

Bishop's Address to the 136th Convention

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God (Hebrews 12:1-2).

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Let us pray:

Almighty and merciful God, it is only by your gift that your faithful people offer you true and laudable service: Grant that we may run without stumbling to obtain your heavenly promises, through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

First of all, I would like to thank the clergy and people of the Northeast Deanery for hosting this convention. You are the ones who always drive long distances to get to diocesan meetings; today, the rest of us are glad to return the favor. I am sure many delegates were relieved to find that it does *not* take six hours to drive here from all points west of Columbus. We cannot feel too sorry for your remoteness, however: it is utterly beautiful here, and I am sure I'm not the only one giving thanks for a convention center that offers us 360 degrees of Appalachian foothills to feast our eyes on.

Special thanks is also due, as always, to the Committee on Dispatch of Business, that has worked tirelessly since the 135th convention to ensure that the 136th convention comes off smoothly. I know they will not mind if I single out the Rev. Cricket Park for particular praise. For several years running she has secured a place to gather and coordinated the technical support, staff and creature comforts to ensure that the work we do here is our best work.

I would also be remiss if I didn't express my heartfelt gratitude to Bishop Price, who, despite being swallowed up by the Diocese of Pittsburgh, has continued to chair the committee on dispatch and has once again made it possible for us to have an agenda that makes sense and allows plenty of time for fellowship and prayer. We all miss you and Mariann, and we are counting the days until you are back among us full-time. I would like to thank everyone who worked together to put together our wonderful Eucharist this morning and the massed choir who offered the beautiful music as well as the Appalachian music group.

Our theme this year is "perseverance for the race." Not long ago I revisited my address to last year's convention, and was struck by how far we have run in a year. Let me share a few mileposts with you. Last November, I called for the selection of a Canon for Mission who would help me focus, develop and oversee the work of this diocese in witnessing publicly to the Gospel of Jesus Christ through community empowerment and advocacy for the poor and those in need. Our national search process led us to the Rev. Anne Reed. I wish to thank the search committee that worked tirelessly, always with grace, humor and a profound appreciation for Southern Ohio's noble history of mission work. They are Paul Clever, Alice Connor, Leslie Flemming, Lee Ann Reat, Janice West and Stephen Williamson.

Then there is our beloved Procter Camp and Conference Center, which I have taken to calling the Procter Farm. A year ago I announced the creation of a task force to help me understand better how we might take this precious diocesan resource to the next level. By 'next level,' I mean a business model that will engender sufficient revenue to expand Procter's reach as a place for gathering, learning and spiritual formation. I also mean exploring how we might best align the cultivation of our 1,200-acres of prime farmland with the mission of the diocese and how we might engage more actively in the life of the rural community that surrounds us in Madison County, to say nothing about how we might play a more constructive role in London, the county seat. This exploration has issued in change, some of it painful. The Procter Board has been reconstituted as a commission of the diocese, on the assumption that Procter is not a separate entity but is a vital and central mega-program of the diocese. With that in mind, I have folded the Procter staff into the diocesan staff. This has been a mutually enriching move. I also would like to take this opportunity to thank Penny and Leo Buckley *in absentia* for their years of service to Procter

and the diocese. We are now in a period of transition to new executive leadership, and we are eagerly awaiting the arrival of Chris Tokarz, our new Acting Director. She will take up her duties on Dec. 1. In my last convention address, I announced my intention to revise our policy on the blessing of same-gender unions. This decision was entirely mine, but a group of clergy and lay people graciously agreed to help me hammer out the details of a new policy. Their work went far beyond this charge. I have seldom encountered the depth of theological reflection and Christian witness that marked the meetings of this task force. I also would add that they were sensitive from beginning to end about the difficulty some members of our diocesan household would have with this policy. I am deeply grateful to them for their charity, their discretion and their courage. The fruit of their work is available for all to see on our website (go to “How we do things”), and I commend it to you. I would like the members of this task force who are present to stand, so that they may be acknowledged: the Rev. Douglas Argue, the Rev. Trevor Babb, the Rev. Bill Carroll, Joe Dehner, Esquire, the Rev. Pam Elwell, the Rev. George Hill, Ms. Nanci Koepke, Dr. Gail Payne, the Rev. Eileen O’Reilly, Dr. Don Reed, Ms. Marti Rideout, Mr. A. J. Stack, and Lisa Wharton, Esquire.

