



THE DIOCESE OF SOUTH CAROLINA

THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN SOUTH CAROLINA

January 27, 2022

Dear Diocesan Family,

During my folding chair conversations this past fall and winter, I became keenly aware of the toll the pandemic has taken on our clergy and church workers. Already, leaders in our congregations have labored under circumstances that have contributed to exhaustion and burnout in the long season of uncertainty since the schism. The added challenges that COVID-19 has presented have only added to the burden. In a vocation that relies heavily on face-to-face interactions to carry out pastoral, liturgical, and leadership responsibilities, these leaders have faced a long season of carrying out duties in ways for which they were not prepared—ways that often do not allow them to rely on their natural strengths and gifts. Data reflects many clergy across the country are taking early retirement, and clergy are often silent about their fatigue and depression. Our clergy and church workers have been stoic and practical, taking these realities in stride and leading with creative new approaches, despite how this added time and effort has affected them and their families.

I am concerned not only for our clergy and lay leaders but for all our members who have labored under these conditions. I realize present conditions impact all parishioners in far-reaching ways. And, pastoral care for clergy and lay leaders is among the special responsibilities I am privileged to have as your bishop. With that in mind, I am asking our diocesan family to come together to support our clergy—both priests and deacons—and lay church workers to offer them a week of respite. I am inspired by the recent decision of The Rt. Rev. Chilton Knudsen in The Diocese of Chicago. Following her lead, I am asking that we embrace a week of “mini-sabbatical” for our clergy and lay church workers. I believe such an action reflects the collective care we have for our clergy and lay employees and will offer time to combat exhaustion and prevent burnout.

I am asking that each congregation work with your clergy and/or lay church workers to choose a week between now and Pentecost when meetings, office hours, and non-essential activities are deferred or cancelled and when clergy and lay church workers are also away for a Sunday from worship. I am also asking available retired clergy to consider helping out by offering your services for the Sunday the active clergy will be away. I encourage each congregation to consider either offering the Daily Office with special prayers of gratitude for these leaders on that Sunday or, where feasible, to invite a local retired clergy person to cover for the Sunday. If you are a lay led congregation already offering the Daily Office on many Sundays, I ask you to invite your usual

worship leader to take this time away and have another member of the congregation offer the Daily Office on the appointed Sunday.

I hold with deepest, prayerful concern the health and well being of our clergy and lay church workers and pray that this initiative will be one helpful piece in our collective care for them.

Christ's Blessings,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Ruth Woodliff-Stanley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross symbol at the beginning.

The Rt. Rev. Ruth Woodliff-Stanley
Bishop of the Diocese of South Carolina