

Bishop Daniel's Address
127th Annual Convention of the Diocese of East Carolina
New Bern, North Carolina / February 5, 2010

I. Introduction

I greet you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and give thanks that we are gathered as laity, priests, deacons and bishops for this the 127th Annual Convention of our Diocese of East Carolina. It is my great joy and honor to be now in my 14th year as your bishop. I pray daily to be a good steward of the trust you as a diocese have placed in me in order that together we pursue the mission of reconciliation God has entrusted to our hands.

This past December, while I was in New York to visit our seminarians and attend some other meetings, I attended a candlelight service of Advent Lessons and Carols in the Chapel of the Good Shepherd at The General Theological Seminary. The chapel was in almost complete darkness as the congregation entered. Each person was handed a candle, several pieces of paper with instructions for the service, the order of service, a sheet with a Psalm and a Hymnal. After taking our place and as the service began, our candles were lit. The effect was quite lovely. For the remainder of the service, however, I had to hold a burning candle in one hand while juggling books and pieces of paper at various times without setting myself, my neighbor or the chapel on fire.

2009 was a full and busy year for our diocesan life and this year promises to be no different. No doubt sometimes it will feel like we are all in the Chapel of the Good Shepherd, juggling the candle and all the other things for which we are responsible and the roads we will walk down as a diocese engaged in mission during 2010.

II. Welcome to Katrina Browne and Bishop Charles Obaikal-Ebitu

Let me most heartily welcome Katrina Browne and her presence with us. We have already seen her powerful documentary *Traces of the Trade*, dealing with the slave trade in the United States and its lasting effects down to our own day, as well as its call for repentance, apology and racial reconciliation. Later today we will hear Katrina preach at our afternoon service. The message she brings is a powerful part of our Convention theme this year: Reconciliation – A future with Forgiveness. Katrina is a major voice in our national conversation and we are thankful for and honored by your presence.

We also welcome Bishop Charles Obaikal and his wife, Margaret, to our convention. Bishop Obaikal is the Bishop of the Diocese of Soroti, Uganda, and is visiting Trinity Church, Lumberton, under the auspices of African Team Ministries. Bishop and Margaret will be arriving later today, and I hope many of you will extend your own personal welcome.

III. We welcome Bishop Marray into our Diocesan life

Next, let me welcome – but not as a guest – one who has come to pitch his tent with us here in East Carolina as Bishop Assisting, the Rt. Rev'd Santosh Marray and his wife, Nalini. Bishop Santosh is a native of Guyana and has served parishes in that country as well as in the Bahamas and the state of Florida here in this country before being elected Bishop of the Seychelles (Province of the Indian Ocean). By the grace of God we met at a conference in Spain two years ago and renewed our friendship after his return to Florida after his term in the Seychelles ended. I have called Bishop Marray to our diocese and have charged him with a variety of ministries, including: regular Sunday visitations to congregations within our diocese, so that between Bishop Marray and me each congregation will have a bishop visit once a year. I have also asked Bishop Marray to chair the Department of Congregations and Mission, working especially with leadership and ministry development in smaller congregations; to chair the Historical Properties Commission to oversee underused church property or buildings without organized congregations (about 6–7 in all); to serve on the Board of the Farmworkers Ministry and to lead in the development of a vital ministry among Hispanics in our diocese. He will also serve ex officio on the Board of Trinity Center, the Trustees of the Diocese and the Foundation Board. His presence and energy have already made themselves felt

in our diocese. Recently I spoke with a member of a congregation which both Bishop Marray and I both visited on different occasions last fall. I noted that it was rather unusual for a congregation to have both bishops visit in such a short time frame. "Oh yes," the kind lady said, "it was nice to see both you and Bishop Marray. When will he be coming back to see us again?" Bishop Marray is a man of deep faith, a missionary spirit, and evangelistic energy. I am so glad that you are among us as a fellow pilgrim and co-worker. Welcome!

