

The Bishop's Address
The 224th Annual Meeting of Convention
The Episcopal Church in the Diocese of New Jersey
February 29, 2008

How shall we mend it, my dear? The oldest son of the English Romantic painter John Constable (1776-1837) wrote in his diaries with great affection for his father. Constable had two great passions: painting and his children. The diaries include an account of one notable day when there was to be an exhibit of new works. Collectors and critics traveled to Constable's home in Suffolk to see his latest paintings, one of which was to be unveiled before them on that day. The moment came and Constable stepped up and drew back the curtain. There was an astonished silence, followed by pained embarrassment. For there, right across the canvas, from top to bottom, was a huge tear.

After everyone had left Constable faced his family and wondered about the torn canvas. One of the children, however, was missing. It was the eldest son. When he came home, his father asked him if he had damaged the canvas. The son answered, "Yes." The diary goes on to record these most gracious words from Constable to his son: "How shall we mend it, my dear?"

This world is a magnificent canvas of God, filled with beauty and given by the artist into our care and stewardship. But, we turned against God, betrayed God's trust and turned against one another (Eucharistic Prayer C, page 370 in The Book of Common Prayer). We confess that we are the ones who have torn the beautiful canvas by the master artist. We live in a world torn apart outwardly, as we ourselves are torn apart, inwardly. Like Constable's son, we have made a mess of things.

But instead of the expected and deserved words of punishment and condemnation, John Constable spoke those amazingly gracious words: "How shall we mend it, my dear?" We can hear in those words an echo of the very Word of the Lord: "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him" (John 3:17).

How shall we mend it? The "we" points to the Church as God's partner in mending the world, by the grace of Jesus Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit. We are members of Christ's Body, empowered to continue Jesus' ministry of reconciliation. On Good Friday that reconciliation was accomplished through the death of Jesus. On Easter Day reconciliation's victory was made clear in the risen body of Jesus. On Pentecost the mission of reconciliation was given to the Church in the Spirit of Jesus. "So we are," writes Paul to the Corinthians, "ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God" (II Cor. 5:20).

How shall we mend it? How shall we be taken seriously as ambassadors of reconciliation? Our theme for this Convention is, "Somos una iglesia. We are one Church." Being one Church is not just a good idea that we came up with on our own. To live and serve together as one Church, one Body is not just a good idea, it is Good News.

We are bold to say that we are one Church. When we celebrate Baptism and/or Confirmation, whenever we reaffirm our Baptism (as we do this morning), the Celebrant and congregation begin the Liturgy with the acclamation that there is one Body and one Spirit; one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all. (Page 413, The Book of Common Prayer). One, one, one... And then, so it seems, the rest of the week is spent trying to deal with the countless ways in which the Church is anything but one Body, but rather, like the world, a Body torn, broken and wounded. It has always been so. One bishop told me that, in preparation for his diocesan convention he had read the bishops' addresses from the previous 100 years. In every one of those addresses every bishop made reference to the unprecedented challenges that threaten to divide the church today.

But, we do not lose heart. We continue to proclaim the reconciliation that we do not yet see clearly, not even in the Church. But we proclaim reconciliation and endeavor to live as reconciled, because Jesus rose from the dead and showed us who is really the Lord. Since Christ is risen, we are embraced in everlasting arms. Being at one with the Lord and with each other is not a wish; it is our destiny. Being together is not an outcome to be wished for; it is a sure and certain promise. Our call is to live as the mended of the Lord and be about the ministry of mending. This is God's dream – Tikkun olam – the mending of creation.

I believe that our Diocese is sound in the faith of Jesus and strong in the Holy Spirit. We have much for which to give thanks and plenty to do. Today I want to celebrate some of our achievements as a Diocese and to face some of our challenges as well.

Bishops. It is a great honor and joy to welcome to our Celebration these four bishops: Mellick Belshaw, the Ninth Bishop of New Jersey, whose presence reminds us that we are one with our history; Martin Barahona, the Bishop of El Salvador and Primate of IARCA (Iglesia Anglicana de La Region Central de America), whose presence reminds us that we are one with the Anglican Communion; Roy Riley, the Bishop of the New Jersey Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, whose presence reminds us that we are one with our full communion partners; and the Rt. Rev. Sylvestre Romero, Assisting Bishop in the Diocese of New Jersey, whose presence reminds that we are one family in New Jersey.

