

In the U.S., most citizens (inside and outside of church) define Christianity as an expression of rules, condemnations, political machinations, sinful leaders, institutional self-interest and such, not as the epitome of love.

Third, the Church, the community of Christians, is mandated by Jesus to serve the goal of reaching all people to enable their salvation, to gather us, as he says, "like a hen gathers her chicks under her wing," like a shepherd gathers his sheep. There has been considerable mission drift from that goal; institutional survival, lobbying to legislate moral issues on Christians and non-Christians alike, political power itself, personal and institutional affluence, promotion of (or, in reverse, exclusion of) particular segments or groups in society, national patriotism, to name a few. Some may even be desirable goals, but for Jesus, they are all penultimate to the gathering mission. The Gospel's message is clear. But sidetracks, rabbit trails and muddled messages make the Church's purposes and proclamations confusing and contradictory.

God, being love, does not force us. Force is a weapon of violence, not a vehicle of love. The patient nudges of the Holy Spirit have transformed those who paid attention and accepted them. But they have not moved the Church herself. In the present chaos and loss of direction, further hopes of transformation may be futile.

The Holy Spirit has never been accorded the same attention in the West as the other two members of the Trinity. People often speak of "God and Jesus," believing in what I term a "Binity" instead of a "Trinity." It reflects in the impending celebration of Pentecost, which is one of our three great annual festivals, yet has nothing of the impact or profile of Christmas and Easter. But it is the Holy Spirit who is charged with walking with the Christian community, and

guiding us. Although he doesn't force, he does act.

Is it possible that the Holy Spirit is intent on a cull of church people? It may be that the current scene is beyond reasonable salvage. A cull can bring the Church back to when she was young, a relatively small community, but on fire to achieve the true characteristics of Christ's Body in the world. There can come a time when the old structures are no longer functioning. They need to be cleared away, along with the people who cannot have the vision to see past them. New ones must be put in their place. This kind of transformation has happened before in history, and the current state of things certainly argues that such a cull is appropriate, even unavoidable. Unity, love and Gospel clarity absolutely do not describe today's Church. Yet the Church without these essentials is a barrier to God.

Therefore, weep not as Church declines. The Holy Spirit is not retiring, but regrouping. If you want to help, seek to achieve those Gospel goals of unity, love and clarity. Be prepared that, even when your message is received without opposition, there are many within the Church whose own goals in reality conflict with these aims, and your sentiments will not be followed by appropriate action. There are many who simply do not have the vision to even conceive of a Church focused on these three goals.

But keep persevering, remembering that God is much more patient than we are, and the Holy Spirit will not desert us. As before, when Christ was crucified, dead and buried, it all seemed pretty hopeless. Few remembered Jesus' promise that, when he was gone, he would send the Spirit. Seek unity with the community of the Faithful, be filled with the Eucharistic love of God, and be clear when you tell the Good News to all who will listen.

And pray, "Come Holy Spirit."

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THE LINE

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



THE NATIONAL SYNOD 2024

BY THE VERY REV. CANON MICHAEL PENFIELD

During the first week of April of this year, for the first time in four years, the Missionary Diocese of All Saints held its national Synod in person. Most times, our Synods are conducted regionally, but once every three years, we are to get together as one Church. Unfortunately, because of Covid and health reasons, we had to delay this year's national Synod by one year.

This particular Synod was especially important for several reasons. First, it was important because we were graced with the presence of our retired Bishop Ordinary, Bishop Ilgenfritz and our present Bishop Ordinary, Bishop Lipka. The last time we had both at one Synod was when we met in Maryland just prior to Covid. The second reason was that this was the first National Synod held outside of Maryland. We met in Detroit.

But the last and most significant reason for this Synod was to elect our newest Bishop Coadjutor. This event is significant also because, for the first time, both candidates were not original members of MDAS. Fr. Fitzwater resides in the Diocese of the

Mid-Atlantic and Fr. Jarrett originally resided in the Diocese of the Church for the Sake of Others (C4SO). Additionally, both are fairly young men with young families. And both men have very impressive backgrounds both in evangelizing and growing their churches and missions. Needless to say, both men were very impressive and made the election process difficult.

