

Special Order
Address of the Right Reverend Nathan D. Baxter
One Hundred and Fortieth Convention
Diocese of Central Pennsylvania
Bucknell University, Lewisburg, Pa.

The Outline of the Faith in the Book of Common Prayer states:

“The ministry of a bishop is to represent Christ and his Church, particularly as apostle, chief priest, and pastor of a diocese; to guard the faith, unity, and discipline of the whole Church; to proclaim the Word of God; to act in Christ's name for the reconciliation of the world and the building up of the Church; and to ordain others to continue Christ's ministry.”

Almost four years ago you called me to this task; through election and ordination you consecrated me to this trusted, to share with you in the leadership of the Church as your bishop—as your chief teacher, priest and pastor.

What I have learned is that to be a bishop is like nothing I have ever done before. In one sense it is, as theologian John Snow's classic title, an Impossible Vocation. The vocation of ordained ministry, especially episcopacy is impossible because no one person has the skills, the knowledge (theological, pastoral, administrative) or spiritual depth to meet the challenge of such widely diverse congregations and regional cultures.

But in another way of thinking I have found that, in a sense---the sense of faith---it is also a possible vocation.

As St. Paul wrote to the Christians at Philippi:

13 I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

I must say that I have felt the presence and strength of the Holy Spirit, not just simply out of my own prayer life and faith; but because I have felt prayed for and lifted up by you. When you were asked, “is it your desire that Nathan be made a bishop” your resounding yes still rings in my ears”

Then Paul continues,

14you shared my distress. 15 You indeed know that in the early days of my ministry...you alone shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving.

This year we stood together to welcome the Presiding Bishop and The President of the House of Deputies; establishing a Pro-Cathedral in the North; to minister with the Church in Haiti, to confer as Bishop, Wardens and Vestries, to generously support needs around the world through ERD and UTO. The Episcopal Church women celebrated a women's spiritual summit with Archbishop Desmond Tutu's daughter, the Rev. Mpho Tutu, as speaker. She and her family enjoyed great fellowship among us.

Here we are together today with our diverse churchmanship, theological perspectives, and community and regional distinctions and the styles of ministry through which we serve. And by that diversity we are the Episcopal witness in Central Pennsylvania. And, we stand together because, together, we have work we must do.

What is the work before us?

- To strengthen communications
- To strengthen our sense and articulation of mission
- To better support and welcome the gifts of children and youth
- To establish models to prepare pastoral leaders (ordained and lay) to serve our changing realities.

First: To strengthen communications between congregations and diocesan staff; between congregations and the Episcopal Church and Anglican Communion; and between our congregations, diocese and the public. Our core project is every congregation with an internet web site to tell our story---the story of Jesus and the meaning of faith experienced in our communities. Communities truly welcoming of all!

Second: Our work is to strengthen the sense and clear articulation of mission in every congregation. In this regard there are three questions we must ask:

- “Is our reason for being simply to survive or to serve where we are?” It cannot be simply, even primarily, to survive! Can we truly and authentically be Episcopalians and assume that our obligatory mission is only local?
- For Example: Without your commitment the strong mission minded witness in small communities such as Trinity, Renovo and St. Stephen, Mount Carmel would end.
- [Trinity Church Renovo shares a part-time pastor (the Rev. Dee Calhoun) with a local Lutheran Church. This allows Trinity to better use its resources and diocesan support to provide the primary food pantry and related support services in the blighted community. Trinity has reached out to delinquent youth in the community that others are afraid. These youth are so inspired by the congregation’s attitude to them and its ministry to the community that they volunteer to unload trucks, build storage space and help with distribution. They have found the joy of sharing the love of Christ. Their ministry has attracted the interest of the Episcopal Church. This year a team of youth from Boston chose Trinity to be their mission project, working for a week with Trinity’s ministries.
- St. Stephen’s Mount Carmel shares a part-time rector and a vocational deacon [Fr. Ron Lausch and Deacon “Hap” Hazzard] with Holy Trinity Church, Shamokin. St. Stephen’s has about 12 worshippers on a Sunday morning. But, they decided that rather than use a large gift they received they would use it for mission. They purchased a small restaurant and began a food bank in the store room. Other churches of the community joined with them in providing food and distributing the bags. Realizing that many were hungry for food and companionship on weekends they started a simple Saturday dinner---sometimes soup and bread, or spaghetti and salad. Children, their families and especially the elderly, many who were lonely come. A Eucharist is offered about a half hour after the dinner and 35+ persons stay each Saturday to worship---to eat from the Lord’s Table. Without your support the 12 could not make Christ’s love known in Mt. Carmel.

