

Bishop's Address, Diocesan Convention, November 2006

Something I have always appreciated in others because I don't do it well myself is the finding that grace which makes time to give thanks. For, to say thank you properly does require time, as do all actions of hospitality. It is easier to keep on moving forward, being busy and assuming we all know that we are appreciated. After all we are only doing that which is our duty to do.

And so, I suggest that we are doing ourselves a great favor in taking up this 154th Convention to give thanks and to celebrate the unfolding of women's ordained ministry over these past 30 years in The Episcopal Church and especially in Iowa. That we have pioneers in those first brave women in Kathryn, Barbara and Susanne is cause for additional gratitude and joy. That we have had pioneers among our bishops and male clergy who encouraged and helped open up the way is equally a matter of applause. That we stand today with a clergy which ranks among one of the most gender equitable in the Christian world, let alone The Episcopal Church, is an issue of pride and praise to our Living God. That we do this in concert with our Church's investiture of the first woman Presiding Bishop is more than coincidental.

That many, however, in the Church world-wide today are strangely unclear about how to read Galatians 3: 28: "In Christ there is neither male nor female" is evidence that we need to remind ourselves of God's New Creation in Christ. That the place of women in society remains an international and political struggle, especially mirrored in the confrontation of the cultures of our Abrahamic faiths, and still needs to be counted as a vital part of the eight point UN Millennium goals only underscores that the essential nature of what we do today. Thank you to everyone who took the lead in making this happen, especially Barbara Schlachter, Lynn Carver, Cathy Bascom and Liane Nichols.

As I said in the written invitation to Convention, I take no credit for any of this. It is only proper that I share this address with Bishops Righter and Epting, who paved the way for all of us, and I thank them for their willingness to participate. Our prayers especially go out to Bishop Righter who would have been here if his health had permitted. Also, through Chris, we extend our thanks for Susanne who helped open the way for deacons in this diocese, an order that has touched the imagination of so many women and men. And it is not only the ordained we celebrate but also all our baptized mothers and sisters in faith, recognizing that probably for the majority of us men and women, God initiated faith within us through the steadfast prayers and teaching of a woman.

As I say to take time to enjoy all of this is only proper, but there is also reason why we pray in Evening Prayer for God to "shield the joyous". Joyful celebration can turn into boasting and an exclusion of a different kind, and so even as we give thanks we are sensitive that not all of our members even in Iowa share the joy. We acknowledge their generosity of spirit in this time to rejoice with those who rejoice. It is a practice we continue to need throughout our Communion.

One of my favorite parishioners in Eagle Rock was the church historian, Sybil. She was a 1928 prayer book devotee, and refused to come to church after I arrived. I went to her and invited myself over, 1928 Prayer Book in hand. Throughout her prolonged infirmity, we celebrated Eucharist together from 1928 rite, and she honored me by dying in my presence after one such celebration. Her son was senior warden of a parish with a female priest, and of course, he wanted his priest to celebrate at the funeral along with me. As we pondered the rightness of what might have been her wishes and that of her son of whom she was rightfully proud as a leader in his congregation, I came to the conclusion that wherever she was right now, she was now fully informed, and if we had gone off the rails, she was in that state of grace to understand.

I am proud of the way Iowans have sought to live together even in disagreements. This time last year we promised to set up a conversation towards reconciliation among members of differing positions around issues raised in the Windsor report. Mel Schlachter convened such a group, which continues to this day. They are not ready to report back to us at this Convention, but be assured of their ongoing ministry on our behalf. At the recent Clergy Conference I was particularly pleased to see our clergy of differing persuasions come together and enjoy one another. I cannot underscore too much how a healthy leadership produces healthy congregations. If we can get along in the midst of our differences, then it is much more possible that our congregations will find the compass to move forward in this difficult climate of our Church at large. Perhaps instead of “find a compass” I should say, “find the compass-ion” to move forward.

Several weeks ago in the *Living Church*, there was a letter about a group of so-called moderate bishops meeting at Camp Allen, and the writer asked where were the rest of us? I wanted to reply “Fulfilling Amos 5:13 – that Sunday’s OT lesson – “the prudent man stays silent because the days are evil”. I could have added – speechless before the presence of God weeping for God’s Church, or perhaps, more importantly, weeping for God’s world.

