

Bishop's Address
58th Annual Diocesan Convention
November 18, 2016

I want to begin this morning by expressing gratitude to those who have planned and worked to put together this diocesan convention. Please welcome back the Convention Planning Chair – my former executive secretary and one who has served this diocese faithfully for 38 years: our friend Carolyn Hearn. I want to thank and recognize the rest of her team: Julie Harris, Tiffany Hernandez, Edie Rische, and Suzanne Mino-Sanchez, who is our contact at this McKenzie-Merket Alumni Center. Let's express our appreciation.

Every diocesan convention is a time of transition. I would like to thank and recognize those who have completed terms of service on a variety of committees and boards: Disciplinary Board – Jim Haney V; University of the South Trustees – Robert Pace, Don Griffis, and John Hall; Episcopal Church Women's President – Jo Ann Rachele; Board of Trustees – Ricky Bowman; Executive Council – Jean Scott and Vice President Dick Ford; General Convention Deputies – Celia Ellery, Jo Craig, and Jackie Batjer who served as a deputy for 10 General Conventions!

And finally, two Standing Committee members who served faithfully on this committee which serves as my council of advice; they were very involved in the process and decision to partner with the Diocese of Fort Worth, and they exercised leadership up to and through my sabbatical: thanks to Kirk McLaughlin who also served as the liaison to the Board of Trustees, and thank you to the outgoing president, Robert Pace. Would everyone that I've recognized please stand? Let's show our gratitude.

Now I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my office staff for their work with Carolyn's team to put on this convention, for their work throughout the year, and for their work during my sabbatical. Everyone on the staff works especially hard for diocesan convention every year, but I do want to recognize Nancy Igo, who as House Steward prepared the Bishop Hulse Center for this 100-year celebration, as well as the reception last night. I am blessed with a great office staff. Let's show our appreciation to Canon Mike Ehmer, Elizabeth Thames, Anna Mora, and Nancy Igo for their dedication and service to this diocese.

I want to thank, also, Renee Haney for her work with our youth; thank you, Renee and Jim, for another wonderful camp experience. We will hear from Renee later today. Jennifer Holder

continues her work with the outstanding campus ministry we have at Texas Tech. We will hear from Jennifer, also.

Earlier, you heard me introduce four students who attend our local School of Ordained Ministry. And you heard me introduce a number of clergy in transition. Seven of those clergy are recent graduates of the School of Ordained Ministry - in fact, they are the first graduating class: Thomas Keith, Dave Blakely, Mildred Rugger, Jim Walker, Doug Thomas, Amanda Watson, and Jill Walters. This is an outstanding program, a part of the Iona Project in the Diocese of Texas. I believe it has - and will have - a significant impact on the life of our diocese. I know we have congregations that can testify to that already. Let's express our gratitude to the Dean Melissa Wafer-Cross, and our mentors Jim Haney, Dave Huxley, and Robert Pace.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to the Standing Committee, to all of you, and to all who made possible my sabbatical. Many of you gave sacrificially in different ways toward this sabbatical, and I am grateful.

Sabbatical is a time of rest, primarily, and I did rest - much of the time on our back porch with a book. There were days when I did nothing and accomplished absolutely nothing, and eventually I didn't even feel guilty about that.

If there was a unifying theme or goal for this sabbatical, it was spending time with my family - often involving travel. In July, Kathy and I went to Chicago for a few days and did a "Ferris Bueler's Day Off" - including two Chicago Cubs games at Wrigley Field, the Art Institute, and an architectural tour on the Chicago River. And we traveled with some close friends from the Church of the Heavenly Rest to Philadelphia, where we saw historical sites ranging from Independence Hall to Christ Church, where the Episcopal Church held the first meeting of General Convention. We enjoyed, also, the hospitality of David and Sarabeth Romanik and their daughter, Cecilia, who is a Texan, and can say, "Hi y'all."