- Without your commitment there are Episcopal dioceses, such as Navajo land, Mississippi and Haiti which daily minister to rebuild devastated communities and catastrophe-weary souls.
- [Without your commitment children in Honduras and the Sudan would not eat or learn or hear the name of Jesus. AIDS infected mothers in Uganda would have no medicine or treatment to insure their new born babies would be HIV/AIDS free. And new dioceses such as our partner Diocese of San Paulo, Brazil (less than 40 years old) could not continue their success in offering to 42 million people an expression of Christianity between Roman Catholicism and fundamentalist Protestantism.

In all of these ministries you have been extraordinarily generous, even in these hard times. Your gifts beyond local support to the diocesan budget, you have given in this fiscal year **\$39,188.90 to Episcopal Relief and Development Fund (ERD)**. At tomorrow's Eucharist we will receive a report of your contribution through the Episcopal Churchwomen's to the UTO, the United Thank Offering. National UTO grants have given over \$7,000 to local parish ministry in CPA but also National grants have gone directly to Brazil, Haiti and Uganda. This is beyond your extraordinary in-kind gifts of service and sweat equity. Thank you, Central Pennsylvania! Thank you.

Third: How do we support and welcome the gifts of children and youth?

How do we offer them nurture and formation as Christian believers; partnership and voice in the ministries of the Church; and rich opportunities to be connected to other Episcopal youth in the diocese and larger Church. This means we must also support their families, teachers, pastors and priests in ways that empower our children and youth.

In the Prayer Book's post-baptismal prayer we beseech God with these words:

"Give them an inquiring and discerning heart, the courage to will and to persevere..."

When they are given voice sometimes their precocious spirit (for which we prayed) is more than expected.

Story of little Janie in her elementary biology class

Teacher: Today we will study mammals which live in the ocean.

Janie: A whale swallowed Jonah!

Teacher: Well, anatomically it is impossible for a whale to swallow a man.

Janie: But the bible says....

Teacher: Janie, the bible story is a spiritual metaphor, this is science. Believe me it is impossible for a whale to swallow a man.

Janie: Well, maybe so. But when I get to heaven I'm going to ask Jonah.

Teacher: What if Jonah is not there?

Janie: Then you ask him!

Janie had "an inquiring and discerning heart, the courage to will." She's going to be a leader. Per your direction last convention and the interim Task Forces a highly experienced and broadly trained staff person will be called this fall to lead this us in these ministries.

Fourth: We must establish additional models to educate and form pastoral leaders (ordained and lay) to serve in the changing realities of our congregations in Central Pennsylvania. While college and seminary training of priests will continue to be the standard model for education and formation of pastors, I believe and there can be other effective models for discerning, educating and forming such leaders. We have seen the effective work of our School of Christian Studies in educating persons for the diaconate and providing enrichment for laity interested in theological education.

- We also have in our history of several distinct experiments of education priest who have a call to serve locally and non-stipendiary ministries. There are also congregations, small and larger, which are effectively using trained lay pastors as full members of their ministry staff. Some are pastoral visitors and counselors, some have specialty in education and spirituality, some hold the liturgical life and mission of a congregation together with a priests coming a couple times a month for sacramental purposes. In some way the School of Christian Studies, with its satellite programs, has been a key component of these experiments. We need to learn about these situations of lay ministries and see if there are pastoral leadership experiences from which we could all learn, support and endorse for the larger benefit of our diocese. We are not the only diocese

exploring and implementing new forms of education and formation. But our school of Christian Studies will be the center of this exploration, with the appropriate existing bodies such as COM, Congregational Development and the Standing Committee.

This is our work and I need your help to carry us forward. Last convention you confirmed these general areas. This convention we begin refinement and implication.

The Closing of Churches.

We have had our sadness regarding mission and I would be remiss if, in the context of this address, I did not speak about the 4 congregations we have had to close over the last 2 years, including at this convention: St. Mary's, Williamsport; Trinity, Antrim; Christ Church, Lykens; and St. Michaels and All Angeles, Middletown.

