

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

Grace to you and peace in our Lord Jesus Christ.

It has now been a bit over a month since the service of ordination and consecration we shared at the Koepfel Center at Trinity College on April 17<sup>th</sup>. The last four weeks as your bishop have been filled with joy and excitement as I begin this new ministry among and with you in the Diocese of Connecticut. I thank God for your collegiality and support as I am learning my way in this new vocation.

This letter represents a new venture for your bishops in the Diocese of Connecticut. Bishops Curry, Ahrens and I share a commitment to be in regular communication with the clergy of the diocese. While there are many different kinds of media by which we can communicate with you, the three of us feel that an occasional printed letter sent by post helps to draw attention to matters of concern in a way that yet another email in our inboxes cannot do. We are thus planning to send quarterly letters, or “episcopal epistles” to the clergy of the diocese. Jim, Laura and I will take turns writing the letters, but the content of each letter will usually represent opinions and commitments shared by all three bishops. In this letter I would like to offer my initial reflections on life in the Diocese of Connecticut.

I want to begin with a word of profound thanks. First of all I want to thank everyone who has graciously welcomed my family and me to Connecticut. So many, many people in the diocese, the staff at Diocesan House, clergy and lay leaders in the parishes where I have visited, and individuals who have sent greetings from across the diocese, have been incredibly warm, loving and hospitable. I already feel very much at home here. Particular thanks go to the Transition Committee and all who worked so hard to make the service of ordination and consecration on April 17<sup>th</sup> such a joyous event. I felt that the service was a wonderful celebration of our common call to serve God’s mission of restoration and reconciliation in the world. Thank you to everyone who led and participated in the service. And thanks be to God for our common vocation to “restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ.” (BCP p. 855)

Bishops Jim, Laura and I have been quite intentional in looking at how we will exercise our ministries as your bishops. I believe that in a diocese there is only one episcopate, one “exercise of episcopé” that is lived out across the diocese. In Connecticut we are blessed with three full time bishops, one diocesan and two suffragans. I want to emphasize that there is only one episcopate, one office of bishop that is shared by three bishops in the Diocese of Connecticut. While the canonical responsibilities and ministry portfolios of your bishops are different, the three of us exercise only one episcopé among and with you as the clergy of the diocese.

This understanding of a singular episcopate, shared by three bishops, will of course be influenced by the unique gifts and attributes that Jim, Laura and I have. We thus have been very intentional in discerning how God is calling us, individually and as a team, to be bishops here in Connecticut. We have begun this discernment by taking two days together on retreat. One day we spent doing theology as we read through the service of ordination for bishops, asking ourselves how we see the exercise of episcopé here in Connecticut. The second day we began to look at the different responsibilities of the office of bishop, focusing on our passions and what we feel God is calling us to do, individually and as a team. In the near future, Jim Laura and I will spend time together deciding the specific assignments that each of us will have in the life of the diocese. Our respective portfolios and areas of responsibility then will be shared with you, the clergy of the diocese, as soon they are clarified.

A brief note on where God might be calling us as a diocese is in order. First I want to say how incredibly blessed we are in Connecticut with the commitment, dedication, professionalism, and faithfulness of your diocesan staff. I am so thankful for all that they do. In the next year or so I can imagine that there will be changes in the configuration, responsibilities and offices at Diocesan House occasioned by new strategic initiatives, budget realities, and retirement. Before any changes can be made, however, we as a diocese need to undertake a “mission discernment initiative” to consider how best we can serve God’s mission in Connecticut and beyond given the resources and opportunities God has given us. This process of discernment will not happen overnight as it will be a comprehensive and diocesan-wide activity. In the meantime, I have asked the staff at Diocesan House not to make any immediate changes, if possible. And during the next six months I will spend dedicated time with each diocesan staff person to learn more about their office and their unique gifts and passions for ministry.

