

THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF CONNECTICUT
222nd ANNUAL CONVENTION

The Bishop's Address

Where to begin? I think it's best to begin with prayer.

Gracious Father, we pray now for ourselves, gathered in Convention, and for all your holy Catholic Church.

Where we are corrupt, purify us.

Where we are in error, direct us.

Where in anything we are amiss, reform us.

Where we are right, strengthen us.

Where we are in want, provide for us.

Where we are divided, reunite us.

We pray these blessings only for the sake of Jesus Christ your Son and our Savior.

Amen.

It has been and it is a very full year. We are seeing significant changes in mission and ministry and we stand at some important thresholds. In this address, I will talk about the reality we face with the continuing actions by five of our congregations against the bishop and the diocese. I will offer a change in our church's policies for ministry with and care for persons in committed same-sex relationships. Also I want to look at some realities of parish and diocesan stewardship and finances.

Let's begin by looking outward. For even in the midst of the hard issues of these times there arises from within the Church a glad energy and commitment to the mission for God in this world that grows and grows. Mission. More and more parishes are seeking partnerships, in some cases with other parishes in Connecticut and overseas, in some cases with whole dioceses. Mission trips by youth and adults, the building of churches, schools, and clinics, visits by clergy and bishops, have awakened us to one another across the world and have strengthened our ties within the Anglican Communion.

For us as your bishops, many of the Anglican connections are new and we absolutely cherish them. Bishop Curry celebrated Holy Week last spring in the city of Maputo and in the countryside of southern Mozambique. His two-week visit was life changing: ask him about it! He came home filled with new joy in Christ, and talked lots about the Rt. Rev. Dinis Sengulane, Bishop of Lebombo. This week that new relationship has deepened. We are so honored by the visit of Bishop Sengulane, the Very Rev. Agostinho Buque and Miss Marinela Chachine of the Diocese of Lebombo. They are special guests of Saint John's Essex, with whom they have a companion relationship through Roger LeCompte, a Volunteer in Mission of The Episcopal Church. They are here in Convention with us this weekend. Bishop Sengulane will be our keynote speaker tomorrow. Our brothers and sister in Christ Jesus, from the top bottom and middle of our hearts, welcome, welcome, welcome. We greet you in Christ Church Cathedral and

thank you for your prayers for us and ask you to carry our greetings to the Cathedral of St. Augustine in Lebombo.

I was privileged to visit another part of the Anglican Communion last February: the island nation and Diocese of Mauritius. The occasion was the installation of the Most Rev. Ian Ernest as Archbishop of the Province of the Indian Ocean. Bishop Ernest had spent sabbatical time in the United States; we had spent an afternoon in conversation together in Hartford, so it was an absolute joy to bring greetings from the Episcopal Church to Archbishop Ernest as he began this new ministry as Primate. It was a joy to welcome him back when he visited his friends in Saint Mark's Storrs again last May.

Also today we welcome Bishop John Danbinta, Bishop of the Diocese of Gusau, Archdiocese of Kaduna, Province of Nigeria. Bishop Danbinta is on leave from his diocese to study Islam and Christianity in residence at the Hartford Seminary, and his spiritual home in Connecticut is Trinity Church Tariffville. Welcome to Bishop Ernest M. Shalita, who served forty-four years as priest and bishop in the Diocese of Muhabura in the Province of Uganda. Bishop Shalita is the guest of Grace Church Old Saybrook.

Bishops are here from all over. Thank you, Bishop Cathy Roskam, neighbor and friend of Connecticut from New York, for serving as chaplain to this Convention. Thank you, Bishop Duncan Gray of Mississippi, for your close relationship with St. Barnabas Greenwich, and for traveling north to tell us of the rebuilding in the Gulf Coast.

Our call to mission is here in the United States too. How many individuals and parishes have sent mission work groups to the Gulf Coast to help with the unbelievable task of cleaning and eventual rebuilding from the destruction of Katrina and Rita, the hurricanes which struck over a year ago? How many more should go! We welcome Bishop Duncan Gray of the Diocese of Mississippi to our midst, and, Duncan, we are eager to hear your witness and receive your invitation as your companions in Christ.

