



BISHOP OF THE
EPISCOPAL DIOCESE *of the* RIO GRANDE

THE RIGHT REVEREND MICHAEL BUERKEL HUNN

14 April 2023

Diocese of the Rio Grande
New Mexico and Far West Texas

A Pastoral Letter
Title III, Canon 12.3(b)

Dear Friends in Christ,

Beginning this coming week until Labor Day weekend I will be on Sabbatical. In the academic world Sabbatical is typically a time for professors to focus on their writing. In the Church many clergy take on special projects, or to visit holy places they would never otherwise be able to see. I think about sabbatical differently, and I want to share my thoughts with you as well as say that I hope this summer, this sabbatical, is a fruitful time of rest and renewal for the entirety of the Diocese of the Rio Grande.

Sabbath is what sabbatical is all about. We know that the body gets stronger when rest comes after significant effort. We also know that creativity comes during times when the mind is allowed to wander and make connections.

Through the stress and the significant work of the last four years we have accomplished much- the diocese, and Bishop's Ridge are financially stable, we have made significant strides in building trust, and we have come through the Covid Pandemic stronger than we were when it started. I am now tired and needing time to ponder what has happened and to imagine what may be possible in the coming years of our life together. We have been adapting in many ways, and we have been doing things in new ways but we now need time to clarify the systems we need in place to sustain the work we are being called to do now.

Sabbatical is not only helpful for me as your bishop— The Diocesan Staff have a number of essential projects which they have been eager to focus on and having me out of the office will allow them to prioritize that work. For example, our diocesan staff are currently using seven different applications to manage the financial life of the diocese and we are using a budget structure and categories which reflect the work that was done ten years ago. We are aware that our mission churches are in need of ever greater support from the Bishop's staff, particularly in administration. The staff could use time to focus on these areas without the bishop there. (Bishops tend to create work for the staff!)

The diocese itself also could use some time to slow down and imagine our future ministry. Our leadership retreat this January began a process of "remembering the future" in which we were invited to imagine the work God is calling us into by using a process which helped minimize the usual "we couldn't possibly" limiting comments. The Diocesan Council has taken on the task of inviting the Diocese to "remember the future" and gather data to share when the sabbatical is done. This summer presents us all an opportunity to take a breath, to ask what God would have us do, and to do that essential maintenance of our diocesan structures, and of our own souls, to prepare us for the future we will share together as diocese.



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For my part I need some rest, to spend time with my family, to work on my health, to pray, to read and (perhaps) write. My plan is to be and sometimes work in the garden and orchard each day; to explore the backroads of the diocese by bicycle— riding routes I have not had the time to explore; and to reconnect with the monks of the Order of the Holy Cross, where I am an Associate. In the first weeks, the goal will be simply to rest and slow down and sleep. As the weeks unfold my thoughts will undoubtedly focus on discernment— who is God calling me to be? How am I to live out my call as Bishop of the Rio Grande? What sort of bishop am I being called to become? I will also be pondering other thoughts as I pedal or kneel in the dirt or wait for the school bus to come, working on how I can establish a weekly schedule which isn't as exhausting as these pandemic years have demanded. How can I focus on what is truly important for the Diocese and learn to say no to the many other things which sound good when I say yes, but then end up crowding the schedule pulling time and attention away from what might make more difference. I will be thinking about our diocesan staff and how I might be more effective in designing our workflow so that we do the things which will have the most impact on our congregations and encourage growth and depth in the Rio Grande.

To that end, and given that my travel will be mostly local and on two wheels, I would like to use sabbatical funds to buy a new bike. My current road bike was purchased with sabbatical funds thirteen years ago and is in need of an update. This is in keeping with my goals for this sabbatical; my interests in health, exploring back roads, and traveling at a slower pace; and even the purchase of a nice bike will still leave the vast majority of funds in the Sabbatical fund, while also allowing me to continue commuting to the office by bike long after the sabbatical has ended. The only other sabbatical funding I propose is a trip to the monastery in West Park New York and perhaps a journey from there to the Kent School in Connecticut, to ride mountain bikes with my son Murphy who lives in Massachusetts. He was born in Kent, has recently become a mountain biker and has never ridden the Kent trails which I helped build when I was the Chaplain and a mountain bike coach at the Kent School.

Sabbath is a commandment— one of the hardest to obey. I hope that I, and that our Diocese, may use this time to grow in faithfulness, to reconnect, to explore our own neighborhoods and our own congregations so that we may come into this fall restored and ready to listen to the Spirit, and what God is calling us to grow into next.

Faithfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'M' followed by a long horizontal line.

The Right Rev'd Michael B. Hunn
Bishop
Diocese of the Rio Grande