

*Dear Fr. Holt,*

*I am writing to you today on behalf of the Standing Committee in the Diocese of Spokane. As with other dioceses across the church, we have received the consent request for your election as Bishop Coadjutor in the Diocese of Florida. As you are no doubt aware, we've also heard from an unusual number of other voices with widely varying perspectives. We are grateful to have the time allowed by canon to pray, to listen, and to consider thoughtfully our responsibility in consenting, especially when the circumstances seem so fraught.*

*We appreciated the video that you recently made available as a response to stated concerns, and the invitation you made to contact you directly. We are taking you up on your offer.*

*During our most recent meeting, the following questions emerged:*

*— In your video, you offered some helpful clarity about your intent to follow the canons as regards the sacramental rites of the church. This included a commitment to allow full and equal access for LGBTQ+ people to the discernment process and, God willing, ordination should a call be discerned; and to allow the celebration and blessing of a same-sex marriages to take place without requiring clergy & congregations to request the DEPO provisions of B012. We are aware that this must be the result of prayerful discernment, especially in light of your previous statements, some of which gave a different impression. Can you help us better understand how you have come to this current place?*

As I have become more connected to the Diocese of Florida, my understanding of what its next Bishop needs to provide pastorally has evolved. When I was in Texas during the first election, my perspective was largely theoretical, based on an outsider's perception of the diocese's needs. However, since relocating to Jacksonville and working for the diocese, I have gained an insider's understanding of its relational dynamics and internal conflicts. By meeting with nearly all active clergy and key lay leaders, I have gained insights that have helped me develop a more suitable pastoral direction.

I have always understood the provisions outlined in Resolution B012 that allow for DEPO as a way for same-sex couples seeking marriage to receive a "gracious pastoral provision" in dioceses with traditionalist bishops. However, in the Diocese of Florida, some members of the clergy view DEPO as a negative practice because it is required for any rector who wishes to preside over a same-sex marriage, rather than being graciously offered. Currently, only four out of more than sixty congregations in the Diocese of Florida have DEPO in place. One priest I spoke with described feeling like a "second-class citizen" because their congregation is required to report to a different bishop. However, others have found DEPO to be a helpful and practical way to maintain peace with the diocese and the current bishop.

I aspire to be the bishop for all the clergy and all the congregations in the diocese. I believe in mediating conflicts rather than simply arbitrating them. The most effective way to achieve common agreements is by engaging in collaborative discussions that involve diverse perspectives and broad support. It is my utmost priority to ensure that all clergy and lay leaders feel equally valued and empowered in their shared leadership of the diocese.

I admire the approach taken by Bishop Andy Doyle when he implemented same-sex marriage rites in the Diocese of Texas. He facilitated a dialogue between the most conservative and most progressive rectors to develop a policy that worked for the entire diocese. This agreement has been successful for the Diocese of Texas, and I believe a similar approach could be beneficial for Florida. The priests need to rebuild trust and respect and find a practical way to maintain fellowship while allowing each other to minister based on their individual contexts and freedom of conscience under the Lord.

My own discernment has also been shaped by the fact that the canons provide authorized liturgical rites for the marriage of same-sex couples, and the laws of the United States recognize same-sex marriage. This makes it my canonical duty as a bishop to provide for them. While clergy can exercise personal freedom about whether to perform same-sex marriage, it is the right of couples to have it available now that legal protections and provisions exist. Such safeguards did not exist 25 years ago when I became ordained, nor 20 years ago when Bishop Howard was consecrated. The canons and civil laws concerning marriage equality have changed dramatically, and in ordination, a bishop commits to acknowledge and abide within these canonical and legal bounds.

*— You have sincerely expressed your regret for the hurt caused by your comments during the “meet and greet” sessions that preceded the first election. You noted that you have apologized several times publicly, and privately where possible. Would you be able to share a sense of the response you’ve received from those who were impacted?*

I have been actively reaching out to all the Episcopal Church bishops with jurisdiction to address the hurt caused by my comments and reconcile our relationships. I am willing and open to engaging in these discussions.

Here in Florida, I have worked to establish a sense of trust and connection with the local community in Florida, prioritizing actively listening to concerns and attending Anti-Racism and Reconciliation Committee meetings and UBE events within the diocese. Attached (See pages 5-6 of this document) is a letter from Ms. Alma Flowers, the president of the local UBE in Jacksonville. She has given me permission to share this. Please note that she clarifies that she is not speaking on behalf of UBE, but her words reflect the kind and gracious response that I have received locally and the movement toward reconciliation that we are achieving.

I have also apologized publicly and privately to individuals outside of the Diocese of Florida whom I know were harmed by my words. I have been disappointed that the social media furor over my election has limited the opportunities for genuine dialogue with some of these people, but I remain open to continued dialogue and reconciliation.

*— You've stated your heartfelt intent to "improve the relational health of the diocese." The Standing Committee of the Diocese of Florida announced that they were working with the Bp. Mary Gray-Reeves on a process of listening and reconciliation. How do you envision continuing the work of godly reconciliation that is clearly needed in the Diocese of Florida, as well as in the wider church?*

During my first College of Bishops retreat, I had the pleasure of spending time with Bishop Mary Gray-Reeves. I was impressed by her wisdom and ability to mediate, as well as her attentive listening skills. As a result of our discussions, I recommended that the leadership of the Diocese of Florida engage with her to facilitate a listening process.

That work is now underway, and our steering committee has established six objectives for the process.

1. To meet the needs of the communicants of the Diocese of Florida who would like to share their experiences and be heard.
2. To build a practice of communication that includes shared language, values, and commitments that support a healthy diocesan culture.
3. To create and facilitate a trusted space for clergy and lay to dialog across differences.
4. To nurture opportunities for clergy to develop trust, mutual respect, and accountability, facilitating collegiality and cohesion in the Diocese of Florida.
5. To hear lay members of the diocese, recognizing their ability to promote the development of trust, mutual respect and accountability within their parish, region, and the diocese.
6. To enable healthy functioning of the Diocese of Florida through the provision of needed information to all staff and committees.

If given the opportunity to serve as the next Bishop of Florida, I will embrace these leadership goals and strive to see them realized. I believe that Bp. Mary's skills and experience will be incredibly valuable as a neutral third-party support and facilitator, and I would continue to utilize her services and rely on her counsel for the foreseeable future. The insights gathered from the listening process will play a significant role in shaping the diocesan community here in Florida for what I hope will be a long and fruitful episcopacy and season of ministry for our entire diocese.

*Our next Standing Committee meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, June 21. Any information you can provide before that time will be most helpful, and carefully*

*considered. If you have any questions, or wish to speak with me directly, please feel free; my contact information is included below.*

*God's peace,  
Jane+*

*The Rev. Jane Schmoetzer  
All Saints' Episcopal Church, Richland, WA*