

The Bishop's Address 149th Diocesan Convention.
November 14, 2015
The Rt. Rev. Lawrence C. Provenzano, Bishop of Long Island

"Lord Jesus Christ you stretched out your arms of love on the hard wood of the cross that everyone might come within the reach of your saving embrace: So clothe us in your Spirit that we, reaching out our hands in love, may bring those who do not know you to the knowledge and love of you; for the honor of your Name. Amen."

Prayer for Mission BCP

We gather this morning in the wake of the tragic news from Paris. And we carry in our hearts and in our prayer the people of Paris, those who have lost their loves, those who have been injured, and all those who have been affected by this terrible act of terrorism.

Before I begin the official address I want to take a moment to thank all of the people who have worked so hard to make this convention possible: the entire staff of the diocese, all of whom have worked very hard preparing for this convention, especially Ivette Fernandez-Guzman and Denise Fillion; the Committee on Dispatch and its Chair, Sharon Brown-Veillard; the Secretary of Convention and Diocesan Council, The Rev. Karen Davis-Lawson; Canon Myra Garnes and all those involved in the youth ministry program that is going on with us and parallel to us as we gather. For all the organizing, all the work, and all the prayer—thank you.

I want to take a brief moment to thank all of you, your families, and loved ones. Your sacrifice of time and energy and that of your loved ones, make it possible for all of us to gather in this place and take council for the life and ministry of our diocese. Without them and without you, we could not be here. It is here in this place, in this gathering, that "One Diocese, One Mission" is regenerated each year.

It is in this time that we together take hold of all that we have accomplished in the name of Jesus Christ, and it is here where we plan together to faithfully respond to Christ's call to seek and serve all people, preach and teach the gospel and give thanks for the countless ways we serve God's mission across this tremendous Diocese of Long Island.

I want to take one moment to offer a word of special thanks and welcome to Bishop Geralyn Wolf who has agreed to serve as our assisting bishop during this coming year.

And to Bishop Daniel Allotey, the retired bishop of Cape Coast, Ghana who is serving at St. Augustine's and has become very quickly a trusted colleague and advisor. Bishop Allotey, welcome again.

And because there is not another place in our convention yet to do this, I would like to offer a word of welcome to the Very Rev. Michael Sniffen, the newly appointed Dean of the Cathedral of the Incarnation.

My purpose in this address today is to add on to the vision set before us yesterday by my brother bishops, David Bailey and John Tarrant. They shared a story of our good stewardship and the faithful ministry of the places they call home. They hinted at the reality that was first given expression in the early 1960s when, in a gathering of the worldwide church called the Anglican Congress, the notion of "Mutual Responsibility and Interdependence in the Body of Christ" was first conceived.

The tool I wish to use to express this reality anew in our midst today is the Ministry Plan for 2016 that was created and passed by Diocesan Council in mid-October and which will be presented to you later in this convention.

To begin with, each of us must be prepared to seriously embrace a new and holy concept. We are one diocese with 133 separate but equal, necessary, and connected outposts.

We cannot leave this convention maintaining any notion of "them" and "us", regardless of whether "them" is Garden City, or "them" is the deanery, or "them" is the parish down the street, or "them" is one of our companion diocese, or, above all else, "them" are the people in our neighborhoods and communities. There is no "them" and "us". There is only "us"—one diocese, one mission!

If we can embrace this reality, then the ministry plan for 2016 and the years to follow will make total sense under a faithful discipline of Mutual Responsibility and Interdependence. Or maybe better stated using the words of our new Presiding Bishop & Primate, "We are a part of the Jesus Movement!" And like everything in the Anglican communion, the words and concepts must take on Incarnational Reality. We must put our time, talent, and resources where our mouth is.

53% of the 2016 ministry plan is dedicated to Mission: Mission in support for the wider Church; Millennium Development Goals; Episcopal Ministries; Diocesan Youth and Young Adult ministries; communication & technology; Congregational Development; support for diocesan missionaries and parish partnerships; programs for retired clergy and lay employees; diocesan liturgies; diocesan convention; and direct support for

ministry such as Asian-American, Black, Hispanic and Women's ministries, transitional ministry & congregational coaches, clergy wellness, the Commission on Ministry, deanery expenses, and our ever expanding companion diocese relationships.

