



The EPISCOPAL DIOCESE *of* **WESTERN MICHIGAN**

October 28, 2018

Dear Friends,

As we make final preparations for the 144th Diocesan Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Western Michigan, I request your fervent prayers for our diocese, for the communities we serve, and for our nation. We need God's help - and your support - to expand and energize our work of healing and reconciliation to address the growing divisions in our American life.

A little less than 3 days after the gavel closes on our 144th Diocesan Convention, America's polls will open for the 2018 midterm election. When the polls finally close Americans could end up more bitterly divided than we are already. No matter who "wins" all of us might end up losing.

I am concerned about this growing chasm of distrust and fear amongst us and the increasing hostility being expressed towards entire segments of our varied communities. This distrust and fear is the opposite of the spirit of reconciliation embodied in the work of the Episcopal Church. As Episcopalians, our mission is, "to restore all people to unity with God and each other, as we pray and worship, proclaim the Gospel, and promote justice, peace and love." (BCP p. 855)

The challenges facing the Jesus Movement in Western Michigan are enormous and among the most urgent is the need for racial reconciliation.

This is also an area where we are well positioned to take important new steps toward effective action. In 2017, our Diocesan Convention passed a resolution calling for the development of a policy and procedure requiring that, "persons running for any elected diocesan position must have completed an approved course of study on racial reconciliation." Our Diocesan Commission on Dismantling Racism has done great work. Working in conjunction with your bishop, they have developed a policy and procedure that was passed unanimously by your diocesan council at its September 2018 meeting.

Regardless of who you are - your background or your beliefs - we are all shaped by systems, including within the Church, in which attitudes, social practices, and power dynamics intentionally and unintentionally create unfair advantages or disadvantages for groups of people based on race.

Simply put, racism is prejudice coupled with power. Racism in all its varieties exists to help those holding power and control to maintain power and control.

It is only when we see and recognize the overarching role of racism as a system that we can begin to examine its consequences and seek ways to change. Our sincere engagement in dismantling racism is a necessary step toward making visible God's likeness and goodness in every person.

As your Bishop, I now call upon us to take up our mission - to seek restoration and unity by fully giving ourselves to the work of dismantling racism in our lives.

The attached policy and procedure for Dismantling Racism in the Episcopal Diocese of Western Michigan outlines a course of study on racism awareness and reconciliation.

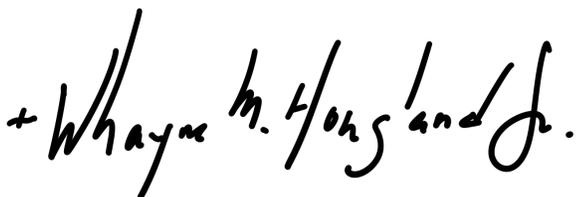
- Phase One - Understanding the history of racism: US origins of racism, institutional racism, awareness of personal bias.
- Phase Two - Committing to intentional personal and public change.
- Phase Three - Creating a parish plan and determining outcomes to be measured and follow-up activities to maintain momentum.

This will not be easy work. It will require humility, vulnerability, honesty and courage. It will take graceful listening with gentle responses. It will require patience and prayer, lots of prayer, as we seek to shift our awareness and our actions, so we might become agents of healing and reconciliation in our communities and in our time.

I look forward to taking up this work with you and moving deeper into our relationship with God as we move deeper into relationship with one another.

I am honored to be your bishop.

May the blessing of God Almighty be with us now and always,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Wayne M. Hougland Jr." The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

The Rt. Rev. Wayne M. Hougland, Jr.
IX Bishop,
The Episcopal Diocese of Western Michigan