ECMN
Episcopal Church in Minnesota

Bishop's Address to Convention - October 2026

To All God's Beloved in Minnesota,

Grace to you and Peace from God our Creator and from the Lord Jesus Christ, by whose resurrection we have courage to face every fearful thing with the fearless power of love, and stand firm in hope amidst things that are passing away.

While I was on sabbatical this summer, I'm pretty sure I had a minor midlife crisis. Don't worry, it didn't involve anything more destructive than learning how to play hockey and getting a bunch of tattoos. But it was the first time in my adult life that I have slowed down for more than a few weeks. And when you slow down, you see how quickly everything passes. My kids are growing up. My own body is older. There are seasons of my life and ministry that are just decisively over. That is always true, for all of us, of course, but when you stand still for a minute, you really see it.

There's plenty of grief in all that, naturally. But there's also profound consolation. Seeing how fast everything changes deepened my gratitude for the unfathomable gift of the people I share life and ministry with, and for all those who have come in and out of it across the seasons. And looking at how things are passing away is always an invitation to lean harder on the God who holds us both firmly and tenderly through it, and who, the scriptures promise, makes all things new.

So the spiritual work in a season like this is to not succumb to the seduction of nostalgia, wishing that things didn't pass away, but rather to look with hope to what is yet to come.

That's the work we are always called to as followers of Jesus. It's definitely the work we are called to as a diocese in the years to come.

Rather than fearfully trying to cling to all that is passing away, rather than trying to stop a constantly changing world from constantly changing, we remember instead that we are held in the unchanging God's unbreakable embrace. We wait, and watch in hope, for all the good things God has promised to do, and even now is doing.

The world is always hard. To follow Jesus is to meet all that is hard around us with love's power, which is both gentle and immovable. To follow Jesus is to look at all that is fearful without being afraid. To follow Jesus is to face every death with unshakable hope in Easter's promise.

The scripture chosen for this convention from Jeremiah gives us the roadmap for how to do that.

Thus says the LORD:
Stand at the crossroads and look,
   and ask for the ancient paths,
where the good way lies; and walk in it,
   and find rest for your souls.

The first thing we have to do if we are to stand as a people of hope in a world of things that are passing away is to stop at every crossroads we come to and actually look at it. We have to look bravely at where we are and what is true. We are standing at a crossroads everywhere we look. The wider world is experiencing the near total collapse of a political and economic order that has existed for seventy-five years, and what will emerge next is not yet clear. The rapid rise of AI is another world-changing revolution coming barely thirty years after the first internet revolution. For most of human history, we got a few centuries between such upheavals. These days we are lucky to get a few decades. All of it will reshape us in ways that neither the enthusiastic optimists nor the doomsaying pessimists can fully foresee.

We stand at a crossroads as a church where the uniform and universal ecclesiastical order that went along with the old geo-political one is also passing away. The National Council of Churches estimates that as many as 100,000 Christian congregations in this country will close in the next decade. And at the same time, there is a renewed spiritual hunger and curiosity in our culture, especially among the youngest generations, and many of our congregations in Minnesota are experiencing meaningful growth and renewed vitality. Standing at the crossroads means neither acting like the sky is falling nor pretending like everything is fine. Standing at the crossroads means doing what I'm trying to do with my midlife crisis: looking with wide-eyed sobriety at what is true, and knowing there is both grief and consolation, both death to mourn and unimaginably beautiful horizons to hope for.

Once we have seen what is true, we ask after the ancient paths. This is tricky. Asking after the ancient paths is not some romantic longing for what we think were the good old days. We all know that even if they were good, they certainly weren't good for everyone. They were good for a few at the expense of a whole lot of others. Asking after the ancient paths isn't clenching down on what is passing away.

Rather, it means remembering that nothing hard is new. There is no hard thing that we face in this moment–in the world, in the nation, in the diocese–that the people of God have not faced before. Asking after the ancient paths is about learning from how they faced them, and seeing how God was faithful.

