

## ***Bishop Charles vonRosenberg's Address to the 23rd Annual Diocesan Convention***

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Third Bishop of East Tennessee*

Mr. President, Bishop Sanders, Bishop Robertson, clergy and lay delegates of the Diocese of East Tennessee, guests and visitors to this Convention, 'Grace to you and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.' We offer that greeting, which is so familiar for Christians since the time of St. Paul. And, on this occasion, a somewhat-modified greeting serves as our Convention theme. Thus here, near the beginning of the Twenty-third Annual Convention of the Diocese of East Tennessee, 'Grace and peace, to you and to the world.' It is my honor and blessing to address you, near the conclusion of my eighth year as your bishop.

Speaking on your behalf, I offer my gratitude to our Convention hosts this year - the Rev. Scherry Fouke, the Rev. Martha Sterne, and their respective congregations, All Saints, Morristown, and St. Andrew, Maryville. We all are indeed grateful to you for your hard work in preparing for us and in hosting us during this Convention. Join me now, please, in thanking our hosts for their work on behalf of us all.

Before I mention each member of my staff and thank them individually, I want to pay tribute to the life and ministry of Jim Muir. Jim died last month, but for many, many years he served as the volunteer diocesan prison chaplain. I give thanks to God for Jim Muir and for his long service to prisoners, in our Lord's name.

Now, as is my custom, I want to thank the diocesan staff publicly - not only for their special efforts in preparation for this gathering, but also for their tireless and effective ministries accomplished all during the year, on behalf of their diocese and this bishop. Therefore, thanks to Lynn Lazlo, Receptionist and Administrative Assistant; Beth Anderson, Manager of Chapter and Verse Bookshop; Alex Haralson, Youth Ministries Coordinator; Rosemary Davenport, Insurance Administrator and Administrative Assistant; Bo Lewis, sometimes Vicar of Grace Point; Sharon Rasmussen, Communications Director; Rick Govan, Ministry Development Facilitator; Mary Berl, Diocesan Administrator; Laura Nichols, Bishop's Executive Assistant; and Stephen Askew, Canon to the Ordinary. Also, thanks to Herb Berl, who retired last year from civil service and who was then put to work in the Lord's service as the volunteer diocesan Stewardship Officer. In addition, I want to recognize and thank Al Minor, who has retired from his volunteer post as Chaplain to Retired Clergy and Surviving Spouses, and to recognize and thank Peter Keese, assisted by Perry Scruggs, who have taken up that responsibility. Please join me in expressing our appreciation for the good work and important ministries of all these fine folks!

Now, for the remainder of this Address, we consider the state of the Church. It is important to note at the outset that such an evaluation could be quite different, depending on who is doing the evaluating and on what part of the Church's life is being considered.

As a way to begin, I want to share one perspective with you, from the Gulf Coast of Mississippi. I joined several other bishops there two months ago, and we encountered

some of the local people as well as workers and volunteers who continue to struggle with the aftermath of hurricane Katrina. Bishop Duncan Gray III served as our guide along the Mississippi coast. Many stories were shared, but one seems especially appropriate as we reflect on the state of our Church.

Bishop Gray reported that six Episcopal churches in Mississippi were destroyed by the storm. That is, six buildings of worship either were damaged beyond repair, or else, they were entirely washed away. The congregations themselves - even now - are not in good shape either, for many, many people either are missing or have moved away. In fact, Bishop Gray told us that one of the six churches was involved in a search process for a new rector at the time of the storm. After Katrina, the Senior Warden and the Bishop issued a call to the new priest, because nobody else on the search committee or the vestry could be found. According to Bishop Gray, one of the six churches has sixty percent of its congregation back, but others have far fewer - all the way down to almost no one.

However, these churches have experienced firsthand the benefits and value of being part of a church that is connected to others, the Episcopal Church - connected through our dioceses. Those six communities of faith know the grace and peace that have been shared with them in tangible ways. In their time of crisis, they have known many blessings indeed. And this is the point of Bishop Gray's story. Of those six destroyed churches, three of them have pledged more money to the diocese in 2007 than they did prior to hurricane Katrina!

