

FINAL FORMATTED COPY

2022 Convention Address

The University of Iowa in Iowa City is about an hour north of where I grew up. My family was involved in sports, my brother and I played sports, and often sports was playing on our television, especially during the baseball, football, and basketball seasons. My mother was working toward a master's degree at Iowa, so along with growing up nearby, I grew up a Hawkeye fan.

In the early 70's, the sports scene at both the collegiate and high school levels, changed. Title 9 of the Education Amendments of 1972 (Title IX) became law, **prohibiting sex discrimination in any education program or activity receiving federal financial assistance.**

The impact in my school district was immediate. Team and individual sports were offered to girls in junior high and high school, the same number of offerings as those for boys. College and university offerings for women doubled, maybe tripled. It was a major step toward equality in sports, but also in so many other education programs.

In my hometown I saw new opportunities for any classmate who wanted to play sports. The first girls' basketball game in my high school was played before an overflow crowd, and the team members were instantly cool. What I didn't see was what had happened in the years prior to 1972 an hour north of where I grew up, at the University of Iowa, thanks in large part to Dr. Christine Grant.

(June 23rd marked the 50th anniversary of Title IX.)

Dr Grant, a professor at the University of Iowa, served as president of the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women, the first group to effectively advocate for equal sports opportunities for women in the United States. As Title IX began to take shape in the early 1970s, Grant was a trailblazer arguing that the legislation should include athletics. She testified before Congress. When the law was signed, it was, pardon the pun, a game changer of immense proportions.

What I saw in my years before graduating high school were the fruits of all that work, championed by Dr Grant, advocating, lifting up those put down, including the excluded, the equitable use of funds to provide opportunities for all. Dr. Grant was inspired by a vision of equality for all students. I commend to you reading more about Dr. Christine Grant a true pioneer in Title 9 equality. It is story worth knowing.

Here in our diocese, in our congregations, we also have stories worth knowing. As we gather in person for this 195th convention, we know that we have inherited the vision and work of those who have ministered and served in the diocese before us. Some stories give us pause and some stories require redress and restoration on our part. Other stories describe a godly vision and good work which continue to bear lasting fruit. And some stories describe ministry that was ahead of its time.

In other words, our diocesan story is a thoroughly human story, and it is a story we have committed to knowing better and knowing honestly. Two years ago, as a Convention we resoundingly passed 6 resolutions, the fruits of faithful rigorous work by the initial Task Force on Racial Reconciliation chaired by the Rev. Kelly Kirby, that was succeeded by the Commission on Racial Healing.

Those resolutions included repenting of our past actions that directly or indirectly injured non-white individuals, congregations, and communities, and committed us all to ongoing racial healing work throughout the diocese as individuals; congregations; deaneries; and at the diocesan level.

Another resolution called on the Commission on Racial Healing to make anti-racism training for the lay and ordained leadership of The Episcopal Church, including all those ordained, professional staff, and those elected or appointed to committees, commissions, agencies, task forces, and boards a priority in their work in accordance with Resolution A045 from the 75th General Convention. Our Diocesan Standing Committee has affirmed the implementation of this training. Training for 100 members of the diocese has taken place and you will hear more about training today from Chair Jan Scholtz and vice chair the Rev. Karl Ruttan.

Diocesan historiographer the Rev Jim Wilkinson undertook a great deal of research for the video "The Great Meadow: History of Race Relations in the Diocese of Kentucky" which two years ago our convention accepted as a foundational historical account. We are grateful to Jim for this work. Convention further urged every congregation in the diocese to begin to tell their history as it relates to racist activity and work toward racial healing, and recommended the *Becoming Beloved Community in Congregations* resource as a road map for this process, and continue to discover our Diocesan story as it relates to racist activity and racial healing ministry.

One of our excellent workshops yesterday Looking Back to Look Forward: Exploring Stories for Racial Healing was led by members of the Commission on Racial Healing, which included offering tools to encourage congregations and individuals to explore their stories and history about race as we work towards becoming beloved community.

Here is one of our diocesan stories:

Last month, Grace Church Hopkinsville, in conjunction with the Commission on Racial Healing, sponsored a liturgical Commemoration of The Rev. Aaron McNeil, sometime deacon at the Chapel of the Good Shepherd in Hopkinsville, which we know as the Aaron McNeil Center.

Preparing for this commemoration, Grace Church's rector, the Rev. Stephen Spicer and Amy Spicer engaged in a lot of research, and at the liturgical celebration, many of us were introduced for the first time to the actual name of the one for whom the center is named: The Rev. Alexander Hamilton (AH) McNeil, deacon. Otherwise known as Aaron.

