

*"And the one who was seated on the throne said, 'See, I am making all things new.'" Revelation 21:5*

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

During our long season after the Epiphany this year, we as a Diocese came together in five listening sessions that took place on different days in different geographical areas. We were blessed by a total of 300+ lay persons and clergy who joined diocesan leaders and me to reflect on who we are in this unique moment of our history. We embraced well the Epiphany themes of mission and light.

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Each session began with worship and song, followed by a **brief address** in which I named priority areas for this interim time between Bishops Diocesan. We then shared a lively question and answer period. Small group table conversations came next, and those present were invited to discuss and write their own answers to these questions:

- Where do you see Jesus at work in this Diocese?
- Where do you see life and energy?
- As we move ahead together, what are your dreams and longings for the Diocese of Virginia?
- What outcomes do you hope for?

We then regrouped for another Q and A in order to follow up on ideas that arose in the small groups. We ended each session with worship and song.

The Diocesan staff is transcribing every response by every person so that not a single word is lost. When the transcription process is complete, we will group responses around common themes to discover what emerges. Even as that work continues, I write to share with you the themes of the question and answer periods that seemed to elicit the most energy. There are four:

### Youth

- How do we bring more young people into our churches?
- How do we work now so that there will be another generation of our beloved congregation when the older generations are gone?
- How do we serve the young people in our communities, whether they come to church or not?

### Healing across divides

- What are we going to do about the racial divide in Virginia that results from the horrific legacy of slavery?
- How do we welcome and include LGBTQ+ persons in every aspect and on every level of diocesan life, without exception?
- How do we talk about and heal the increasing gulf between people because of political affiliation?

### Money

- How do we fund the mission we feel called to do?
- How can congregations become more financially sound so that there's less worry about money and more focus on ministry?
- How do we address decreasing "voluntary giving" to the Diocese that results in under-funded programs and staff, and insufficient resources for mission?

### Connections across the Diocese

- How do we better tell our stories so that people in the pews understand what it means to be a part of a diocese?
- How do we do together what we can't accomplish alone for the sake of the mission of Christ?
- How do we empower and share leadership more fully than ever, even when such sharing becomes a little messy?

In coming months, I will write to you with deeper reflections on each of these four areas, one area per month. I'll include information about and links to work we are doing in each area, along with theological reflection, vision and invitations to go deeper together. I'll also make available the summary of answers to the listening session questions that the staff is preparing.

It's all about Recalling who we are and whose we are. It's all about Reconnecting so that we will serve the world in Christ's name more effectively than ever before. And it's all about one more "r" word as well - Renewing the faith of the Church so that we will be more fully empowered to proclaim the love of Christ in thought, word and deed for the sake of a world so in need of that love.

God bless us all as we do the work God has called us to do, and as we become more and more the loving, faithful, mature human beings that God has called us to be.

Your sister in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Susan". A small cross symbol is positioned above the first letter, "S".

The Rt. Rev. Susan E. Goff  
Bishop Suffragan and Ecclesiastical Authority