



COME, LET US GO TO GALILEE

THE
GALILEE
INITIATIVE

The Episcopal Diocese of North Carolina

The Pastoral Address of the Right Reverend Michael B. Curry
The 195TH Annual Convention of
The Episcopal Diocese *of* North Carolina
Friday, January 21, 2011



The Bishop of North Carolina

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Come, Let Us Go To Galilee

In the Name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

*But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.' This is my message for you."*¹

For Christian people the message of Easter, articulated on the lips of an angel on that Resurrection morning, is well known. He is not here; he has risen from the dead! He's alive! What he taught us is true. The life of God has conquered the powers of death. The love of God has defeated the hatreds of humanity. *The powers of death have done their worst, but Christ their legions hath dispersed.*² Jesus lives!

That first part of the angel's message is the part we know so well. What we often miss, though, is the second part of the angel's message. Do you remember that second part? *He is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.* He is going to Galilee. There is something

¹ Matthew 28:5-7

² The Hymnal 1982 (New York: The Church Hymnal Corporation), #208

in this message about Galilee, something more than mere geography, something for you and me, something for us as a Church.

I

Let me show you where I'm headed with this. Our Diocesan Convention theme this year continues our previous themes of radical welcome -- but stretches them out even more.

Reflecting the Radical Welcome of Jesus by Being a Church for Others is our theme. The phrase "a Church for others" is adapted from the writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Writing from prison, where he was sent for witnessing to his faith as an opponent of Nazism, Bonhoeffer called Jesus quintessentially the one "for others."³ If that description is accurate, as I believe it is, then those of us who would follow in his footsteps are called and challenged to be a people, a community, for others, above and beyond our own self-interest. Thus we gather here under the banner of *Reflecting the Radical Welcome of Jesus by Being a Church for Others*.

So what does our Convention theme have to do with the angel's message, with Galilee? Galilee in biblical times could accurately be described as the land of others. Scholars and archeologists tell us that the region of Galilee, particularly lower Galilee where most people lived, included a diverse mix – Palestinian and Hellenistic Jews; Gentiles of Roman, Greek and Palestinian origin; wealthy landowners, and the First-Century equivalent of sharecroppers. It was ethnically and economically a diverse place.⁴

³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers From Prison* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1953, 1972), p. 381

⁴ The prophet Isaiah referred to the Galilee of his time as "the *Galilee of the Gentiles*." (Matthew 4:15; Isaiah 9:1). One biblical scholar says, "The name [Galilee of the Gentiles] reflects the popular reputation for racial variety and mixture in and around these northern frontier districts" of Palestine. (*The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Volume 1, E-J [Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962], p. 345) Another scholar describes Galilee in the time of the New Testament as an area inhabited by a "multiethnic populace." (*The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Volume 2, D-H [Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007], p. 515)

In Matthew's Gospel it's no coincidence that the Risen Christ goes to Galilee and summons his disciples to follow him there. Early in the Gospel when Matthew describes the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, he quotes the 9th chapter of Isaiah which speaks of the Galilee of the nations, or the Gentiles. Then at the end of the Gospel, the angel tells the disciples to go to Galilee to see Jesus alive. It is from Galilee that Jesus sends his disciples out on their apostolic mission with these words: *Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.*"⁵

The Rt. Rev. James Tengetenge is a dear friend who is Bishop of Southern Malawi and Chair of the Anglican Consultative Council. James has said for years that "in baptism, Jesus has made us family." He's right. St. Paul put it this way: *As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.*⁶

"In baptism, Jesus has made us family." I am convinced that God came among us in the person of Jesus of Nazareth to open the way and to show us the way to become more than merely an aggregation of individual self-interests, more than simply the human race or the human species. Jesus came to show us the way to become the human family of God.

