

## **OUR MISSION STRATEGY**

*As Proposed to the 236th Annual Diocesan Convention (November 2021)*

### **The People We Long To Be**

In tumultuous times, the center can be hard to find. We continue to be shaken by a global pandemic, a climate emergency, and a new reckoning with racial and economic inequalities. These challenges add to the experiences many of us already have of disruption and decline in our church communities. As people of hope, we come together to find a way forward. Renewing our diocesan Mission Strategy at this crucial moment is one small part of a larger movement of individual Christians and congregations to reclaim our identities and our purpose.

From our own hearts to our shared altars and outward into our diocesan community, we are called to place God's love at the center of our lives. Because Jesus first loves us, we are able to love ourselves, our neighbors, and all of creation. Through this transforming grace, we are becoming the people God created us to be:

#### **Disciples of Jesus.**

We gather to break bread in Jesus' name, praying to become the Body of Christ in the world. We come together across all ages—children, youth, adults, and elders—to teach one another about Jesus' redemptive way. We invite our neighbors to know Jesus, proclaiming the Good News by what we say and how we live.

#### **Seekers of justice.**

We recognize the dignity and inherent worth of every person, and we work to build communities where all people find fairness, compassion, and the freedom to live fully. We persevere in resisting evil, not just our own sins but the deep, structural sins of racism and oppression perpetuated in our name. We turn to the Lord for the grace to create honest dialogue, lasting transformation, and true reconciliation.

#### **Protectors of creation.**

We cherish the wondrous works of God and strive to protect the beauty and integrity of all living beings. We recognize that our greed and thoughtless consumption has placed us at odds with the needs of our created world. We respond to the crisis of our climate, using resources rightly and advocating for the restoration of a healthy planet.

When we follow Jesus intentionally, creating justice in our communities and living wisely on our earth, then we find joy and meaning in our lives. Our churches grow strong, with deep and

mutual relationships among our members and our neighbors near and far. Our shared mission comes alive, as a bold witness to God's love for this broken and beautiful world.

## **Our Mission**

Our yearnings to be disciples of Jesus, seekers of justice, and protectors of creation provide the foundation for us to do our shared work together. We will only reach these goals by becoming more completely the people Jesus calls us to be through the power of the Spirit.

First, last, and always, we pray. We ask for God's abiding presence with us and we allow the love of Jesus to transform us. From this place of unconditional grace, mercy, and love, we can trust in God's abundance, knowing we will have everything we need. We receive the courage to be agents of reconciliation and justice.

Devotion to the way of love demands vigilance, as the evil powers working to destroy the creatures of God remain unyielding in their attempts to distract us from our relationship to the Almighty. We must address the history and persistent reality of injustice in our church with honesty and humility. We must pray, learn, act, and advocate for the world we want to create.

We must be bold. We must be hopeful. We are committed to the tasks being given us by the Spirit. We trust that God is with us in the joys and challenges of this moment. We dedicate ourselves once again as the Body of Christ in this place and time to work for the glorious reign of Jesus.

## **Our Goals and Actions**

### **1) Invite robust Christian formation at all points of life.**

Discipleship is the work of a lifetime. As we learn about our faith, we grow in our connection to God. Our communities nurture new believers and help all of us turn again and again towards God.

*Commitments for individuals and congregations:*

1a. Grow as disciples of Jesus through prayer, study, and spiritual practice.

1b. Make formation a priority in our congregations, focusing on the areas that are most relevant for each community.

1c. Invite vestry members to engage in ongoing formation as spiritual leaders of our congregations.

1d. Initiate joint offerings with other congregations and explore creative ways to engage all of our members.

*Commitments for Bishops and Diocesan Council:*

- 1e. Engage in ongoing formation as spiritual leaders of our diocese.
- 1f. Provide ample funding for formation and networking programs.
- 1g. Prioritize the needs of children, youth, and young adults.

**2) Nurture healthy communities where we can care for ourselves and each other.**

In Christ, we discover our own belovedness. We find healing for our souls and freedom from the fears that silence us. We speak honestly and with compassion, learning from the times that we come into conflict. We respond to the unique challenges of this moment with generosity and patience.

*Commitments for individuals and congregations:*

- 2a. Ensure that our congregations follow Safe Church best practices to protect children and vulnerable adults.
- 2b. Foster mutually supportive relationships between clergy and lay leaders.
- 2c. Hold honest conversations about our expectations of one another, the sustainability of our ministries, and appropriate boundaries.
- 2d. Encourage all members and leaders of our congregations to attend to their own and others' mental health.

*Commitments for Bishops and Diocesan Council:*

- 2e. Provide coaching to support the wellbeing and effectiveness of clergy and lay leaders.
- 2f. Make training in mental health support available to all clergy and lay leaders.
- 2g. Clearly articulate roles, points of contact, and designated staff time to respond to mental health concerns in congregations.

**3) Share the Good News.**

We confidently share the story of Jesus and his message of love. We listen well to the stories of others as we invite them into Christian community.

*Commitments for individuals and congregations:*

- 3a. Tell our faith stories authentically and invite new people into our Christian communities, being brave and embracing our discomforts.
- 3b. Create time and space for lay leaders to share their faith journeys at vestry meetings and other opportunities.

3c. Be intentional about listening to the experiences of others, especially across difference.

