

Bishop's Address—Special Convention November 17, 2012

The following address was given by the Rt. Rev. Mark J. Lawrence, XIV Bishop of South Carolina, at St. Philip's Church, Charleston, on Saturday, November 17.

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“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the founder and perfecter of our faith....” Hebrews 12:1—2a

When this Diocese last met in a convention at St. Philip's, it was September 16th, 2006. I was one of three candidates for the XIV Bishop of South Carolina. In my opening address the week before, I spoke these words to the assembled clergy and laity : *“We meet this morning in this lovely city of Charleston. Inside the walls of this great old historic edifice—we can only hope the wisdom of the years might seep into our minds that we might rightly appreciate the present, and more importantly imagine an even greater future for tomorrow.”*

I purposely referenced the past, present and future in this opening sentence. So too we meet here today, our hands reaching back to bring the rich heritage of the past with us and with our feet firmly placed in the present, and with our hearts seeking God's grace for an even greater future for tomorrow—we are facing reality as it is, not as it was nor as we wish it were, but as it is. Before, however, turning our minds to consider the future, I need to say word about what, in recent years, we have come through. For since that day on September 16th this Diocese and I have passed through two consent processes for Bishop, and two Disciplinary Board procedures for Abandonment of the Communion of the Episcopal Church—the last without our even knowing it and while we were seeking a peaceable way through this crisis. I have not done the research but I suppose two consent processes and two disciplinary board procedures is and may well remain unique in the annuals of the Episcopal Church. You may remember that during that stormy first consent process I stated that: “I have lashed myself to the mast of Jesus Christ and will ride out this storm wherever the ship of faith will take me.” Well it brought me two years later here to the marshes and cypress swamps of the Low Country. Where many of your relatives landed centuries before—some searching for wealth and others herded like cattle in the hulls of ships. During these past years I have grown to love this land, set down roots in your history and, even more to our purpose, become one with you in a common allegiance to Jesus Christ, his Gospel, and his Church.

Consequently, I trust you will understand that I have strived in these past five years, contrary to what some may believe or assert, to keep us from this day; from what I have referred to in numerous deanery and parish gatherings as the Valley of Decision. There is little need to rehearse the events that have brought us to this moment other than to say—it is a convergence of Theology, Morality, and Church Polity that has led to our collision with the leadership of the Episcopal Church. I hope most of our delegates and clergy who have heard me address these

matters know in their hearts and minds that this is no attempt to build gated communities around our churches as some have piously suggested or to keep the hungry seeking hearts of a needy world from our doors. Rather, let the doors of our churches be open not only that seekers may come in but more importantly so we may go out to engage the unbelieving with the hope of the gospel and serve our communities, disdaining any tendency to stand daintily aloof in self-righteousness. Indeed, let us greet every visitor at our porch with Christ and while some of our members stand at open doors to welcome, still others will go out as our Lord has directed into the highways and byways of the world—across seas and across the street—with the Good News of a loving Father, a crucified-yet-living Savior and a community of wounded-healers learning, however falteringly, to walk in step with His Spirit. Let not God's feast go unattended. This is our calling and our mission.

But I must say this again and again. This has never been about who is welcome or not welcome in our church. It's about what we shall tell them about Jesus Christ, his mercy, his grace and his truth – it is about , what we shall tell them when they come and what we shall share when we go out.

We have spent far too many hours and days and years in a dubious and fruitless resistance to the relentless path of the Episcopal Church. And while some of us still struggle in grief at what has happened and where these extraordinary days have brought us, I believe it is time to turn the page. The leaders of the Episcopal Church have made their positions known—our theological and creedal commitments regarding the trustworthiness of Scripture, the uniqueness and universality of Jesus Christ, and other precious truths, while tolerated, are just opinions among others; our understanding of human nature, the given-ness of gender as male and female, woven by God into the natural and created order, is now declared by canon law to be unacceptable; our understanding of marriage as proclaimed in the Book of Common Prayer “established by God in creation” and espoused by Anglicans around the world hangs precariously in the life of the Episcopal Church by a thin and fraying thread; and our understanding of the church's polity, which until the legal strategy of the present Presiding Bishop's litigation team framed their legal arguments, was a widely held and respected position in this church; now to hold it and express it is tantamount to misconduct or worse, to act upon it – is ruled as abandonment of this church. While one might wish the theological and moral concerns had seized center stage, it is the Disciplinary Board for Bishops misuse of the church's polity that has finally left us no place to stand within the Episcopal Church. So be it. They have spoken. We have acted. We have withdrawn from that Church that we along with six other dioceses help to organize centuries ago.

