

*Following is a transcript of the opening remarks delivered by the Rt. Rev. Glenda Curry, 12<sup>th</sup> Bishop of the Diocese of Alabama, to the 195th Diocesan Convention on Friday, February 6, 2026, at Camp McDowell.*

Oh God, by your grace, you have called us in this diocese to a goodly fellowship of faith. Bless all of our clergy and all our people, and grant that your word may be truly preached and truly heard; your sacraments faithfully administered and faithfully received. By your Spirit, fashion our lives according to the example of your Son, and grant that we may show the power of his love to all among whom we live; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

You may be seated.

Needless to say, I have been thinking an awful lot about our ministry together. I see a lot of it, and it has been on my mind constantly for maybe about six and a half years or longer. I have been looking for the right metaphor, and a friend of mine sent me something that I want to share with you.

I love that phrase at the end: “No one can do what we do.” I believe that about the Church. No one can do what we do. No one can do what we do.

Several years ago, as we came out of COVID at our first in-person convention right here in this room, we listened to Sam Wells. He was our speaker, and he told us that his understanding of the Church was based on John 10:10: Jesus said, “I have come that you might have life abundantly.” From that, Sam wrote in his book *A Future That’s Bigger Than the Past* that the Church is meant to build up communities, and the Church helps embody abundant life, and the Church brings heaven to earth, and the Church is a community of hope. With the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus at the center, the Church seeks to bless the world, and when it puts its entrepreneurial spirit and talent to use doing that, there is even enterprise involved. The Church is not dying; the Church is changing.

And as I listened to him, I remembered what I learned in seminary that stuck with me from William Temple: the Church is the only organization that exists for the sake of those who are not our members.

When we anchor relationships with humility, and we consider our diversity as a necessary asset that teaches us about the people that Jesus cherished, it helps us discover our gifts, and it prepares us for adversity and also for suffering, which we are all going to have. Sam asked us, “How can you consider what happens in adverse times as a gift?” At that convention in 2022, I asked you, “How can the Diocese of Alabama be a blessing to every parish and, in turn, cause each parish to be a blessing to the world around it?”

Sam also talked to us about God’s promise through the prophet Joel, and he said, “God, say I will restore the years that the swarming locusts have eaten.” A lot of us left that convention together with that ringing in our ears, because that is what we wanted. We were all beginning to feel like we had been in a real big swarm, and we wanted God to restore what the locusts had eaten.

Sam also told us, “You have everything you need, and the joy of the Lord will be your strength.”

For me, that convention turned a corner for me into today. It was like a light out of a dark time. When I opened my first convention as your bishop 28 days after I was seated, 189 days after my election, I was staring into a screen of faces in Hall Hall, where everybody was having fun last night. There was a great big screen with little faces on it, and I was very grateful that technology would let me do that, because otherwise it would have been me, Rip, the secretary, and maybe two other people sitting 15 feet apart.

I was speaking into a little camera light, and I tried to imagine this room full and loud. But we discovered out of that electronic voting in that Zoom convention, that we did amazing things in record time, and everybody was really happy about that part. And we lived into, even there, what COVID made possible.

You probably remember I was elected January 28, 2020, and 38 days later, on my first-ever conference call with the clergy, we made the decision to close our churches. I will never forget that afternoon. This was not going the way I imagined. You have not heard it until you have delivered a decision to a group of clergy that we were going to close all the churches under our care, and we were going to do it in three days. But you responded. You listened.

Leadership theory says that whatever happens in the first 100 days of a leader's tenure marks and shapes everything in their tenure. I really believe that is true. I see the good things and the bad things that COVID helped us do and discover, but I also believe that God has led us through these past six years, healing us in ways that we otherwise might not have felt, and that only God can give us that healing. We have changed, we have adapted, we have suffered and mourned, we have created, and we have lived in countless new ways together.

