

Diocesan Convention Address – 2009

My sisters and brothers in Christ:

It is with joy and thanksgiving that I greet you and welcome you to our annual Diocesan Convention. There are many among you who truly sacrifice some time away from your vocations to spend this time with us. I am especially grateful to you. You are the chosen leaders of your congregations, and you have made the decision that this leadership is very important to you and to your community of faith. To the clergy and the rest of the lay leaders who are not taking time away from gainful employment, I am grateful also to you for your presence with us. Your knowledge of the Church in this part of God's Kingdom is most helpful in carrying out the work of convention. And of course we always hope to increase that knowledge with the offerings of the seminars later today. We are blessed with some very good teachers among us! And as I always say—one of the most crucial purposes of our convention is for shared fellowship with people from throughout the diocese. Introduce yourself to some people you do not know, and learn from them about their ministry and the ministries of their congregations.

In considering this past year, the most obvious place to start in this address is finances and stewardship. The economic downturn that has dominated our lives has been severe. With perhaps but few exceptions, almost all congregations have members who have lost their jobs. And perhaps even more devastating, there are some in our congregations who have lost their homes. These are people who would never have considered being vulnerable to these losses. With these personal losses, our congregations have been affected in their stewardship results and in their economic bottom line. Those congregations who have relied on income from endowments for operating expenses have suffered greatly, and have hopefully learned anew that the operations for a congregation should be funded by the stewardship commitments. Endowments are wonderful for special ministries—such as theological education scholarships, building projects, capital expenses, and other designated work. But they are always very risky when relied upon for the operations of the community.

It has, therefore, been a challenging year in this aspect of our common life. But the struggles and the pain have not brought about a paralysis in our ministries. As I make my visitations and talk with Vestries and Bishops' Committees, I hear of stewardship successes. And I hear of budgets that, while trimmed, are still maintaining a balance between the operational needs and outreach ministries. And in many instances, I hear of increased outreach ministries to those in the larger community who are the most vulnerable victims of recession and economic strife. It is this increase in outreach ministries among many of our congregations in response to the pain and suffering that is widespread that reflects the ministry of Jesus our Lord. I commend you for looking beyond your own selves and your own communities to bring healing and the power of the spirit to others!

There is yet another indicator of where our hearts are in the midst of this struggle. The payment of diocesan assessments throughout this year has been on a par with every other year in recent memory. The percentage of full payment of the assessments is very high—96-97%—undoubtedly one of the highest—if perhaps not the highest—percentage in the entire Episcopal Church. In a year like this year, this is particularly an achievement to be celebrated. I say this not because I am a line item on the budget of the diocese, but because it speaks so well of our awareness of our common life together, and of our continual need to bear witness to this common life in supporting one another and in sharing in the broad mission of our church.

There has been, however, some sincere concern about the formula we have been following in calculating diocesan assessments. Such concern is also to be expected in a time of economic challenge. Five years ago at our diocesan convention, an assessment review committee was formed to consider changes in the assessments. As a result of that review work, most of the assessments were lowered. At that same convention, a resolution was passed to make another review in five years hence. Thus it is now time to do this. I shall be appointing a new assessment review committee following this

convention to look again at how we are calculating our assessments, and make subsequent recommendations to the diocesan council and to our convention next year. What changes are made would then be reflected in the forming of the 2011 diocesan budget.

There has also been concern raised during this year about the diocesan budget-making process. So I shall form another ad hoc committee to study the process, to make recommendations for any changes, and to present this information for action to the Diocesan Council. Since the budget process begins immediately in the New Year, the work of that ad hoc committee will need to be wrapped up in short order.

A final word on this focus upon our stewardship and economic status: at the General Convention in July, the Archbishop of Canterbury gave a lecture one evening that was very straight-forward about the world economy. He said that the downturn is the direct result of living false lives—lives that deny what is obvious to all of us—the need to be ministering to others, sharing what has been gifted to us. He spoke about hard-heartedness—a biblical term that goes back to ancient Israel. Systems, the Archbishop said, need large changes in order to combat hard-heartedness and to develop some new paradigms for ministry. He suggested that we who work at overcoming such hard-heartedness, empowered by the holy spirit and filled with divine grace—we are the ones who must initiate and demand these systemic changes. Archbishop Williams remains very strong in his witness to these admonitions wherever he travels in the world. I — for one—am very grateful to him for this prophetic witness.