I spoke briefly last year about the church’s need to reach out to young adults. This is a mission field of considerable proportions, roughly divided between 20 and 30-somethings who are attempting to establish households and gain credibility in their chosen field of expertise, and undergraduates and graduate students on our college campuses, who are exploring everything under the sun and trying to figure out who they are. Both these groups are high on my agenda.

And not on my agenda only. Southern Ohio has a long record of leadership in campus ministry, and this charism has emerged in powerful ways since we last gathered in convention. When the Episcopal Church, despite severe cuts to its budget, offered grants to support campus ministry initiatives, two of our congregations responded immediately. The Church of the Good Shepherd, literally on the campus of Ohio University in Athens, and Holy Trinity, within feet of Miami University in Oxford, successfully petitioned for funds to develop peer ministry programs. I am very proud of their efforts, which have made us the only diocese in the Episcopal Church to receive two campus ministry grants. With the support of these grants, Good Shepherd and Holy Trinity are developing a corps of student leaders who are themselves rebuilding an Episcopal campus presence from the bottom up.

The same thing is happening at St. Stephen’s, Columbus, located on the campus of Ohio State University. St. Stephen’s has long had a strong ministry to the campus community, based on the raising up of peer ministers, that is, students who reach out to their peers and oversee the program. Just a few weeks ago, these young people hosted a gathering at St. Stephens’s for any and all Episcopalians on the OSU campus, wherever they go to church – or don’t. I was able to be present at this event, which brought together a lot of people who would not otherwise have known that they have the Episcopal Church in common. The Rev. Pam Elwell, who is a deacon based at St. Stephen’s, has been working over the past few months to identify all the people and places in our diocese that are engaged in campus ministry. Earlier this fall, all those people came together at Procter, and I was privileged to meet with them. It was amazing to see what’s going on, mostly with little or no monetary support. Besides OU, OSU and Miami, this group included people ministering at the University of Cincinnati, Dennison University and Capitol University. We will build on this beginning.

What about young adults who are not on campus or who have progressed to the next stage of their lives? For them, as for a host of potential followers of Jesus, it is imperative that the church rethink itself. I stated last year that young people are yearning for connection without coercion. Let me be clear about what I meant and what I mean. The generation that includes my own daughters does not have much faith in institutions or communities, since they see very clearly that even the most high-minded communities end up caring more about credentials for membership than availability to the world at large. Young adults want to serve, but they generally reject being co-opted into any organization that is exclusive or self-serving. The church is no exception. They also have a healthy respect for the ability of the most high-minded communities to become more interested in their own survival than the common good. On the other hand, they yearn for the opportunity to be part of something big. Can we be that big thing that is not ultimately just another interest group?

At its heart, this is surely what the Episcopal Church is all about. At our best, we have sought to be catholic without being denominational. As early as the 1880s, the Episcopal Church declared its solidarity

with anyone who accepted the authority of Scripture, the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Eucharist, the Nicene Creed and the historic episcopate – that is, bishops in apostolic succession. Apart from those four things, we were willing to regard everything as negotiable. Would we be as ready to do that today? Can we distinguish between what is essential to our tradition and what is not? Can we part with elements of our identity that are precious to us but may be a stumbling-block to others? We need to recapture the adventuresome spirit that animated that general invitation, not only as it applies to our ecumenical partnerships but as it may speak to a rising generation that seeks a Christian home.