In August, my mother and I traveled to the Sacramento area of California to spend time with her brother and his extended family (my cousins). They enjoy parading me around so friends can hear me talk; sometimes they needed translation. In late September Kathy and I went to Spain and Portugal with Kathy's two sisters and brother-in-law; we were privileged to see Gaudi's Sagrada Familia and Picasso's museum in Barcelona, the Alhambra in Granada, as well as take various wine and tapas tours. And in late October, we went to Charleston, South Carolina, with my brother Cliff and his wife Shelly, and managed to try a different recipe for "shrimp and grits" nearly every day.

Perhaps the highlight of the sabbatical was sitting on a dock at a small lake south of Abilene (Lake Coleman), baiting hooks for our grandsons, James and Max. That's when I started losing track of the days - not simply the date, but days. I consider this sabbatical to be a gift; not so much something deserved, as something needed.

I want to say a few words about sabbaticals in general. I don't make these remarks to justify my own sabbatical, but rather to encourage congregations to support clergy in taking sabbaticals. I know that such provisions exist in your letters of agreements or covenants, already.

Truly, we clergy are privileged to do something with our lives that we are called to do. Not everyone is so fortunate. And we are privileged to be invited into your lives on your most joyous occasions, as well as in your most vulnerable, and poignant, and painful moments. It is a fulfilling and rewarding life if one is called to it - like any vocation or true calling.

A priest remarked to me recently that polls show that clergy are the most fulfilled of all people by their vocation, but they are the second-most stressed of all people - behind air-traffic-controllers. I'm not asking for sympathy (my father used to say where one can find sympathy in the dictionary). But, priests and pastors don't "turn off" some internal pastoral-care-switch one day a week on their Sabbath. They love you, and care for you, and pray for you "24/7." Most clergy wouldn't trade that privilege for anything. I'm not asking for sympathy. But I am seeking sabbaticals for our priests who have served and led a congregation for six or seven years. Besides, it is a good thing for clergy to know that the world will turn without them. And it's good for you to know it, too.

So, I'm glad to be back in the saddle, so to speak, and I'm glad to be here today with you - the people called to exercise leadership in this diocese and beyond. There is a good spirit in this diocese; just look at the number of people who have offered themselves as nominees to various leadership positions. That's a sign of your desire to serve this Church we love. You believe this Church makes a difference in the world, and you know it makes a difference to you.

You have bought into Presiding Bishop Curry's vision of evangelism and racial reconciliation, and you have been inspired by his proclamation that the most important word in the Great Commission to "go and make disciples of all nations" is the word "go." And we are trying to figure out what that means in our respective contexts.

We know the Church is in the midst of a re-formation or emergence - even a shaking of the foundations - and in the midst of change we remain a body called to be who we are: connected communities of faith, more united by common prayer than common doctrine or beliefs - perhaps the Anglican gift to the world.

The theme for this year's diocesan convention is taken from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians: "We who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread." This is an especially appropriate theme, given our guest speaker and preacher, who by her presence alone reminds us that we are connected to something larger than our congregations or dioceses.

The Rev Gay Clark Jennings serves as the President of the House of Deputies. Gay may say more about the House of Deputies this afternoon, but the House of Deputies is one of two Houses of General Convention - the other being the House of Bishops. By the way, the House of Deputies (known as the "senior house") is the oldest of the two Houses by four years. The first meeting of convention, which was held in 1785, consisted of only the House of Deputies (clergy and laity); the House of Bishops (the "junior house") was established in 1789. So, Gay is one of the two presiding officers of the Episcopal Church, along with Presiding Bishop Michael Curry. (This is a big deal that she is here.)

I want to say a few words about Gay personally. Gay and her husband, Albert (also a priest, and one who has served the same congregation for 28 years) live outside Cleveland, Ohio. She has been ordained for 37 years. For 17 years, she served as the Canon to the Ordinary in the Diocese of Ohio, and then she spent 9 years as the Associate Director of CREDO Institute, a church wellness program. That's where she and Mike Ehmer became close friends.