God’s world asks a great deal of us, who bear on our hearts the cross of Jesus Christ. We who talk about forgiveness, and depend on eternal hope at our life’s end possess a freedom that allows us to give our lives away. If we believe in the resurrection, then we can open ourselves to the befriending of others, even others we find strange. I am challenged by our youngest priest, Mitch Smith of Trinity Waterloo. He and his vestry are committing to engaging others in a one-on-one conversation about life’s values and hopes with the goal of connecting about faith and God. Mitch has committed to one such 20-30 minute conversation for every minute he stands in the pulpit to preach. He has already experienced us reaching out to protect him from his youthful zeal, but shame on us! The world that sees little evidence of compassion among Christian folk as we compete with each other over issues of holiness, *i.e.* whose closest to God; the world that finds more safety in the unknown world of cyber-space than in its own streets; the world that knows the planet is becoming shakier and shakier under our feet and wonders what consciousness is all about; the world that has increasingly less time for our hypocrisy as religious institutions when we are perceived as existing for ourselves first; this world –

God's world asks a great deal of us. I want to tell you that there is joy and there is duty in discovering what that demand is.

We are triply blessed in the Diocese of Iowa because we do not seek to meet these demands alone. We are part of a tri-partite companionship with fellow Anglicans in Swaziland and Brechin. Firstly, this year Bishop Mantle came among us with a searching story. With great vulnerability he told us of the secularization of his own country, and the challenge of presenting the gospel to a post-Christian world, where children and parents have no idea what a church stands for. His questions are our questions because of our unity in Christ. His search for answers and for spiritual power is our search too. Like him we have churches in small areas that have grown in on themselves and lost their identity in the community. Like him, crowds pass by our churches in more populated areas paying little attention to whatever happens inside. Like him, faith has become divorced from meaning for so many. His refusal to surrender to secularism is our refusal. God is our Life and our Love, and believe it or not, we are still God's primary way to get noticed. God could burn a bush, brighten a star, empty a tomb, but still seems to prefer to call a person to be the Spirit's voice.

Secondly, if the challenge of secularism in Scotland doesn't push us into responding, the exuberant and courageous faith of our brothers and sisters in Swaziland pulls on us at the other end. No one goes to Swaziland and returns unchanged. The same could be said of the Sudan or wherever else God might call us out of our small world. We are blessed to be surrounded by such a communion of saints, where love and sacrifice are daily bread. To commit to the Millennium goals as we did at General Convention is to find a vehicle for the 21st century to do what Jesus asked us to do from the beginning (Luke 4) and the end (Math 25) of his teaching ministry. That these goals are not reserved for people of faith to undertake but are asked of anyone who feels their humanity only intensifies for me the sense of the time in which we live. Christians have been asked to make all of these our priorities for 2000 years, and yes we started hospitals and visited prisoners and led in early forms of education, but along the way we have also been busy building institutions to our own names. God is seeing to it in these end times that we have no more excuses because it is clear that God is finding others to accomplish his goals. Perhaps our new contribution might be to add a ninth goal: peace in our time in the name of our blessed Prince.

Thirdly, as every Bowl organizer knows, Iowans are great travelers even if their teams are underachievers. Iowan Episcopalians have traveled much this year. Congregations have outdone one another in sending teams to muck out and rebuild in the Gulf Coast – St. Tim's, W. Des Moines, Trinity Davenport, and Christchurch Burlington. Others are on their way – Trinity Iowa City, Christ Church Cedar Rapids, St. Thomas Sioux City, and more have engaged in projects from afar – St. Albans, Spirit Lake, St. Michael's Mt. Pleasant, St. Mark's, Des Moines. Probably there is not a congregation that has not contributed in some way to the aftermath of Katrina. A large team spent long hours both in travel and then in construction to begin a long-term effort to build a church/school/orphanage complex in southern Swaziland, again with more on their way.

