

NAVAJOLAND: David Bailey of Utah selected as 'co-leader' as church moves forward

By Pat McCaughan, October 18, 2009



[Episcopal News Service] The Rev. Canon David Bailey of Utah was selected as interim canon to the ordinary of the [Episcopal Church in Navajoland](#) (ECN) at a special October 17 convocation in Farmington, New Mexico.

A majority of the 40 delegates who met at All Saints Church selected Bailey in balloting conducted within the context of worship, presided over by the Rt. Rev. Rustin Kimsey, former assisting bishop of Navajoland.

During the service, Kimsey preached a homily "that spoke to the Navajo people of their unique heritage and the gift we have for weaving together our culture and tradition with our Christian faith," according to Anna Fowler, a member of the design team that helped to craft the proposal for developing Navajo leadership considered at the convocation.

Kimsey "also stressed harmony and unity as a part of our culture and that this day is intended for us to unite under the leader we select in order to be one united voice for Christ in the Navajo Nation," she said.

The convocation business session began after the prayers of the people, with time allotted for an address by both Bailey and another nominee, the Rev. James Leehan, a retired Indiana priest and former vicar of Good Shepherd Mission in Fort Defiance, Arizona, in Navajoland.

In keeping with the Navajo tradition, ballot totals were not released. Kimsey announced Bailey's selection after delivering the final blessing.

"The two candidates who had stood beside Bishop Kimsey for the Great Thanksgiving then greeted each other in love and harmony," Fowler recalled.

Afterwards, convocation attendees gathered in the All Saints parish hall for a feast of lamb stew and fry bread. "There was a sense of harmony among all those gathered," she said. "I believe that there will be a unified effort to move forward under the leadership of Canon Bailey."

Bailey had most recently served as canon to the ordinary and deployment officer for the [Diocese of Utah](#). He told Saturday's gathering that he hoped to serve as "co-leader toward our ultimate goal of a Diné Bishop to lead us in the future. What I sensed today was that the vision of the late Bishop Steven Plummer belongs to the Diné people of the Episcopal Church and that we are committed to move on for his vision to be realized," Fowler added.

Prior to his 1998 arrival in Utah, Bailey served as rector of [St. Stephen's Episcopal Church](#) in Phoenix and chaired Native American Ministries in the [Diocese of Arizona](#). He was also a diocesan liaison to Navajoland.

He assisted Plummer in an administrative capacity, helping the area mission develop a mission statement, economic development plans and as a Hogan Learning Center consultant.

Plummer was the first Navajo ordained a priest and the first to serve in the House of Bishops. He was consecrated bishop of Navajoland in 1990.

After Plummer's 2005 death from lymphoma, Kimsey was appointed assisting bishop. Bailey continued to offer administrative support to Kimsey until the Presiding Bishop appointed Bishop Mark MacDonald of Alaska as assisting bishop to succeed him.

MacDonald resigned as bishop of Alaska in 2007 after his appointment as the first National Indigenous Bishop in the Anglican Church of Canada. He continued to serve in Navajoland and Canada until July 27, 2009, when he formally resigned from the ECN.

The candidate selected will be put forward to the Presiding Bishop for formal appointment because Navajoland is an area mission.

After the October 17 convocation, Fowler thanked Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori for her support and assistance "in allowing us to understand who we are as the Episcopal Church in Navajoland and the freedom to take responsibility for our future."

The Presiding Bishop has applauded the team's efforts and said she hopes to ordain a Navajo or Diné bishop during her tenure.

Created by General Convention 1978, Navajoland is the only area mission in the Episcopal Church. It functions much like a diocese but with more oversight from the office of the Presiding Bishop and the House of Bishops. The ECN was carved out of parts of the dioceses of Utah, Arizona and Rio Grande. Its border is contiguous with that of the Navajo Nation.

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