That, then, is one perspective on the state of the Church. In spite of past difficulties, those congregations are looking to the future. Even in extreme circumstances, they have not been paralyzed by the past. They have chosen to focus on reasons for gratitude, rather than to practice lament and accusation. As a result, they radiate a profound sense of grace and peace that provide witness to the power of resurrection in our world. Such examples offer one view of the state of the Church.

I need to add a note here that was not in my Address until earlier this week. Those churches in Mississippi appreciate two things that we in East Tennessee need to recognize, for the sake of our soul's health and, also, for the sake of our diocesan mission. First, the stewardship of resources with which we are blessed needs to be central to the life of every parish and worshiping community. If we are not calling attention to the blessings that we have from God and to our responsibilities as stewards of those gifts, then we are neglecting our job as leaders of the Church. I, therefore, call on every church in East Tennessee to concentrate considerable effort and attention in 2007 on Christian stewardship, as an essential dimension of our lives in Christ Jesus. The practice of stewardship needs to be a primary focus of all our churches in 2007.

Secondly, as you will hear in this convention, we must make adjustments in our proposed diocesan budget, for by canon we must adopt a balanced budget. Our parishes have not accepted the diocesan financial askings to the extent that we had anticipated. Those askings are based on a fair-share formula for all our churches, but not all of our churches have accepted their fair share. As a result, our programs and ministries will suffer from lack of funds this year; and those ministries will be impacted - significantly and negatively. In 2007, we do not anticipate that positions on diocesan staff will be in jeopardy. However, unless churches support the diocese to a greater extent in the future, then staff will have to be reduced in significant ways in years to come. I, therefore, call

on every church in East Tennessee also to re-examine your commitment to our diocese in 2007 and to begin now to plan to accept your full asking for 2008, as your fair share in support of our common life.

To summarize this addition to my Address, please take to heart the message of those Mississippi churches. We are indeed blessed by our relationships and connections in the Episcopal Church, and those blessings do place responsibilities on us as well. I pray that none of our churches will have to suffer tragedy and extreme loss in order to recognize the two-fold message of Christian stewardship - blessing *and* responsibility.

Now, I will return to my original text and to the consideration of other perspectives on the state of the Church. For all of us, the General Conventions of 2003 and 2006 marked significant and profound moments on our collective journey of faith as the Episcopal Church. For some of us, the moments were welcomed and celebrated. For others of us, recent General Convention decisions have been more difficult and trying. However, in fact, Episcopalians have held differing perspectives about decisions made at every level of the Church, for as long as there has been an Episcopal Church. By the way, differences of opinion and perspective likewise are common in other denominations as well - although, usually their differences are not so public as ours. As people striving to follow the Way of Jesus Christ, we say our prayers and we make decisions, imploring the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes our decisions further the cause of Jesus in the world, and sometimes history proves us to have been unwise. But, as people of faith, we keep moving forward on our journey.

My point today is this. The period of time between 2003 and 2006 - like any other period of history - has passed. Unfortunately, some people of faith have chosen that period as the defining moment in the history of our church and they continue to consider that time with lament and with accusation. What precedes that period apparently seems inconsequential to them; what follows it seems irrelevant. For these folks, that time has defined the Episcopal Church. I submit to you, though, that in a strange and ironic kind of way, such a perspective makes a false idol out of those years.

Another analogy for this practice might be helpful within this Body that values scripture. To "proof text" a Bible verse means to lift particular words out of context and, thereby, to distort their meaning, without reference to what comes sooner or later in the text. Some of us here were warned, in no uncertain terms, about that practice in seminary. In a similar way, some folks recently have tried to remove the years 2003 through 2006 from their historical context. In the process, a more complete meaning is lost, and the subsequent danger is that the Church can become stuck at one point in history.

