

The election of Kevin Thew Forrester as Bishop of Northern Michigan has been greeted with a barrage of questions. It is time for us all to take a deep breath and sort things out.

Let's look at some facts.

The controversy over the bishop elect has been framed as a case of competing loyalties, one to the Christian Faith and another to Buddhism. Is this the case? The facts are clear, Bishop elect Thew Forrester is a practicing Christian who uses a variety of prayer methods, one of which is rooted in Buddhism. Can a Christian practice Buddhist forms of meditation? Of course. Just as Christians can teach Yoga, embrace literal interpretations of scripture, try Transcendental Meditation, participate in Charismatic forms of worship, without fear of excommunication. Is this not one of the hallmarks of our way of doing the faith?

Does use of scripture and liturgical texts at St. Paul's in Marquette constitute an infringement of the canons or a response to a changing climate in which we practice our faith? We would be helped to recall how liturgical revision has happened in the past. I can clearly remember the widespread use of The People's Anglican Missal, the St. Anthony Prayer Book and a variety of mimeographed hymn texts, prior to the revisions of the 1928 BCP and the 1942 Hymnal. I well recall that some of the innovations of these texts later came into common use. In this case, the experimentation clearly serves to advance the Gospel proclamation. The St. Paul's congregation has been recognized in nationally as an example of a growing congregation. The Mystery Worshipper on the website [www.ship-of-fools.com](http://www.ship-of-fools.com) has given the congregation one of its highest ratings. These are innovations in response to the Gospel mandate, not wanton infringements of canon law.

There has been considerable controversy about the work of the Search Committee as it presented its candidate to the Electing Convention. Some have erroneously accused the bishop elect as having chaired the Search Committee. The Electing Convention strongly endorsed the work of the Search Committee. These are devoted and competent folk, representing the spectrum of views in the church. Were there anomalies in the process, this would have been widely discussed within the diocese. In fact there were no such discussions. The question we face is the same one we faced upon the New Hampshire's election of their bishop, "Shall a diocese be permitted to express its will?" Bishop elect Thew Forrester's election is the fruit of a well conceived process, involving voices from around the church and spanning a period of nearly two years.

There is a serious question being raised by Thew Forrester's election. His Episcopate will be a cooperative work. A team has been called to do the work of Episcopal oversight. "Is it possible for the Episcopate to flourish in such a collaboration?" Over the past two decades, Northern Michigan, Episcopalians have evolved just such a model of ministry in its variety of congregations. These ministries have involved the discernment of teams and building mutual accountability. Team members have grown in their ability to do the work of ministry on every level and in every order. That the Episcopate now expresses a level of collaboration within and among dioceses might be, for some, a threat. For many it is a sign of hope. We have yet to see how it will pan out. If Northern Michigan's track record is any indicator, this Episcopal iteration will do a great service to the Church. Among other things, it will serve to focus our attention on the Baptismal Covenant.

I think of this season in the Church as a Gamaliel moment. You may recall from the 5<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Book of Acts, the disciples stood in the custody of the Sanhedrin. Gamaliel, a deeply respected member of that ruling body spoke up, saying, "Therefore, in the present case I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God."

I agree with the Living Church's Editor that this new form of episcopate will be "One to Watch Carefully."

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