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Bishop Lawrence Provenzano's Address to the 157th Convention
November 11, 2023

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 forth 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.

Before I begin this address, I ask you all please remain still and silent as we give thanks for the men and women who have served in the Armed Forces of our nation. Today is Veterans Day—set aside to give thanks for those who have served. It is not Memorial Day, when we remember those who gave their lives in service to the nation, and it is not Armed Forces Day when we give thanks for those presently serving. But today, we pray for and with those who no longer serve in active duty but carry with them the scars and the emotions of a time defending our nation.

Please remain silent and give thanks for their sacrifice.

As I begin, please let me acknowledge with great appreciation all the members of our diocesan staff and those serving in elected positions for this convention—for their faithfulness, dedication, and hard work in creating the space and tools that allow us each to fully participate in this time in which we take council for the life and ministry of our diocese.

Today we are celebrating the 50th anniversary of the ordination of women in the Episcopal Church, anticipating the actual date of July 29, 1974. Today, Bishop Wolf, our assistant bishop is presiding this Eucharist, concelebrated with women priests of our diocese.

It should be noted that Bishop Wolf is arranging for our diocese to host a screening of the documentary focused on the ordination of the Philadelphia Eleven. The date will be soon announced for that screening.

An additional historical note is worthy of mention here – although following the ordinations in Philadelphia, the General Convention of our church did not authorize the ordination of women for another two years in 1976, and in this Diocese of Long Island women were not ordained to the priesthood until 1989, more than a decade later. Although late to the “show”, our diocese has been blessed by the full and complete inclusion of women in ordained ministry. And we give thanks.

As we begin, please acknowledge with me the fact that this diocese is an amazingly gifted, incredibly diverse, and exuberant gathering of the people of God! The people and clergy of this diocese are outstandingly faithful and loving.

It doesn't get much better than this anywhere else in the church! Two thirds of the City of New York, Nassau, and Suffolk Counties—more than 7.2 million people in a ministry field tailor-made for the church to be the church, especially in these most trying times in the history of our nation and the world.

In this 157th Convention we will focus our prayerful attention on bridges: building bridges, crossing over them, and maintaining them.

As an island diocese, our geography teaches us about bridges. We know that without them we are stuck and become isolated even though we live and minister in one of the most densely populated geographies in the nation. We are also the most diverse diocese in the nation and understand this reality in a way that demands our best and most faithful efforts to live the gospel of Jesus Christ in the midst of a people who need the church and simultaneously avoid our presence.

Whenever I travel of the Long Island Railroad, I am reminded of our diocesan work. Upon the doors opening there is a verbal and visual reminded to “watch the gap”, “step over the gap”. It always makes me think of our calling in this time in our history as a church. Most especially it brings to mind the reality of our need to bridge a time of security and status into a time of servanthood and identification with those who are most closely living the cross of Jesus Christ.

The legitimacy of our ministries and our proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ can no longer be solely measured by the size of our budgets, the stability of our buildings or the numbers of our programs, and the size of our staffs. Those are helpful tools, but not the measure of faithfulness in ministry.

Tools, as many as we can gather, must have the objective and purpose of serving God's people, not bolstering status, or merely completing projects on the list, as in corporate life, but rather envisioning all that we do as a means of service to all of God's people. That is the measure of our faithfulness.

In this diocese, we have created meaningful structures to address the material needs of our parishes through the ministry of Episcopal Real Estate of Long Island and its engagement with more than half of our congregations in this past year.

Episcopal Ministries of Long Island continue to provide grants and build partnerships in an ever-growing effort to bridge the work of the church to the needs of the neighborhoods and communities we serve. The 2024 ministry plan includes over three million dollars in

direct support for partnerships and missionaries, providing clergy and lay ministries in over 36 of our congregations and all diocesan-wide initiatives.

Sunday after Sunday during visitations, the bishops of this diocese hear over and over again the concerns of parish vestries and bishop's committee related to dwindling numbers in attendance, the lack of children or young people in the congregations, and the general cry that "things are not as they used to be."

Well, good! Because we are not building bridges to the past! The footings of the bridges we need to build are constituted on the rich and holy life of the church and its focus on scripture, tradition and right reason for today and for the future.

The footing of our bridges will be the three-legged stool to support ministry that offers new and sustained life to a people starving to know Jesus Christ, eager to engage the liturgies and to be made holy in the sacramental and formational life of our tradition. With the goal of addressing real life, and real life issues, in this second decade of the 21st century.

Many of our congregations report that it has become nearly impossible to maintain Sunday School, and that family activities and Sunday sports make it impossible to maintain church school or for that matter attract young families.

Well, of course it has! But the children and the families still exist. The population of the geography of our diocese continues to increase. To use a phrase often used: we are not running out of people. So we need new ways of creating communities of learning and formation and it will not be Sunday School in the manner we have once imagined. Faith formation should not and must not look like the classrooms the children occupy all week long. That is not church. Children and parents should not be separated during Sunday liturgy. Parents should be encouraged once again to be the first teachers of the faith. We need to build a bridge to reach the countless families in our communities and offer them a sane, responsible, flexible, and continuous opportunity to engage the sacramental and formational life of our church without gate-keeping access. All should be welcomed. All should be sought after.

The bridge may not be on Sunday morning. It may take various forms and create more work for our clergy and lay leaders, but it is a bridge that will be essential for the ongoing life of our diocese. I am convinced that children's ministry will become the decisive indicator of our ability to engage the next generation of Christians.

Children's ministry must become the main focus of our parochial life and the expenditures in our parish budgets and not an afterthought to the interests of the adults in the congregation.

To support this bridge building, I am announcing today that a new canon for youth and young adult ministries will be announced on Advent I. This person or persons will be charged with being the support staff to every congregation. The focus will be on the development of parish initiatives and not solely the creation of diocesan-focused events. The work will be on building

religious community with children, teenagers, young adults, and their families. The activities must be creating connections and stepping over the gap between their secular life and the assistance the church can and should be providing.

The Commission on Ministry in cooperation with Father Landon Moore, the bishop's vicar for vocations, will host a combination discernment and vocations Day in March of 2024.

On Saturday, March 16, 2024, not only those discerning ordained ministry will gather in the Cathedral of the Incarnation, but also young people ages 13-22 will be invited, encouraging them to explore lay and ordained ministry in the Episcopal Church, and especially in our diocese.

Recognizing that the church encompasses a diverse range of roles and ministries, this day will be focused on St Paul's words found in his first letter to the Corinthians: "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone." Each person possesses unique gifts, talents, and callings. It's in the unity of these diversities that we find strength and purpose.

So in the spirit of our bridge building I urge you to prayerfully discern your own vocation, to find where your passions and talents align with the needs of your congregation and this diocese. Acknowledging a call to serve is an invitation to partake in the bridge building, healing, reconciliation, and love of Christ in the world.

Further I invite each of us to reflect on how we might cultivate a culture of vocations within the diocese. We must ensure that our congregations are spaces where individuals, especially our young people, are encouraged to explore their calling, where they feel supported and equipped to answer that call.

During this past year, in a bridge-crossing endeavor, The Mercer School of Theology and the Center for Spiritual Imagination have taken the next steps in forming a cohesive and sustainable program of education and formation for postulants for ordination, both to the diaconate and priesthood. Given the recent disintegration of graduate seminary programming, and the increase in "distance only" curricula by many of our seminaries, our efforts will provide both high-quality, in-person education and formation for those preparing for service in our diocese and beyond. January 2024 will mark the beginning of this program and the commencement of our having seminarians on the campus of the cathedral and of service throughout the diocese.

As I did last year, once again, I am asking the deans of the various deaneries to ensure that the clergy of each deanery engage the Sacred Ground curriculum. And in turn for every parish of the diocese to encourage participation in Sacred Ground, both in the congregation and in the neighborhood and wider community. Reconciliation can only happen when awareness is clear, hearts and minds changed, and we move past the idea that this is some temporary "woke"

moment for people of the church. This is gospel work, and it is our ministry to accomplish creating Beloved Community.

Almost two weeks ago, on November 2nd during the Commemoration of All Faithfully Departed, Zion Church, Douglaston, taking the next steps following Sacred Ground and doing the history project under the guidance of Father Craig Townsend, commemorated its history in a liturgy naming the discovery that some of Zion's founding members had been slave owners. Praying for forgiveness, and naming and remembering the 42 people who were enslaved by some of their founding members. As Mother Lindsay Lunnum and Father Carl Adair, it was a profound and moving liturgy, clearly one of the most important liturgies ever prayed in that church. Sisters and brothers, we need to continue to do this work. Sacred Ground and the history project must become a permanent offering of every congregation in this diocese, annually. We need to do this work.

Last year each of the three assisting bishops of the diocese agreed to take on specific new roles.

Bishop Daniel Allotey helped to create a bridge to our siblings in the Church of West Africa, and specifically to his native Ghana. Through his efforts we established a way of supporting the various diocese of the Province of West Africa, opening a way for us to fulfill a long-awaited partnership and to help provide support to Archbishop Cyril Ben-Smith. We are grateful to Bishop Allotey for his good and faithful work.

Bishop Geralyn Wolf accepted the role as Chair of the Faith and Science Commission and has endeavored to bridge participation from both sides of the issues that face the world and therefore the church. To manage this work, she has had to invest a great deal of time in study and research to be able to bring to the diocese a comprehensive program that will be helpful on the parish and diocesan levels. We are all grateful for her and the commission members for taking on this important task.

Bishop Franklin has convened the Ecumenical and Interfaith Commission which has gathered and engaged ecumenical partners in a renewed Lutheran /Anglican/ Roman Catholic dialogue, an effort which we have hosted twice here in our diocese. And more recently, he has brought together siblings from the Presbyterian Church USA in initial conversations and fellowship with the added enthusiastic work of Father Matt Tees, the executive director of Camp DeWolf. A bit of irony in this exchange: Matt serving as the executive director of Camp DeWolf, discovering in his research for these gatherings that my predecessor, Bishop James DeWolfe was a staunch adversary to any ecumenical relationships with the Presbyterian Church during his tenure as the fourth bishop of Long Island. I imagine that this recent effort is the work of the Holy Spirit in redeeming a long fracture in ecumenical relationships. I am grateful to Father Tees and Bishop Franklin for this good effort.

This past year, as we saw in the video yesterday, the Diocesan Creation Care Community provided leadership and opportunities for our congregations to join Anglicans and other Christian bodies around the world in "The Season of Creation" from September 1st to the Feast

of St. Francis on October 4th. The Creation Care Community provided liturgical propers, prayers, and settings focused on our stewardship of creation. And while grace builds on nature, as St. Augustine reminds us, the community involved our diocese in multiple efforts, from updating opportunities to accessing solar power, lobbying for the elimination of pesticides through support of the Birds and Bees Protection Act, and by providing direct support for local efforts through the Green Team retreat. Please read their full report in the convention journal.

Stewardship of our financial resources was a major focus for me, the diocesan staff, parish clergy, and vestries in 2023. For the first time in recent memory, the Trustees of the Estate Belonging to the Diocese and I asked the staff of the diocese, and the parishes to anticipate expenditures and allow investment income, property development, and tithe payments to recover before spending dollars which were budgeted. At no time was the diocese running out of money, but rather we were signaling to everyone that we would manage cash flow in a responsible and faithful way, and not access principle to cover expenses. It was good stewardship and resource management on the part of the trustees and our finance office. After the expenditure of over seven million dollars in unanticipated revenue to support ministry and keep parishes open and employees paid through the pandemic, a period of recovery was and will be expected.

This careful money management has not resulted in the suspension of any ministry support or program in the diocese. Our convention last year unanimously adopted the biblical tithe for all parishes and missions to support common ministry through the diocesan ministry plan (also known as the budget).

More of our parishes are now fully committed to the tithe, with the expectation of full participation in 2024. Let me note: with the expectation of full participation by all of our parishes and missions in 2024.

We are living into our call to abundance and the Church's biblical standard for giving. This holy and sacred commitment allows us to realize mutual responsibility and inter-dependence within our diocese which is "One Diocese, with One Mission" and making that a reality.

This year we have launched our first ever—note, first ever—capital campaign. The "One Mission" campaign is designed to fully empower our parishes for ministry by meeting critical building and program needs, and realizing our shared vision for the next generation. The "One Mission" campaign is a bridge building effort strengthening our Reparations Scholarship program, our Cathedral and Pro-Cathedral, the Mercer School of Theology and Episcopal Ministries. With nearly \$2 million dollars already raised in this campaign, and a dozen of our congregations now preparing for their local campaigns: with our active and prayer-filled support, this year ahead will see the effort fulfilled and reach across the entire diocese.

Later in this convention we will have the opportunity to celebrate the admission of a new mission congregation: Iglesia San Francisco in Riverhead, which has grown from the ministry center known as Centro Franciscano and the diocesan ministry to the farm workers and day

workers on the east end of the diocese. Under the pastoral care of Father Gerardo Romo-Garcia and in cooperation with Rural & Migrant Ministries and our own Episcopal Ministries of Long Island, the congregation of well over 200 people (half of whom are children and youth) have faithfully prepared for the next steps. All the canonical requirements have been met, the Diocesan Council has approved their admission, and it will be our joy to celebrate this important and historic moment in the life of our diocese later in this convention.

Also, later in this Convention, we will celebrate the reestablishment of a congregation at St. Mary's Carle Place. Beginning on the Feast of the Epiphany, the Cathedral will launch a new mission venture in Carle Place. "Incarnation Chapel" will be a center for worship, study, and mission.