Gay and two other people came up with the concept for the CREDO Institute; Gay was the one with the gift and skill set to know what clergy want and need, so naturally she oversaw the faculty and curriculum. Mike says of Gay, "she knows people and their abilities, she knows who needs to be on which bus, and in which seat. Without Gay, hundreds - if not thousands - of clergy would not have experienced the benefits of CREDO." It's not an overstatement to say that some clergy would testify that CREDO changed their life.

I would add to that my experience as a bishop, particularly as Bishop of Fort Worth. Gay knows every nook and cranny of this Church, and in whatever challenge a diocese or congregation may face, she knows how to connect that diocese to resources, ranging from expertise to support. Please welcome Gay Clark Jennings.

"We who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread." Throughout Paul's letters we see references to the Church as one body in Christ- specifically in his letter to the Romans and in his first letter to the Corinthians, as well as in Ephesians which is in the Pauline tradition. All of these passages convey our connectedness as living members of the Body, and how all the members of the Body are valued and needed.

The fourth chapter of Ephesians gives a particularly vivid image of our connectedness, as the whole body is referenced as "joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love." I single out this passage to point out that the word "ligament" is the root word to another word: "religion."

I know that word is seen by the culture with the same suspicion as other words like "evangelical," and a growing population identifies with a category called "spiritual but not religious." The sociologist and author, Diana Butler-Bass has written extensively on this cultural view of religion, and how the word "religion" has become a negative term connected to other words like institution, organization, rules, order, dogma, authority, and hierarchy.

But she goes on to remind us of the roots to the word "religion." The word "religion" breaks down to mean "re-connect" or "re-bind." It comes from a Latin word which implies the "reconnection of ligaments" - "re-ligament." And if we think about it, that is God's mission: to restore, to re-unite, to re-member that which is dis-membered, to restore us to union with God and one another.

As much as I personally might believe the word "religion" is a perfectly good word, and a word that actually expresses God's mission, I realize I might be fighting a losing battle about the word. The culture associates the word with an institution. And as our Presiding Bishop says, "In the beginning the Church was a movement, not an institution. Institutions are fine and necessary, but institutions serve the movement. When an institution is more than the movement, it becomes a golden calf." People are rejecting the golden calf.

So, while I may need to take "religion" out of my vocabulary when speaking to the culture, I'm not giving up on the reality which it expresses. We are part of a movement to restore all people to union with God and one another by the power of God's love.

And there is no doing one without doing the other. There is no path to union with God while alienated from others. At a meeting with the House of Bishops last Spring, Bishop Curry

reminded us of a sixth century mystic who gave us the image of a great wheel with spokes and a center. We may be on the rim of the wheel or somewhere on the spokes, but as we move down the spokes - the closer we get to the center of the wheel, the closer we get to God, the closer we get to one another.

So, we are called to participate in God's mission of reconciliation in a world that is obviously fractured. The election season which we all just experienced, followed by the post-election demonstrations and protests, make it clear that as a nation we are divided - and not merely divided in regards to political philosophies as to how to run a country, but divided by deeper, darker forces.

Long before the actual election and in regards to the campaign and the anger, columnists and political pundits were asking and trying to answer, "What happened this time?" - as everyone knew that this campaign was the most divisive in our lifetimes. "What's different this time?"

There are some good theories out there, but I was surprised by one theory about three weeks ago (more surprised by the source than the theory) near the back page of TIME Magazine. Typically, Joel Stein is funny. He is a comedian, but in this issue he makes a serious point. He says: "Sure, it feels like this Presidential Election is not about issues and is instead a barrage of insults, anger and ugly revelations. But as anyone who has ever been in a romantic relationship can attest, a barrage of insults, anger, and ugly revelations is [actually] how you know you're talking about issues...."

He says: "Past presidential elections have focused on issues like how to structure the income tax ... or what the best health care system is ... or how to handle Vladimir Putin ...but this time we are addressing the core issues that divide us: racism, sexual assault, Islamophobia, immigration, elitism, anti-Semitism, authoritarianism and [in an attempt at humor, he adds] whether to require drug test before political debates."

