



The Sheaf

A publication of the Episcopal Diocese of North Dakota
Advent Edition ~ December 2023

Advent Reflections

Submitted by: Bishop Thomas Ely



Bishop Ely receiving a star quilt. Also pictured:
Dn. Angela Goodhouse

*O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the LORD!
(Isaiah 2:5)*

In my Convention Address (included on pages 14-19), I cited some familiar words from the prophet Isaiah: “Behold, I am doing a new thing. Now it is springing forth, do you not perceive it?” (Isaiah 43:19) I cited those words as a way of inviting us to think about what God is up to in our diocesan life as we engaged the New Season of Ministry Task Force Report and Recommendations. I called our attention to the liminal time in which we are in between the already but not yet of God’s deepest desire and longing for our common life as a diocese. To my great delight, you embraced that report and its recommendations, including the significant investments of time, talent and treasure called for. I celebrate that and the promise and possibility it all holds for our common life and ministry. As the song goes, “Who could ask for anything more?” from a Diocesan Convention?

Well, here I am, as we stand on the brink of a new season of Advent, asking you for more. I am asking you to take up the call that comes earlier in the writing of the prophet Isaiah, where the people are called to “walk in the light of the Lord.” There the prophet’s invitation is to *participate* in the prophetic vision of what will happen in the fullness of God’s time, and not to be a passive observer or disinterested party. The vision is one of transformation where on the mountain of the house of God people freely come from every nation to be taught and judged by God. They come tossing their swords and spears onto growing piles of scrap metal, to be transformed into tools for the harvest. We come letting go of what is past and focusing on the future of a diocese being transformed for mission.

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The House of Jacob, the people of God, are called to walk in that light of the Lord, but they, like us from time to time, have stumbled and so the prophet is basically calling them to get their house in order. Like the transformation of weapons of war into tools for the harvest, God's people are invited, then and now, to transform our lives and to walk in the light of the Lord. It is a decision we are lovingly challenged to make, not only with our lips, but with our lives. To walk in the light of the Lord is to do our very best to live lives that are in harmony with God's heart of love, justice, mercy, compassion, dignity, and peace. We do that with Jesus as our mentor and friend. When we stumble, God is always there holding up the vision and inviting us back to the journey, to the way of love. That is why, in the words of one of my favorite hymns, *"I want to walk as a child of the light. I want to follow Jesus."*

As a diocese, we are not just being called to embrace this journey of walking in the light of the Lord as individuals, but also, and I think more importantly, as a community. Will we stumble? Of course, we will. And then what will we do? Will we dust each other off and take up the invitation in a fresh way? I sure hope that will be our posture. While my share in this journey with you is drawing to a close, I do want you to know that a part of me will keep walking with you in my heart and in my prayers, because I truly believe you have responded faithfully and are ready, willing, and able to walk together in the light of the Lord as it unfolds before you.

A blessed Advent and a blessed journey into your new season of ministry dear "children of the light!"

+ Thomas



Diocesan Convention 2023

At the Threshold!

Submitted by: The Rev. Steve Godfrey

The 53rd Annual Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of North Dakota convened in Mandan October 27-28, 2023, in the midst of an early snowstorm. While some clergy and lay delegates were deterred by the weather, most were able to make it, though the trip was slow and difficult for many. This convention was our last with Bishop Provisional Tom Ely, who completes his 3-year commitment in January 2024. It included opportunities to thank him and begin to say farewell while focusing on the road ahead, beyond the current threshold.

The New Season of Ministry Task Force, created by the 2021 convention, brought their report and recommendations and presented them and engaged in conversation with members of the diocese at the beginning of our gathering on Friday afternoon. That discussion was followed by workshops on Mutual Ministry for Today's Church, Native Americans – Celebrating Tribal Diversity, Understanding the Native American Boarding School Reality, Creation Care, and Black Elk's Life Speaks: "That Much...More."

A festive dinner was followed by music offered by Standing Rock musicians Shilo Cadotte, Troy Village Center, Kenny Little Dog, and Douglas Wilkinson, including an honor song and opportunity for everyone present to greet Bishop Ely personally, thank him, and offer prayer. His convention address highlighted the new things God is doing in the Diocese of North Dakota at this liminal time, led by the work of the New Season of Ministry Task Force's efforts to listen, learn, love, and lead. He also announced the appointment of the Rt. Rev. Brian Thom, retired Bishop of Idaho, as Assisting Bishop for the Diocese of North Dakota, to be present in the diocese while Bishop Ely is unable to travel due to medical treatments, and possibly to be a candidate for Bishop Provisional. And he invited everyone in the room to commit to fully participating in the circle of leadership in the New Season ahead.

Our special guest for this convention was the Rev. Canon Lydia Bucklin, from the Diocese of Northern Michigan, who led the workshops on mutual ministry and preached at the Eucharist that started the day on Saturday, charging us to partner bravely with God and each other in remaking the church and the world and to enjoy one another as we cross this threshold together and imagine the future to which God is calling us. The Eucharist also featured music led by Derrick Jackson and Marva Tollefson of the Spirit Lake Nation, whose musical offerings helped to gather us and send us forth throughout the rest of the day. Musicians, acolytes, and altar guild members from St. George's in Bismarck were important leaders in the Eucharist as well.



The Rev. Canon Lydia Bucklin receiving a star quilt.