Bishop Romero. The first achievement that I wish to celebrate with you is that Bishop Romero is here! Demos gracias a Dios. With the help of your prayers and financial support, we now have a bishop who is not only fluent in Spanish but conversant with cross cultural ministry. His faithfulness and hard work are already expanding our missionary endeavors in New Jersey. His spirituality, companionship and humor have already begun to enrich the lives of clergy, of congregations and of our staff. We thank God for him and for his dear wife, Eva.

Companion Relationship with El Salvador. We have also to celebrate the achievement of nine years of companion relationship with El Salvador. Many of you here and many more of our people have traveled to El Salvador and/or given sacrificially to support our

friends. We have all received far more than what we have given. We have been renewed by the faith, love, hope and hospitality of our brothers and sisters. Our thanks to the Rev. Canon Servio Moscoso and to our Companion Diocese Committee for their continuing good work.

Youth and Young Adults. Let us celebrate our ministry with junior and senior high youth and the proposed expansion of our campus ministry. Our programs strengthen young people for their journey as disciples of Christ and leaders of the Church. To choose just one example: we can be very proud of a group of 38 youth and adult advisors who took a 24 hour bus trip to and from Long Beach, Mississippi, where they spent a week working in Katrina relief efforts. We can be prouder, still, that there will be another mission trip back to Mississippi this summer. Canon Kep Short and Deacon Debi Clarke and the Youth Council do great work. But they are eager to help you with youth ministry in your congregation. That is where youth ministry needs to be alive and rockin', week by week. Please invite Kep or Debi to help.

Campus Ministry. We have two premiere campus ministries in the Diocese, at Rutgers and at Princeton, led by two wise and committed chaplains – the Rev. Stephen White and the Rev. Greg Bezilla. These two ministries receive the financial support of the William Alexander Procter Foundation. Now our proposed budget includes a small amount to plant the seeds of a campus ministry at The College of New Jersey and to support new work at Rutgers in Camden. Many thanks to all those clergy and congregations who reach out to their neighboring campuses. This always has been and is today one of our greatest domestic mission opportunities. We are a Church that stands in great need of younger people to enter our ministry discernment process. We should, then, continue to grow these campus ministries and initiate other efforts to recruit a wide variety of men and women to become ordained leaders, especially young people of color. There are bold new plans under consideration for how best to do that. I do not believe, however, that I am the only one here today who got recruited not by plan or program, but by simple words of encouragement from the priests who served the congregation in which I grew up. Will you please do that?

Cathedral. I pray that we all regard our Cathedral as a treasure and Dean René John as a blessing. In our Anglican polity the Cathedral is the symbol and center of the Bishop's ministry. It is a visible symbol of our being one Church/una iglesia. Trinity Cathedral will host over 150 diocesan events this year. We can be thankful for the valiant efforts of our Dean, a small but hard-working staff, and a small but growing congregation to maintain this facility and its many ministries. Among those 150 events are several art exhibits, organized by Ruth Councill, Eileen Kennedy and the New Jersey Chapter of the Episcopal Church in the Visual Arts. I wish that every one of the over 50,000 members of our Diocese would make a pilgrimage to Trinity Cathedral. The Cathedral is a second church home for us all. And I further wish that we would share in the support of this marvelous and essential ministry. Please become a friend of your Cathedral.

Fair Share. Let us celebrate the success of the appeal for Fair Share pledges this year. It is only fair to tell you that we fell well short of the target that I lifted up last year. That is,

instead of increasing the number of churches giving 100% of the asking from 63 to eighty-one, that number actually sank to 50. Hmm... But the good news is that over 70% of our congregations did increase their pledges and, for the first time in the history of our Diocese we have over \$3,000,000 in parish support for our mission. Now that sounds like we are acting like one Church/una iglesia. Thanks to all for trying.

Budget. Our proposed budget is a good one and I commend it to you. We are one with The Episcopal Church and our budget attests to that as we meet the full asking of 21%. There are many other very positive features, including the full funding of requests for mission congregations as proposed by the Board of Missions; funds for the Millennium Development Goals, for our Cathedral, for our Vision initiative, for the support of our staff and for health insurance for our retired clergy and clergy widows and orphans. We are one Church and our budget supports that vision.

One who has labored very hard in the areas of budget and finance is our Treasurer. Having served for ten years, Peter Hausman has decided to step down. We shall thank him after he presents the budget this afternoon, but I would like to express my gratitude for his extraordinary and sacrificial service to our Diocese over these many years. Well done, good and faithful one.

