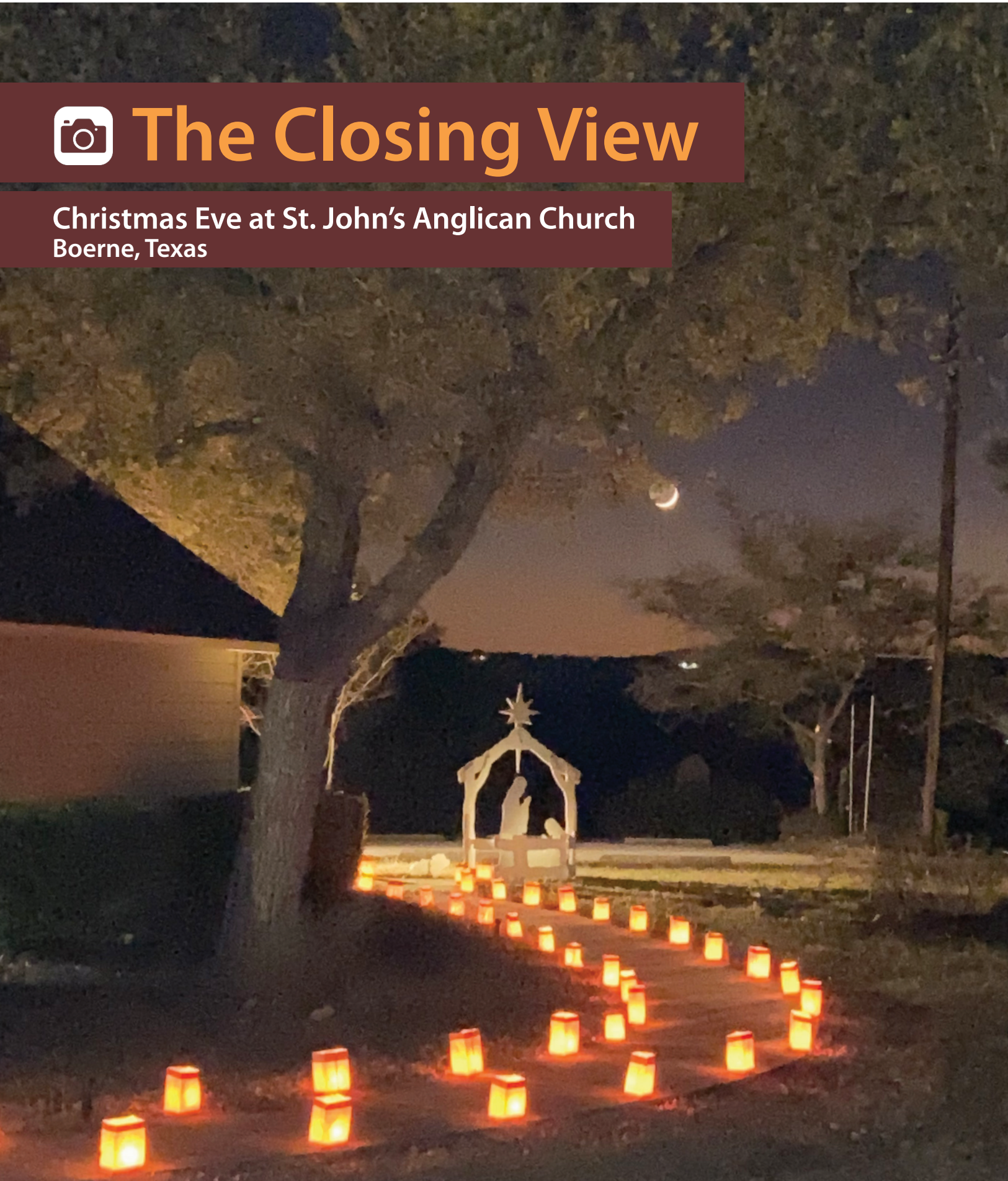




The Closing View

Christmas Eve at St. John's Anglican Church
Boerne, Texas



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THE LINE

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

OUR FUTURE

BY THE VERY REV. CANON MICHAEL PENFIELD

Every new year has the promise of hope, of new beginnings and of change. We approach the New Year with resolutions and a fair amount of superstition. For good luck, the Pennsylvania Dutch serve pork and sauerkraut on New Year's Day; the Italians around Rome wear red underwear on New Year's Day; and the French eat raw oysters and drink champagne on Saint Silvestre's Day (New Year's Eve).

