

**Diocese of Bethlehem**  
**Address to the 136<sup>th</sup> Convention**  
**Bishop Paul V. Marshall**  
**October 12, 2007**  
**Cathedral Church of the Nativity, Bethlehem**

In 1607, 400 years ago this year, Anglican Christians began to worship God in Jamestown, Virginia, much more than a decade before nonconformist worship began to occur near Plymouth Rock. The Puritans had better publicists, it seems.

The celebrations in Jamestown in this year 2007 remind us that we've been here for four centuries. And as Bette Davis observed in "All About Eve," the ride has been bumpy ever since. At several points it looked like the Episcopal Church was headed for extinction, but renewal came in unexpected ways.

The bumps continued. In 1861 a shot fired in South Carolina split us into two churches for some four years. Issues including race, class, and gender have severely tested us in previous generations and we have those and new issues today.

But we are here, here because we have a heritage and because God has a use for us. Our market share has always been quirky and our birthrate is not high enough to provide automatic growth, but our contribution to American life has also always been greatly disproportionate to our numbers and always surprising.

Allow me to illustrate the surprising part as I see it locally. If I told you that a small parish in a somewhat remote area with no population growth had seen its attendance rise and its pledging grow from \$26,000 to \$56,000 in just over one year would you believe me? If I told you that the age of people visiting my office because they are considering seminary has dropped by 15 to 20 years, and that I am even talking to teenagers about seminary now, would you believe me?

If I told you that what started as a tiny mission outside of Reading is preparing for a major new building program, would you believe me? If I told you that ethnic and racial diversity is increasingly apparent in many parishes, would you believe me? If I told you that women in our diocese are in increasing numbers banding together to do good with no tools other than prayer, would you believe me.

If I told you that for the first time in history the clergy of our relatively liberal diocese and those of the relatively conservative Roman Catholic diocese of Scranton have spent a day worshipping, eating, learning, and talking together, would you believe it?

Yes, you would believe me, because by God's goodness Bethlehem is the diocese where anything can happen and frequently does.

That is a long-winded way of saying that I continue to be grateful to God for the surprises the Spirit brings us as we strive to learn and do the work of Jesus, a phrase that I hope will catch on with the modesty only a plagiarist can feign. (That was a \$48,000 dollar joke.)

I remain grateful for our partnership in the gospel of Jesus Christ, to which all else so routinely, so beautifully takes a back seat.

In my sermon at the convention eucharist last year I dwelled on the importance of giving up “magical thinking,” the pathological delusion that somebody somewhere else has the answer to our problems and for some wicked reason is simply withholding it.

That is a child’s way of thinking. Jesus calls us to full maturity, and I emphasized that churches that want to serve will live. The formula for finding one’s life is simple: enthusiastic clergy and lay leadership and the common belief that the God who calls us is faithful. That mix of ingredients, along with willingness to try something new – and unremitting toil – are what God blesses. Negativity or self-absorption guarantee extinction; mission opens door after door.

So, this year between conventions, I have been on the prowl for holy signs of the kind of life that come when there is good leadership, good followership, and excitement about purpose. I find that it has not by any means been a quiet year in my home diocese. I can give only some samples.

The foremost of these is the New Hope Campaign. I am going to torture myself at this point and abstain from the pleasure of telling you exactly how the New Hope Campaign is going – that joy by right belongs to our tireless Chairman, Charlie Barebo, and he will enjoy it in just a few minutes.

I will tell you now that your response of love and service to those in need keeps me awake at night, smiling and thanking God. We still have 4.5 years to go on this project, and I am...well, now I am getting into Charlie’s territory, and will simply say, thank you and stay tuned. I note that representatives from our consultants, the Kirby-Smith company, are here; you may wish to discuss the campaign with them, or learn how they can help your church with its future needs. I can recommend them as a business that operates on sincerely held spiritual principles. I am profoundly grateful to Charlie Barebo, to Char Horst, Jo Trepagnier, and Archdeacon Stringfellow, who joined me in making New Hope presentations through the diocese during the last four months and to the staff at Diocesan House who organized these. They all gave up significant pieces of their summer so that we might move ahead.

