

Episcopal Diocese of Washington

Episcopal Church House, Mount Saint Alban, Washington, DC 20016-5094

January 26, 2012

Dear Friends,

The Episcopal Church, in general, and our diocese in particular, need inspired, spiritually mature, adaptive and resilient leadership, both lay and ordained. Leadership is a gift, yet as with all spiritual gifts, it must be identified, developed, and shared for the good of others and in service to Christ's mission in the world.

Members of the Commission on Ministry and Standing Committee have asked me to review with them our diocesan discernment processes for those seeking ordination. Such a review is normal in episcopal transitions. Yet beyond the predictable need for better communication and a more streamlined ordination process, we as a diocese face deeper questions about the future of ordained leadership in the Episcopal Church.

Given the number of relatively healthy congregations and the appeal of our location, the Diocese of Washington has far more people interested in pursuing ordination than can reasonably hope to find employment in the Church. There are currently almost 30 people in the ordination process, a number that well surpasses the diocese's current need for clergy for traditional parish positions. In addition, there is a significant number of unemployed and underemployed priests in the diocese who are seeking to be called to stipendiary ministries.

Even more challenging are questions regarding the *kind* of clergy leadership needed now, how best to encourage those with the skills and attributes the Church needs to consider ordination, and how to reorient our congregations and diocesan resources toward spiritual renewal and structural transformation.

As a diocese, we invest tremendous resources in the discernment and ordination process at every level of our life, from rectors and congregations to discernment committees, two major diocesan committees, and diocesan staff. We spend considerable money to support this process and the people going through it from beginning to end. I share the assessment of key diocesan leaders that our ordination process needs redefinition and restructuring, starting with a clarification of goals regarding outcomes.

To that end, I am extending the current suspension of the diocesan ordination process through at least December 2012 and longer, if necessary. During this time, the Commission on Ministry, the Standing Committee, and I will convene a small task force charged with the role of assessing our diocesan need for clergy leadership and developing a streamlined, clear process of discernment and selection. Current postulants and candidates for ordination will continue in their respective paths toward ordination under the canonical oversight of the Commission on Ministry, the Standing Committee and the Bishop and their progress will not be delayed by the process we are launching. Moreover, the pilot program for the permanent diaconate will continue on its current course, and we will evaluate it separately.

I want to be clear: this task force will be charged to help us, as a diocese, articulate what spiritual attributes and life skills we need in our clergy, and propose numerical limits. We simply have too many clergy in the Episcopal Church now, and far too few clergy with the skills to help us rebuild the church in these challenging times. For those going through it, the discernment process will be shorter but fewer people are likely to be discerned as postulants.

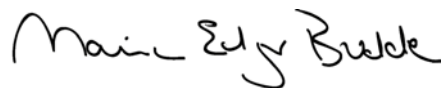
I realize setting limits on ordination is troubling, given that we are discerning the call of the Holy Spirit. Yet the call to serve Christ is common to all Christians. We as a Church have an underdeveloped understanding of our baptismal call, which in a real way contributes to the disproportionate number of people seeking ordination.

I am well aware that there are people throughout the diocese waiting for the opportunity to enter the ordination process, and I regret for them this further delay. If you are among them, let me encourage you to continue your individual discernment, in conversation with your rector and congregation. Those of us with responsibility for guiding and overseeing the ordination process will be better conversation partners for you in discernment following the conclusion of the redesign process.

If you would like to serve on the Ordination Task Force, a one-year commitment that will involve engaging the diocese, learning from other dioceses and denominations, and making clear recommendations to me, the Commission on Ministry and Standing Committee, please contact Preston Hannibal, Canon for Academic and Transition Ministries (phannibal@edow.org). We will appoint the task force in late February.

A Roman Catholic colleague once asked me if the Episcopal Church was also experiencing a clergy shortage. "No," I said. "What we have is a shortage of lay people." The work before us is to rebuild our congregations into the vital centers of Christian community, discipleship formation, and mission that Christ needs us to be. The ordination process, as with all other aspects of our diocesan life, is ultimately in service to that work.

Faithfully,



The Rt. Rev. Mariann Edgar Budde, D.Min.
Bishop of Washington