Dear Friends in Christ,

Accept, O Lord, our thanks and praise for all that you have done for us. We thank you for the splendor of the whole creation, for the beauty of this world, for the wonder of life, and for the mystery of love. We thank you for the blessing of family and friends, and for the loving care which surrounds us on every side.

The prayer that begins and ends this letter is from A General Thanksgiving, in the Book of Common Prayer on page 836. We all have so much to be thankful for as Episcopalians in the Diocese of Alabama; I am especially grateful for the privilege of serving as your bishop, and for the blessing of family and friends.

I want to thank you, friends, for your ministries and leadership in the Diocese of Alabama. There are a lot of things that contribute to this being one of the best dioceses in the Episcopal Church, and certainly our approach to stewardship is critically important. Many of our sister dioceses use assessments: each parish is required to give an amount determined by the diocese according to budget and membership numbers. Our system of voluntary proportional giving relies completely on you, and the conversations you have with your committees and congregations each year as you prayerfully consider what proportion of your budget you will commit to the work of our diocese for programs and ministries that we do together. I am convinced that this system of voluntary giving allows our diocese to thrive in service to our Lord, and I thank you all for your faithful stewardship, in your parishes and in our diocese. I want you all to know that your diocesan staff and I are always here as resources to you in your role as stewards and stewardship leaders, and to your parish leadership and to your entire congregation.

As always, it will be a challenge to fund our diocesan ministries and programs, and we are hoping that the parish covenants will continue to be generous. It goes without saying – but I’ll say it anyway – that the more we receive from the parishes, the more we will be able to do together as a diocese. An additional opportunity for us to be generous will be added to all the others in 2020, as we joyfully prepare to elect and welcome our next bishop, who will serve first as Bishop Coadjutor, and then as the 12th Bishop of Alabama. I am excited for us to welcome that person and work alongside her or him as we continue to share the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord.

I’m grateful to Danielle Dunbar for putting together the enclosed brief report, and I hope you will find it a helpful snapshot of what we do together and who we are serving together in your conversations about your parish supporting our diocese. It is intended to be a teaching tool for those members who are not aware of the relationships and ministries available in our diocese, and a reminder about why your proportional giving is so important.
We request that you return your covenant pledge form no later than **January 21, 2020** in order to plan for the coming year. You may do so by mail, online, or by email. If your vestry has approved the proportional covenant before your Annual Parish Meeting, please go ahead and let us know. It is very helpful to receive your pledge prior to the final development of the proposed budget when we will allocate the resources God is making available through you.

*Lord, grant us the gift of your Spirit, that we may know Christ and make him known; and through him, at all times and in all places, may give thanks to you in all things.*

God’s Peace,

[Signature]

The Rt. Rev. John McKee Sloan  
Bishop of the Episcopal Church in Alabama