Our Connecticut fellowship extends to our companion Diocese of Colombia. I bring greetings to this Convention from Obispo Francisco Duque, who was with us last year at this Convention.

I express my deep appreciation to Wilfrido Ramos for his extensive and effective ministry among us as Bishop Suffragan of Connecticut. He now is Bishop of the Diocese of Ecuador Central, and I am happy to report he is filled with energy for the huge challenge of that new ministry. With his departure to serve in Ecuador, Bishop Curry and the staff and I have attempted to assume oversight in "his" ministries, and we have realized even more the extent of his work, and what a gentle and pastoral presence he has been among us. Do keep Bishop Ramos in prayer, and go visit him every so often.

Speaking of bishops, today I want to recognize a friend and mentor who celebrates a significant milestone anniversary, twenty-five years of active-active and retired-active episcopal ministry to the Church. Bishop Clarence Coleridge. Ordained a bishop on October 23, 1981, he served as Bishop Suffragan for thirteen years, and was elected and

then became our diocesan in 1993. Since he first retired from “us” in 1999, Bishop Coleridge has served as Assisting Bishop for Charles Bennison in Pennsylvania, where the two bishops have modeled the breadth of theology and the unity of service which are hallmarks of Anglicanism. And now he is prepared to retire again. We welcome Clarence home, we praise God for him, and we pray every blessing for Bishop Coleridge and Euna Coleridge in their new home at Seabury Continuing Care retirement Community in Bloomfield. Personally I express my gratitude to him for his many gifts, including the gift of his friendship and wisdom. And I thank both Bishop Coleridge and Bishop Rowthorn who have offered themselves for delegated episcopal pastoral oversight in Connecticut, to help us seek ways to move forward, reconciled and united, for the sake of the gospel.

All things do work together for good to those who love the Lord, and I believe our new awareness and relationships within the Anglican Communion are a blessing which has grown directly from the theological engagements of the past years.

First I will address our relationship with five congregations and their rectors who petitioned for what they name alternative episcopal oversight in May 2004. I have refrained from speaking publicly because I have wanted to keep the matter of our relationships and the possibility for reconciliation “in house,” and I have wanted to avoid giving occasion for the immediate public attacks that inevitably have followed any statement which does not support their cause. However, today I must take some time to speak.

The basic issues – diocesan episcopal oversight of these parishes, and the obedience of the rectors to their ordination vows -- have not changed to this day. In their letter to me of May 2004, the clergy and lay leaders of these parishes named “alternative” or “adequate” episcopal oversight as their expectation, and outlined in detail what alternative episcopal oversight would mean to them. It is clear, as I have said over and over, that their demands lie outside any possibility for the Episcopal Church. To put it another way, were a bishop to accede to their conditions, he or she would have failed to uphold the Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church.

Within our polity there are two alternatives for the five congregations and their rectors: Either live in compliance with the Church’s Constitution and Canons which means serving in communion with the Diocese of Connecticut and our bishops – which still includes the offering of delegated episcopal pastoral oversight; Or leave this church.

Rather than choose either of those options, this small group of parishes, clearly with support from outside this diocese, chose to initiate legal and ecclesiastical action against the bishop and other members of our diocese on several fronts. Our response has required significant time, energy, and financial resources during this past year, and it certainly has diverted us from full attention to the nurture of our diocesan life and witness.

They have brought three actions against us: first, A suit in federal court primarily over the matter of Saint John's Church, Bristol; second, Charges placed before the Presiding Bishop challenging my use of canons in the actions I took to remove the leadership of Saint John's; and third, An appeal to the Archbishop of Canterbury for consideration of their request for alternative episcopal oversight by the Archbishop's Panel of Reference.

An update.

The Archbishop of Canterbury withdrew the complaint from the Panel of Reference because the petitioners had also initiated civil and ecclesiastical litigation. The Archbishop and the Panel reasoned that the civil and ecclesiastical suits seek judgment through adversarial action, whereas the purpose of the Panel of Reference is to seek reconciliation. Because the complainants pursue litigation, the Archbishop will not consider their complaint

Six months after the filing, the federal suit and its accompanying motions were dismissed in their entirety by Judge Arterton in late August.

