

Final Report from the Search Committee

This past January the Search Committee was charged with entering into a period of discernment for the election of our 10th Bishop. Our work was to include:

1. Listening to the people of this diocese by convening listening sessions.
2. Drafting the diocesan profile, including a Call for Nominees, by Easter Monday.
3. Prayerfully consider the candidacy of nominees, shortening the list of applicants to approximately 10 finalists.
4. Providing for a thorough process of references and background checks.
5. Convening the finalists for a discernment retreat in September.
6. Presenting a final slate of at least four candidates to the Standing Committee before September 22.

The committee began our work together in earnest at the discernment retreat on January 18. We introduced ourselves, identified norms to guide our work, and agreed on a decision-making method. We have approached our decision making by using a consensus model first (thumb test), with parameters that should a decision feel more substantive, any member could ask the Chair to instead take a formal vote that required a majority. In the end, every substantive decision was made with consensus.

At the first meeting, we broke into five subcommittees, responsible for different aspects of our work together. The description of each committee below also includes notable events that took place during this process.

The **Listening Subcommittee** was responsible for listening to those within our diocese. The members were committed to a process of listening by beginning at the margins of our diocese (smaller congregations with part time or no clergy; outdoor worshipping communities; an Episcopal-Lutheran community; Spanish speaking communities; our historically black congregation; etc.) and then move their way inward toward the Cathedral as the heart of our diocese. Fourteen listening sessions were held, ten in person and four online (including one for young adults). These were held between February 8 and March 2 at the following congregations (listed in order of sessions held) St. Helena's, Lenox; All Saints, North Adams; Christ Trinity Church, Sheffield; St. Paul's, Holyoke; St. Paul's, Gardner; St. Peter's Springfield; All

Saints, Worcester; Holy Spirit, Sutton; St. Philip's, Easthampton; and Christ Church Cathedral.

In addition to these listening sessions, sessions were offered for clergy within their deaneries; interviews were also held with diocesan staff, missionaries, and leaders across our diocese; and a survey was offered which garnered fifty responses. It became clear that while we have growing edges, as a whole, this is a healthy diocese that has been loved and led well by our current bishop. As we look to the future, we know we will need to make some changes to our administrative structure, tend relationships across congregations of all sizes, and become ever more agile in the changing landscape of the church.

In early March, the Listening Subcommittee presented their findings to the Search Committee, which were accepted and affirmed. The baton was passed to the **Profile Subcommittee**. This subcommittee was responsible for crafting the profile that potential candidates would use to discern whether to apply. This involved pulling together essential facts about our diocese; describing life in Western Massachusetts; using the Listening Report to share who we are as the people of God in the diocese, and what we are looking for in our next bishop. The committee also spent time researching and discussing the design and seeking quotes from parish wardens and clergy describing their parishes for use in the profile.

On March 22, at St. John's, Northampton, the Profile Subcommittee led the Search Committee through a process of reviewing and editing our draft profile in small groups. After those edits were incorporated, the team shifted the remainder of our work online, fact checking the profile with diocesan leaders and staff; and collaborating with a copy editor and designer. We gathered as a Search Committee online on April 1 for a final review, and the profile was accepted and affirmed as representing our diocese and what we heard in our listening sessions. The profile emphasizes we are looking for a bishop who is: a bold and prophetic leader with strong organizational skills who will strategically equip and mobilize us for mission and ministry; a faithful, wise, and pastoral leader who will speak the truth in love to their people; and a strong leader who has a heart for justice, diversity, and inclusion, is committed to the gospel, and is a faithful witness in the public square.

Meanwhile, the **Communication & Education Subcommittee**, was busy announcing the listening sessions and the listening survey, seeking profile input, requesting prayers, and periodic updates on the work of the Search Committee; releasing the profile and slate; offering educational information on the role and function of a bishop, and the canonical

process of electing a bishop. To this end they held three educational online gatherings: March 9 and March 11 in English; March 13 in Spanish.

This subcommittee utilized our diocesan email list, website, and social media for our communications. All communications, including the profile itself, were offered in both English and Spanish, thanks to the translation efforts of the Rev. Joel Martinez. When the profile was released on Easter Monday (April 21), it was communicated through the same channels, shared with over forty organizations, word of mouth, and featured in a month-long paid advertisement on Episcopal News Service. In anticipation of announcing the slate, the committee outlined a timeline and process, including the layout and materials to be posted on the diocesan website. Throughout this process, the support of the Rev. Vicki Ix and Ms. Alison Gamache, our diocesan communications leaders, have been invaluable.