The Diocese of Alabama is a blessing to the world today in ways that I could not imagine at my first convention. I have been amazed, delighted, surprised, and overwhelmed by your determination and your energy and your faithfulness and your generosity and your deep love for each other, for the world around you, and most of all reflected in your love for Christ.

As I watched our election unfold and as we celebrated together last Saturday, I was joyful and delighted with you in welcoming our next chapter, led by now-Bishop-elect Richard Lawson. Welcome, Richard. We are excited, and we are blessed.

I am happy to report in this final report to you that the Diocese of Alabama is strong, solid, vibrant, and growing, and for the most part, it is not at all like herding cats. I hope today to show you just a glimpse, a big picture of our ministry together, measuring it in two ways: through numbers and through the fruits of the Spirit.

We chose our convention theme, "Good News for a New Day," inspired by Lamentations, not often used for such a thing. The Old Testament book of five poems records the laments and the prayers of those who are mourning the loss of Jerusalem. In B.C. times, around 500, the prophet and his friends recorded their suffering and sadness over God's perceived silence. In poem three, God's hope begins to seep into their life again, and they remember. They begin to believe there will be a rescue. There is going to be good news. There is going to be a new day.

Over the course of the last four years, we have tried to make our convention time together a brief learning community so that everyone might hear something they could take home that was useful, and it might help you grow and spread the gospel.

In our third year together, we spent time with Jason Byassee, who wrote the book *Northern Lights*. He encouraged us to lower our threshold, to try to look for more and more ways to make it easier for people to get inside our buildings. Long ago, Doug Carpenter taught me that people come to Jesus with their feet, their hearts, and their heads—in that order.

The best way to get someone to come with their feet is to ask them to come directly. Raise your hand if someone asked you to come to church, and that is how you got there. That is what happened to me. Someone asked me and took me off the front porch when I was 16 and hungry for a friend, and I went, and I ended up being baptized. You never know what will happen after we get them there with their feet. Their hearts will be warmed in some way, usually because they meet a friend they did not have, and then they hear the prayers, and then they will join in spending time with us trying to solve God intellectually in a community of hope.

Our speaker at that convention told us God's gifts are not meant for God's people, but through God's people for everyone else. You can't keep them, he said, but if you give them away, they will replenish themselves.

Our fourth year, as COVID receded, Carpenter House began to talk about God-sized dreams. How do we have enough resources to share with parishes to remove the barriers they perceive are holding them back? How do we grow younger? How do we speak the truth in love? How does my life tell people we are in God's hands? We had all these questions.

We invited Jake Mulder, the author of *Growing Younger*, a specialist from Fuller Seminary. He and the Dechurching people told us the best days of the Church are ahead, and they gave us some reports with numbers, some data to back it up.

It was a new way of thinking. A church does not have to be larger to engage younger people. There is no magic location. Old churches engage young people.

Then we went to school on the Fresh Expressions movement from England, and a man named Mike Moyer came and introduced us to a little process called Godsend. You can still find that we are working with him if you ask Cameron Nations. The takeaways were: intend to grow: whatever you pay attention to will happen; decide not to be afraid; give away your best people to start a church somewhere else; make God the subject of every sentence, and we could see the Spirit at work in Alabama.

Three years ago, we experimented by offering small grants for churches whose average Sunday attendance was 125 or less. The grants were from zero to \$5,000 Refresh and Renew grants. We asked for accountability. We asked to be told, "What barrier are you removing?" Spend the money on that project.

The first year, we awarded 51. We raised a little money to better fund all three grant programs, and they all blossomed, and the ministry was really stimulated. Churches were rebirthing and renewing all around us. So let us look directly at more of the numbers.

In 12/31/20, diocesan trust funds were \$9,215,000, and on 12/31/25, they are \$15,555,000. Parish trust funds were \$16,472,000 in 2020, and at the end of 2025 are now \$23,266,000, a difference of over \$6 million. Thanks to the wonderful leadership of the trustees and their management, it has been extraordinary to watch. Really, it has been amazing.

