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## Second Sunday of Advent, 2022

*"You are my servant, I have chosen you and not cast you off. Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be afraid, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, I will help you. I will uphold you with my victorious right hand." (Isaiah 41:9-10)*

Dear Friends in Christ,

On December 18, the Standing Committee plans to announce the slate of bishop coadjutor nominees, for the election at the end of Diocesan Council in February. Today, I would like to offer you my thoughts on the nominating process and upcoming election – before everyone, including me, knows who our nominees will be. I hope that by speaking to you before those names are released, no one will try to read between the lines or look for clues about how I think people ought to vote.

**1.) Right up front, here's how I think delegates and clergy ought to vote: prayerfully, thoughtfully, humbly, hopefully and thankfully,** with hearts turned away from self-defined self-interest and toward Jesus and his call to shared life and common mission in him. This upward call will, by grace, help us resist the downward pull of choosing sides.

**2.) Whoever appears on the ballot, let us give thanks for their willingness to enter the discernment process and to be called to serve as Bishop of West Texas.** Please understand that none of the nominees will be "ready" to be our next bishop. We will elect, but it is God who will make that person ready and equipped to be a bishop. Part of the life of a bishop is to be called beyond the limits of his or her abilities and to follow Jesus beyond familiar, trusted skills.

**3.) The nominating process may seem like it is taking a long time, but our Standing Committee is moving both quickly and at a measured, deliberate pace.** Leadership transitions in our Church typically can take around two years from the beginning to the day of election. The Standing Committee is working diligently within a 10-month timeframe, to honor my decision to retire in late 2023. Be thankful for them and their devotion to West Texas. Pray that the Spirit will lead and guide them in every meeting, every decision.

**4.) The Standing Committee has sole canonical responsibility for organizing and overseeing both the nominating and the election process.** Together, its members have crafted a process to help the delegates and clergy identify and elect the right person for our Diocese at this time. They have added some steps to the process that were not part of previous bishop elections in our diocese, and as often happens, the changes have added a measure of stress and uncertainty.

The Committee has worked hard to communicate clearly and often about the process and their rationale for these changes. Before indulging in destructive gossip and speculation, please read, or reread, the numerous



communications from the Committee this year. All are available on the diocesan website, at [dwtx.org/blog](http://dwtx.org/blog). Contact the President of the Standing Committee, the Rev. Dr. Ben Nelson, at [b.nelson@tmi-sa.org](mailto:b.nelson@tmi-sa.org) if you have questions or concerns.

**5.) When the nominees are announced, suspend any rush to judgment – whether positive, negative, or neutral.** There may likely be some surprises on the ballot; carefully read the information about the nominees and their responses to the various questions. Make time to listen to the sermons they have submitted; watch their video greetings. Serious discernment requires that we look at the whole individual—their gifts, experience, leadership, and faith—through the lens of the life and mission of the Diocese. Then we must offer it all to God in prayer.

**6.) A transition from one bishop to the next always brings challenges and anxiety as we look toward what is not yet known. Please don't let that anxiety rule.** The Diocese of West Texas is healthy and well-positioned to choose and receive our next Bishop. Signs of recovery and renewal in our 87 congregations are far more common than not. While we still have a way to go before we will be free of the “COVID-effect,” we are far from finished, and the imperfect numbers by which we measure congregational and diocesan health are good. While we should always desire to be a stronger Church – to answer our baptismal call “to grow into the full stature of Christ” – Average Sunday Attendance is increasing across the Diocese, dramatically in some places. The Diocese is financially healthy, and most of our congregations report budgets that are holding steady or increasing. The average financial pledge in West Texas is one of the highest in the country.

**7.) Be at peace; be of good cheer. God's got this.** In 2024, the Diocese of West Texas will be 150 years old. I am the 10th Bishop Diocesan, and so even though we don't hold these elections often, this isn't our first episcopal rodeo. The election of our 11th Bishop is serious business and matters greatly, but this process is not a matter of salvation. Jesus is Lord and will remain so after the election.

Way back in 2006 when I was chosen as Bishop Suffragan, I had to stand before a committee at General Convention of The Episcopal Church to seek consents to my election. *(Thankfully, that process has changed!)* I don't remember much of what I was asked or how I answered. I do remember saying that I loved the Diocese of West Texas and that I believed our life together, and our abiding commitment to staying together and loving one another for love of Christ, was a gift and a witness the whole Church needed.

The Episcopal Church, and the whole world, still needs that example of community in spite of and because of our differences. May this election – and the weeks leading up to it – be that gift, for love of Jesus and one another.

*“Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God...God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear...We love because he first loved us.” (1 John 4:7, 16-19)*

Love in Christ,

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