While speaking of money, I should also add that in the last couple of years our indefatigable Episcopal Church Women have raised more than \$25,000 for ministry in Kajo-Keji. Last night the bishop of Kajo-Keji said that he didn’t know where his diocese would be without us. It is equally true that we have become a different diocese because of them, and ECW along with the World Mission Committee have held that difference before us.

A last thought on the subject of numbers: stewardship continues to increase in the diocese across the board. Although, like every mainline body, we have experienced some decline in overall attendance, our total giving *and giving as a percent of personal disposable income* have both increased. Bill Lewellis has posted on the web a link to the hard numbers about attendance and money. The research has already been done by the Episcopal Church Foundation using the best available science.

There is local data, too. The hard numbers are that, while the average family’s buying power has declined in every county of the diocese, parish revenues are up by 25.9% since 1998, and the percentage of total parish revenues expended to do diocesan ministry has declined from 9.7 to 9.29%, so parishes are on the whole in better shape financially when we consider the gross.

At the same time nobody can keep up with the cost of health care; I am happy to report that, after some years of hesitation, the national church is right now studying how we can band together for more affordable insurance coverage while we wait for a single-payer system that is fair to providers and patients.

In this diocese, parishes have seen in the last year 25, 35, and even as I mentioned before, 100% increases in giving by following spiritually-based programs that link faith to all aspects of life. Although it is true that 1957 will not come back, 2057 has real promise because increasingly our parishes see that the connection of money to overall holiness of life is intrinsic and vital.

Leaving the numbers aside, what else do I see that keeps me grateful for our life together? The outpouring of clothing for inner-city children, the increasing commitment of our churches to ministry to the poor, the transforming experience young people had while working in disaster-torn New Orleans, and the determination of northern tier parishes to rebuild after flooding have all shown what Christian life can be.

Tomorrow morning you will see and hear about our partnership with the Diocese of Kajo-Keji, so I will simply mention again that we have been changed and mobilized by that connection and are about to be honored by greetings from Bishop Anthony.

Milford has done what nobody would have imagined ten years ago: installed a magnificent pipe organ to lead the singing of crowds that nobody would have imagined ten years ago. At the *Walk a Mile in Their Shoes* event, children from all over the diocese teamed with adult sponsors to raise money for child advocacy by walking through Allentown. In the private sector, Scott Bader-Saye, Philip Secor, and Canon Anne Kitch continue to teach the Church with wonderful books.

That's pretty impressive for a small diocese. But wait, there's more.

The Peacemeal Community in Scranton continues to provide a home and community for those who seek an alternative way to follow Christ. 100<sup>th</sup> and 150<sup>th</sup> anniversaries of parishes have become a regular feature on our calendars, most recently in Lehighton and next in Lebanon. In this very building this summer, the wonderful production of *The Lion, the Bishop and the Wardrobe*, while perhaps inconveniently named from my point of view, was indeed high revel, high church, and highly focused on Jesus Christ in a way that children and adults will long remember.

Last January the bishop limited himself to simply enjoying the pleasure of others as the Diocesan Youth snowtubed during Bishop's Day for Youth at Camelback, to the relief of his orthopedist. This year we head for *Nightwatch* in New York's Cathedral of St. John the Divine and on the way back will pay a visit to a different sort of shrine, the Hard Rock Cafe. Speaking of revelry, Berks County churches got together around the Boar's Head Festival in ways that have gotten the church great publicity and helped many young people attend special camp to discover what peace and nonviolence mean in reality.

Last Saturday, nine of the eleven parishes in the northern tier gathered "Under One Roof" to begin a journey of mutual support and discovery. The staff and I were present to join in the conversations and explorations, and all felt that something very significant was going on.

St. Luke's in Scranton got national coverage for its hospitality to a wandering Washingtonian. Trinity, West Pittston has a new mission to Haiti, and Epiphany, Clark Summit, continues its work for pygmy ministry in Uganda. St John's in Palmerton evangelizes with an unequalled puppet ministry.

Our generous hosts here at the Cathedral continue to show us the way in communicating good news through striking graphics. Nativity's wonderful practice of giving away the offerings at Christmas and Easter has begun to be followed in other churches –wonderful fruit from a wonderful seed.

Trinity, Carbondale has had a creative relationship with prisoners that gave us all something to think about. Additionally, Eagle Scout Andrew Loyack spent countless hours refinishing woodwork in Carbondale, reminding us that character-building programs are still available to all young people who can see the importance of character.