Oppressive empires, civil strife, pestilence and plague, economic upheaval? Just ask Jeremiah about that, and see how in the face of Babylon's campaign of ethnic cleansing and mass deportation he kept calling people back to the God who always cares for the poor and the stranger. A collapsing world order and decaying institutions? Just read St. Augustine's *City of God*, and see how he stands in the midst of a crumbling world, and paints a picture of God's future that is every bit as real as the rubble around him. Ask St. Benedict and St. Scholastica about that, and see how they met a world marked by fear and decline by forming small communities of radical prayer and love.

Seeking the ancient paths means forming communities of radical prayer and love. It means gathering to offer our lives to God, hear God's promises in scripture and preaching, see, touch, and taste those

promises in sacrament, and stand with those on the margins. Those are the ancient paths. They have always marked what it means to be God's people in the world.

Finding our way forward is never about doing new things, it's about doing old things in new ways, for new moments.

Here's an ancient path from our diocese to help us with a new old thing. The first Minnesota Episcopalians stood in the midst of a nation that was tearing itself apart. Minnesota was cut through by deep racial divisions and vitriol. The diocese had very, very few people, and even less money. But the first Minnesota Episcopalians knew that the gospel of Jesus Christ is built for hard times, and that every little Episcopal church had a crucial part to play in God's work of healing.

On June 11, 1862, Bishop Whipple gave an address to the small group of clergy at St. Luke's in Hastings, called *The Work of a Missionary Church*. In it, Whipple, in the third year of his ministry, lays out a bold vision for planting churches and establishing schools. He grounds this call to start new communities, not in some ambition for institutional success, but in the loving identity of God. He says, "We are not here to make a dignified sect for the worldly, the fashionable, and the wealthy. God sent us here to extend an Apostolic Church. We are all of yesterday, but the Church was planted in Jerusalem. This Diocese is a branch of the vine which the Lord planted. It must either grow, and bud, and bear abundant fruit, or wither and die. Its growth depends alone on work and grace. Its life comes alone from Jesus Christ."

What do the ancient paths say you do in hard times, when there is so much loss all around? Plant something new. Start new communities to reach new people with the life-saving good news of Jesus Christ. If we are to be faithful at this crossroads, then in the years to come we will have to prioritize starting new worshipping communities. That's the work we began tilling the soil for five years ago, and is now beginning to bear fruit.

St. Peter's in Shakopee was planted this past year by the Reverend Moses Tebui to serve the growing African immigrant population in the Twin Cities. They are currently meeting at a Lutheran Church in downtown Shakopee, and we hope to be able to admit them formally and joyfully as a mission of the diocese at next year's convention.

We are here today because someone planted seeds of the communities we come from from the fruit of another. That is always the work of tending to our branch of the Jesus vine.

Once we have stood and looked at the crossroads, and looked at the path our ancestors have forged, we walk in the good way. But I have some bad news about the good way. For disciples of Jesus, the good way does not look like success. The good way does not look like personal fulfillment. The good way does not look like avoiding pain, or gaining political victory. No, for disciples of Jesus Christ, the good way looks like the cross. On the cross, the God incarnate stared straight at the very worst the world can be, the very worst human beings can do. God stared right at death, and saw the new life that is always possible on the other side when it is met with love, and is willing to give it all away.

That is the good way we are called to walk in. The way that gives it all away in love, the way that sees new life springing from every death.

So the good way looks like an entire diocese responding to the campaign of cruelty and terror we lived through last winter by mobilizing for love. It looks like Casa Maria delivering food and critical supplies to people trapped at home. It looks like our clergy and lay people marching in the streets so that the world would take notice. It looks like raising several hundred thousand dollars to help people with rent who couldn't leave their homes to work for two months. I would love to list out all of the ways we rose up in the power of the Spirit in that moment and name all the people who did it, but there was more than I could possibly ever see or acknowledge. I have never known a group of Jesus' disciples show up looking like love the way you all did last winter. You all, every one of you, walked in the good way.