However, I repeat that as people of faith, we must keep moving forward on our journey. We must move on. We must continue to say our prayers; to keep imploring the Spirit for guidance; and to practice the discipline of confession. In doing so, we remember those things left undone that we should have done, as well as those things done that we should not have done. We believe - at the core of our being - that we are a people forgiven by God in Christ and reconciled by our Savior on the cross. And, as people of faith, we keep moving forward, in faith.

As people who follow Jesus, we resist the temptation to focus on matters of the past, for we believe that Christ calls us to a future that lies in his hands. In that spirit, therefore, I

want to point out a couple of opportunities that I see on our journey of faith - opportunities for ministries of grace and of peace, both at home and for the world.

The Millennium Development Goals have been identified by nations around the world as objects worthy of our attention and cooperation, in the global community. The goals are consistent with efforts of faith communities - and, specifically, with ministries of Christian people - and, therefore, the Episcopal Church has enthusiastically embraced those goals, called the "MDGs." In fact, while relatively little attention was given to this emphasis in the secular press, actually the MDGs were a primary focus of our most recent General Convention.

Our diocesan budget in 2006 and the proposed budget for 2007 include responses to the MDGs at the suggested level of funding. We are committed to these goals - as a diocese, as the Episcopal Church, as members of the Anglican Communion, and as citizens of the world. In this Convention, we plan to focus our attention on the MDGs in a couple of ways. First, we are delighted that our Presiding Bishop, Katharine Jefferts Schori, has agreed to be present later in the Convention, to address a primary matter of attention and passion for her, the Millennium Development Goals. We look forward to her address tomorrow morning a great deal indeed. Secondly, we also look forward to the short presentations, called "Millennium Moments" throughout our time together. Those presentations will highlight responses to the MDGs.

Another appropriate focus for our journey of faith in this diocese is Grace Point, our camp and retreat center. Thanks to the efforts of Bo Lewis, Hugh Jones, Norma Mills, and many others, members of our diocese are becoming more and more aware of this wonderful resource for Christian formation and nurture, for retreat and commitment, and for experiences of faith, fellowship, and fun. Thanks to the generosity of our parishioners and our parishes, we have seen the completion of two tree house dormitories in the past year, the ground-breaking for our new St. Paul's Chapel, and the beginning of construction for a porch and renovations to our Commons Building, which will be used much more effectively as a result. We also have in hand significant seed money for the improvement of our adult housing at Grace Point.

At this time, the diocese has closed all commercial loans on Grace Point, and we continue to repay our trust funds. The Board has adopted a "pay-as-we-go" philosophy for new construction and repairs. Good fiscal management is being practiced, even as we enhance this wonderful diocesan resource. We are truly blessed to be the stewards of this grace-filled and peaceful place, Grace Point.

I am delighted that several people will make presentations on behalf of Grace Point during this convention. I hope that their enthusiasm and commitment will be contagious as we hear their stories.

In summary, then, my intention today is to call us into a future and a future of hope, blessing, and faith and a future that is indeed in God's hands. As we encounter that future, continuing our journey of faith, "Grace to you and peace, from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ" and "Grace and peace, to you and to the world." *Amen.*

## ***Presiding Bishop Katherine Jefferts Schori's Address to the 23rd Annual Convention of the Diocese of East Tennessee***

It is a great joy and delight to be with you. What a beautiful place this is. I bring you greetings from all the staff at the Church Center in New York, and on behalf of the rest of the church, I want to thank you for your faithful stewardship, your full participation in and contribution to the budget of the General Convention is vital to the mission and ministry of the church, and I am grateful for your increase this year. It is a sign of solidarity with people across this nation and in the 15 other countries where the Episcopal Church is present. As the church together we can do far more and do it more effectively than any of us alone. Part of the mission of the Episcopal Church includes our covenant relationships with other parts of the Communion, like the dioceses in Mexico and Central America that are formerly part of the Episcopal Church.

