

DIOCESAN CONVENTION ADDRESS

226th Annual Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut

The Rt. Rev. Ian T. Douglas, Ph.D.

22 October, 2010

Introduction

The Apostle Paul writes in his second letter to the Christians at Corinth, Chapter 5, verses 17-18, 20: “So if any one is in Christ, there is a new creation; everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself . . . So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us.” Paul says: in Christ there is a new creation and we, you and I, are given that ministry of reconciliation. Newness and reconciliation go hand in hand in our life in Christ Jesus. Newness and reconciliation are about our common life in God’s mission.

I never thought I would be standing here in front of you as your bishop. Yet a year ago, this Sunday October 24th to be exact, you elected me your new diocesan bishop. And just over six months ago last week, the Diocese gathered to celebrate our new beginning together when I was ordained and consecrated bishop at the Koepfel Community Sports Center – the hockey rink – at Trinity College here in Hartford. I was, and continue to be, humbled and honored by the invitation to come and be among you as your bishop. This vocation of bishop of Connecticut is a wonderful, new and surprising reality for me (and I have heard that it has also been a surprise for some of you too). God does work in strange and amazing ways!

So I want to begin by saying thank you. First I want to thank God for the gift of this new life, this new creation with you in the Body of Christ here in Connecticut. And I want to thank you and all the people of the Diocese of Connecticut. You have all been so warm, loving, gracious and generous to Kristin, our children and me over the last year. I can say, without hesitation, that the last year of my life has been one of the most exciting, exhilarating, positive, and yes, fun-filled times of my life. I just love being here with all of you. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

The thing that excites me most about being your bishop is that everywhere that I go in the Diocese I see a passion for mission; an incredible excitement for and commitment to what God is up to in the world through Jesus Christ empowered by the Holy Spirit. I think this is worth repeating. Everywhere I go in Connecticut I find an incredible excitement and passion for God's mission. Note here that I say: for God's mission, not the Church's mission, not your mission, not my mission, but rather God's mission. For fundamentally what we are called to participate in by virtue of our baptism is the mission of God, the *missio Dei*.

Now in this address I want to focus on four particular aspects of our common life in service to God's mission. They are:

- 1) The nature of God's mission: God's story in mission.
- 2) The urgency of God's mission for a hurting and broken world.
- 3) The telling of our stories in God's mission and how this might lead to a Mission Discernment Initiative for the Diocese.
- 4) The implications for who we are as a Diocese when we are oriented to God's mission.

The nature of God's mission: God's story in mission

What is the mission of God? What is the work of God in the world that we share in because of our baptism? For baptism is indeed our commission, co-mission, in God's mission.

The Catechism in the back of the Book of Common Prayer says that the mission of the Church, or more correctly put – the mission of God in which the Church is privileged to participate, is “to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ” (BCP p.855) – “restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ.” God's mission, the mission of God, is that profound restoring, reconciling action in the world by which the goodness and possibility of a bountiful, loving creation in and through God is made new. God's mission, God's desire, is to bring about healing, wholeness, and right-relationship.

This then is God's story – God's story in mission. Holy Scripture is fundamentally the story of God's mission, the story of how God brings about restoration

and reconciliation in the world; it's the story of what God has been up to since the beginning of creation.

God in God's abundant love created the universe and all that is in it. In the differentiation of creation, God created light from dark, water from sky, dry land from the seas, creatures of the ocean, air and land, and finally humankind, made in God's image. And all creation echoed with the refrain of God's love: "And it was good!"

No sooner, however, had God created this abundant and life-giving creation than humanity turned against God and one another, choosing to live unto ourselves. Our catechism thus tells us that, "sin is the seeking of our own will instead of the will of God, thus distorting our relationship with God, with other people, and with all creation." (BCP p.848) Sin is about broken relationship and alienation – alienation from God, alienation from one another, and alienation from creation.

But the good news is that God, because God is a God of abundant love, does not leave us alone in our alienation. No – God, in God's love, seeks right-relationship; wants us to be restored to unity with God and each other. God continually seeks after us to restore us and reconcile us to God and one another.

Hebrew scripture tells us that God initially sought to repair the world through a particular people, the people of Israel. Through Abraham and Sarah, God established a covenant by which the people of Israel could be a light to the nations, a point of reconciliation between God and all people. To help effect this right relationship God gave the Law, not as a punitive set of proscriptions but rather as a guide, a means by which the people of Israel could be bound up in God's mission of restoration and reconciliation. And when the leaders of Israel turned their backs on God seeking their own will instead of the will of God, then God sent the prophets to call the people back into right relationship. The Law and the Prophets are all about how God is bringing about God's reconciliation in the world.