IV. A new Companion Diocese relationship with the Dominican Republic

Along with Bishop Marray's arrival, we will at this Convention formally establish a Companion Diocese relationship with the Diocese of the Dominican Republic (which shares the Island of Hispaniola with the nation of Haiti.) The Rev'd Mark Powell has undertaken the task of chairing this committee with energy and diligence. I hope you will visit the booth in the display area to learn more about how you and your congregation can become more involved. I hope that as time goes by, many of us in this room will be able to visit the Dominican Republic in order to take part in mission trips and to enjoy the beauty and wonder of this blessed and beautiful island and its people. Already we have included the parishes and clergy of the Dominican Republic (The "DR" as it is sometimes called) in our weekly Diocesan Prayer Cycle and our diocesan Episcopal Church Women under the leadership of President Jo Anne Kilday are at work on an effort to have each congregation in our diocese provide a \$300 scholarship for a school-age child, which is the cost of one year of school. Bishop Julio Holguin and I have known each other for almost 20 years. He is a dynamic bishop and has led his diocese to tremendous growth in membership and in mission. I invite you to join me as we send our prayers and greetings.

V. A report from the Bishop regarding the state of two congregations

Some parts of your bishop's work are more difficult and sad than others, and I must now turn to such a piece. Canon II.6.1 of our Diocesan Canons states: "When, in the judgment of the Bishop of the Diocese, a parish does not give 'promise of sufficient strength as will enable it to maintain its organization' whether from lack of communicants or from any other cause, this judgment shall be reported to the Convention, which shall thereupon take such action as may seem good." Now, I make such a report to this convention regarding the state of Christ Church, Hope Mills, which has failed for at least five years to file an Annual Parochial Report as required by canon of all parishes; has failed for at least five years to file an annual audit as required by Canon III.4.4; remains in default of payment for canonically required insurances; and has failed for several years to send delegates to the annual Diocesan Convention in violation of the Constitutional requirement to do so (Article 4, Section 5). Canon Stockard, Canon Craig, members of the Standing Committee and I have visited and worked with the few members of the congregation over the course of a year and brought the matter to the Executive Council at its June 2009 meeting. The Executive Council formally directed the Officers and Vestry of Christ Church, Hope Mills, to indicate in writing its intention to correct these deficiencies by September 15, 2009. To date, no response has been received. I now inform this Convention that I believe Christ Church, Hope Mills, to be in such a state of disorganization and weakness as described in the Canons. I am handing the matter to the Department of Congregations and Mission for its recommendations to the 128th Annual Convention regarding the future of Christ Church, Hope Mills.

I also report to this Convention that regular services of worship are no longer being held at St. Matthew's/San Mateo, Yeatsville. This is due to a confluence of circumstances and my report today is made only after valiant efforts were made by Deacon Janet Rodman, the Rev'd Ray Souza, the clergy of the Pamlico Deanery and the congregation of St. Thomas, Bath, along with efforts of the Lutheran congregation in Washington and others. According to diocesan records, St. Matthew's was formed in 1930 as a mission and a building constructed on property given by means of a bequest in a will. The terms of the bequest stated that should regular services of worship cease in St. Matthew's, the property would revert to other heirs named in the will. Such a request has been made by the heirs and the Trustees of the Diocese will make a motion for the Convention's consideration

which will expedite the property's reversion to the heirs after the building has been deconsecrated and religious articles and diocesan property removed.

