

DIOCESE OF CONNECTICUT

CONVENTION ADDRESS

October 25, 2008

This past year has been significant for us as a diocese, and for me as your bishop. On the one hand we have sought to understand and deepen our life together as it is shaped and stretched by our faith and our diversity, and on the other hand we have embraced more and more consistently God's call for us to move forward in the mission which Christ has entrusted to the Church.

God's People on Mission is a theme which I hope is becoming embedded in our Connecticut Episcopalian DNA. To be on Christ's mission for the reconciliation of all creation with God through Jesus is the primary joy and challenge of our Christian life. Our call is to make a difference in these times, when it is easy to become sidelined with the Church's internal conflicts, and the seductiveness of our culture lures us away, or the ravages of poverty and war and malaria seem so insurmountable.

And yet, there are stories to tell. More and more parishes are expanding or refurbishing their buildings, or building new, to accommodate new members and ministries. Care for the poor, such as Church Street Eats sponsored by this Cathedral parish every Sunday, is a sign of our response to the Gospel. The number of parishes who are actively searching for new ways to "do church" – oriented to those outside -- is a source of great joy in this diocese. We do seek to be transformed and transforming, out walking with Jesus, rather than inside worried about our own survival. Let's become the servant Church that people will want to join. As the disciples learned, when you walk with Jesus, you never know where you will go and you'll never guess what miracles you will see!

Our mission in Christ extends far beyond our own diocesan borders. Through the leadership of our Companions in Mission Committee, we now have three international mission networks within our diocese. Each of these is an association of parishes and individual members of the diocese who are engaged in or want to start mission connections with dioceses and parishes in the Anglican Communion outside the United States. We have one network for the Americas, including our Companion relationship with Colombia, one for Haiti, and a third for Africa, including partnerships with Mozambique, Congo, Nigeria, and Kenya. Be sure to visit the mission village at this Convention, and ask how your parish can take its part in the life and mission in the Anglican Communion.

Speaking of the Anglican Communion. In the past I had known something of the fellowship and mission which we share with other provinces of the Anglican Communion. In 2008, with the opportunity for travel to three non-English-speaking overseas dioceses during my sabbatical, and then to participate in the Lambeth

Conference last summer, I have come to appreciate, no, cherish, what God is doing in this Communion.

March. What a joy it was to visit the bishop, clergy and people of the Diocese of Colombia. This missionary church is dispersed throughout that huge and complex country. Colombia is a diocese whose life and service to the poor depends on the private offerings of its members and its clergy (most of whom receive no compensation). It is a diocese where almost no one has access to a Book of Common Prayer, yet it is a diocese full of vigor and lively faith and joy and service in the midst of the poor.

April. I went with Kate and other Board members of the American Friends of the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem to visit churches, schools and hospitals in Jordan, the West Bank, Jerusalem and Israel. Although our sisters and brothers there are few in number, again I saw a determination and tenacity for the Gospel, and a clear focus of mission as they seek to raise the vision of peace and proclaim and work for reconciliation. In the Anglican presence in the Middle East we found gracious Arab hospitality and Christ-centered mission, serving in an area torn by ethnic and religious wars and historic mistrust.

May. Six of us from the diocese spent almost two weeks in the Diocese of Boga, in the far eastern reaches of the Democratic Republic of Congo. The physical and emotional damage that has been inflicted by invading Ugandans, Rwandans and Congolese rebels on the tribes of eastern Congo is horrific. Yet here too, in a land without electricity, water, postal service, banks, or TV, Anglican clergy and laypeople together declare the glory of belonging to the One who transcends every tribe, Jesus Christ. The hospitality shown to us, the first group of foreigners to visit the diocese of Boga, was over-the-top joyful and deeply humbling. It has been a shock to learn that in the past two weeks rebels again have emerged from the forest, and armed fighting now envelopes the villages of the tribes with whom we so recently visited and worshipped.

