

Discerning Our Common Call Steering Committee Report

The Discerning Our Common Call Steering Committee was formed in 2017 to lead the diocese in discernment around our mission and budget which led into the Special Convention that year. Through discernment conversations, workshops, and practical exercises conducted over several years across the diocese, we have identified our core mission and call as:

Our purpose is to form people as disciples of Jesus Christ who participate in God's mission of reconciliation in the world.

We do so as an interconnected community of schools of discipleship.

Since then, we have continued to work as a strategic vision and mission team to assist the diocese in clarifying and focusing on our distinctive call to join in God's mission as the Episcopal Church in this region. Our work is to help the diocese as a whole identify areas in which transformative discipleship work is being done, or can be done, and help foster the connections and resources to strengthen that work.

In 2022, the DOCC Steering Committee explored potential areas of transformation in creation care, and in ministry with youth and young adults, and continued work on a pilot program to identify, train, and support, ambassadors who help their congregations understand how racial equity and anti-racism work must actively help us grow deeper in our discipleship, and how actively following Jesus leads us into anti-racism and racial equity work.

Our major work this year was to launch and sponsor the *My Way of Love* inventory that was offered across the diocese in October and November, in partnership with the Lifelong Christian Formation Committee. This project invited all in the diocese to complete a brief spiritual inventory online. The anonymous results were then collated by RenewalWorks (a ministry of Forward Movement, itself a discipleship and publishing ministry of the Episcopal Church) and compared against results from across the Episcopal Church and across all Christian denominations to give us a "snapshot" of where we are, as a diocese, in our work of forming disciples.

The results show that across the board, respondents from the Diocese of New Jersey are more likely to have a deeper or centered relationship with Christ than respondents in comparable Episcopal churches. This is a positive reflection on our diocesan focus on developing disciples, and gives us much to celebrate.

The *My Way of Love* inventory report shows:

- Strength in the deeper phases of discipleship among respondents in our diocese.
- We are a diocese of "do-ers," who are especially strong in faithful service in our local communities.
- We rely on the core practices of our worship and Episcopal identity to support our discipleship.

- We have opportunities to use our service ministry and our daily prayer practices to strengthen our trust in the core teachings of our faith.
- There are many more opportunities to grow and deepen discipleship.

Compared with other Episcopalians, respondents in our diocese are significantly more likely to rely on God's presence and power in our lives, to trust Jesus as a guide for decisions and actions day-to-day, and to see Christ as the most important relationship in our lives. This is the core of our common call to form a deep relationship with Jesus. The responses to the *My Way of Love* project suggest that we in the Diocese of New Jersey have been doing that work well.

We have room to grow in those characteristics of discipleship when compared across a broad range of Christian denominations, many of which have substantially different traditions of teaching discipleship and relationship with Jesus than the Episcopal Church has traditionally offered.

Our focus on common purpose of growing in discipleship across *all* the work of our diocese – from formation to finance to governance to worship and beyond – has probably played a significant role in the strength shown in these results, and will support our continued growth in this call.

The *My Way of Love* inventory also gives us some insights into areas of our common life and our faithful practices that can support our continued growth in discipleship. Our responses indicated that the practices and teachings centered in our worship – Eucharist and prayer, the Baptismal Covenant and Creeds, and our relationship with The Book of Common Prayer – are especially important in the daily living of our faith in the Diocese of New Jersey. We are also noticeably strong in and committed to the practice of “serving” with our faith – giving our time and using our spiritual gifts to help and serve others – and to sharing our faith. As a diocese, we appear to be “do-ers,” ready to go outside the walls of the congregation with our faith, and to live out our faith with our “hands” – physical and metaphorical.

This suggests that as we continue to follow our common call, we can “go where the energy is” by using the practices of our worship and service to help us focus on deepening and strengthening discipleship. Action/reflection tools that engage questions of how we see God in the service work we are doing may be very useful in the next stages of our shared growth in the diocese. Opportunities to grow closer to Jesus and strengthen our trust in the core beliefs and teachings of our faith can also come from capitalizing on the experience of shared Eucharist and prayer, and regular scripture reading and reflection.

A fuller description of the inventory results can be found at <https://bit.ly/mwolresults> on the diocesan website.

Much of the work of implementing the insights from the *My Way of Love* inventory will be carried forward by the Lifelong Christian Formation Committee, and by other ministries in the diocese. The Way of Saint Paul, coaching ministries, and established practices of focusing on

developing disciples in all that we do will continue to be significant resources. We recommend repeating the *My Way of Love* inventory process and analysis in a few years, as this can give us a method of benchmarking our common work of forming disciples, and understanding changes in our opportunities to do that work.

In conversation with Bishop Stokes, the Discerning Our Common Call Steering Committee has agreed that it is time for the committee to complete our work *as a committee* as we enter the transition to a new bishop. The work of our common call continues, of course, in and through the diocese as a whole, and we trust that it is in good hands with all of you.

It has been an honor to serve the diocese as Chair of the Discerning Our Common Call Steering Committee these past five years, and I give thanks for our work together, and for the gifts and leadership of the members of the committee listed below, and those who have served on this team at any point in our work together.

Respectfully submitted,
Emily Mellott

Members of the Discerning our Common Call Steering Committee

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