Also pictured: Carmine Goodhouse and Dn. Angela Goodhouse.

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During the general business sessions and regional lunch meetings several people were elected to serve in leadership roles: Tammy Enockson as Convention Secretary; Amy Morrow as Diocesan Treasurer; Jason Thoms and Deacons Beth Lipp and Elsie Magnus to Standing Committee; The Rev. John Floberg, Solveigh Barney, and Vanessa Strobel as General Convention alternate deputies; and the Rev. John Floberg, Rachel Schmidt, the Rev. Robert Hoekstra, Susan Lisok and Quinn Palmer (alternate) to Diocesan Council.



New Season of Ministry Panel — Convention 2023. Pictures from left to right: John Baird, Robert Fox, Christie Iverson, Solveigh Barney, Sloane Floberg, and Carmine Goodhouse.

Perhaps the most anticipated business of the convention was the presentation of the New Season of Ministry Task Force report and recommendations, and adoption of the resolution committing the diocese to the goals they identified: investing in remaining one diocese with a bishop; developing youth/young adult, Native American, Congregational, Reconciliation, and Creation Care ministries; staffing to align with goals; collaboration with other dioceses, and structural/organizational changes. The budget presented by Council reflected these goals and priorities. Following table discussions, the New Season of Ministry resolution and budget were adopted unanimously. Toward the end of the business, star quilts were presented to Bishop Ely, Canon Bucklin, and Robert Fox, on behalf of his father, the Rev. Duane Fox, who is retiring as the longest-serving Indigenous priest in the diocese and was unable to travel to Mandan.

The resolution, budget, reports, and videos can be found at <https://www.ndepiscopal.org/2023-diocesan-convention/>.

The Convention Planning Team – Sandy Holbrook, Erika Rankin, John Floberg, Leslie Ross, Jason Thoms, Carmine Goodhouse, Ila McKay, Joanne Lassiter, Bob Hoekstra, Elaine McLaughlin, Jessica Krzewina, Steve Godfrey, Kim Fox, and Tom Ely – worked from April to October to plan and manage the program, liturgy, music, business, food, and hospitality for this event that is our primary opportunity to be together as a diocese.



Robert Fox receiving a star quilt on behalf of his dad, The Rev. Duane Fox. Also pictured: Carmine Goodhouse, Dn. Angela Goodhouse, and The Rev. John Floberg.

Save the Date!

Sunday January 7, 2024,

4:00 PM (Central Time)

**For a Special Diocesan Convention (Zoom)
to elect a Bishop Provisional**

CANON 2: The Diocesan Convention

Section 1.

(d) A Special Convention may be called by the Ecclesiastical Authority, in consultation with the Diocesan Council, provided that notice of a Special Convention is given to the delegates at least thirty days prior to the time set for the meeting, and no other business may be transacted.

In accordance with the provisions of Canon 2.1.d of the Canons of the Episcopal Diocese of North Dakota, I hereby call for the eligible canonically resident clergy and lay delegates of our diocese to gather via Zoom for a Special Diocesan Convention for the sole purpose of electing the next Bishop Provisional for the Diocese of North Dakota. This call is made after consultation with the Diocesan Council. More details will follow.

Faithfully,



The Right Reverend Thomas C. Ely
Bishop Provisional



Ministry Appointment

**The Rev. Kim Fox to be
Missioner for Reconciliation, Creation Care
& Congregational Ministry Development**

Bishop Ely has appointed the Rev. Kim Fox to be Missioner for Reconciliation, Creation Care & Congregational Ministry Development, effective January 1, 2024. In this role she will serve as Priest in Charge of St. Paul's, White Shield, St. Sylvan's Dunseith, and St. Michael & All Angels, Cartwright. She is also charged with supporting diocesan reconciliation and creation care goals – providing resources and encouragement for our committees and leaders in those areas to continue building on current efforts, communicate more widely, expand education, encourage connections between congregations, and connect local efforts with diocesan and wider church activities. These responsibilities address the goals of developing Native American, congregational, and reconciliation and creation care ministries, recommended by the New Season of Ministry Task Force and adopted by the recent 53rd Annual Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of North Dakota.

Bishop Ely says, "I am happy Kim has agreed to accept this appointment and that the Convention approved the New Season of Ministry's recommendation to invest in this position to help ensure success with these critical goals."

Kim has served since 2021 as Regional Coordinator for Episcopal Ministry in Northwestern North Dakota, a position funded through 2023 with a combination of congregational and diocesan funds and the support of two Roanridge Trust grants. In that position she has provided sacramental, pastoral, administrative and ministry development ministries with five congregations in northwestern North Dakota.

The Rev. Duane Fox, current Priest in Charge for St. Paul's in White Shield, has decided to retire from active ministry at the end of this year and has agreed to serve as a mentor for Kim, having experience in ministry with all three congregations. The Rev. Paul Zaharia is also completing his service at the end of 2023 as Priest in Charge for St. Sylvan's in Dunseith. We are grateful for the ministry of both of these priests.

Advent Greetings from the Northwest

Submitted by: The Rev. Kim Fox

Dear Beloved in Christ,

Advent is my favorite Church season, a time of waiting while the secular world has already moved on to Christmas.

