

MY DEAR BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN CHRIST,

September marks my second anniversary as your bishop. Serving as your ninth bishop continues to be a tremendous honor and privilege. I have been deeply moved and humbled by your faith and sincere desire to serve God by selflessly serving others. The Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Western Michigan is alive and well and doing many wonderful and holy things that show forth the glory of God.

I believe my calling as your bishop is to draw us together by strengthening our relationships with God and one another. Striving to live in mutual, loving and respectful relationships as a faith community is absolutely essential for this is the very image of God as Trinity. Something mysteriously holy and divine happens when people seek to live selflessly for one another. As a way to foster and strengthen our diocesan community, I invited you to attend one of three town-hall-style gatherings early this year. The purpose of these meetings was to prayerfully seek to discern how the Spirit is calling us to serve one another and the world around us.

Thank you for attending these gatherings. Three hundred plus participated in them. We prayed and dreamed and carefully listened to each other. You bravely shared your vision for our diocese that you believe God had given you. These were powerful and often moving moments of honesty and truth. The Holy Spirit's presence was tangibly present among us. Your diocesan council gathered all of your com-

ments; we sat with, prayed over and distilled these at our retreat in May and again at our June meeting. Here is what we have resolved to do based on what we heard the spirit saying through you:

“We resolve to create a three-year plan for the Diocese, the primary goals of which are the following:

1. Reaching our younger generations
2. Caring for creation, our neighbors and our place by supporting programs addressing the needs for food, water, and shelter
3. Seeking to raise up a deacon in each parish as a catalyst for mission
4. Engaging in a process of asset mapping to identify the gifts given us to do God's work.

“In order to achieve these goals, we have identified the necessity to improve internal and external communication: first, to communicate with each other for mutual growth and learning and second, to the world around us explaining who we are as the Episcopal Church, what we stand for and what we are doing in the world.”

Did we hear you?

What did we get right?

What might we have missed?

Is there anything else we should know or consider?

Discerning the Spirit's movement is an ongoing, never-ending process. The above resolution is a starting point. The hard work of fashioning our priorities around these now begins. It is vitally important that our dialogue and discernment continue. I am asking you to please take time to reflect on this resolution and give us your feedback by going to our website dedicated to our diocesan vision:

edwm.org/vision.html

Please respond to the survey. While there, please also watch a video of your diocesan council members reflecting on what they heard the Spirit saying through you.

This is a pivotal moment in our diocesan life together.

Now is the time for fresh starts and new beginnings.

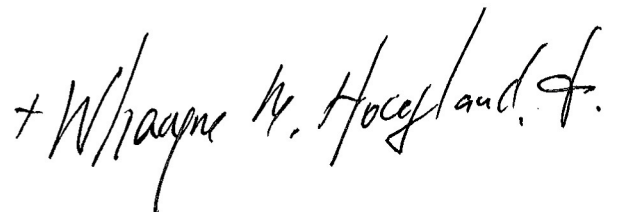
Now is the time for us to sail boldly out into the world under the banner of peace which is depicted on our diocesan shield.

Now is the time for an Episcopal revival in western Michigan.

Now is the time my friends – what shall we say? What shall we do? How shall we proceed together?

These are exciting and hopeful times my friends so, be of good courage. We are God's children. We have everything we need to do God's will, everything we need to answer God's call.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with you now and always,



+The Rt. Rev. Wayne M. Hougland, Jr., DD.
IX Western Michigan