These Anglican Communion visits in South America, the Middle East and Africa prepared me to hope for the best at the Lambeth Conference in July. The Archbishop of Canterbury determined that there would be no resolutions debated or decisions voted. Rather the bishops of the Communion began with a three-day retreat, and then proceeded to listen and speak to one another from the claims of Jesus in the Gospel of John, and from our own experiences in mission and ministry. What came from that? For me, a deeper understanding of what it is to be called into communion – it cannot mean agreement in all things – and a huge new appreciation of what this Anglican Communion can mean for the entire world. Did we miss the presence of Bishop Robinson? Yes. Will we have a covenant? Will there be pastoral interventions? That remains to be seen. But I do know that even working through such questions keeps us in the room together, keeps us listening to one another and at prayer, and helps us fulfill the mind of Christ, that all may be one.

In addition to mission, there have been two other focuses in these addresses: stewardship and youth. Here we continue to work together to deepen and strengthen the life of the diocese.

Stewardship. The teaching and example of Jesus about how we employ what we have – and that certainly includes what we do with our money -- is so very clear. I think more and more we are believing Jesus. To give for the Gospel Mission is in a different category from giving to or spending on other things. The Gospel is the most important work in the world. Yet we are in troubling economic times. Fear gets hold of us, and it is easy for any of us to pull back our church pledges. We have heard that some vestries already are expecting diminished giving and have told us they plan to slice their parish's ministry and outreach and contribution for diocesan mission.

Economic anxiety is in the air. For each of us in bad times, we may have to cut back our spending, but let's resist the temptation to back down from giving for the mission of the Church. In fact, it's in times like these that people look to the Church more than usual for ministry, for personal, financial and faith support. We are here for one another and others. How counter that runs to conventional wisdom! In the season's political campaigns, have you heard a single politician ask you to increase your giving for the common good? Or to sacrifice to provide for the needy and poor? But that is exactly what we ask of ourselves. We are different. Remember the boy who in the middle of nowhere gave everything he had to Jesus, his five bread loaves and two dried fish, and how more than five thousand were fed? So take courage! Christian stewardship is part of what makes us different, and brings change to the world, and Christian giving is our joy and lifestyle as true People of God.

Youth are the members of the Church today, not tomorrow. Parishes with youth in fellowship, serving on Vestries and search committees, reading Scripture and administering the sacrament; parishes with staff dedicated to serving youth and young adults, with adults participating in learning classes, giving example of the importance of education no matter what our age – all this and far more draws young people into a closer relationship with God and the Church. And again, thanks to the youth who are here in this Convention as out stewards, guiding and assisting us in our work.

In 2005 six parishes banded together to demand autonomy, outside the fellowship of the diocese which is a hallmark of Anglicanism. Since then, we have reached clear resolution with four of the six. Saint John's Bristol, and Christ and the Epiphany East Haven remain vibrant parishes of our diocese. Christ Church Watertown continues with a small worshipping congregation. Recognizing Saint John's as the Episcopal parish in Bristol, the Bishop and Diocesan Executive Council have decided to close the parish of Trinity Church, Bristol. Trinity's property currently is for sale. Of the two other parishes, the congregation in Groton has joined the Convocation of Anglicans in North America, and we have filed a suit to regain the assets of Bishop Seabury Parish. I have had recent conversations with the clergy of Saint Paul's Darien, and I hope soon also to meet with the lay leadership of the parish.

There are two parishes which continue under Delegated Episcopal Pastoral Oversight, Saint Peter's South Windsor and Saint Paul's Brookfield. I have planned meetings with their clergy and lay leaders in the weeks just after this Convention.

Change and the issues change brings always will be part of our lives. In spite of what some would wish, there never was a "universal golden age of belief and practice" in the Church. Therefore "to know Christ and make him known" always is a task lived in context of the time – with its changing religious, cultural, social, material, global contexts – which challenge us to know and love our living God in sometimes deeper and yes, sometimes new ways.

As I said several years ago in a convention address, there is no Episcopalian whose faith has not been unsettled by these days and the issues they have brought us. My thanks to all as we have grappled privately and in public forums, thanks to all who have written and met with the bishops, and all who have held fast to the prayer of Christ for the unity of the Church, thanks to all who have cherished our diverse, complex and sometimes ragged life together. As Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks said to us in his address to the Lambeth Conference, we Anglicans are one faith group which extends around the globe and which recognizes diversity within our own communion, and also respects those who believe very differently from us.