The theme of our convention, At the Threshold, also had an anticipatory element as we live into a New Season of Ministry—and I am honored to be moving into a new role in the Northwest in the (secular) New Year as Missioner for Reconciliation, Creation Care & Congregational Ministry Development, including functioning as priest in charge for St. Paul's, White Shield, St. Sylvan's, Dunseith, and St. Michael and All Angels, Cartwright. Fr. Duane Fox has graciously agreed to serve as my mentor and I thank both Fr. Duane and Fr. Paul Zaharia for all the ways in which their respective ministries have enriched their communities.

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As a child, I always loved lighting the Advent candles on the wreath my mother had prepared for the table. I then did the same with my son, who loved the tradition, including helping me gather greenery. Next it was my young niece and nephew arguing over who got to light and who got to snuff the candles out. They are now almost grown, my nephew in college and my niece in her senior year of high school.



I have aged, yet the traditions and season remain.

Joan Chittester has a wonderful book called *Life Is for Living: Advent Reflections*. She calls Advent "the waiting season" and writes:

"As life goes on, the liturgical cycles seem to become more and more meaningful to me. Perhaps after you've done enough living you come to understand that every life waits, suffers, comes to new life and rejoices in the ordinary. Advent is especially meaningful because it teaches me to wait without complacency, to wait without compliance."

How might we continue to wait without complacency or compliance?

Rather than going through the motions of Advent, could we be intentional about waiting with expectancy for our Creator to do new things, perhaps even things for which we were afraid to ask?

Diocesan convention passed resolutions and a budget, based on the hard work of the New Season of Ministry Task Force, which in turn based its recommendations on visits to and input from congregations. The documents thus were not dry and lifeless, but rather living documents that represented visions for the future that will eventually, we hope and pray, come to pass, with God's help.

Chittester acknowledges that waiting can be hard and therefore asks, "What is there about the waiting that is redemptive?" She suggests the following response: "...while we wait we can learn and grow and become stronger than ever in our convictions. We can be conscientious and creative. And no matter who wants to suppress us or to silence us, we can be signs of hope that never, never go away until, someday, the star finally shines."

Each of us in the Diocese has a sacred calling to be conscientious and creative and we have been given grace and courage to do so by virtue of our baptism. As Advent begins, each of us can strive to be signs of hope in a hurting world as we await the celebration of the coming of the Messiah at Christmas. But not yet. First, we have the gift of Advent during which we can prepare ourselves to shine even more brightly. Thanks be to God.

In Christ's peace, power, and love,
Kim Fox
Northwest Regional Coordinator
Nwcoordinator@ndepiscopal.org
240.472.1102

Ministry Appointment

It is with great pleasure that I announce the consent of the Standing Committee to appoint Bishop Brian Thom as Assisting Bishop in North Dakota. Bishop Thom was with us doing Bishop's Visitations in November, and will be with us again in December and January. Please welcome Bishop Brian Thom as you are able. Bishop's Thom email address is bishopthom@ndepiscopal.org.

The Right Reverend Tom Ely
Bishop Provisional

It is an honor and a great pleasure to be invited by Bishop Ely to work with you in this time of transition in the Diocese of North Dakota. I have deep admiration for Bishop Ely's compassionate heart and considerable leadership skills. I am also inspired by the tremendous discernment you've accomplished through the New Seasons of Ministry Task Force. I am eager to walk beside you as you bring life to these goals and vision.

The Right Reverend Brian Thom
Assisting Bishop



Ministry Opportunities

Ministry Opportunities: Please Share!

The Diocese is now seeking candidates for full-time **Missioner for Youth, Young Adults, and Congregational Ministry Development** to be Priest in Charge of St. Thomas, Fort Totten; develop diocesan youth & young adult ministry; and provide sacramental and congregational development ministry in small congregations. This position addresses the New Season of Ministry goals of developing youth/young adult, Native American, and congregational ministries.

St. George's in Bismarck is seeking candidates for their next full-time **rector**. They are looking for an organized and passionate leader who is open to effectively managing a congregation in collaboration with part-time professional staff and many volunteer leaders and maintaining and improving worship through sermons that meet them where they are and challenge them to action, with a deep understanding of the importance of music in worship. St. George's values outreach in the community and education in the congregation.

Details, including application instructions and deadlines for both positions are available at <https://www.ndepiscopal.org/ministries/employmentopportunities/>.

For more information or to suggest priests to invite to apply, contact the Rev. Steve Godfrey at 515-450-9858 or sgodfrey@ndepiscopal.org.

Calendar

**All noted times are Central Time*

Bishop Thom's Schedule

December 2023

- 12th-18th: Bishop Thom in North Dakota
- 17th: Bishop's Visitation at St. Paul's, Grand Forks

January 2024

- 14th-20th: Bishop Thom in North Dakota

Diocesan Events and Dates to Note

December 2023

- 4th-7th: Diocesan Minister at Transition Minister's Gathering (TX)
- 5th: Clergy/Congregation Leaders Meeting (Zoom); 6:30pm
- 5th: Province VI Small Church Gathering (Zoom); 7:30pm
- 14th: Full time Priests/Pastors Gathering (Jamestown); 12pm
- 25th: Diocesan Office Closed (Christmas)

January 2024

- 1st: Diocesan Office Closed (New Year's Day)
- 2nd: Clergy/Congregation Leaders Meeting (Zoom); 6:30pm
- 2nd: Province VI Small Church Gathering (Zoom); 7:30pm
- **7th: Special Convention (Zoom); 4:00pm**
- 15th: Diocesan Office Closed (Martin Luther King Jr. Day)
- 8th-22nd: Diocesan Minister on Vacation and Continuing Education

Bismarck Global Neighbors Donation

On Sunday, October 1, 2023, Senior Warden Joanne Lassiter presented a check to Leah Hargrove, the Executive Director for Bismarck Global Neighbors, for \$15,000, which will be used to increase Global Neighbors' mentoring program for new Americans. The donation was made possible by a generous donation from Kenneth Nicola, a past lifelong St. George's Church member.

