



The 233<sup>rd</sup> Convention of the Diocese of New York  
Convention Address  
The Cathedral of St. John the Divine  
November 21, 2009

Good morning. I am delighted to greet you at this 233rd Convention of the Diocese of New York.

As in years past I want to recall to our attention the fundamental truth that grounds everything we do, “Nothing will happen here today that is not of interest to Christ.”

Again, as has been my custom I want to open these remarks by offering a word of thanks to those who have worked so hard to make certain that these hours together in Convention are as fruitful as possible. In particular I want to highlight the contribution and efforts of our Secretary of Convention, James Forde, also John Osgood, the Assistant Secretaries of Convention and the members of the Convention Planning Committee. In addition I offer special thanks to Sara Saavedra for her care and attention in organizing this large and complicated event.

This past year has been one of significant transition within the staff who serve the Diocese. We have said goodbye to Bishop E. Don Taylor who retired to become rector of the Parish Church of Kingston, Jamaica. I was pleased to preach his installation sermon there, and I can assure you that he is well and happily ensconced in his beloved Jamaica. In addition we have said goodbye to Tina Donovan, Lynnette Wilson, Mark Cyr, Sara Condon, and Winnie Varghese. Just this past week Dan Webster has announced his resignation to become Canon for Evangelism and Ministry Development in the Diocese of Maryland.

In addition to all this, we have been immensely saddened by the death of Edel Ferguson, long-time member of the finance office.

As you would imagine the reasons for these departures have been as varied as the individuals themselves. However, the net result has been two things. First, and most obviously a significant increase in the work-load of the remaining staff. I want to take this opportunity to publicly thank them all for their willingness to step up and shoulder extra responsibilities, working longer hours, and doing it all with a good spirit, even though they, like so many others, did not have any salary adjustment to compensate for that extra work. The proposed budget will address this issue in a modest way. A second consequence of this significant staff reduction has been to force a sharpened focus on exactly where our efforts need to be directed. I will return to this challenge later in these remarks.

There is another impending departure that should not go unnoticed. David Wilmot, who has served as the President of the Diocesan Investment Trust, has resigned that position, having accepted a new post that has him moving to Portland, Oregon. And a second is that of Chuck Banks who has served so faithfully as Vice-Chancellor, is moving to Pennsylvania.

In addition to these good-byes, I am happy to say, we have some welcomes to offer as well. Foremost among those is our welcome of St. Mary's Ghanian Congregation which was formed as a mission church in the diocese just this past September. Welcome to you, the people of St. Mary's.

Another heart-felt welcome is to Allen Barnett our new Chief of Finance and Operations. Allen began his work with us this past January and continues to bring clear vision and creative suggestions as to how we can serve the people of the Diocese more effectively and still more efficiently.

There are two other quasi "welcomes" that I want to share that are of a more historic nature.

The first is to make mention of the fact that Justice Thurgood Marshall, sometime vestryman at St. Philip's Church, in Harlem, was, by action of this past summer's General Convention, added to our book of *Lesser Feasts and Fasts*, in the future to be known under the

title *Holy Women, Holy Men*. We will look to an occasion later in the year to celebrate this recognition in a fitting service of celebration.

Another historic welcome is that of the portrait of the late Rt. Rev. Harold Wright, the first African American Bishop in this diocese. It was my pleasure to have worked with Bishop Wright when he served as Suffragan Bishop of New York from 1974 to 1978. I have felt for some time that we as a Diocese would be stronger if we were more aware of the depth and range of people who have served among us as bishops; hence his new portrait which will, over time, greatly enrich our collective awareness of who we are as a community of faith. Later we'll have a more formal unveiling.

This past year has been especially intense. Coming in the midst of it all was our General Convention this past July. I don't plan to spend more than a minute or two discussing it, but it is important to note it in passing because these triennial meetings are central to our institutional life as a Church. In the end, in my opinion at least, the most important things done by Convention: the adoption of a much reduced budget, a church-wide health plan, and a new disciplinary canon got very little attention, while intentionally ambiguous actions relating to the ordination of bishops in same-sex committed relationships and the blessing of same-sex unions dominated media coverage.

Speaking directly to the institutional life of this Diocese, a good bit of this past year has been dominated by the need to shape a conscientious response to the economic implosion that has been so all consuming. The guiding principle has been to be realistic without being panicked; yet to fulfill the primary mission of the Diocese which is: to be of service to, and to assist, the parishes and people of this Diocese in their life in Christ and growth in their mission.