Then there are the endless resolutions: lose twenty pounds, walk every day, learn a new language or a new instrument, and become a "better person" – however you wish to define that. Many resolutions are unreasonable, and most find a way to peter out.

At the gym to which I belong, there are basically three seasons in which we see an influx of new people: when the weather starts getting nicer; when people return to college in August and September; and when the new year begins.

The latter group are in the gym because of their New Year's resolutions, and we usually give these people until mid-February. It's a good year for the gym if ten percent of the new people remain for the whole year. And this may be the basis for why in every gym to which I have belonged it usually takes about six months of talking to someone before you learn their name.

But for us in the Missionary Diocese of All Saints, this truly is quite a hopeful time. We have been well-shepherd during a very difficult time, through an emergency change of leadership and the COVID shutdown. We have worked out many of the logistical problems of having a non-geographic diocese, and many administrative functions have been put in place. However, our Bishop Ordinary has asked for



The Convocation of the West Summary Statement

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

Carnage

By The Right Reverend Winfield Mott

Christmas is about the Incarnation. The world, which has been done with Christmas and “happy holidays” since December 25th, doesn’t accept that. Christians, who begin celebrating Christmas on the same day as the world concludes its festivities, understand the uniquely historical reality of Christianity, unique because religions in general depend for their various foundations on rules, ethical precepts and a God, or gods, who stay away from personal visits to our planet.

In contrast, the Christian Faith depends on a center point in history, that one night in the First Century, Jesus Christ rose from death in order to redeem and restore our planet, and all of us with it. He did so on a specific real day in history, with a real body and soul. That Resurrection, in turn, obviously depends on his real body and soul having been born into earthly life on another real day in history. Knowing the actual dates involved is not important for us. Knowing that they were actual is very important.

Asking people, including many Christians, to define Christianity can be somewhat discouraging. Many define it the way Buddhists, Jews or Muslims define their religion: a set of religious beliefs which guide the believer in life, so they may live ethically and devoutly. The latter two religions would add that these beliefs include the worship of an almighty God. But in fact, Christianity is not a religion, nor is the important thing about it a set of devout acts, rules or commandments. It is a way of life based on a personal relationship with God, who saves us and has made himself accessible to us through the earthly manifestation (=epiphany) of Jesus Christ in human form and flesh.

The Incarnation is also an involvement in our dysfunctional planet. This is manifest at the very beginning. The Christmas story has some “wow” elements as heaven salutes the event with angel choirs and a guiding star. The reality of earth, however, follows quickly. The birth appears no different than any other, painful and messy. It happens in particularly humble and difficult circumstances, in a cave or barn, to a betrothed but unmarried couple away from home, and the infant placed in a manger (note to urban readers: a device used to feed farm animals).

Shortly after, the couple and child are forced to flee from the political situation, a bad ruler inflicting murderous violence on children in a (vain) attempt to thwart God’s will. They become homeless refugees in Egypt, which fortunately had an immigration and border policy of compassionate welcome.

Thus, even before the child can grow to be “on duty” (his ordination/anointing as Messiah does not happen until he is in his late ‘twenties), the situation on earth impacts him in its failures, evil and problems. Nor does it get better. The story of his ministry, aside from his own teachings and actions, is one of encounter with a variety of medical issues (lameness and paralysis, blindness, deafness, vaginal bleeding, epilepsy, child and youthful mortality, inflicted injury, high fever, etc.), and mental problems (lots of demons acting out multiple bizarre and dangerous behaviors, which today we mostly attribute to other causes, but still consider mental illness). He is confronted with ugly attitudes: self-righteousness, judgmental arrogance, hostility, greed, religious rigidity, lack of compassion, heresy, unbelief, political expediency, etc. As well, he observes, and sometimes shares in, difficult times; poverty, hunger, violence and riots, fear, prejudice and discrimination, oppression, unemployment, divorce. Finally, he is unjustly convicted and executed by those who fear his power and truth. There are, it must be added, also moments of great inspiration when humans show strong faith, warm love, forgiveness, giving and other good works. As we all know, life on earth is a mixed bag. My point is only that when you choose to be incarnate, you are immersed in all of it.

