

Beloved People of God,

As the clock ticks toward midnight in the final hours of December 31st, we gather spirit across the Dakotas-Minnesota Episcopal Area - united by our connection at the threshold of a new year— we are at a moment poised between what has been and what is yet to come. Tonight, we celebrate the long tradition of Watch Night, a sacred time to reflect on God's faithfulness and renew our covenant as disciples of Jesus Christ.

This night holds special significance in our Wesleyan heritage. For John Wesley, covenant renewal was not merely about personal resolutions but a communal act of recommitment to God's mission of love, justice, and transformation in the world. It reminds us that we are called to something larger than ourselves: to embody the hope and grace of Jesus Christ in every corner of our communities.

In 2024, we walked together through challenges and celebrations. We saw the Spirit at work in new ministries, revitalized congregations, and lives transformed by the gospel. We also carried the weight of grief, global unrest, and the ongoing cries for justice in our world. Yet, through it all, God's grace sustained us, and your faithfulness as a people of hope has been a light in dark places.

As we enter 2025, I invite us to reflect on three questions for this new season:

1. How is God calling us to deeper discipleship? Our focus must remain on growing in love with God and neighbor, sharing Christ's love with all people, and forming new leaders who will carry the mission forward.
2. Where is the Spirit leading us to take risks for the sake of the gospel? The challenges before us require boldness, creativity, and a willingness to trust God's vision for a flourishing church and world.
3. What will it look like to embody the hope of Christ in our local neighborhoods and global partnerships? Let us reimagine what it means to be a church that heals, reconciles, and makes the love of God known in tangible ways.

I also challenge each of us to enter this year with hearts attuned to prayer, seeking clarity about how our collective witness can strengthen our mission. The Dakotas-Minnesota Episcopal Area is uniquely positioned to proclaim the good news in ways that unite and inspire. Together, we will build a future where God's love and justice shine brightly in the communities we serve.

Watch Night Covenant Prayer

Focused on God's Unfolding Story

Holy and Gracious God,

On this sacred night, as one year ends and another begins,
we gather in your presence to remember your faithfulness,
to celebrate your love, and to recommit ourselves to your unfolding story of grace.

You are the Author of all creation,
the One who spoke light into the darkness,
who shaped humanity with your hands,
and who continues to write redemption and hope into the fabric of our lives.
Through every moment of joy and trial,
you have been with us—guiding, sustaining, and renewing.

Tonight, we step into your story once again.
We offer you our lives, trusting that your plans are good,
your purposes are just, and your love is unending.
Write your vision on our hearts, Lord.
Shape us into your people—faithful, courageous, and ready to bear witness to your love.

We covenant with you tonight:

To listen for your voice and follow where you lead,
even when the path is uncertain.

To love our neighbors with the same compassion you have shown us.

To work for justice, reconciliation, and peace,
believing that your kingdom is coming on earth as it is in heaven.

To proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ
in word, deed, and the way we live together as your church.

Holy Spirit, stir within us.

Give us the courage to take risks for the sake of the gospel.

Open our eyes to see the ways you are already at work in our communities,
and give us the strength to join you in building a world
where love overcomes fear and hope rises from despair.

As we cross the threshold of this new year,
we entrust our lives to you, O God,
knowing that we are part of a story far greater than ourselves.

Use us, we pray, as instruments of your grace.

May our lives be chapters that proclaim your glory,
and may our witness draw others into your unfolding story of redemption.

We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ,
the Alpha and the Omega,
the One who is making all things new.

Amen.

As we close this year and welcome the next, let us affirm the words of Lamentations 3:22-23:

"The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness."

May God's mercy and faithfulness guide us into 2025, and may this be a year where we bear witness to Christ's redeeming power. Together, let us rise as a church renewed by the Spirit, ready to live into God's unfolding story.