God calls us to be a people of reconciliation, responding to the pain and brokenness in our world resulting from the sin of systemic racism and racial injustice. The ministry of reconciliation is an integral part of the church’s mission and our baptismal vows as Episcopalians. It is deeply rooted in scripture: “All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself. ... So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.” 2 Corinthians 5:18-20

The purpose of the commission is to assist and equip clergy and lay leaders to fulfill the mission of the Church, live out the commitments of our baptismal vows, and build God’s dream of the Beloved Community. We want to create safe and sacred space in which everyone can examine issues of racism from whatever level of awareness they may have. We recognize that some have been studying these issues for many years, while others may be less familiar. This learning is a lifelong process and we will work together to address issues of systemic racial injustice and to facilitate change within our congregations, diocese and local communities.

Our goal is to provide resources for clergy and lay leaders to assist in understanding systemic racism; empower them to recognize and confront racism; and reform policy, practices and institutions in our church and communities. The overarching goal is to dismantle racism, and to achieve equity and justice for the most marginalized and harmed among us, especially our Black and Brown neighbors, in our church and communities.

Bishop Mark van Koevering asked Mr. Whit Whitaker and The Rev. Dr. Carol Ruthven to serve as co-chairs of the commission. Bishop Mark van Koevering and several clergy and lay members attended the annual Unity Breakfast and participated in the Freedom March in Lexington on January 20, 2020, in observation of the Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday. The Rev. Ruthven preached at Berea College on February 25, 2020, in observance of Black History Month.

Following the brutal murder of George Floyd, a 46-year-old black man, by white police officers on May 25, 2020, in Minneapolis, there was heightened interest in the work of the commission. Twenty-five clergy and lay members joined the commission and have been organized in three working groups: learn, pray, and act. The learn group is chaired by The Rev. Carol Ruthven, the pray group is chaired by The Rev. Keila Thomas, and the act group is chaired by Mr. Whit Whitaker.

A diocesan-wide worship service focused on the theme of dismantling racism was held on Sunday, July 26. A thirty-day diocesan prayer vigil was held during the month of August. An online training program that will be offered to clergy and lay leaders has been developed. The dates for launching the online training program have not yet been set. There were no requests from congregations for mini-grants that were available in the commission’s 2020 budget. The commission is planning to offer learning opportunities to address one topic a month in 2021 to build upon the initial online training program. The intention of these monthly learning opportunities is to explore in greater detail many of the topics pertinent in understanding white privilege, racial injustice, and dismantling racism.
Respectfully submitted,

Mr. Whit Whitaker and The Rev. Dr. Carol Ruthven, Co-chairs