VI. Ministry among Hispanics

I am happy to report that regular worship services in Spanish and ministry among Hispanics continues in a lively way at St. Peter's, Washington, St. Francis, Goldsboro, and La Sagrada Familia in Newton Grove. As valuable and as important as this work is, and as deeply thankful as I am for it, I must say that as a diocese we have not yet formed our will to respond to and minister among the growing population of Hispanics in East Carolina. I believe that the flood of Hispanics into our region is the greatest evangelistic challenge we will face in our generation, and they are already part of us! Sagrada Familia, by Sunday attendance, is the second largest congregation in our diocese, aspires to build a church that will seat 1000 and each year this congregation, led so ably by Fr. Antonio Rojas and his wife, Lucia, also hosts a festival which draws 4-6,000 people in attendance. Accordingly, I am today asking Bishop Marray and the Department of Congregations and Mission to begin work on a diocesan strategy for Hispanic ministry and to report to the 128th Annual Convention. I am also appointing Bishop Marray and the Rev'd Ron Abrams to the Board of the Farmworkers Ministry in order to help reinvigorate this fantastic ministry and its funding sources in the coming year and beyond.

VII. Youth Ministry

This past year saw the departure of Carol Taylor, Diocesan Youth Worker for the past 22 years. She left with the gratitude of many within our diocese for her good ministry over the years and a resolution in thanksgiving for her ministry will be put before this Convention. With Carol's departure, it was time to re-vision and re-staff our diocesan ministry among youth, college students and young adults. Over the late summer and fall, in various consultations and during a weekend gathering at Trinity Center consisting of youth, adults who work with youth, and college students along with me and Canon Stockard, we began to lay a vision for youth, college and young adult ministry in our diocese. A search for a full-time Diocesan staff member for this ministry will be public next week and we hope to engage a qualified and energetic person in the latter part of this year.

In the meantime, our diocesan youth and college work goes on: Camp Trinity, under the able leadership of Mary Beth Gay, will no doubt be once again filled to the gills this summer; the Sound-to-Sea environmental education program at Trinity Center welcomes almost 10,000 school-age children each year; college campus ministry is carried out effectively at St. Paul's, Greenville (for East Carolina University) and at Church of the Servant, Wilmington (for UNC-Wilmington). This coming summer, youth from the three Episcopal dioceses in our state will take a "Freedom Ride" beginning in Wilmington, continuing on to Somerset Plantation in Creswell where some 850 African-Americans were enslaved and ending in Greensboro at the site of the first sit-ins in the nation for racial integration were held. This journey is being planned in order that young people learn about some of the significant racial historical sites and moments in North Carolina's history of racial oppression, liberation and reconciliation. In April, Bishop Marray and I will join with youth from all over our diocese for a weekend acolyte festival at St. Andrew's-by-the-Sea in Nags Head. (There will be a Bishop's Ball on Saturday night at which we'll see if Bishop Marray can do the Electric Slide!)

VIII. "...To Provide Generous Pastoral Response..."

At last summer's 76th General Convention of The Episcopal Church, two resolutions (D025 and C056) were adopted by the General Convention. These two resolutions describe where this Church finds itself presently in relation to the place of gay and lesbian persons in the life and ministry of The Episcopal Church. Resolution D025 reaffirms the continued participation of this Church as a constituent member of the Anglican Communion: reaffirms the place of gay and lesbian persons in committed relationships in the life of this Church; and reaffirms that God has called and may call persons in committed relationships to ordained ministry in The Episcopal Church in accord with the Constitution and Canons of this Church, though Christians of good conscience disagree about some of these matters. Resolution C056, also adopted by the Convention, calls on the Standing

Commission on Liturgy and Music – in consultation with the House of Bishops – to collect and develop theological and liturgical resources and to offer them to the 77th General Convention (2012) for its consideration. The resolution also calls on bishops “...to provide generous pastoral response to meet the needs of members of this Church.”

While I believe that the General Convention has spoken clearly and set a direction in these two resolutions that I find wise, clear and compelling, I reaffirm my 1997 policy which states that no priest of this diocese has my permission to bless a same-gender union. This policy stands until such time as I alter or remove it. I am also persuaded that the General Convention 2009 has spoken in a way that invites the bishops of this Church to take a pastoral path ahead which neither forces nor demands particular actions or ministries. It is that path that I intend to follow.

