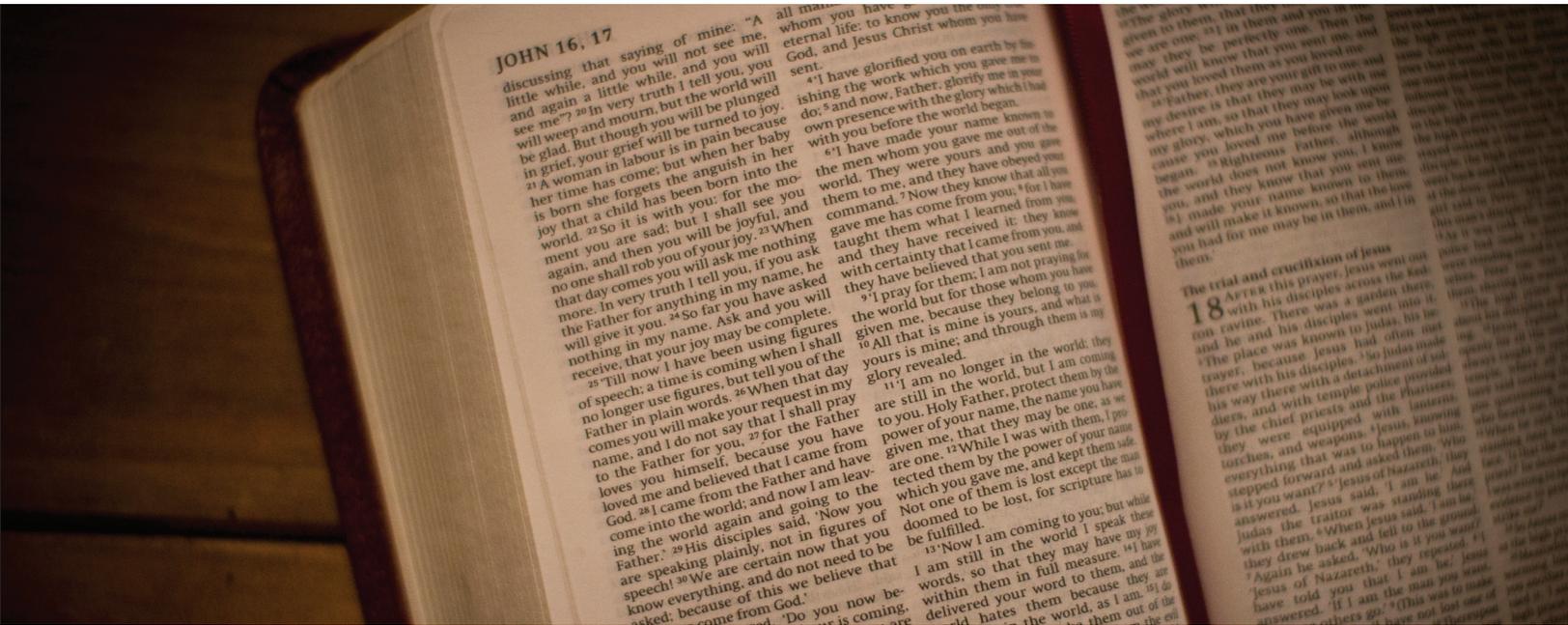


THE LINE

Newsletter of the Convocation Of The West
OF THE MISSIONARY DIOCESE OF ALL SAINTS



THE JOHN 17 PROJECT “Father, Make Us One in 2021”

By The Rt. Rev. Richard Lipka

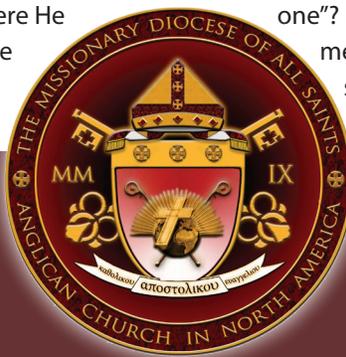
In the Gospel according to Saint John, we find this passage:
“I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which you gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.” [John 17:20-23]

With the coming of a new year and the approval of the new infrastructure for MDAS consisting of three Convocations, I started thinking about Jesus’ prayer in John 17. Here He prays that there will be unity. And this prayer came to me: “Father, make us one in two thousand and

twenty-one.” As I prayed this prayer, I became resolute that we need to concentrate on how to unify our diocese – one to another – while also being one with the ACNA under their constitution and canons.