Anti-Racism. One of the highlights of 2007 was the Anti-Racism Conference held last November and featuring Dr. Joy Leary. In a packed house, we were enthralled and inspired and excited and profoundly challenged by our speaker and by one another. I am proud of the Anti-Racism workshops that are offered by our Anti-Racism team. They regularly serve discernment committees and vestries and parishes. I urge you to make use of this asset of our Diocese in order that we may better understand and put an end to those practices and behaviors and attitudes that hurt our brothers and sisters of color and make New Jersey not new, but old. This program gives us all hope that there is one Body and one Spirit. "Hope," as St. Augustine said, "has two beautiful daughters. Their names are anger and courage: anger at the way things are and courage to see that they do not remain the way they are." Let us be angry and courageous as we work together to remove racism from our hearts and dismantle it from our Church and society.

Lambeth Conference. By the grace of God and in the strength of your prayers, Bishop Sylvestre and Eva Romero, Ruth and I will attend the Lambeth Conference this summer. We welcome the Rev. Dr. Ian Douglas of The Episcopal Divinity School as our keynote speaker today. As a member of the Design Team for Lambeth, he is well equipped to give us a sketch of the Conference and its significance to the Communion. His presence at our Convention is a gift of the Belshaw Foundation, for which we thank Bishop Belshaw. The Lambeth Conference takes place once every ten years at the initiative of the Archbishop of Canterbury and this year nearly all of the active bishops in the Anglican Communion are invited. That the Bishop of New Hampshire has not been invited is of great concern to me and to many. As one of his consecrators, as a colleague and a friend, I will stand in solidarity with him. I look forward to the many dimensions of the Conference: Bible study, prayer and worship, lectures and discussion, fellowship and cross cultural experiences of our worldwide fellowship. While human sexuality is not a

major focus on the stated agenda, I look forward to opportunities to build relationships with other bishops across differences. In those conversations I will bear witness to the faithfulness of homosexual clergy and laity and their place in this one Church. I want to acknowledge and celebrate the dignity and gifts of these folks who love our Church and our Lord so much.

Disaffiliation. We are one Church but we are not of one mind on these matters. We all know that the body of the Anglican Communion, like that of The Episcopal Church, is torn apart by disagreements over these issues. Many of the more conservative bishops and dioceses have suffered greater losses than we have here in New Jersey. But we are not immune. Our brothers and sisters at St. George's, Helmetta, have voted by a substantial majority to disaffiliate from our Diocese and from The Episcopal Church and to join CANA (Convocation of Anglicans in North America). I have worked with the Rector and Vestry over the past several months in a pastoral conversation about their interest in retaining the use of St. George's property. Thanks to the work of John Wood Goldsack, our Chancellor, we now have a Pastoral Direction, approved by a majority of the Standing Committee, that will guide our consideration of these matters. I will uphold the Canons of this Church and this Diocese, as well as the New Jersey Statutes, all of which are clear: all real and personal property of any parish is held in trust for The Episcopal Church and for the Diocese. I will also do all in my power to avoid expensive litigation and the attendant scandal of Christians suing each other in secular courts. Again, I beg you for your prayers for those who have chosen to leave and for us all.

Last June the entire Vestry and many members of Christ Church, Millville, left to form a mission of the AMiA (The Anglican Mission in the Americas). Soon after I met with a remnant of 15 members of Christ Church. With the help and direction of the Dean of the Woodbury Convocation, other clergy and neighboring churches, Christ Church is now growing again. As the Senior Warden said in her Annual Report, "Yes, this has been a difficult year but we are stronger as a congregation than before and we will survive and be disciples of Jesus, serving the world through the power of the Holy Spirit." To which Canon Powers added, "Here in New Jersey, AMiA means "And Millville is Alive!"

Vision. We are one Church/Somos una Iglesia. Last year we adopted a Vision of our Diocese, flourishing. We said that said that we are "one family of diverse and unique congregations, belonging to Jesus Christ and belonging to one another for Jesus' sake." We said that we are a "missionary community" and that our vision is to

Share the Good News simply and genuinely;

Worship the Lord radiantly and reverently;

Serve the poor boldly and strive for justice passionately;

Give of our resources joyously and generously; and

Seek continual spiritual renewal for a closer walk with Christ.