The ecclesiastical charges currently are in the hands of the Review Committee for the Ecclesiastical Court for the Trial of a Bishop. This month investigating attorneys for the Review Committee conducted several days of extensive interviews here in Connecticut, and they plan to continue with more investigative interviews later this month. At some time in the future those attorneys will report to the Review Committee, who then must decide whether to bring Presentment, which then would bring a trial in a court of the Episcopal Church. At this time, contrary to statements issued by the American Anglican Council and others, I am not under Presentment.

We are not before the Panel of Reference, the federal case has been dismissed, and the ecclesiastical charges remain under investigation.

In the meantime, for these past two years the five parishes and their clergy have continued to enjoy the benefits of The Episcopal Church while at the same time they refuse to contribute to our life and mission and they continue to pursue their own agenda. To turn a simile, it's been a little like flying an airplane while some of the crew are working to dismantle it.

The agenda? In the press and in private communications they and their spokespersons continually misrepresent the issues and impugn the motives and character of this bishop. They refuse to support our common mission and life financially: in 2005, of the five parishes, two parishes contributed nothing toward our diocesan budget, and for the other three the contribution average for the year was \$430.00. They have refused to fulfill their canonical requirements to enable the bishops' visitations. In one instance their members were stopped from receiving communion in a diocesan pre-convention meeting. Members from the five congregations have visited other parishes to recruit "converts." They held a service and a public rally on the grounds of the state capitol in which they denounced "false shepherds." The numerous allegations, complaints and motions, each

of which we have had to answer, to date have cost us more than \$350,000 in legal fees. Without even the courtesy of a call, much less seeking permission, they have invited breakaway bishops into our diocese for meetings and public events. Some of the clergy themselves are featured speakers at convocations which advocate the division of this church.

The benefits they enjoy? They purchase insurance coverage under our diocesan plans for the health and life of their clergy and liability coverage for property and casualty claims. They continue to make contributions to the Church Pension Fund of the Episcopal Church for the future benefit of their clergy. They profit from tax privileged status under our diocesan exemption (which exemption they also have challenged in court). They have the ability to attend and participate and vote at this Convention. They have the privilege of unfettered use of property held in trust for the mission and ministry of the very diocese and bishop whom they repudiate.

There are several new incidents from the past several weeks.

First, the five clergy and their lay leaders have now appealed the federal decision by Judge Arterton. Addressing the Second Circuit Court of Appeals in New York, they are seeking a reversal of Judge Arterton's ruling and in that appeal they seek damages of five million dollars. We will defend against that appeal.

Second, last week the lead attorney for these members of our diocese sent a message to the attorneys representing us to give notice that they plan to file a new suit in Connecticut's Superior Court. In that same message there followed a lengthy demand that the bishop reach settlement with the plaintiffs. Settlement? Settle what? Settle with us or we sue? That sounds like a threat to me, in the way of the world, unworthy of Christ.

Third, on October 12, again last week, in an article about the litigation in the Darien News a priest from one of the five parishes was quoted, "I would tell the bishop that if he was to let us remain Anglican we would drop the pending lawsuit and call it a draw."

Wait a minute. First of all, we are Anglican. Whatever anyone else may say, or hope, we are Anglicans, you and I, and that's because we are the Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut, a member diocese of The Episcopal Church, a member church of the Anglican Communion.

All along I thought the pending lawsuit was principally about Saint John's Bristol. Now we understand that they are willing to drop the charges concerning Saint John's if they get what they seek for themselves?

It now appears that the legal actions are not the main event, but tactics intended to cost us and back us into a corner and bully us into submission. Makes me think of the little book "Hardball on Holy Ground". All this activity appears purposefully designed to bring this

diocese to our knees. Is this really a matter of winning and losing or “calling it a draw”? And this is of Jesus?

Let me be clear: I cannot and will not grant a status – alternative episcopal oversight -- that is not permitted by the canons of our Church. Again, let me be clear: I have never spoken of or offered “settlement” in any conversation, public or private. “Settlement” is language of the law courts, introduced by their attorney. Reconciliation is the language of Christ. We are people of Christ, and my hope has been and is for reconciliation.

