

**The Rt. Rev. Mark J. Lawrence's Address
To the Annual Diocesan Convention 2011**

St. Helena's, Beaufort, South Carolina, February 19, 2011

As I have spoken in recent days to Diocesan Council, the deans, and the Standing Committee, Page | 1
it is my expressed hope that this year of 2011 will be free from constitutional and canonical challenges from the "national" leadership of the Episcopal Church, and that we in the Diocese of South Carolina can get on with the work of growing our parishes, strengthening the lives of our parishioners and churches, and planting new congregations. I am eager to be about this work of the Gospel. A Biblical metaphor I have employed from time to time is from Chapter 4 of the Book of Nehemiah where the workmen rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem labored with a tool in one hand and a weapon in the other. But as I have said, my hope is that this will be a season for the trowel not the sword. Time alone will tell if we will be permitted to do our work unencumbered by intrusions. I am eager to see this Diocese of South Carolina add daily to its number those who are being saved; and what better way to do this than by growing our existing congregations and planting new ones. This work, not the controversies of the day, will be the thrust of this address.

When the word came to the apostle that a newly planted church was thriving in the town of Colossae some hundred miles inland from Ephesus, he was in prison. Epaphras, one of Paul's converts, had spread the news of Jesus throughout the Lycus valley of Asia Minor. Paul wrote to these recent believers to consolidate and establish this fellowship within the unity of the larger Church, therein recognizing the labors of his disciple. *"We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ when we pray for you, because we've heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love you have for all God's holy people, because of the hope which is kept safe for you in the heavenly places. You heard about this before in the word of truth, the gospel which has arrived on your doorstep—just as, in fact, it's produced fruit and is growing in all the world, as it has been among you, from the day you heard it and came to know the grace of God in truth."* This is an example of what the renowned Anglican missionary and missiologist, Roland Allen, described as the spontaneous expansion of the Church. He suggested this was due mainly to the spontaneous activity of individuals. A newly-found joy impelled these rescued men and women to propagate the Gospel. Allen argued that the early Church recognized this natural instinct of divine Grace, gave free scope to it, and the apostles and leaders of the early Church gave it their blessing. Another example is found in Acts chapter 11. In this case when the apostles in Jerusalem heard of a congregation of Gentile believers taking root in Antioch, the third largest city in the Roman Empire and propagated through everyday believers "gossiping the gospel," they sent Barnabas, a Cyprian Jewish believer in Jesus, to assess this spontaneously growing congregation in Antioch. "When [Barnabas] came and saw the grace of God he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose...."

Similarly, the Apostle Paul in his letter to the church in Colossae, having heard of this spontaneous expansion of the Church, anointed it with his apostolic blessing. It was through such simple, grace-filled actions that new groups were brought into the unity of the Church and into fellowship with the Apostles through the apostolic faith.

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I mention this because it is this faith and the dynamic movement and spontaneous expansion that is its fruit that we need today—particularly in a Church so rooted in institutional complexity and apparatus as ours. I suppose I could say we are in need of revival or renewal. But that is not quite what I mean. Such language might carry certain connotations especially for those of my generation who have witnessed the charismatic renewal, the growth of Cursillo, Faith Alive, and other such movements which have yielded important and godly fruit within the Episcopal Church. But these have not stemmed the tide of the cultural captivity, nor have they always brought what Roland Allen described as the spontaneous expansion of the Church. They brought renewal for those within the Church; today we need both a centrifugal and centripetal force. Early Christianity was a movement of expansion. As such it was not always tidy. If one desires safety and tidiness it is richly here in our heritage as Episcopalians. But I am reminded of a saying “The safest place for a ship is in the harbor, but that’s not why ships were built.”

