do not seem transparent and up-front? We need a sense of all being together, working together in a cohesive way that builds trust and community. Thus, transparency is vital to all our work.

We invite you to complete the **Follow-Up Survey** and return by May 9, 2020.

1. Online it is at [https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/NDTaskForce](https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/NDTaskForce)
   Paper copies are at every congregation or at [http://ndepiscopal.org/](http://ndepiscopal.org/). Complete and mail to DDTF
   EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF NORTH DAKOTA
   3600 25TH ST S
   FARGO, ND 58104-6861

Thank you for your attention to this information.
If you have questions, please contact one of the members of the Task Force below.

The Diocesan Discernment Task Force:

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