Bismarck Global Neighbors mentorship program matches community members with new Americans. Mentors share one hour per week, tutoring and introducing their mentee families to American life for six months. Activities vary from family to family and according to your abilities but frequently include English practice, homework tutoring, culture swapping, driving practice, exploring the community, and sharing meals.

Joanne Lassiter, Senior Warden



WHITE PRIVILEGE: Part 3

How Do We Respond to It?

Submitted by: Amy Phillips, Sandy Holbrook, & Dan Rice

This is the third part of a three-part series on White privilege. The series was written at the request of the Diocesan Racial Reconciliation Committee. To read Parts 1 and 2 visit <https://www.ndepiscopal.org/the-sheaf/>, and open the *Sheafs* for June/July 2023 and September-November 2023. A digital version of this article is also available there for following the links.

PART 3: How do White folks respond to White supremacy and White privilege?

As mentioned in Part 2, it can be very difficult for those of us who are White to acknowledge the history and presence of White supremacy in America and the privileges we enjoy because of it. It can also be difficult for us to have authentic conversations about White privilege and racism with each other and with individuals who do not identify as White. We may struggle with guilt, anger, confusion, embarrassment, and sadness. So how do those of us who are White respond to White supremacy and White privilege?

Fortunately, there are many resources available to help us with this journey of self-awareness, accountability, and conversation, including resources from our own Episcopal denomination. Drawing on these resources, we recommend that those of us who are White consider doing the following:

Learn more about White privilege and racism. Use the links throughout this essay and any other useful resources to become more familiar with the history of White supremacy and its continued presence in our country and church. Some additional resources include: [How White supremacy became part of our nation's fabric](#); [21 day racial equity habit building challenges](#); [In the fight for racial justice, Native stories should not be ignored](#)

Have the courage to face the reality of our White privilege and the emotions we experience because of that realization. It can be difficult to deal with this issue by ourselves, so think about forming a group in your parish to journey together toward a better understanding of White privilege and how to respond to it.

Use your White privilege. If we ignore our White privileges, we are helping to sustain the system of racism in this country. By recognizing our privileges, we can begin to see specific ways we can use White privilege to help dismantle systemic racism. Some resources to help with this include: [7 things White Christians can do to address White supremacy at church](#); [10 ways to be a better ally and to use your privilege for power](#); [4 steps that I and other White people can take to fight racism](#); [Allies for Indian Country](#); [How to be an ally for Native voices](#); [21-Day Challenge: Youth, Faith, Race, and Moore](#)

Do not let the "culture of niceness" prevent us from having the difficult and important conversations and listening sessions we desperately need to have. White people need to talk with each other about White privilege, but we also need to willingly and carefully listen to what others who identify as Native or Black or another identity have to say about their experiences in this country. Watch videos and read books by a diversity of people and, as Robin DiAngelo says, we need to turn our attention "to hearing what people of color have been telling us for centuries" ([Robin DiAngelo, 2020](#)).

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Become acquainted with the Episcopal church's call to racial reconciliation and racial justice and form a study and action group in or outside your parish.

The Episcopal Church offers a number of Racial Reconciliation Resources at [this link](#).

In response to Presiding Bishop Curry's call to all of us to engage in the ministry of racial reconciliation, the Theology Committee of the House of Bishops issued a report entitled, "[White Supremacy, the Beloved Community, and Learning to Listen](#)." The document acknowledges in the first paragraph that "White supremacy is not the only grave sin that the church must address, but as our deliberations clearly indicated, at this moment in our history, it is the most salient and pressing issue we face, and a deeply entrenched and pervasive obstacle in our common life. Thus, confronting it is the first step to building beloved community." The document goes on to provide a theological template for addressing White supremacy. The document's companion piece, [Covenant for Reckoning with White Supremacy as a House of Bishops and as a Church](#), offers concrete actions that dioceses and parishes can take to begin the process of dismantling White supremacy and addressing White privilege.

Join the ND Diocese's racial reconciliation committee! Feel free to contact Carmine Goodhouse (ncc1701trek@icloud.com) to get more information about the group.

Join other community or national groups or trainings that address racism and White privilege. Some groups can be found at these links: [National Racial Justice Organizations](#); [The Absalom Jones Episcopal Center for Racial Healing](#); [Crossroads Anti-racism Organizing and Training](#)

The authors of this series hope it provided both a useful overview of White privilege and a motivation to be part of the collective journey to dismantle racism in our church and country. It can be a difficult journey, but one that results in personal growth, expanded social networks, and fulfillment in being part of the community of people working to embody and expand the Beloved Community.

The authors also recognize that there are many other forms of privilege that we all experience in our country and church that benefit some of us and disadvantage others. To learn more about these privileges, go to this [link](#).