While I have strived to keep us from this Valley of Decision, having walked so long in its gloom myself—once forced to decide—my allegiances are firm. The doctrine, discipline and worship of Christ as this church has received them and the solemn declaration “that I do believe the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, and to contain all things necessary for salvation” cannot be surrendered. Nor can we embrace the new revisions to the doctrine, discipline and worship so wrongly adopted. Whether we could or could not have stayed longer, or continued to resist in the face of these recent innovations need not detain us further. An unconstitutional process has weighed us in a faulty canonical balance and found us wanting. The Presiding Bishop's legal team having entered with coy excuses and without

canonical authority into this diocese some three or more years ago, now emerges from the shadows, stepping boldly into the light of day. We must of course address them and their actions; but should they look to reconciliation and not litigation, changing from their prior practice of speaking peace, peace while waging canonical and legal war, we shall meet with them in openness to seek new and creative solutions. Yet let this be known, they will not detract us from Christ's mission. We move on. Those who are not with us, you may go in peace; your properties intact. Those who have yet to decide we give you what time you need. Persuasion is almost always the preferable policy, not coercion. By God's grace we will bear you no ill. We have many friends among the bishops, priests and laity of the Episcopal Church, and we wish you well. Furthermore, I bear no ill toward the Episcopal Church. She has been the incubator for an Anglican Christianity where God placed me many years ago. Rich is her heritage and regal her beauty. When I have quarreled with her it has been a lover's quarrel. For many of the precious gifts she has received from prior generations she has not maintained. And she has left no place for many of us to maintain them either. So I say free from malice and with abiding charity we must turn the page. And I say this as well: to all who will continue with us: "Let us rend our hearts and not our garments." Let us be careful not to poison the waters of our communities with our differences with the Episcopal Church. Rarely have the spiritually hungry, the seeker, the unconverted or the unchurched been won for Jesus Christ through church conflicts, denominational discord, or ecclesiastical excesses. If we are to have the aroma of Christ we must live in his grace with faith, hope, and charity. The apostle has described it well the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness (long-suffering) and self control. Therefore, we cannot allow either personally or corporately any root of bitterness, resentment, un-forgiveness, anger or fear to take us like untied and forgotten buoys in an outgoing tide, burying our hearts and mission in some muddy marsh or to float adrift in some backwater slough. No, we shall turn the page with hearts wide open and love abounding for the chief of sinners – which is always us. We shall move on. Actually, let me state it more accurately. We have moved on. With the Standing Committee's resolution of disassociation the fact is accomplished: legally and canonically. The resolutions before you this day are affirmations of that fact. You have only to decide if that is your will and your emotions will follow.

Following Christ the Pioneer and Perfecter of our Future

So turning the page let us take a brief look at this next chapter of the Diocese of South Carolina. We shall need, of course, the promises and exhortations of the apostolic word. I began this address with verses from the Letter to the Hebrews. After surveying in the 11th Chapter of his letter the luminaries of past generations who walked by faith and not by sight—Abel, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Moses, David and many lesser known men and women—the writer turns the page for his readers to the present and the future. Surrounded by these witnesses or martyrs from the past these early Christians must take their place in this great narrative of salvation history. Shedding themselves of every hindrance and clinging sins and (may I suggest perhaps things they cannot take with them) they are to press on looking to Jesus the founder and perfecter of their faith. And so must we.