It is a hard thing for a bishop to preside over the closing of a ministry; and it is hard on the morale of a diocese. The hard question is does this mean we are dying as a diocese? The easy answer is, yes; we are all at a cross-road with an ominous future. The faithful answer is, no, if we learn the lessons taught by these situations.

Among the lessons learned are:

- a) These were not congregations recently at the crossroad. Too long they had been thrust into an unsustainable path of survival. From all records and memory these congregations have been silently on this trajectory for almost 10 years. Fearful if candid about their circumstance they would be closed. There is a mistrust factor in our diocese which is unhealthy and which we must prayerfully bridge.
- b) Another obvious reality is that three of the four were also victims of drastically declining regional demographics (economy, population and employment).
- c) As diocesan leadership---bishop, staff, commissions and local congregational leadership must better discern together for the sake of mission and not just a few more years of survival. We must prepare to support and plant in areas of growing demographics, such as was done in Southern York County (St. Benedicts).

- d) We must find ways to support our larger congregations which are finding they can no longer support an assisting priest or deacon. There are 10 or 12 congregations experiencing growth in numbers, mission and spirit. But stewardship is not keeping up with ministry and mission growth. Without an assisting priest and/or other forms of ministry assistance the growth in mission will recede. We must think outside the box about how to use the gifts of all the people of God---priest, deacons, and lay ministers; and we must find new ways to prepare them for ministry?

Bill Graffius and other leaders will share with you how we hope to begin addressing these needs for the work of our mission in CPA.

I want to move at this point to “Covenants”.

First, there are three covenants currently being considered in our life as an Episcopal diocese in the Anglican Communion. The Partner in Mission Covenant with our sister Diocese of San Paulo, in the Anglican Episcopal Diocese of Brazil; and the proposed Anglican Covenant offered for study by the Archbishop of Canterbury’s Covenant Design Committee; and the Prayer Book Baptismal Covenant.

At the 2008 Lambeth Conference the Archbishop of Canterbury invited his good friend Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks as one of our highlighted keynoters. Rabbi Sir Jonathan is the Chief Rabbi of the British Commonwealth. His address was entitled “The Relations between the People and God.” He explained that in Jewish theological and experience tradition there are two types of covenants: covenant of fate and covenant of faith.

In a covenant of fate “a group can be bound when they suffer together, when they face a common enemy. They have shared tears, shared fears, shared responsibility. In a covenant of fate, they huddle together for comfort and mutual protection.

A covenant of faith “is made by a people who share dreams, aspirations, and ideals. They don’t need a common enemy, because they have a common hope. They come

together to create something new. They are defined not by what happens to them but by what they commit themselves to do (together).”

The Diocese of Central Pennsylvania, The Episcopal Church, and the Anglican Communion are faced with a decision---will we, going forward, live in the crucible of a Covenant of Fate or Faith?

We are all familiar with the issues, principally around full inclusions of faithful Christian who are homosexual at every level of Church life; and the right of other Provinces in disagreement to establish or abed extraterritorial Anglican/Episcopal bishops and churches in local dioceses. Of course underlying this are issues of women’s ordination, different decisions making polities (including authority of the laity), conflicting ways of interpretation the scripture, and the most recent issues of the council primates authority (i.e. Archbishops and Presiding Bishops and President Bishops) to determine and define theology and order for all the provinces and their dioceses in the Anglican Communion absent the equal voice of clergy and laity.

Over the last 40 years or more we Anglicans, including the Episcopal Church, have, as Chief Rabbi Sacks has said, “huddled together for comfort and mutual protection.” Some Provincial Archbishops refuse to share communion with others “Archbishops”, some denying their bishops participation in Lambeth Conferences; demanding that those who did come return immediately. In our own Episcopal Church conservatives or traditionalists have created networks or left to affiliate with the ecclesiastical authority of bishops and Provinces other than the Episcopal Church. Opponents are called revisionist, un-godly and other less flattering monikers. Ultimately a number left to found the Anglican Church of North America (principally in Canada and USA).

