

“Convention Address”

**229th Diocesan Convention
The Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut**

25 October, 2013

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The theme for this year’s 229th Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut is “The Way of Jesus: Growing in God’s Mission.” “The Way of Jesus: Growing in God’s Mission.”

Some of you might recall that the issue of “growth” arose in last year’s convention when we began to confront the reality of numerical and economic decline in our diocese. It was suggested that “growth” might be a possible theme for this year’s convention. As your Convention Planning Committee prayerfully planned for this convention, our understanding of growth slowly shifted from a focus on numerical and economic indicators to the broader invitation to grow in faithfulness to the mission of God. It was the Planning Committee’s position, one with which I agree wholeheartedly, that as we become ever more faithful to what God is up to in the world (the mission of God), then the Church as a Body will become ever more vital and alive. Numerical and economic growth is thus not a goal but rather a result - the result of the Body of Christ becoming ever more faithful to God’s mission of restoration and reconciliation in the world.

So of course, the question is: How do we become ever more faithful to the mission of God in the world? Well, my sisters and brothers, the answer is Jesus. In Jesus, we are given “the way, and the truth, and the life.” (John 14:6) In Jesus, God

has broken down the walls that divide us one from another and restored us to unity with God and each other in Christ (BCP p. 855) In Jesus, God has reconciled the world to himself and given us the ministry of reconciliation. (2 Corinthian 5:18) The way of Jesus is the way of God's mission of restoration and reconciliation. Following the way of Jesus, and empowered by the Holy Spirit, we will grow in God's mission.

So the theme of this, the 229th Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut is: "The Way of Jesus: Growing in God's Mission." In this address, in our bible study to follow, in our worship (particularly in the sermon tomorrow by my good friend and brother Bishop Michael Curry), in our breakout groups, and in our business together we will be invited, over and over, to consider what is the "Way of Jesus;" and how are we called through the power of the Holy Spirit, to become ever more faithful to God's mission in the world.

Now as I consider the way of Jesus, one constant I see is the reality of change. In Jesus, God is forever doing something new, forever calling us forward into greater wholeness and possibility.

Think about it. When God became human in Jesus it was an entirely new thing. In the incarnation of Jesus, fully human and fully divine, God changed reality and brought about a new creation. In Jesus' life and ministry, God uniquely and decisively changed the way that humanity comes into relationship with our loving creator. And in Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, God even changed the finitude of death by bringing about everlasting life. In Jesus, God changed everything.

The apostles and disciples knew that the way of Jesus was thus the way of change. They left their nets, their families, their vocations, to follow Christ. Like Paul who was literally knocked off his high horse, the disciples were converted, changed from old ways to new ways in the love of God in Christ. The way of Jesus is the way of dying to old selves and rising to new life with him.

Each and every one of us is invited to change as we follow the way of Jesus. In the waters of baptism we are “buried with Christ in his death, share in his resurrection, and are reborn by the Holy Spirit.” (BCP p 306.) The way of Jesus is the way of change. The way of Jesus is the way to grow in God’s mission of restoration and reconciliation.

We Episcopalians in Diocese of Connecticut, following the way of Jesus, have been embracing change for some time now. Four years ago, yesterday, you elected me, a stranger from the far away land of Massachusetts, as your 15th bishop diocesan. In the diocesan profile for the election you stated: “We sense a strong desire to be open to the Holy Spirit in a new way. We want our next bishop to be someone who can take from our rich history and culture and can also help us be more open to breaking out of entrenched habits and customs.” I dare say that the Diocese of Connecticut, all 168 eucharistic communities, have been embracing change for some time now as together we seek to follow the way of Jesus.