This is what lies behind the Great Commission spoken in Galilee. This is what lies behind my prayer that, when we celebrate the 200th anniversary of the founding of the Diocese of North Carolina in the year 2017, the face of our Diocese will have begun to reflect the face of the peoples of North Carolina in all of our Galilean variety and diversity. This is Galilee. This is why our work at this Convention with the Reverend Stephanie Spellers on "radical welcome" is so important. This is Galilee. Jesus came to show us the way to Galilee, the way to become the human family of God.

⁵ Matthew 28:19-20

⁶ Galatians 3:27-28

Of course, anyone who knows anything about families knows that while family is a wonderful thing, and while we can't live without them, all families have histories, all families have issues. And we know healthy forward movement is not possible if our wounds and hurts from the past still linger in the present.

I suspect that's in part why Jesus began his ministry in Galilee with the words of John the Baptist on his lips: *Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.*⁷ You don't have to be a therapist to know that in the context of family, repentance and forgiveness are important practices. Archbishop Tutu has taught us that there is, to quote the title of one of his books, "no future without forgiveness."⁸

Repentance and forgiveness are about facing the past, the good and the bad, acknowledging all that has happened, and then redeeming it by learning from it and moving in a different direction. The word 'repent,' as you know, literally means "to turn around." It has nothing to do with blaming or shaming or wallowing in the mud. It's about reconciling and being set free to move forward into the future.

So tonight, as part of our commitment to truly become a Church that reflects the radical welcome of Jesus by being a Church for others, our Convention Eucharist will take the form of a liturgy of repentance and reconciliation -- especially for the sins of slavery and segregation and injustice perpetrated against any child of God.

I am blessed and privileged to serve as the 11th Bishop of North Carolina. I am also blessed and privileged to be the descendant of slaves and sharecroppers who labored in fields here in North Carolina and Alabama. Tonight the repentance and reconciliation that we do we will do together, not simply as the generational sons and daughters of slave owners, and as the generational sons and daughters of slaves, but as those baptized into Christ in whom there is no

⁷ Matthew 4:17

⁸ See Desmond Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness* (New York: Doubleday, 1999)

East or West. Together, as one, as the family of Jesus -- for in baptism Jesus has made us family. That is our witness to what the world can be. I am mindful of the words of Maya Angelou in her poem, *On the Pulse of Morning*.

*So say the Asian, the Hispanic, the Jew,
The African and Native American, the Sioux,
The Catholic, the Muslim, the French, the Greek,
The Irish, the Rabbi, the Priest, the Sheikh,
The Gay, the Straight, the Preacher,
The privileged, the homeless, the teacher....
History, despite its wrenching pain,
Cannot be unlived, and if faced with courage,
Need not be lived again.*

Come, let us go to Galilee!

II

It's not an accident that Jesus was in Nazareth of Galilee when he first defined his ministry, quoting the words of Isaiah: *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.*⁹ It's not an accident that the Sermon on the Mount is set in Galilee: *Blessed are the poor. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom.....*¹⁰ Jesus spent most of his time in the rural communities and peasant villages of lower Galilee with those who were "the other," with those on the margins of society and sometimes on the margins of hope. Jesus is the one for others. Being his disciple, following in his footsteps means being a Church and people for others. Jesus said, *The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.*¹¹ He includes us among those others and is calling us to follow in his footsteps by being a Church for others. Come, let us go to Galilee.

⁹ Luke 4:16

¹⁰ Luke 6:20, Matthew 5:3

¹¹ Matthew 20:28

That is why we will award the Bishop's Medal at our Eucharist this evening to All Saints, Greensboro and St. Bartholomew's, Pittsboro. Each of these congregations truly reflect the radical welcome of Jesus by being a Church for others.

When All Saints decided to renovate their parish hall complex, they decided not to do it primarily for themselves but for the use of the community. And they renovated the building in such a way that it has received numerous awards for environmental stewardship and innovation in building design. That's the servant Church, caring for creation, serving community. That's the Church reflecting the radical welcome of Jesus by being a Church for others.