What also made the process difficult was that we needed at least a majority of each group of representatives. We needed a majority of clergy and a majority of churches represented by lay-delegates. We had a great showing of the churches. Out of 28 churches that officially make up MDAS, 22 had representatives at our National Synod. The clergy was another matter. Out of the 81 clergy that were permitted to vote, only 31 were physically present. We also had 12 absentee votes and 3 proxy votes. That means we had a quorum of 46 clergy.



REQUEST FOR A BISHOP COADJUTOR & ARCHBISHOP

During our last National Synod, we elected our new Bishop Coadjutor. However, this is not the end of the election process. Now, he must be approved by the College of Bishops. Additionally, our Primate, Archbishop Foley Beach, will be retiring from this position. He asks us all to pray for our next Primate which will also be selected by the College of Bishops. For these reasons, I ask that all our parishes, clergy and laity, pray that God will insure that the correct men be selected for these very important jobs. To this end, I have modified this prayer, which I hope will help you:

A Prayer for the confirmation of the Missionary Diocese of All Saints' Selection of a New Bishop Coadjutor and the selection of the new Archbishop for the Anglican Church in North America

Almighty God, giver of every good gift. Look graciously upon Thy Holy Church, and so guide the minds of those who shall confirm the selection of the Bishop Coadjutor for the Missionary Diocese of All Saints and who shall elect the next Archbishop of the Anglican Church in North America that we may receive faithful pastors who will preach the Gospel, care for Thy people, equip us for ministry, and lead us forth in fulfillment of the Great Commission: through Jesus Christ our Lord.

God bless,
Fr. Michael Penfield
Vicar General

The Convocation of the West Summary Statement

We are a missionary people living out the historical, Biblical Christian faith in the Anglican tradition.

With only a majority in the house of clergy, we then needed a two-thirds majority in each group to elect a new Coadjutor. That came after two ballots. At the end, Fr. Fitzwater was elected. However, this does not complete the process. Next, his election and he will be considered by the College of Bishops. This is slated for June of this year. If they confirm Fr. Fitzwater's election, then Fr. Fitzwater will be consecrated in either October or November of this year.

The other matters considered by the Synod included the approval of minutes and reports and the proposed amendments to the Constitution and Canons of the Missionary Diocese of All Saints. Most of the proposed amendments involved cleaning up language and clarifying the role of the President of the Standing Committee. These changes were all approved with one minor amendment regarding punctuation. The changes to the Constitution will have to be approved again next year at our regional Synods in order for them to take effect. The amendments to the Canons will take effect ninety (90) days after this past Synod.

Besides business matters, we also had the renewal of vows by the Clergy, the consecrations of Holy Oils for the various churches, a large number of confirmations, and the setting aside of a Deaconess. All of these very important religious celebrations were moving and beautiful to behold. It was a great honor to be part of them.

Next year (and for the next two years after) we will be holding regional Synods in each of the three Convocations. The plan currently is to have our next National Synod in the Convocation of the West. So, we may want to start thinking about where to have it and at what time of the year. Finally, our regional Synod next year is tentatively set for the first week in May because Easter is so late that year. However, we may want to revisit this, depending on the schedule of the Bishops.

As we approach next year's regional Synod, we need to think of several things. One is having our much-discussed women's retreat in conjunction with our clergy's clericus. We already have one woman who has volunteered to help in the planning. If there are any other's interested, please let your Vicar General, Fr. Michael Penfield, know.

Next year, our Diocese will also be trying to meet our requirement to have something in place to handle cases of inappropriate behavior by clergy or members of our Diocese. This may involve employment problems, such as harassment, or criminal problems involving inappropriate sexual behavior. We may have to approve these new procedures at our next regional Synod, or at least discuss them.

If there are any other topics for which you would like the next Regional Synod to discuss or something spiritually you would like us to embrace in our Clericus, please let our Vicar General know.