Steve in his sermon shared that Alexander graduated from Hampton Normal becoming a teacher. He and his wife Dora taught reading, writing, and arithmetic, as well as classes on religion and social issues.

In 1887, at age 29, Alexander was accepted into the ordination process through the Diocese of Missouri. He studied theology at King Hall, part of what is now Howard University. Through his hard work and the good he was doing in his community; his reputation grew. Alexander tragically lost first his wife then their infant daughter in a matter of months.

Alexander keeps going. He continues to teach, and continues his seminary studies. Alexander says "[He] 'aims' to do all the good he can in all the ways he can."^[iii]

Which brings us to Alexander being called to the Diocese of Kentucky. Here is a portion of Father Spicer's sermon: [10 minutes to this point]

[Video]

It is my intention that next year at that liturgy I will formally authorize that the commemoration of the Rev'd Alexander H McNeil, deacon, pastor, and educator may be observed in the Diocese of Kentucky. This is one of our stories, and we will retell it annually, along with the story and commemoration of Anne Braden.

We were blessed to have other outstanding workshops in addition to the one mentioned earlier.

In one, we heard the story from 1837 of a woman named Ariana, who had her son, Macon "Thomas" Russell, baptized at Christ Church, Louisville. Ariana and Thomas were enslaved by the Powell family of Loudoun County, VA. Researcher Alison Herring described a compelling connection between the stories of Ariana, Thomas, and Christ Church up to the 21st century. My predecessor and dear brother, our beloved Bishop Ted Gulick, broke open the language of the baptismal liturgy in use at that time from 1789 Book of Common Prayer, discussing its dissonances with the practice of slavery, and how its words might have fallen upon the ears of the enslaved and their enslavers when Thomas was baptized. Bishop Ted concluded with this: "In the story of the Episcopal Church, there was a time when Episcopalians owned Episcopalians."

In another workshop The Rev. Dru Kemp and the Rev. Emily Crouch shared their skills addressing the impact of Covid-19 on leadership and congregations, focusing on local concerns as well as the unexpected gifts that are now a part of our mission we wish to maintain going forward. The care of those who care for others is vital.

New Wine, New Wineskins

Luke's Gospel describes an encounter where Jesus is asked why his ministry looks different from traditional practices and ways of following God. One image Jesus uses is that of new wine needing to be placed in new wineskins. Old skins won't expand so that the new wine, freshly pressed from a harvest of grapes, can mature and become what it is meant to be. He is speaking of the new work of the Holy Spirit, as well as the need for his disciples to be filled with new power, to mature and become the witnesses to the Resurrection that are meant and sent to be.

New wine belongs in new wineskins. As the prayerbook catechism teaches, Our mission to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ has not changed. But how we engage that mission certainly has changed in some ways.

I've heard it said, "I can't wait to get back to the way things were." The root of the sentiment is understandable. But we can't go back to the way things were. Perhaps it is better to not look to getting "back" to former things, but pressing forward, knowing that God will give a harvest of new fruit, that then is pressed into new wine, new expressions of Gospel proclamation and promoting justice, peace, and love, in new venues that meet the deepest needs of weary, hungry, and thirsty souls. This work will look different in each of our congregations, as well as in various aspects of diocesan ministry.

Episcopalians are blessed to have a consistent messenger in our day about new wine in new wine skins, our Presiding Bishop. Today, I wish to share with you the wonderful news that next summer the Presiding Bishop is coming! The Most Rev. Michael Curry will make a visitation to our diocese July 21-23. More about that in the new year.

And then Bishop Curry will return in 2024 along with several thousand of our kin for the 81st General Convention of the Episcopal Church! While the exact dates are not yet set, the latter half of June is the time frame currently swirling about! You will be hearing more about opportunities to volunteer later this morning. At that General Convention, here in Christ Church Cathedral, the House of Bishops will elect this Church's next presiding bishop and primate, to be confirmed by the House of Deputies. It will be an historic convention!

More new wine in new wineskins.

The Rev. Dr. Jerry Cappel's workshop **Connecting Christian Faith and All Creation: Prayer, Praise, and Practice** explored God's good news to all Creation and how parishes can more fully embrace its proclamation and celebration in liturgy and worship. I was introduced to the concepts of creation inclusion, marginalization, and normalization. I was challenged by the notion that to use a phrase like we are to "save the earth" is to put ourselves in the place of God. God calls us to a loving relationship with all. I want to learn more about the path of Deep Green Faith.