A list of diocesan partnerships and diocesan missionaries is found on page 30 of the convention journal. You will discover that we truly are one diocese, one mission in the focus and intention of our mutual responsibility and the inter-dependence across the four counties of the diocese. Our entire structure is designed to provide the needed tools for support for the local church, the local church community, their ministries and their programs.

34% of the ministry plan is dedicated to the Episcopate and staff of the diocese—all the people who are the service ministry to the clergy and people of the parishes, missions and agencies of the diocese. The staff of the Diocese of Long Island are some of the most dedicated, hard-working and faithful group of people in the church. They learn that from you, from your hard work, and your dedication.

We exist to be of support and encouragement and service to the people and churches of the diocese. The staff is either out in parishes all week long or at the very least spending most of their time advocating and providing support for the various projects and ministries of our parishes. Our ministry is your ministry, our success is found in the people you reach and serve in the communities where our churches are planted. The bishop's staff is never the enemy.

On the day of my consecration, the Rev. Mpho Tutu charged me in her sermon, and therefore my staff, to "Tend the Lord's flock. Feed his lambs." This is the constant and only expression of our love of the Lord. "If you love me, feed my sheep." That is our one mission from the base of the Verrazano bridge to Orient Point (or if you still prefer, the Brooklyn Bridge to Montauk Point).

A few basic ecclesial realities might be helpful at this juncture and must be understood: our ecclesiology (our theology of church) is not that of the congregational church. It is helpful to remember that we are not independent church organizations. We are mutually responsible for and to each other.

One diocese, one mission is even embedded in secular law. Our tax exempt status exists as member parishes of the Episcopal Diocese of Long Island. Within that reality the staff of the diocese is dedicated to building capacity and depth within each congregation so that the local church, the vestry, or bishop's committee can facilitate ministry on the local level. We support each other, but do not necessarily act instead of the local leadership.

The goal of Mutual Responsibility and Inter-dependence on a diocesan level is to build strong church communities and ministries, to share resources and ideas, sometimes

even to share people and programs on a deanery level to address the needs of the local community.

During our last convention I requested that the Committee on Canons study our Archdeaconry system in an effort to evaluate effectiveness, use of resources, and to come to this convention with recommendations to increase capacity and depth in our support for ministry on the local level. Later in the convention we will be asked to consider propositions that address the findings and recommendations of the Canons Committee.

But for now, I raise the issue to provide insight into our need for local mission development that moves beyond structures and titles, and delivers tangible, "on the ground", support for ministry on the local level. This is why you will find included in the ministry plan under Congregational Development, a proposed \$208,000 line that includes continued funding for the Church Development Institute. The Church Development Institute is a leadership development program presently up and running under the leadership of Mother Liz Tunny that includes 44 clergy and lay people from our parishes. And this line item also includes support for the calling of a Canon for Congregational Development in 2016.

Under the same heading of Congregational Development, it should be noted that although the actual number of congregations is lower than last year because of consolidations, our parishes are growing in overall numbers of people and the financial health of our churches is increasing. They are trending in a healthier fashion across the diocese.

This is a great indicator of the attentiveness and faithfulness of our clergy and lay leaders as each congregation addresses the needs of the local community and replaces competitiveness with a greater spirit of cooperation—ecumenically and programmatically with the support of the whole diocesan family. The parishes that are growing are the parishes that have abandoned a notion of survival and the inward focus of merely getting people to come to church and have adopted a healthy understanding of being the Church in the midst of God's people.

13% of the ministry plan is dedicated to administrative expenses and facilities maintenance. This portion of the ministry plan is allocated to legal fees, contracted services in support of office operations, computers and other equipment and the day to day cost associated with the operation of the diocesan offices and the facilities owned by the diocese, including the Cathedral campus.

