

ADDRESS TO THE 171ST ANNUAL CONVENTION OF THE DIOCESE OF CHICAGO
November 21, 2008
Westin Hotel, Lombard, Illinois
The Rt. Rev. Jeffrey D. Lee, Bishop of Chicago

All I can say is “Wow.” Look at you. Just look at us here in this place. I am so grateful for the presence of each and every one of you today. I am more grateful than I can say to have been called to serve Christ with you in this diocese and to come to my first convention as your bishop. I come to this assembly today deeply aware that I stand in a line of faithful servants who have been my predecessors. I had the joy of meeting one of the older members of the diocese recently, a woman named Liz Carpenter, the last living founding member of St. Charles’ Parish. I introduced myself to her at my visitation and from her wheelchair she looked up at me and said, “Oh, I’m so glad to meet you ... let’s see ... how many bishops have I gone through?”

The energy in this convention reflects what I have experienced at other gatherings in my first ten months in our diocese: an eagerness to be together to share stories, worship, gain new insights and skills, celebrate achievements, bear witness, find common ground. We are blessed here with so many opportunities to grow and be formed—Leadership and Ministry Fair, our vibrant youth programs, Happening and New Beginnings, and Summer Camp; all our trainings—Keeping God’s People Safe, Anti-Racism training, web workshops; and our programs and conferences in congregational and leadership development. And of course this convention, where it all comes together: learning, sharing, praying, dancing, celebrating and proclaiming—all the elements of being church.

And from these gatherings where we’re equipped for ministry we go out into the world and give ourselves in service to Christ. At Bishop Anderson House. Or Grace House, or St. Leonard’s House, or Cathedral Shelter, or the other eight agencies of Episcopal Charities and Community Services. And in food pantries and feeding programs like the Father Pond Memorial Soup Kitchen at SS. George and Matthias in Chicago, or the Jubilee Center at St. Clement’s in Harvey. And in assisting immigrants and refugees through parish programs like the Amnesty Center at Trinity Church, Aurora, agencies like the Interfaith Refugee and Migration Ministry in Chicago. And in mission partnership with our companion dioceses of Renk and Southeast Mexico; and with congregations rebuilding on the Gulf Coast. In raising funds for malaria nets. And in making prayer blankets for kids of incarcerated parents as they are doing in the LaSalle County Episcopal Ministry. (Boy, have we ever cornered the market on prayer shawls –

Lisa and I have one for every cold night of the year!) Sending care packages to troops in Iraq, and holding welcoming home liturgies as St. Gregory's, Deerfield is doing. And in Habitat for Humanity projects and neighborhood rebuilding as St. Edmund's has been doing for nearly 20 years in the Washington Park neighborhood. And . . . I could keep going. The commitment of God's people in this diocese is ongoing and remarkable.

For five years we have worked toward the goals of the strategic plan developed under Bishop Persell's leadership. That five year plan has now concluded and the question is where do we go from here? As I have shared at the pre-convention meetings, and on other occasions, I have a framework for moving ahead in mission that came to me in the middle of the night last spring. Three short affirmations that I believe can serve as our compass as we build on what we have done and are doing:

Grow the Church

Form the Faithful

Change the World

This framework for mission speaks to what we are doing now and to the opportunities in front of us. The world is changing at a dizzying pace. The mission field is shifting fast and so the church has to change too. We are transitioning from a modern to postmodern world, and this will mean profound changes in how we order our life, our worship and carry out our ministry. The prolific author Phyllis Tickle (who led our most recent clergy conference) calls what we're going through the Great Emergence, a profound shift in the social, cultural, economic and political structures of our world. The Great Emergence is redefining relationships in all spheres of our society and replacing the notion of a single narrative of identity that defines what it is to be a member of this society with an anthology of identities. Information technologies are revealing both our differences and just how much we need each other in ways we have never before imagined.

The church cannot avoid change if it is to be faithful. Borrowing an idea from Bishop Mark Dyer, Phyllis Tickle argues that every 500 years or so the church and the society in which it is embedded has a big rummage sale. The sifting and sorting and pricing and decisions about practices and assumptions of what we need and don't need that are true of any rummage sale. 500 years ago it was the Great

Reformation. 500 years before that it was the great schism between Rome and Constantinople. 500 years before that was the solid emergence of the papacy. And 500 years before that it was Jesus. In each instance the major question before us all has been, “What is now authoritative?” I believe we are entering another such epoch-making transition and it accounts for some of the turmoil just now in our church. I regret that some members in dioceses of the Episcopal Church are seeking affiliation elsewhere in the Anglican Communion – we are diminished when sisters and brothers leave our table. As Archbishop Daniel said to me at Lambeth this summer, staying away from the conversation is not the way forward.