I heard several times people say how difficult it was to choose from the workshops given the schedule! (I agree, which is why I floated a bit!). May we take a moment to express our thanks and appreciation for those who offered their gifts for us all.

My last point is very personal for many here and throughout our diocese, and for me:

In our common life, there are important dates we remember together because they mark our most challenging days. One of those dates for the Commonwealth of Kentucky is now December 11th.

Through the evening of December 10th into the early morning of December 11, killer tornadoes tore through nearly the entire length of the diocese. 5 tornadoes carved devastating paths through western Kentucky, affecting 25 counties in our diocese. With the daylight of the morning of December 11, communities began to see the reality of this multi-state supercell of tornadoes which combined to claim 76 lives in Kentucky, including 12 people on one street in Bowling Green, most of whom were children. Nearly 700 others were injured. Approximately 2000 homes were destroyed. The statewide damage is so extensive that the only estimate is “at least \$3.9 billion dollars” (just for insured damages). The full extent of the damage is incalculable in terms of lives completely upended, small towns wiped out, waterways littered with debris, and tree canopies that stood for generations but are now only a memory.

I say to you that of all the mission and ministry we can point to in our diocese in the last year as signs of healthy, deep faith, living the new commandment to love one another, there is no more powerful story than the immediate response of the people and congregations of the Diocese of Kentucky in the days, actually in the hours that followed 12/11.

Episcopalians in our diocese partnered with other communities of faith and non-profit service organizations immediately in 9 areas of our diocese, responding to basic needs for water, food, and shelter even as the federal and state agencies arrived on scene in the first 24-48 hours. Within days, several congregations—St. Peter's of the Lakes in Gilbertsville, St. John's Murray, Grace Paducah, Trinity Fulton, St. Paul's Hickman, St. Mary's Madisonville, Grace Hopkinsville, Trinity Russellville and Christ Church Bowling Green were all at work serving their most impacted neighbors—including dozens who are our fellow Episcopalians. Across the area—from Mayfield to Dawson Springs, to Cambridge Shores overlooking Kentucky Lake, to Bowling Green, Episcopalians took leading roles and are still serving, because this Church is in it for the long haul.

By Monday morning December 13, the Presiding Bishop's Canon, Mark Stevenson, and Katie Mears, Director of Episcopal Relief and Development's US Disaster Response Program were on a Zoom meeting with clergy from the diocese and by the next week we received the first grant from ERD, from whom congregations in our diocese have now received \$124,000 in grants. Episcopalians from across this diocese, from our neighbors in the Diocese of Lexington, and from across the wider Episcopal Church have donated over \$500,000 to tornado relief—including \$5,000 that was found in the toe of a boot donated to a thrift shop in Florida the day of the tornadoes.

These funds have made it possible to provide caseworkers in both Bowling Green and Marshall County, immediate housing in Marshall County, urgent household needs of families in Mayfield, transportation needs near Madisonville, food and water in Logan County, school supplies and food for students in Russellville, support for long-term partners in Bowling Green like Habitat for Humanity, and HOTEL Inc, and many, many gift cards and cash assistance to support the essentials of daily living for our neighbors affected throughout the area. (During our breaks I encourage you to seek out members of these front-line congregations to thank them and hear a bit of their current ongoing work. Just walk about or take a look at the seating chart)

ERD's Katie Mears said to me, and then shared in our Zoom meeting: *Be the Church. Pray with and for, celebrate the Sacraments, share the Gospel, love God and love your neighbor.* And I am here to tell you that is what you did. The response continues. Please pray for the leadership of the congregations who have been on the front lines of this response; please give generously to the offering we collect today for Episcopal Relief and Development, who have responded so generously to us and who responds to disasters every day in our name; please consider a commemoration on Sunday December 11, Advent 3.

Beloved, I am full of optimism and trust in God's goodness that before us is a wide mission field that we are well suited to continue to engage. No matter what the coming new year of Grace brings, we are up for every challenge and opportunity. Share in both familiar and new ways the gospel imperatives of equality, justice, peace, and love.

My charge to our Diocese, and let me say to me first, is this: Make room for new wine in new wineskins. Stay centered in Christ's love, so that compassion and kindness mark who we are and whose we are, and thus, mark what we do. Continue to love God and love neighbor with everything we have.

I am blessed to be your bishop. Beloved, continue to do what you do best: **Be the Church!**

God bless you and thank you.