By now I hope that every Vestry, at least, in every congregation has had an opportunity to reflect on this vision and to find in it support and inspiration for its parish vision and program. The “Right Onward” Visioning Committee, has been charged to “put feet” on our vision. You will be hearing about their work from the Chair, Annette Buchanan. They have decided to challenge us by lifting up one of the vision initiatives per year for the next five years. Our focus this year is, “Growth through Welcoming and Inclusion.”

This vision initiative calls for our churches to be provided with “practical tools and concrete examples” that will help them to grow. I do not know of anything that weighs more heavily on the clergy and lay leaders than the experience of decline. There are some who feel discouraged or frustrated or even helpless about the lack of growth. And it has to be said that there are some who are too complacent who should be more frustrated. But I do urge you to take advantage of workshops and programs such as “Invite a Friend Sunday,” “Fireweed Evangelism,” and “Magnetic Church.” Many of our churches are growing and one – Trinity, Asbury Park – has doubled its attendance in two years. I strongly urge you to learn what these churches are doing and make their practices your own.

Looking further at this same initiative, be aware that the heart of growth is not Good News about us or even the church that we love, but about Jesus Christ. I encourage each one here and every member of this Diocese to know your faith story and be ready to share that story, simply and genuinely. Not everyone is an evangelist, but each one of us has a story. Let us get more comfortable with getting outside of our comfort zone by saying a word about who Jesus is for us.

Let us also be mindful that growth will require a different vision and different methods than were used even a short while ago. There is no growth without change. Our communities are changing and, if your congregation does not look like the community that surrounds it, you have an urgent challenge. We must take reach out to our Hispanic, Asian, African and other neighbors. We do have an energetic, dedicated and passionate Hispanic Commission, led by the Rev. Dr. Francisco Pozo. They want to work with everyone in this Diocese who wants to undertake new missionary work among Latinos. I have been gratified to see new work begun in Rahway and Elizabeth this past year. I really believe that new and abundant life will be seen in our Diocese if we take up the challenge to develop at least ten new Spanish-speaking congregations in the next ten years.

Stewardship. It is time for a major new effort to foster faithful stewardship in this Diocese. There are several dimensions to this and I want us to take all of them seriously. First, we must become a green Diocese. I am not sure what all that means, but the mending of the world certainly is not less than caring for creation and adopting practices that respect the creation and provide for those who come after us. Among the resources that churches can use are our own Environmental Committee and an organization known as GreenFaith, based in New Jersey and led by Episcopal priest, the Rev. Fletcher Harper. Stewardship is to be seen in our action for the earth as an asset we have on loan from our descendents.

Second, we have to recognize that the endowments that we have inherited from those who have gone before us are to be respected and managed so that those who follow us may also have the benefit of these assets. While I understand the financial strains that many of our churches are facing, it is most disheartening to watch vestries invade the principal of their endowments to fund operations, with no plan other than to keep spending until the money runs out. We are better than that. We must do better than that.

Third, we are facing many situations where we have buildings but too few people and finances to maintain them. Often the reasons given for holding on and holding out are centered on the needs of those who already belong. But facilities have been given to us to support mission. When our mission is totally consumed with supporting facilities, it is time to stop, look and listen. Think creatively and act faithfully, re-imagining your mission. Ask God to open your eyes to new configurations for doing ministry, including, perhaps, a merger or some consolidation. Here I congratulate St. Luke's Roselle and Grace, Linden, newly merged and now known as the Church of St. John the Baptist, Linden; and St. Paul's, Rahway and Holy Comforter, Rahway, also merged and now the Church of the Good Shepherd, Rahway. I also affirm the new partnership between St. Barnabas-by-the-Bay, Villas and St. Mary's, Stone Harbor, where they share a priest and new outreach ministries. Their courageous and creative work is surely good stewardship.

Fourth, (if I may be permitted one little rant here) I simply cannot believe the report that was received at Diocesan Council ten days ago. Only twenty-five percent of our churches have had their financial records audited, as required by our Canons. My first concern is that 75% of our Treasurers are doing their ministry without the assurance of an annual review. I realize that few churches can afford the cost of an audit, but there is provision for a parish audit committee to review the church's financial statement and operations. Acting as one Church, a subcommittee of our diocesan Audit Committee will conduct workshops to train and direct parish committees on how to meet our canonical requirement. They have my enthusiastic support and deep gratitude. Please get this done.

