

Convention Address 2018

Grace and peace to you in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It is a great joy to be together once again in Convention. I began last year's address talking about the catastrophic fires that had so recently severely impacted several of our congregations; and so it continues in this "High Hazard Diocese." I begin this year particularly mindful of our hosts, the people of All Saints, and their neighbors, and how they have suffered and struggled and yet so graciously welcomed us. Thank you. We are committed to be with you in the long, hard work of healing and rebuilding.

This is my 13th and last regular annual Convention as Bishop the Diocese of Northern California. I expect to be with you, and presiding once more on February 9, at the Special Convention which I have called for the purpose of electing the 8th Bishop of our Diocese. God willing and the Church consenting, we will ordain that bishop on June 29. I am grateful to our Standing Committee, and to its Search and Transition Committees for all the hard work they have done to date. And I am grateful to all of you for your availability to and engagement in every part aspect of this important work:

praying
sharing hopes and concerns
discerning
petitioning
walking about
voting
welcoming
consecrating

May Jesus Christ, whose Church this is, be conspicuously present in this entire process; and may he be truly glorified through its results.

Our election comes amidst a great many other bishop elections in the Episcopal Church. All of these come on top of the more than 100 episcopal elections that have taken place since you elected me a little less than 13 years ago. Obviously, this would represent a huge challenge to any organization, and especially to one that tries to hold in creative tension continuity and progress, stability and change,

institutional integrity and missional energy. And all of this in a rapidly, constantly changing social context.

Overall, I believe the Episcopal Church has been living into that challenge, faithfully and well. Overall, I believe that this Diocese has also; we set a good course together, through our visioning work in 2007-2008, and you enthusiastically affirmed that course in the follow-up survey 4 years later. We have been on a good trajectory, and we have accomplished much together.

You will recall that our early years were times of deep divisions in the Church. We worked hard in that landscape to build system-wide trust and openness to change, allowing us to re-orient from maintenance to mission. We undertook significant restructuring, made major reductions in congregational apportionment, eliminated on-going subsidies to congregations (and the unhealthy dependencies they fostered), and shifted resources to emerging opportunities for mission. To support that work:

We reinvented our deanery system so that it functions as a group of smaller, mission-focused networks, led by very capable and committed Regional Deans;

We created new staff positions in communications and ministry development, underwrote new assistant rector positions, and funded and helped organize a variety of ministries throughout the diocese, including Latino ministry, summer camp, youth and young adult ministry, disaster response, lay leadership development, and clergy continuing education and spiritual health;

We established the College for Congregational Development, which has been truly transformational for numerous congregations—and for that we owe great appreciation to Canon Andrea McMILLIN, who imported CCD, built it, and so very ably leads it;

We began Pathways, helping our youth and young adults to realize the ministry of reconciliation entrusted to us, and to develop into the leaders the Church needs to carry out its mission—and for that, profound thanks to Anne Clark and her team, especially Sarah Quinney;

We have had “Total Ministry” for some time now, helping to create a diocesan culture grounded in the Baptismal covenant. This emphasis on the ministry of all baptized has taken hold; the normal ordination

process has been adapted to create individualized formation plans, and ministry teams are understood to be helpful, but not essential.

We've evolved to a place where we will no longer be using the name "Total Ministry" as a formal designation, as if it were a *program* of the Diocese. It is not; it is *a way of life*. As Pat Harik, our Living Stones Coordinator has said, "Our way of being Church is not disappearing, just the designation we have given it. The beauty is that there may be many new ways of transformation and formation ahead." Amen.

It is still true that no ministry makes sense apart from baptism, and the point of all our ministries is Christ's mission—which is our mission, the reason we are here. That's why God made this Diocese.

It wasn't named explicitly as part of our Vision, but for me our mission of Making Disciples, Raising Up Saints, and Transforming our Communities has from Day 1 meant building up and enlarging the Diaconate. Early on, I named a personal goal of having at least one deacon in each congregation. With the help of our former Archdeacon Cookie Clark, and our current Archdeacons, Gary Brown and Pam Gossard, we now have 42 active deacons, 15 of whom I have been blessed to ordain in the last 5 years.