However, we also need to look at the uniqueness of MDAS within the ACNA and its common purpose and the statement that Bishop Ilgenfritz wrote for Forward in Faith. In terms of worship, a new Prayer Book with a three-year lectionary has been approved, and a traditional language Prayer Book is slated to be published by the end of this new year.

But the issue then becomes, what do we mean by “being one”? Does it mean that we are all in lock step? Does it mean that we all need to use the same Prayer Book or service? I do not believe so. Being one does



Our Core Value is:

“The Convocation of the West is Missionary, bringing people to Christ and meaningfully engaging in the transformation of the culture around us.”

The Vision of the Convocation is:

“To STRENGTHEN existing churches;
To PLANT new churches; and
To RAISE UP missional leaders.”

not mean that there is no difference in how we worship, but rather that we are one in our theology and one in our diocese. However, I do believe that we all need to start using the same three-year lectionary from the new Prayer Book. This will help me in preparing for my visits to our individual parishes. But it will also help us become one. In this way, we all will be united in our proclamation of the Bible each Sunday and each Feast and Holy day.

Now, let me make something clear: if you are a parish that is using the 1928 Book of Common Prayer, or the 1979 Book, or the new 2019 Book, or the Anglican Missal, I am not asking you to give those prayer books up. Diversity in the form of worship is part of our Diocese. But, if we all are following the same lectionary with the same lessons, all our parishes will be reading the same lessons on the same Sunday. And it will mean that no matter what MDAS church you attend, if you go to another, you will be hearing the same lesson. And this will bring us all closer to one another. This is a very simple and symbolic way to proclaim our one-ness, but there is more.

We are a non-geographic diocese. Because of this, we are spread pretty far and wide. And because of the physical distance, there is a greater chance for separation and isolation. Add to this the fact that many of our parishes are not wealthy enough or physically capable of attending our yearly Synod, and we can see how each parish can feel cut off, alone, and on its own. But we are not alone. We are part of Christ's universal Church. And we are part of the Missionary Diocese of All Saints. We should be One Body – we should be one in Christ and Christ one with us. And, if we are one, then Jesus promises that

others will know we are His disciples. Therefore, it is our goal this year to bring each member of the clergy and each member of each parish closer to the rest of us.

Looking at our passage from St. John's Gospel, we can see how dense with meaning Jesus' prayer for becoming one really is. He prays that the Love of God be in all of us, making us one. He is praying that we should be in Him and He in us so that we are truly one. And this is possible through the Sacraments of the Church, especially Baptism, Holy Communion and Confirmation. Through Baptism, we are made adopted children of God – one family. Through Holy Communion, our Brother, Christ, is in us, and we in Him, strengthening us and bringing us closer to the Father. And finally, through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, especially through Confirmation, we become one with the Blessed Trinity, and He with us.

I would ask all of us to pray on these Holy Mysteries, to pray on this passage from the Gospel according to Saint John, and to pray on how we can show the world that we are true disciples of Jesus Christ by becoming one. If in 2021 this becomes our mission, then with the help of our Lord, we may be able to show the world that what we believe is true. We may be able to show the world the way to Salvation and Life everlasting. And we may be able to show that Jesus IS the Way, the Truth and the Life.

May the Lord bless you and keep you as you embark on this mission for 2021.

The Rt. Rev. Richard Lipka
Bishop Ordinary of MDAS

Rejoice!

By Fr. Michael Penfield

Rejoice – a word we hear a lot, especially at Christmas time. It is a word that has been associated with Christianity for a long time and is a word used especially by Saint Paul. But what do we Christians mean when we say or sing this word?

"Rejoice" is one of those words that is so deep in meaning for us Christians, and yet we can live our whole Christian life without ever appreciating its great depth. And, in our post-modern society where everything is given a sound bite amount of meaning, "rejoice" has been reduced to a very shallow exuberance. It is time to take this word back and re-introduce it into our lexicon of Christian expressions.

