

March 22, 2023

Dear Bishops and Standing Committee Members:

Grace and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

My name is Charlie Holt, and I have had the honor of being elected bishop coadjutor by the people of the Diocese of Florida. As you consider the Standing Committee's request for consent to my election, I would like to give you a sense of how I will lead the Diocese of Florida if I receive your consent.

First, I want you to know that I am determined to be the best bishop and pastor to ALL the people of the diocese. I will work to create a big tent community filled with the loving spirit of belonging in Jesus Christ.

As you may know, the Diocese of Florida has experienced decades-long divisions over the issue of same-sex marriage. While we are one of the more conservative dioceses of the Episcopal Church, we also have a significant membership that is fully affirming of LGBTQ members, particularly with regard to marriage and ordination. My concern is that continued conflict about these important issues will become so contentious that it will damage our relational unity as the Body of Christ. As God's people, we must do better than this, and we will.

The first years of my episcopacy in the Diocese of Florida will require some careful mediated listening across the diocese with all members-- especially members of the Union of Black Episcopalians, people and clergy of color serving in the diocese, and members of the LGBTQ community who have felt excluded from previous conversations. I am also mindful that the two objections to the election process have added another layer of consternation, mistrust, and hurt among members and leaders of the diocese. We have much work to do to foster a culture of healthy relationships and mutual flourishing so that we can find our way toward reconciliation and the way of love.

We must address the concerns of all the members of the diocese in a way that not only brings relational peace and healing, but also addresses any systems, processes, and policies that need to be reformed and improved to be consistent with our Baptismal Covenant, the Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church, and our longing to be united in Christ.

#### Listening Process

Together with Bishop Mary Gray-Reeves, the elected leaders of the diocese and I are developing a structured listening process that will allow us to hear all voices, build

trust in the diocesan culture, and allow us to articulate our deep need for reconciliation. We will engage this discussion and reform work over several years together with Bishop Gray-Reeves's leadership. I will trust members of the House of Bishops to bring other resources and wisdom to our diocese as it heals, and I will participate fully in the College for Bishops, seeking wise counsel from its faculty and my coaches during this transition time.

Here are some of my commitments regarding issues within the diocese that I pray will help bring us together:

### Beloved Community

The work of building Beloved Community has shaped my ministry. [Working with African American pastors](#) in the Sanford, Florida area after Trayvon Martin's murder was one of the most profound experiences of my ministry and taught me to understand that true reconciliation happens when we pay attention to building personal relationships and fixing systemic inequalities. In the years since then, as a priest in Houston, I established multi-racial partnerships as the coordinator of Hurricane Harvey relief at The Church of St. John the Divine and through an [English as a Second Language program](#) engaging 150 students representing 45 countries and 33 languages. Doing this work with people from many walks of life has helped me see that if we start with open hearts and hands, we move into deeper relationships with our neighbors by listening, learning, and doing.

Nothing in this long election process in the Diocese of Florida has pained me more than knowing that during the meet and greets last year, I spoke in a way that has made people question the commitment to racial reconciliation and racial justice that is so central to my life and ministry.

I am sorry for the hurt that I caused to people who have seen the edited mashup video of my clumsy remarks, and I am working hard to do better at talking about painful and important issues of race and racism.

I am grateful to the pastors of the Sanford area who first trusted me enough to help me learn, and to the people in the Diocese of Florida and across the Episcopal Church who have been generous enough to talk with me in recent months so I can continue to learn and lead the diocese forward on issues of race and justice.

The Presiding Bishop and General Convention have made Becoming Beloved Community one of our church's top priorities, and as bishop of Florida, you can expect me to participate fully and sincerely in the House of Bishops' and in the Episcopal Church's work toward racial reconciliation. We have already begun this work together in Florida, and I [invite you to read the vision](#) that I have developed

together with members of the Anti-Racism and Reconciliation Commission. We pray it will guide our efforts.

