

Convention Address 2017

Bp. Barry L. Beisner

Grace and peace to you, in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This is our 12th time to do this together, me addressing you as your bishop, the 7th Bishop of this Diocese; you coming together in annual Convention, for the 107th time.

We gather this day to do the business of the Church very much aware that we are doing so in the context of the most catastrophic wildfires in California history; fires that have severely impacted several of our congregations, and many of you here. Our prayers and deep desire to stand with you, and to help in any way we can, will continue undiminished while the long hard work of healing and rebuilding goes on. I am grateful for the generosity of so many in this Diocese whose compassionate giving has allowed me to disburse so far over \$20,000 in aid to our churches in Sonoma, Napa, and Mendocino counties, in addition to \$10,000 from Episcopal Relief and Development. Much more than that amount has been received directly from around the Church by Incarnation, Santa Rosa. Tonight's offering at the Eucharist has been designated for fire relief and redevelopment. Please continue to pray especially for the clergy and lay leaders of those affected churches, as they

work to guide their communities through this time of deep disruption, in the power of the Resurrection.

We are gathered also at the time of the 500th anniversary of the advent of the Reformation, and we are greatly blessed to have the bishop of the Sierra Pacific Evangelical Lutheran Synod, Bishop Mark Holmerud, with us tonight to minister Word and Sacrament, and to remind us of our reformation heritage. I hope that we will all recognize that our stewardship of that heritage involves the unfinished business of reform: one theologian [Yves Congar] describes it as a three-fold work of challenging distortions in faith and practice, tapping again and again the sources of true life in our tradition, and working at keeping the life of the Church open to new insights, new ways of being Church, new beginnings.

Ever notice all the “RE” words that we’ve been using here and around the Diocese these past 11 years? Just now, reform, remind, recognize. And also words like, renewal, revitalization, recovery, revision, restructure. (And of course, apportionment *reduction*—which we’ve done twice in my episcopate.) What does that say about us? What is going on?

One answer in these words attributed to Martin Luther: “This life, therefore, is not righteousness, but growth in righteousness; not health, but healing; not being but becoming; not rest but exercise. We are not yet what we shall be, but we are

growing toward it; the process is not yet finished, but it is going on; this is not the end, but it is the road. All does not yet gleam in glory, but all is being purified.”

There is a four-letter word used to describe any system which is not in transition. The word is “dead.”

We are in process. We have been changing as we have been living into the vision that we discerned together, and going forward, knowing that any authentic vision for the Church will meet some essential criteria:

it will lift up Jesus Christ, that he might be better known, loved, and served;

it will have our baptismal covenant at its core. It will strengthen us in living that covenant, taking us further in the direction of realizing that each and every baptized one of us is a minister, with God-given gifts for ministry, in the service of God’s mission. (And true to that covenant, it will be inviting, hospitable, and inclusive.);

it will be diaconal, directing and inspiring us to serve the world beyond our walls;

it will be priestly, drawing us nearer to one another and to God, raising up saints and nurturing the people of God;

it will be apostolic: mission-focused and universally networked in a living tradition;

it will help us to be very clear about our identity and purpose, understanding that God has a mission, God is at work in the world, and God invites us to be partners in that mission. (Therefore we won't just ask God to bless our work; we will learn to notice what God is up to, and join in. And we won't try to save the institution of the Church; we will use the institution to save the world.)

We have been living a vision of change and continuity. Change that celebrates and builds on the best of what has been, and carries it forward, for the glory of God.

Perhaps another "re" word occurs to you about now: "repeat." You have heard this from me before. And you will hear it again, before I'm through.

In fact, I am moved to repeat something I shared with you 7 years ago, at the time we were beginning our celebration of the centennial of this Diocese, and shortly after the fire that destroyed our offices:

"One very great and painful loss in the fire was the collection of portraits of the bishops of this Diocese—all except for Bishop Wingfield, who had the good sense to be painted so large that his portrait was hanging safely downstairs. But everyone hanging upstairs, in the Conference Room, all those were destroyed. Moreland, Porter, Hayden, McNair, Thompson, Lamb—all those portraits gone.

“I have been wondering about the elders disappearing from view right on the eve of our centennial celebration. It doesn’t feel like an abandonment, since their legacy is so much with us; rather it feels almost as if they were stepping back to allow something new and different to emerge. Maybe it’s just that I have inhaled too much really nasty smoke recently, but that’s what it feels like to me. It is not a break in continuity. What the elders have built and bequeathed is with us in almost every aspect of the life of this Diocese. Rather, this feels more like a very graphic reminder of what it means to be Church. A reminder of the Communion of Saints. A reminder that ours is a living, dynamic, expansive tradition. A reminder of the primacy of mission. And an invitation to a renewal of confidence of confidence as we move forward...”

That memory, at this time, reminds us of the reality that Bishops come and go. Clergy come and go. Congregations come and go. No good thing we do in Christ’s Name is ever truly lost. What matters is that we build on the right foundation. What matters is that we work so that Christ is truly known, and loved, and served.

In keeping with that truth, I have announced my intention beforehand:

I now call for the convening of a special meeting of Convention on February 9, 2019, at a place to be determined by the Standing Committee, for the purpose of electing my successor. Our Standing Committee will, as in previous episcopal transitions, oversee the election process. In consultation with the Presiding Bishop and the Office of Pastoral Development, and in accordance with best practices in the

Episcopal Church, our Standing Committee will create such committees as they deem necessary to do that work well. With the help of those committees, they will oversee the process of discernment for determining who might best be called by God to be the 8th bishop of Northern California; they will conduct the process of electing that bishop; and they will oversee an orderly transition, including the ordination and consecration of your new bishop, which will occur, God willing, on or about June 29, 2019.

I have complete confidence in our Standing Committee to do all things necessary and to do them well. I ask you to support them completely. Let us work together to bring this episcopate to a healthy closure, and to assure that the next, new one is well begun. To that end, let us pray for this process earnestly, beginning now:

“Almighty God, giver of every good gift: look graciously on your Church, and so guide the minds of those who shall choose a bishop for this Diocese, that we may receive a faithful pastor, who will care for your people and equip us for our ministries; through Jesus Christ our Lord.” (BCP 818)

Amen. And thank you. And God bless you.