In his epistle to the Philippians, Saint Paul wrote: "*Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice.*" [Phil. 4:4]. In his first epistle to the Thessalonians, Saint Paul wrote: "*Rejoice evermore: pray without ceasing: in everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.*" [1 Thess. 5:16-18] These are not idle statements by Saint Paul. This is how Christians are to live. Rejoicing, not just when everything goes

well, but always. And this is the example Saint Paul and the early Christians give us in how they lived.

Saint Paul rejoiced when people came to the Lord, but he also rejoiced while being driven out of town with sticks, stoned in Lystra, imprisoned in Philippi, ignored and ridiculed in Athens, and imprisoned and executed in Rome. Likewise, the early Christians met their demise in the coliseum in Rome, rejoicing in the Lord. Jesus never said that, if you followed Him, your life would become idyllic. Rather, He warned that it might be quite difficult. But knowing the Lord means rejoicing no matter what may happen. And if we find ourselves persecuted for our faith, our rejoicing should not wane, but rather redouble. But why?

Why do Christians rejoice always? Why do we rejoice even though life is quite hard? It is because we know Christ; we know why He was born, and we know why He died. And above all, we know that He rose again and, in His Resurrection we have the promise of eternal life for all His believers.

These three hallmarks of Jesus' ministry – His birth, His death, and His resurrection – are key as to why we Christians rejoice always, and not just when things are going well.

A while ago, I was speaking to the then Dean of the Episcopal Cathedral of San Jose'. He had an interesting observation. His contention was that Anglican theologians seem to concentrate on the Incarnation and its meaning more than the two other great hallmarks of Christian rejoicing. So, being good Anglicans and being that we are still in the season celebrating Jesus' birth, let us concentrate now on the Incarnation and why this should bring us to rejoicing always.

The Incarnation is the first and greatest stumbling block to people's belief in Jesus and the basis of much criticism by some other religions. How can God become Man? This question reveals more about the person asking the question than our faith. It shows a lack of imagination, it's true. But it also shows great hubris. If we humans cannot comprehend it, then it cannot be true. If it is beyond our intellect, then it is impossible. No wonder we Christians have held for centuries that the greatest sin is pride.

If we go back to Creation, we see that God created all things to be good. He created man and woman, and He created them to be corporeal. He made them to be both body and soul. This

means that, unlike what the ancient Stoics believed or the Gnostics still believe, we Christians believe that the body was created to be good and is basically still good, though fallen. God becoming true-man in the person of



Jesus Christ validates this belief. How can God become a Man if the body is evil? Didn't Jesus say that a house divided against itself must fall? In fact, one can assert that when God became Man, He sanctified the human body. It definitely means He blessed the human body. The body is basically good and was always intended to be good. The Fall damaged this good thing; that is true. But only God can set it right. And now we can start to see how God-becoming-Man serves God's great purpose of redemption.

Here we see that all of creation is this wonderful gift of God's and that, even though corrupted through the Fall, is still, at its heart, good. And, finally, in God-becoming-Man, we have the Second Adam as an example of what God had intended for mankind from the beginning and an example of what we should all strive to become. Becoming Christ-like is not the obliteration of the corporeal in favor of the spiritual, but

rather bringing both into the Holy of Holies and letting God remake both as He always intended. We have God saving His great creation, man, but we also have Him showing us that this creation is worth saving.

Sometimes I fear that we become so wrapped up in our sins and so wrapped up in the Fall that we fail to look at – truly look at – what it means for God to become Man. What does that say about us? What does it say about this world? And what does it say about our bodies?

"Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been purchased at a price. Therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's." [1 Corinthians 6:19-20]

It says that, for God, your body is worth saving. And it means for us that we really need to learn to appreciate the goodness that is imbedded in all of this corporeal world. And this, in and of itself, should give us joy.

Yes, we know that we have fallen. Yes, we also know that when we fell, we took the world with us. And yes, with the Fall came aging, disease and death. Some of us were given healthy bodies; others of us were given bodies that are ravaged by illness or disease. But God became Man. He did not just step into the world as God. He came into the world as a Man, and not just a man, but as an infant, born to a human mother and raised with the help of a stepfather. He did not come into the world as a known royalty, though He is King. He did not come wealthy or privileged. He came into the world as humble as can be imagined, born in a stable and placed in a manger. This surprised many, but, as the prophet Elijah found out, it is not unusual for God:

"And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake: and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire, a still small voice. And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave" [1 Kings 19:11-13]

God became man to show mankind that God loves us. He shows us that, even though this divinely created world is battered and damaged by sin and the Fall, God sees the good in it. And most important of all, God sees that we are worth it. It shows us that we, God's special creation, both body and soul, are worth saving. If this does not give us the impetus to rejoice always, no matter what happens, then I do not know what can.