As Christians we believe further that God's mission of restoration and reconciliation did not end with the covenant with Abraham and with the Law and the Prophets. We believe that God took a new and unique step to effect right relationship, healing and wholeness. We believe that through the incarnation, life, death and resurrection of Jesus the Christ there is a new creation. In Jesus, fully human and fully

divine, God crosses the divisions between an errant humanity and the loving creator. God becoming one of us in Jesus provides us a new way, a new covenant, by which we can be restored to unity with God and each other. God's mission to bring about right-relationship is made accessible for all in Jesus as the one who broke down the dividing walls of hostility between us and God, and between ourselves and each other.

And so the Body of Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit in Pentecost, is thus called to continue in God's mission to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ. The witness of the Apostle Paul and the epistles provide testimony to how the Body of Christ, the Church, is called to this mission of God. While the Church often falls far short of its vocation in God's mission – as evident in the epistles – the call, the vocation to effect wholeness, healing, right relationship in the world is no less urgent today than it was for the early followers of Jesus. God's mission of restoration and reconciliation will continue until we are all gathered around the throne of God in right-relationship with God and each other at the end of time, as envisioned in the Book of Revelation.

This is God's story. God loves the world and us so much that God will do anything, anything – even become human, to bring us into a new, restored, reconciled, right-relationship with God and each other. Paul proclaims this story of God's mission: “So if any one is in Christ, there is a new creation; everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself . . . So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us.”

The urgency of God's mission for a hurting and broken world

Oh my God (literally!), is the world still in need of God's mission of restoration and reconciliation today. As we look around us: in the world, in this great nation of ours, in the state of Connecticut and in our local communities, in our parishes and congregations, in our families and in our own personal lives, we sadly find alienation and distorted relationships wherever we cast our gaze.

In the world where war and violence seem to be on the increase, whether in Central Asia or in Africa, we seem to be further away from God's reign of justice, compassion and wholeness than we have ever been. Ten years ago, at the turn of the new millennium, all the nations of the world came together committing to eight goals that, if realized, would radically reshape the world. These eight Millennium Development Goals, the "MDGs," sought to: eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, achieve universal primary education, promote gender equality and empower women, reduce child mortality, improve maternal health, combat disease, ensure environmental stability, and develop a global partnership for development. The Anglican Communion, The Episcopal Church, and yes even we in the Diocese of Connecticut joined with the nations of the world to meet the Millennium Development Goals. But the sad news is that ten years into the 15-year commitment to the MDGs, we find that not only are we not meeting the goals but the world has in fact become much worse off in many places. God's mission of restoration and reconciliation globally is needed now more than ever.

And in our country, it seems that everywhere we look we are increasingly alienated from each other in ever more distorted human and political relationships. Our political system, once the great democratic hope of many, is strained almost to the point of breaking in this election season. Tea Party members, Democrats, and Republicans are all pointing the finger at each other blaming one other for the harsh economic and political times in which we live. And there is no lack of incivility and even hate in our society today as we scapegoat the "other," the marginalized, the one who is different, in an attempt to alleviate our fears, our insecurities, and our sense of loss. Persecution of migrants and immigrants who cross our nation's border looking for work and a better life, verbal and even physical attacks on people of the Islamic faith with accusations that they are terrorists, are all symptoms of the alienation in our country today. God's mission of restoration and reconciliation in our country is needed now more than ever.

And here in Connecticut it seems as if individuals and families are working harder and harder yet falling further and further behind. New Census data confirms that poverty has risen sharply over the last decade due to the economic recession. In 2009, 9.4% of Connecticut residents had incomes under the Federal Poverty Level, up from 7.3% in 2001. Among Connecticut children under age 18, 12.1% lived in families with incomes

under the Federal Poverty Level in 2009. And yet Connecticut per capita income is one of the highest, if not the highest, in the nation. What does this gross mal-distribution of our “common-wealth” say about our state and our local communities? How does the economic crisis in which many of us are struggling get manifested in distorted relationships among the citizens of Connecticut? God’s mission of restoration and reconciliation in our state is needed now more than ever.