This portion of the ministry plan provides all the human resources and financial services. It also provides for the personnel and programs that support maintenance and construction projects across the diocese. When parishes receive help and advice for

construction projects and building programs, it is this portion of the ministry plan that supports that work.

In the short time he has been in place, the Rev. Andrew Durbidge, the Diocesan Real Estate Manager, has made a significant impact by helping individual congregations maneuver through construction projects, property sales, and building programs. Again, it is here that we are acting in inter-dependence with each other across the diocese.

The Trustees of the Diocese, along with Episcopal Ministries and my office with the oversight of Canon Betit, have created four separate programs to support Congregational Development and Mission Development across the diocese. The Diocesan website under the heading "Grants and Loans" provides detail for accessing these programs.

So, how are we mutually responsible for each other?

54% of the income for this ministry plan comes from the pledges and tithes of the congregations that constitute the diocese. Generally speaking, each congregation is expected to offer a tithe (10%) of the three-year average of the parish's ministry plan. This is not merely 10% of the pledge income, but rather 10% of the three-year average of the total parish budget, excluding capital projects and improvements.

You will see that there is a \$990,000.00 difference between what the tithe should be and what the Diocesan Council expects to receive in 2016. Almost one-million dollars short of what would constitute a full tithe in mutual responsibility to each other.

When a parish vestry or bishop's committee decides to balance their own ministry plan by offering less than a tithe in support of our common ministry, they are essentially deciding to hamper the ability of the diocese, as a whole, to address the needs of other congregations or to begin much needed new ministries.

If we were nothing more than independent operations, that choice might be acceptable. But as a diocese, our understanding of ourselves—our ecclesiology—demands another response.

So beginning with this convention, I am requiring that if a tithe is not going to be made to the ministry plan that is passed by the convention, that the rector or priest-in-charge of that particular congregation must, under Mutual Responsibility and Inter-dependence, indicate the reasons and circumstances behind the choice in writing so as to facilitate the aid and support of the rest of the diocese.

You see, it goes both ways. The rest of us cannot know that a congregation is in need of additional support or if there is no communication. From this point forward it will not

be ok to just ignore the Ministry Plan. Either by your tithe and pledge or by your request for assistance, we incarnate the reality of who we are as “one diocese, one mission”.

Voting in favor of the Ministry Plan is a commitment to stand together, to work together, and to pray together, and to aid each other in ministry on the local level.

39% of the income for the ministry plan comes from investments and trusts, and other grants like the Astor Fund, Messiah and Incarnation Fund, and the Redeemer Fund. All of these produce investment income that goes directly to support ministry across the diocese on the local level.

As of this convention, I am asking the people of the diocese to consider this method of support for our ministry anew. What was once called legacy stewardship must find a place in our diocesan life once again.

Over the last several years there has been an average of 700 funerals each year in our parish communities. I imagine that even if a small percentage of those whose funerals we preside had been encourage to name the diocese, its agencies or parishes as recipients in wills, there would be increasing resources for the support of ministry across the diocese.

Just this year, Episcopal Ministries was named as recipient of an estate and received over two-million dollars from the estate of a woman named Jennifer Christoffers, a working-class woman from Queens, who during her life, made nominal contributions to the work of charities but in a legacy gift significantly added to the ability of Episcopal Ministries to support parish development.

7% of the income in support of the ministry plan comes from the accumulated fees paid to our finance office as our diocesan staff provide support and services to the other diocesan corporations such as Camp DeWolfe, Episcopal Ministries, the Mercer School of Theology, the Trustees of the Estate, and the Cathedral corporation. This is another very obvious, but often overlooked inter-dependence in our overall diocesan structure.

As you can see, the Ministry Plan of the diocese is not merely about money: it is an indicator and a tool to measure our common commitment as a community of faith. It is a statement of our intention to work, pray, and live together as the people of God in this diocese and beyond. It is therefore a sacred document, an expression of our obedience to Jesus' call to serve and love one another and all of God's people. (Pause)

In this coming year, it is my plan to convene a committee to address issues of Racial and Ethnic Reconciliation, partly in compliance with the directives of our General Convention and partly in recognition of our desire to finally address the plank in our own eye before offering to remove the speck in the eye of our brothers and sisters in the communities we serve.

