



## Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts

Office of the Bishop *The Rt. Rev. Alan M. Gates, Bishop*

### **A Pastoral Letter from the Bishops to the People of the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts**

*To be published in every congregation of the diocese not later than  
the Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany, February 17, 2019*

January 17, 2019

Dear People of the Diocese of Massachusetts,

Since October 2017, when #MeToo began to spread virally in conversations on social media about sexual abuse and harassment, primarily in the workplace, shocking stories of misconduct have come to light involving business leaders, celebrities, politicians and many others. Sadly, the church has not been immune from instances of sexual abuse and harassment. As a result of this heightened awareness and flood of painful stories, Presiding Bishop Michael Curry and President of the House of Deputies Gay Clark Jennings issued a [call in January 2018](#) to The Episcopal Church to “examine its history and come to a fuller understanding of how it has handled or mishandled cases of sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse through the years.” They invited voices from across the church to help determine how to proceed in both “atoning for the church’s past and shaping a more just future.”

Thankfully, many of those voices have been heard over the past year. Stories were collected and anonymously related in a [“Liturgy of Listening”](#) at the 79th General Convention last July in Austin, Texas. They also inspired a number of resolutions which came before General Convention, among them resolution [D034](#) which called for a three-year suspension of the statute of limitations on clergy disciplinary cases involving sexual misconduct against adults. There is no time limit on reporting clergy sexual misconduct against children and youth under age 21. The adoption of this resolution, which lifts the statute of limitations from January 1, 2019, through December 31, 2021, provides an opportunity for those injured or affected by sexual misconduct by Episcopal clergy to relate their stories, as well as a vehicle for the church to respond with disciplinary processes for the clergy responsible for these acts and with concrete actions toward the healing of individuals, congregations and, in some cases, entire dioceses affected by abusive actions.

In our own diocese, we recognize that clergy are not the only ones who have committed acts of abuse or harassment in the church. Some who are lay staff, volunteers or other parishioners have acted inappropriately. For several months, a new #MeToo Task Force of our diocese has been in conversation and has been considering how to respond in situations where a lay person has engaged in sexual misconduct within the church. While there is no canonical disciplinary process for lay persons as there is for clergy, our desire is that our churches be safe places for everyone, environments where all can thrive in faith in God and service to their neighbors. The #MeToo Task Force is considering

ways to encourage the sharing of stories, protocols for response, and events to atone for these harmful actions and to engender in our congregations a deeper awareness of our baptismal call to “respect the dignity of every human being.”

As your bishops, we invite you to take several actions as you may be moved to do so:

First, we hope every member of our diocese will remember all who are victims of sexual abuse, harassment, exploitation, or human trafficking in your prayers both publicly and privately. For too long, these stories have existed in the shadows. As painful as it may be, it is time to bring them to light, to examine the failings of the church, to pursue appropriate discipline and repentance for those who have committed acts of misconduct, and to seek healing for victims and others affected by these actions.

Second, we invite those who have been affected by acts of sexual abuse, harassment or misconduct by clergy, whether in this diocese or elsewhere, to relate their stories to one of our [diocesan intake officers for clergy disciplinary matters](#), Starr Anderson ([starrkanderson@gmail.com](mailto:starrkanderson@gmail.com)) and The Rev. Thea Keith-Lucas ([revthea@gmail.com](mailto:revthea@gmail.com)). Those coming forward with a complaint can be assured that their identity will be held in confidence until and unless they agree that it may be revealed to others. The Episcopal Church’s clergy disciplinary process can be found in detail at [www.titleiv.org](http://www.titleiv.org).

Finally, stay alert for reports from the #MeToo Task Force as it prepares a protocol for receiving stories of misconduct by lay persons and develops resources to assist our congregations in further developing a climate that nurtures and respects the dignity of each person.

Faithfully,



Alan M. Gates  
Bishop Diocesan



Gayle Elizabeth Harris  
Bishop Suffragan