

Bishop's Address to the 141st Convention of the Diocese of Easton The Rt. Rev. James J. Shand

Greeting, my friends. It is an honor to be among you at our annual convention, and I thank each of you for being here today.

Every year at this time, it is my privilege and responsibility to stand before you to review the ministry that we share here in the Diocese of Easton in the nine counties of Maryland's Eastern Shore.

And what a year it has been. Since we last gathered in this place, we have labored in God's vineyard in many ways. We have faithfully worshipped in our parishes, responded to the needs of our communities, and formed and supported parishioners of all ages in the Christian life. As a diocese, we have studied the St. Andrew's draft of a proposed Anglican Covenant, and participated in a Lambeth Conference. We built a new pool at Camp Wright, and held another successful Camp Agape for children of incarcerated parents.

Since we last gathered here, as citizens of these United States, we have lived through many challenges, among them: soaring gasoline prices; the longest presidential campaign ever; a surprising downturn of our financial institutions; and the historic election and inauguration of our first African-American President. On many levels, it is a time for celebration, as well as for concern.

Many people I encounter express this mixture of hope and anxiety. These two emotions seem to be prevalent in our lives right now – yet I believe that, even in the midst of our anxiety, it is our call as Christian people to focus on hope, seeing it where it exists, and creating it where it doesn't. It is in this context I wish to share some remarks.

I have chosen the theme of "listening" as our focus this year, for several reasons:

First, because in every Sunday visitation, every committee meeting, and every individual encounter, **much of my ministry centers on listening** to what you have to say. On a daily basis, I hear your concerns, your excitement, your good ideas, and your sincere conviction to live the Christian life; and I am always seeking to respond in a way that builds up the fabric of good will in our diocese.

Second, because we are meeting midway between a Lambeth Conference and a General Convention. In nearly every day of the Lambeth Conference, time was set apart to listen to those in our indaba groups with people from very different places, holding very different perspectives. General Convention, this July, will embrace the spirit of ubuntu, "I in you and you in me," stressing our interconnectedness through public narrative, building bridges through telling and listening to personal stories.

And third, because in the depths of my being, I believe that it is through compassionate listening that we encounter the living God in and through one another. When we listen as eagerly as many of us speak, we create a still space to hear not only one another, but the Holy Spirit as well. Listening is, in its essence, a hopeful activity.

The last time this diocese was preparing to elect a bishop, we spent a significant amount of time listening to each other, in order to discern a Vision Statement that expressed our conviction about what kind of community we wanted to be. That was in 2001 and 2002. Through that listening, we made the bold statement that:

We are "a community of congregations, glorifying God in Christ, making disciples of all ages."

We went on to say that, “We believe our baptismal covenant in Christ is the foundation of this call to community and discipleship.”

And furthermore, we said, that we “seek to link congregations, convocations, convention, and the role and person of Bishop in supportive relationship that will: inspire, equip, and care for leaders in ministry; build creative and relevant youth ministries; respond to the prophetic vision of Holy Scripture for peace and justice; and participate in ongoing strategic planning for renewal and growth.” I was elected to live into this vision with you. Now, as I begin my seventh year as your bishop, I ask: How are we doing?

I would like to highlight some of the ways we are meeting this vision, as well as challenge us to invest ourselves more deeply where we are not. My desire is to leave this diocese as healthy as it can be when it is time to elect *another* bishop. So let’s look at some of the ways we are building community and discipleship, being faithful to our baptismal covenant, building, equipping, and responding.

And as you listen to *my* thoughts, I invite you to inject your *own*. Just as every sermon is a mixture of what is said, what is heard, and what is understood, I hope that the Spirit will inspire thoughts in you that I have not had – and that later, in the months ahead, you will share what you heard and the thoughts that were sparked in you, with me, so I can hear them. We are in this together, you and I, shaping ministry and building the Body of Christ in our corner of God’s Kingdom. So I am hoping that while you are hearing this address from me, another voice may be speaking as well.

Let me begin by highlighting **Youth Ministry**. You all know how close to my heart this is. I am thrilled, and grateful, that last year you made it possible to create and support a part-time Diocesan Youth Coordinator position, and I am very happy with the job that Shelby Morrison has done. With her characteristic exuberance, Shelby has made connections in parishes, helped to develop local youth ministries, led our young people to the Episcopal Youth Event in San Antonio, and been an integral part of Camp Wright. She has already planned the gamut of activities for this calendar year, which includes a mission trip to Canada, another thing that is near and dear to me. As a diocese – that is, all of us together -- we worked for years to make this ministry a reality. With Shelby’s leadership and the guidance of an advisory board, we look forward to encouraging even more young people to have a life-giving relationship with Jesus and to know that they are the church of today – regardless of the size of their congregation.