Now not all change is easy. And sometimes the precipitating causes of change are not of God (and in fact might be absolutely contrary to the love and life of God in Jesus). Last December 14th the shooting of twenty grade school children and six teachers and administrators at Sandy Hook Elementary School radically changed

us all. In Newtown we witnessed and experienced the incredible horror of gun violence in new ways; gun violence that sadly is not unknown to many who live in our inner cities where shootings of young people are an all too often occurrence. In the hours, days, weeks and months that followed the tragedy in Newtown, (and here I want to acknowledge the incredible leadership of the Rev. Kathie Adams Shepherd, Rector of Trinity Church, Newtown, and the Rev. Mark Moore, Missional Priest at St. John's in Sandy Hook) we, the people and Diocese of Connecticut, struggled to find the light and life of Christ in the face of death and destruction.

And out of Sandy Hook, we have begun to find a new voice, a new sense of urgency, in challenging the violence, particularly the gun violence, endemic in our society. In new efforts of advocacy, in our Way of the Cross witness in Washington on Monday of Holy Week (see the cover of *Crux*), and in the ways we are learning to stand with those who continue to lose loved ones from gun violence in our cities, we are being changed. We are being invited to grow ever more faithfully into God's mission of restoration and reconciliation. Thanks be to God.

Change is not always easy, but often God blesses change. I mentioned in my convention address last year that our four main instruments of common life together, namely the Bishops and Diocesan Executive Council, the Standing Committee, the Commission on Ministry, and Donations and Bequests, would "try on" meeting together as one body in order to better serve God's mission. The experiment has gone well, I believe, and we are slowly discerning how we can be more fully empowered as leaders together.

Last September this “leadership gathering” of the four main councils and commissions of our diocese participated in a SWOT analysis (**S**trengths, **W**eaknesses, **O**pportunities, and **T**hreats) led by the Rev. Gay Jennings, a gifted facilitator who knows our diocese well and is also the President of the House of Deputies for the General Convention of the Episcopal Church. I am pleased to say that the results of the SWOT analysis reflected that in the opinion of our diocesan leaders: 1) our primary strength is “openness to change,” 2) our main weakness is a “broken deanery system,” 3) we have a great opportunity right now “to restructure based upon radically new ideas and possibilities,” and 4) the biggest threat is “not changing or changing too slowly.” Now does that sound like Connecticut of old, “the land of steady habits”? I don’t think so. For God has indeed blessed our diocese with leaders on the Executive Council, the Standing Committee, the Commission on Ministry, and Donations and Bequests who are open to the way of Jesus, the way of change. I want to note some of the changes that these leaders, working in conjunction with your diocesan staff, have been able to effect over last year or so.

At our 2011 Diocesan Convention, we passed Resolution #1 on “Mutual Responsibility and Interdependence in the Body of Christ.” The intent of this resolution, I believe, was to help the parishes of our diocese become increasingly mutually accountable one to another, particularly through participation in our common budget passed by Diocesan Convention. Unfortunately the impact of this resolution was fear (and please excuse the violent metaphor here but it is what I have heard some in our diocese say) as some thought the resolution called for “hit squads of the bishop who would close parishes if they were not pledging at the 10%

level.” This could not be further from the truth. Rather in response to the Mutual Responsibility and Interdependence Resolution and with leadership from the office of the Canon for Mission Collaboration and Congregational Life, Audrey Scanlan, and an incredible team of dedicated volunteers from across our diocese have hosted 13 different parishes in three collaborative day-long workshops to see how we can best support one another in living into the parameters of the resolution. Thus, over the last two years 34 of 75 parishes who were previously pledging under 10% of their income to our common work have come up to the 10% or more level. And average parish pledges to our budget passed by convention have increased from 9.2% to 10.00% over the same time period. This is an incredible change. Thanks be to God and the parishes of our diocese.

Over the last year we have also experienced significant changes in how our lay and ordained leaders are supported as together we walk the way of Jesus. On April 20, 2013 we initiated a “Spring Training” event. Close to 200 leaders from parishes across our diocese, primarily lay people, gathered to participate in 19 different workshops and training opportunities helping parishes to be more effective in God’s mission. This educational day was so well received that we will have another “Spring Training” for parish leaders on May 3, 2014 at East Catholic High School in Manchester. You all are invited.

In a similar vein, your bishops have started “Wardens and Bishops Dinners” where we meet with wardens from a variety of parishes to eat together and discuss our common life and service to the mission God. So far we have had five dinners with close to 100 participants and perhaps a third of our parishes participating.