Trinity, Easton, was the site of my first confirmation service conducted entirely in Spanish. Lo siento. Most astonishingly in a period where it is easy for Christians and Muslims to push apart, the Church of the Redeemer in Sayre and the Sayre Mosque have exchanged visits and discussion, and some Christians and Muslims prayed together to the God of Abraham.

This list is not complete by any means, but these samples are given to suggest the variety of life the Holy Spirit is giving us. Let us praise God often for our life together.

In my first address to this convention in 1996, I emphasized the necessity and priority of evangelism and have mentioned it every year since. I remain convicted of that truth. Then as now, the concern has not been with numbers or growth for our institutional survival, but with the basic necessity of obeying Jesus' command to bring good news to, for one example, those boomers and gen-xers oppressed by their riches, by meaninglessness, and enslaved by spiritual emptiness.

We built up momentum through Share The Bread (and yes, I hope for another one) and then had enormous setbacks in resources and energy due to national and local tragedies in 2001. But God is not defeated, as our Sudanese partners say. For the past six years, we have worked methodically to restart evangelism and are now moving along with a good number of our parishes ready to enter Level Three of our regional evangelism workshops. Stop at the Evangelism booth and tackle the puzzle of Number 154.

Nonetheless, the challenge is still before us in many places to internalize the truth that the churches that are thriving are those who have given up their lives in order to find them. They focus on mission and God provides the rest. If we live unto ourselves, we will most certainly die unto ourselves. If we live unto the Lord, things happen. Because I cover the waterfront, I know that a great deal of living is going on, living for the sake of Jesus Christ, and I am grateful for that.

There have been moments of pathos this year, as well. Chaplain Ira Houck's stirring reflections on ministry with those serving in Iraq touched many readers of *Diocesan Life*, and we can never permit ourselves to forget all of those caught up in war. I have had the beginnings of a pastoral relationship with a homeless person that is changing my perceptions more than it is so far helping him.

One of the tougher aspects of my having been with you for some time now is that, when I do a funeral, it is almost always for someone I knew and loved, and this year was particularly hard. We grieved the death of our first woman rector, Margaret Merrell, and suffered the loss of Jean Snyder who was so much at the heart of social ministry and overall connectedness among us. We marked the loss of clergy widows Nancy Patton and Sarah Robinson, both of whom brought many gifts to our life together. May they rest in peace, and may light perpetual shine upon them.

Challenges remain. Some churches continue to struggle against situations not of their making. Even large churches must face the fact that it will never again be 1957, and that for the foreseeable future northeastern Pennsylvania will not be the center of heavy industry and transportation that it once was. The culture no longer expects or reinforces church attendance. Furthermore, we who have a Lord in Jesus seek to offer discipleship to a narcissistic and fragmented culture, a very uphill task, and yet we carry on.

What God requires of us in lean years and fat years is faithfulness in mission. Belts have more than one hole in them for a reason, and our adaptability in fluctuating circumstances is the key to our continued ability to serve. But again, in many if not most places, things are improving as discipleship and mission become the central focus. In a way we are like the Sudanese in that lean years teach us why we exist.

Well, the canons require me to report how I see things going, and that was my effort. In a few minutes we will hear from some others about our relationships with other Christians, and I will at that point explain this cup, but I would like to say a few things about the present and the future.

## II

Comment is needed in the aftermath of the late meeting of House of Bishops. I need to say something different from what other bishops may be saying in their conventions because the Bethlehem deputation in 2006 did not vote for the General Convention Resolution that the bishops were seeking to “clarify” for the primates. Something we were not favor of in the first place has been intensified.

Every single news report I have read about that meeting does not resemble the meeting I attended. Let me just say that I remain perplexed by the action and more perplexed by the process in New Orleans, but as always, I think God is providing a spiritual opportunity for me.

I find that as just a few years ago I had to learn to be a gracious “winner,” if such a term is ever appropriate, when the church was moving my way, now I must learn to be a gracious “loser,” if such a term is ever appropriate, when that course is reversed or halted. For some of you those poles are reversed, and it is your turn to be a gracious winner. Some of you may well feel keen disappointment and even rejection as a result of my colleagues’ clarifications. As those of you who accepted the invitation to meet with me two weeks ago know, I believe that your pain is deep and proportionate. I will not presume to say that I can feel anyone else’s pain, but I certainly recognize and grieve its existence, as do many, many people in this diocese.