### Same-sex Marriage, LGBTQ Inclusion, and Racial Equality

As I [wrote to the people of the Diocese of Florida](#) in December, if I become Bishop of Florida, I will fully comply with the spirit and the letter of General Convention Resolution 2018-B012. Parishes and rectors that choose to offer same-sex marriages will be free to do so in accordance with the approved liturgies and canons of the Episcopal Church. Pastoral care and episcopal oversight of all congregations will remain with me. Congregations that perform same-sex marriages will no longer be required to have Delegated Episcopal Pastoral Oversight (DEPO), and generous pastoral support will be provided to any clergy and congregations that may request it in keeping with Resolution B012.

My understanding of how the church should accommodate the differing convictions of its members on this issue has evolved since the hard days Episcopalians faced in the first decade of the 2000s. The changes in our ecclesiastical and state laws that provide marriage equality matter to me and have changed my views on how we must live together in the church.

I want you to know I am committed to being a sensitive pastor to LGBTQ people and to improving their situation in the Diocese of Florida—a place that has admittedly not always felt safe to many. God willing and with your consent, when I take the vows of a bishop, I will be making a solemn promise to follow the non-discrimination canons of the Episcopal Church without reservation. I am committed to ensuring that LGBTQ people are loved and cared for, and feel not only safe, but cherished. In my episcopacy, LGBTQ people will have full and equal access to the discernment process and opportunities for lay and ordained ministry.

One of the great gifts of The Episcopal Church is that we have found a way to spread our tent wide enough and make our doors broad enough so that people with diverging views on topics that divide the culture can be truly united and mutually flourish, as one Body in Jesus Christ. Any inequality of or discrimination against people of color, LGBTQ persons, or any other group in this diocese will be addressed and corrected. All sacraments will be accessible to all people consistent with the Episcopal Church's doctrine and order. Opportunities for participation in ministry, leadership, and the full life of the diocese will be open to all. "All are welcome" should be understood to be the hospitality of all our congregations.

### Loyalty to the Episcopal Church

With God's grace, I am planning on a long ministry of growing the Episcopal Diocese of Florida as its bishop. I will not leave the Episcopal Church, and I do not believe that dissenting bishops, clergy or lay members have the legal or ecclesiastical ability or justification to alienate property that has been given for the use of the Episcopal Church and the Diocese of Florida. While individuals may leave the Episcopal Church, they cannot take our physical or financial assets with them. I have taken that fiduciary responsibility seriously as a priest for 25 years, and I will abide by that responsibility as a bishop without exception.

I too lived through the pain of the schism during early 2000s, which is still with us. In those years, when many conservative clergy were leaving the church, I made the decision to stay. I wanted no part of a movement that was not only schismatic, but often angry and puritanical as well. For me, it comes down to the high priestly prayer of Jesus for us, "that all of them may be one" (John 17:21). I never want to be responsible for violating the Lord's prayerful heart for his church. The people of the Diocese of Florida are loyal, faithful Episcopalians, and we desire to be fully engaged in the life of the Episcopal Church.

The Diocese of Florida has great clergy and laity, and together I believe we can and will heal our relationships with one another in the name of Christ and for the sake of church unity, our Christian witness, and God's mission. My training as a peacemaker and Christian conciliator fosters a desire in me to create a place where mutual respect can allow people with diverse views and values to have communion across difference—it is this spirit that drew me to the Episcopal Church many years ago, and led me to dedicate my life and love to its service.

God willing and with your consent, I look forward to serving not only the Diocese of Florida but also the wider church in faithfulness to the solemn vows and charges taken by a bishop of our beloved church.

This is a long letter, and I hope it has answered many of the questions you might have as you consider consenting to my election. But if you have others, I will be very glad to meet with any bishop or standing committee at your convenience. You can reach me at [CHolt@diocesefl.org](mailto:CHolt@diocesefl.org) or 321-689-7401.

Thank you for your time and your consideration of consent to my election. You are in my prayers, and I ask you to keep me in yours.

Faithfully in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Charlie Holt" followed by a small cross symbol.

The Rev. Charlie Holt