This shift, this reformation we’re in poses great challenges, but also great opportunities. At each of these 500-year junctures, the church has gone through conflict and division, yes, but it has also experienced expanded mission and arguably a more diverse and vigorous faith. I believe our diocese is uniquely gifted and situated to benefit from this re-formation, and be a model and resource to the wider church. We are awash in resources—few dioceses have such a concentration of talented, dedicated and discerning lay and ordained ministers; few have such an active and effective network of social service agencies as we have in Episcopal Charities and Community Services; few have the extensive lineup of formative and transformative programs—this convention being a prime example; and few have a staff and corps of volunteers that are as committed and hardworking as those I work with every day. In short we have a lot going for us. And I believe, I am convinced, we are going to continue to be a powerful voice and force in advancing God’s mission in this time and in this place.

There are uncertainties and risks, yes—as the present economic crisis reminds us. But it is in these times of stress that we often encounter our greatest opportunity as disciples of Christ. “Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not let them be afraid,” Jesus tells his followers on his final night with them, John 14:27.

How do we respond to this seismic shift in our society and church, one which many of us are just beginning to notice? How do we take all these gifts, experience and wisdom and apply them to our mission, the mission we have had since the first followers of the Way gathered to break bread and pray? You know the mission of the church, it’s on page 855 of our prayer book: “Restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ.” That mission begins with the simple command of Christ to

announce the Best News there could ever be. The Good News that God loves us, each one of us, infinitely with no strings attached, every man, woman and child who lives or dies.

How do we do this? Well, keep on doing what we are already doing. But there are some areas that I believe hold great promise for advancing our mission if we can focus our energy and resources on them. So with this compass in hand—Grow the Church, Form the Faithful, Change the World, let me share with you what I have seen happening and some opportunities I would like to engage, and then hear from you how you see our mission and your hopes and dreams for the future.

Grow the Church

Jesus was pretty clear in the Gospels: Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. . . That's why we have baptismal fonts, the most important in our church buildings, the pool where we wash away the world's disguise, the vessel from which emerge newborn members of the Body of Christ. Early Christians called the font the womb of the church.

It's not just about more bodies in the Body. It's about the transformation of lives, the deepening of faith, incorporation into God's own deathless life, submitting to the Lordship of Jesus. When we talk about growing the church, we are talking about growing our witness; about growing our knowledge of God and our faith tradition; about growing our confidence as ministers of the Gospel; about growing our generosity, and our gratitude; about growing our enthusiasm; about growing our openness to the movement of the Spirit; about growing our love for one another. It's about growing more and more into the image and likeness of Christ.

There are 40,000 or so Christians active in or identified with a congregation of our diocese. But smaller numbers might say more about who we are. This past weekend the Happening retreat where I served as Spiritual Director had 75 youth participating, one of the highest ever in our diocese, and 29 of those young adults were new to the program. The first Friday of every month the LaSalle County Episcopal Ministry hosts a bluegrass jam session that brings 100 people into the church who wouldn't be there otherwise. The Vacation Bible School at St. Edmund's had 75 kids from the neighborhood last summer, and the VBS program at All Saints, Chicago and so many other congregations is a magnet for

neighborhood families. A mom and her children were recently baptized at Grace Church, Pontiac just because of the parish's outreach to children. An ecumenical Taize service at St. Charles is drawing in scores of people, and a prayer shawl ministry that touches lives all over the country; welcoming immigrants at St. David's and Trinity in Aurora, and St. Paul's by the Lake in Chicago. And in Lake Villa in northwest Lake County our newest worship fellowship has formed, more than 200 souls that meet for Spanish language services at Church of the Holy Family under the leadership of Narciso Diaz, vicar of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Waukegan.