Church Planting and Congregational Growth

In the late 20th Century, because of the explosive growth in the major cities around the world, the missiologist, Roger Greenwood (a missionary to both Sri Lanka and Mexico City) made the observation that “He who wins the city wins the world.” It is even truer today. Winning cities for Christ is not done only or even primarily by making big churches bigger—though it certainly helps. Sometimes a city is won by adding more congregations. Charleston for instance is known as the Holy City not because it has a huge mega church, but because it has many significant churches. What is astonishing to many outside of South Carolina is that there are seven Episcopal Churches within a fifteen minute walk of the Episcopal Residence. Three of these congregations (St. Philips, St. Michael’s and Grace) are among the larger Episcopal Churches in the country and three others (The Cathedral, Holy Communion and St. Stephen’s) are substantially larger than the median congregation in the Episcopal Church. There was clearly a vision among those who founded these congregations not merely to make one church ever bigger—but to reach a new neighborhood and a new niche of people by starting another congregation. These parishes are made better by their proximity to one another. Often a new congregation can invigorate an older one.

To begin to think seriously about church planting is to begin to reframe the opportunities that lie before us. Imagine the vitality that would be released if two of our congregations in the four deaneries which have the greatest unchurched demographics (Beaufort, West Charleston, Charleston and Georgetown) planted two new congregations or satellites in the next five years.

What new life would emerge within our communities and within the Diocese of South Carolina from eight new congregations or even twice that number? I believe this can be done even during a season of economic downturn. We often get fixated upon buildings and property. But for many in our present culture it is not the aesthetics of the building which attracts; it is the dynamism of the preaching, worship and fellowship which wins the heart of the unchurched person. Certainly we cannot leave entirely behind the need for property and buildings; a drab setting blesses no one's heart. But if we can focus upon reaching the lost I believe the issues of property and building will emerge in many cases as quite secondary to the winning of the seeker and the transformation of his or her life in Christ. This change from building church plants to growing missional communities is a concept we need to embrace more fully. This will have the dynamism of a movement rather than the often stagnating effect of tending an institution.

The Diocese has in recent years held to the model of established parishes being planters of new churches or congregations. This has worked well in such places as The Cross, Bluffton where a satellite congregation was established at the Buckwalter Campus. So also with Holy Cross, Sullivan's Island in the planting of a satellite at Daniel Island and their future plan of a third satellite congregation at 'Ion in the Mount Pleasant. Such vision is inspiring. Others like St. Paul's Summerville, St. James', James Island, St. John's, Johns Island, and Christ Church, Mount Pleasant because of adjacent land were able to build ministry centers, essentially planting "congregations" on campus. There has been no lack of vision and creativity among us. Today, two of our congregations in the Georgetown deanery have begun initiatives as well. Trinity, Myrtle Beach, under the leadership of Rob Sturdy and Iain Boyd, has initiated a church plant in the Carolina Forest community. This is making good progress. The Rev. Wilmot Merchant and the people of St. Stephen's, North Myrtle Beach with the help of the Congregational Development Committee purchased property in the Loris area for a potential church plant in the future. They are presently making a strong witness for Christ by their volunteer work in Loris Elementary School therein making a difference in children's lives. It will also work as a relational base from which to plant a congregation in the future. Nevertheless, elsewhere we have lagged behind, and others have seized the day—God will have his witnesses – with or without us.

The future of two other initiatives is more complicated and raises the question of Diocesan leadership in planting or acknowledging more complex cases. *The Well By the Sea* at Market Commons, in the area between Surfside and Myrtle Beach, is a "congregation" that has already outgrown its rented facilities and is at a crossroads. There are issues that need to be clarified and worked out and we are seeking to address these at both deanery and diocesan levels. This is where the institution and the spontaneous movement need to work together to facilitate healthy growth. Likewise, the presence of St. Mark's Chapel in Port Royal raises questions which

need answering. In both cases the role of the Bishop and the deanery come to play in how such initiatives are recognized.

Then there is a question of how the Bishop and the Congregational Development Committee assist church plants, and recruit ordained and lay persons who have a calling or vocation for such work. The establishment of St. John's Chapel on the East Side of Charleston is one such "diocesan" plant and has included significant financial support from some of our larger parishes, such as Church of the Cross, Bluffton, St. Michael's, Charleston, Holy Cross, Sullivan's Island and St. Andrew's Mt. Pleasant (when it was still part of the diocese).

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Related to diocesan involvement in church planting is our recent reconfiguration of ***The Protestant Episcopal Society for the Advancement of Christianity in South Carolina*** (the first society organized in the Episcopal Church for the extension of the gospel). Just recently we re-established as the first priority of this oldest society in the Episcopal Church the financial support of church planters in the diocese. This is a return to its founding purpose. You will find in your convention packet a brochure which explains the heritage and the future vision of this Society, along with how you can become a member. Your gifts and membership in this Society will enable us to reconnect with the rich evangelistic heritage of this diocese.