If anyone has questions or comments about this series or would like to engage one or more of the authors in conversation, feel free to contact them at the following email addresses: Amy Phillips (kaphillip@gmail.com), Sandy Holbrook (slholbrook41@gmail.com), or Dan Rice (danielroyrice@gmail.com).

Editorial Note: The Reconciliation Committee hosted "Owašte Wakarj: Sacred Healing, Antiracism and Racial Reconciliation," an overnight retreat for leaders of the dioceses of North Dakota and South Dakota, September 29-30, led by The Ven. Paul Sneve, Archdeacon of the Diocese of South Dakota. Over 40 leaders gathered to attend. The committee is also evaluating other options for dismantling racism formation and looks forward to hosting other opportunities in the coming year that would help us to respond as Christians to the challenges raised in these articles, fulfill our commitments as Episcopalians as identified by General Convention, and be effective in our context. Watch for announcements in coming issues of *The Sheaf* and *The Prairie* email newsletter. Please contact Carmine Goodhouse (ncc1701trek@icloud.com) to get more information on the Reconciliation Committee.

St. Gabriel's Camp and Conference Center

Submitted by: The Rev. Sloane Floberg

St. Gabriel's camp completed its 27th season of camping this year. In the spring, the camp once again hosted a group from Dayton University in Ohio who worked at the Camp as well as assisting in other projects around Standing Rock. St. Gabriel's hosted three camps this summer and saw an average of 35 students in attendance at each camp session. Campers enjoyed different themes this year including the opportunity to go to a Bismarck theater to watch a movie and have a meal at Pizza Ranch together in the Bismarck/Mandan area, a multi-cultural camp with inner city students from Eastminster Presbyterian church in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and hearing from a special guest speaker, Jordan Shell Track, Jordan shared his faith journey that started with faithful parents and grandparents, attending Young Life youth group as a student, then student leader, becoming a Pathways camp staff at St. Gabriel's for two summers and is now an elementary teacher in Selfridge, ND.



Volunteers gather to plan a week of camp



Water game on basketball court

St. Gabriel's Camp is not just a place for students to get away from it all at home free of charge due to our diocesan funding and generous donors, rather, a place where students and adults alike can embrace nature, time away from cell phones and a haven to listen to God's still small voice. It is also a place for groups who want to learn more about indigenous culture or want to be involved in outreach or service to others. St. Gabriel's is open to hosting groups from this diocese, whether it be for hunting, building projects, youth group outings or even a scrapbooking group.

If your students would like to attend one of our three camps, they have always been welcome to attend. If your church would like to help volunteer with one or all three camps during the summer, whether it's to be a cabin leader and lead cabin time, build a bonfire for smores and playing guitar, to cooking, driving vans or a boat for tubing, you are welcome to come check it out!



Jordan Shelltrack talking with students

St. Gabriel's has four seasonal cabins that sleep roughly 6-8 people, a seasonal "mess hall", Chapel, Canteen, and bath house with three showers and two commodes. There is a swimming pool, basketball court and four-square volleyball court. Many campers also take the hike to the butte that overlooks the 40 acres of land that was entrusted to the church by Chief Red Hail. There are two year-round buildings available as well. We have Fairfield cabin that sleeps 10 and has heat and central air, and Star Lodge, that has a geothermal system always set at 70 degrees, has a large meeting space, stage, kitchen, two bathrooms and an apartment in the back that sleeps five to six. We are so very thankful for all of your generous financial gifts and sweat equity that make camp a reality each and every year. If you would like to find out more, simply call Father John Floberg at (701) 891-2911 or email him at jffloberg@gmail.com.

Council Update

Council Meeting: November 17-18, 2023

Submitted by: Stephanie Garcia

The November meeting at Grace Church in Jamestown represents a new period of work for the Diocesan Council. The group convened with new members and new goals to support the Episcopal Church of North Dakota.

Before jumping ahead, myself, the council, and the larger diocese owes Bishop Tom Ely a deep debt of gratitude for his continued role as our coach and provisional bishop for North Dakota. While his communication with the group persists, the meeting felt different without his physical presence. His calling from retirement in Vermont into our midwestern state continues to enrich our lives. His tireless work has allowed us to remain a unified diocese. We thank Bishop Ely for his continued support of our faith community as he focuses on his health. We send our prayers and well wishes to Bishop Ely.

In Jamestown, we welcomed Assisting Bishop Brian Thom to North Dakota. He previously served as the Bishop of Idaho from 2008 to 2022. He comes to us highly recommended by our provisional bishop who appointed him with the unanimous consent of the Standing Committee. During the meeting, Assisting Bishop Thom described his reverence for our liturgy as he reflected on what makes us unique as Episcopalians. I felt a strong sense of reassurance as he discussed his understanding about our journey as a diocese and his hope for our future. We are grateful for his support as we continue our work.

A primary focus of the meeting was to review our new goals from the New Season of Ministry Task Force report that was adopted at the 2023 convention. It is clear that parishes around North Dakota want a unified diocese for the state. In order to continue in this direction, we have plans to elect a new provisional Bishop for 3 years. On the basis of the report, we are looking for a provisional bishop who will support and repair our diocese. Other goals include developing youth/young adult ministry, fostering Native American ministry, promoting congregational ministry, growing reconciliation and creation care ministry, creating a new structure for diocesan staff, fostering new opportunities for cross-diocesan collaboration, and recommending structural and organizational changes for our future.

