

Dear Colleagues in Ministry:

As we journey from Epiphany into the season of Lent, we your bishops continue to commend to you our desires that we will be a people who seek self-care, offer care and respect for one another and do not neglect to tend to our relationship with God. Our hope for one another and for all of the clergy of this diocese is that we will seek to honor our commitments to ourselves, our families and our parishes. We honor these commitments by tending to them with love and respect. We recognize that these commitments cannot be kept to their fullest capacity if we are not honoring our commitment to God. We are called to be a people of prayer, spending time with God both in personal times of prayer and meditation and corporately worshipping the Lord. Our personal relationship with God is nurtured by the rhythm of daily prayer time and reflections on the Scriptures. Incorporated into the rhythms of the week, seasons and years should be retreats, spiritual direction and /or other means to enhance a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Nurturing our personal relationship with God, we are strengthened and grounded in our ability to share the Good News of Jesus Christ with others through our word and action.

This past Advent the bishops of Province One (Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Western Massachusetts, Connecticut and Rhode Island) met for a week long retreat at the Bishop Barbara Harris Conference Center in New Hampshire. Our time away was led by the Rev. Margaret Bullitt-Jonas, a priest in the diocese of Western Massachusetts and a thoughtful and thought-provoking retreat leader. In her time with us, Margaret called us to deepen our relationships with creation, with one another and with God. Through prayer, meditations, time for quiet and time for personal sharing we all came to a more abundant awareness of our love for this fragile earth our island home, our care and affection for one another and our faithfulness and devotion to the God who has created us and gives us breath. What a gift the time away was for us as a community of bishops and as people of faith!

Self-care is a topic often neglected by clergy and yet one that we have sought to raise up as an ideal for this diocese. Bishop Douglas's first Episcopal Epistle spoke at length about his desire to keep some nights free for family time, maintain a regular fitness routine and hold to keeping Monday as his day off. These goals have continued to be articulated and maintained well into the first year of his episcopate. This model of self-care has led to an abundance of conversations and commitments to health and wellness throughout our diocese. Ron Casey recently spoke at a Connecticut Clergy Association gathering about self-care and the need for rest and recreation.

We continue to encourage priests of the diocese to look into Professional Development Leaves/Sabbaticals after they have served in their parish five years or more. This time of sabbatical is a vital time of refreshment and replenishment for clergy and parishes. Sabbaticals are typically three months in length, most often taken as consecutive months. Academic work,

spiritual growth and personal refreshment are all significant parts of this time. The parish continues to pay the clergy person during their sabbatical and some parishes set aside money annually into a sabbatical fund to assist the clergy financially in their time away. Every priest's letter of agreement should include provisions for a sabbatical. General information about sabbaticals can be accessed through the website. Marge Roccoberton's office also has information about grant money as well as what other clergy have done in their time away if you would like to hear of the wonderful experiences of some of our brother and sister clergy. Please do ask Bishop Curry about his most recent sabbatical which included two months of immersion in Spanish, incorporation into a start-up parish in Costa Rica and engagement in mission outreach in Ecuador.

As clergy of this diocese, we are also committed to caring for one another. Encouraging each other to take time away, respect our days off and spend time with family and friends (both clergy and friends outside of the church). Inviting one another to go to lunch or for a walk or run is one way we stay in touch. Inviting one another to join us on retreats or quiet days or continuing education opportunities are others. Bishop Ahrens recently attended a movie with some clergy and their children, a special and fun outing and a wonderful way to get to know one another in a new way.

We are also called to care for one another and reach out when we see sister or brother clergy not taking their time off, or showing signs of burnout or fatigue. When we do not practice self-care we can find ourselves working long hours, making poor choices or not maintaining healthy boundaries. The clergy of this diocese are not immune to the realities of alcohol/substance abuse or other addictions. The Diocesan House Leadership Team has put together "Guidelines for Intervention/Response to Clergy Addicted to a Substance or Behavior". It can be accessed through the website and we commend it to your reading. It offers an outline of how we seek to care for the people of this diocese, the clergy, their families and parishes whenever the bishops have reason to believe that a cleric is addicted to a substance or a behavior. The guidelines also offer specific steps that can help with the redeployment of clergy in recovery. Our hope is that the process will facilitate healing and restoration to wholeness. It is our intention in publishing the guidelines that we will be clear and transparent about our response to this need. Our intention in designing the guidelines is to offer our care and respect to the people of this diocese.

We celebrate with all of you the good work of the parishes involved in Recovery Sundays and the healing and reconciliation that have been brought about by the faithfulness to God and one another through the offering of pastoral care, worship and fellowship. Karin Hamilton has kept our diocese well informed about liturgical opportunities and resources for learning and exploring avenues for healing and recovery.

As we seek to deepen our commitment to God's Mission in the 21st century, much will be asked of the clergy of the Episcopal Church. Exploring new models of ministry including the contextual learning models of the emerging church movement, encouraging the networking of

parishes and the sharing of resources to more fully witness to God's reconciling love and risking telling our stories and dreaming new dreams with the Mission Discernment Initiative are some of the good works that are before us. All of this work is exciting, invigorating and needed for us to engage in if we are going to be faithful to God's call to us in the 21st century. And, we need to care for ourselves, support one another and nurture our relationship with God, if we are to be fortified and ready to faithfully and successfully carry out this ministry in Jesus' name.

Faithfully,

The Rt. Rev. Ian T. Douglas
The Rt. Rev. James E. Curry
The Rt. Rev. Laura J. Ahrens

The Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut