



THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN MAINE

Office of the Bishop

143 State Street Portland, ME 04101

207-772-1953 www.episcopalmaine.org

30 January 2019

To: The People of the Diocese of Maine

Re: Healing the Church of Sexual Abuse and Misconduct

Dear Friends in Christ:

As you are well aware, the church is not immune to the sins that beset every human institution. The news frequently carries stories of improper and abusive behavior on the part of clergy, a great deal of which is coming to light in response to the activism of victims, the #MeToo movement. The Episcopal Church has made great strides over the last generation in educating clergy and lay leaders about the maintenance of personal boundaries and the responsibilities we share to protect the most vulnerable from harm. But we are not exempt from bad behavior. There are far too many instances of sexual misconduct in our church.

At last summer's General Convention, The Episcopal Church suspended for three years the statute of limitations for reporting and addressing sexual abuse and misconduct by clergy against adults. (There is no statute of limitations for sexual abuse and misconduct committed against children and other vulnerable persons.) Beginning January 1 of this year and continuing to December 31 of 2021, any victim may report incidents of abuse and misconduct to the diocesan intake officer for consideration and response.

The Diocese of Maine has two Intake Officers: the Rev. Michael Ambler, priest and Canon to the Ordinary, and Ms. Elise Magnuson, a lay member of St. Luke's Cathedral experienced in working with persons affected by abuse. (Their contact information may be found at the end of this letter.) Persons wishing to report sexual abuse and misconduct, as well as other sorts of clergy misconduct, may do so by reaching out to either of them by phone or by email. The intake officer will respond to you directly.

The role of the Intake Officer is to hear the complaint and to offer appropriate support. The Intake Officer may also conduct a preliminary inquiry in order to fully understand the nature of the complaint. If the Intake Officer finds the complaint raises disciplinary issues, the Intake Officer will initiate proceedings under Title IV of the Canons of The Episcopal Church. These canons govern the behavior and discipline of clergy.

It is important to be clear that Title IV governs only the discipline of clergy, not of lay people. For that reason, the suspension of the Title IV statute of limitations applies only to complaints against clergy. Amenability to discipline is part of what clergy agree to when they enter Holy Orders. This by no means diminishes the harm that is caused when lay leaders commit sexual or other forms of abuse. We want to hear about such cases, and we will offer support and help addressing them through civil and other processes.

It is my conviction that the church must do no harm. Whether or not the church is effective in its mission, it must be a place where all people, regardless of age, race, sex or background, are welcome and safe. Our model is the loving kindness and compassion of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, and our goal is reconciliation: to bring all people together into God's reign of justice and peace. Where the church has done harm, the church must repent, seek justice, and work for reconciliation. We have not always done this well, and the next three years provide an opportunity for us to care for those who have been harmed.

This letter of explanation is also, therefore, an invitation. If you have been hurt by the sexual abuse or misconduct of a clergy person, we invite you to make it known to one of our Intake Officers. We will do our best to respond promptly and compassionately and to take the appropriate actions for seeking justice and reconciliation. We are fully aware that not everyone will want a public or disciplinary response, but desires instead the opportunity to be heard and acknowledged. We pledge to preserve your confidentiality and to conform to your wishes to the degree it is possible to do so under the canons and civil law.

Three years is a long time, but it may take a while for some persons to be ready to come forward. This process will continue for the full three years and will be overseen by both the Ninth and Tenth Bishops of Maine. I understand how daunting such an opportunity can be, and we promise to treat you with dignity and respect.

I hope this process, for us in the Diocese of Maine, will strengthen the good work we have already done to be honest and compassionate with one another. I believe that the Spirit of God is with us and will give us the grace and the courage to address what justice and mercy require. My prayer is for all of you who have been harmed and carry that invisible wound within you. May we be instruments of God's healing and may we bear one another on arms of love.

Faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stephen T. Lane". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

The Rt. Rev. Stephen T. Lane
Bishop of Maine

Intake Officers

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