One final thing I would like you all to consider, which I am sure will come up by the time of our regional Synod. Because of our "near miss" in establishing a quorum for the clergy, the Bishop, with the advice of the Standing Committee, will probably be considering ways to streamline the number of Clergy listed as eligible to vote. We want to make sure all Clergy, either retired or active, can vote. But we may want a way to clean up the role of those who never participate and from whom we never hear.

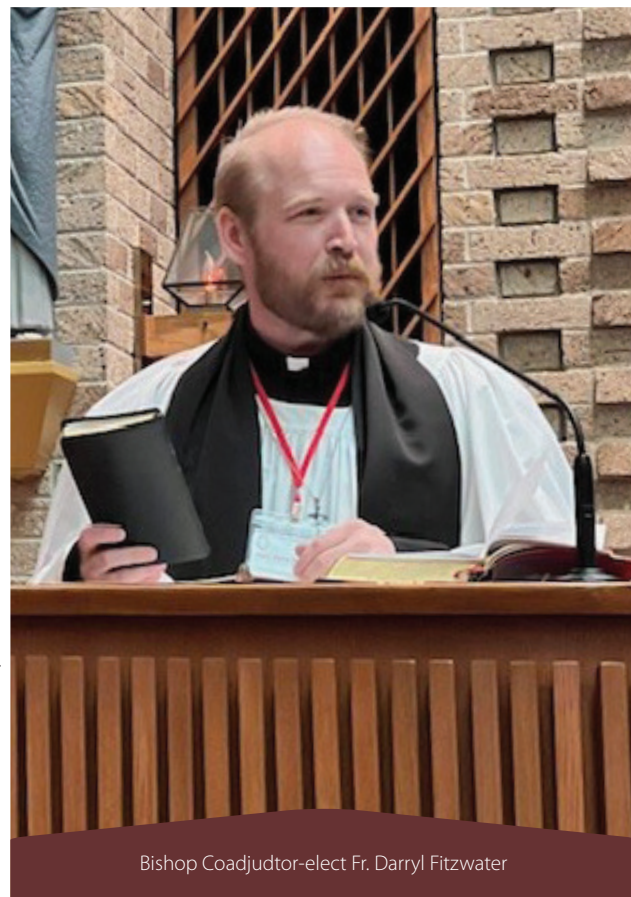
This is a very exciting time for our Diocese. Fr. Fitzwater will be a great addition to our family and we trust and pray, he will help us in growing our churches, spreading the Gospel, and sharing the love and saving grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in our incredibly and increasingly jaded society.

God bless.

*All article photos courtesy of
www.mdasanglican.org*



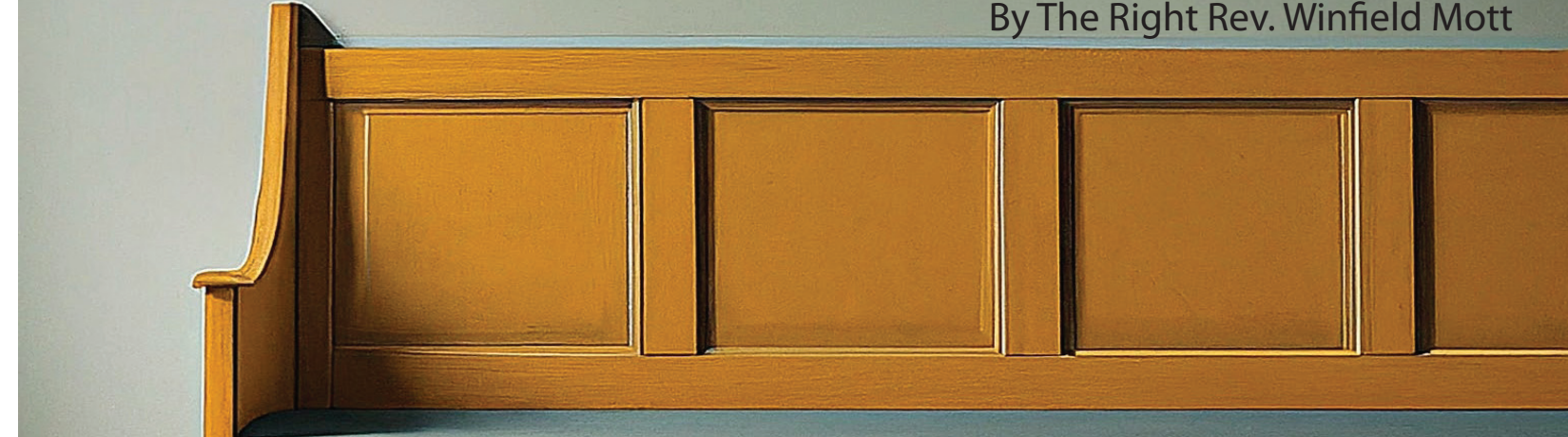
Bishop Rich Lipka preached and celebrated Thursday's Holy Eucharist



