



THE BISHOP'S ADDRESS TO THE 124th DIOCESAN CONVENTION

It is an honor to address this Convention for the fourteenth and final time.

I will always remember the first one when I was still bishop-elect. I started my remarks by saying why Betsy wasn't with me. Earlier that day one of our two dogs - who was 16 years old - got very sick after months of failing health. We had to take him to the veterinarian to end his suffering. We brought our younger dog - a Westie - with us because we were told that it is actually better for a pet to see his beloved friend put down because death is natural. The remaining dog can accept it, but would be confused if we just drove off and returned home without her. So, we did it.

The problem was that Betsy would need to return our Westie to that same vet in the afternoon because that is where he would be staying while we are at Convention. Betsy felt that would be a lot for our Westie, Quinn, to handle. So, she stayed home with him and I went to Convention.

After my address, numerous people came up to greet me. No one said a word about my address or about my hopes for our diocese. Every single person came forward and said a variation of the same thing: "I'm sorry for your loss." "Betsy did the right thing staying home with your dog. That is absolutely where she should be."

I bring that up now to say that I could not have done this work without Betsy. She has always been where she needed to be. Whether that was serving her parish as their full-time rector, or taking care of our family, or being with me on the staff that led retreats nationally for new bishops and their spouses, or being there day in and day out to support me - Betsy has been beside me all the way.

Thank you, Betsy!

And, allow me to express one more family thanksgiving. Here we are on December 1, 2012 at the consecration at the Mass Mutual Center. Here we are 13 years later. We have gone from five to twelve and they are all a great blessing in my life.

And, so is my staff. Please stand when I call your name. My Executive Staff - Lainey, Vicki, Steven. My entire staff - Kim, Susan, Melanie, Kristina, Delphine, Bob, Lydia, Karen, Ali, and Chancellor Don Allison. Thank you for putting up with all my baseball references to explain every situation. Thank you for serving our congregations so faithfully during my episcopate.

So, because I can't help myself, here is one more baseball reference that applies to all of you - everyone gathered here today and so many others in our churches that I have had the blessing to serve with. At the end of his career, Mickey Mantle, my childhood baseball hero, was asked what he would like to be known for. His answer: "I just want to be known as a great teammate."

I have been abundantly blessed to be on Team Western Massachusetts. Absolutely everything that has been accomplished here has been the work of many followers of Jesus listening to the Holy Spirit and then acting faithfully. Thank you for the people you are. The Jesus Movement rolls on!

The theme of our Convention this year is, "**Your Mission, Your Gospel, Our Future.**" It came from the words of the search prayer for this election. "Guide us in this important work, that your mission may be furthered, and your Gospel proclaimed." You knew there would be a Bruce Springsteen reference sometime in this address so why not fit it in early. Springsteen has a great song called, "Working on a Dream." Here is a lyric from that song.

*"I'm working on a dream
Though it can seem so far away
I'm working on a dream
And our love will make it real someday"*

During his faith-filled ministry as Presiding Bishop, Michael Curry told us who we are: "We are the Episcopal Branch of the Jesus Movement that is out to change the world from the nightmare it is for so many, into the dream God has for us."

Let's go a little deeper here and start with the Episcopal Branch.

For many years now, just like all the other branches of the Jesus Movement, we have experienced a decline in membership. There are many societal reasons for that, and the pandemic was a real blow. But recent studies across the Episcopal Church have shown that our numbers are stabilizing or going up. That is true in Western Massachusetts for many of our congregations. I have experienced that in my visitations.

We live in troubled, difficult, divisive times. We desperately need community. Some people are finding that in our churches. Many find that this one hour a week is the game-changer in how they live these days. We pray together for mercy, compassion and hope and we receive it. Church community is a place where we know that we are here for one another, a place where we know we are part of something bigger than ourselves. It is counter-cultural - the place where we look out for one another and where we look out for our neighbors.

I know you have heard me say this many times before but it is so true. Every single one of our churches - no matter how big or small - has at least one significant outreach into the community. It might be:

- meals and community for veterans
- Marie's Mission giving out free diapers
- Laundry Love offering the dignity of clean clothes
- Big Blue Drop-In Center at our cathedral
- Outdoor Faith Communities like Cathedral of the Beloved, Church Without Walls, Tent of the Beloved
- ministry to the incarcerated

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- food pantries
- Prayer shawls for the homebound or sick
- Teaching English as a Second Language
- making space for those with mental health challenges
- outreach to immigrants, refugees and asylees
- seeking creation justice and defending the interconnected web of life on earth

The list goes on and on.

We are the Episcopal Branch of the Jesus Movement that seeks to change the world from the nightmare it is for so many to the Dream God has for us. *I'm working on a dream and our love will make it real someday.*

And we need to work on this big dream in the context of our time. Presiding Bishop Sean Rowe recently made a powerful statement. “The Episcopal Church was once the church of the Founding Fathers and presidents. 34 of the 56 signers of the Declaration of Independence were members of what became our church after the Revolution. 11 presidents including George Washington have professed our faith. Today, however, we are known less for the powerful people in our pews than for our RESISTANCE to the rising tide of authoritarianism and Christian nationalism emanating from Washington DC.”

Jesse Zink, one of our clergy, wrote a wonderful book entitled *Faithful, Creative, Hopeful: Fifteen Theses for Christians in a Crisis-Shaped World*. He suggests that our congregations can be particularly effective in this time. It is our task, he writes, “to cultivate communities in Christ that share an ethos and a set of practices that form people to live in hope, resist the powers of this world, and be a foretaste of the kingdom Jesus proclaimed and enacted.” I think he is telling us to be faithful, to really follow Jesus and share the rich spiritual inheritance of the Gospel of love.