Two years ago at our convention, meeting here, we had as our guest the Rt. Rev. Trevor Mwamba, bishop of the diocese of Botswana. His presence ignited us with great hope for a new companion relationship that we had just begun through formal resolution on the part of both dioceses. Our Companion Diocese committee immediately went to work, hoping that the momentum from this charismatic leader and his visit among us would focus our relationship on interchanges with ideas and programs and people. But what we found as we

met each month and tried to make further plans was a difficulty in communicating with members of the companion relationship committee in Botswana, and the lack of focus upon information we sought to involve not just individuals but our congregations in our common life in Christ. We decided that the only way to bridge this gap was to visit directly with the leaders of the Diocese of Botswana. So last November eight members of the companion committee, including Mary and I, went to Botswana for a little over a week. What we found upon arrival was the most wonderful welcome and the most genuine hospitality. The leaders of the diocese kept us busy from 8:00am in the morning to 10:00pm each evening, sharing with us all aspects of their life and work and mission. We traveled many kilometers in a mothers' union van, stopping at congregations and schools and orphanages and the one hospice in Botswana which is run by the diocese. And of most importance in all these stops, we met new friends who are faithful sisters and brothers in Christ. And at every stop we were fed! Sometimes we had as many as five meals in one day! We had a chance on two occasions to sit down with their companion relationship committee and to share hopes together. What we were not able to do in the very packed agenda was to settle upon some concrete plans together. The group came back with some very specific ideas about our linkage—particularly in the area of helping to support a certain group of children who are at great risk in every aspect of their lives. We also hoped that our St. Luke's hospice could be a source of support in programs and basic procedures for the hospice program there. But as we worked on these ideas and hopes, we realized that we needed very dedicated people in Botswana who would set up the proper structures and lines of accountability that would be essential for our efforts to be helpful. So again, two people on our committee volunteered to return to Botswana, Dennis Robinson and Melissa Bolden, to try to understand the cultural structures there, and to help find some people from the diocese in Botswana to make these projects practically possible. Dennis and Melissa spent almost three weeks there, again accepting very generous and loving hospitality, and have brought back some very clear ways these projects might become strong ministries for all of us in the diocese. Melissa is

going to give a report about this tomorrow. We are anxiously awaiting the visit of one of the people from Botswana working to make this ministry possible. She will be visiting here in West Missouri the week of Thanksgiving. We are now excited about making this relationship work in concrete ways, having established some wonderful personal relationships with faithful soul mates. So please know that you will soon be hearing about possibilities for sharing in this significant outreach ministry as congregations and as individuals. We look forward to Melissa Bolden's report tomorrow!

And, by the way, we do keep in touch with Bishop Mwamba about all of these endeavors. He spent time with us when we were there, and he also spent considerable time with Dennis and Melissa. And since he continues to travel all over the world, most recently two weeks ago giving a major lecture at Yale, he makes sure that he is available electronically at all times.

I mentioned General Convention a few minutes ago. A little more needs to be shared with you about that gathering in July—a gathering that takes place every three years. Fr. Steve Wilson will also offer a report on the General Convention tomorrow. He was the chairperson of the deputation, and will speak from the perspective of the House of Deputies. This was my eighth General Convention—four as a deputy, and four as a bishop. With the exception of the first one I attended as a deputy in 1982, this Convention was as focused upon who we are to be as the people of God as I can remember. This focus was clearly upon our mission. Included in that focus was the realization that we are a unique body in the church, not just how we are structured through our polity, but more importantly how we carry out our witness to Christ among ourselves and in the world. Archbishop Williams hinted at this uniqueness when he said that the Anglican Communion cannot do without us. It is important to say here that every church is unique; every province of the Anglican Communion—unique in cultural mores and traditions, unique in social and family interactions; unique in expectations of leadership and membership. We as Anglicans are as diverse as can possibly be—and that is one of the most wonderful blessings in a

global panorama of souls seeking to serve the Lord Jesus. We again invited some sixty bishops from around the Anglican Communion to share this Convention time with us, and most of those invited were there—some for a few days, others for the entire ten days.

What I observed from the standpoint of the House of Bishops was a desire to acknowledge this uniqueness, and to get on with the serious mission of countless ministries that we are called to carry out. Without actually verbalizing this, (and I think this was true for the House of Deputies), we indicated an unwillingness to be threatened and cajoled in our work by a small group of leaders in other places within the communion. We acknowledged the deep schism that has been created in our own church, and made it very clear that we will always be most welcoming of people who wish to return in the future. The schism is probably not without further activity, and this is painful to see. But we are who we are, and we are finding other church denominations now responding with similar policies and possibilities about diversity and about ministry in the world.