A few words about the implications of the decision of the Connecticut Supreme Court this month to broaden the State's definition of marriage. To offer gay and lesbian couples the right to marry is a significant change which challenges our Church's historic definition of Christian marriage and poses major questions for our mission and ministry. The Book of Common Prayer assumes that the State's and the Church's definition of marriage agree, that they are the same. As of two weeks ago, they no longer do.

Bishops Ahrens, Curry and I have been looking at three areas of complex questions arising from the Court's ruling. Are priests ordained in the Episcopal Church permitted to officiate at civil marriages of gay and lesbian couples? What standards of commitment should we have for ordained deacons and priests (or bishops) who are in same-sex relationships? In all things, how can we be the face of Christ, to invite, welcome and pastorally care for seekers and believers who are gay and lesbian, including those who seek to be married?

I raise these today as questions. And I ask you to think about them with us. Before there can be policy on these matters, we your bishops plan to talk with the bishops of other dioceses where the definition of marriage has been changed. We also want to listen to laity and clergy whose lives are directly affected by the Court's decision. I have asked my Chancellors to research the civil and canonical questions. And I have asked the Standing Committee of the diocese, as the Bishop's Council of Advice, also to engage these issues. And as we think on these questions it's also necessary to remember that we are a member diocese of the Anglican Communion.

In the meantime, the policies I announced last year for civil unions remain in effect and for now are extended to cover marriage of persons who are in same sex relationships.

Let us hold each other in generous affection and prayer as we face this change in the historic definition of marriage made by the decision of the Supreme Court of Connecticut.

Speaking of change, and Chancellors, we must take time, now, to recognize Canon Edwin G. Hebb, who several months ago indicated to me that with this Convention he will resign as Chancellor to the Bishop of Connecticut.

It was in 1975, thirty-three years ago, that Ed accepted appointment as Vice Chancellor to Henry Bakewell. He “moved up” when he was appointed chancellor by Bishop Walmsley in 1985. Years before that he had started his own law firm with his partner Richard Gitlin, and Hebb and Gitlin grew and grew, becoming specialists in corporate law. The firm has been bought and bought again, and now is part of an international law firm of sterling reputation. And Ed Hebb is enormously respected within the legal community; one of the most joyful occasions I ever have attended was the evening when the Greater Hartford Bar Association presented Ed with a lifetime achievement award.

I knew of Ed’s wisdom, patience and knowledge, and was delighted when he seamlessly stepped into my life as chancellor to this diocesan bishop. We have been through Some Times together! I have grown so to respect, admire, treasure and love this man. He always has been a legal advisor, never an insister or dictator, and we have had disagreements. His favorite expression is, “Well, Drew, let me ponder that.” Even when he was not sure where we were headed, he always adhered to law, canon, and his living faith in God. Ed founded and chaired the annual conference for the chancellors of Province One, New England, he is known nationally among the chancellors and many bishops of this Church, and he has served as Church Attorney, representing The Episcopal Church, in the ecclesiastical trial of a bishop. For me personally Ed Hebb has been a teacher and an encourager. He has been a pure and gracious Christian light in my life.

Ed, on behalf of all of us, Thank You!! You have served this diocese for thirty-three years. You have said you have wanted to “lay the burden” of this office down and I know you want to spend more time at your home in Rhode Island and in Florida. We are so blessed by you, and by your ministry. A bit later today we will more properly bid you fare-well, but at this time, to ensure that you always have a place of honor among us, I want to name you Chancellor Emeritus of the Diocese of Connecticut. Thank you, Ed Hebb, and we pray every blessing for you and Janice and your family.