If you go to St. Bartholomew's in Pittsboro on a Thursday around noon, you'll see what you might at first think is a soup kitchen to feed the poor. In many respects it resembles a soup kitchen -- but with a remarkable twist. This soup kitchen is for everybody, and I mean everybody: homeless, homebound, business folk, farmers, artists, Republicans and Democrats. I'm reminded of that old spiritual that sings, "I'm gonna come to the welcoming table one of these days." That's the radical welcome of Jesus. That's a Church for others.

Being a disciple of Jesus, following in his footsteps, means being a Church for others. That's why we are working to expand and renew the ministry of deacons in this Diocese, which you will hear more about later in this Convention. The primary job of a deacon is not to take care of us within the Church. The model of a deacon for me is Francis of Assisi, someone who helps the Church become a Church for others, who helps us serve and witness to the gospel in the world.

Two of our deacons who died last year, Kermit Bailey and Carter Lofton, left this Diocese and the churches they served, Ascension Church, Fork, and Holy Comforter, Charlotte, with incredible legacies of service and witness. Largely because of Kermit's leadership, the Episcopal Church of the Ascension in Fork -- a congregation of 72 baptized members -- makes sure that over a hundred schoolchildren who might not have meals on weekends get backpacks of food to

take home each Friday. They also provide meals for over a thousand people every month through their food pantry. That's what we need deacons to lead us in doing.

And largely because of Carter Lofton's leadership, most of the Episcopal Churches in Charlotte have made food packets for Stop Hunger Now. Largely because of Carter, we made 100,000 food packets at this very Convention. Carter inspired an incredible ministry with the Hispanic Latino community in Charlotte. That's what we need deacons to lead us in doing -- to take us out beyond the doors of the church into God's mission field, the sanctuary of the streets.

Imagine what our Diocese could accomplish with forty or fifty deacons like Kermit Bailey and Carter Lofton helping us become a Church for others. They and many others like them have inspired us to ask you, the members of this Convention, to help make felt Bible characters for Sunday School kits for children in our Companion Diocese of Costa Rica and in Hispanic and Latino Episcopal churches here.

And they and many others like them have inspired us to make a commitment to purchase 40,000 mosquito nets through NetsforLife. One mosquito net can protect up to three people, often a mother and children, from being bitten during the night and possibly contracting malaria. If we do this together we can purchase one net for each confirmed communicant in the Diocese, about 40,000 nets. And if one net can save three lives, that's about 120,000 lives that can be saved.

I'm not that interested in mounting a diocesan capital campaign to do something for ourselves. There may be a time for that, but this is not that time. I am passionately interested in and committed to a campaign to serve others. That's what we can do through NetsforLife. That's discipleship. That's following in the footsteps of Jesus. That's reflecting the radical welcome of Jesus.

Come, let us go to Galilee!

III

I'd like to explore another aspect of Galilee as a missionary metaphor for our Diocese. This has to do with sharing our faith with others in the cultural and missionary context that seems to be emerging. I've always treasured the words of John Greenleaf Whittier in that wonderful hymn, "Dear Lord and Father of mankind, forgive our foolish ways." The third verse goes on to say:

O Sabbath rest by Galilee!
O calm of hills above,
where Jesus knelt to share with thee
the silence of eternity
interpreted by love!

I'm sure Galilee included some places of serenity and refreshment. But I'm not sure peaceful hills and landscapes really describe First Century Palestinian Galilee any more than they describe Galilee today. A few years ago in a PBS documentary titled "From Jesus to Christ: The First Christians," a segment on New Testament Galilee began: "While often portrayed as a bucolic backwater, Galilee was known for political unrest, banditry and tax revolts."¹² Galilee was not a stable, uncomplicated territory. Galilee was a hotbed of economic uncertainty and political instability. It was a volatile environment, a place of anxiety and fear.

