

November 9, 2017

A time for truth, reconciliation

By Bishop John Harvey Taylor

When colleagues and I visited St. James Church on Via Lido in Newport Beach this week, I spotted a wall calendar still showing the page for June 2015, a month that will long be remembered in the Diocese of Los Angeles. It signified the end of weekly worship at St. James and the beginning of a season of wearying conflict that, in one way or another, has affected the ministries each member of our diocesan family.

Among the casualties: The reputations of a beloved and courageous bishop and his talented vicar, deep disappointment experienced by a congregation, deep mistrust between diocese and congregation, strained relationships among bishops, deacons, laypeople, and priests, and a black eye for our diocese in the local media and national church.



A new season, we pray, begins this morning.

Before too long, as standard operating procedures dictate, the mission church of St. James the Great will open its doors on Via Lido. Mission and diocese, vicar and bishop's office will work collaboratively, collegially, and by the book.

Then all of us will have the opportunity to turn faithfully and purposefully to the hard but necessary work of truth-telling and reconciliation.

The latest season of struggle began in July, when Presiding Bishop Michael Curry gave the Standing Committee, its president, the Rev. Dr. Rachel Anne Nyback, and me the responsibility for mediating a pastoral solution to the controversy over the impending sale of the St. James property. On Oct. 11, the buyer decided not to proceed. Vicar Cindy Evans Voorhees and other leaders of the St. James congregation offered to purchase the property so they could use it as a community church unrelated to our polity, a proposal we considered but rejected. After further conversations with St. James, we and church leaders decided to issue today's joint statement detailing the way forward for St. James, Canon Voorhees, and the diocese.

It is the product of considerable discernment and prayer and frank conversation among the parties. It is also likely to leave few feeling completely vindicated.

Thus it has been these two and a half grueling years. Many



advocates of St. James were frustrated in August when the Standing Committee and I decided not to run the legal and financial risk of violating the existing sales contract. Some said that our appearing to reward Bishop Jon Bruno flew in the face of the case that had been mounted against him for conduct unbecoming a bishop during March's ecclesiastical trial before a hearing panel of The Episcopal Church. Loyal advocates of Bishop Bruno may well be unhappy with today's announcement, since it appears to reward the leaders of St. James for what some feel was conduct unbecoming a Christian community.

Winners and losers. Polarization and accusations of duplicity and betrayal. Inflexible positions and disrupted friendships. Not the church at its best — but inevitable consequences whenever controversy erupts, the fog of conflict descends, and colleagues in leadership and ministry take up sides instead of tending relationships. In the midst of conflict, we're often at our worst when we think or know we're right. As the parties wrote in our statement, "We will end the cycle [of hurt] by sharing our narratives openly and honestly, using reconciliation in relationship to rediscover our unity and purpose as a diocesan family in Christ."

The Standing Committee and I do not envision the people of St. James returning to the church building as the end of the story but the beginning of the final and perhaps most important chapter. It amounts to a call (one that is binding on the signatories) to a season of truth-telling, mutual discernment, and reconciliation. Undistracted by participants' preferred outcomes when it comes to occupancy of the building on Via Lido, we stand a better chance of constructing an accurate narrative about our recent troubles.

Details are coming soon about how our reconciliation work will be organized. It won't be easy, and sometimes it won't be pleasant. But the psalmist got it right (133:1): "How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity!" Let us begin today, each of us, by taking a moment to behold the world as it is, its deepening hunger for meaning and justice; to face up to the wealth of energy and treasure we have spent on the question of St. James these 28 months; and to imagine the work we may accomplish in unity for the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. †