Across the diocese, we see congregational vitality everywhere. Total Average Sunday Attendance in the last two years is up 17 percent. Average Sunday Attendance over the last three years has been like a rocket, and it continues to rise. Christmas and Easter attendance is up 10 percent. 46 parishes increased their pledge amounts in the covenant for 2026; pledges are up four percent.

This is an interesting one to me: confirmation over the last four years is up 71 percent. Woo-hoo.

These are beyond pre-pandemic numbers. In 2024, 18 parishes were beyond pre-pandemic numbers. This year, they have been joined by 17 more. That proves the point that everyone is moving forward and growing bigger.

Diocesan grants—Refresh and Renew, Mission and Outreach, and Creation Care—totaled 126 grants awarded in 2025 for a total of \$269,000, and that is in those three programs. Refresh and Renew, Mission and Outreach, Creation Care, over the past three years, 285 grants were awarded for a total of \$864,552 in direct support for your mission and your ministry as you describe it, as a barrier and as a need to all of you. And that's 285 grants individually – 159 were Refresh and Renew. That's the way that I look at and find out what's happening and if we really are doing the “why” of the diocese.

The “why of the diocese” we figured out four years ago, when governing boards gathered together—the Commission on Ministry, Standing Committee, and Diocesan Council—all got together in retreat. We asked, “Why do we need a diocese? What is that about?”

We decided the diocese needs to be a resource for all the parishes rather than a regulating body. We are a resource. The staff is here to serve the parishes, to help them become and remain vital. If the bishop and staff can walk alongside a parish one at a time and put all the resources we have, the time and talent, to understand your plight, we can help you remain and become vital. It is powerful and simple.

Our goals have focused on four areas every year. Congregational Vitality provides consultants, vestry training, mutual ministry review, recruitment, and placement of clergy. We are blessed to have eight really wonderful consultants who assist with finding and keeping good leadership. The three grants I just mentioned are doing magical things. We know that our churches continue to grow, and average Sunday attendance continues to go up.

In Leadership Development, the Canon for Vocations, Cameron Nations, guided with the help of the Commission on Ministry and your help, now has 52 people in some stage of discernment or preparation for ordination. This year, we saw five new clergy come to the diocese. We had four

celebrations of new ministry, 109 bishops' visits to parishes, 129 staff visits to parishes, 38 parish consultations, five mutual ministry reviews, eight vestry retreats, and 14 racial healing events.

We have two Commission on Ministry cycles now because the pipeline was too small and we could not keep up with the demand for ordained leadership. We have been operating two cycles now for about three years, so you can come in the fall or in the spring. If you hear God's call, you can begin discerning year-round.

We have a great group of examining chaplains who help us figure out where people are educationally and help us guide them into the right formation programs. In addition to that, Cameron has 24 lay people in a lay ministry cohort for preaching, pastoral care training, or worship leading. We have approximately eight active lay preachers now, and these new 24 lay ministers will finish their work later this year. So talk to Cameron Nations about this program. It is a way to help churches that are between leadership placements, that have part-time clergy support but need more. We need to find more ways like this.

Racial Healing and Pilgrimage continues to grow and is so important. We had the inaugural Scottsboro Boys pilgrimage this year, thanks to the work of St. Luke's Scottsboro. Next year, they have invited former Presiding Bishop Michael Curry, my cousin, to come and speak there. This past year, at the 30<sup>th</sup> Jonathan Daniels pilgrimage, Michael came, and we had 350 people in the street in Hayneville. What was interesting and wonderful about it was that, in addition to hearing him, you did not have to walk very far—you just had to turn around—because the crowd was so big.

Sawyerville Person2Person ministry continues to foster healing and hope. Bre Carter, who is leading us in the Becoming Beloved Community Task Force work, is a blessing, and the work continues to be wonderful and deep.