Speaking of bishops, I want to take a moment now to recognize and give thanks to God for the ministry, witness, and collegiality of our Bishops Suffragan, the Rt. Rev. James E. Curry and the Rt. Rev. Laura J. Ahrens. Bishops Laura and Jim are two of the finest, most gifted, most faithful, and hardest working bishops in The Episcopal Church. Together, the three of us have tried to model “one office of the episcopate inhabited by three different bishops – one diocesan and two suffragan.” This has meant a change in how we in the Diocese of Connecticut understand the nature and shape of the episcopate. I so appreciate how together, all of us in Connecticut, are reimagining how the office of the episcopate – Jim, Laura and I together, can foster and support the diocese’s life in God’s mission. I thank God and thank you, Laura and Jim, for our common ministry as bishops. I could not do this job at this point in our diocesan life without both of you.

There are other profound ways by which we have made changes in our diocesan life and leadership as we seek to be more faithful to the way of Jesus in our service to God’s mission. In late 2012 we undertook a nationwide search to find a new Canon for Mission Leadership resulting in Tim Hodapp joining our staff from the staff of the Episcopal Church in Minnesota. Tim is profoundly committed to the mission of God and is a gifted communicator and administrator. He, his staff, and parish consultants have reoriented our clergy transition process from primarily focusing on a search for a next rector to an opportunity for growth in God’s mission. And with their good efforts, 41 new letters of agreement between parishes and Rectors, Assistants, Priests in Charge, Interims, and Missional Priests have been signed since our last convention. That’s a lot of change in the life of our parishes.

One of the parishes of our diocese that has come through a time of change in its ordained leadership and community over the last year has been our cathedral, Christ Church Cathedral in Hartford. This fall the Spanish-speaking parish of St. James chose to become fully incorporated into the life of the Cathedral making the Cathedral a bilingual parish. I am delighted to say that the Rev. Miguelina Howell, previously of the Dominican Republic and most recently of the Diocese of Newark and one of the most vibrant and dynamic young Spanish-speaking priests in The Episcopal Church, has come to the Cathedral as our Vicar serving the Spanish and English speaking congregations. Together with the Rev. Harlon Dalton as our regularized Priest-in-Charge, the Cathedral community and our whole diocese will now move forward together to answer the questions: 1) How can Christ Church Cathedral be even more faithful to God's mission in the city of Hartford, and 2) What is the vocation of a Cathedral in our Diocese of Connecticut into the 21st century. These are exciting questions for the Cathedral and our whole diocese to engage as we seek to follow the way of Jesus and grow in God's mission.

Significant changes have also occurred amongst our staff and activities at Diocesan House. As some of you might recall, in July of 2011 we had a significant reduction of six staff positions combined with two retirements (including the retirement of Jack Spaeth.) These departures represented a 30% decline in staff numbers and the loss of close to 130 years of experience and knowledge. For the first year and half after July 2011, those left at Diocesan House had to work mightily just to figure out which end was up while trying to keep business going as best we could. It was incredibly difficult for all. Here I want to thank all the staff at Diocesan

House who tirelessly, and often at great cost to themselves, hung in there during all the changes. I want to note, in particular, Cindy Winslow who stepped in to assume the responsibilities as Canon for Mission Finance and Operations during this difficult time. In 2014 Cindy will return to her former position of Controller and with input from and outside consultant, we expect to search for a new Canon and completely rebuild our finance department in the very near future. (Can we give the staff of Diocesan House here with us tonight, including our Secretaries of the Diocese and of Convention, a round of applause for their incredible faithfulness and hard work through the year and in preparation for this convention?)

In 2013, I am happy to report, that we have started to discern some semblance of order in the staff and offices at Diocesan House. Robin Hammeal-Urban, Our Canon for Mission Integrity and Training, along with a dedicated and gifted group of Human Resource professionals from across our diocese, literally rewrote our diocesan Human Resource Manual that had not been significantly updated since 1998. The new manual, authorized by the Bishops and Diocesan Executive Council, is an incredible resource for our whole diocese and puts in place a new, transparent and just system of supervision, evaluation, and accountability for staff at all levels. I commend it to all of you and all of your parishes as a model.