Beyond that, I must also say that I believe we have held together as a diocesan community during a turbulent three decades not because our range of opinion and conviction is narrower than that found elsewhere in the Episcopal Church. We have held together because of discipline, the tough discipline we practice of keeping our focus on Christ rather than ourselves, the tough discipline of genuinely honoring the conscience of every member of this diocese and welcoming the gifts the Holy Spirit bestows on the Church through each of the baptized. In previous years in this room I have had to reassure those who might be considered conservative of this fundamental principle of our life. I find myself today needing to reassure those who might be considered liberal or progressive of the same thing, that the only disciples of Jesus excluded in this diocese are those who exclude themselves.

I do not know how to predict if what the Archbishop of Canterbury and our domestic leadership wanted of and got from the majority bishops of this church will be effective or productive, and having no power in the matter have chosen to cease from worrying about the behavior or witness of any bishop other than myself.

So here is where I am. My understanding of my relationship with Christ means that I am not personally able to sacrifice individual lives or the dignity of any follower of Jesus to even the most benign dreams of world-wide ecclesiastical empire, but will do my utmost to stay in real and effective communion with Anglicans in every place on the globe.

As the designated chief sinner of the diocese, I will continue to try to honor each of you as God’s works in progress, living stones built into a marvelous temple for the praise of God the Father. As

Habbakuk was taught in last Sunday's first lesson, we do not know how things will turn out but we do know that the future belongs to God and we are to keep busy letting people know that there is a vision. We need to do that communicating, the prophet was told, in letters so big that joggers may read them. Translation: it must be unmistakable in our words and deeds that we trust the God who made each of us and that we are moving ahead in that trust.

In saying that I do not mean to say that we should pretend that our varying understandings do not exist. On the contrary, I meant something active and powerful and traditionally Anglican – that is, *in honoring and exploring our differences, we may generate the way through them* to a place nobody would have imagined.

Let me dwell on this for just a minute. I just spoke of 400 years of Anglicanism in Virginia, now let me go back a mere 40 years, to a non-Anglican in California. In 1967, Dr. Ralph Greenson, “psychiatrist to the stars” and medical professor in Los Angeles, wrote about the tendency of his colleagues not to communicate with each about their disagreements in theories or practice. Remember, these are psychiatrists who weren't communicating. Listen to his observations from 1967. Where you hear the language of his vocation, insert the language of our life as disciples. Ask whether Greenson's words do not speak to our situation:

Those who wish to suggest innovations or modifications of technique do not usually confer with others who are more traditional in their viewpoint. They tend to form cliques and to work underground, or at least segregated from the mainstream... As a consequence the innovators are apt to lose contact with those groups... that might help validate, clarify, and amend their new ideas. The secluded innovators are prone to become “wild analysts,” while the conservatives, due to their own insularity, tend to become rigid with orthodoxy. Instead of influencing one another constructively they each go their separate ways as adversaries, blind to whatever benefits each might have gained from an opening and continuing discussion. (*The Technique and Practice of Psychoanalysis I*, p. 2)

To put his observation in spiritual terms, we grow when we risk exploring each other's perceptions *and applications* of biblical truth to test and strengthen our own grasp of God's will for us. I would say that it is quite one thing to think that one *possesses* truth and quite another thing to experience oneself as being *possessed by* truth. Whether it is an old truth or a new truth, they who believe they own the truth will become rigid and defensive. They who believe they are possessed by truth, new or old, find themselves in joyful service to the truth, and willingly engage others so that all members of the conversation can be productive and balanced. Rigidity and disconnection are the enemies of spiritual growth in conservatives and liberals alike.

The value of the worldwide Communion, when it is working well, is that those who see something new and those who cherish something old, are in a position to grow in a conversation that is truly catholic. At the moment, at least, that possibility still exists and, like many, I hope that the long-promised conversation may actually get started.

Please don't hear me as speaking only to the one or two contentious issues in church life that you might or might not care about. Please do hear me as speaking to an orientation towards life as a spiritual person that applies to every minute of the day. *The last thing the planet needs is any more spiritual autism.* (Out of town papers, please copy.)