I am deeply grateful for the confidence and trust that this Convention expressed last year when it passed a budget that we all knew could not be met. You acted on the conviction that the appropriate Diocesan entity, namely the Trustees of the Diocese, would do the right

thing. And we have tried to do just that. In the end, the budget you approved last year was slashed by almost 2 million dollars. That is on the order of 15% decrease.

These painful cuts were necessary to address the reality of the situation that we all faced. Some staff positions were eliminated, others have been left unfilled. Hard decisions had to be made when congregations reapplied for Congregational Support. It is easy, even natural, to see such decisions as negative judgments. However, as understandable as that might seem; it is not true. I know that Congregations in the CSP work hard to carry out their ministry in their own community, and do much to further the larger work of the Diocese. It is entirely understandable that those congregations feel vulnerable; however, I am convinced we should never lose sight of the importance of their work and ministry. The challenge will be to find new and creative ways to carry that mission forward. The dedication of the faithful people all across this Diocese gives me confidence that we will continue to bear witness to our Lord's message of hope in this and in every future generation.

Another crucial step this past year was the appointment of the Special Committee on the Assessment that I promised in my address last November. Their charge was to look to our assessment and determine whether it is as fair as possible, and whether our budgeting process itself can be made more flexible and responsive. Under the co-chairs the Rev. Canon Susan Harriss and Mr. Dick Dunham, a very able and dedicated committee deliberated extensively and deeply. They produced an outstanding report which I hope and trust is familiar to you all. The key finding, which I was particularly pleased to see, is the widespread agreement in the Diocese that we are a community, bound to each other, and that we are all better for that. It follows that if we are to continue and thrive as a community each member of the community must contribute its fair share of financial and other resources. The Report contains recommendations, which have already been adopted by the trustees, to strengthen the Review Board's ability to work with parishes encountering difficulties in meeting their assessment obligations. The Report also recommended reducing the assessment rate to provide relief for

parishes paying their full assessments. The trustees approved a 20% reduction for the 2009 assessment and this Convention is being asked to approve a permanent reduction in assessment rates. And, as will be discussed, the report provides means by which every congregation of the Diocese, even those in the most difficult circumstances, can be drawn back into our common life.

It is worth remembering in this context exactly what the purpose of the Diocese qua Diocese actually is. It is this: to build up the body of Christ in order that the Gospel may be proclaimed more clearly. Most of that work is done through the congregations of the Diocese, and, therefore, as one would expect, over half of the Diocesan budget goes to direct support of congregations in their work and ministry through such services as: the Canons for Congregational Development who help congregations think through and work through their plans for development, the funding and technical advice of a very able property support staff person, as well as stewardship counsel. College chaplains on the various campuses guide young adults while our Canon for Christian Formation helps parishes with their youth group and other types of educational planning. Our Canon for Deployment works with congregations (typically between 10 and 15% of all congregations in the Diocese every year) as they look for new clergy to help lead their congregation. The Canon for Ministry who works with those who are in the complex and very demanding ordination process, and the Canon for Pastoral Care of the Clergy extends the pastoral care of the bishop's office to the more than 600 priests and deacons who are canonically resident in this Diocese.

In addition some support goes to strengthening the structures of the Diocese as they, in turn, provide the infrastructure of support that enables the Diocese to function. I think specifically of the increasingly sophisticated internet capability that we hope will greatly assist our efforts to communicate more clearly – this being one of the things that our Special Committee identified as a pressing need.

And finally some support goes to assist our National Church as we, at that national and international level, seek to make known the saving love of God as revealed in Jesus.

It is my profound hope that this Convention will support the recommendations and accept the canonical provisions proposed by the Special Committee.

The Budget you will be asked to consider reflects the new economic realities, realities that I believe will be with us for some years.

In my view it would be a mistake to see this reduced budget in terms of retrenchment. In fact the hard cuts and reassessments that have been forced upon us have the potential of being a good thing. It will be a good thing if we don't lose our nerve and become distracted by the very real dangers that swirl around us. These forced reductions will be good for us if we do two things; if we embrace them not out of a sense of desperation and if we recognize in them an opportunity to focus and refocus once again on the ministry that God has entrusted to our so very fallible hands.

I am convinced that the budget that you have before you is a mission oriented budget. It asks us to focus sharply, very sharply, on the work that we have been given to do. In addition it reflects the things we have learned during the course of this past year when, to ease the budget pressure, we have done without in several positions. The budget you will consider proposes the gradual restoration of three of the seven positions that have gone unfilled during this current year. These three are: a college chaplain, the archdeacon and an assistant Bishop. The specific plan is to restructure the chaplain position and fill it, as well as that of the Assistant Bishop by September, and the archdeacon position in late winter or early spring of this year.

