



THE
EPISCOPAL
CHURCH®
IN MISSISSIPPI

THE RT. REV. BRIAN R. SEAGE
Bishop

July 11, 2020

Dear Friends,

We find ourselves at a moment in time that requires action by our Diocese and her leadership. The COVID-19 pandemic and crisis has forced some longstanding issues to the forefront of my concerns. The financial history of Gray Center, our camp and conference facility, is a troubled one. Well-intentioned, but unsuccessful programs and management practices allowed the accumulation of significant debt to the Trustees of the Diocese as well as other Diocesan and private entities. With the cancellation of virtually all income producing events for the year 2020, and little light at the end of the tunnel for months to come, the survival of the original mission of the Gray Center, Camp Bratton-Green, was in jeopardy without consideration of significant restructuring of Gray Center operations.

In order to meet these challenges, the leadership of the Diocese has decided upon the following course of action: Gray Center operations will be immediately suspended. Our plan and sincere hopes are that Bratton-Green will be able to reopen in the Spring of 2021. We will immediately begin a process of discernment regarding the Conference Center and the 550 acres on which it is situated. The simplest and most efficient solution would be the sale of some or all of the properties on which Conference Center operations are located. But all options will be explored and evaluated. This was an incredibly difficult and emotional decision. I am grateful for the elected leadership of the Diocese and the Board of Managers who joined me in this initial discernment. The Executive Committee of our Diocese partnered with me in making the final decision.

In part, the suspension of operations at Gray Center has been taken to preserve and ensure the sustainability of the camping ministry of the Diocese for future generations of children and youth. It is my sincere hope and prayer that a vaccine for COVID-19 soon will be widely available so that campers, staff, and volunteers may gather and make lasting memories at Camp Bratton-Green in the summer of 2021 and beyond.

To that end, net proceeds of the *Seeds You Sow* capital campaign, which as of July 9 equaled \$454,316.42, have been set aside and designated solely for improvements and construction at Camp Bratton-Green. To be sure, none of the *Seeds You Sow* monies will be used to settle the financial affairs of Gray Center. The gifts offered through this campaign are an extraordinary example of generosity and

JOHN MAURY ALLIN EPISCOPAL DIOCESAN HOUSE

P.O. Box 23107, Jackson, MS 39225-3107 • 118 North Congress Street, Jackson, MS 39201-2604
Phone: (601) 948-5954 • Toll-free: 866-550-0872 • Fax: (601) 354-3401 • E-Mail: info@dioms.org • Website: www.dioms.org
Facebook: www.facebook.com/TheEpiscopalChurchinMississippi • Twitter: @EpisDioMS #being1church

stewardship. We could have never foreseen the crisis created by COVID-19. Please know that your gifts, present and past, will be preserved, honored and used for the continuance and preservation of the mission God is calling us to redefine on Way Road.

You should also know that the Capital Campaign Task Force, created by the Diocesan Executive Committee in December of 2019 with representatives appointed by me, continues its work. It is preparing a full accounting of the contributions, pledges and expenses of the campaign. Using the Interim Report presented earlier this year at Annual Council as the starting point, the final report will be shared with the Diocese at large after it is submitted and approved by the Executive Committee later this year. The final report no doubt will show that we fell significantly short of our campaign goal of \$5 million, and also short of the amount of pledges announced in the waning days of Phase I of the campaign as being received. Rest assured, we will work diligently to leverage your generous contributions and gifts to the campaign so that Camp Bratton-Green will better accommodate camping programs and activities for years to come.

I realize this may come as a shock to many of you, but we are at the point of triage. These decisions are being made in order to save our primary mission – Camp Bratton-Green. Concerns about Gray Center have been an ongoing struggle for many years. Ironically, 2020 looked to be the best financial year for Gray Center in history before the impacts of COVID. The Gray Center staff, led by Susan Merrill, are to be commended for those efforts. I speak for myself and other Diocesan leadership about how we deeply appreciate the hard work that went into making that a possibility. We share a deep concern for those individuals that will be financially impacted by these decisions, as well as the future uncertainty this creates for them. We will work hard to mitigate this for our current employees and will offer support to them going forward.

As we move forward with this new vision of Bratton-Green we hope to create a system that is financially sustainable, and the leadership of the Diocese is committed to learning from past mistakes and creating better oversight and management. This may require new management structures, or oversight in the future. We ask your prayers for diocesan leadership, employees of Gray Center, and all those affected by these changes. Prayers for guidance, wisdom, understanding, and perseverance are greatly appreciated.

We are Easter people. Our faith rests on the belief that from death comes resurrection, new life and hope. Gray Center's ministry is in the process of being made new.

“Behold, I make all things new. And he said to me, “Write for these words are true and faithful.” Rev 21:5

May the peace of Christ be always with you,
+Brian

BRS:pj

JOHN MAURY ALLIN EPISCOPAL DIOCESAN HOUSE

P.O. Box 23107, Jackson, MS 39225-3107 • 118 North Congress Street, Jackson, MS 39201-2604
Phone: (601) 948-5954 • Toll-free: 866-550-0872 • Fax: (601) 354-3401 • E-Mail: info@dioms.org • Website: www.dioms.org
Facebook: www.facebook.com/TheEpiscopalChurchinMississippi • Twitter: [#being1church](https://twitter.com/EpisDioMS)