



## A Pastoral Message about Lent from Bishop Loya

Grace to you and peace from God our Creator, and from God's son Jesus, who has entered fully into the depths of our sufferings, and who, for love of us and of all Creation, has defeated death and shown us the way to liberation and life everlasting, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Since the earliest days of the Church, Lent has been a season of intentional fasting, prayer, and repentance. The faithful follow in Jesus' footsteps in the wilderness. During this season we wrestle, as Jesus did, with the seductive lies of empire, domination, self-reliance, and about whose lives matter. We undertake this period of wrestling in order to turn our lives around, that life after Easter might be lived in the light and power of the resurrection, even in a world still in thrall to sin and death.

As this Lent begins, we are acutely aware of the grinding power sin and death continue to exert. Over the past week, we have witnessed heartbreaking scenes of terror and suffering as a war of pure aggression is waged in Ukraine; the United Nations has just released [the latest report](#) detailing the alarming urgency of the climate crisis; and we are reminded at every turn of the devastating toll systemic racism exacts on the lives of our siblings of color. All of this comes as we continue to carry the weariness and complexity of pandemic, even as we seem, blessedly, to be in its waning stages.

What can we possibly do in the face of so many reasons for despair?

***Return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; rend your hearts and not your clothing. Return to the Lord, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love. Blow the trumpet in Zion; sanctify a fast; call a solemn assembly; gather the people. Sanctify the congregation; assemble the aged; gather the children, even infants at the breast. - Joel 2:12-13, 15-16***

Even and especially in such a time as this, our ancient practices are a gift. I believe that God is calling the Episcopal Church in Minnesota to become small communities of spiritual practice and shared life together, beacons of light in this corner of our dark world. As a gathered people and a sanctified congregation, rending our hearts, repenting of the ways of empire and returning to the One who loves us, we can find again the living water of life in Jesus Christ. God willing, our life together and with our neighbors can become an oasis of God's truth, God's justice, and God's peace in the desert of temptation and sin.

I write today to invite every Minnesota Episcopalian to observe a holy Lent, and to do so in three particular ways.

### **Repentance and Fasting for God's Justice**

Again and again in the past two years, violent acts, poisonous rhetoric, cynical disinformation, voter disenfranchisement, environmental degradation and more have exposed the deep racism



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that forms the foundation of our common life in this country. Since the murder of George Floyd in 2020, many of us from racially privileged groups have come to see the depth of this foundational sin in ways we had not previously known. As I hope you have heard me say many times before, the work of racial justice and healing is not a task or a project we undertake, but is a lifelong process of spiritual conversion that is a core part of what it means to follow the way of Jesus.

We have also reached a critical point of no return with climate change, and the future of human flourishing on our planet hangs very much in the balance. Our original vocation as human beings is to tend and keep the world God has made, and collectively, we have failed to do this. The looming climate crisis will compound the injustices of race, wealth, and gender already built into the world's political economy.

I am asking you to designate one day each week to repent of your complicity in the sins of racism and the decimation of the planet, however that complicity may appear in your own life, and to find some manner of fast as way of praying for the healing of the nations and the planet. Fasting is an ancient spiritual discipline found in many faith traditions, and in our culture of excess, thoughtfully and safely undertaking such a restriction—whether that's limiting the consumption of meat, processed foods, addictive substances, social media intake—or any other meaningful constraint, is a profound way to embody our concerns for the ways in which we, collectively, have taken more than our share from the world and one another.

### **Prayer for the Spirit's Power**

Daily prayer is the foundational practice of a life of faith; it is water for our souls. It unites our spirit more fully with God's Spirit, and allows that Spirit to work in, through, and among us. We recently shared [a series of suggested spiritual practices](#) to try on for Lent. I commend these practices to you, and call on every Minnesota Episcopalian to pray daily for God's Holy Spirit to be poured out upon our diocese, that our small communities of spiritual practice might witness boldly to the way of love in a world that is so full of suffering, fear, and hatred. Find a time each day, whether it's five minutes while your coffee is brewing, at midday, or before you go to bed at night, to intentionally speak to and listen for God, sharing concerns and thanksgivings from your own life, for our ECMN community, and for the world.

### **Rest**

I see the deep weariness of our lay and ordained leaders everywhere I go, and I feel that weariness in my own soul and body. The past two years have been grueling, even traumatizing, but God is neither served nor glorified by our exhaustion. In the Hebrew Scriptures, sabbath—a weekly pattern of rest—is an act of resistance against the forces of empire that tell us that human beings are valued for what they produce and achieve, rather than who they are. Sabbath reminds us who we are and whose we are, and reminds us again that we are made, not for toiling to enrich imperial masters, but for loving creation in the pattern of Love, our Creator. I ask every



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Minnesota Episcopalians to engage in some regular, weekly practice of rest. The rigors of caring for loved ones and the limitations of our various jobs might make a full day of rest each week difficult or impossible, and the challenges of our lives mean that what we call “rest” is often some form of mindless consumption. As valuable as that kind of down time can be for our weary bodies and minds, I invite you to find a regular period of rest each week that will leave you feeling restored and renewed.

Repentance and fasting, daily prayer, and sabbath rest: I believe deepening our commitment to these practices this Lent will help us to withstand the forces of evil that so dominate our daily lives, and will help us live more fully into our vision of becoming a church that looks and acts like Jesus—small communities that make a big impact on our world through the power of love. Over these next five weeks, we will walk with Jesus through temptation, hunger, thirst, mockery, deceit, betrayal, state-sanctioned torture, and death. Whatever the depth of your or the world’s suffering in these days, make no mistake Jesus has known it and draws closer to us than we could possibly imagine. As we walk with Jesus in these days, as we stand closer in solidarity with those who, in Howard Thurman’s great phrase, have their backs against the wall, we together will know and feel the central truth of the Paschal Mystery: the way of the cross, the way of self-giving love, is the only way to true life and peace.

I am so deeply grateful to God to be learning to walk this way with each of you. Have a blessed Lent.

Grace and Peace,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Craig Loya".

**The Right Reverend Craig Loya**  
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Episcopal Church in Minnesota