It was the Convention that also had to respond to the economic downturn in our world. Mostly all aspects of the budget of the larger church were significantly cut. But mission projects were not cut! We as a diocese have always paid our full assessment to the larger church. But there are many dioceses that do not. If even most of the dioceses paid their full assessment, there would be loads of opportunities for greater mission and greater support for ministry. On the other hand, the cuts in the budget are making it necessary to look seriously at the structure of the larger church and how we have been doing business. About forty people on the staff of the larger church have been released from their work. This need for a restructure has been long overdue.

I came home from this General Convention with a deep sense of thanksgiving for who we are and for how we struggle mightily to discern the will of the Lord. There is and will always be much disagreement among our membership about that discernment. But I hope there will also be a strong

commitment to listen to and to relate to all those differences of opinion, knowing that it is the love of the Lord we are to ultimately share, one with another.

And please know that I am very proud of and grateful to the people you elected to send from our diocese. They were very committed to the tasks before them, and acted with courage and conviction and love for all. And speaking of good pride, I was bursting with it as a group of close to twenty of our youth from this diocese arrived for a five-day time of presence at the Convention. They came to Anaheim from here by train. And during their train rides to and from convention, they were absorbed in learning Anglican history and understanding our unique polity. Thus they could thoroughly understand what they were witnessing when they sat in on the committee hearings and the legislative sessions. They also had some great fun times while they were there. A very big thank you to the adults who accompanied them and taught them and modeled leadership for them!

And is it not wonderful that the largest number of youth have gathered here with us this weekend—more than ever before for their Diocesan Youth Event. Their energy and their eagerness to participate are infectious! These youth will again lead our opening morning service tomorrow. They have planned a special liturgy for All Hallows' Eve, and you will not want to miss it.

This is the year we welcomed Padre Jose Palma as our diocesan Hispanic Missioner. Padre Palma is putting a lot of faithful effort and energy into this work, and we are blessed to have him and his family among us. We are grateful to Grace Church, Carthage, for offering their Rectory to them. And we are also grateful to St. Matthew's, Raytown, for their continuing mission for the Hispanic community and their excellent program of English as a second language. We must be forthright in establishing greater opportunities for this ministry, knowing that the growth of the numbers of our Hispanic sisters and brothers is happening in a dramatic way. One of our deacons, Laurie McKim, has started seminary training this year, having felt called to become a priest, prepared and equipped to be a leader in serving the Hispanic community. She is going to the Seminary of the Southwest in Austin,

where there is an emphasis on such training. Her ministry with such training and preparation will be invaluable to our mission in this area of our common life.

During this year the diocese sponsored four clergy for training in the congregational development program called Appreciative Inquiry. Two other clergy also have been trained to offer their services to congregations in our diocese in helping with new ways to look at how we are doing our work together, and at new approaches to creating visions and implementing them. These trained clergy are available for no charge to Vestries and Bishops' Committees, and are anxious to assist congregational development in any way they can.

The diocese also continues in some partnerships with some congregations—a program of financial support that is based upon measurable goals and expectations. This partnership program has been very successful in most congregations who have partnered with the diocese. I hope that leaders will utilize these opportunities, both of which require some important planning for the future. If we are not looking ahead in the life of our communities, we are looking at maintaining what can only ultimately not be maintained.

In addition, the clergy were challenged at their annual Clergy Conference in September by a very forward-looking person who focuses on what produces wellness in our communities. He will be coming back to the diocese to do some work with one congregation. It would be to our benefit to have others seek to work with him while he is in our midst. He, however, will be working among us for a consulting fee.

In our Campus Ministry program, we have two interns who are working on campuses, and at least three more that we have recruited, and who are undergoing background checks at this time. This is an exciting new development for us as a diocese, utilizing people on campus who are committed to working with students and faculty members, and who do so with little compensation from us. The two interns at work now are at St. Mary's, Fayette, working with students at Central Methodist College, and at St. John's, Springfield, working with students

at Drury University. The others awaiting our endorsement are from All Saints', West Plains, working with students at the Missouri State University campus there; from Christ Church, Warrensburg, working with students at Missouri Central University, and at Christ Church, Springfield, working with students at the main Missouri State campus.