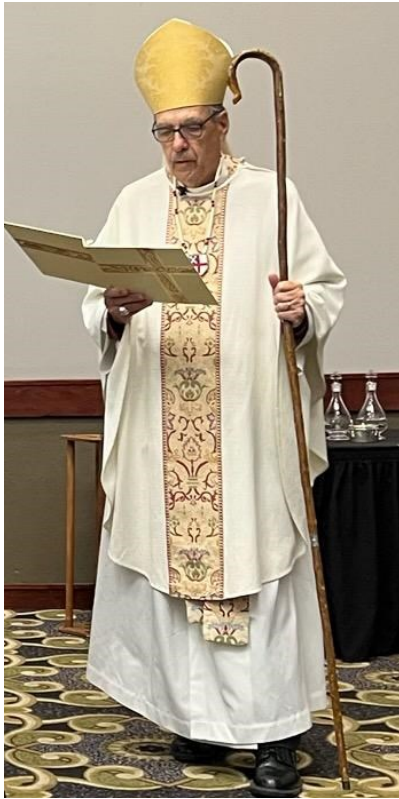
We hold hope and faith that working towards these goals will allow us to grow in community with God and one another.

Proposed meeting dates and locations:

- March 2, 2024—Saturday Zoom Meeting
- April 19-20, 2024—Fargo In-Person Meeting
- May 21, 2024—Tuesday Zoom Meeting
- June 14-15, 2024—Minot In-Person Meeting
- July 30, 2024—Tuesday Zoom Meeting
- September 20-21, 2024—Bismarck In-Person Meeting
- October 25-26, 2024—Diocesan Convention; Jamestown
- November 22-23, 2024—Jamestown In-Person Meeting

Convention Address

Submitted by: The Rt. Rev. Thomas Ely



Bishop Ely presiding at Convention Eucharist.

Let us pray: Creator, we give you thanks for all you are and all you bring to us for our visit within your creation. In Jesus, you place the Gospel in the center of this sacred circle through which all of creation is related. You show us the way to live a generous and compassionate life. Give us your strength to live together with respect and commitment as we grow in your spirit, for you are God, now and forever. Amen.

How can I thank you enough for the gift of that music and the singing and the words and the hugs and the love and the outpouring of your gratitude? You know, they don't have a class for this in seminary. It's about living. It's about receiving gifts that come from others. And tonight is one of those gifts that I will always remember. And cherish. And welcome to those who might be watching us online. We are grateful that you're here with us as well.

I did want to pause before I started my address and ask you to be in silence just for a moment, as we hold before Creator the heartaches of our world. You know them. The conflict in Israel, Palestine, the gun violence in Maine, the earthquakes in Afghanistan. The conflict in Ukraine, and so many others that we could name. Let's just hold all these heartaches that we have before Creator. And let our souls rest in the knowledge of God's deep love for us. Even as we walk through these shadows of the valley of death. Amen.

I wasn't sure if I would be offering this Address to you in person or via Zoom tonight, and so I was most delighted on Monday when my medical team cleared me to travel to North Dakota, so that I am able to be with you in-person at this important Convention. I was so hoping that that would be the case. And it turned out, that is what it is. And I am even more deeply blessed by all that is here tonight.

As I thought about our Convention theme: *At the Threshold*, and the work of our New Season of Ministry Task Force, one of my favorite Bible verses kept coming to my mind. A Bible verse from the Prophet Isaiah. One that many of you know and perhaps share with me in great delight. Hear what Isaiah said: "Behold, I am doing a new thing. Now it is springing forth, do you not perceive it?" (Isaiah 43:19) I also connect this Bible verse to what Kim Fox wrote about in her recent Sheaf article when she was talking about liminality. She wrote: "Liminal space is therefore the space between what is now and what is not yet. It is a time of possibility and an opportunity for new energy if we are willing to move through it in faith." Thank you for those words, Kim. I would say it is the place, that liminal place, where God is at work bringing forth God's new thing.

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In the larger context of Isaiah's writing, the prophet's proclamation reminds his hearers, and us, of the great things God has done in the past. But the prophet also reminds the people that, as important as those things were, the focus for the present time should be upon what God is doing today, here, and now, right in our midst. God is doing a new thing, the prophet says, and God will continue to care for the people. In other words, pay attention to what God is doing NOW. Right here, in this room, in our Convention, in this time in the life of our Diocese. It was true then; it is true today! Pay attention to what God is doing now. Because that is about God's faithfulness, even in the face of the people's uncertainties, disobedience, and skepticism, and perhaps some of ours.

Having been privileged to serve as facilitator, or consultant as the New Season of Ministry Task Force like to refer to me, it is my conviction that this sentiment from Isaiah permeated their work, even though we never said the words out loud, at least as I recall. The task force was constantly aware that as a diocese we were, and continue to be, at a liminal time. A liminal time in our life together in which we're between the already and not yet of what God is up to in our midst. Through careful listening and open-minded thinking, the task force was able to name what they believe God is up to in the life of our diocese. They tried to give voice to the "new thing" that God might be holding out for us, and I believe they have done a most faithful job in that regard throughout this whole last year and a half. It has been my privilege to work with them.

