

SPECIAL ORDER: BISHOP'S ADDRESS  
The 139<sup>th</sup> Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Central Pennsylvania  
The Right Reverend Nathan D. Baxter

## **1. Introduction**

As I have traveled this diocese, read your newsletters I have rejoiced at some of the bold and creative expressions of public worship, outreach and mission and fellowship; reflected in the smallest to the largest congregations: We have marvelous liturgies, like. Palm Sunday Parades led by donkeys, and contemporary stations of the cross liturgies designed and lead by teens; we have Mission Trips to places like Uganda, Sao Paulo, Namibia, and our continuing commitment to the Gulf Coast. We have Urban Ministries: the St. Barnabas Mission (a coalition of Episcopal/Lutheran parishes) - serving inner-city children in Harrisburg; and the Anchorage Breakfast ministry in Lancaster serving over 150 souls and bodies every day.

We also have Ministries in smaller, economically challenged communities: such as clothing and food banks, and hot dinner meals in communities such as Columbia, Mt. Carmel and Selinsgrove, Sunbury; and we have Educational Programs: 154 students representing the rainbow at the St. Stephen's Episcopal School at the Cathedral celebrating 30 years; and the new quickly growing preschool at St. John's Carlisle.

And in many regions, there are parish ministries of prayer cloths, shawls and quilts for the sick; and woolen prayer squares for our troops at war, recently acknowledged by the Bishop of the Armed Forces. This is just to name a few of the parochial missions around our diocese.

Of course, with your generous support, our major diocesan mission of 80 years is our Diocesan Episcopal Home at Shippensburg, an assisted living community for Senior Citizens. Under the leadership of Canon Mary Grace Shearer, MSW it is recognized as one of the best of its kind in the State.

Special Guests who have visited us this year have included teachers, preachers and administrative experts in parish finances, insurance, stewardship and evangelism.

- Hal Ehart, Risk Management Expert, and Deb Kelly, Senior Auditor with a leading audit firm: Treasurers and Parish Administrators Workshop
- Episcopal Church Foundation President Donald Romanik and members of his staff: Leadership Conference for Clergy and Lay Leaders on Campaigns and Stewardship and Evangelism with Generation X.
- Linda Puckett from Church Pension Group and Paul Callio from the Church Medical Insurance Group: Wardens and Vestry Conference
- Bishop Sean Rowe of Diocese of Northwest Pa, the youngest and one of the most articulate bishops on future trends, and Mrs. Carly Rowe (Christian Educator): He preached at the Renewal of Ordination Vows liturgy; and at the clergy & spouse lunch, Bishop and Mrs. Rowe lead a discussion on "Christian Formation and the Emerging Church."

- Canon John Peterson, former Secretary General of the Anglican Consultative Council: With 7 priest of the diocese was installed an honorary canon of St. Stephen's Cathedral in Harrisburg.
- The Rev. Mpho Tutu: Episcopal Church Women Annual Meeting keynote speaker.
- Bishop George Packard, Suffragan for Federal Ministries: Diocesan Memorial Day Observance at Trinity Church, Williamsport.
- Today, our Chaplain, The Rev. Dr. James Simons, President of the Standing Committee of the continuing Diocese of Pittsburgh.
- In September we look forward to the three day visit of our Presiding Bishop, who will visit several regions of our diocese. Her husband, Dr. Richard Schori, has accepted Mary Ellen's invitation to lead a special breakfast discussion and fellowship with our clergy spouses during the visit.

## **2. Traveling the Diocese**

What Mary Ellen and I enjoy most is being with you, in your parishes and local communities. I want to thank you, Mary Ellen, for being my partner in this ministry. We celebrated 40 years of marriage this year. Yes, we were mere children.... But we have also shared more than 30 years of ministry together and it has been a true partnership.

My time as a bishop is of necessity divided between being a bishop of the diocese and a bishop of the Church. Counting weekends and weekdays, I have driven approximately 22,000 miles, around the diocese (including 6,500 since mid-February) for visitations, parish and convocational and other meetings. It is also my last year in the mandatory three year program for New Bishops (better know as the "Baby Bishops' College), which has been about 7-8 days a year, including travel.

Of course, the House of Bishops' holds two week-long meetings a year. This is to say nothing about Lambeth Conference following last year's Diocesan Convention and General Convention following this year's Diocesan Convention.