Challenges and Opportunities within the Diocese

Much speculation has arisen now that we are out of the Episcopal Church as to where the Diocese of South Carolina is going? I have repeatedly said at gatherings around the diocese that this question has not been a topic of serious discussion among the changing members of the Standing Committee over the years, or for that matter among the deans, or within the Council. It needs to be stated again that our time has been taken up with keeping the diocese protected, while being intact and in the Episcopal Church. And knowing that should push come to shove we would need to be prepared for numerous contingencies, we put in place various protections. These are now profoundly helpful: we have a pension plan for clergy and laity; insurance possibilities for our congregations; a diocesan health insurance program. These do not allay every sacrifice or concern by any means, but they do at least fill a void that would otherwise be unnerving and almost unmanageable for many of our clergy and congregations. Yet work remains to be done in these areas, and will be done in a timely manner. Our challenges in this new landscape are many. Some rather small, and others quite enormous—but so are the advantages.

Having chosen to persuade rather than coerce we have a great meeting place—the Cross and Resurrection of Jesus Christ! He is the one who opens the great doors or closes them. You may recall that the risen and glorified Christ spoke to the Philadelphian church in the Revelation of St. John the Divine: “Look, behold I set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut.” I believe he has opened a door for us as well. We know how to do mission. We know how to preach the gospel; to make disciples; to share our faith with others; to do effective youth ministry; to hold on to the essential doctrines of Christ while being innovative in reaching emerging generations; We know how to plant and grow congregations. Do we have much to learn? You bet. Will we learn it? We will. I ask you to imagine if this might be true that perhaps the greatest congregations in this Diocese of South Carolina have yet to be grown, Maybe they haven't even been planted. Some of us are getting long in the tooth and need to learn from and make way for younger leaders. As for me I realize how quickly it has happened: those words of the Psalmist that once caused me to think of retired priests and elder statesmen I now apply to myself: *“O God, you have taught me since I was young, /and to this day I tell of your wonderful works. /And now that I am old and gray-headed, O God, do not forsake me, /till I make known your strength to this generation and your power to all who are to come.”* (Psalm 71:17-18) When did that come to be about me and not someone else? The LORD spoke to Servant-Israel regarding her witness to the world saying: *“Behold, I do a new thing—before it breaks forth I tell you of it.”*

It is a time for the old to dream dreams and the young to see visions. If we can combine prudence and dynamism we can get somewhere. So even while we keep the richness of a residential seminary clergy track, we need to explore new ways of preparing young men and women and even middle-age ones for ministry; especially those who know how to travel light. It is a new day and new ways of proclaiming the old truths need to be adopted.

I stated at our recent Clergy Conference that I hoped we will maintain a comprehensive Anglicanism. Should we lose an African-American congregation we shall look at planting another. If we lose an Anglo-Catholic parish we will pray for what God will have us do; there are those from whom we can learn from here in this area. As for multi-racial congregations surely that is a gift whose time has come—or perhaps is past time. Imagine what this Diocese of South Carolina can accomplish for the Kingdom of God and the Gospel if so much of our common life

is no longer siphoned off in a resistance movement. What can our diocesan and deanery gatherings become when our focus is first and foremost on our ministry at home and Christ's mission in the world? If we can move beyond our parish silos and into relationships that foster mutual growth and mission a new day of possibilities awaits us. I will be calling together a task force to link stronger parishes with congregations and missions in the diocese that may suffer the loss of members due to this departure from the Episcopal Church. If a smaller parish has lost 10, 20 or 30 percent of its membership it may not be able to afford a full time priest. So while continuing to keep the door ajar for disaffected parishioners to return, we need to find ways to enable that congregation to continue to support their rector or vicar; and not merely in order to keep ply wood from the windows but in order to reach their community for Christ and to grow his Church. That is what it is about. Let's get on with it. This will be one of our first priorities. We also need to re-configure some of our deaneries. Some are functioning well and others are almost defunct, offering little, if any, real support for clergy or for drafting cooperative work for ministry and mission. There is room for exciting developments and opportunities here.