As I look toward our direction ahead, I promise several things to you:

- I will not act rashly in the matter of the blessing of same-gender unions. I have already begun seeking consultation among clergy and laity around our diocese and will continue to do so.
- I will neither alter nor seek to replace the definition of marriage as found on page 422 of The Book of Common Prayer: “A solemn and public covenant between a man and a woman made in the presence of God.”
- I will neither force nor demand that any clergy person or vestry undertake any ministry which contravenes their conscience; understanding however, that since none of us has the final word in scriptural interpretation, our practices may vary.
- I understand that there is considerable disagreement among persons of good will around matters of sexuality. I will be intent on hearing all voices since I believe that such broadness is a treasured part of our Anglican Tradition.
- I am content to believe that the Church is large enough to contain a variety of practices within the broad stream of Christian tradition, even if some of those practices are divergent.
- I am persuaded that the cumbersome legislative process of the General Convention both prevents the General Convention from acting rashly and insures that by the time General Convention acts, its decision represents a vast consensus of the lay and ordained leadership of The Episcopal Church and the delegates to the diocesan conventions which elected them.
- I am very clear that the Church, the Body of Christ, is a divine institution which will continue to endure beyond the best human efforts over 2000 years to kill it. I have confidence in God’s future for the Church and in God’s unwavering love for all people.

IX. Trinity Center: its future, and ours

Thank God for Trinity Center! As is my custom, I went to Trinity Center a week ago to write this Address. I marveled once again at the sheer majesty and beauty of the setting. I watched young people, school children, vestries, military families come and go for their various conferences and events, and I heard the quiet voices of people on retreat at Pelican House. I ate with the wonderful staff of Trinity Center at the back table in the kitchen and enjoyed their fellowship and admired their dedication. I sat and talked with Penn Perry, our great Executive Director, now securely married and growing a beard! Trinity Center has been an integral part of our diocesan life for 20 years and arose from this diocese’s missional energy and dedication to hospitality extended to all in the name of Jesus. I wonder what our life as a diocese might be like without Trinity Center. To that end, I have asked the Rev’d John Frazier, Chair of the Trinity Center Board, and Carl Ragsdale, a member of the Board to prepare a presentation for this convention to help us consider these very questions and we will hear and see their report immediately following this Address. I believe you will be amazed at what you hear about the vitality and vigor of Trinity Center, its life and ministry of hospitality, the number and diversity of people it serves in a year, what it accomplishes in your name and on our behalf, and what opportunities and challenges we face in the near future.

X.

Conclusion

I began this Address talking about a small candle in a darkened chapel, and how juggling that tiny light along with books and papers became an image for me of our life as a diocese and the place of the light of the Gospel in our life. Our call is to be bearers of light to the darkness of the world in Jesus' name. And in bearing that light, there seems to be more and more to do, more and more challenges to face, and more and more for us to juggle as a diocesan family engaged in mission.

A fellow bishop said to me last year: "I've been a bishop for over 10 years now, and I've noticed that my convention addresses get shorter and shorter and that I have less and less to say." My sympathy immediately went out to you gathered here today. My experience as your bishop is that over the years, there is more and more to say as we are called by God to wider fields of ministry even though the road ahead may not always be well-defined or well-lit. Of course, we all want the million-watt floodlight to show us clearly what lies ahead down the road. But the Psalmist promises that God's word is a lamp unto our feet – and lamps shine only enough to show the next few steps ahead. It's a way of affirming that the future belongs to God. We can trust God's promises. We can trust the future God prepares.

Brothers and Sisters, Jesus calls us always forward in our mission and promises both his guidance and undying presence as he leads us in the way ahead. Even when the way ahead is dim, the road unmarked and the night is dark, we can always trust Jesus' promise never to desert his Church and always to guide it toward its fulfillment through his love and will. As the Spanish poet Antonio Machado said, "No hay camino. El camino se hace en andar." ("There is no road. The road is made by walking.") We are called to walk as God's people. We make the road ahead by walking and Jesus promises to be with us every step of the way. In the light of that promise we can walk confidently into the future God prepares.