The story is still unfolding. Today and over the centuries, much Christian thought has attempted to move our Faith from being the following of an incarnate Savior. Since the Middle Ages, and perhaps earlier, people have attempted to be “spiritual,” trying to deny or minimize their material being. A whole theology has developed, borrowed from the ancient Greek philosophers, which separates our soul, being spiritual and therefore good, from our body, being material and therefore bad, or at least of no value, except as a tent for the soul to dwell in, or perhaps a prison from

which the soul eventually escapes when the body dies while the soul soars free. Some tried to escape the carnal world by fleeing to the desert or a contemplative monastery, rejecting as much as possible the material world. Rod Dreher (“The Benedict Option”) envisions a spiritual remnant hiding out from the grubby material world around them. Some simply separate their “spiritual” element and keep it for times (as in Sundays) or places (church, or out in nature, depending on preference), while the rest of their life is given over to the pursuit of profit, pleasure and pride.

Nevertheless, the Incarnation has never been repealed. We remain intact in the Body of Christ ourselves. The very acts of our Faith are fully material, completely and irretrievably tangled into the Spirit, in the water, bread and wine. The material earth, so despised by the pagan Platonists, is created by God, who made it to be good (Genesis 1:31). It is still his, even when it is maltreated and blasphemed.

The Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, built at the precise site of Jesus’ birth, is usually abounding with thousands of tourists at Christmas, decked in Christmas finery and full of festivities. On Christmas Eve, the archbishop and entourage processes through the streets to the church, led by the Boy Scouts bagpipe band and thronged with rejoicing faithful, both Palestinian Christian locals (who are the majority of Bethlehem’s population) and pilgrims from around the world.



The Church of the Nativity
Photo by Neil Ward

This year, there is none of that. The horror of thousands of deaths, predominantly children, caused by the bombing in Gaza, only a few miles away, and the shock of watching a genocide unfold through bullets, bombs, starvation and disease makes festivities unthinkable, especially for Palestinian Christians who share in the suffering of the occupation. Instead, the nativity scene for this Christmas in the Holy Land is the Christian mother and child shot dead by an Israeli sniper as she came out of the Church of the Holy Family in Gaza.

This is the problem of Incarnation. When you engage with

earth, you are immersed in its sin, suffering, and sorrow. Where is Jesus in all this? He is right here, in Gaza. Jesus wept over Jerusalem, the city which symbolizes all earthly cities and models a heavenly pattern. He continues to weep for Jerusalem, whose name, ironically, means “City of Peace.” His love is not theoretical or abstract. The Cross is real, just as much as his birth and resurrection, just as real as his presence as the Lamb of God, the Agnus Dei, in the Eucharistic bread.

If we are his followers, incorporated in his Body, where are we? A church which dismisses the troubles of the world with a wave, as it sings its songs in comfortable pews behind blessed walls is a church which is denying the Incarnation. In encountering Jesus, they will be shocked to find he was not in their pews at all, not impressed with their righteousness, not involved with a pro-life movement that remains indifferent to the lives of children being violently ended. “Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink, . . . when did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?” And the answer is “whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me”(Matthew 25:37-40).

Nor is this about Palestine. It is about you. The multiple suffering of the people and animals of the world, shared by our Savior, is manifest in many places and times. Violence done to unborn children in abortion needs to be addressed just as

violence to already born children being bombed and starved. Funding oppression and funding abortion look the same in an incarnational theology, along with a host of other suffering caused by evil people, by good people doing nothing, by citizens who don’t understand their tax dollars are the funding source, by people indifferent to human need, by people who see salvation as a private, self-centered matter between them and Jesus.

How you implement the actions in your life to express an incarnational ethic is something God leaves up to you. That you will implement it seems something Jesus strongly advocates. We live in a world of carnage. The word comes from the same root as incarnation. Christianity is a carnal concept, the Word become flesh to dwell among us. “The Body of our Lord Jesus Christ given for you” is incarnation into your very being, soul and body. It is not there to sleep, but to nourish your action. The Merry Christmas of his humble, suffering, powerful real presence continues as you see his face on all people.

us to find a Bishop Coadjutor who can take the reigns when the Ordinary decides to retire. It is a bitter-sweet time when future possibilities are arising, as well as some trepidation. In other words, we are about to embark on a new adventure.

