

# **BISHOP'S ADDRESS TO THE 16<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL CONVENTION**

**The Episcopal Diocese of Eastern Michigan + West Branch, MI + October 9, 2010**

## **Introduction and Thanks**

A Bishop's Address to Diocesan Convention is typically an equal-parts mixture of ministry retrospective and challenge for the future. I don't intend to disappoint those who are looking for the typical rhetoric; however, this year's address will have a bit more of the tone of a heart-to-heart talk, for we face significant challenges that threaten to overwhelm us if we aren't all working together toward the vision through the mission which God has placed before us:

### *Our Vision . . .*

The Diocese of Eastern Michigan is a baptismal community fostering deeper generosity, hospitality, meaning and formation among the people and congregations who are the diocese.

### *Our Mission . . .*

Empowered for ministry through our baptism, the Diocese of Eastern Michigan is called to love God and neighbor through our relationship with God in Christ and through covenantal relationships characterized by collaboration, mutual accountability, and capacity building. We live this mission by *praying, learning, serving* and *growing*.

. . . and we must live this mission as a community, not simply as individuals without partners. Partnering with the Diocesan Staff to make possible this first session of the 16<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention of the Diocese are the Rev. Phil Seitz and the People of Trinity West Branch. Thank you for your assistance with local arrangements and your gracious hospitality.

No bishop ever ministers alone but rather must share episcopacy with many dedicated staff and volunteers. Without the faithful and tireless efforts of the Diocesan Center Staff, I would be lost in a sea of correspondence, e-mails, phone calls, administrative decisions and pastoral care for the members of this diocese. My heartfelt thanks goes to Molly Girard, Administrator; Katharine Rose, Financial Manager; Barb Meikle, Administrative Assistant to the Bishop; Elsa Presentin, Assistant to the Bishop for Ministry Development; and to Bev and Charlie Reagan, Volunteer Receptionists. I am also supported by others beyond the three full-time equivalent staff in the Diocesan Center; serving in field ministry capacities on a part-time basis are Marty Field, Rob Skirving, David Vickers, Anna Leigh Kubbe, Tracie Loffhagen, Sue Rich, Ray Orth, Brian Chace and Sherry Young. Collectively, their paid support for mission and ministry throughout the diocese is less than one full-time equivalent but their time given far exceeds any pay received. Furthermore, diocesan and local ministry is supported and encouraged by the Presidents of our four Convocations: Ginny McNabb, Dean Bedford, Charles Leibrand and Naomi Deo. Many thanks to you all; I can't imagine exercising the responsibilities of this office without you.

Completing the support given to the exercise of episcopacy in this diocese are the members of my family: my wife, Ann, and our three sons, Ian, Dae and Josh. Their love, encouragement, patience, wisdom, and challenges are what keep me grounded in the reality that long before I became your bishop I was called to live my baptismal promises as husband and father. I love you all.

## Cause to Celebrate

In only her second address to the United Nations, Queen Elizabeth II, speaking some 57 years after her first appearance before the General Assembly, said this past July:

*I know of no single formula for success, but over the years I have observed that some attributes of leadership are universal, and are often about finding ways of encouraging people to combine their efforts, their talents, their insights, their enthusiasm, and their inspiration, to work together.*

--- Queen Elizabeth II, in her message to the United Nations, 2010

Wise words from a woman who at age 84 and after almost 59 years on the throne, is among currently reigning monarchs the third-longest serving.

*Success . . . [is] often about finding ways of encouraging people to combine their efforts, their talents, their insights, their enthusiasm, and their inspiration, to work together.*

Perhaps no other aspect of our collaborative diocesan life illustrates this royal dictum better than the phenomenal success of the Coppage-Gordon School for Ministry. In my address to the 14<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention of the Diocese in 2008, I called upon that Convention:

*. . . to embrace the concept of a comprehensive and creative ministry of leadership formation, known as The Coppage-Gordon School for Ministry --- a school for individual and group Christian formation, vestry and congregational leadership formation, a local school for equipping ordained leadership, and a catalyst for our becoming a learning community of faith.*

Will the students and faculty of the Coppage-Gordon School for Ministry, who are present, please stand?