The historian Douglas Brinkley adds: "This [campaign] has been a hellbroth of stew that's been tacky and tawdry, but the reason a lot is coming out is because we've been avoiding the big conversations." "Now we are discussing what our culture should be like."

I would suggest there is a glimmer of hope in that, however painful. Yet however uncomfortable, however painful, the Church is called to such conversations as we work toward reconciliation. The great Old Testament scholar, Walter Brueggemann, says that "the Church should be a place where pain can come to speech." And that sounds wonderful if it's MY pain coming to speech in

a safe place without judgment. But it's not so easy when it's someone else's pain - especially if it's directed at me.

I've heard our guest speaker refer to the "Three E's," as we work through difficult situations. The Three E's are Esteem, Engage, and Excel. Esteem means to treat everyone as a child of God, and appreciate them, and encourage them. Engage means to listen, and to tell the truth, and to wrestle with the problem or issue - not the person. Excel means to commit to doing our best, to maintain personal integrity, to seek development, and to dare to be creative. The work of reconciliation is something more than "kumbaya," and anyone who has ever been seriously harmed or offended knows that (which is everyone, I suspect).

We are baptized for such moments as this. Last Spring I heard the Dean of the Seminary of the Southwest, Cynthia Kittredge, preach at the traditional Evensong service on the night before commencement. The appointed Gospel for the occasion was the story of James and John saying to Jesus, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." And, as the story goes, Jesus replies, "Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?"

Dean Kittredge says: "Do you know what you are asking? Drink the cup means take on the cure, drink the Kool-Aid. Take it in both hands and drink it, the cup of grief, the bitter cup of betrayal and shame."

"To be baptized with my baptism means to go the whole hog, be all in, sign up for the whole program, the Whole Enchilada. It's not sipping, not dipping. Drink her down, bottoms up. Take the plunge into the deep waters."

As our Presiding Bishop says, we are baptized into a movement, called to change this world by the power of God's love. We are part of a movement. One day Bishop Curry shared with the House of Bishops how he came to understand the Church as a movement (one of the ways, at any rate).

Maybe you've heard of Clarence Jordan. In the late 1960s he wrote "The Cotton Patch" version of the Gospels, a translation of the Gospels set in his home-state of Georgia. I suspect there are some clergy here who have these translations. At any rate, in the early 1940s Clarence Jordan created an inter-racial Christian community, a community which was perceived as a threat during the Civil Rights Movement. And in the face of such threats, Jordan made the claim that "the God Movement is greater and deeper than the civil rights movement. The God Movement is the most

revolutionary movement in human history."

And in his translation of the Gospels, everywhere the word "kingdom" is used in most translations, Jordan uses the word "movement." "The movement of God is at hand," for example. The "Kingdom of God" and the "Kingdom of Heaven" are translated as the "God Movement" - the most revolutionary movement in human history.

I believe there are numerous good reasons to understand ourselves as participating in God's Movement. You have heard me say that Christianity is moving from presenting itself as a system of beliefs to presenting itself as a way of life. For people are hungry for more than doctrine, more than knowing ABOUT God. People are hungry for an encounter with God.

People are starved for a new way of life which leads to a sense of God's, a path which leads to the abundant life which Jesus promises, a path which leads to a sense of being alive. That's the shift we are seeing. And more and more Christians from every corner of the Christian tradition are returning to the ancient Christian practices which lead to life. We are moving from an emphasis on doctrine (however important - and believe me, I think it is), and returning to an emphasis on practice. Theologians and historians are reminding us of our ancient practices - that Christianity in the beginning was a "WAY," a path, a movement.

If you're wondering what I mean by "practice," think of it this way. Think of it as exercise. Think of it as training. Brian McLaren says, "Practice may not make perfect, but... it does make currently impossible things possible. The one who tries to run a marathon cannot do it, but the one who trains eventually can."