And what about the Church, are we immune from this? Ecumenically we seem to be in a state of flux and decline as old models of cooperation in regional and state ecumenical councils no longer seem to be viable. At the same time, newspapers and blogs have a field day proclaiming the demise of the Anglican Communion as we continue to wrestle with hard questions of difference, be they differences over biblical interpretation, the place of women in the Church, or the full inclusion of gay and lesbian people. In The Episcopal Church, parishes, and even some dioceses, continue to threaten leaving the Episcopal Church in internecine power struggles. What results all too often is increased alienation and bitter relationships between sisters and brothers in Christ. And here in the Diocese of Connecticut, harsh economic realities seem to nip at the heels of our congregational life. How many of you here this afternoon cannot say that you are not anxious about your parish budget? God’s mission of restoration and reconciliation in the Church is needed now more than ever.

Many of you have heard me say a few times in my brief time here in Connecticut, “The devil is not stupid.” There is nothing the evil one wants more than for us as Christians to turn our backs on God’s mission of restoration and reconciliation, wallowing in a spirit of, “I can’t,” or “we can’t,” or “God can’t.” The devil wants nothing more than for us to be dragged down by the problems of the world, this nation, our state, or the Church. But that is not what God wants. Rather what God wants is for us to stand up, act boldly, and proclaim: “Get thee behind me Satan. I have work to do in God’s mission.”

The telling of our stories in God's mission: a Mission Discernment Initiative

So how might we do this? How shall we discern? How might we find anew our place, our vocation, individually and corporately in God mission of restoration and reconciliation?

One way of being renewed, of discerning our role in God's mission is, by locating our lives as Christians within the story of God's mission. When we tell our stories of faith, when we tell our stories of the moments that we have been swept up in the restoring, reconciling love of God, then we begin to see again in new ways how God strengthens us and binds us one to another in service to what God is up to in the world. Locating our stories, individually and corporately, in God's story gives us new hope, new possibility, new energy, new excitement to serve God's mission in the world.

When we as Christians tell our faith stories in the context of the story of God's mission, then we are reborn with a new sense of power and possibility as the Body of Christ to serve God's restoring and reconciling action in the world. Let me say that again: when we tell our own personal stories of how we have been swept up in, connected to God's healing, restoring, reconciling work in the world, then we find new meaning as the Body of Christ as a whole. This new identity in the Body of Christ, this new creation in Jesus, then gives us as the Church new focus, new possibility, new energy to serve God's restoring, reconciling action in the world. As we tell our individual stories in God's story, we discover anew our common story and are empowered for new action in service to God's mission.

This is the work, the newness, that God holds out for us in the Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut. I believe that God is calling us to tell our own personal stories, out loud, in public, of how we have found restoration and reconciliation in the loving embrace of God. Yes, I do mean Episcopalians telling how God is active in our lives. Can you believe it, actually telling our stories of what God is up to in our lives? Dare we say witnessing to the Love of God in Jesus? To that end you will hear stories from eight sisters and brothers in Christ in the Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut, two each in four different time slots, during this convention. Each of these "witnesses" will share a very brief story of how they have been caught up in God's restoration and reconciliation in

their own lives. Listen to these stories with open hearts; let them wash over you, as icons of God's mission.

I do believe that as we tell our stories of how we have been swept up individually in God's mission of restoration and reconciliation, we rediscover our commonality and communion together as the Body of Christ in our local eucharistic communities – our parishes and congregations – as well as in other communities of practice, be they committees, commissions or other pan-diocesan groupings such as the Episcopal Church Women, the Union of Black Episcopalians, Integrity, or the new Connecticut Clergy Association. When we tell our stories in God's mission we will become even more profoundly the Diocese of Connecticut as a whole, in service to God's mission.

And so I call the Diocese of Connecticut to engage in a process of story telling, individually and corporately, so that we may more fully discover our common life and common action in God's mission. More specifically I ask this convention to affirm by resolution that the Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut enter into a Mission Discernment Initiative. This Mission Discernment Initiative will be an ongoing process that will: 1) invite us to tell our individual stories in God's mission, 2) help us to discover anew our commonality, our common story, as the Diocese of Connecticut in service to God's mission, and then 3) lead us to make decisions about how to use the incredible, abundant resources God has given us to serve more faithfully God's mission of restoration and reconciliation in our communities, across this state and nation, and to the ends of the earth.