Mention of a possible “mission discernment initiative” leads me to a few remarks about ecclesiology. In Anglican tradition, the diocese is the basic unit of mission. The diocese is made up of the combined witness of the local eucharistic communities, historically understood as parishes. The Diocese of Connecticut is thus the common, united service to God’s mission of our 170+ parishes, congregations and worshipping communities. There is no diocese separate from the collected life of our parishes, congregations and chaplaincies. It also follows that no parish or congregation exists separate from the life shared with other local eucharistic communities. All of us are the Diocese of Connecticut. The diocese is not the bishops, staff or building in Hartford (and to that end we will be changing the sign in front of 1335 Asylum Ave. to read Diocesan House and not The Diocese of Connecticut.) This understanding of diocese obviously has implications for how we see our shared resources, and shared responsibilities, with and for each other. Filing annual parochial reports and audits, contributing fully to the shared diocesan budget, serving on various commissions and committees of the diocese, participating in Clergy Days, Clergy Conference and other mission-focused gatherings are all ways by which our parishes, our congregations, and we as clergy

are the Diocese of Connecticut. When a congregation or clergy person does not participate fully in the life of the diocese, it not only limits the parish or clergy person's life in the Body of Christ, but also diminishes who we can be in our common service to God's mission in the world as the Episcopal Church in Connecticut. You will hear more from me over time with respect to how our particular Anglican ecclesiology fosters our service to the *missio Dei*.

As clergy, we are blessed with the vocation of caring for the lives of those whom God has put in our trust. This is a wonderful privilege and an awesome responsibility that has significant implications for the manner in which we live our own lives and how we care for ourselves, our families and loved ones. For if we do not take care of ourselves, how can we take care of others? Healthy eating, regular exercise, and taking Sabbath days, vacations and holidays are necessary for wellness. When we become overly stressed or tired, then we become more vulnerable to unhealthy and destructive behaviors including addictions to substances and processes. With the leadership of Robin Hammeal-Urban, our Pastoral Response Coordinator at Diocesan House, a new set of guidelines is being developed with respect to how clergy addicted to substances and/or processes can find recovery, health and wholeness in their own personal lives and in their ministry. These guidelines will be shared with the clergy and the wider diocese once they have been fully developed.

Perhaps a word on how I try to remain healthy and whole given the demands and responsibilities of my new office as your Diocesan Bishop might be useful. It will also help you to understand my schedule and work habits as we build our common life together in the Diocese of Connecticut. Generally speaking I will be in the office at Diocesan House in Hartford on most Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays. This will be the time when most appointments will be made. On Fridays, I will be working from my home office in Essex. There I expect to spend my day in bible study, preparation of sermons, other writing projects, correspondence, email, and phone calls. As appropriate within the guidelines of Safe Church practices, I will also arrange for occasional appointments on Friday for individuals who might find it more convenient to meet in the southeastern part of the diocese. Saturdays I will participate in diocesan events and confirmations and Sundays will be reserved for visitations. On average, I will try to limit my evening meetings to two nights a week. Mondays will be my Sabbath day off where my spouse Kristin and I will pursue our love of the out-of doors and exercise in a variety of ways including kayaking, sailing, and walking our dog. On Mondays, in keeping with my Sabbath, I expect to turn off my office BlackBerry and not return work-related emails. Julie Burnep, at Diocesan House, will know how to reach me in case of emergency during my Sabbath and when I am out of the office. These clear boundaries on my time are intended to foster a balanced and healthy life and will help me to keep a perspective on my work. I appreciate your understanding of these limits and encourage you to try and find a similar balance in your own lives.

I would like to close this "episcopal epistle" with an invitation to a conversation. As a new bishop, I am learning how best to exercise this ministry with and among you.

A significant part of any episcopal ministry is the visiting of parishes. Over time I expect to develop my own style of visitation as to process and customary. I have some ideas as to how the visitation might be used to assist clergy and lay leaders to be more focused and engaged in God's mission. As part of this discernment as to how best to use the visitation, I would like to invite you to communicate with me as to what you think might be most helpful when I come to visit. In addition, I would like to open the question as to whether you think confirmation/reception is more effectively exercised in the parish on Sundays during a visitation or on Saturday in a deanery-wide service. Bishops Laura and Jim are also very interested in how confirmation might best be celebrated in the diocese. We have begun conversations about the nature of confirmation in various clericus meetings and look forward to having more conversation with you about these matters. Please do share your thoughts, hopes, opinions about confirmation with us and with each other.

This has been a rather long letter and I appreciate your taking the time to read it and think about some of these ideas. Most of all, I want to thank you and thank God for our common participation in God's mission here in Connecticut and beyond in the wider world. It is joy and honor to be serving in the Diocese of Connecticut alongside all of you. God bless you.

Faithfully,

The Rt. Rev. Ian T. Douglas, Bishop  
The Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut