



**158<sup>th</sup> Convention of the Diocese of Long Island**  
**In the Sixteenth Year of my Consecration**  
**November 16, 2024**

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.

One departure from my notes: We have with us this morning, arrived with us last evening before the convention banquet began, Bishop Rodney Michel, the retired Suffragan Bishop of the Diocese of Long Island, and we are grateful he is with us.

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

Let me also say that contrary to my practice in years past, I will not use this time to highlight reports, or programs or ministries that may be accessed either in the convention journal or found in the exhibit spaces at this convention. I encourage you to read the reports in the journal. They have been created with a great deal of faithfulness and love and care in order to inform our diocese about all the various ministries that are a part of our life. And so please read them and in doing so, I eliminated about nine pages of this address.

My friend, and classmate in the House of Bishops, the now resigned Bishop of the Episcopal Church in Connecticut, Bishop Ian Douglas, would often remind us that “the church does not have a mission.” Rather, he would remind us, “God has a mission, and God has a church, and it is the ministry of the Church to fulfill God’s mission in the world.” For a great while, I struggled with the various implications of that theological hair splitting, but I have grown to appreciate it and incorporate it, into the practical ecclesiology—that is the theology of the church—that motivates my shepherding this diocese.

So, then what is that mission of God that is the essence of our ministry? The Catechism of the Book of Common Prayer on page 855 mistakenly titled “the mission of the church”, states this: “It is to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ.” And it does this “as it prays and worships, proclaims the Gospel and promotes justice, peace and love.”

Now, I would like to ask you to hold on to that definition of our ministry as we proceed.

Since the election on November 5<sup>th</sup>, countless people throughout this diocese have asked me to make a statement or give some direction. I was even encouraged to mount an offensive. But my only faithful and legitimate response is something that this diocese has heard now for over 15 years—the Church must be the Church.

But now, under these present realities—we really need to be the Church. You see, for much too long we have acted like a Political Action Committee, dressing up our political agendas in vestments and statements, protests and maneuvering, when all that was and is required is to pray and worship, proclaim the Gospel, and promote justice, peace, and love. But not as the world does these things, but as the Church does these things.

By our baptism, we are made citizens of the kingdom of God. That is our first allegiance and that should dictate our actions.

Adherence to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, to the creeds, and to our sacramental and liturgical traditions as a Church are the ways in which we must interact with the secular society.

Being political, acting in a political way, maneuvering for political gain, either in the church or outside of the church, is not the way of Jesus. It is not the way of the Gospel, which is above and beyond any constitution, or court of law, or legislature or branch of government. It is the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

We are citizens of the kingdom of God. And the Gospel mandate must be our way of life and living within the society in which we find ourselves.

We belittle the Gospel and betray our calling to be the Church when our words, our actions and our planning mimic the secular society.

We cannot legitimately stand against prejudice and bigotry. We cannot stand against White Christian Nationalism using the means that mimic their play book—our playbook must be the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Like it or not, this is what got Jesus nailed to a cross. But we know the end of the story! We must live and work and pray and gather in recognition to that resurrected life we celebrate and claim for humanity.

So today, Sisters and Brothers, I am asking you once again, to be the Church. I am asking you to repudiate politics. In the Church and outside the Church.

I am imploring you to reject political behaviors and motivations—reject the inclination to “fight fire with fire” and return your hearts, your minds and our church communities to the ministry of the Church in service to God’s mission.

In doing so, we will act as One Diocese, with One Mission—God's Mission to promote justice, peace and love. In the name of Jesus Christ, we will use the Gospel to reject sexism, racism, homophobia, xenophobia, antisemitism, and the demonization of those who come to us as immigrants.

We will use the Gospel to promote the dignity of every human being, their rights over their own bodies, their privileges as children of God, the unalienable right not to be shot dead in their classrooms or on the streets of our cities. We will capture the essence of the Gospel message and its preference for the

poor. And with this convention we will make a recommitment to the sharing of resources so that the rhetoric of “One Diocese, One Mission” will be truer when we leave this place than when we arrived.

So, let’s be practical. There exist very few congregations in our diocese who possess all the resources necessary to fulfill the ministry set before them. The sky rocketing cost of maintaining clergy and lay staff, the maintenance of our buildings and the infrastructure to do ministry is crushing the enthusiasm of many of us. Often it is caused by the holding fast to a corporate notion that each and every congregation must do everything, as if it is a standalone franchise of the Church.

Today, I would like to introduce the next bridge in our understanding of “One Diocese, One Mission.”

Today, I am asking the deans of each of our deaneries to meet with the clergy and delegates of your deanery right here today during lunch. Push tables together if you must. Find a way to have a brief conversation during lunch today with one goal. Set a time, a date to gather back home as a deanery—clergy, lay leaders, and staff to meet together during this Advent to initiate a program of mutual responsibility and inter-dependence in each deanery.

Not some boutique program that make us all feel good, but real, practical sharing of resources, people, and program. In each deanery there should be vigorous youth and young adult formation. In each deanery there should be faith formation for families and children. In each deanery there should be programs for the elderly and elder care. Feeding programs across congregations, outreach to the disenfranchised in any of the geographic settings of our deaneries, care for the incarcerated and the homeless, and the immigrants.

What I am calling for is the adoption of our practical, real response to Jesus’ call to us found in Matthew 25: “For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, I was ill and you comforted me, in prison and you came to visit me.”

The Church being the Church in obedience to Jesus.

It means, practically, budgets and programs will need to be transformed. We cannot have “comfortable parishes” who do not and will not share resources and people. With the cooperation of my office, Letters of Agreement will reflect our understanding that every parish priest and every deacon in this diocese, adheres to their ordination vows, works under the pastoral direction and guidance of the bishop and is available to serve all the congregations within a deanery and other configurations of ministry.

Every congregation will know who their clergy are, and we will not violate the canons but in generosity and mutual accountability, we will be blessed to share them in inter-dependence with the neighboring parishes.

Now before you all get crazy: this is not centralized control or over-management, quite the opposite. It is a setting free of imagination and the invitation to creativity in mutual ministry and interdependence. If you don’t violate the Canons and you don’t violate the law, and you pay attention to your specific calling, creativity and imagination will be welcomed.

We are the Church on Long Island together. This is not a survival tactic; it is a holy response to the movement of the Holy Spirit. It is so very obvious that we cannot continue to operate under a capitalist-formed model of ministry that is contrary to the essence of the Church. Competition between congregations and especially between their clergy must never exist in this diocese again.

Later in the convention, we will consider a ministry plan—which you all call the budget—for 2025.

It envisions some three and half million dollars in partnerships and mission across the four counties of our diocese. This three-and-half million dollars is almost completely funded by the Trustees of the Estate belonging to the Diocese of Long Island. The trustees, who hold the fiduciary responsibility of our endowments and property believe fully in what we are about to initiate.

This, my friends, is how we fight back: listening to Jesus, not the world. Not seeking clever models to survive, but adapting a scriptural model, so we can flourish.

In the Acts of the Apostles we read, “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of the bread and in the prayers ...those who believed held all things in common, they would sell their property and goods, dividing everything on the basis of each other’s need.”

The often-used phrase, “Grace builds on nature”, mistakenly attributed to Thomas Aquinas is helpful in this endeavor. God’s grace will build upon our cooperation in attempting to do something different, difficult, maybe even scary.

There will be reluctance and even some resistance. Some will say, “the Bishop can’t make us do this” and they might be right. But Jesus can.

The alternative is to keep doing the same things we have been doing, hoping for a different result, and ignoring the changing realities around us. And that would just be insane.

That is why I am seeking the full and honest cooperation of each deanery. To begin within the start of the new liturgical year this Advent, to initiate prayerful conversation and discernment before this initiative is lost in the craziness of the Christmas season and the ever-present demands of parish life. I already anticipate the cry, “But our program year is already all set!” Change it. Change it. We can’t keep doing the same thing over and over again. Change it. I’m asking for one meeting, one evening or morning or afternoon to get things off the ground.

I would start by asking these questions, which will be made available to you through our communications office:

- What can be done better together than apart?
- What is the need both within the congregation and the community which cannot be met by a single congregation?
- What can be strengthened or initiated more fully by cooperation?
- What is the witness of the Episcopal Diocese in a certain geographic area? Or what do we need to accomplish together?
- Which clergy and lay leaders are better suited to provide leadership in certain areas?

No judgments, no competition, no selfish agenda. Holding all things in common to fulfill God's mission.

In the same spirit of mutual responsibility and inter-dependence, on the diocesan-wide level, as many of you already know, the Mercer School of Theology, the Cathedral of the Incarnation, and the Center for Spiritual Imagination are now working cooperatively to form and educate candidates for the priesthood. Under the leadership of Dean Michael Sniffen, the entire faculty of the Mercer School and Canon Adam Bucko, these three diocesan institutions are collaborating as three of our new seminarians, who are all sitting right here, have begun their education and formation right here in the diocese. And at the same time continue to foster the cooperative arrangement with the Church in the West Indies and specifically, Codrington College, to enhance the experience of their seminarians and our own seminarians, as yet another expression of mutual responsibility and inter-dependence in the Body of Christ.

Siblings in Christ Jesus, we are a strong, vibrant, holy people gathered here between the Brooklyn Bridge and Montauk Point. We are also a complicated diocese with a sophisticated combination of not-for-profit corporations, in a geography that is multi-lingual, multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, and we are serving a population of over seven million people, most of whom do not know, and I dare say do not care, who we are. That reality should be an encouragement to our ministry, not a deterrent.

You see, in the last commandment given to the church by our Lord Jesus Christ is recorded in the 28th Chapter of Matthew's Gospel, "Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I command you."

Fortunately for us, the nations of the world have come to us in the midst of this most diverse diocese in the Episcopal Church. Let's now fulfill the commandment of our Lord, Jesus Christ. In this most difficult and trying time, let us be the Church, together as One Diocese, One Mission. God's mission. Amen.