Last weekend I visited the Episcopal Church in Cuba, a diocese that until the late 1960s was part of this church, but at present does not belong to any province. We still have a covenant relationship with Cuba, even though our interactions are severely limited by our governmental policies. The province of this church and of Canada and the West Indies oversee the church in Cuba and appoint its bishops. I was there to participate in the metropolitan council and the annual gathering of their diocesan synod.

Despite the language differences, you would recognize the same passion for mission and ministry in that place, which is bigger than the state of Tennessee. They have one bishop at present. They remain quite isolated because of the embargo, and I would encourage you to reach out to them in any way you can - at the very least, offer them your prayers and your solidarity. You might also speak to your elected officials; there is energy in Congress to remove the barriers of trade and exchange with Cuba, but the administration the last time that was discussed threatened to veto.

Cuba is but one example of our interconnectedness in the body of Christ. This very gathering here in Gatlinburg is a celebration and recognition of the interconnected body that is the Diocese of East Tennessee. You work together year by year to make mission and ministry possible in this part of Tennessee, and I gather in a small part of Georgia. How we work together is making evident, a sacrament, of the greatest reality that is this part of the body of Christ.

Our mission as Christians is the healing of the whole body - to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ. That means *all* people - not just East Tennessee, not just Episcopalians, not just Christians - it means the whole family of God - that includes all of Creation, not only the human part.

We work toward healing the body of God's creation in a variety of ways. The General Convention last summer identified a series of priorities for our common mission support, and you're probably familiar with at least the first one: justice and peace work, framed by the Millennium Development Goals. But they also identified priorities having to do with ministry with youth, young people and children; reconciliation and evangelism; the

transformation of congregations; and partnerships, both within the Anglican Communion and with ecumenical and interfaith groups. All of those are particular ways of teaching God's mission in reconciling the world.

The mission of the church reconciles the whole body of God's creation and can also be spoken of as building the reign of God. That vision of a healed and restored world is what you and I are charged with doing and being in this world. That dream of God reverberates throughout a long history of encounter with God in key revivals and in the second covenant with Jesus: coming home again to Eden, leaving slavery in Egypt, entering the promised land, drawing all nations into Zion, building a city set on a hill, the great banquet set on a hillside to which all people are invited - those are all images of a world restored to right relationship. Jesus himself acts out those images when he feeds the multitude, when he heals people and then invites the people around them to be their friends and restore them to community, and when he has the final supper with the disciples, to provide them with the great dream of God. His resurrection appearances include several about food and feeding people, and all are about restoring the community to health and wholeness.

The last part of Matthew's gospel, starting in chapter 25, brings a call to that kind of service of healing and reconciliation. "I was hungry, and you gave me food; I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you welcomed me; I was naked, and you gave me clothing; I was sick, and you cared for me; I was in prison, and you visited me." The Millennium Development Goals are a contemporary illustration of the work that Jesus did himself, and of the work to which he continues to call his followers.

Some people understand the mission of the church to be primarily about the Great Commission, which comes later in Matthew's gospel: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations." But both of them are part of loving God and loving our neighbors as ourselves, and one cannot be divorced from the other. I don't imagine that God has any patience with arguments over whether evangelism or social justice ministry is more important. In order to love God and neighbor, we have to do both. Evangelism has to be understood in the sense of our baptismal covenant, as sharing the good news of Christ in *both word and deed*. And we would do well to recall that we cannot love God whom we cannot see, if we do not love our neighbor, whom we do see.

The world is not reconciled, as long as some live without: without food, without good news, without adequate housing, without peace or clothing or justice. The work of this church is to build a world of shalom. That dream of shalom includes all of those other versions of God's dream - about adequate streets and food and housing and employment and health care and education and equality and the peace that comes only when justice is present and available to all.

The Millennium Development Goals are a vision of that kind of shalom for the world. They focus on extreme poverty - the kind of poverty that prevents children from developing their full mental capacity because their bodies and brains are malnourished, and the kind of poverty that makes people far more susceptible to disease and to shorter life spans.