I have asked Mr. Al Wilshire of the parish of St. Luke and St. Matthew to chair this effort and begin to gather people: academics, elected officials, and clergy and members of our diocese. I am convinced that there is no better time than right now to address these issues and strengthen the legitimacy of our work together, but more importantly to have the church lead the way.

If we say we love our God with all our heart, and mind and will, and we love our neighbor as ourselves, then let's get real about providing leadership, example, and tools beyond making statements and public posturing.

In October, a small group of us prayed on the steps of the cathedral and then processed to the Union Baptist Church in Hempstead, to participate in the funeral of Dejah Joyner, a 12-year-old girl who was shot dead in her home by a bullet that came through a window while she stood at her family's dinner table. The call that day from the pulpit was to address the root causes of gun violence, and racial and ethnic violence in our communities.

Walking from Garden City into Hempstead was a few miles. But as you all know, it could be a 1000 miles away given the experience of the children in both communities. Walking and praying, and showing up was good. Now Mutual Responsibility and Interdependence demands that we do something more.

Today, from this convention, I am pledging to our sisters and brothers in Hempstead, the use of St. George's Episcopal Church in Hempstead to become the site of a much needed youth center for Hempstead. And I pledge the financial and moral resources of the Diocese of Long Island to make it happen in cooperation with other agencies and with the leadership of Fr. P. Allister Rawlins and the vestry of St. George's and that of the interfaith clergy, and the elected officials of Hempstead.

Several years ago it became clear to many in the diocese that there was a growing, unseen population of people in the east end of the diocese. Farm workers, day laborers, wait staff, and domestic help living and working in some of our most affluent communities were nearly invisible to the church. This September, with the appointment of Fr. Gerardo Romo-Garcia, we have established a new Latino ministry centered at St. Thomas, Amagansett, a setting that had previously only been used as a summer chapel twenty days a year.

The beginning of this new ministry is a great example of mutual responsibility within a deanery.

The Peconic Deanery, and especially Fr. Denis Brunelle and the people of St. Luke's, Easthampton, have made this new ministry possible by their ongoing support,

development of good community relationships and vision of how we, as a diocese, might serve and include the growing Latino population. Fr. Gerardo has already made great strides into the community and is already recognized as a leader and friend in the community.

There are countless stories of the tremendous work that is being accomplished in the neighborhood and communities of our diocese. The agencies and corporations of the diocese are serving people in new and exciting ways primarily because we have moved beyond the silos that once segregated our ministries and divided our efforts to live the Gospel in the midst of the people we are called to serve.

I invite you to read the reports of the other diocesan corporations found in the Convention Journal. Examine how the work of Episcopal Ministries of Long Island promote youth ministry at Camp DeWolfe, and how Camp DeWolfe not only serves our youth but has become a major center for ecumenical and interreligious partnership as many outside our diocesan family use the camp and promote the Gospel message in a holy intermingling of traditions which we provide with our hospitality.

The Mercer School of Theology continues to reinvent ways to provide education for postulants for Holy Orders and promotes the deepening of formation and spirituality across the diocese by its many offerings open to the entire diocese and beyond.

Episcopal Health Service has pledged significant financial resources and personnel to promote the establishment of a mobile health clinic in cooperation with a coalition of community agencies and parish initiatives in Greenpoint and South Brooklyn who are establishing a "food truck" ministry to more fully care for the needs of the homeless and working poor.

In Queens County, the most diverse county in the United States, our churches have re-established a notion of parish, that has created multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-linguistic congregations, served by some of the most dedicated and faithful clergy in the whole church. It is not easy work to continue to reimagine church with such vast shifts in population.

Steady, faithful, honest ministry has proven to be the key to fostering welcome and stability in the midst of ever-changing realities. St. James', Elmhurst has emerged from a long and complicated history of struggle as a growing, stable center for new ways of ministry in the midst of an ever-changing population.