The Mission Discernment Initiative is not envisioned as a time-limited program, a one off been-there-done-that planning event promulgated by some office in Hartford located at 1335 Asylum Ave. It is much larger than that. It is an invitation for each and every one of us, individually and corporately, to discover anew who we have been, who we are, and who God wants us to be as Episcopalians in the Diocese of Connecticut in service to God's mission. More specifically, the Mission Discernment Initiative will provide leadership training so that all local eucharistic communities and all communities of practice in the Diocese can become more aware of and articulate about how we are to serve God's mission. As we become more aware of and articulate about how we are to serve God's mission, then we will be better equipped as a diocese to discern what specific

steps, what strategic initiatives God's wants us to take in order to become more faithful "ambassadors for Christ." I hope and pray that this Convention is bold enough to take this step in faith, to take this step forward in God's mission.

The implications for who we are as a diocese when we are oriented to God's mission

In this address you might hear a new or different missiology and ecclesiology than that which has historically been common in the Diocese of Connecticut. (It's true I could not get through a public presentation without using the words, "missiology" – which means theology of mission, and "ecclesiology" – how we order our common lives as the Church!) So now I want to make explicit how I understand what a diocese is, in service to God's mission.

Anglican tradition holds that a diocese is the united witness of Christians in their local parishes and congregations in a particular geographic region. There is no diocese separate from the common life of those gathered around the altars of local eucharistic communities in a specific area. There is no diocese separate from the congregations and parishes, chaplaincies and missions, in which all of you live and move and have your being.

And while there is no diocese separate from the witness of the parishes and congregations, the other side of the equation is also true: no parish or congregation exists separate from the diocese as a whole. Each local eucharistic community is intimately bound up in the life and witness of other parishes and congregations, whether they acknowledge this reality or not. We cannot be "catholic" – small "c", meaning universal – Christians without sharing in the common life of the parishes and congregations that make up the diocese.

Obviously, what I am saying here has implications for how we see ourselves and how we live our lives as the Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut. The Diocese of Connecticut is indeed the united witness and service to God's mission of Episcopalians in 170+ parishes, congregations, chaplaincies and missions in Connecticut – nothing more, nothing less! The Diocese of Connecticut is not the bishop or some office building with staff in Hartford. To this end the old sign at 1335 Asylum Ave that reads, "Diocesan House," has been retrieved and re-hung, because it reflects the reality that the Diocese

exists in our parishes and congregations and not in an office building far away in Hartford. So please do not refer to Diocesan House and the faithful work of the gifted and dedicated people who work at 1335 Asylum Ave (for whom I am incredibly indebted and thankful) as the Diocese. 1335 Asylum Ave is not the Diocese; the staff is not the Diocese; I am not the Diocese. You and the parishes, congregations, chaplaincies and missions that sent you here are the Diocese.

This view of the Diocese, which I would argue is quintessentially Anglican, does have implications for our common life as it is expressed financially. Here I want to say just a few words about how we see our budget and how our parishes and congregations participate in our common budget. Our budget, and I want to underscore that it is our budget and not some other entity's budget, is based upon a common sharing of our common God-given resources for the sake of our common witness and common action in God's mission. Clearly "common" is the operative word here. The call to share 12.5 % of one's local parish income in a diocesan-wide budget, a call enacted by this Convention when you pass the budget, is a common commitment made by the whole for the sake of the whole. The 12.5 % sharing is thus a manifestation of our common life as the Diocese Connecticut. It is not a tax. Our parish and congregations' participation in the diocesan budget might even be considered somewhat sacramental – an outward and visible sign (our money – or more correctly put, God's money) of an inward and spiritual grace (our common life in Christ.) So not participating fully in the diocesan budget at the local parish and congregational level limits both the local eucharistic community, and the Diocese as a whole, of our potential and common life in God's mission.

Now the budget that we will consider at this convention is basically a flat budget from last year. There are, however, a few new modest expenditures in support of the Mission Discernment Initiative. Projections based on parochial reports for 2009 will produce \$4,400,000 if all parishes pledge at the same rate as last year, which was 9.3%, but if we are to have a balanced budget all parishes and congregations will have to participate at least near the 12.5%. OK, enough said.

The way by which we order our common lives as the Church (the ecclesiology) that I am putting forward here not only has implications for our common identity and common budget as the Diocese of Connecticut, but it also has implications for how we

understand the episcopate, the office of bishop. The episcopate, particularly in the tradition of the American Episcopal Church, is not some monarchical exercise of power over. Rather the episcopate is fundamentally about an office whose sole purpose is to build up and support the Body of Christ in service to God's mission. It is thus no coincidence then that The Episcopal Church initiated the "missionary episcopate" in the early 19th century to help extend the Church into new mission frontiers.