Liberals or progressives have also established Covenants of Fate. Liberals have banded together in their own advocacy consultations, networks, and many, myself included, committed to support organizations such as Integrity (a community of support and voice for GLBT Episcopalians). We have accused others of being fundamentalist,

homophobic; and, after 40 years of begging for a real conversation about scripture, reason and tradition on the issues, we began doing some pushing of the boundaries ourselves of what opponents see as intolerable...including the recent consecration of Bishop Mary Glasspool. Currently, the Archbishop has felt that the imposition of punitive measures on the Episcopal Church and the Canadian Church is necessary and appropriate. Our leaders in turn are determining what protest we might offer. When we sincerely believe that we are being lead by the Spirit in some prophetic matter there will be consequences, whether unjust or otherwise. But it seems we are all still locked into the fatalistic cycles too often inherent in Covenants of Fate.

Covenants of Fate are inevitable and very natural in times of change and human conflict. The upside is that they can provide critical power bases to protect us from the assaults “our enemies”. But they also further isolate us from others in similar Covenants and narrow our focus on our survival or position---if not the destruction of the enemy. The greatest victim is always the larger mission.

The Episcopal Church and our Presiding Bishops Griswold and Jefferts Schori have tried to keep us thinking mission—As our current Presiding Bishop so eloquently preached at last years General Convention “Mission must be the heart beat of the Church”. But it’s hard when you’re operating from a Covenant of Fate.

The Bishops of this diocese have also been trying. In 2000 Bishop Michael Creighton and our diocese reached out the Diocese of Recife, Brazil to join with us as partners in mission. After the consecration of Bishop Gene Robinson in 2003 the Bishop of Recife we were summarily dropped by Recife. But Bishop Creighton and the Partner-in-Mission Commission would not give up on mission. With the help of the Presiding Bishops of both Brazil and The Episcopal Church the Diocese of San Paulo agreed to be in mission with us. In 2004 Bishop Ito and Bishop Creighton signed the formal Covenant of Mission partnership at their respective Conventions. Bishop Bird and I, following the spirit of our predecessors and the actions of our respective Convention, renew that

covenant of mission. ***I count Bishop Bird as a friend. He and Mrs Bird will be with us later today. And we will welcome them and San Paulo as truly partners in mission!***

But the natural inclination to “huddle mentality” still tempts us to embrace a Covenant of Fate, as a Diocese, a Church and as a Communion. It tempts us to seek security and comfort from the storms of controversy, assault and retribution.

The second Covenant in our life is the Anglican Covenant. In one sense it is an attempt to create a political construct to bring the factions together. However, like the contenders the Archbishop seeks to reconcile, the Anglican Covenant is born of fear and fate. In principle, the Covenant may be the only political option for creating some temporary, if not retributive “détente” between the Huddled Camps. But it can never create a dreaming Church or Communion. It can never inspire a passion for mission or new visions of what God is trying to do differently---beyond tradition, because political détente still keeps our focus and security inward and our view of the other suspicious. It changes circumstances but not hearts.

In the middle of the huddles are our icons of moral integrity, symbols through which we define the mission of God. One camp finds integrity and spiritual comfort in being the protectors of the Faith as “once delivered to the saints”. The other finds integrity and spiritual comfort in protecting the continuing movement of the Holy Spirit, which Jesus promised “would (in each age) guide us in all truth”. The problem is that neither of these allows room for the others; and the larger mission for which Christ died is being neglected if not ignored. What Verna Dozier the Dream of God, is neglected for the “fears of the Church”.

At the same Lambeth Conference, the Rev. Brian McLaren was also invited to lead a workshop. Pastor McLaren is our Convention Keynote. He opened his workshop to all the bishops and others present with these words:

“Brothers and sisters, I love Jesus Christ. I am not ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ, because it is the power of God to bring salvation to our sinful, broken, fragile, beautiful, beloved world. Think of all that word salvation means...to reconcile, liberate, rescue, consecrate, transform, redeem, forgive, cheer, heal, and restore.”

He was speaking to all of us, including Nathan Baxter! It was hard for any of us to truly hear him, because he was speaking from the perspective of another covenant. He was speaking from a Covenant of Faith. He was inviting us to Covenant of Faith. As Rabbi Sacks had defined earlier from an Old Testament perspective, Pastor McLaren proclaimed even more clearly from the Gospels, calling us, with all our differences to be “a people who share dreams, aspirations, ideals. To be a people who do not need a common enemy, because they have a common hope. A people who come together to create something new. And most importantly, a people who are defined not by what happens to them but by what they commit themselves to do (together).”