What I am particularly mindful of and grateful for is that they began by listening. I always tell new pastors going into congregations or newly ordained people, the key to leadership is this: the four "Ls." Listen. Learn. Love. Lead. And do it in that order. So, the task force began by listening and in their listening they learned. They learned the voices, the hearts, the soul, the spirit of the people of this diocese. Then they began to have some goals that emerged from their listening and learning. And they tried to give voice to this new thing that God was holding out for us. They began to name some of these goals and priorities that they believed lined up with that listening and learning. And notably, at least to me, is the fact that they focused their attention, (I hope you saw this on the slides from this afternoon) on some of the most vulnerable, marginal, and fragile aspects of our common life and ministry: youth and young adults; our ministry with and among our Native American communities; our smaller congregations and their need for sacramental ministry support and development; and our common concerns regarding reconciliation and creation care. All these very fragile and sometimes marginal dimensions of our life were very much at the heart of their listening and their learning. And they did this, all the while, affirming the widespread desire that they heard loud and clear from you, that we maintain our identity as the Episcopal Diocese of North Dakota. And that we find our way to the next Bishop Diocesan, whether that be a part-time or full-time person. And at the same time, while we do all that, we recognize and embrace the opportunities that are out there for collaboration and cooperation with our neighbors, with other dioceses, with those who want to share in our life together. To understand that we are not in this journey, we are not in this liminal space, that we are not paying attention to what God is up to, all by ourselves. There are others who care deeply about what happens here in North Dakota. And want to be part of helping us shape that future.

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Now here comes the disclaimer. Of course, there is no guarantee that what the Task Force has proposed is *the* “new thing” that God is doing. Not necessarily even the only “new thing” that God is doing. But isn’t that what discernment is about? It is doing our best to pay attention. And then to bring out of that discernment, the very best that we can. Well, we are living in that liminal space between the already but not yet of God’s divine mystery and love. And isn’t that what it requires of us? To live faithfully there. Is it not what it is about in terms of taking risks for the sake of what the gospel calls us to. The Gospel calls us to take these risks over and over again, not just for ourselves but for the life of the world. As we perceive this “new thing,” this new chapter, this new season of ministry that is here and now, on which we are standing at the threshold tonight, will we decide to invest in this future possibility or not? And that becomes our question. Not just the question of the task force, but the question for every Episcopalian in the Diocese of North Dakota.

And so, I devote the first part of this Convention Address to that work that has brought us to this place at this time tonight. And I begin this convention address grateful for the work of the New Season of Ministry Task Force, confident that God is not done with the Episcopal Diocese of North Dakota, and in fact is leading us toward God’s “new thing.” Do we perceive it? Will we perceive it? Do we believe in its possibility? Will we walk side by side and hand in hand into that future – larger churches and smaller churches, churches in the East and churches in the West, Native churches and non-native churches, churches with financial resources and churches struggling to pay their bills, churches speaking the truth in love to and with one another, so that, in the words we will hear in tomorrow’s epistle, *“we might grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knitted together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body’s growth in building itself up in love.”* (Ephesians 4:15-16). That is my hope for us. That we will be that community that walks that way. Together. Into that future that God has in store for us. So, thank you task force for bringing us to this threshold. For naming for us our goals, our priorities, our hopes, our dreams, and for setting us on a course that we might realize so much of that.

Let me briefly continue and conclude with just a few other items.

First, regarding my health, let me say how deeply grateful and humbled I am by the amazing outpouring of love, care, support, and prayers that I have received since sharing with you my surprising diagnosis of Stage Four Esophageal Cancer. I know many of you have walked your own cancer journey, and that of loved ones, and so you have some idea about the disruption such a diagnosis carries with it. I have a great medical team. You hear me, if you follow my blog at all, that I talk about Agnes all the time. I am not sure I have the capacity to make someone a saint, but she’s really close right now in my book. And so is my oncologist and the rest of my medical team surrounding me. And of course, I have an enormous loving family, group of friends, colleagues, all over the world who are joining in the prayer for my health and healing. It’s beyond my wildest imagining. Maybe some of you can relate to that from your own experience of one of those times in your life when, beyond anything you can imagine, you felt the profound love of God in the lives of the people whom you meet. And tonight, oh my! Nothing more powerful than that. I can imagine. So, the road ahead is a challenging one and I am trying to face its reality with faith, hope, and confidence in God’s healing grace. And your prayers help so very much in that regard.

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That said, there are some real-life implications that will now impact the balance of my ministry among you as your Bishop Provisional. My hope had been to finish out this calendar year with two more pastoral visits to North Dakota in November and December, and to support the Standing Committee as they work with Bishop Todd Ousley from the Presiding Bishop's Office of Pastoral Support to call your next Bishop Provisional. Unfortunately, because of my treatment schedule, and the way it is aligned, I will not be able to travel to North Dakota for those visits, including the first meeting of the new Diocesan Council in November, and three scheduled services of Confirmation, at the Cathedral, at St. John the Divine, and at St. Paul's in Grand Forks. My medical team barely let me travel for this Convention.



