



December 2017 Message for Congregations and Lay and Rostered Leaders

Dear Beloved of God –

As we enter the season of Advent I have been thinking of Joseph and Mary journeying to Bethlehem. The gospel writer tells us that as the hour of birth drew near they tried to secure lodging and they found no room in the inn (Luke 2:7).

Founded in this verse *Las Posadas* (literally “the inns”) developed as a tradition based on the unavailability of shelter. For nine days (usually occurring nine days before Christmas) *los peregrinos* (the pilgrims) walk through darkened streets carrying candles to accompany the Holy Family. They travel from house to house requesting lodging and singing carols. The procession is invited inside to enjoy food and drink before they are turned away by someone posing as *los mesoneros* (the innkeepers).

La comunidad is invited to partake in the pilgrimage and await the birth of the child; but for many walking in solidarity with the Holy Family means more than simply re-enacting the familiar biblical story. The re-enactment reminds participants of the challenge of providing a home for all and of the millions who have journeyed from home and land to refugee camps or to other countries. The re-enactment remembers a God who calls us to hospitality, lest we, too, leave Jesus out in the cold.

To remember involves more than abstract thought; it involves praxis. Re-enacting *Las Posadas* signifies the risk-taking and life-seeking migrations of millions. Participating in *Las Posadas* reveals the most basic understanding of who God is and what acts we are called to enact. Dr. Ana María Pineda reminds us that when we participate in this annual Advent practice, we “ritually participate in being rejected and being welcomed, in slamming the door on the needy and opening it wide. [We] are in this way renewed in the Christian practice of hospitality, the practice of providing a space where the stranger is taken in and known as one who bears gifts” (Ana María Pineda, “Hospitality,” in *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People*, ed. Dorothy C. Bass [San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997], 29-42 [31]).

This Advent, though we may not ourselves participate in *Las Posadas*, I invite you to ponder with me and then to move to action as we consider the Christian practice of hospitality. Who is that stranger for whom we are called to provide a space? How might we share and receive, and learn from, the gift of hospitality? How might we experience the stranger as gift...lest we, too, leave Jesus out in the cold?

In Christ Jesus –

Shalom,

+Bishop Larry Kochendorfer

*The God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing,
so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*

Romans 15:13