Gathering Space Task Force
Report to the 184th Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Missouri, Nov 3-4, 2023

The Charge: Is it feasible for the Diocese of MO to pursue creating a space for the diocese to gather together for shared ministry, formation, recreation and fun?

Who we've received input from: The delegates, clergy and guests attending the 183rd Convention (table talks); diocesan members who participated in the 2023 iSeek survey; Bishop Johnson; diocesan influencers; organizers of conferences and retreats; conference and camp directors.

What we heard: Try to keep the drive from any church less than 1.5 hours; emphasize children, family, youth and young adult programs, and ministries for care of creation; get buy-in from the 'people in the pews' before committing to moving ahead with purchasing property or a facility; try sharing a gathering space with a broader audience and expanded mission; consider partnering with an already established camp or retreat center(s).

Centers visited or interviewed within the boundaries of the Episcopal Diocese of MO:

- Eagle Rock Retreat Center - Eagle Rock, MO.
- Eagle Wings Ministry - West Plains, MO.
- Ebenezer Retreat Center - Steelville, MO.
- El Ritiro Franciscan Retreat Center - Dittmer, MO.
- H&M Retreats - Hermann, MO.
- Herman retreat - Hermann, MO.
- Legacy Cabins at Sun Valley Youth Ranch - Canton, MO.
- Mercy Conference & Retreat Center - Crève Coeur, MO.
- Pallottine Renewal Center - Florissant, MO.
- Sherwood Forest Camp- Hillsboro, MO.
- Spring Bluff Retreat Center - Union, MO.
- TEC Conference Center - Fetus, MO.
- Windridge Solitude - Lonedell, MO.
- YMCA Trout Lodge Lakeside Camp - Potosi, MO.
- Wurtz Rd Lodge & property (194 acres) - Hermann, MO.

Centers visited or interviewed outside the Episcopal Diocese of Missouri:

- Barbara C. Harris Camp and Conference Center - Greenfield, NH.
- Bellwether Farm Camp, Retreat, and Education Center - Wakeman, OH.
- Holy Wisdom Monastery - Madison, WI.
- Kanuga Camp & Conference Center - Hendersonville, NC.
- Plainsong Farm - Rockford, MI.

The Task Force's conclusions: The idea of a large Gathering Space is new for the Diocese of MO, making it difficult to 'Dream' about that future. YES - it is feasible for us to pursue this dream of a gathering space! First, however, the diocese needs time to develop a *culture of gathering together* before leaping forward to establish a large gathering space.

Recommendations moving forward: Start smaller! Obtain experience on a smaller scale (in the range of 20-75 people) at an established gathering venue or meeting/retreat center. Investigate sharing an existing gathering space or partnering with an established camp or retreat center that is already offering programs similar to what people across the diocese might want so we can learn before we leap.

Next Steps: Identify established centers in eastern Missouri that offer the opportunity for a multi-year sharing of facilities and land. Envision starting with a 'micro-retreat center' philosophy - modest accommodations with some land for smaller retreats and short stays. Contemplate if both a rural and urban center could be sustained. Consider what diocesan staff support would be necessary to sufficiently support a smaller center(s), and evaluate what staffing would be needed to grow into a larger venue. Pursue offering retreat programs in 2024 or 2025. Invite others to join the task force who might be interested in joining us in this preliminary culture-building journey.

The active Gathering Space Task Force members during 2023:
The Rev. Dcn. Betty Bowen (Trinity - St. Charles)
Ms. Betty Bowersox, Co-leader (Grace – Kirkwood)
Ms. Angela Breeher (St. Paul's – St. Louis)
The Rev. Dcn Loretta Go (St. Martin's Ellisville & All Saints & Ascension – Northwoods)
The Rev. Kevin McGrane, Co-leader (Trinity – St. James)
The Rev. Bill Nesbit (Grace – Jefferson City)
The Rev. Dr. Clive Samson (Faith Christian Church of India – Ballwin)
Ms. Machelle West (All Saints & Ascension - Northwoods)
   Assisted by Facilitator Extraordinaire - Ms. Katie Ong (Consultant for Strategic Visioning)