We have been invited to prepare a tour for 2008 to help the Diocese of Swaziland celebrate their fortieth anniversary as a Diocese.

In a special mention at their Synod, Bishop Mabuza writes:

In all of this we experience how we are not alone in the Episcopal Christian endeavor. It is a shame that we cannot find our inspiration more ecumenically and closer to home among Christian believers in churches immediately round us, but that seems like more trouble than a long trip to the southern hemisphere. In whatever ways God can get our attention, however, we should be thankful. It was exciting yesterday to have Bishop Palmer with us to help set us down the road of closer relations with the United Methodists. In time we hope this will result in a shared ministry similar to the covenant with the Lutheran Call to Common Mission, but even in that relationship the challenge remains how can we share more than our clergy, who, don't get me wrong, we do gladly at Marshalltown, Storm Lake, Calvary Sioux City, and Le Mars? The point is that our institutions would have to dismantle if we moved any deeper, and once again we love our institutions. Everything we do is compromise – even an Anglican Communion is a compromise on the early Church. In Christ we are already One but we are so far from seeing it.

And yet it is precisely this near-sighted earthen vessel through which God continues to be willing to work. Our earthen vessels of Commissions and Task Forces have been hard at work this year as ever. You finally, though in small numbers, met in Chapters to discuss issues coming up in this Convention. Solidifying our Chapter representation in the canons is part of that agenda. We will be calling you together again in the spring to consider the product of the Task Force on Strategic Planning and receive your feedback for a launching at the 2007 Convention. It is my expectation that the budget of 2008 will see evidences of your hopes for the future. I am grateful to the staff for spreading out among you to have a presence at every chapter meeting. I was even more grateful for the members of the Bishops' Advisory Group on Stewardship who gave of their time to share their plans and potential resource. It is their goal to engage six congregations in this first year more fully with the fruit of their two-year conversation on our mutual accountability. Art Wittmack has chaired a great group of advisors, turned presenters.

A Commission appointed only last year at Convention, the Multi-Cultural Commission, chaired by Scott King, has demonstrated immense energy in shaping their agenda. They hosted a Province anti-racism training for the staff and a number of ordination candidates in particular, training trainers for future work among congregations. Future ministry among new immigrants is part of their portfolio, which I hope will be very intentional by this time next year. We look forward to increasing visibility in the Diocese of leaders from our Indian community. Members of St. Paul's Sioux City will be attending *Wintertalk* this January, and Carol Kramer of St. Stephen's Newton, herself an Ojibwa Native, will chaperon two young people from St. Paul's to the Native American Youth event in New York later this month. It is fitting for us as a Convention to recognize with great praise the work of David and Charlene Titus who for more than eighteen years have pastured St. Paul's and for whom any talk about the temptation to be self serving or to

have a gospel which is separated from the people is totally bizarre. The issues of justice and poverty among the people ministered by the people of St. Paul's belong to all of us. We have not done our duty to our own and for far too long David's voice has been a voice in the wilderness. I am grateful that The Episcopal Church Native Ministries is beginning to find ways to attend to our existence.

Perhaps our young people will show us a way forward as their program continues to develop under the leadership of our Youth Missioners and the Youth Ministry Development Team. A growing highlight of our young people's summer is a mission trip through Sioux City to the Pine Ridge Reservation. More than forty young people went this past year. As we meet they are holding their own Conference centered on the Millennium Goals. It is partnership in mission that will keep us looking beyond ourselves. Whether it is Pine Ridge, or Swaziland, or the working class areas of Dundee or Cedar Rapids, or rural Clermont, or New Orleans, I encourage us all to give up a week's vacation and make mission on the move a part of our spiritual walk. You might even choose to go and break ground and bread where your dear Bishops no longer walk together. Who knows? It might get us all back in step.

I cannot begin to describe the experience of being in step with you for 175 miles this past summer as I journeyed from the Cathedral in Davenport to the Cathedral in Des Moines. It was an intentional journey, a pilgrimage, a prayer walk. It transformed my inner sensitivity to life in Iowa. It did not take long to recognize those who came to walk with me as angels sent by God. You walkers tempered my early enthusiasm, which could have got me in physical difficulties. You runners pushed me along when I was in danger of being overcome by the silliness of it all. I was a fool for Christ in some ways. But Christ was no fool in coming alongside in the conversations, and in the contemplative silences, and in the increased longing to see the Diocese reclaim that holy time between Ascension and the Day of Pentecost. Many of you contributed through your prayers and your gifts.