Moving From Fighting Fires to Detecting Smoke

Too often we wait until a house is in flames before we call for help. Just yesterday there was a report from the Religious News Service which confirmed what we all knew, that "Mainline Protestant churches that have seen a fall in membership since the 1970s continued their decline." Of course the Episcopal Church is included in this declining membership. I do not reference this in order to berate us, but rather to alert us to the clear challenges we face in reaching our society for Jesus Christ. Even more to the point I wish to stir us to positive action. In many cases we are failing to effectively disciple and catechize our parishioners, or reach the unchurched in our communities. Far too many congregations in the Episcopal Church are either at the tipping point or very near it. Recently the Church Insurance Company has revealed "that every month more than three congregations close their doors for good. This alarming situation threatens the health and life of the Episcopal Church."

The Challenge of our Smaller Churches: The most recent statistics from the Episcopal Church shows 6,895 congregations in the U.S. The Median Size congregation has 160 members with a Median Average Sunday Attendance (ASA) of 66—down from 74 ASA in 2002. This may not appear to be that big of a problem, but I believe it is a most disconcerting trend. It is a challenge beyond just numerical decline. The present demographics in our Church will have a profound effect in the next decade if not before. With the passing of the GI generation (those who fought WWII) and the ageing of the Silent generation (Korean War, post WW II) and the first of the

Baby Boomer generation entering into their retirement years (those born between 1946—1964) we are facing a dramatic decline in the next ten years in financial resources for our smaller congregations as well as further dramatic decreases in average Sunday attendance. If you are member of a small church, look around this Sunday and ask yourself realistically how many of these people will be here ten years from now? Once a congregation can no longer afford a full time priest it becomes increasingly difficult to arrest the trajectory of decline. As one researcher has revealed, “Congregations with no clergy leadership (either because they are searching for a new priest or because they cannot afford regular clergy leadership) are very unlikely to grow.” This reality is making itself felt in congregations in the rural communities and smaller towns of our diocese, as well as among our African-American congregations even within Charleston. Combined with this, the current economic recession has cut dramatically into the diocesan funds available for our Congregational Development Committee to assist struggling congregations. But frankly, this was not why this committee was created. The purpose was to enable parishes and missions which had a growth posture and an outreach focus to accomplish their God-given vision; not just to keep the doors open another year. But it is easy for such a purpose to devolve into merely assisting dependency. The straightforward truth is that I have had to say to several of our smaller congregations what St. Peter said to the lame beggar sitting at the Gate called “Beautiful” in Jerusalem: *“Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have give I thee; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk”*; this is the genesis of the upcoming Deanery Workshop for changing congregation DNA—***“The Future & Your Church”***. We will begin with a session entitled “Reality Therapy”. We need to face reality as it is, not as it was, nor as we wish it were, but as it is. We have a window of opportunity and we need to seize it. Therefore, on March 5th at St. David’s, Cheraw, we are holding a deanery-wide workshop for the clergy and lay leaders in the Florence Deanery. This will not be a one shot, fix-it-all workshop. It is the implementation of a process to nurture a growth posture in our smaller congregations—especially in what I refer to as our “cat, collie and garden” size parishes and missions. After we have taken this workshop to other parts of the diocese we will return with ***The Future & Your Church: Take II*** in order to build on what we’ve done. Our plan is that the deanery clericus will be an ongoing support for the clergy in our more isolated congregations. This marks an important shift or development for our Congregational Development Committee, while not losing sight of our prior work.

Medium and Large Congregations: Gardens, Houses, Mansions & Ranches. I wish I had time to describe and address the opportunity and challenges before each of these different size congregations. But this will have to wait for another day. These congregations are the backbone of any diocese and we have some of the finest examples of these congregations in the Episcopal Church. For years as a parish priest I sat in Diocesan Conventions and heard the unique or novel spoken of with excitement only to see it pass away in a few years, but the hard, steady work of shepherding and growing these size parishes would go unnoticed. If you are the rector of a

Garden, House, Mansion or Ranch size congregation and are moving forward in ministry and mission you have my profound respect for I know from experience your work is never done. There is always more to do than you have time in your calendar. We have enough exemplary rectors of such congregations to hold in-house workshops in the diocese just as we are doing for our smaller congregations with—*“The Future & Your Church”*. That will be another project for our Congregational Development Committee. We can hold diocesan workshops to further growth in every size congregation and “man” such workshops with successful leaders from within our own diocese. So stay tuned.