The goals begin with the fact that one-third of the world's people do not have adequate resources to maintain the stuff of life, and that every day a billion - a billion - people go to bed hungry. The first of the goals aims to cut that number in half by the year 2015, eight years from now. The other goals move on from hunger to include maternal health care - like what you just heard about - so that healthy children are brought into this world. The goals include primary education for all children, both girls and boys; gender equity and the empowerment of women. Many of these goals focus on the *anawim*, the little ones, on whom Jesus' own ministry focused: widows, orphans, those with infirmities and communicable diseases, women in general - those who labor at occupations labeled unclean - and I reflect on the fact that your resolution this morning dealt with people who work in occupations within the nuclear energy and weapons industry that is in our society often considered unclean.

Sociologists and anthropologists know that when women are educated and empowered, their families and communities reap the benefits. The larger community becomes healthier and develops a greater capacity for life, and that is the beginning of the kind of abundant life that Jesus said is the birthright of all human beings. Where the least among us are served, the whole community begins to flourish.

The Millennium Development Goals also include drastic reductions in preventable diseases like AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria, and they include halving the childhood mortality rate. Did you know that 10,000 people die every day from diseases that can be prevented or treated?

The last two goals have to do with environmentally sustainable development and the development of global partnerships, especially partnerships around trade and debt reduction and initiatives to provide development.

These goals mean profound change, even catastrophic changes, in that sense of gospel overturning. They're looking for change in the way the world works, or more accurately, in the way the world doesn't work. But the reality is that they only go halfway. The first goal is to halve the number of those who face abject poverty by 2015; it's an achievable goal if we're serious about doing the work involved, and it's certainly not easy work. But we can't ever sit back and say, "we've done it, we've met the goal," not until every human being - *every* human being - has a full and adequate diet, not just half the starving people in this world. Not until every child is born into this world with all the adequacy of health care for him and for his mother. Not until every child has the full expectation of equal education, equal rights and equal access to the necessities and blessings of this world. Not until every person has the full opportunity to use all her God-given gifts and truly know a life of abundance.

The Millennium Development Goals have caught the imagination of this church in a way that is quite startling. I first heard about them in 1998, when Bishop Bob Ladehoff of Oregon then came back from Lambeth, and we talked about Jubilee and 0.7 percent. I understood the part about Jubilee, but where did that number come from? It literally took me years to discover that the 0.7 percent number came out of calculations ... nearly 40 years ago. They recognized that if the developed nations of the world were willing to commit a relatively small percentage of their annual income to the needs of the developing world that global poverty could largely be eliminated. That number is at the

centerpiece of the push by Episcopalians for Global Reconciliation in a growing awareness of the MDGs. The number is based on governmental giving. As a sign of solidarity, more than 70 dioceses, including this one, have indicated that they too will give at least that percentage of their annual budget for international development and will encourage congregations to do the same. Your diocese is a shining example of how awareness is beginning to change your understanding of mission.

There's an untold or unrecognized challenge in this story, however. The scale of funding required will not be reached through the giving of individuals or dioceses, however generous. Giving by members of this church is an essential and prophetic act, one that challenges others, especially governments, to join in the work. But the MDGs can only be met by governmental generosity, and it will be here that the next work of the MDGs is going to have to focus. You and I as Episcopalians, and all the other like-minded folks we can muster, of whatever faith or denomination or none are going to have to lobby our government to raise the level of aid we give to one percent of the annual budget.

Currently, the U.S. gives about a quarter of what's needed. The Scandinavian countries meet the goal, but it should be obvious that their economies are a lot smaller than ours. England and France and some of the other EU nations are also giving increasing portions of their budgets. Yes, this country is generous. But if we're going to build a reconciled world, we're going to have to be even more serious about it.

If you take nothing else home from this gathering, I hope you'll carry away the message that advocacy is essential. That means the willingness of all our senators and congressional representatives to make international development a priority. That means being willing to write letters and call Washington to say that children are starving in Bangladesh or dying of AIDS in Zimbabwe, that we care; we want our government to do more to put a stop to it. Remember, they work for you.

