

Bishop Loya's Address to Convention

September 26th, 2020

A year ago today, I was in the early stages of discerning with you a possible call to be your tenth bishop. I will freely admit that back then, I was curious, but not convinced. As I came to know you, what I heard began to resonate deeply with what was stirring in my own heart. I heard a longing to be more deeply rooted in Jesus and his way of love. I heard a longing to boldly embrace the church's changing landscape, because you believe that God is not done with us yet. I heard you wanted to get on board with Minnesota's rapidly shifting demographics and fully receive the gifts of our diversity. I heard a longing to nurture vital congregations of every size, shape, persuasion and location, from the beautiful north woods to the bustling city centers, from the rich soil of the river valleys to our rolling prairie vistas. When I heard all of that, I thought, that's a place I want to be, and those are people I want to be with.

So, beloved, here we are. We have just concluded our 163rd diocesan convention in the midst of a crippling pandemic, and against the backdrop of a global uprising for racial justice. We are in the midst of one of the most challenging seasons any of us have lived through. Today, at the dawn of a new era for our world and our diocese, we are faced with a choice: We could simply throw up our hands in despair because none of us have been here before, we can simply keep our heads down and hope for the best, or, we can thank God that we have been given this moment, that we have been invited to join the Holy Spirit in doing a new thing; in bring about new life

and new vitality, hope in the midst of despair, light in the darkness, and throw ourselves fully into that invitation.

I can't speak for you, but I'm going to use all the breath I have to join the Spirit in breathing new life into our church and our world. And for all the complexities of this moment, joining with the Spirit is remarkably simple

I believe we are being called to first return our focus to the basics of discipleship: daily practices that help us follow Jesus as a whole way of life. Discipleship is our core business. When we deeply ground ourselves in it, I believe we will see that bear fruit in at least three major ways.

- 1) Faithful Innovation: joining the Spirit in new ways to proclaim and live out the gospel.
- 2) Justice: joining the Spirit in becoming the beloved community
- 3) Vital faith communities of every kind, in every place.

I am proposing that these serve as four priorities that will help shape our life together as a diocese: discipleship, faithful innovation, justice, and vitality. As weary as this summer has left us, as uncertain as the road ahead appears, the question before us is clear: will we, will each one of us, join what the Spirit is doing among and around us?

Discipleship

What people most long for in church is spiritual depth, support in discovering how the God we encounter in scripture and sacrament actually matters in our lives and the world. We find that depth by focusing on the practices that help us follow Jesus as a whole way of life (scripture, prayer, worship, service).

My great hope is that in the years to come we will focus less on preserving a particular form of our institution, and focus more on just practicing the way of Jesus together, of living in a way that shows who Jesus is.

This looks like every individual and every community committed to praying daily that we may render a sense of God's peace and presence in our daily lives and recognize the Spirit when we see her in the world and in our neighbors. It looks like dwelling in scripture both in private and every time we gather so that our whole minds and souls might be shaped by the story of God's love we meet there. It looks like every one of us loving and serving with the poor and marginalized, it looks like following the simple rules of life like we find in Gospel Based Discipleship or the Way of Love.

Will you join the Spirit by returning to following Jesus as a whole way of life?

Faithful Innovation

When we start there, deeply rooted in Jesus and well practiced as disciples, we are able to join the Spirit in three ways.

The first is faithful innovation. The good news of Jesus is the same, yesterday, today, and forever. But *how* and *where* we gather, how we raise up leaders, and the ways we share the good news with our neighbors is always changing.

In this season, our beloved church is being radically re-shaped, by cultural forces beyond our control, by the disruption of pandemic, changing demographics, ways we connect, and so much more. Faithful innovation is about joining the Spirit by creating spaces to experiment: planting new communities, partnerships between congregations, reimagining what our buildings are for, discovering new ways of joining our neighbors and sharing the life-giving, liberating, and loving way of Jesus. I hope this will look like a culture of bold and courageous living, of being fearless in the face of failure, and following how the Spirit is reshaping and renewing us.

Will you join the Spirit in making all things new?