Rejoice my brothers and sisters, for God has shown us all how well loved we are. Rejoice, because we have been saved. Rejoice, because we will live forever. And rejoice, because God is not done yet. He is still working to reconcile the world to Himself, and He has chosen us to help. Rejoice always and again we say rejoice!

God bless,
The Very Rev. Canon Michael Penfield
Vicar General for the Convocation of the West



Together

By Bishop Winfield Mott

For a long time, people have been cajoled, pleaded with, enticed, threatened, admonished and otherwise urged, to attend church. It has been downright disorienting to suddenly be told we are not allowed to go to church. No wonder some are attracted to conspiracy theories about dark plots to shut down all the churches. Nothing apparently has prepared a generation or two of Americans for the phenomenon of a pandemic, after a life of having all our wants satisfied on demand. It seems to have unloosened some of the mental screws holding a number of folks together.

In fact, as your Mother told you about taking your medicine, this might be good for us. Pre-pandemic church life was in a rut of declining commitment and mission drift into non-essentials. The pattern in western Europe over the past century of seriously evaporating church affiliation was being repeated here, with about a half-century lag. Tired old programs and formulas for renewal and revival were not working well, at best temporarily retarding the decline. Even more than the attendance statistics, the noticeable greying of the average congregation told the story.

Good for us in the sense that, since elderly folks are more vulnerable to serious illness and death in the pandemic, the authorities might have been saving church lives with their decrees. But beyond that, good for us because we have been jolted out of the rut. It has brought home that the Church is not where the building is, the Church is where the people are. We knew that already, in theory. This is the first time since the fourth century it has been

activated on a near-universal scale. It is possible that when the pandemic is over, people will simply sigh in relief and go back to the rut, resuming the slow decline where they left it.

But to do so is to be blind to a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, which some certainly see having the mark of the Holy Spirit leading it. Now, in the new era of Zoomchurch, learning is taking place. When the "all clear" is eventually sounded for the pandemic, the Church can fully apply the learning, which is:

1. The second century axiom, "Where the bishop is, there is the Church," as the definition of catholicity, with the bishop as its guarantor, has a corollary from Jesus, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there in the midst of them." Budgets, buildings, career clergy compensation, advocacy campaigns, membership drives receive no mention. These may not be wrong, but they can be jettisoned when we are pushed back to the essentials. Whether through Zoom or in a parking lot or house by house, it is the people gathered around the bishop which continues and celebrates the catholic Church.

2. Sometimes, Church is not easy. We should have learned from this that our Church life has been privileged and pampered. The Church elsewhere has often faced serious life-threatening persecution, through the centuries. This has continued in our era, from Albania through Zanzibar and many places in between and is going on this very moment. As American Christians have paid little attention to the plight of truly persecuted brethren, the Christians

caught in these situations can be excused for not taking our "persecution" very seriously. Hopefully, we in turn can learn that the perseverance of the average Christian is, and always has been, what the Holy Spirit needs from us to continue the Faith.

3. The best evangelism doesn't happen through some program to entice people into the building. It happens when the unchurched find love and a caring community. People are, in fact, hungry for this. They seldom find it in church on Sunday morning. They mostly find it incarnate in the caring selfless actions of Christians.

What the Zoom experience demonstrates is that they will even seek it out when it comes to their world, even when they will not take the leap to leave their comfort zone to walk into the building. We can learn to follow up this lesson even when we can all safely gather within the usual walls again. It will be a joy to so gather, but it will be dereliction to not also persist in living as Christians far away from those walls. Nor is the soapbox the best evangelical tool. Love which seeks out those in need is a much more desirable, effective and more Christian implement. We all basically know this. The pandemic experience reminds us we now need to do it.