Their ministries are essential to our being the Church we are called to be.

And we have St. Matthew's Center, and its partnership with River City Food Bank, as an embodiment of our common Diaconal call, and an inspiring example of how a congregation in a changing neighborhood can reinvent itself in response to new mission opportunities. The 2016 Census revealed that the once-affluent suburban community where St. Matthew's is located had the largest One-year increase in poverty of any census-designated place in the entire State of CA; currently, over 21,000 people there are considered to be "food insecure." Other churches there have pulled out; we are still there. Thank you, St. Matthew's!

Overall, this Diocese has been on a good trajectory; we have been living into our vision. But progress in some areas has been slower than we hoped. We have talked about new church planting and identified the best places for it but do not yet have an action plan. We have welcomed a new mission congregation and 2 new parishes, built and consecrated new churches, but we have also had to close 4 congregations.

True, congregational vitality cannot be reduced to Average Sunday Attendance, or anything quantifiable. It is more a matter of how well we discern the God-given mission opportunities around us, and how faithfully and energetically we respond. But the numbers merit attention. We must beware of the

cognitive illusions, wishful/magical thinking, and denial that are so prevalent in church circles. Still, there simply is no technical fix or programmatic solution to the problem of declining numbers; the way forward requires that we look deeply into what it means for us to be a church entrusted with the Good News of Jesus Christ, and to be partners with him in his mission here in Northern California. And we must continue to be willing to seize opportunities, and to take risks.

We have been living into our vision. But I believe it is time for us to discern a *new* vision, and formulate new strategies. I came to that conclusion more than a year and a half ago. Instead of starting that visioning process then, I started the process for the election of my successor, so that you and our new bishop can discern, articulate, and carry out a new vision together.

Meanwhile, we press on. There is much to do. We don't get to press the "pause" button on the Holy Spirit.

We will continue to build on our strengths:

To strengthen our embrace of the Baptismal Covenant. In this time of deep national division, it is especially urgent that our congregations are places where we hold each other in baptismal regard, see Christ in each other, and do everything in our power to strengthen the bonds of communion between each and all of us.

We will continue to nurture the wonderful and wonderfully gifted people of our congregations, their commitment, faithful service, and compassionate generosity. (And speaking of generosity, we have recently learned that, In addition to all that the people of this Diocese have given to their local congregations, and to the Bishop's Annual Appeal, and to special appeals like Disaster relief and redevelopment, we in the Diocese of Northern California have in the 12 years I have been bishop given over \$1.9 million to Episcopal Relief and Development. God bless you for it!)

We will continue to build on the great strength that is our clergy: Deacons who really do instruct us in the needs, hopes, and concerns of the world, and lead us in faithful response. Priests who nourish us from the riches of God's grace, who gather us and hold us together in the transforming love of Christ.

Michael Curry preached about that love at the royal wedding and it became an international sensation. And that was a great thing. But what's more impressive to me is how that message gets preached in our

congregations faithfully, Sunday by Sunday, in all Seasons and circumstances. Fires don't stop it. Shootings don't stop it. Nothing will stop it – but don't ever take it for granted. Diocese of Northern California: love your clergy; nurture and care for them. Treat them as the great gift and strength they are for us all.

Another strength is our Office of the Bishop staff, who work faithfully, skillfully, and sacrificially, on our behalf, to support that which is necessary for effective ministry, to facilitate that which is desirable, to help us interpret opportunities and manage economies; to be the best stewards possible of the Church entrusted to us.

This is a time for us to build on our strengths.

In my first Address to you, I promised continuity and stability and openness to healthy experimentation and to change. For our compass, our gyroscope in that navigation, I promised a constant asking of the questions, “Is this the mission God has for us? Is this what Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church, would have his church in Northern California doing at this time?”

I believe we have before us the right work at the right time:

- Elect our new bishop,
- Make a healthy transition,
- Discern and articulate a new vision, and develop the necessary strategies and means of living into it.

People of the Diocese of Northern California, I charge you to do these things, and do them well, with God's help. And I ask you, Dear Friends in Christ, to:

Focus on the mission

Stay Together

And keep moving forward, in the Name of Jesus Christ