The good way looks like the Trustees, the Standing Committee, and the diocesan staff are walking with such clarity, compassion and hope with congregations as they make decisions about their buildings. This year, we've adopted a shared framework for how we will decide what to do with properties when congregations close, or choose another place to gather which includes investing a significant portion of every building we sell into a fund that will help us start new communities. That's facing death and seeing the new life that is always possible on the other side when we meet it with love.

The good way looks like Trinity in Anoka making a hard and faithful decision to leave the building they've worshipped in since 1964, and finding renewed energy, new growth, and a new life in a new community space just across the street.

The good way looks like St. George's in Saint Louis Park making the hard and faithful decision to close their doors, and be received by the incredible embrace of St. David's in Minnetonka down the road. We're working to finalize the sale of St. George's building now, and some of the proceeds from that will allow us to place our first church planting curate at St. David's; a priest who will help that vital community plant a new worshipping community.

The good way looks like St. Paul's in Winona making the decision to offer nearly its entire parish building to serve as a day shelter, after the non-profit that runs struggled for years to find a space willing to be given over in love.

The good way looks like three congregations in the Lake Pepin area moving closer to one another to plant the seeds of how our presence in that region will be shaped in the season to come. Christ Church, Old Frontenac, St. Mark's, Lake City, and Grace in Wabasha are sharing Christian formation together, and are being supported as they discern what closer partnership might look like by Bob Furniss as their Ministry Developer, and Cindi Brickson, our intrepid Dean in the South.

There are, as ever, more than enough painful situations to meet and painful decisions to make in both the world and the diocese. But we are meeting them in every corner by giving ourselves away in love, because we can see the new life that God will raise up from every thing that passes away. We, like our ancestor Augstine, can see the city of God's love that is every bit as real as the hard things around us.

And then, finally, by walking in the good way, we will find rest.

This is, if you can believe it, my seventh address to this convention. The six years that we have been together would make even the most vigorous people weary. We began together with the pandemic, the murder of George Floyd, we've continued to sail through the stormiest political waters of any of our lifetimes, and that wave swelled to new heights during Operation Metro Surge. I know that if you are a lay or ordained leader in our church, you are tired.

I feel that weariness in many ways, too. I was surprised to find this summer that my sabbatical did not *feel* as restful as I thought it might. But that's only because I did not understand what real rest is. Real rest, I am finding, does not only come from ceasing activity. Real, deep, restorative rest can only happen when we are aligned with God's purpose. Real rest can only be found when we know what we are for. It comes from cultivating the singleness of heart that the post-communion prayer speaks of.

The world is going to keep being hard. Withdrawing from time to time is important, of course. But even more than that, we will find a deeper rest when we learn to face every crisis that comes at us and see the new life that is always possible if we move through it with love.

We can only do that if Jesus, God's promise of new life in the midst of every crisis, is the very center of our hearts, the very center of our identities, the very center of our lives. If our primary activity in the years to come is yoking ourselves more tightly to Jesus, then I'm convinced all the hard things and important decisions we have to make will largely work themselves out. If we do not make Jesus the center, then all of our brilliant ideas and best efforts won't make much difference at all.

This summer while I was away, I found renewed certainty that in this hard season, I continue to be for you, Minnesota. I'm ready for our next season together. I'm resolved anew to keep Jesus Christ–crucified, risen, and ascended to the beautiful city of God–at the center of my vision, and to give the very best of myself to keeping Jesus at the center of our life together. Pray for me, as I ceaselessly pray for you, that God might take the broken pieces of our souls, and form from them a mirror to reflect Jesus to the whole hard world. Walking in the good way, finding rest. Until we are all gathered together in God's one light.

Submitted to you on this, the 23rd day of October, in the year of Our Lord, 2026, and in the city of St. Louis Park.

The Right Reverend Craig W. Loya
Tenth Bishop of Minnesota