*Commitments for Bishops and Diocesan Council:*

3d. Promote and fund the use of Invite, Welcome, Connect or similar evangelism training tools.

3e. Encourage Council members and other diocesan leaders to share their faith journeys at meetings and other opportunities.

3f. Invest in technology and staff support to enable the sharing of stories through digital media.

4) **Seek greater unity as members one of another.**

When we come together with other congregations, we discover new ways that God is present with us. When we deepen our relationships with our neighbors near and far, we better understand the strengths and challenges of our local communities and our global mission partners, learning how to work side-by-side for a more just and peaceful world.

*Commitments for individuals and congregations:*

4a. Work together as congregations and deaneries, creating new teams, strengthening existing collaborations, and initiating new partnerships with other Episcopal congregations, ecumenical and multifaith partners, community organizations, and global missions.

4b. Cross boundaries to seek out diverse partners who will broaden our understanding of God's mission in the world.

*Commitments for Bishops and Diocesan Council:*

4c. Broaden the diversity of leadership for all diocesan project teams and governing bodies.

4d. Seek and support opportunities to work ecumenically and with other dioceses both around the corner and around the world.

4e. Continue to schedule time to build relationships at all diocesan events.

4f. Create and maintain online resources, websites, and directories that help members of our diocese to connect effectively.

**5) Commit to our own growth as people who live in right relationship with one another.**

We hold ourselves and one another accountable to our vision of a just community. We are willing to do the hard work of addressing the sins of racism and oppression in our midst. We pray for God's grace to transform our diocese.

*Commitments for individuals and congregations:*

5a. Engage in racial justice work with energy and intention, committing resources and time to learning from the Episcopal Church's Racial Justice Audit, educational programs like Sacred Ground, and trainings like those offered by Episcopal City Mission.

5b. Cultivate mutual relationships with people of other faiths, cultures, classes, and racial backgrounds, while building awareness of the differences in power that shape these connections.

*Commitments for Bishops and Diocesan Council:*

5d. Participate in racial justice training and dialogue as a leadership team.

5e. Promote and fund resources for racial justice work, ensuring that all congregations are aware of the opportunities and can readily access them at a reasonable cost.

5f. Equip diocesan and congregational leaders to retain and call clergy of color, so that our diocese may benefit from a wealth of diverse talents and experiences.

5g. Help to sustain networks for Episcopalians of color to connect with and support one another.

5h. Incorporate the findings and recommendations of our Racial Justice Commission into all levels of diocesan life.

**6) Work together against the climate crisis.**

The forces affecting our planet can feel huge and far beyond our control, and yet each one of us has a role to play in choosing a better future for ourselves, future generations, and all living beings. As communities of faith, we can inspire one another's individual choices, take shared actions, and speak publicly about God's call to protect creation.

*Commitments for individuals and congregations:*

6a. Support one another in working against the sins of overconsumption, pollution, and complacency.

6b. Choose a specific area of climate response for action and study as a congregation, and partner with other congregations through the Creation Care Justice Network.

6c. Participate in an energy audit to assess and improve the sustainability of our church buildings.

6d. Address the direct impact of climate change on low-income communities and people of color by engaging in local initiatives and worldwide advocacy efforts.

*Commitments for Bishops and Diocesan Council:*

6d. Promote and fund resources for climate justice work, ensuring that all congregations are aware of the opportunities and can readily access them at a reasonable cost.

6e. Invest in grant programs to support more sustainable church buildings.

**7) Influence public policy by advocating for justice for all people and for the creation.**

As our own lives and communities are transformed, we hope to shine with the light of Christ, bringing love and justice to every part of our life together in this nation and in the whole human family. We have an important witness to offer to our leaders at every level of government as we stand up for the integrity of creation and the dignity of every human being.

*Commitments for individuals and congregations:*

7a. Participate in civic life through community meetings, messages to government leaders, and educational campaigns.

7b. Continue to draw on the wisdom of the Racial Justice Commission, Episcopal City Mission, the Creation Care Justice Network, and our diocesan Office of Immigration and Multicultural Ministries to speak and act boldly for justice.

*Commitments for Bishops and Diocesan Council:*

7c. Promote participation in faith-based advocacy networks.

7d. Model engagement in civic life, inviting our diocese into conversation about the ethical questions of our time.

**8) Communicate our progress regularly and transparently.**

True transformation of ourselves and our world will take long years of faithful effort. At the same time, the kingdom of God is very near. We will regularly take stock of the signs of the Holy Spirit's work among us, celebrating our progress and owning the ways that we still need to grow. In particular, we ask our leaders on the Diocesan Council to watch over this work and encourage and challenge us towards our goals.

*Commitments for individuals and congregations:*

8a. Share stories and videos of our congregations' efforts in formation, health, evangelism, collaboration, racial justice, climate response, and public advocacy.

8b. Assess our communities' progress on our strategic goals as a regular part of vestry meetings, annual meetings, and deanery gatherings.

*Commitments for Bishops and Diocesan Council:*

8c. Gather information on our diocese's efforts towards the goals stated in the Mission Strategy and develop tools to convey our progress.

8d. Review recent resolutions adopted by Diocesan Convention on formation, health, evangelism, collaboration, racial justice, climate response, and public advocacy, and report on the work remaining to fully implement them.

8e. Empower an implementation team to lead the effort to meet our strategic goals.