It's to such a place that the Risen Lord Jesus goes. After the Resurrection he doesn't stay with Mary Magdalene, to quote the old hymn, in the "garden alone, while the dew is still on the roses."¹³ He leaves the garden and returns to Galilee, to all of its ambiguity, instability and volatility. And to those would be his disciples he says, "Let us go to Galilee." I want to suggest

¹² Frontline: "From Jesus to Christ, the First Christians,"
www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/portrait/galilee

¹³ *Lift Every Voice and Sing* (New York: The Church Hymnal Corporation, 1993), #69

that the uncertainty, the unpredictability, the anxiety of Galilee make it an appropriate metaphor for the missionary moment in which we are living and which is emerging.

Whether we're talking about global economic and political instability or our own personal uncertainty, we are in Galilee. Whether we're talking about the threat of terrorism or the nightmare of natural disasters, we are in Galilee. Instability, uncertainty, increasing polarity among people because of ideology or tribal groupings, all these conditions describe our time. We are, all of us, in Galilee.

Let me bring this closer to home. If you're like me, you thought you were up to date when you learned to use email. Then you had to learn to text. Then texting wasn't enough; you had to learn to tweet. A few years ago I was telling churches, You've got to get a good web page. That's still true. But now you've also got to get on Facebook. I don't know what's next, but I'm sure something is coming.

Gutenberg's printing press changed history. The Protestant Reformation, the rise of European nation-states outside of papal control, the Enlightenment, the Industrial Revolution, all sprang from that invention. These days, Gutenberg could be named Steve Jobs, Bill Gates or Mark Zuckerberg, the man who invented Facebook. A professor of management studies recently told me that the pace of technological, global and societal change is so fast that much that is new in our culture becomes obsolescent in three years or less. We are living through a major epic of human transition and transformation, of instability and uncertainty, no less epic than that of Gutenberg's Fifteenth Century. Everything is affected. We are in Galilee.

Social commentators like Thomas Friedman argue we are in the midst of a massive global cultural transition in everything from our economics to our politics to our faith.¹⁴ Theological commentators like Phyllis Tickle, Harvey Cox, Loren Mead, Brian McLaren and Diana

¹⁴ See *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* and *The World is Flat*

Butler Bass concur.¹⁵ They suggest that the environment in which we seek to share, proclaim and witness to the gospel of Jesus is more akin to that of the Church of the New Testament and the Patristic era, the early centuries of Church history, than that of the High Middle Ages or the Nineteenth Century. The 1950s are over. World-wide Christendom is no more.

This may not yet be as obvious here in the South, but the trend is clear. If you don't believe me, go to Starbucks at 10:30 on a Sunday morning, even here in the Bible Belt. A few weeks ago I was riding with the Reverend Sealy Cross and a parishioner of Church of the Ascension, Fork, to Sunday service. Along the way we passed one or two mega-churches and started talking about church growth patterns. As we drove West on I-40 out of Winston-Salem, Sealy said, "Do you want to know who the real competition is? Just look out the window." At nine o'clock on Sunday morning we saw a large field dotted with hundreds of children in bright-colored uniforms playing soccer.

This trend has nothing to do with liberal church or conservative church. It's affecting mainline churches, mega-churches, all religious institutions. The cultural landscape of America is changing. This is not a passing moment, but a dramatic shift. And the question we face is: Will we as the Episcopal Church in central North Carolina do everything we can -- for the sake of the gospel of Jesus -- to engage this missionary moment?

In February 2010 the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life published a report titled "Religion Among the Millennials." Pew researchers have been tracking Americans' religious affiliation and spirituality over several generations.¹⁶ They've found that what's called the Greatest Generation -- those who fought in World War Two and Korea and rebuilt a country and world -- has the highest levels of both religious affiliation and spirituality. With the Baby

¹⁵ See *The Great Emergence* by Phyllis Tickle, *Everything Must Change* by Brian McLaren, *The Future of Faith* by Harvey Cox and the last chapter in particular of *A People's History of Christianity* by Diana Butler Bass

¹⁶ From my reading of the study, "religious affiliation" includes attachment and commitment to a faith community such as a church, synagogue, mosque, temple or meeting. "Spirituality" includes personal beliefs, prayer, study of Scripture and other practices of devotion and service that are motivated by faith.