As someone called to be a bishop among you, I see myself as an inheritor of that missionary episcopate whose sole purpose is to build up and support the Body of Christ in service to God's mission. As such I am a networker for God's mission, serving to help link all of you together as you seek to be more faithful to God's mission in your own lives and communities.

And I share this office with two incredibly faithful, gifted and committed individuals, Bishop James Curry and Bishop Laura Ahrens. I am so blessed to share the office of the episcopate with Laura and Jim. They are a constant source of joy, challenge, and support as together we are bishops for all of you here in Connecticut. I want to underscore that together the three of us inhabit the singular office of the episcopate. While we each might have different portfolios, different gifts, different spheres of work, we are united in the fact that we are called to do this work together in a mutually responsible and interdependent manner. Let me say it again: Connecticut has one episcopate embodied by three bishops. Jim, Laura and I hope to model the unity of the office of the episcopate by sharing responsibilities in new ways including co-presiding at this convention. Thank you Laura and Jim for your collegiality, friendship, and love. You are the best!

Before closing, I want to name very briefly a few additional items of concern, opportunities for our faithfulness to God's mission that are or will be before the Diocese in the near future.

The first is the call to address the ongoing suffering of people of Haiti in the wake of last January's horrendous earthquake, and now, sadly, the new outbreak of cholera. Many, many of you have been involved in addressing the relief and development needs of the people of Haiti, and the Episcopal Church of Haiti in particular. I thank you and I thank God for your love and generosity. But the needs of the people of Haiti will not be

met easily. There will be ongoing calls for us to give and work sacrificially for the rebuilding of Haiti. To that end in the coming months there will be a 10 million dollar appeal advanced by the Executive Council of the Episcopal Church to help rebuild the Episcopal Church of Haiti. You will hear more about this appeal in due course, and when you do I ask that each and every one of our parishes, congregations, chaplaincies and missions participate generously.

Secondly, as I suspect many of you are aware, there is now before the churches of the Anglican Communion a proposed "Anglican Covenant." This covenant is intended as a new means by which the churches of the Anglican Communion can grow into deeper and more meaningful relationships. Some see the Covenant, however, as a tool for excluding some churches from inter-Anglican life because of beliefs and actions related to the full inclusion of gay and lesbian people in the life of the Church. Whether we see the proposed Anglican Covenant as a means of deepening relationships or as a tool for exclusion is the question that is now before the churches of the Anglican Communion. The 2012 General Convention thus will consider how The Episcopal Church responds to the Anglican Covenant. In preparation for the next General Convention, all dioceses in The Episcopal Church have been asked to weigh in on how we see the Anglican Covenant. I have asked that the evaluation of the Anglican Covenant by the Diocese of Connecticut be led by the deputies to General Convention that you will elect at this convention, given that they will be voting on the same in 2012. I ask that you keep this responsibility in mind as you mark your ballots for deputies to the 2012 General Convention.

Speaking of the Anglican Covenant and the General Convention leads me to note that questions of how gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered sisters and brothers in Christ are included in the life of the Church remain central concerns in The Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion. This is not the time and place for me to articulate my full understanding on these concerns (and I do not have the time even if I wanted to). I do want to say, however, that I see the norms and procedures for the Diocese of Connecticut advanced by Bishop Andrew Smith in these matters as consistent with the intent and direction of Resolution C056 of the 2009 General Convention. I thus have no plans to change Bishop Smith's direction at this time.

Conclusion

I want to conclude where I began – with a spirit of gratitude and excitement. I thank our loving creator God for God’s restoring, reconciling mission in Jesus Christ. I thank God that in the power of the Holy Spirit and through baptism, each and everyone of us is called and empowered to join God in God’s mission. And I thank God for all of you, the Diocese of Connecticut, for your expressed hope and possibility in God’s mission. Thank you for asking me to come and be a part of that newness and reconciliation in God’s mission here in the Diocese of Connecticut. It is all so very exciting!

Since we are in Christ, there is a new creation. Everything old has passed away; see everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and has given us, *given us*, the ministry of reconciliation. We are indeed ambassadors for Christ. Let us share our stories of God’s love with each other and with the world and so be drawn more deeply into God’s mission to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ. AMEN