We have a lot of enthusiastic Christians, none more so than our youth and young adults. Our programs—Summer Camp, New Beginnings, Happening, our four campus ministries—are increasingly avenues to faith in Jesus for young people with no church background, or those who have drifted out of their family's church. Having been to Summer Camp and to the Episcopal Youth Event, let me tell you what you probably already know: the light of Christ shines more brightly in those young people than almost anywhere else I can think of. Expanding youth and young adult ministries have to be a top priority for us. Children and youth are not the church of tomorrow, they're the church of today and if we treat them like they are, I think we have a much better chance that they'll be the church of tomorrow too.

The young may lead us, but I see enthusiasm for mission all over this church.

We want to be part of the church's mission through partnering with other congregations like churches in Barrington and Wauconda and Elgin are doing. We're eager to serve in diocesan ministries, and increase our giving to diocesan programs, the ECCS agencies, and the global work of United Thank Offering and Episcopal Relief and Development. Two years ago we raised over \$25,000 at our convention eucharist for the Millennium Development Goals, dividing it equally for ministries in our companion dioceses and here in our own diocese. I would like us to do it again here, so have your checkbooks ready tomorrow.

More and more we are seeing ourselves as part of a collective witness, accountable to each other, and invested in a common mission. When we changed to a system of voluntary giving to diocesan program 15 years ago, there was some doubt whether it would last. But it has outlasted nearly every other voluntary system used by other dioceses, and that is due to our shared ministry and commitment to relationship. We like to be together and serve together. And from that sharing comes greater giving to the common mission. I see this as one of our strengths and a cause for celebration. Of requests to 123

congregations for a common mission share pledge for this year, 120 congregations responded with a pledge and of that number 39 congregations increased their pledge from 50-79%. That's an incredible testimony to our commitment to our common mission. Thank you. Thank you.

So how do we build on our strengths and grow this church? One area that's absolutely key is leadership development and deployment. The vigor of our mentoring programs, Making Excellent Disciples, and the Fresh Start program for leaders and congregations in transition, are earning our diocese notice throughout the church. We are attracting some of the church's best and brightest priests eager to exercise their gifts with us. I meet every month with our deployment team, Scott Hayashi Randall Warren and Susan Czolgyz -- I want to demonstrate that leadership development is probably my top priority.

A church plant that reflects emergent church values is a goal I will be pursuing. You may have heard of the emerging church or attended the workshops last June at the Cathedral and St. Barnabas, Glen Ellyn. This is not a movement so much as a renewed sensibility or stance about being church, one anchored in ancient Christian spirituality but incorporating contemporary culture, recognizing the sacramental nature of all arenas of life, and closely linked to the community it serves. A recognizably emergent ethos is active in several of our congregations already—All Saints in Ravenswood, Church of the Epiphany on Chicago's Near West Side, St. Nicholas in Elk Grove Village, and in an ecumenical partnership on the North Shore, Jesus Christ Reconciler.

Church planting, not church closing, should be our focus, and we have had to close far too many churches in our diocese. I am going to have to be dragged kicking and screaming into allowing another church to close, but if it must happen, then we have to have a plan for redeploying the assets to seed new growth.

Cultivating a greater appreciation for the authority conferred in baptism is the first step in creating a total common ministry mindset in our community. When people are able to identify the gifts already present in their congregation, they can assume responsibility for guiding and exercising the ministries of the fellowship. There are other models for being a fully sacramental and missional church than relying only on the leadership of a fulltime compensated priest. I have invited a group of people who are

interested in what all this might mean for us to gather this coming week to begin to explore the possibilities.

Liturgy is one of our most powerful tools for evangelism, and it is an area of our life dioceses seldom commit resources. I am changing that by appointing a parttime missionary for liturgy and the arts. Dent Davidson, the new music director at St. Paul and the Redeemer, will be taking on that ministry this coming year.