Let me turn to the challenges and opportunities in North American Anglicanism for a minute. South Carolina has been and continues to be a microcosm of North American Anglicanism—with all that is good and vital, and all that is most troubling. In an address at the Mere Anglicanism Conference last January I noted that there were some six overlapping jurisdictions within the boundaries of our diocese all making claims one way or another to being Anglican. With the exception of this Diocese of South Carolina, the oldest of these Churches is the Reformed Episcopal Church. There are many Reformed Episcopal Church congregations throughout South Carolina. They reach a good number of people with a vital faith and a strong Anglican tradition. They have a goodly heritage and a seminary just up the road in Summerville. Then there's the Anglican Mission in America (AMiA) which has until recently been the mother church of their movement at Pawleys Island. Recently the All Saints' Pawleys Island congregation voted to associate with the Anglican Church in North America (ACNA). But AMiA has still other congregations scattered across the Low Country—some with bishops and some with rectors. Then, just this year ACNA ordained a former rector of this diocese, The Rt. Rev. Steve Wood, of St. Andrew's, Mt. Pleasant as the first bishop of their new Diocese of the Carolinas, which includes North and South Carolina. St. Andrew's offers dynamic ministry and many within this diocese have kept bridges of relationships with these brothers and sisters in Christ and for this I give thanks. There are other Anglican bodies as well, some of whose bishops I know and some I do not. As I have stated before this is all rather un-Anglican! All these bishops overlapping one another - but to reflect on a more positive note we ought to at least acknowledge that South Carolina may well be the most "Anglicanized" turf in North America! Everybody's talking about Anglicans. You know what happens when everyone's talking about Baptists? They grow churches. Everyones' talking about Anglicans. It's our moment!

All this might be what lies behind the question often raised at the deanery and parish forums I've been addressing—"Bishop, with whom will we affiliate?" My answer has been quite simply, "For now—no one." As any wise pastor will tell you, if you've been in a troubling, painful or dysfunctional relationship for a long period of time and then the marriage or relationship ends, you would be wise not to jump right away into the first one that comes along and tie the knot. You'd be wise to take your time. Nevertheless, I hope we can work with and for a greater unity

among the Anglican Churches within our local region and also within North America. We have many friends and bonds of affection that unite us and along with this—a common mission, Christ's Mission and unity will deeply assist it. A century ago a son of this diocese, William Porcher DuBose, wrote these helpful words: *"The question, How to restore and conserve Unity must go back to a prior one,—What is the Unity in question? Let us recall and repeat in our Lord's own words: 'I will not leave you orphans; yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but ye shall see me; because I live, ye shall live also.'....If then, in all our differences we are thus able to concentrate and agree upon the one necessity of being in Christ and of being one in Him, we must not despair of some ultimate Way to it. If we will cultivate and prepare the disposition, the will, and the purpose—God will make the Way....let us, I say, once begin on that line, and the differences that do not eliminate themselves will be turned into the higher service of deepening, broadening, and heightening the resultant Unity."*

To this end I will appoint a task force to begin contacting, praying and working with these other Anglican bodies as they are willing and as God gives us the grace we will together seek a greater Anglican Unity within South Carolina or at least within our jurisdiction.

I recall some other challenging words from the past. Those sardonic and haunting words of William Reed Huntington, whose genius over a century ago shaped the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral: *"If our whole ambition as Anglicans in America be to continue a small, but eminently respectable body of Christians, and to offer refuge to people of refinement and sensibility, who are shocked by the irreverences they are apt to encounter elsewhere; in a word, if we care to be only a countercheck and not a force in society then let us say as much in plain terms, and frankly renounce any claim to Catholicity. We have only, in such a case, to wrap the robe of our dignity about us, and walk quietly along in a seclusion no one will take much trouble to disturb. Thus may we be a Church in name and a sect in deed."* I mention

these cutting words for two reasons. I believe we need to work in two directions at the same time. First we need to allow ourselves to draw near to the throbbing needs of the world around us. And while maintaining the four pillars of the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral, we need to creatively engage our culture not with the tired arguments of the past, answering questions no one is asking, but answering those questions in the sorrowing and aspiring heart of our society.