As Bishop and Diocese in Central Pennsylvania we will, with others, study and decide upon the Anglican Covenant. Fr. David Peck, rector of St. James, Lancaster and formerly of the Archbishop of Canterbury’s staff, is heading a the group which will help us to do local study of the document. I suspect, with our Presiding Bishop and the Episcopal Church, we will ultimately agree to some form of it.

We will also continue to move forward as a truly inclusive Diocese, to be prepared as our Episcopal Church moves towards full liturgical recognition of Gay and Lesbian Episcopalians. But our preparation must include how we honor those whose convictions limit their support for full inclusion. They too are part of our church and their concerns will be honored, and they too are and will be part of the Full Inclusion of which we speak---

- full inclusion in our love,
- in our protection from disrespect for their beliefs and sincere convictions.
- and full inclusion in our larger mission.

Canons Gregory Hinton and Mark Scheneman are leading a group which is working with me on a theology of Spiritual Community that will inform and undergird anything we do in response to the larger Church's decisions at next General Convention. **Rest assured that with your prayerful support and open hearts, in this diocese Full-Inclusion will mean Full-Inclusion: Full-Inclusion for those on the justice margin and those on the theological margins. I believe if we approach this in the right spirit God can do something wonder---maybe lead us into a new covenant!**

I don't know about you, but I am ready for a new Covenant! Living with Covenants of Fate may have had its place in years past, but I'm tired of it now! I'm tired of old theological debates. I'm tired of villainizing and being villainized. I'm tired of being huddled for fear of what other Episcopalians or Christians may think; or even being fearful to evangelize—to share the beauty of Christ in our midst---because of what those we would evangelize might say---like, *“aren't you that Gay Church” or “is it true you don't believe in the bible?”*.

I'm tired of substituting politeness for grace; and political agendas of the day being confused with Spiritual liberation of the Gospel. I know that Jesus stood in the margins and welcomed them into the Kingdom. I know that Jesus shared meals with the traditionalists and loved them into the Kingdom. I don't have to lose my soul to make it happen, the Holy Spirit is already working. I'm ready to live into the larger dream of God. To be a church where we can be at different places and still be on larger mission.

I'm tired of ecclesiastical “Tea Parties” disguised as Covenants of Fate.

I want a Covenant of Faith! I want to dream and live the Gospel of Hope. How about you!!!

I want to be like Conservative Peter and Progressive Paul who found themselves in Covenants of Fate about full the inclusion of Gentiles. They eventually decided to move to a Covenant of Faith. *To have different views but common mission.* They remembered the command of Jesus in John 13 chapter.

³⁴ *that you love (Agape—have godly respect for) one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.* ³⁵ *By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love (Agape—have godly respect) for one another.”*

THIS IS OUR MISSION: *(Agape—have godly respect for)*

I want to be and make disciples of this Jesus. With Joy I want to welcome all into our imperfect and diverse church, still being molded and formed and used by Jesus Christ for the sake of the Kingdom. On God can take imperfect tools and make a perfect kingdom.

I want to live more boldly and fully into evangelism. I want to live more boldly and fully into mission. Even into our current missions such the Diocese of San Paulo, the Masereka Foundation in the Church of Uganda, and the witness of God’s love to refugee with the Diocese of Torit, in the Sudan. I want to be so bold to tell the love of Jesus to anyone else who will hear and know that sometimes we will be rejected, but to accept that rejection in the spirit of courage and not the spirit of fear.

I want a Covenant of Faith with you and God!

2 Timothy 1.7-18 “...for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.”

We, my sisters and brothers all, are going to move forward to a new Covenant--- a Covenant of Faith...a Covenant which allows God to wash us in a Spirit of hope, of love and of courage. A covenant recognize in our Baptismal Covenant. I promise to live into our Baptismal Covenant. If you will join me in this new Covenant of hope please stand and let us renew our baptismal promises to God.

The Baptismal Covenant

Celebrant Do you believe in God the Father?

People I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

Celebrant Do you believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God?

People I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.
He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.
He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.
He descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again.
He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

Celebrant Do you believe in God the Holy Spirit?

People I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.

Celebrant Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?

People I will, with God's help.

Celebrant Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?

People I will, with God's help.

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Celebrant Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?

People I will, with God's help.

Celebrant Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?

People I will, with God's help.

Celebrant Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?

People I will, with God's help

**May the God who has given us the will to make
these promises give us the grace to accomplish
them. Amen.**

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