I want to say a further word about these latter two positions. One of the things that we have learned is that the role of Archdeacon really is one that needs to be filled. Our work with the larger Church, as well as our work with emerging congregations, the ecumenical and interfaith work that has become increasingly pressing, and what remains of what I continue to

believe is the quite important Public Voice initiative, desperately needs focused staff interest. I am all too aware of what is not getting adequate attention in this broad field, as well as how often we have been scrambling to meet a suddenly apparent crisis. I would like to acknowledge the members of the clergy and staff who are representing the diocese at various state and local gatherings during this transition.

My request for continued funding for an Assistant Bishop represents two convictions. First, given that there are nearly 200 congregations in this Diocese, our long history has repeatedly demonstrated that we simply need three bishops to attend to them. Second, and to be quite blunt about it, my hope to recruit an assistant bishop rather than call for a second suffragan bishop, is simply to avoid unnecessary crosscurrents when the time comes to elect my successor (which time, by the way, is not now).

Despite, or perhaps I ought to say, because of, or at least in the light of, the budget constraints of this past year, we have made several important steps forward. The Council of Bishops of New York State has been shaping up quite nicely. We met with Governor Patterson in the spring, and recently have communicated to him our concern as to proposed cuts in the state education budget. This effort is in accord with the long standing concern of this Diocese that we not sacrifice the education of our children on the altar of convenience and it is buttressed by our expanding "All our Children" initiative. In this same theme I am especially pleased that our Carpenter's Kids program continues to expand as well.

A second initiative that has been taken is the appointment Fr. Ted Pardoe, as the first director of the newly established Diocesan Institute for Continued Learning. It is our hope and intention to utilize our about-to-be greatly up-graded computer capacities to provide distance learning opportunities as a parish resource.

But, one might ask, "Why all this?" In the light of an on-going and perhaps accelerating environmental crisis, of interminable wars which produce incomprehensible suffering, seemingly without end; in the face of an economic crisis that, at best, may be making a slow

and halting recovery, in the light of global forces, that in their tedious and overwhelming power, seem to have numbed the human heart, why, in heavens name, would we worry with the minutia of Church life?

I was reminded of the answer to that question by a friend of mine who died this past June. He was an exceedingly taciturn auto mechanic. He was also a veteran of World War II. The ambulance he drove was the second to reach Omaha Beach on D Day. When not driving an ambulance he had driven diesel laden fuel trucks for General Patton's tanks in the Battle of the Bulge. For years I knew only these bare outlines. But then toward the end of his life he began to talk about it in detail. One day I asked him "Why, Why had he chosen to tell these stories after all these years." His answer was simple. Because, he said, "They are saying the concentration camps didn't happen. And they did. I was there. I entered Buchenwald when the ovens were still warm. I saw it. I was there. I am a witness."

Well folks, you and I are witnesses too. There are those who are saying that poverty, and the injustices that flow from it, are largely resolved. There are those who say that in every large society, in every field of conflict, there must be acceptable levels of collateral damage. They say, no bomb, no rocket, can avoid hitting *any* civilian. No program can see to it that *everyone* gets an adequate education. It is not possible for *all* people to have reasonable healthcare. Not everyone who wants a job can get one. You can't expect everyone who is issued a credit card can fathom the fine print even though that fine print may entrap them in a lifetime of servitude to a debt they can never overcome. A fully accessible justice system is a nice ideal but not a practical reality. These, and countless others, are all the collateral damage of our global world.

As Christians we are to bear witness: that these things are not so. People are children of God. People can never be reduced to a calculation. They can never be dismissed as regrettable but necessary collateral damage. Nor can they be relegated to the trash heap of

humanity with a label: criminal, terrorist, immigrant, chronically indigent, incorrigible offender, or for that matter: conservative or liberal.

We can not stand by without witnessing. We are all God's children. We are all embraced in the arms of God's Divine Love.

That is the vocation of our community. That is why we work so hard. We are called to be here, and to continue to be here, in order that we might bear witness that all is not well – all is not as it should be. But ours is not a message of doom. Far from it – ours is the good news of the truth. And the truth is that, through our sacrifice, but above all through God's own sacrifice – all will be well. And all manner of things will be well. Do not lose hope – by the power of the Holy Spirit we dwell in the life of the Christ of God, now and unto the ages of ages.

Thank you.