Scattered around the room are individuals who have given freely of themselves to be part of the initial experiment in exploring the frontiers of **theological education for all the baptized**, not just those who would be ordained. Let me repeat: **theological education for all the baptized**, not just those who would be ordained. The Coppage-Gordon School began with 16 students in the first year of operation focused on basics of spirituality, theology, scripture, history, and liturgy, and continues this year with 11 from that first year being served by 10 faculty members with well over 150 years of combined teaching experience. Today, expanding beyond the three-year intense curriculum in theological education, the Coppage-Gordon School is sponsoring preaching workshops and a licensing program for Preachers, a licensed ministry open to laity. Further expansion includes sponsoring regional workshops for training of Eucharistic Ministers and Eucharistic Visitors as well as management of examinations for those seeking licensure as Worship Leaders. Future projects include development of programs in diversity training, evangelism, Christian Formation and collaboration with Seabury-Western Theological Seminary. Remember, the Coppage-Gordon School for Ministry is about equipping all the baptized for ministry, not just those who would be ordained!

Continuing the theme of working together for success, we must also celebrate the ministry of the Global Mission Task Force in fostering a growing relationship between the Diocese of Eastern Michigan and the Cheyenne River Episcopal Mission in Eagle Butte, Diocese of South Dakota. A second mission trip comprised of a team of individuals from this diocese were in Eagle Butte this past

summer, continuing work on the reclamation and restoration of a building for housing seminarians and clergy who will serve the Cheyenne River Mission and working with local residents on a vacation bible school. Plans continue for multiple trips of adults and youth in future years.

Another aspect of the work of the Global Mission Task Force is continued exploration of our quad-diocesan companion relationship between the Dioceses of the Dominican Republic, Western Michigan, Michigan and Eastern Michigan. The Diocese of Eastern Michigan is now a member of the Dominican Development Group, a U.S.-based organization charged with collaborating with officials from the Diocese of the Dominican Republic on people, ministry and financial development. I have named the Rev. Sherry Young, Deacon, to be our representative to the Dominican Development Group and have asked her to coordinate efforts to build our companion relationship. Sherry will attend her first Development Group Board meeting this next week; I know that upon returning she would love to visit your congregation and share ways you can become involved in this vital mission and ministry partnership.

### **Mission and Ministry Not Always About Success**

Faithful mission and ministry do not always lead to success. With the decision to close made this past spring by the congregation of Calvary Saginaw, congregational and diocesan leaders were forced to consider the meaning behind an event that looks a lot like failure in the world's terms. While the closure of a congregation is never a happy event, the gradual embrace of the Christian understanding that resurrection only occurs through the pain of death, has led the good folks of Calvary to find new life and new purpose as active members of St. John's Saginaw. Meanwhile, diocesan leadership continues to note the missional and financial vulnerability of the overwhelming majority of our congregations. With 49 remaining congregations, we can expect that within five years no more than 10 will be able to sustain full-time seminary trained leadership --- down from 15 today. A superficial analysis could lead one to believe that if we worked harder and gave more generously from our own financial abundance, then we could avoid the impending challenges we are beginning to face even now. But in the face of a declining and aging population and significant loss of real income and potential employment, the reality is that simply working harder and digging more deeply into our pockets is not enough. Like those early days when the contours of this diocese were being creatively shaped by those with a vision of a new kind of church, we must once again be imaginative in our response to our circumstances. The late Mother Teresa of Calcutta was famous for saying:

*I do not pray for success. I ask for faithfulness.*

--- Mother Teresa of Calcutta

Our prayer must be for faithfulness, not success, in our response to God's call upon our lives --- and in our faithfulness, surely God will bless our efforts and call them good. As I travel around this diocese and The Episcopal Church, I am overwhelmed by the continuing faithfulness you display in your willingness to sacrifice on behalf of the gospel of Christ and to persevere even in the face of a stagnant economy and rampant unemployment. Your response fills me with hope that even in the midst of overwhelming odds, we can and will continue to be a diocese marked by faithful witness and an ever-deepening embrace of the ministry of all the baptized. But, to do so we must take a long, hard look at ourselves and prepare together to make some challenging adaptations to our common life that will better serve God's mission in the days and years to come.