The **Processing & Screening Subcommittee** was responsible for determining the process for screening applications; collaborating with the Profile Subcommittee in creating a Call for Nominees and required application materials; organizing interviews and reference calls; determining what questions would be asked at each stage of the process; and collaborating with the Chair on a process for shortening the list of candidates. This subcommittee proposed a process and plan for screening to the Search Committee at our March 22 meeting; it was accepted and affirmed.

Nominations were open from April 21 to May 20. We had a diverse pool of candidates that reflected a vast array of experience, theological perspective, and backgrounds. Nominations were received from 6 of the 9 provinces. Between May 21 and June 13 every candidate and their three references were interviewed by a team online; all materials for each candidate, including interviews, were reviewed by all committee members; and interview teams prepared summaries of candidates and their references' feedback.

On June 14, the Search Committee gathered at St. John's, Northampton to discern which candidates to invite to the retreat, pending background checks, and which were to be thanked and conclude discernment. The committee spent the day in prayer and engaged in discernment activities to help determine which candidates had essential skills noted in our profile and which candidates the committee was the most excited about and drawn to continue discerning with at the retreat. There was consensus on all decisions, and then the complete lists of continuing and concluding candidates were then affirmed again by

consensus.

The **Retreat Subcommittee** was responsible for organizing the discernment retreat with candidates. This included identifying a retreat location; instructing candidates about what to prepare, hospitality details, travel arrangements, and reimbursement; crafting an agenda in collaboration with the Chaplains and Chair. The committee gathered at Genesis Spiritual Life Center in Westfield on September 11-14 and crafted a retreat that was focused on mutual discernment. Candidates were asked to lead a brief daily office, make a presentation, engage in dialogue and reflection on Episcopal vows, and think creatively about the church of today and tomorrow.

The Search Committee gathered to reflect on the candidates throughout the retreat. The committee noticed these candidates were largely people of great joy, able to inspire and encourage those they serve, while mirroring for us that this was something we were seeking in our next bishop, without even fully realizing it. Similarly, we noticed these candidates were primarily from larger dioceses, equipping them with a different sense of how a diocese can organize itself for effective mission and ministry. As expected, each candidate was a person of deep faith, wisdom, and skilled leadership.

Over the course of the weekend, it became abundantly clear the committee was unanimously enthusiastic about three of these candidates. Their gifts, skills, and experience were the most aligned with the qualities the profile described we sought in our next bishop.

On September 20 the Search Committee gathered to pray and discern the final slate, leaning on the same process used in June. The proposed slate was offered with great care and hope for where God will lead our diocese under the leadership of our tenth bishop.

The proposed slate is as follows:

- The Rev. Susan B. Fortunato, she/her
- The Very Rev. Dr. Marcus George Halley, he/him
- The Very Rev. Miguelina Howell, she/her

The committee wishes to offer its thanks to those who supported this process, known and

unknown: those who prayed for this process; parish leaders who engaged and supported these efforts; for the good folks at Genesis Spiritual Life Center who hosted our retreat; Ms. Blanca Silvestrini, our Consultant, who journeyed with us offering us insights throughout our process; Mx. Aaron McMurray, our Search Administrator, who kept us organized; Mx. Liv Combest, Office and Operations Manager at St. John's, Northampton who managed our hospitality at all day meetings; the Rev. Vicki Ix and Ms. Alison Gamache, who kept our communications out in front of our diocese; the Rev. Steven Wilco, Interim Canon to the Ordinary, and other diocesan staff who helped answer many questions and handled invoices in our process; the Rev. Rich Simpson, who offered his guidance on search processes as previous Search Committee Chair; the Rev. Nathaniel Anderson, who was available to answer questions that arose in our process; and the Chaplains, the Rev. Julie Carson and Mr. Will Harron. They were a gift to this committee and our process. They led our worship, were frequently called upon to pray throughout our gatherings, and were there to listen and walk alongside us.

Yours in the peace, love, hope, and joy of Christ.

The Rev. Heather Blais, *Chair* - Sts. James and Andrew - Greenfield

Mr. Richard Delorme - St. Francis - Holden

Mr. William Frazier - St. Stephen's - Pittsfield

The Ven. Jane Griesbach - Archdeacon

The Rev. Jenny Gregg - Cathedral of the Beloved - Pittsfield

Mr. Caleb Ireland - Grace - Amherst

The Rev. Joel Martinez - St. Paul's - Holyoke

The Hon. Judith Philips - CTK - Epiphany - Wilbraham & St. Peter's - Springfield

Ms. Amanda Watroba - St. Stephen's - Pittsfield

The Rev. Anna Woofenden - St. John's - Northampton

Dr. Adrienne Wootters - St. John's - Williamstown