As Christians, we believe that the world is not supposed to permit girls to be excluded from school or to allow mothers to die in childbirth because no one will go to help. We believe that malaria is largely preventable; we believe that all people should have clean water to drink and adequate food and shelter. We take seriously what Jesus said, that whenever you did not do this for one of the least of these, you ignored the presence of God in your midst.

Now, the protest I most often hear is that the church is not supposed to meddle in politics. Well, my friends, politics is the art of living in community. It doesn't have to be a dirty word. Spanish even has two words for it: politica means politics; politicacia means dirty politics. The kingdom of God is about a society of peace and justice. The goals won't be achieved without the willingness to use all the gifts at our disposal, including politics.

All of Jesus' preaching and teaching about the kingdom of God is a pointed way of saying that God is in charge, and not any human government. Our task is to challenge those governments to live up to a higher standard, one that is worthy of God's devotion.

Working on the MDGs is not just a matter of identifying a place to send your money. It is about developing truly giving relationships and listening to and learning from other people's experiences. How many of you have gone on a mission trip or helped to build a

house here, or fed the homeless? You have some sense of how one's own heart is transformed by that experience. It's only when we can bring that kind of change that comes when you and I have our hearts and minds converted that the world around us will begin to be transformed. The basic message of Christianity is about that kind of transformation – that a relationship with God has and does begin to change us; that the power of the resurrection can overcome the desert all around us and within us; that Jesus shows that how we love our neighbors can transform the society in which we live by giving all we are and have to God's purposes. And the message tells us over and over again that the kingdom of God will prevail, over all the petty kingdoms of this world.

Transformation can begin with partnerships, through building up the body of Christ in interpersonal relationships. Those partnerships can begin to move us away from an approach to the suffering of this world that is merely putting Band-Aids and charity on the problem, and move us forward, transforming the systems of this world that permit the ungodly and inhumane suffering and poverty and violence that are so rampant.

Our full communion with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is an example of the partnership that globalized how we approach the MDGs. Our own Office of Government Relations and the ELCA's Washington office have collaborated to produce a study guide on the MDGs called, "God's Mission to the World." It's designed for parish use, it's just been published, it would be an excellent Lenten study and it's free for downloading. You can order multiple copies from Episcopal Books and Resources for a \$7.50 charge for shipping.

You can also join ONE Episcopalian, the ONE campaign to make poverty history. You can learn about all of this on the Web site of the Episcopal Public Policy Network, and I'm sure there are resources out in the hall about all of these.

You and I are meant to build a society of peace with justice. That will not happen without challenging the structures of this world, whether city or state or national level. Systems of injustice do not change only through prayer, though prayer is essential. Prayer comes in many forms: the words we pray week by week in church – words that convert our hearts and our minds; the kind of prayer of presence and companionship; the kind that's shouted from the housetops; the kind that gets our hands dirty and strengthens our hearts.

Prayer is involved the other kind of transformation as well – the prayer that prepares and empowers us for writing a letter to or calling our senators; the prayer that undergirds conversion of hearts in conversation with our families and neighbors and fellow parishioners and even strangers.

Justice calls us daily to use all the gifts we've been given – the power of prayer, the power of the vote, the power of persuasion and the power that comes to transform relationships. We have the ability to transform this world, to realize the vision of the reign of God, in Appalachia as well as in Africa and Asia.

Human communities are meant to be sustainers and empowerers of life, not slues of despair. Together, we have the ability to live out that vision of hope, to help this country become reconcilers and healers rather than bearers of war and violence.

It is long past time to beat our swords into plowshares, to lay down our weapons of destruction and to build an open city of truly human relationships, rooted in the radical freedom and friendship of God.

May God bless that work; may God bless each one of us; and may God bless our ability to continue to dream that dream of shalom until the entire Creation once more is whole.

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