So, no Chancellor? Just over a year ago, Ed began exploratory talks about church canons with Brad Babbitt, a member of Saint John’s Church, West Hartford. He tried Brad out as an attorney with a first assignment. Thank God Brad passed the test with flying colors! At last year’s Convention, at Ed’s suggestion, I appointed Brad as Vice Chancellor of the diocese. Since then he has accepted more and more of the questions

that come across our desks. And, with the Chancellor of Western Massachusetts, Brad is serving The Episcopal Church as a Lay Assessor for the Trial Court for a Bishop. With Ed's retirement, I asked Brad if he would accept appointment as Chancellor, and he has accepted. I am thrilled, could not be more happy. Thank you, Brad, we will welcome you a bit later to the Chancellor's chair, and thanks be to God!

There is another new face among us today. A huge welcome to Lyn Brooks, whom we ratified as Treasurer of the Diocese earlier this afternoon. Lyn is a member of Saint John's West Hartford, and already serves the diocese as a member of the Trustees for the Support of the Bishop. His day job is President and CEO of Briarwood College. Lyn now serves ex officio on the Finance Committee, Program and Budget and the Bishop and Diocesan Executive Council, and is a candidate today for election as a trustee of Donations and Bequests for Church Purposes. He will report to Convention for the first time today.

Change is a constant in our Christian life and service. And, as many of us learned in seminary, it comes in two ways.

There is change that comes with the passage of time – months and years. Chronos. New Year's is an example of this kind of time

And then there is change that comes at a special time not necessarily related to any measured time. It's a right moment. Kairos. God acts in kairos time, right moments or seasons when God brings opportunity or blessing on the world. The birth of Jesus was a kairos time.

I believe this is a kairos time for us, both you and me. Our diocese has come through a difficult time. While there is no perfect resolution to the church's controversies of the past several years, we are at a place at which many people have said they want to lay down the arguments and pick up the Gospel and move forward as the Church. Our faith is healthy, we have embraced anew the mission entrusted to us in our baptism, and we are on the threshold of a new chapter in our life together. . For me, I believe I too am at a turning point in my life. I have served as a bishop in the diocese for almost thirteen years, and this is the tenth Annual Diocesan Convention which I have chaired as diocesan. And in January 2009 I will turn 65.

Therefore, I believe this is a right time to begin the search for new episcopal leadership for the diocese, to choose a person as bishop to lead us with new vision for a new era. Today I ask the us to prepare for the election of the next Bishop of the Diocese of Connecticut.

My intention is that next year's Annual Diocesan Convention, in October 2009, will be an electing convention. We will elect a new Diocesan Bishop. When the person whom we choose is consecrated or installed, which I hope will be in the spring of 2010, I will hand over the bishop's pastoral staff to the fifteenth Bishop of Connecticut, and I will retire.

It is a privilege beyond measure to serve as your bishop in this diocese. There is tremendous faith and energy among us and we have been given much to do. Of course we will continue to build and deepen our life, mission, teaching, and worship, while we enter this time of change. Don't nail down the lid yet!

For instance. I have talked many times about a Bishop's Assistant for Mission, and our diocesan budget has provided a special appropriation for this work for several years. Increasingly our parishes seek to re-orient themselves from looking inward to their own survival to moving outward in vigorous mission. There are other parishes who need to be encouraged – sometimes mightily – to a new vision and vitality to be alive for Christ and the needs of the world. So in the near future I intend to find a person to join our staff for two years, specifically to encourage and guide our parishes in formation and renewal for mission. This Assistant for Mission position description will be posted on our website within a week.

What a blessing it is to serve with my two “bishops companion.” If you attended one of last month's presentations on the Lambeth Conference that we three hosted, you caught a glimpse of how much Bishop Ahrens, Bishop Curry and I enjoy our call to serve as bishops together. Jim and Laura are an immense lively blessing for the Church. To all the staff, to the clergy, the laity, you are a wonderful diocese. As I have served among you, you have become for me a picture of the Kingdom of God in its variety, its richness, its potential, yes its struggles, and also its faithfulness to and love for the Lord.

Christ Jesus is the source of life and hope for this broken world. And we are baptized into him to be his face, voice, hands, feet, to go and bring good news of the blessing of new life here in Connecticut and to all people. God's People, on Mission. It's the most important work in the world. May God's Name be praised!

Thanks be to God.