Take for example a wonderfully gifted musician. We may experience her music as inspirational, if not transcendent or ecstatic. I suspect there are times when even the musician would agree that something glorious has filled her and her audience - and it is pure gift. Practice alone did not earn that gift. By definition, we cannot earn a gift. But practice made it possible.

Practice can make the gifts of patience, and kindness, and courage, and forgiveness, and inner peace possible. Practice can make the gift of an awareness of God's presence possible. Practice can make the gift of communion with God and one another possible.

I assure you that the preacher is preaching to the preacher here. It was discovered last Sunday that our diocesan office, the Bishop Hulse Center, had been vandalized. On the east porch, someone had written the same type of anti-Semitic, racist, homophobic threats that we are seeing

around the country.

Nancy Igo sent a photograph to the staff; I received it as I was driving back from the Diocese of Fort Worth. At supper that night, I showed it to our son and daughter-in-law, and our daughter-in-law (Jonna) said the following: "I feel sorry for someone like that - someone who is filled with so much hate."

I've been "practicing" for a long time, and that was not my initial reaction. I am envious of such an interiority. Some of us need more practice.

Having said that, it is not wrong to be angry. The fourth century saint, Augustine, said: "Hope has two beautiful daughters; Anger and Courage. Anger at the way things are, and courage to see that they do not remain as they are." I'm mindful of a portion of the Franciscan Blessing: "May God bless us with ANGER at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people, so that we may work for justice, freedom, and peace."

When we gather to celebrate the Holy Eucharist, or as we pray Morning Prayer, and we say the General Confession together, we confess that we have not loved God "with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We are truly sorry, and we humbly repent."

I want to look at that word "repent" for a moment. In the culture, we tend to think of the word as feeling bad for doing bad things, and in the Church, we tend to think that it means to turn around; we are going the wrong way, so we need to turn around. And both of those understandings can be helpful.

But the word "repent" in the Greek language means something more. It means "to go beyond the mind," or "go into the larger mind." (Both William Temple and Cynthia Bourgeault tell us that.) Jesus tells parables and stories that invite us to go beyond the way we typically think, to go into the larger mind.

And one way of going beyond our minds, and into the larger mind is to re-think how we understand the Confession that "we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves." When Jesus commands us to "love our neighbor as our self," he does not say to "love your neighbor AS MUCH AS yourself." Cynthia Bourgeault points out: "It's just love your neighbor AS your self - as a continuation of your very own being." To love our neighbor as our self is to see us as connected, as at-one. That's what it would mean to go beyond the mind, to go into the larger mind, to repent.

That's how the mystics see the world - as connected. Interestingly enough, postmodern science (Quantum science, particle science, string theory - about which I know nothing) observes what the mystics claim: that all is one; all is connected.

Every time we gather to celebrate the Holy Eucharist we are participating in God's vision for the world - God's vision of Holy Communion with God and one another. And I wonder if it's even more than God's vision. Maybe we are participating in Reality, and we just need to repent, to go into the larger mind, to see it. "We who are many are one Body, because we all partake in the one Bread."

My recent sabbatical gave me time to reflect on the last seven years. I am so grateful to serve you - and serve with you. I would like to close today's address with the same words I spoke eight conventions ago, reading Nolan Kelley's description of my pectoral cross which he designed.

Nolan says in his description - "the moon, stars, and sun on the arms of the cross reference the vast open sky, a defining feature of the Episcopal Diocese of Northwest Texas." Even the shape of the cross comes into play, as the discs which emanate from the cross serve to remind us of the mesas ... that emerge from the expansive Northwest Texas horizon. The Latin word for the shape of the cross itself means, "to open, to extend oneself."

Vast. Open. Expansive. Nolan has described our territory - the defining feature of this diocese. Vast. Open. Expansive. And yet, he has described more than the territory. He has described your heart. He has described our hearts on a clear day - and what our hearts can be when we "walk in love, as Christ loved us." Vast. Open. Expansive.

I count it a huge privilege to walk this path – to participate in this Jesus Movement – with you. Thank you.

+J. Scott Mayer