Bishop Coadjutor-elect Fr. Darryl Fitzwater

THE CULL OF THE SPIRIT

By The Right Rev. Winfield Mott



You can see it in the pews and in the polls. Church affiliation is declining. It has been the trend for at least several decades, and shows little sign of reversing. It follows quite closely the pattern across western Europe, which began over a century ago, leaving only a small remnant today. The statistician for the Anglican Church of Canada, assuming the rate of decline continues at its present pace, announced the last Anglican in Canada would be gone in 2040. While the decline is happening at different rates in the U.S., depending on geography and denomination, it is certainly happening.

Strategies among churches to counteract the trend range from denial to despair to frenetic programs. While there have been occasional local reversals of the trend, no "magic bullet" has been found. The "graying" of the pews indicates that it follows a generational pattern, which the polls again confirm, indicating the older generation of church goers will not be replaced as they fade. Christian youth groups, formerly a standard organization in a congregation, are rare. Statistics of baptisms, confirmations and church weddings are dropping much faster than the general stats.

The explanations of the causes of the trend are numerous, sometimes contradictory and usually lacking in solid evidence. Membership in all organizations is dropping. Churches are not alone in feeling the impact of new generations who are not "joiners." Some attribute the decline to the failure of churches to adapt to changing cultural and ethical standards. Others point out that the denominations resisting those changes, while not immune to the decline, are doing better than those who are trendy. Some suggest it is the same pattern of "secularization" experienced in Europe in the last century, where a lifestyle appearing not to need or notice churches provides a satisfactory living for most people, who give little thought to the questions of ultimate origins, salvation (indeed, from what?), or God's existence at all. Another explanation is that our capitalist and enterprise society has moved to the worship of Mammon rather than God, and in the pursuit of profit has no use for the latter.

And there are many more attempts to explain, many of them worth thinking about, (and some of them pretty loony). But none have succeeded in an analysis which, if applied, reverses the trend. Blame and hand-wringing do not achieve measurable results, political solutions make it worse, and as each generation becomes more remote from a Christian point of reference, having a common base of assumptions fades. It is easy to predict doom. Those who focus on the last days, rapture, Armageddon, and the destruction of the planet have much fodder to chew in current events.

But God doesn't seem worried by this trend. It may be he is simply waiting, as in the days of Sodom, to get down below the ten-man minyan of righteous people before smiting. And all these possible explanations might be going down the wrong road. Perhaps, as in the days of Old Testament Israel, the cause is not in the neighbor nations nor evil infiltrators. Maybe it is internal, not external. When Israel, despite the admonitions of the true prophets, departed from true worship and obedience to God, he ditched them.

An objective look at the Christian scene today is not inspiring, despite the presence of some wonderful saints among us. But we have surely come a long way from what the New Testament lays out for the Christian community, the Body of Christ. First, Jesus prays that we are one (see John 17:20-23), a theme repeated by Peter and Paul. They use the analogy of the body, where each part has its unique function, but the whole body functions as a seamless unit. Yet, our oneness is so shattered that we don't even notice it anymore, and serious ecumenical efforts are rare. We are clearly not one.

Second, Jesus and the New Testament authors made clear that the single, compelling motive, indeed essence, of God is love (see, for example, 1 John 4:7-12). That love, expressed most completely on the Cross, continues. Christians, however, are no longer renown for their love for others. Christian history is a depressing recitation of anything but true love.