(See: [https://www.ctepiscopal.org/images/customer-files//HRManual formatted 9 13 2013.pdf](https://www.ctepiscopal.org/images/customer-files//HRManual_formatted_9_13_2013.pdf))

Similarly, under the leadership of our Canon for Mission Communication and Media, Karin Hamilton (who brought us once again this amazing issue of *Crux* – please do not forget to take home your parish’s box to be distributed to your

parishioners) we are in the process of building a whole new diocesan website with much better search functions as well as initiating a diocesan-wide branding effort. The fruits of Karin's efforts will help all of us to use 21st century media to better communicate what it means to follow the way of Jesus.

Finally at our 227th Diocesan Convention in 2011 we passed unanimously – as best as I can recall - Resolution #12 authorizing the Bishop and Diocesan Executive Council (BDEC) to relocate Diocesan House in order to “fit current and future staff size as to space flexibility, safety, ADA Standards for Accessible Design, adequate parking and ease of transportation access.” A dedicated Project Team of BDEC, augmented by staff and other volunteers from across our diocese have worked incredibly hard over the last two years to fulfill this resolution.

I am happy to announce tonight that because of their good efforts we have recently entered into an agreement to sell the existing Diocesan House located at 1335 Asylum Avenue in Hartford. In the first quarter of 2014 we expect to move out of the gracious mansion given by Miss Mabel Johnson to our diocese during the episcopate of Bishop Walter Henry Gray, 60 years ago this year and into new diocesan offices.



The Diocesan House Relocation Project Team has thus also been actively engaged in helping to find new offices to serve our diocese. A diocesan-wide poll completed in June 2012 with 263 responses from Episcopalians in 104 different towns and cities showed that our next diocesan office needed to be accessible, close

to major highways, centrally located, with state of the art communications and office facilities, and plenty of free parking.

I am excited to report that we are in the final stages of formalizing a lease for a new diocesan office space in a redeveloped ball-bearing factory at 290 Pratt Street,

in Meriden, Connecticut. The new space is fully

accessible, right off highway I-691 at exit 8, with an abundance of free parking, and located in the geographic center of the population of our diocese.

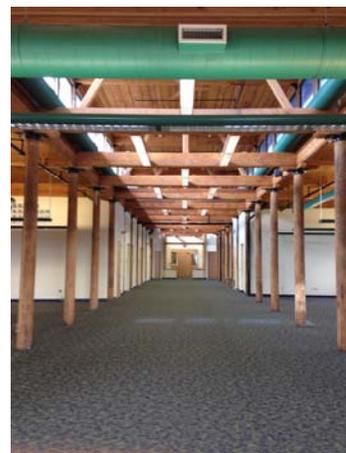
The annual operating costs of the new space will be



approximately that of the existing Diocesan House except

that we will have a much more workable and appropriate office, with reduced capital costs of owning, and our building in Hartford will have been turned into liquid assets.

Two dedicated laymen of our diocese are facilitating the move to our new diocesan offices: Mr. Peter Holland from St. Alban's in Simsbury as our relocation consultant, and Mr.



Duo Dickinson from Trinity on the Green in New Haven as our architect. The plan for our new space is that it will accommodate our diocesan offices, gatherings, and meetings in a state of the art facility that belongs to all of us, is open, and flexible.

(Duo Dickinson is here with us tonight and is available to speak with anyone interested in seeing the initial plans for our new space in the Vendor Hall during our break.) I believe that moving from a mansion in the West End of Hartford to a

former factory in Meriden is indeed iconic of the changes God is bringing about in the Diocese of Connecticut as move forward into the 21st century.

I pray that all that we do in this our 229th Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut will draw us deeper into the way of Jesus and help us to grow in faithfulness to God's mission of restoration and reconciliation in the world.

Thank you.