Some years ago actually after the General Convention 2009 I went with a group of conservative Bishops to meet with the Archbishop of Canterbury. But not wanting to put all my eggs in one basket, I also made an appointment with the Bishop of London. His offices are near St. Paul's Cathedral. And not wanting to be late for an appointment with the Bishop of London I got there a little early. Since it was raining, as it often is in England, I took cover under the portico of the steps of St. Paul's Cathedral. If you've been there you know it is a conjunction of many streets coming in various directions. I watched the bustling crowd. I watched the people coming and going - cars and taxis and buses – the heartbeat of a city. And I thought to myself, "How did it happen that I'm spending all my time with these ecclesiastical problems and meetings when for most of my life my heart has been to engage the culture with the Good News of Jesus Christ?" We cannot let this happen. Christ said to go out into the hurting world. When Jesus said the gates of hell will not prevail he didn't mean the church would stand in Alamo-like fashion before the world beating down at the doors of the church, he meant his disciples would go out into every place where people were shackled behind prison doors of pain and suffering, dysfunction and brokenness and those gates of hell that are holding them in to a place of death

and suffering will not stand - against God's people going out into the world. That's our call. Because it's Christ's call.

Finally, I turn to our place in the worldwide Anglican Communion. Our vision since 2009 has been to Make Biblical Anglicans for a Global Age: Helping by God's grace to help shape emerging Anglicanism in the 21st Century. Just this week I mentioned in my recent Open Letter to the Diocese that we have heard from Archbishops, Presiding Bishops, and diocesan bishops from Kenya to Singapore, England to Egypt, Ireland to the Indian Ocean, Canada to Australia. They represent the overwhelmingly vast majority of members of the Anglican Communion and they consider me as a faithful Anglican Bishop in good standing and they consider this diocese as part of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. Ah friends, this has got to comfort us as we await further guidance from God regarding future affiliation. And we need to continue conversation with the Provinces and Dioceses with whom we have missional relationships. Just yesterday I received emails from bishops in Egypt, North Africa and Ethiopia assuring us of their prayers. I thought my gosh if those in such hard pressed environments should take an interest and intercede on our behalf? How humbling that is for us. I woke this morning to find an email from Ireland, from Bishop Kenneth Clarke saying we are in his prayers. We are not alone. Greater are those with us than any who may be against us.

Nevertheless, this I assure you, there shall be lengthy and thorough conversation among the clergy of this diocese—our bishops, priests, and deacons—and our lay leaders before any decision will be presented before this Convention that would ask you to associate with any Province. I remind you of an historical fact—this diocese existed after the American Revolution for four years before it helped to fully form the Protestant Episcopal Church in these United States and before that organization was completed. It was a fifth year before this diocese ratified that relationship at our Diocesan Convention in 1790. So for now and the foreseeable future, having withdrawn from our association with the Episcopal Church, we remain an extra-provincial Diocese within the larger Anglican Communion; buttressed by the knowledge we are recognized as a legitimate diocese by the vast majority of Anglicans around the world. Truly, we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses.

What then in conclusion? Having turned the page, having gazed however briefly at the next chapter, the path begins to open up before us, *"... let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the Founder and Perfecter of our faith who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."*

These resolutions you will soon have before you are first and foremost a way for you to affirm the action of disaffiliation which the Standing Committee has legally and canonically taken. Many of you have already decided in your heart and mind how you will vote. Others will need more time. But I invite you for just a moment to stand on the steps of St. Paul's Cathedral at the heart of the bustling city with the needs of the world; or if you prefer stand at the corner of Meeting and Broad here in Charleston; or outside the Walmart in Goose Creek or Moncks Corner; or sit in a vestry meeting after having been at a Rotary luncheon in Florence and lean yourself into a throbbing and hurting world. Ask yourself how long do I want to spend my time, my energy and my soul in a resistance movement that has proven so fruitless. Is it not time to get on with a ministry of Jesus Christ to a broken world? So in keeping with your understanding of God's Word, the historic teachings of

Christ's Church, the leading of the Holy Spirit, and Jesus' call to make disciples, it is time to take stock of what you think, and in harmony with your heart and conscience to act. May God guide us all.

"Now to him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you without blemish before the presence of his glory with rejoicing, to the only God, our Savior through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and for ever. Amen."□
Jude24