4. We are joined together. Sacramental Christians know that we are bound and sealed together in the Body of Christ, "very members incorporate in the mystical Body of thy Son, which is the blessed company of all faithful people" (BCP 1928, p.83). If before the pandemic, your congregation resembled more of a country club, self-help group or poor man's Rotary, now is the opportunity to break the pattern. The Christian Church is not an institution or affiliation: it is a community so bonded that it is closer than family or marriage.

5. Non-sacramental churches can continue their holy karaoke or lecture series on religion with little disruption due to quarantine. But our center is the Table of the Lord, the incarnate manifestation and physical presence of the Body of Christ among us. Hungering for that when you are deprived of it is a worthy sacrifice and devotion in itself, making a reunion together all the more desired and meaningful when it happens. We find ways, just like the persecuted Church always does, to connect the Eucharist with the

Faithful, even when conditions are imperfect. But the biggest lesson of the pandemic is that we NEED this essential instrument of grace.

6. As with many facets of life, opportunity lurks in adversity. I don't believe God has sent this pandemic, but I do believe He can make use of it, to re-orient us to a more accurate view of what "church" is, to insist that our congregations, our Convocation and our Diocese come together to function as true community, gathered as family at the Table, bearing one another's burdens.



Photo by Chris Montgomery

May it forever blast us out of our comfort zones into the celebration of a vibrant, living Liturgy and into being a caring people who reflect the love of God. That is the only message, as well as the absolute best news, that we have for the world around us.

Featured Church of the Month

Happy New Year from St. Barnabas, Shoreline, WA

Like every church in our great nation, St. Barnabas has had to face the challenge of being church. The pandemic, with its associated restrictions, has forced us to think outside of the box to remain Anglican and faithful to our Lord, Jesus Christ.

As a church, our vision has always been Jesus Christ. Our mission, although not formally stated, is to live Gospel mandates, as faithfully as humanly possible.

When Covid-19 restrictions were first directed on the 4th Sunday of Lent, we immediately provided anointing oil to be applied to the entrances of each parishioner's home. By God's grace, those in attendance who received the oil and blessing, have remained Covid free. Recently, reapplications have been provided as there has been a surge.

Immediately on placement of gathering restrictions, we moved worship to outdoor tents. We assembled an altar. Cars drove up to the altar, people confessed, received absolution, received the sacraments, and were blessed. Using a sterile technique, communion was served without direct touch and maintaining distance. Each parishioner was given a printed order of service with sermon to read. Resources provided on the ACNA website for the 2019 BCP were crucial! While this worship technique was not optimal, it has kept our community intact and made a witness to our neighbors, as most other churches went to digital format. Our gifted musician performed hymns continuously during the services. We celebrated Maundy Thursday Eucharist and an altar of repose under the tents. We observed driveway stations of the cross as parishioners drove through each station on Good Friday. On Easter Eve and Easter Day in the same fashion, we were able to continue making a witness to the world. We have been blessed with a growing number of visitors from various denominations.

Some have lamented that their churches won't be opening for physical worship any time soon. We are truly, grateful for the spiritual challenge that has been presented. We have been called out of the routine to share the Gospel and Anglican tradition with a wider community.

Cooler and wetter weather has forced us to move inside.

On Labor Day we celebrated our first complete Mass, inside the church since March 17th. Our brief time of complete worship was curtailed once again as numbers surged and restrictions were reimposed. To stay inside the church, Worship time has been modified to minimize groups congregating together. Using a time range for worship (10:00 am – Noon), people drop in at their convenience, approach the rail, confess, are absolved, receive communion, and get their weekly order of service and sermon. Each is sent with a blessing. Once again, while not optimal, we remain in contact, celebrate birthdays and anniversaries in prayer, check on one another, **BUT REMAIN IN COMMUNION WITH GOD.**



We have fed those in need. We installed a community blessing box (full shed) which contains food, clothes, toiletries, pet food, and spiritual encouragement literature. We knew there were those suffering from job loss and school closure difficulties. We were surprised and blessed though, by meeting friends in the community that have helped support and stock this outreach mission.

Our prayer for 2021 is to stir the faithful and remember our commission across our convocation and diocese. There is much to do and no better time than now to spread the good news and preach the Gospel. A minister, Don Lynch, coined and shares his "Prophetic word for 2021: get off your blessed assurance!" Our prayer is to be watchful and responsive to the way the Lord is working and calling His people.