Stewardship

I turn now to a sensitive subject—Money. It’s sensitive because it touches that most sensitive nerve – the one that runs from the human heart to the pocketbook. Recently I was reading a bishop’s address to his Diocesan Convention. He mentioned that parish giving to the diocese was 4.4%. He was concerned and he should be. I came here to South Carolina from a diocese which had a percentage formula for assessments. The higher the parish income the greater was the percentage of assessment. The parish I served was getting dangerously close to 25% of our annual disposable income. I soon became an advocate of the 10—10—10 model which South Carolina adopted back in early 1990s. The model is biblical, clear, and easily communicated at every level. Parishioners are asked to give ten percent of their annual income to support the local parish. The parish is asked to give ten percent of its annual income to support the diocese, and the diocese gives ten percent of its income to the larger Church. This has proven to be a tremendous means of financial expansion in the Diocese of South Carolina—as the chart below reveals:

I will ask now that a chart be put on the screen for you to look at briefly. Now, some of you are not able to see it and you will be grateful that you are not able to see it. So for those who cannot see it, let me just read the first figure that’s there. 1990: The estimated disposable income of the Diocese of South Carolina, all of its parishes, was \$10,165,748. The actual turned out to be \$9,604,885. The actual pledge of parishes to the Diocese was \$1,486,228 which produced an estimated pledge of 14.62%. It was at that time the Diocese decided to move to the 10—10—10 model. It declined in ‘91 to 13%, ‘92 to 12%, ‘93 to 12%, ‘94 to 11% and for one year, and one year only the parishes of the Diocese of South Carolina gave to the Diocesan budget 10%. It then began to decline 9.78, 9.26, 8.53, 8.52, 8.21, 7.82, 7.58, 7.39, 7.22, 7.05, 7.56, 7.83, 7.43, 6.62. Well that that was the pledge. Now let me get to the actual. No, I will spare you that.

	Estimated NDBI	Actual NDBI	Actual Pledge	Pledge % of Estimated NDBI	Pledge % of Actual NDBI
1990	\$10,165,748	\$9,604,885	\$1,486,228	14.62%	15.47%
1991	\$11,086,810	\$10,630,676	\$1,466,785	13.23%	13.80%
1992	\$10,787,281	\$11,066,976	\$1,388,303	12.87%	12.54%
1993	\$11,724,240	\$12,622,039	\$1,450,297	12.37%	11.49%
1994	\$11,800,999	\$12,835,352	\$1,369,288	11.60%	10.67%
1995	\$13,212,532	\$14,150,252	\$1,411,424	10.68%	9.97%
1996	\$13,827,520	\$15,418,504	\$1,352,925	9.78%	8.77%
1997	\$14,928,804	\$17,270,871	\$1,381,788	9.26%	8.00%
1998	\$17,105,095	\$19,211,934	\$1,458,210	8.53%	7.59%
1999	\$18,050,220	\$20,839,069	\$1,537,198	8.52%	7.38%
2000	\$20,735,392	\$23,031,524	\$1,702,966	8.21%	7.39%
2001	\$21,998,249	\$24,308,065	\$1,719,575	7.82%	7.07%
2002	\$23,327,933	\$25,792,095	\$1,768,645	7.58%	6.86%
2003	\$24,593,759	\$27,599,959	\$1,816,727	7.39%	6.58%
2004	\$26,240,127	\$28,072,572	\$1,895,549	7.22%	6.75%
2005	\$28,871,148	\$29,912,697	\$2,036,579	7.05%	6.81%
2006	\$29,897,836	\$33,224,878	\$2,261,400	7.56%	6.81%
2007	\$31,530,119	\$34,243,339	\$2,468,733	7.83%	7.21%
2008	\$31,812,009	\$34,436,669	\$2,363,593	7.43%	6.86%
2009	\$30,957,803	\$34,084,645	\$2,048,947	6.62%	6.01%
2010	\$27,037,146				

