



Excerpt from Diocesan Blog Posting

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Reflection on the election of Michael Curry to be the Presiding Bishop

Yesterday began with early morning committee meetings for many folk, but we all came together for the morning Eucharist. Every day our worship follows the commemorations on the liturgical calendar of the Episcopal Church, and June 27 is the observance of Cornelius Hill, who was a lifelong Episcopalian, and a priest, and the last hereditary chief of the Oneida Indians. Much of the music for the service was provided by pan flutes and drums, and was simply elegant and excellent. As that day's observance carried the theme of the ministry of the church among Native Americans, our preacher was the Reverend Cathlena Plummer, of the Navaholand Area Mission. Her father had been the bishop of Navaholand, and Cathlena's recent ordination to the priesthood was an occasion of much joy in the church. She is a priest, but is also a working shepherd, and at the beginning of her sermon noted how satisfying it was for a shepherd, from the Good Shepherd Mission in Fort Defiance, to be preaching on the gospel, which was Jesus' teaching on the Good Shepherd. She was nothing less than wonderful. Her sermon was drawn from her life as a shepherd, and as she spoke of following her sheep up into the high cliffs where she lives, she talked of hearing God speak to her out in that lonely place, and of what it meant to be known by God and to know God, and to learn from God the direction of one's life. She talked about being so deeply rooted in Navaho spirituality and of being a Christian, and of how those two sacred threads run together through her, and of what she has learned of God from both. She ended, "This is my story, this is who I am, I believe in both faith traditions. Amen." And she won us over in a big way.

At the end of the Eucharist, we were asked to sit in silence and prayer, and told that when we heard the sound of the pan flute, all of the bishops were to get up and leave, and then to board buses for the Episcopal cathedral in Salt Lake City where we would elect the Presiding Bishop.

There were four buses, and a short drive, and we were at Saint Mark's Cathedral quickly. We sang hymns as we gathered, from a cathedral song sheet. The first order of business was the calling of the roll, which is done in order of seniority, beginning with the longest-serving living bishop and working down to the most recently ordained. As the roll begins, we heard name after name after name of bishops who were not present, as age and infirmity made attendance impossible, but then people began responding with "Here" as they heard their name. We had over 170 bishops present, active and retired, and learned that the simple majority required for election would need 89 votes.



Our chaplains then came forward and led us in prayer, and then ballots were distributed. The actual voting was fast, and the ballots were collected. We then drifted out toward the parish hall where there was water, and bathrooms and lunch waiting for us. While we were eating our sandwiches, we were asked to come back into the church to hear the results of the first ballot. As all the world now knows, it was a stunning and decisive first ballot victory for Bishop Michel Curry of North Carolina! We rose to our feet and gave our approval of this election in a sustained, five to seven minute ovation, as Michael was led up to the front of the cathedral. He spoke briefly, but movingly, and then emissaries were sent from the cathedral over to the convention center to inform the House of Deputies that the bishops has elected. While they were gone, all of the bishops signed the canonical testimonials of election, sang some more hymns, and waited for the House of Deputies emissaries to come and tell us that they had confirmed the election.

Back on the buses, to join the deputies and assembled guests to await the arrival of the Presiding Bishop Elect. There were many tears, and much jubilation. Bishop Curry received 121 votes in the House of Bishops, 100 more than the next contender. The House of Deputies confirmed this election with a vote of 800 to 12. Nothing could have been more apparent than that the Holy Spirit was all over this election! We have called one into the leadership of the church who will make us proud, and who will I know help us as a church never to forget why we are Christians, why we are Episcopalians, why we love Jesus and why that matters. It is a wonderful thing that we have elected the first African American to lead our church, but I want to be very clear about something. Michael is African American, indeed, and in a time when the work that we must do as a people and as a church in racial reconciliation and justice is so powerfully before us, his election sends a strong message to the church and the world. But we did not elect Michael because he is African American. We elected him because he is a man of deep, deep spiritual health, who speaks of his love of Jesus freely and with power, and who has all of the gifts and abilities we would want in our leader to run the church. We elected him because he is manifestly the right person for this job at this time, and the fact that he is also African American will bless us too. The church will rightly celebrate the election of our first black Presiding Bishop, but make no mistake: we have not elected a symbol, but a leader, and one whom I and countless others are more than ready to follow into God's future.