We are well aware of the canonical actions that are available to the diocese. They are serious. We have been patient.. We continue to hold open the door. Yet it is time to say, Enough. The passive nonsupport and the active sabotage of the diocese by the leaders of these five congregations and those who support them from the outside are a scandal in the community and before the Lord, and they cannot continue.

To the clergy and members of the five congregations. Perhaps in your mind or in meetings some of you already have made the decision to leave this church. Perhaps you are caught in this fray. It is time for your yes be yes, and your no be no. If one church, or two churches, or all five churches will return to the life and mission and communion of this Church, and, clergy, if you will honor your ordination vows, the door is wide open. If you cannot tolerate the life and openness of The Episcopal Church, then honorably move on. Above all, stop the whining and the destructive behavior which diminish all of us and the Lord Jesus. This Church has gospel work before us, and we have been more than patient, and the attacks continue and it is time for us to say, enough!

What most hurts, in addition to our severely strained relationships in Christ, is the active nurturing of dissension and the diversion of our attention and assets away from our mission and ministry. While we could be saving thousands of children and adults who will die today of malaria, while we could be building and staffing churches and schools and clinics, while we could be forming microeconomic enterprises, while we could be supporting mission and missionaries abroad and here in Connecticut, we have been compelled to devote our resources and attention to five parishes and their demand for accommodations we cannot grant. Enough.

The root of the controversy is what kind of church this will be, what our gospel values and imperatives are, how we shall live and minister. Shall we be a church of generosity, or of judgment? The focus in this question is whether this church will accept as full and valued members persons who are followers of Jesus and who are gay and lesbian. We are divided by theology and experience, and we hold different perspectives and some of us hold those perspectives very strongly. For many years we have been living uneasily with the divisions, and the controversy has caused pain and anguish on all sides, on all sides. There has been no movement on the question within the Anglican Communion, certainly no movement to consensus.

I believe in my heart and soul that it is time for this church, this diocese, formally to acknowledge and support and bless our sisters and brothers who are gay and lesbian,

including those who are living in faithful and faith-filled committed partnerships, as followers of Jesus and faithful members of the Church.

When I became diocesan bishop seven years ago, I modified the Connecticut policy that had been in place, so that as of 1999, same-sex orientation and a committed same-sex partnership no longer would in themselves disqualify a person from being ordained or placed in a pastoral cure in the Diocese of Connecticut. The next year the Bishop and Diocesan Executive Council extended health benefits to same-sex partners.

The reality of same-sex relationships came squarely into the public eye with the election and consecration of Bishop Robinson in 2003, and again with the surprising passage of the law for civil unions in Connecticut in 2005.

Within The Episcopal Church as a whole we have responded to these events more with strong conclusions than with open dialogue. Last spring I gathered a diverse group of lay persons and clergy who, after much necessary dialogue among themselves, offered the first two of what we hoped would be a larger series of public discussions in the diocese on Scripture and Sexuality. One gathering was in the Bridgeport Deanery, a second was offered before General Convention in West Hartford. They were sparsely attended which was, I believe, a reflection of our lack of will to engage the issues or to listen deeply with one another. I particularly missed the people who have claimed that we cannot make changes because we have not had dialogue. I am deeply grateful to Dr. Borden Painter and all who worked so hard for these forums. They are now preparing material that will be available for discussion in parish study groups.

Again, at the heart of the matter is whether we as a Church will welcome and embrace and serve with and care for and bless persons who are homosexual and partnered as cherished and fully accepted members of the Body of Christ. I believe it is right to change our current policy which prohibits our clergy from blessing same-sex relationships. The debate and vote on Resolution 6 in the 221st Annual Convention of this diocese last year clearly indicated a desire for a change.

There are several verses of Scripture that have been used for argument over and over by folk from every side.

What has not been heard, however, is the sweep of Scripture witness in which Jesus and later the apostles over and over open up new dimensions of what it can mean to live in faithful relationships with God and one another and the whole world. Without question there I see a progression of revelation, beginning with our Lord's inclusion of women among his disciples. It continues as Peter and then Paul recognize that in the New Covenant faith is not about family lineage, dietary laws or the Biblically mandated mark of circumcision, but about accepting Jesus, and receiving the gifts and bringing forth the fruits of the Spirit.

