

August 28, 2026

Dear Siblings in Christ in the Diocese of Florida,

As I write, I have much to be thankful for. Thank you to the Transition Committee and all who participated in the candidate pilgrimage last week. Donna and I found it affirming and inspiring to hear your excitement for the Episcopal Church and your diocese, and to see the good and faithful work you are doing. I am grateful for the vulnerability offered through questions and stories, honestly describing where you are as individuals, ministries, parishes, and as a diocese. I am also thankful for the hope expressed about the future of the Diocese of Florida. By the end of the week, I had a clearer picture of who you are and how God might use my gifts in ministry with you.

In the ninth chapter of Matthew, as Jesus proclaims the Good News, he sees the crowds and has compassion for them. Translations vary, but the connotation is that the crowds are weary, scattered, troubled, and dispirited. Matthew notes they were like “sheep without a shepherd.” I share that because it’s a phrase I heard several times last week. My compassion for Florida has deepened with the reaffirmation of the pastoral work your bishop will do, which, as I conveyed, would be my top priority in the near future should I be called to serve alongside you. Many translations of this passage also use the word “helpless,” although you proved that is not the case in Florida. Given what you have done and are doing, despite the turmoil and the scatteredness of this time in your common life, it is also clear that the Episcopal Church in Florida is resilient and strong. It would be my joy to build on that solid foundation, work for healing and reconciliation, and help the church continue to flourish in the Diocese of Florida.

I also know there are voices we didn’t hear last week; it is impossible to know everything about a diocese (or a candidate!) in a process like this. I would have loved to discuss youth ministry and was so grateful that at least one young person took the time to attend a meet and greet. I know there are opportunities for spreading the Good News among our Spanish-speaking neighbors, although we didn’t really cover that during our time together. I also know there are many more incredible ministries going on than we could have ever seen in one trip. I am heartened that in an era of anxiety and fear about the future of our church and churches like it, we have opportunities to build God’s kingdom with intention, not simply accepting a demographic fate.

I can see what’s possible among you because I’ve had a front-row seat as God has done this grace-filled work before, bringing healing and unity to a scattered flock, allowing us to fully love and respect one another, which includes EVERYONE. God’s love is not a zero-sum endeavor. As I began this process, I was advised to discern whether I could love you and you could love me, for if so, we could do anything with God’s help. Last week confirmed that for me. On September 11, God will provide the shepherd to love you, and I know you will love your shepherd in return. You all remain in my prayers as you continue to discern.

With a full and thankful heart,

Tom +