

Naming, Not Blaming

From Susan Goff, Bishop Suffragan and Ecclesiastical Authority

There is an 800-pound gorilla in the room. A two-ton elephant. A fire-breathing dragon. Everywhere we turn, there it is. As I name it in this Monday meditation, I ask you to hang in with me, putting blaming and judging aside for a moment. Let's ask some healthy questions about the state of our Diocese and the wider Church, and let's listen for what the Holy Spirit might be up to. For the first time since 1993, a slate for bishop in the Diocese of Virginia does not include racial, ethnic or gender diversity.* This slate as currently composed has become a lightning rod for deep issues facing both the Diocese of Virginia and the entire Church. Our anxieties about diversity, race, sex, gender, Covid losses, economic uncertainty, changes in church attendance and other issues have latched on to this slate, making it the latest repository of our fears. How do we understand and respond faithfully in light of these realities?

- We avoid blaming. This is not the fault of the four men who are on the slate, and it does not call their qualifications into question. They were presented by the diverse Search Committee to our diverse Standing Committee which, in turn, presented them to our Diocese. Any complex systemic issues that are part of this outcome are broader than these groups alone, so it will not help us to lay blame at their feet. We are all on the same bus, so let's not throw anyone under the bus.
- We notice and name our emotions about this, then we put those emotions aside so that we can act effectively and responsibly.
- We uncover, name and work to heal the brokenness that people experience because of racism, sexism, genderism, heterosexism or any other "isms." We name what we see, and we work and pray for a Diocese, a wider Church and local congregations that fully reflect the wonder and beautiful diversity that is already present at the feasting table in God's heaven.
- We expand our learning and growth through [Sacred Ground](#) and other circles. We spend time, honest time, with people who are different from us. We recognize the gifts of individuals, the strengths of our Church and the growing edges for our Diocese, all through eyes of love.
- We take part in next steps in this election. Engage the [petition process](#) which remains open until midnight on April 8. If you desire to see the slate expanded, this process lays out how to do it. Attend a [Meet and Greet](#) session. Read the [materials on each candidate](#). Pray, pray and pray some more for the person God is raising up as our next bishop diocesan.
- We ask questions and live with the questions for a while:

What is the Spirit saying to the Church in this moment of our story?

What patterns and trends in the Church and in the world are being revealed?

What is our response to those patterns and trends?

What new thing might God be doing among us?

How will we be Jesus' hands and feet, eyes and ears, mouth and voice in our Diocese and in our world right now?

God, lead us and guide us along the way. Still our restless minds long enough so that we will see the way and let you continue to work through us.