At the request of the Presiding Bishop, I chair two committees for the Episcopal Church: a Bi-lateral Committee for establishing a new partnership with the Episcopal/Anglican Church of Brazil and our Episcopal Church, which meets every 18 months; and the Special Committee to elect a new Bishop Suffragan for Federal Ministries (Armed Forces, federal hospitals, federal prisons and Eucharistic communities attached to military posts).

## **3. Thoughts About Our Diocesan Life and Mission and Context**

Having shared a review of the year, I want to turn to the most important reason why we exist as a diocese and the work before us. We exist to be a witness in and to the world of the transforming redemptive love of God in Jesus Christ. That is the only reason the Church exists in any age. Everything else could be done by some secular or government agency, charitable organization or ethical society. We do not even exist to keep our buildings and religious traditions alive. Christians are called, in every kind of circumstance—free or repressive societies, good or bad economies, as minority or majority presence--in every place, to make known the transforming redemptive love of God in Jesus Christ. Je-

Jesus told us to: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey every thing that I have commanded you. And remember I am with you always, to the end of the age.” [Matthew 28:19 & 20].

But how do we do this in our time? Each age must understand its world (politics, culture, and generational perspectives) and discern how to proclaim the Gospel in its realities. Today we must be clear about our mission, clear about the realities of the world around us which is changing faster than American or the global society has ever before.

Let’s take a moment and look at our times, just through the lens of technology. [U-Tube Video “Did You Know”]

This is a critical window through which we come to understand the world which is fast changing. A world which may seem too many of us as “leaving us behind”. Indeed many are saying that the church is being left behind. I often tell people I feel like a type-writer guy in a computer world.

Phyllis Tickle, in her new book, “The Great Emergence,” suggests there has not been such a period of rapid change since the invention of Gutenberg’s moveable type press. Every 500 years there seems to be a major invention with cultural circumstance to which the church must respond. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century Gutenberg’s technology came amidst a time of commercial, intellectual and cultural renaissance, out of which came the Protestant Reformation on the Continent of Europe and also one in the British Isle.

Tickle got me to thinking. We often think of the larger issues of theological, scriptural and ecclesiastical authority, symbolized in Luther’s 95 theses nailed on the door of Wittenberg Cathedral [Mary Ellen and I have visited Wittenberg and the Cathedral and it does not seem such a consequential setting]. But it still stands a symbol of a much larger Emerging Church...from new major denominations, to small piety movements which endure even today. On the Protestant side there was empowerment of laity, new methods of biblical and ecclesiastical interpretation and their authority. And, because of technology, there was an explosion of books and tracts spreading ideas and fueling debates in pubs and dinner tables and not just in universities, seminaries and bishops councils.

But there were more “on-the-ground” cultural implications for theological matters. Of particular interest, just imagine with me one are of resulting practical social trauma: married priests and nuns. Celibacy had come to be seen as not just a sign of personal holiness, moral stature and ecclesiastical order, but even more, persons in the clergy and religious orders were almost seen as “asexual” beings. Picture this:

- The heretofore beloved English parish priest is now walking down the street hand in hand with the village widow!! How does one swallow such public display? The protestant bishops---Church of England---say choice for clergy to marry and be sexual, is not counter to God’s plan or biblical teachings.

- Or a former German abbess is seen great with child, now the wife of the village merchant. Luther says it is not a sin; in fact he has married a fiery nun named Katie.
- A bishop who had lived in quiet scandal (everyone winked at the woman in his house as being his housekeeper) now claims their union has been blessed by a priest turned Calvinist pastor from Geneva.

Yes, on the ground it was a mess of an adjustment for some, as it was liberating for others. We so easily forget that other changes in history were as traumatic to everyday faithful as for us today.

Tickle says the issue is that in every age (approximately every 500 years) technology forces a broader conversation and awareness that a new world is emerging and that the church must emerge or die. And the questions for the Church, at the heart of that change, are:

- “What is emergence?”
- “How did it come into being?”
- “Where is it going?”
- In addition she understands that spirituality, at such times, is individual and internal, not institutional (or religious or corporeal); and the corporeal reality---the outward behavior is morality. The church then must examine and, when necessary, unload traditional baggage, adapt to the technology, and reexamine “authority”. For in each age, the biggest question for the church is “authority”.

#### **4. More Thoughts About Our Own Context (Perspective of our Youth):**

In our own time we are influenced by computer and nano-technology, by advances in pure sciences such as genetics and DNA; by anthropological, psychological and sociological advances and political/moral notions of individual freedoms.