Justice

Well-practiced disciples also join the Spirit in establishing justice for those who have been cast aside and kept down by the empires of the world.

When George Floyd was murdered this summer, he became another name in a long list of black men and women who have been brutally killed by police. The global uprising that started in the streets of Minneapolis is unlike anything most of us have seen in our lifetime, and I believe it is the activity of the Holy Spirit in the world.

Joining the Spirit's work of justice and building beloved community will look like a comprehensive strategy for every faith community to learn, pray, and act to dismantle systemic racism in our church, and to join that work in the world. We are building our approach to that work even now, and I will soon be asking every faith community in our diocese to take their part in it.

Joining the Spirit's work of justice will look like recognizing Minnesota's rapidly changing demographics, and developing an intentional plan to nurture and grow our multicultural faith communities.

And it will require us to account for our ongoing complicity in the decimation of indigenous cultures, and receive again the gifts of Minnesota's first people, and first Episcopalians.

Will you join the ways the Spirit is bringing about justice?

Vitality

In all my years serving in the church, I have seen vital, thriving communities of every shape, size, and context, from the grandest cathedrals to the smallest gatherings. The common denominator across all of them is an almost singular focus on Jesus and his way of love, and seeing themselves as part of God's bigger story of loving and healing the world.

I have quickly fallen in love with every corner of our vast and beautiful state, and with the diverse people spread across all of our faith communities. I dream of a diocese where we see ourselves, not as 94 separate churches, but one church in 94 places. Where every faith community, of every size, shape, culture, and persuasion, is bearing vital witness to the way of Jesus in their community.

Our smallest congregations are among our biggest gifts. So our focus on vitality will include renewing our model for team ministries in this season, it will look like a long-term plan for developing ministry in smaller towns, and it will look like connecting best practices and creating a culture of ongoing discovery for all of our faith communities.

Will you join the Spirit in making your faith community a vital witness to the gospel?

Conclusion

When I look out over the coming years, I dream of us returning to the basics discipleship so we can join the Spirit in innovation, justice, and vital congregations. So where do we start? First, I'm inviting every Minnesota Episcopalian to start now by praying every day for your faith community and our diocese, re-committing to the basic practices of discipleship, dwelling in scripture, listening for what the Spirit is saying in the lives of your neighbors, and trying new ways of joining them.

Next, I hope the four things I have outlined today will shape our life together as a diocese, and I am in the process of forming teams to begin laying some concrete plans for ways we might begin to experiment and join the Spirit in all this.

And finally, I hope you will join us as we dive into this work formally next Tuesday at 2:00. Our weekly Leading Beyond the Blizzard webinars will shift from being places where we have navigated the immediate crisis of the pandemic, to being spaces to hear stories of how these things are already beginning to happen around Minnesota, reflect on what we are learning together, and go deeper. This work belongs to every single one of us, and the only faithful and effective way to do it is together.

This landscape may be new to us, but God's people have been here before. God has seen God's people through every imaginable challenge, disaster, exile, and heartbreak. God has helped us climb the highest mountains, and walked us through the deepest valleys, and God is not done with us. When we dwell in scripture, when we gather for worship, when we share our lives, when we practice listening for the Spirit at work around us, then this journey will not feel like a march through a desolate wilderness, but an exhilarating journey into God's fuller, more just, and more loving future.

This is the 163rd time that Episcopalians in Minnesota have gathered to do what we are doing this weekend. 163 years of joining the Spirit in bringing forth what is new. What an immeasurable gift to be invited to take our place in the story that began when God brought forth

the first light in the darkness, that continued when Sarah and Abraham were chosen and called, through liberation from slavery, the painful disruption of exile, the scared disciples, the empty tomb, Bishop Whipple, and Enmegaboh and countless saints besides. That is our story. Thanks be to God that we have been invited to take our place in it, in this moment, with each other. Thanks be to God for the immeasurable gift of this new journey together.

Submitted this 26th Day of September, in the year of Our Lord 2020,

The Right Reverend Craig W. Loya

X Bishop of Minnesota

If you'd like to watch the Bishop's Address, or learn more about the Priorities outlined in this address, visit episcopalmn.org/priorities.