Even a cursory reading of this chart, however, will show that while a move to the 10% asking has been a tremendous boost to total diocesan growth, it has not allowed for diocesan staffing or program to keep even a lagging pace. During these 20 years Total Net Disposable Budgeted Income has increased by 350% while giving to the diocesan budget has increased only 40 %, barely keeping pace with inflation. I am compelled to thank our diocesan staff for getting by with less especially during this time of economic recession while continuing to expand the work we seek to accomplish. As our parishes have steadily declined in their giving to the diocesan budget it has curtailed the initiatives which we might otherwise have pursued, particularly in assisting growing parishes and missions, and in planting new congregations. The 10—10—10 model is proving to be a study in steady decline on the parish to diocesan level thereby hindering what the diocesan leadership (clergy and lay) can accomplish in expanding the mission and ministry of the Church. This ebbing trajectory predates not only the recent economic decline which hit in mid 2008, but also predates the intense controversies of the Episcopal Church during last seven years. It has nothing to do with either one of those.

In stating this I am in no way suggesting that the main work of the gospel is done somewhere other than on the local level. What I am suggesting is that given our ecclesiology, the ministry and mission of the local congregation will eventually be thwarted by a diocese being hindered from providing what only a diocese can provide. Please know I am grateful for every dollar that our parishes and missions contribute to the common work of our diocese. And some have given at real sacrifice to their congregational life. Others I have granted a temporary “exemption” from giving until they can work out of a financial crisis. If you are in that role, please feel no guilt. But if not, you can feel a little. But I believe the temptation to balance the parish budget by giving less to the diocese has proven to be less than helpful for our common life, and frankly less than helpful to our congregations. The Diocesan Council and I have just reestablished the Diocesan Stewardship Committee. I have appointed the Rev. Jim Taylor as the chair. Our first two tasks will be:

- To restore the original vision for Diocesan Stewardship of the 10—10—10 model, through teachings on Biblical Stewardship.
- To Establish a Planned Giving and Estate Planning Task Force in each deanery to be available to give presentations in our parishes and missions.

Title IV Revisions and our Constitutional Concerns/Issues with the Episcopal Church

Let me give a bullet point account of developments regarding events and experiences since our Reconvened Convention on October 15th of last year.

- Several other dioceses have followed our lead in expressing concerns with the Title IV revisions—these are Central Florida, Dallas, and Western Louisiana.
- I have addressed some of our concerns with the Province IV Bishops and they have expressed their concerns with the stands and actions of South Carolina. I believe this was honest, forthright and ultimately fruitful conversation. One out-growth of this conversation is that the bishops of Province IV will discuss some of the challenges facing the Episcopal Church regarding human sexuality before the next provincial gathering in June.
- I was invited by Bishop Nathan Baxter to speak at the recent Clergy Conference of the Diocese of Central Pennsylvania on the challenges we face as a “Conserving Diocese in The Episcopal Church” and to explain our approach to ecclesiology and mission. Again I believe this was fruitful and well worth the effort to converse with others within the Episcopal Church.
- I have received no official comment from the Presiding Bishop regarding our Reconvened Convention in October.

Certainly there remain, however, significant differences for many of us with the direction of the Episcopal Church. So I believe we need to finish what we set out to do at our Convention in 2010, upholding the heritage and Constitution of our Church. I believe we have done a service to everyone in the Episcopal Church by pointing out the problems inherent in the Title IV revisions.

Making Biblical Anglicans for a Global Age

Finally, I believe we have made a godly witness by holding steadfast to our calling. Nowhere is this more significant than in our vision to help shape emerging Anglicanism in the 21st Century. The fault lines that emerged in the Anglican Communion with increasing clarity in 2003 have in the past month become starker than ever. The Instruments of Unity have proven inadequate to mend the net of Anglicanism. While the Episcopal Church has solidified its place within these Instruments, the unity which the Instruments were meant to hold has run like water through an open hand. Communication, let alone communion, between many Provinces, has all but ceased. Yet our diocesan vision of *Making Biblical Anglicans for a Global Age* grows more prophetic with each passing day.