Interns function as persons who enable our programs with the students to have certification by the college or university they attend. Our programs when they are so certified become recognized activities which can be publicized through campus communication organs. The interns also work with the appointed Campus Minister to develop programs and by representing the Episcopal Church and the local parish to the students. They work with the Campus Minister to suggest and develop ministry activities. I am very grateful that what few resources we have available as a diocese for this ministry are being utilized in this way. Campus ministry is still so vital and important for young people, and contributions to any of the college and university programs are essential. The Campus Ministry is presently applying for a significant grant for 2010 from the national church center to broaden this work. These national grants are awarded for one year—hoping to be seed money for new initiatives. This intern program is a new initiative for West Missouri. It is imperative that our congregations keep the campus ministry informed of the people who are in our colleges and universities in our diocese so that these people can be supported and encouraged and invited to be in the spiritual life of the community. One of our interns is the person featured in our first profile in our new *Spirit* that is available to you here at the convention. Read about the incredible spiritual journey of Ergi, and her fervent desire to witness to the presence of the Lord in her life!

At our convention last year, a resolution was passed to enable the diocese to hire a person who would be responsible for the communications that we need to share. As the New Year found many economic challenges, I and the staff, with the approval of the Diocesan Council, made the decision to not hire a new member of the staff. But we did want to honor

the desire on the part of convention to improve our communications with congregations and individuals. The outcome of looking at the resources we have and the way in which people are receiving data in our culture was to launch a plan of sending an *E-Spirit* every two weeks to all the individuals who are on the email lists of our congregations. The news that is shared in the *E-Spirit* is much of what we have tried to share in the *West Missouri Spirit* in the past. But the *E-Spirit* also directs people to links on our webpage and on other sources of news and information about our common life in Christ. If you are not receiving the *E-Spirit*, speak to your rector or vicar or priest-in-charge. They are the ones who are to send it out when they receive it from the diocesan office to all of you! The other organ of communication is a quarterly magazine entitled the '*Spirit*' which will be mailed by snail mail to everyone whose address has been given to us by your congregation. You are receiving the first copy of the '*Spirit*' here at Convention, and you will find that it is a features publication, and not a news source. The news source is the *E-Spirit*. the *Spirit* that is before you has features on health reform; on congregations who are doing ministry work that is forward-looking and responding to the needs of people in our culture today; on the transition of leadership that is now in the works in our diocese; on some thoughts of our active youth; and on a profile of one among us—a feature that will always appear in this organ of communication. We are hoping that these two ways of communicating, using more up-to-date tools and methods, will share more of our life together in Christ, and do so more economically and more fully. With the retirement of our former editor of the *West Missouri Spirit*, Ben Wood, we have found a new editor of these communications, Hugh Welsh, who has proved to be an eager learner and skilled writer—having an excellent background in such work. I am sure you will identify Hugh as he does interviews among you and takes many pictures!

Finally, a word about the transition in leadership: as I have shared with the clergy, I am not unhappy with what I am called to do and to be! But I am older, and have been at this time ordained for over forty-two years. I sincerely think that it is time for

new leadership for this wonderful diocese— leadership that is younger and ready to lead in the Church for years to come. By the time an election and consecration takes place, I will have been with you and among you for thirteen years—God willing. In my understanding of calling and of leadership, a diocese should be desirous and hopeful of new leadership!

While I must remain apart from the search process for a new bishop, I want to say how pleased I am that the Standing Committee has taken hold of the process, and is working through it. The president of the Standing Committee, Fr. Russ Johnson, will be making a report to you following this address. The members of the Standing Committee are also making themselves available later this afternoon to answer any questions about the process as it is now planned. They also will be putting a new message about the process on the diocesan website every two weeks. No one will be able to say that there is no report available about the process!

While I cannot comment further on the process, I am able, nevertheless, to say to you that your first priority in the election of a new bishop is to find someone who will love you and care about you, and one who loves the Episcopal Church with all its bumps and warts. In my role as a faculty member of the College for Bishops, it is clear to me that those who are elected with such qualities are the ones who are responding to the challenges and the joys of the Church. And I promise you that while I am still your Bishop, I will continue to love you and to love our church, using whatever gifts the spirit gives me for the work of ministry. Mary and I will not be departing from you until your new bishop is ordained and consecrated for the leadership of this wonderful and blessed diocese. It continues to be a joy and a great privilege to serve the Lord with you!