



# THE DIOCESE OF SOUTH CAROLINA

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## THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN SOUTH CAROLINA

March 30, 2023

Dear Faithful People of the Diocese of South Carolina,

As we move toward the observance of Holy Week, I am reminded of the generations of faithful people on whose shoulders we stand in the ministries that are ours today. The tireless and courageous work of those in generations past has set us on a course to bring the gospel to those who long to know the healing, saving grace of Jesus in our day. The work our spiritual ancestors did required both holding fast to the enduring truths of the gospel and being willing to try new things, to take risks to plant new churches, investing resources for a future yet to be seen.

Such is the case for us today as we turn the corner from a decade of hard division over nothing less than the heart of our faith and cherished history. Now, we must make decisions that reflect our desire to continue their legacy to plant The Episcopal Church in every place where we are called to be across this diocese. We must honestly and accurately assess where we are and develop plans that reflect the most faithful stewarding of the resources God has given us.

Since this past summer, we have been diligently focused on reopening historic parishes that were returned to us last year after a decade of litigation. As I shared at Diocesan Convention in November, we have begun the process of redeveloping our diocese, using our financial resources to support all of our congregations and ministries, while making catalytic investments in three priority areas over the next five years:

- Supporting the congregations returned to our diocese after 10 years of litigation.
- Planting a new presence in locations where our historic churches were not returned, but where we feel called to have a presence, developing plans to keep a vital presence in remote and rural regions of our diocese.
- Providing overdue support for our historically disenfranchised congregations – the beloved and historically African-American congregations of our diocese who for centuries were deprived of the resources afforded to other churches.

Our discernment has also led us to take a hard look at questions of where we may not have capacity to sustain or grow congregations in a responsible and faithful manner. Our diocese is one of the oldest in The Episcopal Church. There have been generations when the growth of our diocese was marked by planting churches in close proximity to one another, but this has not shown to be the most prudent way of sustaining a vibrant and growing ministry in a modern world.

In recent weeks, after significant discernment and heartfelt conversations with diocesan lay and clergy leadership, we have come to the difficult decision not to reopen one of the parishes returned to us, Holy Trinity, Charleston. Located in the South Windermere area in West Ashley, this historic parish has raised up generations of Episcopalians. One of the most notable leaders of this parish was The Rev. Canon George Chassey, who grew Holy Trinity into a vibrant church over decades of wise and faithful ministry. Prior to the diocesan schism in 2012, Holy Trinity had a strong place in the community of Episcopal parishes in our diocese.

When it was returned to us, we promptly began assessing the condition of the physical buildings, as well as considering its proximity to other Episcopal churches, including St. James, Charleston, on nearby James Island, which

we had already committed to reopening. As we received estimates on the substantial amount of work needed to bring Holy Trinity back to a reasonable and desirable physical condition, and considered this expense in light of a reasonable assessment of growing two returning congregations in such close proximity to each other, we recognized that to attempt to reopen Holy Trinity would not likely lead to sustainability. We also considered its possible use for other ministries of the diocese, but the cost to restore the facilities to proper condition for any such endeavor would be prohibitive and would take away from other ministries of the diocese where God is calling us to love and serve.

At the same time, we understand that the land on which this parish sits has significant value, which, if realized, could support churches and ministries across our diocese where the need is pressing. As stewards of the gifts of God has given us, we believe the most responsible decision with respect to Holy Trinity, Charleston, is to sell the property and invest the proceeds in the vital ministries underway in our diocese, as well as those that will ensure our long-term vitality and sustainability. For those who are saddened by this decision, please know it has been a very difficult one, where our focus has been on choosing the most prudent path forward for the sake of our diocese as a whole, while also being faithful stewards of the resources in our care.

Some of you may be aware that the Acorn School is currently housed at Holy Trinity. Appreciating their important place in the community, we extended their contract through this school year.

Across The Episcopal Church, there are examples of churches, hospitals, and other diocesan institutions that, after a faithful season of ministry, have become the seed that makes fresh growth in other areas of ministry possible in a new season. As your bishop, I am called by God to help lead this diocese through a new season, sometimes making difficult decisions along the way, with the support of diocesan leadership. It is my strong hope that we will see the fruits of the labor of faithful Episcopalians in years gone by at Holy Trinity seed new ministries in our day.

Please know that as we move forward, I will keep you informed of new developments, and I ask for your continued prayers. Diocesan leadership has begun the process to develop a strategic visioning plan for our diocese that will enable us to sustain our ministries and be a servant of the community for many years to come. I look forward to sharing more about that with you soon, and presenting a final plan at our Diocesan Convention in November.

“I am about to do a new thing;  
now it springs forth; do you not perceive it?  
I will make a way in the wilderness  
and rivers in the desert.” Isaiah 43:9

Thanks be to God, who is doing a new thing among us. May we, honoring our past, step into our future with courage and hope.

Faithfully yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, featuring a large, stylized initial 'R' with a cross symbol integrated into its upper loop, followed by the name 'Ruth' in a cursive script.

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