Bishop Michael Curry said often that the best way to evangelize is to go deeper in our own faith. I have been so inspired by the number of congregations in our diocese who hold regular Bible study. Deepening our relationship with the Word of God is an essential part of our discipleship. I want to recognize our clergy and lay leaders who make ongoing formation a priority in our congregations with study, *lectio divina* and weekly preparation for the Sunday lessons. In times like these, we depend on the living Word to guide us. It is a *light to our path*, and *sharper than a two-edged sword*.

Thirteen years ago, you asked me to take the vows of a bishop. One of those vows that really stood out for me was this one.

Will you be merciful to all, show compassion to the poor and strangers, and defend those who have no helper?

And, I said, ***“I will, for the sake of Christ Jesus.”***

Then I joined you in doing that in all the many ministries that I mentioned before. Love is a form of resistance to the rising tide of authoritarianism. Love welcomes and bears witness when government is deporting our neighbors. Love feeds bodies and souls as government cuts funding for the poor and the sick and for our veterans. God’s faithful love does not abandon us in these distressing days. Our certainty that God is with us, and will move

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us from the nightmare to the dream, enables us to hope. The words from one of my favorite hymns reminds us that “the world is about to turn.”

*From the halls of power to the fortress tower
Not a stone will be left on stone
Let the king beware for your
Justice tears ev'ry tyrant from his throne
The hungry poor shall weep no more
For the food they can never earn
There are tables spread, ev'ry
Mouth be fed
For the world is about to turn*

Another vow you asked me to take:

“Will you boldly proclaim and interpret the Gospel of Jesus Christ, enlightening the minds, and stirring up the conscience of your people?”

I said, **“I will in the power of the Spirit.”**

Again, we do this as a team. There are four areas in particular where we have really worked together for change.

One is the rights of LGBTQ+ people and their rightful place among us as church. With the Commission on Ministry, I have supported the ordination of many deacons and priests who identify as LGBTQ+. But more importantly, we have embraced the gifts of this community and nurtured a culture of welcome that blesses all our congregations.

Another is addressing the gun violence in our communities. Two weeks after I was ordained your bishop, the unthinkable happened in the mass killing of students and teachers at Sandy Hook Elementary School in nearby Connecticut. Despite our best efforts, gun violence in our country is growing, but we must not give up. Our diocese is known as a leader in addressing this national health crisis. We need to continue to work on this multidimensional problem more than ever.

This diocese is recognized as a leader in caring for creation and addressing climate change. Inspired early on by the Rev. Dr. Margaret Bullitt-Jonas, so many of our members are actively engaged in the local, state, national and worldwide levels. Now, with the faithful leadership of the Rev. Rachel Field, many of our congregations have embraced An Episcopal Path to Creation Justice. The Path costs nothing and gives a congregation everything it needs to deepen their relationship with God in creation. Talk about Your Mission, Your Gospel, Our Future!

Here is just one more among many things we have been passionate about together. There is a movement throughout the Episcopal Church to address racial justice. That means coming to terms with our past and addressing our future. Many dioceses have started this work and have done it in different ways. Here, we have held over 100 Sacred Ground Circles. How this has raised our consciousness of the sin of slavery, the dispossession of Native land. Becoming Beloved Community in this way required study, truth telling, discussion and prayer. Sacred Ground is not over. New Circles will form in 2026 with the revised curriculum. It has

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transformed hearts and minds and has led us to learn our own true story as a diocese. We resolved to engage a historian to walk us through our archives and learn how our founding finances were directly linked to the slave economy in the North. Our decision to tell that important truth has led to the next step in our journey toward racial atonement, which you will be voting on later today. It will be read later for your prayerful consideration. As part of your team, I urge you to vote “yes.” I urge you to show that our conscience has been stirred up and we are moving forward. We are working on God’s dream for us. Even though it seems far away, *our love will make it real someday.*

We do not do the work of justice in isolation. All the other branches of the Jesus Movement are our partners in mission. I have made deepening those relationships a priority in my episcopate. Luther-palian is not just a catch phrase. It reflects our deep commitment to common mission in this diocese.

Ecumenical and interfaith partnerships are critical in moving from the nightmare to the dream. I have walked beside the imam and studied the Bible with the Rabbi-in-Residence at our cathedral. These intentional relationships are happening on the ground between your clergy and local faith leaders. Jesus longed for his followers to be one. God’s dream for us is even bigger. I pray that ecumenical and interfaith work will continue and deepen in the years ahead.

Before we end this address in prayer, just one more thought from your teammate. After the election in 2012, so many people came up to me and said, “I voted for you.” No one said, “I didn’t vote for you.” But I know I was not elected unanimously! But whomever you voted for, you all supported me. It was, and is, a great gift.

Tomorrow, you have a choice of three outstanding candidates. No matter whom you vote for, I invite you to offer your support to whoever is chosen the way you so graciously did for me. Come, Holy Spirit.

This blessing is from *A Black Rock Prayer Book*:

The world now is too dangerous and too beautiful for anything but love.
May your eyes be so blessed you see God in everyone.
Your ears are so blessed, you hear the cry of the poor.
May your lips be so blessed, you speak nothing but the truth with love.
May your feet be so blessed you run to those who need you.
And may your heart be so opened, so set on fire,
that *your* love changes everything.

And may the blessing of God who created you, loves you and sustains you,
be with you now and always.

Amen.