## Diocesan Review Task Force

I have mentioned in the past my colleague in the House of Bishops, Sean Rowe, Bishop of Northwest Pennsylvania. At age 35, he continues to be the youngest bishop in the Anglican Communion and one who is always challenging the institution in its complacency. His oft-repeated question, "How's that working for you?" continues to challenge us when we find ourselves living into the very definition of insanity: **doing the same things and expecting different results.** With his words echoing in my mind, at the 2008 Convention, I said:

*When this diocese was formed, the overarching vision was one of collaborative leadership between laity and the ordained, as well as decision-making and empowerment at the most appropriate level in the diocese. Our fourteen years of experience as a diocese have shown us that while we continue to embrace the overarching vision, our diocesan structures impede our ability to realize the dream. Some structures --- constitutional, canonical, and programmatic --- no longer serve the mission and thus the dream, but rather function to inhibit possibility and prevent us from realizing our vision. With profound respect for the continuing vision of a new kind of diocese and church and the unanimous support of your Standing Committee, I call[ed] for:*

*a comprehensive Constitutional, Canonical, Structural and Programmatic Review of the Diocese of Eastern Michigan to be conducted by a Review Task Force appointed jointly by the Bishop and Standing Committee of the Diocese of Eastern Michigan . . .*

--- from *The Bishop's Address to Convention (2008)* by the Rt. Rev. Todd Ousley

Two years later, the Diocesan Review Task Force is prepared to make a Report to this Convention and to offer recommendations for our collaborative consideration. Their comprehensive report will offer concrete suggestions for enhancements to our common life, particularly in the areas of mission, ministry networks, and structure. With support from this Convention, the process of grassroots engagement will continue and be deepened through the active participation of all who desire to be part of the ongoing conversation regarding our future together. No final decisions will be made today but rather we will have an opportunity to express opinions and to ask questions as part of the continued move toward structural and programmatic adaptation for a more faithful future. I appreciate the work of the Task Force and hope that we will receive their report with grace and an openness of heart and mind.

God is doing wondrous things in our midst and as I said to you in our Convention last year, God . . .

*. . . is continuing to call us into partnership for great things. We are being called to shed institutional structures that inhibit our growth and fuel our decline; we are being called to travel more lightly and to risk more imaginatively for the kingdom of God; we are being called to stop hoarding our private treasure and to share the abundance so graciously given to us by God; we are being called to focus our energies on life not death; we are being called to work together, to set aside selfish agendas and allow the power of God to work through us to do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine.*

--- from *The Bishop's Address to Convention (2009)* by the Rt. Rev. Todd Ousley

## **A Final Note and an Appeal**

In the midst of the challenges we face together as a diocese, we must also acknowledge that our challenges pale in comparison to the continuing challenges faced by the largest diocese of The Episcopal Church, the Diocese of Haiti. Following a devastating earthquake in January of this year, the diocese continues to serve hundreds of thousands in tent cities and its bishop, priests, deacons, and laypersons continue not only to rebuild their church but their country as well. In response to the overwhelming need faced by The Episcopal Church's presence in the poorest country in our hemisphere, the Executive Council and the House of Bishops have committed to a \$10 million appeal for the rebuilding of The Episcopal Church in Haiti. With approximately 100 dioceses reasonably able to assist, that works out to \$100,000 per diocese. I hereby challenge this diocese to raise a minimum of \$100,000 by December 31<sup>st</sup> of this year for transmittal to the Fund to Rebuild the Church in Haiti. With approximately 3,000 persons in Average Sunday Attendance, that works out to be \$33.33 per person in the pews on any given Sunday or a challenge to each congregation to raise at least \$33.33 per person in Average Sunday attendance in 2009. As a way to begin this campaign, Ann and I are making a donation today equal to \$33.33 for each of the five members of our family. If each of you simply write a check for yourself, we will raise \$8,000 today alone. Furthermore, in honor of the leadership she has given to our Church and in thanksgiving for her visit to our diocese, all proceeds from this appeal will be given in thanksgiving for the ministry of The Most Rev. Katharine Jefferts Schori, 26<sup>th</sup> Presiding Bishop of The Episcopal Church.

*Glory to God whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine: Glory to God from generation to generation in the Church, and in Christ Jesus for ever and ever. Amen.*

**The Right Reverend Steven Todd Ousley  
Bishop  
The Episcopal Diocese of Eastern Michigan  
The 16<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention of the Diocese, Session One  
October 9, 2010  
West Branch, Michigan**