We all know that autism is a tragic brain development problem marked by low ability for interaction with others – a bad thing in a religion. Few know that it is also characterized by constant repetition of a very small set of behaviors – a disaster in religion. The Spirit calls us to as wide a connection with others as is possible and to as broad a spectrum of ways of relating. Any chess player knows that the

one who knows the most moves wins. The souls and the churches that are moving ahead are the ones unafraid to do something new – and to talk about it, under one roof.

As might be suggested by two references to the social sciences, I have come to believe very strongly that one's basic and *beginning* attitude toward things religious is determined by non-religious factors, particularly the parental home. Thus, I am a tremendous fan of the books of our own Canon Kitch on raising our children in faith and for faith.

I would illustrate my claim about predisposition to certain religious attitudes with every story in the Bible! Think of Jacob creating the scene where Joseph related poorly with his brothers, St. Paul's inability to work in a long-term partnership with Barnabas, or the woman at the well who had never formed a secure attachment to a man. Therefore, in each and every case the gospel involves you and me in fearless self-examination and growth. That is what conversion means, and it is a lifelong process.

For each and every one of us, conversion means openness to the ways God is calling us to change or develop, willingness to explore what we cannot see for ourselves, willingness to share what we do see with others. Because we are individuals (and because parishes have individual personalities, too) those changes will all look different and proceed at different paces and in different rhythms. Much patience is required. Bottom line: as individuals and parishes, we grow best when we stay in the conversations where conversion can happen. Just whose conversion that will be is God's business. What can be true for us as individuals and parishes will, we all pray, be true for Anglicans throughout the world.

### III

Now for the future.

You have some opportunities coming up to move into futures nobody might expect.

We have received an invitation to send members of the diocese to a national training event based in the practice of reconciliation and mutual conversion. If this is what God is calling you to, please talk to me directly during the next few weeks.

Twelve parishes will be chosen in 2008 to work with *Partners for Sacred Places*, which shows how using our buildings for community ministry can do the work of the gospel and bring in grant money to preserve our churches at the same time. If this works, we will continue with another twelve. Again, if this is of interest, I need to hear from you, as the program requires me to identify parishes. The only initial requirement is that your building must be at least 50 years old, so the potential field is almost all of you.

Next summer is EYE, the Episcopal Youth Event. I hope that once again that there will be a bumper crop of young people from our diocese. The destination this year is San Antonio, Texas, in July. When young people from a church with dioceses in eleven countries get together, the future fabric of the Episcopal Church is being knit in their work, play, and talk together. If we mean it about youth and the essential nature of connection, communion, and conversation, this is the place for young people to be.

I would like to challenge the women of the Diocese to remember that they are all, by definition, members of the Episcopal Church Women, and urge them to take advantage of the opportunities for ministry that ECW provides. Likewise, the Daughters of the King continue both to grow and to evolve, and all women are invited to consider their ministry of prayer. Some of our parishes have men's groups or men's study groups. I hope that we will hear of more gatherings before too long. We

have recovered enough now from the last few decades to recall the anthropological truth that there are times when groups of one's own sex can be particularly effective for growth in identity and purpose.

The presence of a youth delegation at this convention has been our tradition for almost a decade now, and I hope that, when you encounter them, you will let them know that you are glad for their participation in our deliberations.

That brings me to a point that is slightly neuralgic for me. We often speak of the importance of children and youth in the life of the church, and I believe that we mean it when we say it. We do not, however, as a diocese raise or spend a dime on those ministries. Children's ministry is underwritten by a grant from Talbot Hall that has been consuming capital and must be decreased. Youth ministry is paid for by a grant from funds at my discretion at the sacrifice of other purposes including new ministry support and some physical safety issues. Both of these stop-gap moves were made after the decline in financial markets early in this decade. This week the market hit 14,300, and I am herewith asking the archdeacon and finance committee to review possibilities for the convention to begin at least to reengage the funding of children and youth ministries when planning future budgets.

Given what lies before us this afternoon, I had better stop. Let me sum up by saying that I remain amazed at what enthusiastic parish leadership is producing where parishes choose mission over survival. I am grateful for the many ways the Spirit continues to enliven and delight us in our work together. We have much to do and I ask that God will increase our momentum. Thank you for your kind attention.