I am grateful for Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali’s witness as our Visiting Bishop for Anglican Communion Relationships at this Annual Convention. His sermon last evening was deeply encouraging to me. His teaching yesterday and in our deaneries has been exemplary, spanning such diverse topics as Islam, multiculturalism, secularism, current developments in the Middle East, and within the Anglican Communion. Thank you, Bishop Michael and Valerie. As a consequence we are better equipped to help shape emerging Anglicanism in this 21st Century.

This could hardly be more relevant or timely. Last fall, while in Cairo at the invitation of Bishop Mouneer Anis to lead a retreat for the clergy of Egypt, the Horn of Africa and North Africa, I was joined by Mike Clarkson and Chris Royer from our Anglican Communion Development Committee (ACD). While there we initiated a companion relationship between our dioceses. Then the Rev. Emad Mikhail, Principal of the Alexandria School of Theology (AST) and a priest in the Diocese of Egypt joined us for our Clergy Retreat in November and spoke of the challenges the Church faces in a dominantly Islamic country. This January one of the senior priests of South Carolina, the Rev. Rick Belser and his wife, Anne, went to Alexandria to teach at AST during Fr. Mikhail's sabbatical. Shortly after the Belsers' arrival dramatic events unfolded in this pivotal and key country of the Middle East. We have received regular updates from the Belsers and Bishop Mouneer. Most recently the bishop has written:

"Our beloved country Egypt is going through a critical time which requires all of us to be united, working together in order to achieve "freedom, democracy and social equality" which are at the heart of the Youth Revolution of 25 January 2011. Without achieving these goals, the Revolution will have been mere words. Therefore, with strong hands, hopeful hearts and with patience, we all need to work each in our own field, until Egypt becomes a developed democratic country. Only then will Egypt regain its pioneering place in the Middle East, a position it has held over the centuries."

We pray for them at this crucial and pivotal time in their country and give thanks to God that our prayers and efforts can play some modest role in the lives of these brothers and sisters in Christ. I encourage every congregation to include our brothers and sisters in the Diocese of Egypt in the Prayers of the People on a regular basis.

If only time permitted I could speak of our diocesan ministries and relationships in other places around the Anglican Communion:

- Diocese of Kilmore, Elphin and Ardagh, (Ireland)—The Cross, Bluffton; the Diocesan Youth Leadership plans for this summer.
- The Province of Tanzania—St. Luke's Hilton Head and the ACD Committee.
- The Province of Burundi—St. Michael's, Charleston, Church of Our Savior, et al and the ACD Committee.
- The Diocese of North Uganda—St. John's Johns Island, ACD Committee.
- The Diocese of Jos, Nigeria—Christ-St. Pauls.
- Dominican Republic—numerous parishes in the Diocese (OSA, Holy Cross-Faith Memorial, St. Helena's, the Cathedral, All Saints', Grace, and many others).

This is to name but a few— the complete list is lengthier by far. I refer you to the map produced by our diocesan Anglican Communion Development Committee (ACD) which shows the various

parish and diocesan relationships around the world. You may find this on our diocesan website. When Bob Lawrence, chairman of the ACD Committee, and Mike Clarkson joined me at the recent Communion Partners Gathering in Orlando, Florida we spoke of the work of this Committee and our Diocesan Vision. Upon handing out copies of the ACD map participants expressed astonishment that one diocese could foster such an extensive number of missional relationships around the world. Frankly, when I first saw it I, too, was astonished.

Conclusion

There are so many dimensions of our diocesan life that I could have mentioned. I have chosen only these four—First, the need to focus afresh on growing our churches and to plant new congregations whether through spontaneous expansion, parish-led initiatives, or diocesan ventures. Secondly, there is a need for addressing faithful stewardship with our parishioners, our congregations, and the diocese. Thirdly, I have touched briefly on matters dealing with the Episcopal Church, particularly our concerns with the Title IV revisions, and which we shall take up again this afternoon. Fourthly, I have reminded you of our vocation to help shape emerging Anglicanism by Making Biblical Anglicans for a Global Age. May God continue to guide and empower us to hold firmly to the Truth and to venture out with the Gospel.