

Pentecost 23, Proper 28, Year A, 2014  
St James Episcopal Church, St James NY  
The Rev. Dr. Raewynne J. Whiteley

The Episcopal Diocese of Long Island  
The Bishop's Address  
By The Right Reverend Lawrence C. Provenzano  
148th Diocesan Convention  
November 15, 2014

My sisters and brothers, it is a privilege for me to be your bishop and to serve this amazing diocese and the ministry we share from the Brooklyn Bridge to Montauk Point and beyond to Fisher's Island. As I begin my sixth year as bishop, I continue to be amazed at how God's grace continues to sustain and strengthen the complex, multi-cultural, multi-lingual ministry that is the life of our diocese. Thank you for your faithfulness!

Since our last convention, a great deal of attention has been placed on the development of local mission strategies. The concept of parish as neighborhood—and not merely the church building—has become the focus of our attention and planning.

Father Virgilio Elizondo, in his book *Soul of the City*, has stated, "...our church communities are being asked to be like a 'living gospel' where the story of a people, a neighborhood, a community is held and celebrated; where the focus is on mission and not solely the maintaining of the church. The church building, and therefore those who worship within its walls, is a church in the midst of a parish."

It is a return to an old-fashioned concept whose time has come again in the neighborhoods and towns of our diocese. Prayer, contemplation, and devotion primarily rooted in community, rooted in Scripture (the communities' words and expressions - a living gospel), and the communal and sacramental life of the church - this is what church offers the parish, the neighborhood, the person as the church discovers what God is already doing in the lives and work of the people of a given place.

Our diocese is filled with rich and healthy examples of hard working clergy, and dedicated, faithful lay leaders transforming buildings and programs that served the parish in years past into centers for the ministry of the church moving forward.

The closing of some church buildings has given birth to new opportunities: the closing of St. Paul's Great Neck has given way to the consolidation of St. Joseph's Korean Congregation and All Saints, Great Neck to strengthen the Great Neck Episcopal ministry.

The closing of St. Matthew's Woodhaven has result in the church, parish house, and rectory being renovated and becoming the home for the bi-lingual congregation of All Saints which moved from Richmond Hill.

Christ Church, East Meadow and St. Mark's North Bellmore have consolidated to form St. Francis of Assisi which, once completed, will serve not only as a center that feeds the needs of God's people through their community garden, but will serve as a center for Ecological theology and witness for the entire diocese.

St. John's Fort Hamilton and Christ Church, Bay Ridge have just begun a journey together as one congregation following the closing of St. John's buildings as they work together to serve the parish they have shared for many years.

The closing of St. Paul's, College Point, St. Lydia's, East New York and St. Bede's, Syosset will fuel new mission initiatives as the buildings are sold and resources are used to fund ministry in the midst of new church communities being established.

Bushwick Abbey in the Bushwick/Ridgewood neighborhoods is one example of how resources are being used to engage a neighborhood, establish a worshipping community, and serve the needs of people who are new to church but not to the parish.

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In the Convention Journal you will find a list of twenty other initiatives, missionaries, and partnerships that have been created because of the strategic and faithful use of resources in a similar way. Each of us should be proud of the ministry of our diocese.

One other church closed this past year and its legacy and ministry is far-reaching and faithful.

The Church of the Redeemer was forced to close due to life-safety issues. The small but faithful remnant of that church for the most part stayed in the parish by moving over to St. Luke & St. Matthew.

In spite of our best efforts to partner with a developer to create a ministry center and church while sharing the space one block from the Barclays Center with retailers and renters, we were forced to sell the property outright, receiving almost twenty million dollars for the property. Or to be exact, 19.7 million dollars.

The Trustees of the Diocese have invested the proceeds of the sale wisely. In the years to come the investment income will be used to fund ministry. Each year, half of all investment income is allocated for use in Brooklyn & Queens and the other half will be used for ministry development across the rest of the diocese. Best estimates are that, on average, the investment will produce

eight-hundred thousand to a million dollars, annually, that will be used each year for ministry development as part of the legacy of the Church of the Redeemer.

The Trustees have also established a small fund from the proceeds to assist parishes with small loans and grants for building-related projects which will be available in 2015.

Before any money is distributed or used for any purpose within the Diocese of Long Island, we will practice good and faithful stewardship.

In 1963, the Anglican Congress meeting in Toronto established the faithful notion of mutual responsibility and interdependence, basically calling upon the entire Anglican Communion to recognize our desperate need of each other across the globe.

