



Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts

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Aug. 6, 2020

Dear People of the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts,

We've been living through a wilderness time. The last five months have been filled with uncertainty, injustice, and fear. Yet we know that we are people of the resurrection—we are an Easter people—and we've seen members of our diocese holding out faith, joy, and hope to the many communities in which we live.

As we travel further into this season, we, as Diocesan Council, want to update you on a few things. First, we recognize that many of our congregations have been impacted financially these past months. Gifts that you budgeted to receive this year have fallen short, while new ministry costs—especially in moving to a virtual worship setting—have increased. We've also realized that the full financial impact of a global pandemic would take many months to be seen, and not something that could be easily predicted after a month or two.

Near the end of the third quarter we will be sending a Pandemic Impact Survey to all of our congregations to help us assess the best course forward in addressing financial concerns in our diocese. In the survey, we will ask for a financial report for the first three quarters of 2020 compared to the comparable quarters in 2019. In addition, you'll be asked about the value of your investments at year-end for the past three years. Additionally, we'll request if your congregation applied for a Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loan, and if you've met the requirements to make it a grant. You'll be invited to share about other sources of income—be it a nursery school, thrift shop, or renters—and any impact on them. Finally, we'll encourage you to submit this information to us promptly in October to help us ascertain the best course forward. Please be looking for that survey in September.

Some of your congregations have taken advantage of delaying regular payments of assessments as was offered back in March. At this point, we have yet to determine if there will be any abatement of 2020 assessments, so please continue to send your payments prior to the end of the year. Additionally, please continue to apply for grants both through the [COVID-19 Emergency Response Fund](#) (until Aug. 15), as well as with the [Wicked Good Idea Microgrant fund](#) of our mission strategy to help support your ministries during this time. Information can be found online.

We also want to inform you that our diocese did receive a PPP loan for those working on our diocesan staff. We will be applying to make that loan a true grant once the requirements become finalized. As our diocesan financial picture becomes clearer this fall, Diocesan Council will determine the best use of any additional funds from that program.

While recognizing that financial concerns can become a point of anxiety in our common life, we also want to let you know of the continued work on our shared [mission strategy](#). Clearly we've had "brave change" thrust on us, even if we've not been as willing to "embrace" it fully. And yet the work of our mission and commitments we made nearly four years ago have become more pronounced. A newly formed Racial Justice Commission has been working with our bishops and leaders from across our diocese to address the ongoing oppression of racism in our country and in our church. We committed to seek deeper conversations on racism as well as engaging the essential work of racial justice and reconciliation in our mission strategy, the urgency of which has become even more painfully evident these past months.

The ongoing impact of neglecting to fully care for our environment has also been seen through this pandemic. Together with our Creation Care Justice Network, we're exploring ways to more faithfully incorporate this important work into the full life of our diocese. We hope to share more of this at our Diocesan Convention.

We know there is much more going on in your congregations too. While we journey in the wilderness, God continues to meet us there in new ways. The Lord proclaims through the prophet Isaiah, "See, I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?" We'd love to hear the stories of how God is doing new things in your congregation. You can send them in word or video form to our Mission Strategy Team via e-mail to missionstrategy@diomass.org.

Please know that we are grateful to serve alongside you in the work God has called us to do as the people of the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts. Pray with us that we would all know God's grace and mercy during this unsettled time. And know that you can always reach out to your Council deanery representatives to be in contact with us.

Faithfully,

Members of The Executive Committee of Diocesan Council:

Rob Kelleher, Phil LaBelle, Betsy Ridge Madsen, Debbie Phillips, and David Sullivan

Ex Officio Members:

Sr. Kristina Frances, SSM, Secretary, Tom Moore, Treasurer, and Rachel Wildman, Assistant Secretary