

The Episcopal Diocese of East Carolina
New Bern, NC
February 4-6, 2010
Bishop Marray's Convention Address

Convention Theme: Reconciliation: A Future with Forgiveness

Our Times are in Our Hands

The renowned African Christian Church father of the 4th century, St. Augustine sums the urgency of the times in these words, "The times are troubled! The times are bad! This is what we humans say. But we are our times. If only we would live properly, our times would be good. Such as we are, such are our times". The constant challenge of human life is to survive the times of our lives. We are immortal. We shall live forever according to the fundamental core of Christian teaching on the resurrection. We shall live forever whether we want to or not; but to truly survive our times now means to value our present times.

It also means we must endure our bad times with as much hope, and joy as we can. We develop such endurance through the message of our faith that God still walks through this world, as mixed up and as troublesome as it may sometimes be. No matter how good or bad our times may be now, the most important fact is that we are, as a Church and diocese, on the move with God.

It is within this awareness of the crucial times we are in, and in recognition of the fact that vocational life in the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church calls us out to help shape the life of ministry, that I joyfully accepted the call from the Right Reverend Clifton Daniel, 3rd, Bishop Diocesan, to share Episcopal ministry with him in the Diocese of East Carolina. The call of the bishop comes with the overwhelming appreciation that the ensuing phase of his vision, as your servant leader, would be best served by two episcopates. The pastoral intent conceived in this decision comes as a response to comments shared by many parishes that they would wish to have annual Episcopal visitation. In these urgent times, the presence of the bishop is a sign of solidarity his office shares with congregations in their struggle to witness the gospel in their respective parochial settings. The presence of the bishop is equally interpreted as bearing the scars of ministry with each of you, and that his prayers are ever constant before the Lord for the Church he is called, in mutual ministry with each member, to serve.

We are grateful to be part of the diocese at this juncture of its vision and to make our contribution in shaping its life and concretize its missionary zeal. Whereas Episcopal visitation would define my sacramental role, you will notice a change in the budgetary allocation for 2010 as against 2009 in the position of Canon Missioner. One of my responsibilities is to spearhead this area. Mission and ministry would occupy front and center of our call. I eagerly look forward to working with our churches in advancing the divine commission from the Lord, as it is imperative that we continue our intentional focus at diocesan, parochial and global fronts. There is already

the obvious intensification of this effort in the life of many of our parishes and we thank God for it, and commend those parishes for their ministry. However, there are many areas in mission and ministry still left unattended, and some churches that have shown a heart and willingness to engage mission could benefit from inter-diocesan support. Additionally, there are others areas in the Global Mission Initiative waiting to 'breathe' again, whose 'breath' is stifled for lack of support and supply to conduct basic Christian witness. We who are benefactors of God's largess have a divine obligation, where ever possible as led by the Holy Spirit, to continue to engage our brothers and sisters in those eucharistic communities.

The pastoral life fosters the elements of personal transformation and greater empowerment of the people of God for creative and Christ like living. In this scenario the parish becomes the new center of conversation living out the baptismal covenant within the framework of mission and ministry. It is important for us to note that the missiological life (MISSIO DEI-Mission of God) of the church promotes and engages the broader more outward looking role of the church. By word and apostolic action the gospel needs to be incarnated in the lives of fellow sisters and brothers yet to know and experience the love and welcome of Jesus.

There seems to be an overwhelming consensus to the acknowledgement that many of our churches are experiencing significant challenge in membership growth, and this grave concern translates, understandably so, into lack of motivation. The Department of Mission and Development at Diocesan House intends to review the shape of many our parishes working with vestries and laity to find ways at revitalizing and reinvigorating their life. It is accepted that some of the congregations are located in stable settled communities; however, parish vitality is never only about numbers but vibrancy and impact. In the model of the twelve apostles we have a group of people that spearheaded the transformation of the world through the simple act of being a faithful Church. The primary intention is to ensure that all our churches feel that they have an intrinsic and invaluable role in diocesan life; that each forms a critical part of the whole and that the struggle of one does have the potential of adversely diminishing the vitality and life of the others.

One of the strengths in Anglican/Episcopal ethos and polity is that we are shaped by the notion of being a family of many congregations living out our Christian witness in communion under 'one tent', the Episcopal Diocese of East Carolina. This unique model makes no allowance for parochialism, which means that when one member of the family is hurting all are experiencing the pain. The Pauline definition of wholeness in the body in his eloquent description of the Church serves well to illustrate this observation (I Corinthians 12: 12ff). In this process of re-visioning, it is our unequivocal hope and fervent prayer that all of our churches, which ever location in the diocese they may be planted, would indeed continue to remain 'beacons' of God's presence without losing their luster.

In pursuit of the vision, the diocese will continue to promote and encourage fuller engagement of the tried and tested two-fold component manifest in the form of stewardship and evangelism. The gift in this two-fold program is that it is adaptable to every parish setting. Radical evangelism which incorporates stewardship is already one of the official foci of Bishop Daniel's vision adapted as the diocesan vision. One of the responsibilities of the Bishop Assisting is to deepen its outcome.

A fundamental strategy proposed will seek to reorganize resources for mission and ministry. This would be handled through the Diocesan Historical Properties Commission. It is intended that this body working in conjunction with the Department of Mission and Development would assess properties that have no active ministry and advise Convention and /or Executive Council accordingly.

Alongside sharing the council of the various diocesan commissions and committees, I am open to any task the Bishop Diocesan and diocesan family call upon me to perform. I see my role in the diocese as that of a colleague in ministry with the Bishop Diocesan, Canon to the Ordinary, the Clergy, laity and office staff in fulfilling the mandate of the "Great Commission". It is my humble prayer that you would allow me a share in your ecclesial or parish life. As I come to you from diverse ministry and mission settings across the Anglican Communion the Lord called me out to serve, undergirded by sincerity of intention and humility of purpose, I hope that you will allow the manifestation of the gift of the Spirit, the Lord has undeservingly bestowed on me help in the empowerment of the greater Church to the common good. In so doing, it is my prayer that in the spirit of mutuality and collaborative ministry we will grow together.

Finally, wisdom from St. Gregory is helpful here, "It is neither what you are or what you have been that God sees with his all merciful eyes but what you desire to be". The true character of leadership is to accept what is before us, and either transform it or improve upon it for the better. Together, let us renew our commitment to move forward with Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit toward the deepening of diocesan witness using our differing gifts, and yes, fundamental differences in opinions and positions as strengths rather than grounding for conflicts or frictions that ultimately serve to weaken the work of the Spirit among us. The "anchor" of our hope is Christ the unchanging reality. If we listen carefully, we can hear God in Christ whispering to us, "I am here and I will never leave you in time or eternity!" My wife Nalini and I have come to share in the dream for your diocese, and by extension the dream of God in Christ for all of us.

Now to him who is able to keep you from falling, and to make
you stand without blemish in the presence of his glory with rejoicing,
to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory,
majesty, power, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen!!!
(Jude 24-25)