So, how do we approach this time? How do we make sure that we do what we must to prepare for the selection of this man as our new Bishop Coadjutor? And how to we temper our expectations? Well, first, we must trust. Second, we must also pray. And third, we must do our "due diligence". Each of these aspects helps us choose the right man to be our next Bishop Coadjutor while still controlling our expectations.

Trust is one of the more difficult Christian concepts to understand. We know from Holy Scripture that we are to trust the Lord, but we also know that we are not to "test" Him. We are not to ask for something with the expectation that the Lord will prove something for us. When we test the Lord, we lose. In other words, it is one thing to trust and quite another to test. Yet, many Christians fall into the trap of testing when they think they are showing trust. They ask for something specific with the belief that they will and should be granted exactly what they want – sort of like a genie would grant our wishes. But that is not what Jesus tells us:

"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!"

[Matthew 7:7-11]

God is our Father. He will give us what we need and what is "good" for us. But please note, that is not necessarily the same as what we want or even exactly for what we asked. We will receive what is best and what is good, but it may not be for what we specifically asked.

The truth is that God is in control, and we can trust Him that all will work for the fulfillment of His Kingdom. But that does not mean everything will go our way always. It doesn't mean that we will be granted the Bishop Coadjutor who meets our personal specifications or our personal image of what he should be. It means rather we will be granted the best person for what



God wants and is best for us. It means that His will is going to be done. In other words, we can be confident that all will happen according to His will in exactly the way He wants it to happen. And we can also trust that, at the exact same time, we will be given exactly what we need and what is good for us.

As we look at trusting, we can see how prayer is an intimate part of trust. We pray that God will grant us what we desire. In our specific case, we pray that God will send us a man who loves the Lord and loves his neighbor as himself. We pray that the man will be a good Christian who is committed to the Great Commission, who will preach the Gospel, who will care for God's people, and who will equip us for ministry. And we pray that he will maintain the Catholic order and traditions that are the bases for our Diocese. Prayer speaks for itself. Jesus told us to pray for what we want and what we need. And He also said that, if we ask, the best will be given to us. So, pray we must.

The last thing we need is to do is something that is a legal term. We are to do our due diligence in evaluating each candidate. "Due diligence" means that we must review the information we have on each candidate. We must evaluate what we read. And it may even mean a bit of research. How has this man acted in the past; what has he done for his own church that reflect on those qualities we want in a Bishop. Then, we must decide what would be best for our Diocese.

There is an old Russian proverb: "Trust, but verify". Ronald Reagan used this phrase to convince the American public that we can trust the Soviet Union in relationship to the nuclear weapon limitations, but that we are not to be naïve about it either. We must verify that the agreements are being kept. Likewise, we need to trust the Search Committee's selection of candidates, but that does not mean we do not need to review what each candidate has to offer. We must review the information provided in order to decide which one is the best choice for

our diocese. We must review their information and pray on each quality in order to make an intelligent decision.

But even with all of this, there are no guarantees. We must pray, trust, hope and review. However, no matter what we decide, it is truly in God's hands as to whom we will have as our next Coadjutor. And that should give us confidence and comfort.

God bless.

Request for a Bishop Coadjutor

The Standing Committee for the Missionary Diocese of All Saints have closed nominations for our next Bishop Coadjutor. Since one of these men will be leading our Diocese in conjunction with our Bishop Ordinary, our other Bishops, our Vicars General and the rest of our Standing Committee, we ask for your prayers that the Holy Spirit will guide us in selecting the right man. I would ask that all our parishes, clergy and laity, pray that God will insure the correct man be selected for this very important job in keeping us within the One, True, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. To this end, Fr. Christopher Parrish of St. Luke's Chapel in the Hills has drafted the following prayer, which I hope will help you:

A Prayer for the Missionary Diocese of All Saints' Selection of a New Bishop Coadjutor

Almighty God, giver of every good gift. Look graciously upon Thy Holy Church, and so guide the minds of those who shall choose a Bishop Coadjutor for the Missionary Diocese of All Saints that we may receive a faithful pastor 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



Save the Dates!
The Missionary Diocese of All Saints
General Synod
April 2-5, 2024



St. Paul of the Cross Passionist Retreat Center

www.stpaulretreat.org

23333 Schoolcraft

Detroit, Michigan 48223

located 14 miles from airport (DTW)



Check-in Tuesday between 3-6 p.m. & depart Friday before noon