As I ponder these matters, I asked two questions:

- First, I had to ask how does the world we seek to reach see us, especially in this time of modern renaissance and reformation?
- Second, if the heart of the Gospel and the need of the human heart have not changed, then how do we reach them with Good News we have been given from the beginning?

A young priest from the diocese of Southern Ohio, who works with congregational development called to my attention the book: *Un-Christian: What the Next Generation Really Thinks About Christianity... And Why it Matters*. The authors are two widely-respected evangelical researchers, David Kinnaman president of The Barna Group and Gabe Lyons of Fermi Project and Q. They did extensive research of 18-29 year olds on how they saw Christianity (both the church institution and church people):

- inauthentic (only wanting to “win converts” like putting a notch on one’s tally sheet);

- anti-homosexual
- sheltered---not really interested in the problems of the world
- Too political: We use power to manipulate others for what we want or believe.
- In Sensitive to one another.
- Talk out or both sides of their mouths: Speak of love but act with hate.
- judgmental (the last two can be seen in our language: “Pro-life” or “Pro-choice”; “liberal or conservative; the bible says it, I believe it, that settles it”);
- There is no room for those who do not agree with a given perspective (all or nothing)

Kinnaman and Lyons wrote:

“We consistently find that the vast majority of teenagers nationwide will spend a significant amount of their teen years participating in a Christian congregation....they enter adulthood considering themselves to be Christians.... But within a decade most of these young people will have left the church and will have placed emotional connections to Christianity on the shelf. This leads to the sobering finding that the vast majority of outsiders in this country, particularly among young generations, are actually de-churched individuals.” Un-Christian page 74.

I found the following quotes by the youth of your time most poignant and worthy of our attention:

“Christians like to hear themselves talk. They are arrogant about their beliefs, but they never bother figuring out what other people actually think. They don’t seem to be very compassionate, especially when the feel strongly about something”  
 [87% of young outsiders and 53% of young churchgoers believe that the label “judgmental” fits present-day Christianity]

## **5. Thoughts About Issues in the Episcopal Church and our Diocese:**

The resolutions before us, and those before General Convention, especially on human sexuality; are they about judgment, or discernment? Will they be determined by the Angry Certain or the Fearful Uncertain? Or will they be discussed, “speaking the truth, as we can best discern it, with love.” I wonder if, while we are working to get our way, are we aware - do we even care - what the world thinks of us? What our children are telling us is that more than our issue; it is the spirit with which we engage our issues and others which form their opinions of us.

Jesus taught his disciples about this in John 13: 34, 35. He talks about the commandment of love or “Agape”. Agape means “Godly Respect”. He was trying to tell us what our Children are trying to tell us: We’ll be recognized as Christians not by the issues we win, but the spirit of Christ we evidence in our contending and discerning and deciding.

Listen to Jesus teaching using the Greek “Agape” rather than our vague English word “love”. “I give you a new commandment (a new guiding principal), that you Agape one another. Just as I have had a Godly respect for you, you should also have a Godly respect one another. By this shall the world know you are my disciples, because you have ‘Godly respect’ for one another”. [John 13: 34, 35]

Or as the Baptismal Covenant asks, “Will you seek and serve Christ in others, loving your neighbor as yourself”.

## **6. Thoughts About Our Own Diocesan Resolutions:**

What are we saying to Central Pennsylvania about our convictions...but also about our spirit as a community? Do we care? The resolutions we are about to consider include the following:

- a. Congregations at the Crossroads
- b. Anti-Racism (which we have dropped)
- c. Ecumenical Relations
- d. Episcopal Relief & Development
- e. Blessing of Same-Sex Unions
- f. Full Inclusion

I have my own concerns, including that we have dropped Anti-racism. The Anti-Racism Commission felt that we as a diocese had no concern for combating racism. With a Black President and a Black Diocesan Bishop, it seems to many we are in a post-racist era. Among their concerns is that there have only been single digit registration for anti-racism workshops. This matter troubles me and I hope it troubles you also.

Furthermore, among our resolutions there are none about poverty, unemployment, health care; HIV/AIDS; public education; nor about world missions, social justice or evangelism. I have very recently appointed Mr. James Taylor as HIV/AIDS Commission Chair. I have also asked Fr. Tom Reeder & Fr. David Peck to co-chair the World Missions Commission. Their mission is to build with me a commission to lift up, and encourage the many quiet international ministries in our parishes beyond our diocesan companion work with San Paulo, Brazil. I am also looking for leadership partners to build a commission in the work of Evangelism. I am still praying for persons who will have a heart for Evangelism and Adult Christian Education.