And while we are talking about youth ministry, let me now turn to **Camp Agape**. There are few ministries in our diocese that better exemplify the Christian spirit of service than what is happening through our prison ministries, which focus on prevention as well as care for offenders. This past August, we held our second Camp Agape for children of incarcerated parents, with twice as many children attending as the year before. Under the leadership of Brenda Dingwall and her committee, people from all over our diocese donated time, money, talent, and most of all, unconditional love, to help convey the message to each child that “you are beloved of God. You are somebody. You are worth it. We care about you simply because you are.” This year’s challenge is to provide follow-up contact with the children, with mentors and reunions. I hope you read the article in the February *Eastern Shore Episcopalian* about the Christmas party, during which each child was given a bicycle and helmet. In March, we are hosting the Spring Fling, a gathering that will feature swimming, games, and fellowship. Each of these

reunion opportunities gives us the chance to reconnect, and to be made aware of specific needs that the children may have.

We are already beginning to see the results of Camp Agape. One of our campers recently achieved the highest math score in the state for his class. Another had the courage to speak up about the abuse he received at home, and is now living and thriving with other relatives who care about him. Others are growing in the hope and knowledge that their community cares deeply about them and their future.

Our work is far from finished. We will always need volunteers, mentors, and financing to continue this program and to reach our dream of expanding it.

While Camp Agape seeks to break the cycle of incarceration within families, the other side of our **prison ministry is a compassionate response to those who already are in prison.** Currently our focus is re-building the Alternatives to Violence Project at the Eastern Correctional Institution, the state medium-security prison in Somerset County. At one time, it had a successful Alternatives to Violence Project, but when the volunteer facilitators, required to oversee the program, retired, it ended. A long waiting list of inmates remains; some have been waiting years. Jesus reminds us of the call to demonstrate practical care for those in prison. Our prison ministry task force has set out to do just that – by getting involved. Deacon Penny Morrow is providing leadership for this, and has made an appeal for others to join her in enabling this ministry.

Let me continue to speak about the spirit of service exemplified in our diocese. Our response to the devastation of Hurricane Katrina through the **Mississippi Mission** has been the backbone of our diocesan outreach for the past three years. Skip and Sandy Wrightson continue to lead and support this, making sure we have teams to send for two-week sessions each spring and fall, as well as others who make the trip to Long Beach, Mississippi, at other times of year. If you have not visited the areas affected by Katrina, you may not realize how much work remains to be done, how many lives are still not back to normal. We need to rally more energy and get a second wind to continue to help rebuild. It is too easy from our comfortable distance to forget that something simple, like the gift of a sewing machine, or time spent attaching siding to a house, can transform someone's life. **I challenge everyone to renew our commitment to our Mississippi Mission, AND I challenge vestries to encourage and support their clergy to make this trip with me.**

Supporting the **Millennium Development Goals** is an ongoing priority of our diocese, through contributing .7% of our annual budget to help meet those goals, and responding to world disasters through Episcopal Relief and Development. Rick and Julie Waterhouse and Roberta Gribbon keep this ever before us.

At the Lambeth Conference, I became painfully aware of the stark differences between the abundance of our culture and much of the rest of the Anglican Communion. Over a meal with an African bishop from Mozambique, Lynne and I heard him and his wife tell the story about one visitation when he was asked to baptize. He turned on the tap, and out came murky brown water. It was the same water the people of this remote village drank, and washed, and cooked, and cleaned in.

I have had a hard time getting that image of brown tap water out of my mind. That's why, in my Christmas message to the diocese, I asked for your help to raise \$5,000 to provide clean water for a village. And what a response you gave. You contributed nearly \$15,000, enabling us to contribute three wells, in South America, Africa, and the Far

East. Gifts large and small came from all over the diocese, including some of our youth groups! You did this! And I thank you for your generosity, even while the news each day reports an ever-worsening economy.

This outpouring of donations gives me hope that you will continue to provide **generous support to your individual parishes** as well. The reality is that our churches are being asked to respond to the increasing needs of many in our communities. We all know this, and need to hear and respond to these needs – and we can do it! Our newest priest, David Michaud, rector of St. Andrew's, Princess Anne, wrote eloquently about this in the January issue of *Eastern Shore Episcopalian*, after having attended a Southern Convocation meeting. He was reminded that we live in a culture of abundance, and that it is our privilege to serve the neediest among us. Let me quote him:

“The church is supposed to work to **bring the kingdom of heaven to this world**, and we need to be aware of how this world pushes against this mission by lulling its members to think that, like every other secular institution, it needs to cut back on what it does, hunker down in a bunker somewhere and wait this financial crisis out. It is time for parishioners to say, ‘wait a minute, I may have to rearrange how I do my giving, but I cannot be party to the weakening of my church – it is too important in the lives of many who are relying on the church for physical, emotional, and spiritual needs. I need to do my part with my investment of more of my time, talent, and treasure in my church so it can be an effective counterweight to the misery the economic downturn is causing all around us.’

“The discussion in church vestries, at coffee hour, and from the pulpit [-- and I would add, in the parking lot! --] should be how **we as a church can do more, not less**. But it takes leadership to proclaim the good news of abundance that Jesus taught us, and it takes commitment and sacrifice by the members of the church to make this a reality.” Unquote.