My goal of \$ 1,000 a mile may have been out of our reach, but we raised almost \$ 50,000 towards the beginning ministries of our newly ordained, mission internships for young adults, and new starts exploration. I am pleased to announce that grants of \$ 6,000 each will be going to St. Albans Spirit Lake, St. Albans Davenport and Trinity Waterloo as they begin a partnership in mentoring with their new clergy freshly returned to Iowa. Carl Mann, Brian McVey and Mitch Smith serve those congregations, and each has a mentor under a program being led by Bill Pugliese of Christ Church, Cedar Rapids. Colleagues in mentoring with Bill are Lynn Carver and Curt Moermond. I am grateful to the people of Christchurch, St. Peters and St Thomas for allowing their clergy to give time for this endeavor. Whether I take up the suggestion of running the Iowa Lakes (Storm Lake, Spirit Lake, Emmetsburg and Clear Lake) which would take me from Storm Lake to Mason City next year, I am not sure. Nevertheless I will continue the annual Bishop's challenge for grants for new ministry efforts, which is something I hope more and more people will support.

The mentoring program is one of a number of formation processes coming to completion by the Commission on Ministry. Deacon formation is now finalized and a publication is

available from Mills House. Discernment procedures were presented at last year's Convention and should be in the hands of every congregation. The Ministry Development Team process should be available by next year, as we work out the coordination of Team ministry with the canons on ministry. The process for individuals being nominated for priesthood should be available by the spring. The Commission on Ministry work long weekends to support the various people going through the process, while also working on the articulating of procedures. It is no easy task, and we owe them our thanks. We have added Ministry Team coaches to our list of resource people, as well as exam readers and a theological resource person available for non-stipendiary priests.

I began a new class of deacons in July by gathering aspirants at the Ministries retreat, reviving a custom started by Bishop Epting. It is my hope that in two years we shall ordain a class of up to a dozen people, possibly at this Convention. The E-Seminary, under Tom Gehlsen's direction, has continued to grow in alumni. Three courses were held each semester this year, and the Seminary will be essential to the deacon formation, as well as providing continuing education for Team members and for the baptized in general. Tom works hard at getting sites where you are, and it would be good to recognize our teachers thus far: Bill Pugliese, Jim Davis, Tim Vann, Karen Wacome, and Alice Haugen. Funds for theological education are always in demand. We provide grants for Seminarians, deacons in formation, and for continuing education of clergy and lay professionals. The E-Seminary still needs funding to stand it alone from the Diocesan Budget, and this must be a priority for the coming year. In February we will hold Theological Education Sunday throughout the Diocese with contributions to be made to the Theological Fund.

This coming year we shall see a change in leadership of the Ministries Retreat. Cornell Chaplain Catherine Quehl-Engel has taken over from John Harper, and though in July we said thanks to John for his many years of leading the Retreat, it is only fitting that we add our thanks as a Convention. John's new ministry in Holy Relationships seeks to gather the Christian witness of gay and lesbian Christians across denominational boundaries into a fellowship of theological and spiritual reflection that is often marked by the common experience of persecution, abandonment and rejection. Christ still gathers His children.

I did not expect this address to be about a changing future or to challenge us to be very different from how we have been as the Gospel dictates. Yet as I think of the work of the Jubilee Commission and its decision to revert to its original name of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation I find a similar theme. In one spellbinding three week stint, I found myself speaking at a regional event on Global Warming, attending a World Food Prize forum on Africa, preparing thoughts on restorative justice for a Prison Conference which was since postponed, sharing in the celebration of one of Iowa's outstanding pioneers of Black American civil and human rights, Alexander Clark, and discovering in the process the fine work of Episcopalians from Trinity in Muscatine in preserving his papers and uplifting his name, and consulting with Judicatories at Bishop Charron's request on our various approaches to the War in Iraq.