Form the Faithful

Formation is one of our strong suits—as we have seen today in the turnout for convention learning opportunities. We have a broad and deep understanding of formation in this diocese – it informs our liturgy, fellowship, evangelism, outreach and stewardship. Some examples: At Transfiguration, Palos Park folks were concerned about the direction and purpose of confirmation preparation, so they wrote their own curriculum. That experience and the energy it released have spilled over into all kinds of other areas of the church’s life. A healing service at Grace Church, New Lenox has become their seeker service and a leadership clinic for lay members. Readings performed at St. Peter, Chicago bring in people who wouldn’t ordinarily show up for a Sunday service; and at St. Mark’s, Evanston before anyone got a pledge card they were given \$10 and asked to spend it in ways to build up the kingdom of God, and then report back. Art and music are employed extensively at St. James Cathedral as formational experiences for church members and seekers – you should’ve seen the visitors to Chicago who showed up on Easter morning because of flyers cathedral members had blanketed surrounding hotels with. The Keiskamma Altarpiece exhibit last spring showed how art can provide a transformative experience. Along with hosting an interfaith healing service and a panel discussion, the cathedral welcomed a youth pilgrimage from all over the diocese to view the altarpiece and learn more about the cathedral’s ministry and the story of those who living with HIV/AIDS.. At the end of the day young people joined in Eucharist where they dedicated their own altarpiece, which now hangs in the diocesan center lobby. The cathedral will welcome our youth again Dec. 14 for a pilgrimage to learn about the legacy of St. Nicholas.

At the diocesan level there seems to be a formational event offered every week, whether it be a Keeping God’s People Safe training, a Magnetic Church Conference, a clergy day presentation, a New

Beginnings or Happening weekend, an antiracism training course, or one of our annual conference and workshop days: the Leadership and Ministry Fair, the Episcopal Church Women annual meeting, the Whose Church is it anyway? Conference for formational leaders, and the Parish Administrators day.

Here are some ways I would like to build on this success. First, Vicki Garvey, our canon for formation, will become fulltime in 2009—not that Vicki Garvey isn't already working pretty much at that level. This will give her more time to plan, lead and design existing and new events at the congregation or deanery level, consult with formation leaders in congregations, and organize a resource center accessible through our website.

Another step is to emphasize catechumenal training, relearning the central principles of Christian community and forming new Christians in the faith in a public way: Learning over and over again the centrality of the assembly—experiencing it as the sacramental presence of Christ, the font, the place of rebirth and renewal in Christ, the word, testimony to God's saving grace, and the table, where we encounter the living Christ, are fed, and sent into the world. I'd like to see new Christians being formed in every congregation of this diocese.

I want us to expand our partnerships with church related development institutions. We have had a fruitful partnership with the Lily Endowment for over five years. We're active partners in exploring what the future of Seabury-Western will be. Several of our diocesan staff serve on the faculty of CREDO, the clergy wellness initiative created by the Church Pension Fund. These connections are all powerful tools in helping all our leaders and members to take responsibility for their wellness and effectiveness in the gospel.

Other initiatives underway are the development of the diocesan and cathedral campus to better support our mission. With the plans for a condo tower now disbanded, we are free to reimagine our buildings more creatively. I would like to see our use of technology expanded, and more education and formation programs for adults.

Change the World

We are committed to embodying God's love to those on the margins of society, for those who are hurting, anxious or discouraged. This mission is being addressed in our congregations through soup kitchens and food pantries, citizenship classes and refugee sponsorship, housing rehab and mission trips, tutoring programs and summer day schools, 12-step programs and emergency shelters, job training and health care advocacy, and care for elders. Here are a few reported at our pre-convention meetings: the Elijah Ministry at St. Andrew's, Grayslake which provided clothes to 116 kids a few weeks ago, and is gearing up for a toy giveaway; a malaria net campaign at Calvary, Lombard that recently received nine donations from people outside the parish thanks to an article in the Daily News; advocacy and learning events around the Millennium Development Goals at Church of the Holy Spirit, Lake Forest, St. John the Evangelist, Flossmoor, and Church of the Transfiguration, Palos Park; an ecumenical partnership in Rockford that is rehabbing the west side neighborhoods; the community development initiative in Waukegan supported by the Waukegan Deanery congregations in partnership with ECCS; outreach to wounded veterans at St. Clement, Harvey and St. Joseph and St. Aidans, Blue Island; the work of St. Martin's Church, Chicago with marginalized gay and lesbian youth; and the congregation partnerships with churches in our companion dioceses.