I wish to strongly stress that we are not the only witness of God’s love in Christ, but we have a particular tradition, an expression of witness which contributes to the fullness of God mission to reach all people. Some will be reached by other mainliners, some by Free Church or independents, and others by Orthodox or Catholics. God needs us to contribute our Anglican gift.

## **7. Discerning Strategic Priorities for our Future:**

But over the last three years, I have tried to listen to you regarding the most pressing issues to build a stronger diocese, to be a body fitly joined together... to be a witness of the Spirit of Christ in Central Pennsylvania. My visitations always include time with

vestries, as well as informal conversations with congregants. I have attended convocation meetings, discussions with commissions and committees. Later today I want to test these priorities with you and ask you to begin helping me discern our way forward. Here is the Overarching Vision, which I believe is our unique identity and calling as the Episcopal Diocese of Central Pennsylvania.

Our Episcopal Diocese is the Anglican expression of God's love  
In Central Pennsylvania Through Christian community, service, witness and worship.

Here are the four priorities which I believe you have identified, and which we will discuss in our table dialog later today:

I Vision: Every congregation in the Diocese will be a place of spiritual nourishment, learning, hope, mission and peace.

Goal: To encourage every congregation towards continual discernment of their call to serve and witness, locally and beyond; and to have a clear, current statement of their mission purpose.

II Vision: There will be an abundance of leaders – both ordained and lay – working collaboratively to lead congregations in pastoral care, teaching, outreach, administration and worship.

Goal: To develop new models for educating, forming and supporting lay and ordained leaders.

III Vision: The Diocese will be blessed with children and youth who are currently engaged in spiritual formation, service, worship and other areas of parish and diocesan life; and are also being enthusiastically prepared, both spiritually and experientially, as Church leaders for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Goal: To focus on strengthening ministries and programs of inclusion and formation for all children and youth in congregations and in the Diocese

IV Vision: Every individual, congregation, commission/committee, convocation, and group within the Diocese will feel listened to and informed on a regular basis.

Goal: To assure all communications are clear, connecting, informing, and enabling between our diocesan agencies and staff and our congregations; and between congregations and convocations; and between our churches and the public. And further assure that our resources for communications are technologically appropriate and available to all congregations in the diocese.

These seem to be the most essential priorities in our heart, and I believe they are essential if we are to be truly effective in our common witness.

Finally, I wish to thank you for allowing me to serve with you and serve on your behalf. We have much to do in our ministry together, as parishes, as a diocese and as the Episcopal Church. Our future is both joyous and controversial, rewarding and challenging; but I rejoice to enter this future with you and the Episcopal Church.

FOR THIS IS THE CHURCH I LOVE.

- THIS IS THE CHURCH WHICH INFURIATES ME.
- THIS IS THE CHURCH WHICH REJOICES ME.
- THIS IS THE CHURCH WITH WHICH I AGREE
- AND THIS IS THE CHURCH WITH WHICH I DISAGREE.
- THIS IS A CHURCH WHICH INCLUDES DIOCESE IN 14 DIFFERENT NATIONS ABROAD; AND NUMEROUS CULTURES HERE AT HOME.

YES, THIS IS MY EPISCOPAL CHURCH; THE CHURCH I LOVE.

- MY CHURCH STRUGGLES AWKWARDLY TO BE “AGAPE”---A CHURCH OF GODLY RESPECT FOR THE ONE WHO DIFFERS.
- MY CHURCH STRUGGLES TO BE JUST AND PROPHETIC;
- MY CHURCH LIVES IN THE TENSION OF BEING BIBLICAL BUT NOT LITERAL; TRADITIONAL BUT CONTINUALLY DISCERNING THE EVER EXPANDING VISION OF GOD’S KINGDOM;
- MY EPISCOPAL CHURCH IS THEOLOGICALLY, CULTURALLY AND LITURGICALLY DIVERSE.
- MY CHURCH IS.....BUT IS ALSO BECOMING.

THIS IS THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH. THIS IS THE CHURCH I LOVE.

AND I AM BLESSED TO BE A PART OF IT...ESPECIALLY AS IT LIVES IN YOU, MY BELOVED EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF CENTRAL PENNSYLVANIA.