So I have asked the Trustees, and they have unanimously agreed, that soon after January 1, 2015, the Diocese of Long Island will tithe the 19.7 million dollars to ministry and work internationally, nationally, and locally. This means that 1.97 million dollars will be given away by the Trustees as a tithe of the proceeds of the sale of Church of the Redeemer:

- 1) \$300,000 will be placed in a fund to support the recovery of the Anglican dioceses of Liberia, the Diocese of Guinea and Diocese of Bo in Sierra Leone following the devastation of the Ebola outbreak.
- 2) \$300,000 will be given to the Missionary District of the Navajoland to support the development of a project already in the planning stages that will result in their ability to become an independent diocese of the church once and for all, and to end their dependence on donations from the wider church. Doing this will free the resources of other dioceses who have supported Navajoland for many years to focus on ministry development within their own diocese.
- 3) \$300,000 will be placed in a fund to support the re-establishment of St. Barnabas Agricultural College in the North of Haiti and to establish housing and ministry space in direct support of the work of Bishop Ogé Beauvoir and the people of the Diocese of Haiti.
- 4) \$300,000 will be sent directly to the Cheyenne River Episcopal Mission in the Diocese of South Dakota. The Cheyenne River Mission is approximately the size of the state of Connecticut. It has ten churches and only one priest...Our contribution will fund a full-time second priest for the next four years who will be a youth and young adult missionary and ministry developer in a section of the Diocese of South Dakota that has the highest suicide rate of youth and young adults in the entire country.
- 5) \$300,000 will be placed in an established Companion Relationship fund to support the ministry of the Diocese of Torit in South Sudan, the Diocese of Ecuador Central, and our partners in ministry in the Diocese of Cape Coast in West Africa.

6) \$120,000 will be given to the Long Island Council of Churches in support of our pledge to the Freeport Food Pantry, which assists in feeding the poor in direct cooperation with our community garden in North Bellmore.

An additional \$500,000 will be held for the use of the remnant of Church of the Redeemer as they establish "Redeemer Hall", a feeding program in their new home at St. Luke and St. Matthew's.

I pray that this historic and faithful tithe of the Redeemer Fund will encourage all the people of our diocese to be good stewards of all our many gifts and encourage similar generosity within our churches and among our people. I cannot emphasize enough the necessity of our clergy and lay leaders practicing and teaching faithful stewardship in support of our ministry.

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Three years ago, during our convention I called for the establishment of a Strategic Visioning process. That work began in earnest, gathering leaders from across the diocese in structured meetings and produced a report that was made available during our last convention. As promised, implementation of the recommendations of this task force has now begun.

...Bishop Knudsen has been charged with the responsibility [for] Episcopal Ministries of Long Island [which] will encompass the combined work of Episcopal Charities and Episcopal Community Services and result in the creation of a shared or continuing board, and a process by which the raising of funds will go directly to programs whose oversight is accomplished by the same faithful individuals. This was the first of many goals outlined in the plan. And it is well on its way to being a reality.

The second initiative of the Strategic plan was to [recommend] more flexible structures to support the development of local ministry plans which would be more focused on deaneries and the local parish community.

As you recall I have asked the clergy of each deanery to meet once a month for clericus: to foster prayer, mutual care, and cooperation amongst the clergy in a particular geography. I have also asked that there be quarterly deanery gatherings of those same clergy and the elected lay leadership of the parishes to plan together, pray together, and work together on ministry development that engages the wider community. This is why I have been assigning the deacons to deaneries and not to specific church communities, to foster a growing awareness of the real need of the people in a given community and the work of the churches in that same geography.

A third initiative of the Strategic visioning process was to enhance the ministry of the Cathedral in the life of the diocese. ...A Cathedral is a unique place. It must simultaneously hold the story of a community of people who worship and are served and who serve locally, while it also holds the story, the history, and the gospel of an entire diocese of people who gather for the important events of its life and ministry. A cathedral is not only a place, it is an instrument of formation,

encouragement, and witness. It not only holds the bishop's seat, it is sacrament and the center of diocesan life.

The fourth initiative of the strategic plan was to expand Clinical Pastoral Education throughout the diocese. Traditionally, CPE, is usually a program found in hospital and healthcare-related settings such as the outstanding program provided at our own St. John's Hospital and Episcopal Health Services. The plan has recommended that we expand CPE in the diocese to include other ministry settings such as our camp, food pantries, prisons, college chaplaincies, and parochial settings. ...

Given all that is happening around us, and the continually changing face of ministry, it has become clear that we need to primarily support, encourage and equip our clergy and laity on the parish level. I remember how difficult and challenging it was as a parish priest to faithfully discharge my responsibilities while continually hearing of the new ideas, new models, and new approaches to parish ministry that I could not access and did not have time or energy to engage. To that end I am very excited to share with you that in 2015, we will launch the Diocesan Church Development Institute.

This will be a leadership training program used and perfected in many dioceses that is focused on strengthening the spiritual community and organizational life of congregations as they seek to further serve the local community. It will equip leaders to serve their congregations through integrated training experiences. The Diocesan Church Development Institute is designed for clergy and lay leaders who desire to transform their congregations by making them stronger, healthier, and more deeply rooted in Anglican spirituality while equipping them to serve the parish around them. ...

"Walk in Love as Christ loved us" is the theme of this convention. It seems to me that the Diocese of Long Island is all about walking in love and not merely talking about it. The incarnational reality of our life across this diocese provides vivid evidence that the Word of God is lived and preached, the sacraments are faithfully administered and faithfully received. And all the people of God are loved and cared for richly.

There is always more to do, more people to reach, more prayers to offer, and certainly more love to share. The nature of our ministry together is that we are never completely satisfied, never finished with the tasks at hand. There is always more to do. But today, as we celebrate this Eucharist with one another, let us be thankful—really thankful—for God's call, God's love, and our fellowship with one another.

Let's be the church together—truly walking in love as Christ loved us. Amen.