Some of the negative thinking I hear about why we can't do this or accomplish that, is, quite frankly, little more than short-sighted whining. **I challenge both clergy and laity to provide the courageous leadership to move through these times without losing our sense of the mission of the church.**

Let me now turn to ways we are attempting to **build community and discipleship, through the linking of congregations**. Currently this is underway in the Southern Convocation, through conversation and mutual sharing. This has been building through many visits by the Canon and myself with St. Mary's, Tyaskin, and St. Paul's, Hebron, over the last two years, including an onsite visit this past fall with the Rev. Robert Honeychurch, the national church officer for Congregational Vitality. These conversations have now expanded to include Grace, Mt. Vernon, and St. Philip's, Quantico. These churches have been listening to each other, sharing their hopes and dreams, as well as what they lack in resources for ministry. Some of them are reading together the helpful book that I recommend to all of you, *Holy Conversations*, by Gil Rendle and Alice Mann.

I hope that the cooperation among these churches will serve as a model throughout our diocese. The time is coming when it will be less likely that the one-priest, one-parish model will be realistic for us – and not just us; many dioceses are struggling with this. How can parishes form helpful partnerships with one another, thinking outside the box to share ideas, resources, leadership, and ministry? The Dorchester County Council of Episcopal Churches is one example of how this can happen. The Commission on

Ministry and Department of Missions are part of the conversation as well, offering training for licensed lay ministries and evaluating the role of the deacon. Where all this will lead, we don't yet know, but we do know that the answers will come from *you*, not necessarily from me. This is not a top-down process. **I challenge each Convocation to take a serious look at its parishes, and come up with a strategy for support of leadership and sharing of resources.**

Last spring, we held a church growth conference with Kerry Mackey, formerly of Saddleback Church. One of the valuable ideas that came out of that conference was the notion that it is important to tell our stories, and to listen to each other, as the foundation for how we move forward in ministry. A few parishes are now doing that, and so is your Diocesan Council. For the past year, we have begun each meeting with one person sharing his or her spiritual journey. There is something about this practice that is enormously valuable. It encourages trust; invites others to minister to us as we have need; and inspires folks who may be yearning for something, but don't quite know what is missing from their lives. You have Good News to share. Share it. **I challenge each vestry, each committee, to make space for sharing, through the telling and listening to stories. I challenge you to take the risk to extend the gentle invitation to someone, to worship with you one Sunday at the church that nourishes you.**

As part of our commitment to listening and “ongoing planning for renewal and growth,” during this calendar year, **we will re-assess some areas of our shared life to determine how well they are working.** We may find things are going well, or we may find we can make some improvements. One of these areas is the diocesan apportionment. This was brought up at recent Convocation meetings, and Diocesan Council is beginning to discuss it.

Another is the format and priorities of Diocesan Convention. We are trying a somewhat different format this year, in response to your comments on the evaluations last year. We're holding the Eucharist on Saturday morning instead of Friday evening, to make the Friday schedule less rigorous. We have one session of workshops on Friday instead of two, as in past years. We will also take another look at where we hold convention in 2011, realizing that you can't please all of the people all of the time, and that venues that can accommodate us are limited. Is our top priority simply cost, or do we value opportunities for fellowship and learning, all under one roof?

We will also continue to assess what work we need to do in laying a strong foundation for emergency preparedness -- you will hear more about that tomorrow -- and environmental stewardship, which our clergy recently discussed in a clericus program. In both of these areas, we will cooperate with our neighboring Diocese of Maryland, if we can.

So let me re-cap: During the year ahead, I challenge us as a diocese --

1. to nurture our **youth**
2. to expand our commitment to break the cycle of violence that leads to **incarceration**, through prevention and pastoral care
3. to renew our commitment to our **Mississippi Mission**
4. to provide abundant **financial support** for our parishes which serve the neediest, and move beyond negative thinking

5. to work within our Convocations to share resources and **form new partnerships** among parishes
6. to create safe ways to **tell our stories**, and invite a friend to church
7. to **reassess areas of our shared life**, including apportionment, convention, emergency preparedness, and environmental stewardship

Let me close by saying how positive I feel about our diocese and **how hopeful I am about our future**, and our ability to listen to one another and forge positive and life-giving relationships. How do I know this? Let's put this into perspective. For the sake of comparison: Our diocese has 39 parishes. So does the Diocese of Nevada. How well do you know your geography? How many Dioceses of Easton, geographically, do you think could fit into the Diocese of Nevada? Ten? One of our blessings – which we may take for granted – is that we are a small diocese in a small area – which means **we actually have the potential to build real, nurturing community**, to know one another personally, to cooperate in our discipleship and share the love of Christ.

I believe that it is through listening to one another that we discover a fragile hope, a new understanding, a community of compassion, and a path forward. Through human beings who are vulnerable enough to be willing to listen, the Holy Spirit finds a way to break through, sometimes boldly, sometimes silently, as the gift is given. If we **truly listen** when we open ourselves to one another, we will find healing for our souls, hope in the strength of community, and we will nurture and be more able disciples for Jesus Christ. Let's get on with it.

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