The question is:

The divide in our country is growing and the need to come together is obvious. At the same time the pandemic is making it difficult to come together safely. How do we as churches step up as leaders in our communities to help break down divisions and prejudices during this pandemic? Similarly, how would you as Bishop lead us through this time as a diocese?

It is no surprise that the uncertainty of the pandemic has further alienated people, while also shining a bright light on the inherent inequities of our systems. The collision of a global pandemic, deep seated racial and economic inequities, and our increasingly combative political tribalism has created a perfect storm.

As Jesus calmed the waters in Matthew 14, we too are called on to help people navigate this storm. When the world around us is in chaos, we can serve as a non-anxious presence, as Jesus did when he walked across the water to his disciples who sat, terrified, in the storm that battered their small boat, saying simply, “Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.” Christ is with us through the chaos. Christ is with us as we speak truth and seek justice. Christ is with us as we sow and nurture God’s love in our congregations and our communities.

During times of disruption, leadership matters more than ever. As Bishop, I would communicate regularly with our congregations, providing relevant theological reflections, resources, and calls to action that would help us each find our way through this time. I would be in regular contact with our clergy to understand the unique challenges and concerns of their congregations. I would also encourage churches to support one another in their efforts, sharing resources and ideas. I am encouraged by how our churches have risen to the occasion to ensure that they continue to serve each of our unique communities.

We begin by connecting as church communities. Masked, social distanced in-person services and online services do not feel like church as we know it, but they still nourish us. We must be creative, not simply replicating what we have always done in different formats but seeking new ways to build connection. When we are grounded in our connections to one another, our Scripture, our Baptismal Covenants, and our deep faith, we are able to speak our truth with love to the larger communities in which we live.

We follow in Jesus’ footsteps by being truth tellers, bringing deep wounds and injustices to light so they can be healed. Our Presiding Bishop, Michael Curry, models this leadership as a strong voice for truth, justice, and healing. He says, “reconciliation is the spiritual practice of seeking loving, liberating and life-giving relationship with God and one another, and striving to heal and transform injustice and brokenness in ourselves, our communities, institutions, and society.” This is our work.
People need the message and leadership of our church and its people now more than ever. A recent Pew Research Center poll shows that while 2% of those surveyed say the coronavirus has weakened their faith, 25% declare the virus has deepened it. In vulnerable times, people yearn for God’s message of love.

As Christians, we know how to love one another across conflict and difference. When we break bread together every Sunday, our political and social differences fall away, and we are able to love one another. We must model this way of being for our communities.