Some of our most dynamic and far-reaching work is being accomplished through the agencies of Episcopal Charities and Community Services, often in partnership with our congregations. The work of these 12 agencies reaches deep into the world: lay chaplaincy training at Bishop Anderson House, psychotherapy provided on a sliding rate scale through Cathedral Counseling Center, addiction treatment, emergency food and clothing aid, and transitional housing through Cathedral Shelter, food distribution and employment counseling at the Primo Center for Women and Children, pastoral care for the elderly at Church Home at Montgomery Place, residential education programs for troubled youth at Lawrence Hall Youth Services, a weekly community meal program serving hundreds of people at Ravenswood Community Services, a reentry program for former inmates at Grace House and St. Leonard's House, emergency and transitional housing and a drop in center for the mentally ill at Shelter Care Ministries, adoption services and maternity counseling at St. Mary Services, and counseling and crisis intervention at Youth Guidance.

Consider these numbers:

- Bishop Anderson House – 10,000 pastoral care visits and over 200 trained lay chaplains

- Cath. Counseling – 15,000 therapy sessions; 60% of clients have no insurance
- Cathedral Shelter – over 9000 persons served as either residents or recipients of emergency assistance
- Church Home at Montgomery Place – pastoral care for 215 residents and 10 CPE students
- Lawrence Hall – 1,100 children, 10% of all children in residential care in Cook Co.
- Primo Center – 125 women and children in transitional shelter care
- Ravenswood Community Services – 13,500 persons served meals and groceries
- St. Gregory’s School – 76 students in grades K-8.
- St. Leonard’s Ministries – served over 700 men and women recently released from prison with a 20% recidivism rate
- St. Mary’s Services – counseled 20 women, placed 12 infants with 9 new families having completed home studies
- Shelter Care Ministries – provided emergency transitional housing for 98 families, that’s 103 adults and 260 children
- Youth Guidance – serves 14,000 young people aged 5-19 in Chicago Public Schools

The impact of these agencies is felt in powerful ways among those they help. We are blessed to have Georgianna Gleason and the staff of ECCS leading us in these endeavors that are saving and changing lives and our world. Here is a quick story, last February on one of my first visits to an ECCS agency, I met a young man at the dedication of the Residential Treatment Center at Lawrence Hall Youth Services. He thanked me for saving his life, saying that without Lawrence Hall being there to help him he would likely have died. That is what changing the world is about.

We need to broaden awareness of the work of ECCS and proudly proclaim the work of its member agencies as an important part our diocese. We need to explore new ventures like the Waukegan initiative, and prospects for work in underserved communities like Austin on the Far West Side. All this is part of the broader task of finding the image of God in all people, honoring the full dignity of all our sisters and brothers. In the work of ministries like St. Leonard’s House and our support of Lake County United in Waukegan addressing the gross inequalities of education for Hispanic students we are engaged in dismantling systems of racism and patterns of privilege. I am glad to tell you that members of diocesan staff and Diocesan Council recently participated in our Crossroads Anti-Racism training. But

we must recommit ourselves to this work again and again because racism in all its ugliness drains the life out of all of us. I will continue to call all our leaders to participate in our AntiRacism training program, which this convention has endorsed repeatedly. I call us also to look for increasing partnership opportunities with the Dioceses of Renk and Southeast Mexico; and engaging the living stones of the Holy Land on a pilgrimage I hope to lead in a year or two.

Growing, forming, changing. I believe that describes our mission. I have seen it happening in every corner of this diocese. You know, at a recent staff meeting we were reporting in on the various visits we had made to congregations around the diocese and we realized that in one week over 10% of our congregations had been visited by someone from the diocesan center. That's just one week. My vision of the diocesan center is not some kind of command and control center, but a resource center for the mission and ministry we all share. The Diocese of Chicago is not 65 East Huron. It is not the bishops or the diocesan staff. It is Calvary Church and St. Paul's and Holy Spirit, and Trinity. It is every local church woven together into a network of living cells – our job as bishops and staff is to serve as connective tissue for the church. This, you, we are the church. As a sign of that reality I want to invite other voices to come up here now to respond to this address. It will take all of us together to realize the mission and ministry to which we are called. Let's listen to the voice of Christ.

Where does this leave us? In one sense, where we began, at the font, surrounded by the assembly, repeating the words of the covenant or our rebirth:

Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in the prayers?

Will you persevere in resisting evil, and whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?

Will you proclaim by word and example the good news of God in Christ?

Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?

Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?

If we can affirm each promise then I have no doubt that yes, we can; yes, we will, and yes, we are:

Growing the Church

Forming the Faithful

Changing the World