Camp McDowell—you will hear more about tomorrow. Derrick Hill has been here for about a year and a half. Given everything that has happened in his first year, we are glad he and Beverly are here. We have Epps Hall under renovation, the septic system is repaired, and I am happy to declare Clear Creek is still just as clear as it ever was.

There was a time in COVID when camp was down to 15 people on staff and nobody else. We had budget meetings every week. We are so blessed, and yet there are still some God-sized dreams ahead for camp.

Parallel to our work was St. Paul's notion that we are called to build up the body, to equip the saints for the work of ministry. We heard that passage last night in church. You know ministry is spiritual, but it is also practical. Paul even says it has to work properly. It promotes the body's growth ultimately, building it all up in love.

The challenges of COVID really helped us be creative. They helped us deepen our devotions. They called forth our best efforts and clarified our purpose as a Church. We are meant to love and serve one another in our Lord Jesus Christ. So, how to finance and sustain our work became part of the path. Thanks be to God that many generous hearts and hands came forward in big and small ways. Though we set our goal at \$7.5 million to build an endowment to support Congregational Vitality,

those little Refresh and Renew grants, Racial Healing and Pilgrimage, and specific projects at Camp McDowell, we received \$8.6 million from 400 donors.

I cannot thank the capital campaign leadership and all of you enough. You opened your doors, and allowed us to talk with people, and came forward with parish gifts, and that was the result. Thanks to you, those grants can be funded as long as the money stays in the bank.

We have been through a lot in six years. We have weathered and navigated two years of a pandemic with losses and uncertainty, two General Conventions—you have not lived until you go to two of those in two years, a once-in-a-decade worldwide Anglican Communion meeting, and in that same time we suffered the unimaginable loss of three faithful people at St. Stephen's; terrible tornadoes that devastated Selma and the Black Belt, three epic hurricanes, two presidential election cycles, repeated strife around migration and social unrest, wars, tragedies, and all the unknown and known troubles our parishes have faced.

Through it all, each time I visited you, you showed me unreasonable hospitality and love abundantly. Last year, we heard about *Unreasonable Hospitality*, first inspired by a restaurateur but put into practice at St. Luke's Birmingham. Rich Webster told us, "You do not create a welcome community; you create a welcome culture. You make every church visit meaningful with a welcome." Infusing a culture of welcome opens the door for vitality.

I see the best hospitality every Sunday when I visit. It is in our DNA, and we just have to keep trying to show it to the world every Sunday.

How can the Diocese of Alabama be a blessing to each parish and, in turn, cause each parish to be a blessing to the world? How can we share the life-saving gospel of Jesus Christ? These questions have been on my mind every day since day one.

Here are some quick examples of how ministry is going—just a glimpse of the good news.

Five years ago, when COVID came, St. Luke's Scottsboro had a very small food ministry. When I visited a couple of Sundays ago, it had grown to take over their parlor, turned into shelves. They've written grants for these giant refrigerators, and they now serve 250 or so people a week with their food. They have relationships with Food Banks. That ministry did not exist, as Polly Rob, their rector, says, "It goes on its own. I don't have to do anything. People show up, do the work, and bless the community". The week I visited, they also gave away 250 coats collected from the community.

St. Mary's Jasper had a small food ministry that grew into two outside buildings with walk-in refrigerators. During COVID, they gave away as many as 700 bags a week, and now it is closer to 350. Their Christmas giveaway looks like an Alabama–Auburn football parking lot, serving people across Winston County. It is too much to describe fully in words.

Our ministry together is strong, vibrant, and inspiring. But a bishop working with a parish visibly makes a big difference. I was blessed to have Bishop Prior to help part-time, but really, the growing ministry in our parishes and here at Camp needs someone who is a full-time helper and a partner on the ground all the time. I believe the Council and Standing committee will be supportive of our new number 13, just as supportive as they were with me. But I believe it is critical, as we look ahead, that he has his choice of help, but he will need help. If there are to be 100 and something visits to parishes by the bishop, it will be too much for one person.