Rather than Sunday mornings, a Saturday evening Eucharist will be celebrated with an order for the evening welcoming the sabbath followed by fellowship and a simple meal. The liturgy will reflect ancient contemplative and monastic traditions. It will also emphasize adult Christian Formation, discipleship, and education in collaboration with the Cathedral and the other deanery congregations.

Father Daniel Ade and Father Mark Kowalewski, the co-deans emeritus of St. John's Cathedral in Los Angeles, will serve as the vicars of Incarnation Chapel and assisting priests of the Cathedral, further strengthening the deanery-wide ministry plan in forming ministry teams of shared responsibility and cooperation between all the congregations of the deanery.

Fr. Dan and Fr. Mark are inviting ministry partners to help form the initial mission community from neighboring congregations. If you are interested in details, please see one or both of the new vicars while here at convention, or inquire at the Cathedral table in the display area. The reestablishment of a worshipping congregation, with a focus on formation and inclusion, is one model for the growth of ministry in the future.

The model of forming accountable, cooperative ministry teams is a direct response to my call for the clergy and lay leaders to begin to focus on joint ministry, joint efforts, shared programs and to refrain from maintaining independent operations regardless of the size of budgets, number of staff, and healthiness of programs. Once again, I remind all of us that we are not working from a place of desperation or survival to hold on to the past, but rather to faithfully embrace an ecclesiology of mutual responsibility and inter-dependence to strengthen our service to all of God's people.

"One Diocese, One Mission" is a call for us to use all our resources, our buildings, our talents and abilities, to bridge the church to the needs of the communities in which we do not merely exist, but rather to which we belong and are called to serve.

This 157th Convention of the Diocese of Long Island is taking place in the midst of the horrific realities of war in the Middle East, in Ukraine, and on the streets of our neighborhoods, towns and villages. Just as we imagined ourselves emerging from the isolation and fear of the

pandemic, we have been traumatized by the actions and sometimes the inaction of world governments, including our representatives in Washington.

The people who live within the geography of our diocese, 118 miles from the Brooklyn Bridge to Montauk Point, south shore to north shore, some 7.2 million people comprise the largest foreign-born population of any region in the world: their prayerful needs need our attention. The children of these families need our attention. The elderly, the underserved and forgotten, the families, the refugees, the asylum seekers, the people in our churches and the majority who are outside the church need our prayerful attention.

We need not ask the questions posed in today gospel: “when did we see you?” We see them, we know them. They need us to be the church.

I know it sounds unfair and almost impossible, but we cannot become fatigued and disillusioned, we cannot ignore the Gospel mandate. We must sustain ourselves, our ministries, our congregations and provide hope and comfort to aid God’s people. The holy scriptures, the sacramental and liturgical life of the church, formation and education, fellowship and welcome to a relationship to Jesus Christ and his love in the midst of this world must become the bridge we build and provide for others.

We must be the church. Legitimately and wholeheartedly the church. No strings attached. No budget concerns holding us back. Shifting the way we see the world around us and putting our money, our energy, our very lives to cross the bridge from what we see and what we know and who we are.

The only prescription and remedy I know to offer at this moment in history is the tradition of prayer.

The only way we sustain ourselves in doing this work is prayer.

Not programs, not seminars, not caucuses, not rallies. Prayer.

So once again, I am renewing my call to all of you in this diocese to join me each day for an hour of personal prayer. I have asked the clergy of the diocese to do this in addition to the other times of prayer which are part of the clergy covenant.

To sustain ourselves, and to avoid losing heart and courage in the midst of difficult circumstances, each and every Episcopalian in this diocese should take the hour of personal, private, contemplative prayer, in order to know Jesus, to serve God’s people, to participate with open hearts in the ministry of the church, to live out the baptismal covenant in the midst of the world. We need to know Jesus to do this work. We need to sit at his feet, recognize him in the people around us, even when they disguise themselves in hatred and in sin. An hour of prayer each day for ourselves, our souls, and to sustain our collective efforts in faithfulness—an acknowledgement that we are all in this together in the Body of Christ.

My siblings in Christ: there is trouble all around us. We may despair, become frightened, angry, even combative, but if we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, we will not only move past our fears, we may even provide a way forward for others.

You and I, active members of the Body of Christ, become the bridge for those who know not the love of God, and the fellowship of a community of faith. You and I become the invitation to cross over from despair and hopelessness to a place of security: a bridge over the troubled waters of our time and place, a recognition of building the kingdom of God, a people committed to the cause of Christ for all the people of God.

One Diocese, One Mission is our calling in Jesus Christ. This is the work of ministry in the Diocese of Long Island. Amen.