From the Hellgate Deanery, through the Flushing and Forest Park Deaneries, all the way through the Jamaica Deanery to the Nassau County border our churches are transforming the lives of the people who live in their neighborhoods and have moved beyond the old fashioned, church encampment model of ministry. And it is working!

Lives are being changed. People are being ministered to and cared for.

In Douglaston, Mother Lindsay Lunnum and the vestry saw a particular need for an unserved population and began a new liturgy named Rhythms of Grace, tailored especially for families of special-needs children. The liturgy crosses all the divides and with a combination of storytelling, arts and crafts, therapeutic play and a celebration of the Holy Eucharist, which includes children and families who would otherwise find the church experience intolerable and too unfriendly.

What is happening across our diocese is a faithful obedience within our own tradition. And while we celebrate and give thanks for all the many innovative and creative ways ministry is happening, we must also give thanks for the majority of our parishes who are steady, faithful, and vibrant mission stations.

Grace Church, Brooklyn Heights has quietly and faithfully completed interior renovations raising over 5.5 million dollars while not jeopardizing outreach and ministry in the neighborhood. St. Stephen & St. Martin has broken ground for the building of a new church in Bedford Stuyvesant. St. John's, Cold Spring Harbor has completed renovations on all their buildings, creating new office space, outreach and community space, and refurbishing the church. Our cathedral has completed interior renovations while accomplishing a full exterior repointing of stone and roofing.

These are just a small sample of the kind of faithful stewardship that is being accomplished by the people of our parishes across the Diocese of Long Island.

But buildings are buildings. Ministry happens with people and for people in the buildings and outside the buildings.

A week ago, the present Police Commissioner of the City of New York in discussing the increase in homelessness around the city stated "...my best advice to the citizens of New York City is, if this is so upsetting to you, don't give. One of the quickest ways to get rid of them is not to give to them..."

Now, there is so much wrong with that statement. But for our purposes here today I would like us to focus on the 25th chapter of Matthew's Gospel, "...for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I saw sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me..."

It's gospel. We can't ignore this problem or ignore "them", regardless of the selfish advice of the present police commissioner.

So, sisters and brothers here is what I would like to suggest. We have buildings, those buildings have space, and heat, and light. Many, if not all, have kitchens and running water and bathrooms.

I would like every congregation in the Diocese of Long Island to consider opening up their parish house or church to the homeless of our communities. Invite them in. Care for them as a regular part of our parish programs and ministries. Adjust budgets to make it happen. Because unlike the city of New York, caring for Jesus as he comes to us in need is not an option.

Now, I know that right about now, some in this room are thinking to themselves, “The bishop is not being practical. He has not thought this through. There are legal and insurance implications to this request.” You are right. So work it out. Make it happen like it was some pet project or building repair, or music program or cruise or pilgrimage or fund raiser.

Work it out. We seem to be able to get those things accomplished. Let’s be the Church. Let’s care for the most vulnerable in our communities because we can’t just ignore this problem away. We must care for the people of God in our midst.

So let’s get started on really being the church. I would like to know how it is going in each parish community and how I and the staff of the diocese might help. Please communicate directly with my office in the days and weeks to come. I will expect to be hearing from everyone before the end of the year.

Mutual Responsibility and Interdependence goes beyond the structures of the church organization.

Our cooperation with God's mission in the world requires great joy and enthusiasm for the Gospel—not merely in teaching and instructing others, but by living and breathing the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the places in which we find ourselves.

What you will find is that the Diocese of Long Island, all its agencies and corporations, and all of us together, are taking the notion of Mutual Responsibility and Interdependence seriously in every setting and every place. The Gospel is being proclaimed boldly, the sacraments are being administered faithfully, and all of God's people are being invited to experience the life-changing, transformative, reconciling love of God in Jesus Christ.

I am so proud to be the bishop of this great and diverse diocese at this moment in its history. We are about doing good and holy things as a part of this “Jesus Movement” we have been summoned to engage. So let’s get going! There are people to love into wholeness in Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