The night before Jesus dies, he says to the disciples, “Be one as the Father and I am one”. We have four theologies of the atonement in our church. We recognize all of them. We have two theologies of marriage, and Jesus is at the center of it all. And when Jesus is not at the center of it all, you can tell the difference. Being in Christ and with Christ, though, is our anchor, and that's where we have to keep him in the center. As Desmond Tutu told us, “Anglicanism is lovable, but it's also messy”. Remain in Jesus' love as Jesus' love remains in us and be one. Jesus said, “I've said these things that my joy might be in you and your joy might be complete, be one”. So I would leave you with that idea, be one. We have learned through all of this in my six years that we are connected, and it's a good thing.

And when we look for help from each other, and we share our resources, our ministry is stronger, and our faith is deeper. Our resource parishes are wonderful stewards of encouraging smaller parishes and assisting constantly and they don't even let us know at the bishop's office what they're doing. There are actually so many to thank for all of that that my head spins.

My time as your bishop has been an enormous blessing to me and my family. It has been very hard work. It has been tremendously edifying and rewarding, but it's also been heartbreaking at times, challenging, exhilarating, humbling, deeply fulfilling, exhausting, and I wouldn't trade a minute of it. It was a little hard on my ego for everyone to know my birthdate and my age from day one to today. But there is also a great blessing to knowing how much time you are allotted.

The psalmist prays in Psalm 90, “So teach us to count our days that we may gain a wise heart.” I believe knowing how long I might serve sharpened my focus, my decisions, and my direction.

There are so many people who work tirelessly right alongside me. They were praying, encouraging, deliberating, and worrying with me. To hear my name prayed each Sunday is an extraordinary gift. To have my favorite food or music. The notes I get every week are like little envelopes of light that you don't even know that I need. They are signs that God is near us and with us in this. To have others labor fearlessly alongside me in this amazing vineyard where God places us is a deep and enduring blessing I'll always cherish.

I have had the privilege of climbing in a deer stand at St. John's Forland to bless the people and in a cherry picker at Stephen's Birmingham to bless solar panels. In my ride in the cherry picker, the young man who steered me and kept me harnessed had on a baseball cap and had no idea what we were doing. When we got to the top, and we started to say the prayers, he took off his cap and started to pray, and I thought I wasn't going to be able to do the blessing. And he thanked me, and he wanted a special picture when we got back on the ground. You just don't know what your witness is doing.

I have confirmed people in hallways and receptions when they thought they were getting out of it, when they thought they were getting out without being confirmed. That's why that number has gone up. I confirmed a mom who was too sick to come because she, her husband, and her baby were going to be confirmed together at St. Stephen, Smith Station. So, the husband went home, got her, and drove her back. I rolled down the window and confirmed her. She had a mask on, the baby was cuddled up, and I thought, "You can't make this stuff up."

I have worshiped with many of you for the very first time outside with mosquitoes and ants and hot sun, and you still had good food. I've worshipped inside. I've been in the rain. On my first visit to Holy Trinity, Auburn, I was standing where the sun hit me right in the side of the face, and this part of my face was sunburned the next day.

I've represented you proudly around the world and never once felt anything but astounded at your faithfulness. So my final words would be, don't quit. The church is the only organization that exists for the sake of those people who are not its members. That is a truth that you can't forget. That's the only reason we're here. Last night, there was a little guy who wanted to be in the picture who wasn't yet old enough, maybe not baptized, and couldn't take communion. He didn't know what to think, but he held on to my crozier because a bishop is an odd-looking thing in the eyes of a child.

One little boy told me he thought it was a snake's dick. And I said, almost. But when I stood with that little boy last night, I thought, this is why we do this. We do this so this little red-haired boy might know that he has a savior who's Christ the Lord. We do it for the one who died so that we might have life. It is worth everything, and I am forever grateful to everyone; I can only say thank you.

I love you, and I hope I see you at church.