It is convincing to me as I read the New Testament and also see how the implications of the person of Jesus and his teaching and actions continue to unfold in new ways in the

Church. Even though we continually slip back into old ways, there have been triumphant breakthroughs in new ways: equality regardless of nationality or social classes, equality regardless of being male or female, equality regardless of age, and equality regardless of race.

Was the Church in the forefront of all of these new understandings, leading the way? In reality we the Church struggled with those issues sometimes against and often with the rest of the culture. And so it is now.

Jesus' ministry so radically redefines what life in faith is that, says Jesus, it is a call to a new realm, the Kingdom of God. Both Jesus and Saint Paul say that entrance into it means dying and being born over again. Because I see this teaching and its implications unfolding in the Bible and through history, I believe that God continues to open our eyes to new insights and truths of living in faith.

I believe that it is time for us to re-think, re-pray and re-form our theology and our pastoral practices, to welcome, recognize, support and bless the lives and faith of brothers and sisters who are gay and lesbian in the equal fullness of Christian fellowship.

In addition to the witness of Scripture and our history, what convinces me that this is a right place for the Church has been the clear, patient Christian witness of the many, many members of the church who are lesbian and gay.

It is the witness of the focused faith and pure charity of so many gay and lesbian companions who seek lives blessed and lived in Christ, it is the patience and endurance with which our gay sisters and brothers run the race – sometimes openly, sometimes hidden – it is knowing first-hand their struggles and their sacrifice and their clear witness to the love and power of the risen Christ that has brought me to say yes.

Many times, in the presence of gay and lesbian brothers and sisters, I have felt a little like Peter in the house of Cornelius. Recognizing the presence of God where it wasn't supposed to be, in a pagan household, Peter baptized the entire family. Like Peter, who when criticized by the elders in Jerusalem for breaking the traditions, I have said to myself, "Who am I that I can hinder God?"

Today's step is to begin to permit blessing as a pastoral ministry within a congregation.

When we talk about a pastoral ministry of blessing, we have much to think about and discern. Should clergy officiate at civil unions? I believe that we should not – they are in fact civil unions, and our Church has not made provision in our polity to address the issue. (In fact, as we think about these things, maybe we can rethink whether clergy should officiate as state agents at weddings, and we might back out of the costly, costumed pageant industry that cares more about perfect settings than faith.)

More questions arise. If a couple lives in Connecticut, should we expect that there has been a commitment in a civil union? I think that yes, there should already be a civil

union. Is there a difference between a congregation's prayer for blessing, and a priest's pronouncing of blessing? Yes. What criteria should we expect of a couple for giving blessing?. What preparation should there be? How should we proceed if a former civil union has been dissolved?

As we prepare to take this step, I must be clear that we are not creating or authorizing a new sacrament. Nor are we giving a green light for public ceremonies that look and sound like weddings. Nor am I authorizing any public rite or liturgy.

What I am inviting us to do is create pastoral and prayerful occasions in which we can gather as Christians to pray and pronounce blessing. So we will be able to offer Christ's blessing for those same-sex committed partners among us who seek, in faith, the recognition, prayer and support of the Church for their lives as followers and servants of Christ.

The best place to entrust decisions concerning blessings is locally, with our clergy and the lay leadership of the parishes of the diocese. I do ask that the clergy and lay leaders of any parish of this diocese which discerns that it wishes to offer blessings for same-sex partnerships, first meet to confer with our bishops. This is new ministry, and we will be most effective as we think together and share our experiences.

For many in our diocese, this change in policy may cause anguish. There also would be anguish if we stay where we are. To open the door for an expanded pastoral ministry of blessing does take us from one unsettled situation and moves us into another. I pray that in this time we will continue to care one for another, and seek to honor and serve one another with the same compassion and forbearance with which Christ cares for us.

I am well aware that we have visiting us members of our Communion who may differ significantly from what I am offering today. Your presence is a living sign of the breadth and grace of the Anglican Communion. I ask and pray that, if you disagree with me, yet you will be tolerant, and allow us room, and pray for us in these times. For Christ calls us and prays for us to be one in him. We may be very different, and we are, and we may believe very differently, and we do, and we live and serve in very different worlds -- yet the Scriptures define us as one Body for reconciliation and peace, and for the poor of this world.