It reminded me that politics for Christians is not about Party affiliation. Christians should flip-flop as Gospel principles dictate at differing times. The poor, the marginalized, the elderly (the bible's widows and orphans), and our need for generosity and self-giving and servanthood are the issues we promote, in whatever way we feel will get the job done the best. Sometimes the way is red. Sometimes it is blue. Mostly it is green. It is always baptismally white. But to all we are to be about prophecy and the uplifting of that which is good news and which promotes the finest dignity of God's child, and we are always to be a pain against self-interest.

I want to applaud Ben Webb and St. Luke's Cedar Falls for their project in measuring and reducing the weight of their carbon footprint. I want to thank Craig Stark and St Tim's W. Des Moines for leading the way in signing for the Iowa Sustainable Energy Charter. Our next Convention will pick up where you have left off as we focus on the theme of Returning to Eden: Caring for God's Planet and People.

At that Convention we will also receive a Strategic Plan for the years 2008 through 2012. Despite the low enthusiasm our surveys showed toward evangelism and social justice, we cannot let these central themes of Jesus life and legacy get lost. In my meetings with clergy, we have already begun expanding our ideas about sharing the faith in word and deed. A newly appointed Congregational Commission will be asked to take this further, as also will a revived Cursillo movement. As the newly appointed Bishop liaison to the National Cursillo, I hope to bring new energy to this movement.

In that same series of surveys you were clear and so as we look at the resolutions on the formula for what we are calling "Shared Stewardship" it is the top priorities you have stated that we are embracing: the ability to worship led by clergy. The formula intends to relieve you of the expense of paid clergy and the provision of supply by exempting these costs from the amount of income used for the Diocesan apportionment. I think it is a formula, which more accurately reveals our financial state and offers a more transparent response to the Diocesan request for Shared Stewardship. I believe a more open formula will encourage a greater compliance among congregations. It will certainly help our conversations together.

We are changing. By December I will have ordained nineteen people, three vocational deacons and the rest ultimately for priesthood. All but three are serving among us. At the same time thirty-three out of sixty one congregations have experienced transition in their leadership since I arrived. I would say that most, about 90% have experienced an upturn in their congregational life. Not all, however. There is still much to be done in training vestries and clergy how to lead together in mutual appreciation. I have much to learn about balancing my presence or non-presence in the really fiery situations, which quite frankly are a surprise to me because I was mentored very much in the tradition of mutual appreciation and the taking of time to be human together before we are administrative.

We will probably not push ahead in 2007 with new Ministry Development Teams until our coaches and the system and the curriculum become more settled, and the track record of our existing Teams becomes more of a reality. In fact this coming year may well be a

year of allowing things to settle and take shape, while pushing away quietly with increased training opportunities. Taking a leaf out of Bishop Mantle's book, I want to gather young adults and hand them more of the reins. It is hard for a baby boomer ever to think we are not with it, but the truth is we are increasingly without it. It is not too late and never too early to let a new generation talk to the newer generations about Christ and His Church. It will be a year for receiving and learning, and even re-learning how it is to be a follower of Jesus Christ.

I am told that Bishops become Bishops somewhere in their fourth year. I think the moment we become Bishops, we had better quickly become children of God again. In the end we all help at making each other what we are as Christian people. It is the plus and minus of community. As always I am grateful for the staff I both inherited from Chris, and have been able to bring on board for us all. I thank the Chancellor for his abiding wisdom, which we will no doubt need more and more in the coming year as we respond to the ins and outs of the Communion. And I consider myself extremely fortunate that for the first three years I have been able to enjoy the same Standing Committee. I will miss the counsel of Al Aiton and Nancy Lee Ziese. With patience, faith and sound mind, we have seen one another through these initial tricky years. As long as we remember that we are not our Church but God's Church – God's expression of Christ through the Spirit for this generation – I know that we will flourish. For as I have prayed over so many of you this year as you have come forward to reaffirm your baptism, I know that "The Spirit who has begun a good work, direct and uphold you in the service of Christ and His Kingdom".