To that end, I am working with the Commission on Congregational Life to launch some new initiatives that are alive to what is sometimes called “the emergent church,” what a number of our younger Episcopalian sisters and brothers have dubbed “Anglimergence,” and what the Church of England is calling “fresh expressions.” These ‘fresh expressions’ include more participation on the congregation’s part in the conduct and substance of worship, dialogical sermons, time for significant silence, increased emphasis on sensory elements (e.g. incense, chanting, drums), and effective incorporation of outsiders. My hope is that, within a tight budget – and respecting the terms of the proposed budget process, we may be able over the next year to redirect some COCL and Procter funds to the planting of one or more “fresh expression” worshipping communities. We also are planning a diocesan gathering at Procter on Saturday, Feb. 12, 2011, to introduce our congregations to the “fresh expressions” movement and to offer some tools for incorporating elements of that movement into our worship life. Mark your calendars now.

Above all, this last year has been characterized by a deep and diocesan-wide exploration of common ministry. Common ministry is nothing less than a total rethinking of how we function as church, one that takes the ministry of all the baptized with utmost seriousness and re-imagines the work of bishops, priest and deacons within that larger framework. The time is past when we can picture the perfect parish as a largely passive flock gathered around its pastor or a group of clients supporting their priest in return for spiritual sustenance.

For some, this realization is the fruit of economic necessity – fewer and fewer congregations can afford to pay for a priest who will serve as their personal chaplain. But, as we are all learning, common ministry is not a way to save money. It is a recovery of the church’s original understanding of itself as the body of Christ, galvanized and electrified by the Holy Spirit to be a new kind of community, a community that can change the world through its witness to God’s reconciling love and through its modeling of that love. The work of bishops, priests and deacons derives its proper meaning from this vision and this reality alone. Our job is to insist on this vision and fan the flames of this reality, but our ministry is pointless if it does not empower God’s people to be a vibrant, restless, creative and courageous community of faith, doing the one thing the church is called to do, namely, to be a community that rejects privilege and embraces the stranger.

Whatever else it may turn out to be, this is the church of the future, and it is the church that is attracting a new generation of Episcopalians here and now. I am grateful to the six congregations that have helped us glimpse that future through their participation in the Common Ministry Pilot Project, developed and led by Canon John Johanssen and Canon Karl Ruttan. Those congregations are St. Barnabas, Montgomery; Grace Church, Cincinnati; Trinity, Columbus; St. John’s, Worthington; Trinity, Newark; and Good Shepherd, Athens.

But common ministry is not simply about how we function at the congregational level. It is also about how we claim and live out our common life as a diocese. The budget process you will be voting on later today, and which I hope you will approve, will test our readiness to take our common life to a new level. As you all know, a projected reduction of \$300,000 in mission share income has forced us to take a careful look at the diocesan budget. But this also gives us the opportunity to engage in a diocesan-wide conversation about our mission priorities – a process which will, I pray, bring us all to a renewed appreciation for what God can accomplish through our united efforts and to a fresh realization that the diocese is not an office in Cincinnati or a line item in a parish budget. The diocese is all of us together, knowing the common story, proclaiming our common faith, praying our common prayer, drinking the common cup, serving the common good.

That common work is the adventure we have been sharing now for quite some time. As this year’s theme suggests, this adventure is, to some extent, a race: a race against the loss of a generation; a race against mere survivalism; a race against a spirit of hard-heartedness and suspicion abroad in our land. These are

enemies we must outrun, and outrun them we will. But racing is not only about escape. It is about the exuberance and delight of unbridled motion over new terrain. Most importantly, it is about our fixed attention on a destination whose attainment is assured, if we will but put our trust in Christ, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.

Let us pray:

O God, you declare your almighty power chiefly in showing mercy and pity: Grant us the fullness of your grace, that we, running to obtain your promises, may become partakers of your heavenly treasure; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.