Our next, perennial topic is stewardship. Stewardship continues to challenge us in the diocese. We are increasingly aware that the earth's climate and very life are changing, deteriorating, because we consume the earth's resources for our own benefit. Likewise we should become increasingly aware that our parish life and the Church's mission are impoverished because we use and keep so much of our personal resources for our own benefit.

We have many parishes, including historic "cardinal" city churches, that have inherited buildings far larger than are necessary for their life and mission, buildings built in another

age of cheap energy. And smaller parishes face their own challenges, stretching resources to make ends meet.

Part of our answer of course is gospel-based stewardship. One of my great joys in the past several years has been to travel with Canon Jack Spaeth in a teaching ministry for parish mission development and stewardship. Our hope is to hold up the full gospel clearly and without apology, as a call to mission and generosity with wealth. Our delight is when people “get it,” and respond with new spirit and hope, a new vision of liberality and increasing giving, all rooted in the sacrifice of Christ who gave himself.

But part of the answer about the future also is in creative thinking within and between our parishes. What do you do when you have inherited 38,000 square feet of floor space, or have to replace a half acre of slate roof, and also are committed to care for the poor and homeless, and the endowment is dwindling fast? There is no sure fix.

The challenges of stewardship and mission are before us, and the days of reckoning move closer. The challenge is to draw ourselves into new thinking and creativity about supporting mission and life in our parishes, our diocese, and certainly in the church beyond – all of the above -- as we move further into this new century.

Finally, I want to recognize several ministries today.

My thanks to JoAnn Munro, who for six years has been a colleague on our diocesan staff. She served as Canon for Clergy Deployment, or as we now say, Canon for Transition Ministries. JoAnn learned this work, and has defined it in new ways, and has left a strong legacy with us. I wonder where her inquisitive mind and faith will lead her in the future. Blessings in your retirement, and thank you, JoAnn.

My thanks also to the people and leaders of Saint John’s Church Bristol. From very troubled times, in the past year you have rallied in spirit, you have built trust anew, you have rejoiced to recapture essences of the parish’s life that had been suppressed, and you have moved into the future in confidence and joy. And I express my thanks to the Rev. Susan McCone, who in the summer of 2005 accepted a call to step into a situation that was fraught with the unknown. Susan, I with the people of Saint John’s am deeply grateful for the year you graciously gave, and we thank you for your sensitive, caring, healing, priestly presence and ministry.

The gospel is about God, who is love, and Jesus’ sacrifice of himself, in love, for us and for the world, that there may be new life. It’s a complex fragmented world we live in, where issues and right decisions often clash, where faith requires us to trust and forgive and risk, and sometimes in the eyes of the world to be foolish or wrong. The new life in Christ the Word and the Holy Spirit is both a comfort and a struggle, for the realm of God as we know and pray for it is not here in fullness.

Yet there is no blessing greater or more important in the world than to know Jesus and live in his love. In and through everything, I ask that we remember that God is a

generous God, who in Jesus lived and died as one of us, and who calls us together in new, different, and changed life. As I look to our future, I close with a hymn which long has been a favorite of mine, and whose words as I sang them recently settled a deep and mysterious peace into my heart:

There's a wideness in God's mercy, like the wideness of the sea;
There's a kindness in his justice, which is more than liberty.
There is welcome for the sinner, and more graces for the good;
There is mercy with the Savior; there is healing in his blood.

There is no place where earth's sorrows are more felt than up in heaven;
There is no place where earth's failings have such kindly judgment given.
There is plentiful redemption in the blood that has been shed;
There is joy for all the members in the sorrows of the Head.

For the love of God is broader than the measure of the mind;
And the heart of the Eternal is most wonderfully kind.
If our love were but more faithful, we should take him at his word;
and our life would be thanksgiving for the goodness of the Lord.

Thank you for who you are. For your steadfast faith. For your works and witness to the Gospel.

Be thankful. Be generous. Be merciful. Be inviting. To all people.

And so by grace together may we be a blessing in Christ. Amen.