Boomers – those born between 1946 and 1964 -- levels of both affiliation and spirituality begin to decline. That decline continues with Generation X, those born approximately between 1965 and 1980. And with the Millennial Generation – those born after 1981 – there's a 25 percent decline in religious affiliation, the highest in measured history.

But the Pew researchers made an interesting discovery. Even though the Millennials show the lowest level of affiliation with a faith or religious community of any generation in history, their interest in spiritual practice and their curiosity about the spiritual journey is much higher than that of the Boomers or Generation X. In fact, their level of spirituality almost equals the level of the Greatest Generation. This most technologically and scientifically sophisticated of the generations, according to the Pew researchers, has actually reversed the downward trend in spiritual practices.

As I mentioned, we're blessed to have the Reverend Stephanie Spellers helping us become a Church of radical welcome. Stephanie has a special interest in the subject – she's the organizing priest for a congregation called The Crossing, housed at the Cathedral Church of St. Paul in Boston. Her congregation reaches out to young adults in significant – and unusual -- ways. They aren't buying land or building more buildings. They're using the resources they already have in new ways to proclaim, share and witness to the gospel. Instead of waiting for young adults to come to them, The Crossing is going where they are. They're leading people back to the deep Christian roots of prayer, meditation, sacrificial service and witness to the gospel in the world. They're recovering the spiritual disciplines of the ancient Church, of the gospel, of the Risen Christ in Galilee.

I'm convinced our missionary goal at this time is not to build bigger churches or start a lot of new churches or fill up the pews. I'm not convinced those in themselves are goals born of the gospel. They might have more to do with institutional survival, with the idea that bigger is better. I do believe our missionary goal as a Diocese is to live, witness to and share the gospel of Jesus Christ in order to make disciples in the Anglican and Episcopal way of being Christian – disciples who will join us in making a real difference in the world for the cause of God's kingdom and the realization of God's dream. That is a missionary goal born of the gospel, suited for our

time, and worthy of our effort. We are living in a new and different mission context. For a significant emerging population, the gospel of Jesus will not be just good news. It will be new news. And we must go where they are. As the hymn writer said: “New occasions teach new duties.”¹⁷ Come, let us go to Galilee.

When I was at the Lambeth Conference a few years ago I attended a workshop on the Fresh Expressions movement in the Church of England, which encourages churches to reach out to emerging generations in innovative ways. One of the keys is that many congregations in England are no longer waiting for young people to return to church after they get married and have children. The Church is going to them where they are.

Stephanie Spellers wrote a book titled *Radical Welcome: Embracing God, the Other and the Spirit of Transformation*, which we will hear more about, but she is also an editor of a recent collection of essays concerning this emerging mission opportunity. This book is titled *Ancient Faith, Future Mission: Fresh Expressions in the Sacramental Tradition*. It includes essays by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Brian McLaren, Karen Ward, Phyllis Tickle and others who can help us move in this deeply Episcopal and Anglican way of mission. Here in the Diocese we are fortunate to have a priest from the Church of England, the Reverend Nils Chittenden, as Chaplain at the Episcopal Center at Duke and Diocesan Missioner for Young Adults. He brings experience as a British university chaplain working in precisely the cultural context I’m talking about.¹⁸

¹⁷ *Hymnal 1940* New York: The Church Pension Fund, 1940), #519

¹⁸ The Reverend Nils Chittenden wrote when I shared some of these thoughts with him a few weeks ago: “You might not think it, but our young adults have a passionate love for our wonderful, ancient, beautiful liturgies, for traditional music, for numinous, spine-tingling worship that captures the senses and touches the soul. And, yes, they are also eager for worshipping in fresh new ways that intersect with and reflect the everyday culture around them. This is a generation that is comfortable with plurality: with no single definitive dogma, but lots of strands intermingling all at once. This is unsettling stuff: we are going to have to become adept at multi-tasking our church lives together. Ask any campus minister how they communicate with their community of students, and they will tell you that it’s email... and text... and twitter... and Facebook.... and phone... and YouTube... all at the same time... No single way – but all of the plates spinning at the same time.”

