

September 22, 2017

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

Last weekend at a meeting of the clergy of the Dioceses of Western New York and Northwestern Pennsylvania, Bishop Franklin announced that he will retire on April 3, 2019, as required by the canons of the Episcopal Church. His letter, which you can read here, [episcopalwny.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Retirement-letter.pdf] says he has returned from sabbatical “full of energy and ideas that we will explore together over that time.” Chief among those ideas, as we discussed with the clergy of both dioceses, is the possibility of our dioceses sharing a future.

At our upcoming diocesan conventions, we will propose that we spend the next year convening discussions among leaders across our region about how we might create more opportunity for mission by working together. This process will culminate in October 2018, when our dioceses plan to meet together for a joint convention in Niagara Falls.

If our discussions in the next year are fruitful, as we hope they will be, we would anticipate that in 2018, the Diocese of Western New York would elect Bishop Rowe as its bishop provisional for five years beginning in April 2019, when Bishop Franklin retires. During the first three years of the partnership, our two dioceses would work together to deepen our relationships and develop shared mission priorities. In October 2021, we would re-evaluate the partnership and then, in October 2024, decide whether we wanted to continue it beyond the five-year mark.

In proposing a partnership between our dioceses, we are not seeking simply to save money, although we believe that will be possible, and we are not aiming just to share a bishop. We believe that our dioceses have complementary strengths and challenges, and that together we are well suited to respond to God’s call in our region. Our communities share an industrial past, a Rust Belt culture, and a love for the natural beauty of the Lake Erie watershed, and our congregations are home to resilient people who know that by working together and staying focused on mission, we can weather uncertain times and a changing church.

Between now and our conventions—October 27 and 28 in Western New York and November 10-11 in Northwestern Pennsylvania—we hope that you will join us in praying about the opportunity we have before us and thinking about your hopes, concerns, and questions. We look forward to being together soon and to embarking on this year of discernment about the future that God has in store for the people of both our dioceses.

Faithfully,

The Rt. Rev. R. William Franklin
Bishop of Western New York

The Rt. Rev. Sean W. Rowe
Bishop of Northwestern Pennsylvania

James Isaac
President, Standing Committee
Diocese of Western New York

Jack Malovich
President, Standing Committee
Diocese of Northwestern Pennsylvania