Convention Eucharist

But, alas, all is not lost, and God is good (all the time). There is a provision in our church canons for the appointment of an Assisting Bishop, as those of you who heard John's presentation this afternoon learned. Bishop Keith Whitmore served with you in that capacity before I became your Bishop Provisional. I am pleased to announce that the Right Reverend Brian Thom, who retired as Bishop of Idaho in 2022 after 16 years of episcopal ministry, is willing to accept my appointment, subject to the consent of the Standing Committee, to serve as Assisting Bishop for the Diocese of North Dakota. In short, what this means is that I will continue as Bishop Provisional until the next Bishop Provisional is in place, elected by you, and that Bishop Thom will cover my week-long scheduled pastoral visitations to North Dakota - taking all the appointments that I had and being in all the places that I was supposed to be on those days, which to me is a great relief especially for those awaiting Confirmation. And, especially for the start of the new Diocesan Council. And I should also mention that Brian is also open to being a candidate for your next Bishop Provisional, should that be the direction the Standing Committee and Convention choose to go.

I served with Bishop Thom in the House of Bishops for the 12 years during which our respective episcopates overlapped, and we have continued as colleagues and friends ever since. Brian is a man of many gifts, those of you who know him can attest to that, including having the heart of a ministry developer, and a collegial, collaborative commitment in ministry. He likes the idea of coaching. We served together as coaches in the House of Bishops, so he brings that gift along. Brian was born and raised in Portland Oregon and served all his ordained ministry in the West, so his orientation learning curve to North Dakota will be different from mine, coming from the East coast! I don't know who will have it easier, but it will be different. I am grateful that he is willing to step into this new ministry and have every confidence that he will serve our diocese well. I am going to keep talking about it as "our diocese" until I'm no longer your bishop provisional. Maybe even after that. I know you will welcome Brian warmly.

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Second, I want to say a word about our human and financial capacity as a diocese. During my time as your Bishop Provisional, I have been blessed to work with so many, many talented people, who give of themselves with great devotion to our common life and ministry. That includes the members of our diocesan Ministry Support Team – Steve, Jess, and Kim – along with all the volunteers who provide leadership throughout our various committees, commissions, boards, task forces and working groups. My word of caution to you in that regard is that we need to keep expanding this circle of leadership. We need to keep expanding that and not just relying on the people who have stepped up to the plate so often. My hope is that those of you here and when you take word of this Convention back to your congregations, that you will step into some of those leadership roles. Maybe you might consider being elected to the Diocesan Council tomorrow at the luncheons that will be hosting those elections. Or maybe reading the reports that are in the back of the document that you received about the various ministries going on, you might find something there that says, “hey I have a gift that I could give to that ministry. Let me step forward.” I know it’s not necessarily the North Dakota way to put yourself out. That you sometimes just wait for someone to encourage you. Well, I’m encouraging you right now. I’m encouraging you, I’m asking you, I’m saying please find your place in the leadership of this Diocese. It will be critical for the next three years especially to have as many people in leadership roles as possible. And the same goes for your local congregations. I know you all are very active in your congregation. So, you must go back and encourage others to take up the mantle of leadership as well with you.

I think as we expand the circle of leadership, we discover that the gifts and talents of many provide us with a richness that is just not ours when it’s only a few who are stepping up to do the work. I think if the Episcopal Church in North Dakota, one of the smallest dioceses in The Episcopal Church, and if we are to maintain our identity and be ready to elect our own bishop within the next three years, we need to have solid, stable, well-informed leadership functioning in every single congregation.

The same can be said on the financial resources side of things. One of the wonderful things that happened this past year is that we exceeded our WoDakota Appeal goal of \$50,000. I think some of the council looked a little bit with crooked eye at me when I suggested that we might be able to do this, but we actually raised over \$52,000 in that appeal. Thanks to the gifts of so many of you. And there is still time if you haven’t! But because we were so successful, we have also put that into next year’s budget. So, be thinking about how those of you who have the capacity to give over and above your local giving (this is not to take away from your local giving) can do so to this appeal. This will help us fund our ministries.

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Further, as you know, the New Season of Ministry Task Force is recommending that we make a significant financial investment in our future as a diocese. Make no mistake about it, they're asking us to do something big. They are asking us to use some of our reserves that have accumulated over the past few years, along with available endowment funds, to help fund two positions that align with the goals set by the Task Force. The hope is that these investments will pay dividends, but of course nothing is for certain. But this is where they are leading us and calling us. That is why our human investment is as important as our financial investment, as we make a common commitment to these ministries. And not just say, "oh well, now that we have this missionary and that missionary, we can step back and there's nothing more we've got to do around here." No. That will never work. They will need all the support we can give them. And so, I ask you to keep that very much in your thoughts.

Finally, on a personal note, I want to say how rich and rewarding an experience it has been for me to serve as your Bishop Provisional. Coming to North Dakota was never on my retirement radar screen, except in the capacity of tourist. Instead, the Holy Spirit was at work bringing us together for some important work, and I am glad I said yes! And that you said yes!

When I was approached about the possibility of serving as Bishop Provisional, I looked closely at the documents produced by the Diocesan Discernment Task Force in which you said what you were looking for in this current season of ministry. It struck me that you were looking for a coach who could help rebuild some of the administrative structure of the diocese and help build a more collaborative, collegial, and circular model of leadership, focused on some very specific goals and priorities. You were looking for someone with the heart of a ministry developer and for someone who would work with you, across differences, in the spirit of building a beloved community. You invited me into your agenda for your future and I am glad you did. My life and ministry have been enriched by and through our relationship and I will continue to do all I can in support of your new season of ministry and the "new thing" that God is up to among and through you. Please continue to pray for me, as I continue to pray for you.



Convention Eucharist



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