As a way forward into this missionary future, allow me to offer two proposals that I believe can help us follow our Risen Lord into the new Galilee that lies before us.

First, I encourage you to seriously consider the canonical establishment of an Endowment for Missionary Strategy. We've been blessed by the gifts of generations of Episcopalians in supporting the mission of the Diocese. And when we sold The Summit to the State of North Carolina, the proceeds after all obligations were paid were held in trust as a quasi-endowment to support missionary strategy and help implement the diocesan Mission Action Plan. At the time some voiced concern that the funds would be frittered away. That has not happened. Diocesan leaders have been wise and careful stewards of this resource.

The proposed Endowment for Missionary Strategy would put institutional teeth in our commitment to be a missionary diocese for Jesus in the world. It would provide a mechanism for careful stewardship and oversight of our resources. It would allow us to respond effectively to the missionary needs of a culture characterized by rapid change. An endowment would answer Jesus' call to us to be not only innocent as doves, but wise as serpents.¹⁹

The second proposal I am calling the Galilee Initiative. The Galilee Initiative will be a group of clergy and lay people -- a combination think tank, council of advice and planning and strategy group -- who understand this emerging mission context and who will engage the Diocese in exploring the missionary field we are now entering. Over the next three years I will ask the Galilee Initiative to work with the School of Ministry to provide education that will help us understand this mission context and all the possibilities it offers. I'll also ask the Galilee Initiative to suggest practical ways that we as clergy, congregations and ministries of the Diocese can effectively reach new populations with the gospel.

What are we really talking about with this new initiative? We're really talking about Jesus. We're talking about putting our hands and the very life of this Church and Diocese in his

¹⁹ Matthew 10:16

hand and following where he leads, or, better put, following him where he has already gone. That is faith's way, and our way, into the future.

After reading a draft of this address our Communications Coordinator created a graphic that I think captures what we're talking about. The old saying about a picture being worth a thousand words might well be true in this case.

In the picture, if you look along the road, off into the distance, you can't really see what is there or where you are headed. The contours of the future before us in the Diocese as we enter this new missionary context are not clear and will not be clear for some time. But it's that figure dressed in the ancient garb of the beginning of the First Millennium, with that hand reaching toward us here in the Third Millennium, that most catches my attention. I remember folk in my grandmother's church used to say, "I may not know what the future will hold, but I know who holds the future."

Our task now is to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, who on the cross gave himself totally over to God when he declared, *Father, into thy hand I commend my spirit.*²⁰ It is that hand that's the key. That's what the Galilee Initiative is getting at. At stake is nothing less than the future witness of the Episcopal way of being Christian, a way that reflects a generous and compassionate orthodoxy, a way that reflects an openness to God's mystery, a way that is committed to serving the other, a way that dares to love as Jesus loves, that is willing to give as Jesus gives, that is willing to forgive as Jesus forgives, that is willing to welcome and open its arms as Jesus does -- a way that dares to be the body of Christ in the world, that dares to place its future in the hand of the man from Galilee.

There's an old song -- a diverse group of artists sang it, singers like Joan Baez, Shirley Caesar, Ray Conniff, the Five Blind Boys of Alabama, Tennessee Ernie Ford, Ramsey Lewis, the Platters and Loretta Lynn -- and the words go like this:

²⁰ Luke 23:46

Put your hands in the hand of the man who stilled the water

Put your hands in the hand of the man who calmed the sea

Take a look at yourself and you can look at others differently

Put your hands in the hand of the man from Galilee.²¹

Come, let us go with Jesus to Galilee!

²¹ Lyrics by country singer and songwriter Gene MacLellan



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