Finally, we need some fresh teaching and creative approaches to help improve our stewardship of money. We all know that the tithe is the minimum standard of giving in The Episcopal Church. I hope that all of us here today are tithers or have adopted a plan to reach that level of giving within a reasonable time frame. Ruth and I have tithed for over 30 years. We have not found it easy, but we have found that real sacrifice is the way to deep joy. We are not better than anyone else because we tithe. But we are more deeply aware of God's blessings and more grateful for them because we tithe. I challenge vestries and parish leaders to share their stewardship witness not only in the fall but throughout the year. If you love your church you will want to give sacrificially to care for it and to mend it. And you will know greater blessings as you live that way.

I have appointed a new and expanded Stewardship Commission. I am going to invite them to develop an annual stewardship appeal that could be used by every church in our Diocese. We have come to you and asked for your support for the Diocese through your Fair Share pledges. But I never want "the Diocese" to be seen only or chiefly as taking

from the congregations. Rather, if we are one Church, then we must help and support one another. We are one Church/Somos una iglesia.

Above all may we keep in mind that real stewardship begins with transformation. If we are not touched and changed by the love of Christ, then none of this matters no matter what the numbers say. Faithful, generous, joyous and sacrificial stewardship is not a command or a credential, but a fruit of my relationship with Jesus Christ. Stewardship is what I do with my life after I meet Jesus and decide to follow him. It is all that I am and all that I have all of the time. Fund-raising can be a lot less than that. Not stewardship.

Capital Campaign. On the final page of the proposed preliminary budget for 2009 you will find (at line 712a) an expenditure of \$30,000 for the preparatory work to explore the feasibility of a capital campaign for our Diocese. There has not been such an effort in New Jersey since the Venture in Mission program in the late 1970's. I will work with diocesan leaders to develop the case for such a campaign with an eye on the year 2010 – our 225th anniversary. (We have just this week confirmed that our Presiding Bishop will speak at our Convention in that year.) I have many ideas, but these must be our goals, not mine alone. My hope is that we will get the best help available to design a program that aims to raise funds for the capital needs of all of the churches. This will be a great opportunity for us to act as one Church/una iglesia, for the benefit of all.

Sabbatical. Among the most valuable gifts The Episcopal Church has given me has been the privilege of a regular sabbatical leave for the purposes of study, renewal, travel and refreshment. Each of the three ministries in which I served prior to coming to New Jersey provided a sabbatical of three months for every five years of service. So the Standing Committee in 2003 approved a Letter of Agreement that included this benefit. I will, therefore, take this leave from mid-October, 2008, until mid-January of 2009. My plans are still in formation, but I am hoping to engage in a major pilgrimage and/or other physically challenging exercise; take a retreat or two; follow up the Lambeth Conference with some directed reading; and enjoy opportunities to worship and rest.

I am well aware that many – and, probably, most – of the clergy here today have never had a sabbatical. I want to challenge us as a Diocese to adopt a policy that advocates for the provision of a sabbatical leave of at least three months' time after five years of service for all full-time clergy serving our congregations. I realize that the provision of such a benefit will represent a major financial challenge for many of our churches. It is that. But a sabbatical policy will help us to practice wise stewardship of the human resources of the clergy. Having the opportunity for a Sabbath leave from the rigors of the ministry will not only refresh the priest but strengthen and enrich the congregation. I invite you to ask the Wardens and Vestry of St. John's, Somerville, about their rector's sabbatical and the excitement and joy with which the Rev. Ron Pollock returned to his duties after his leave. I will advocate for funding in the coming year's budget so that our Diocese may assist the smaller and poorer churches in providing sabbaticals for their clergy. I look forward to working with the Commission on Clerical Compensation on a detailed proposal for the fair administration of this benefit.

Health. I thank you for your prayers for my health. I thought that it was important to make an announcement about my diagnosis of Parkinson's Disease last summer. I can never fully express my gratitude for your overwhelming outpouring of support and your continuing prayers. Although some times at the Altar I observe my tremor and think of the great Jerry Lee Lewis ("Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On"), I have very few other symptoms and the disease is progressing slowly. This is a distraction, not a disability. I hope and expect to continue in this ministry for a long time, for I believe that God has work for us to do together. I do not claim to know God's plan. All I know for certain is, "God is good, all the time."

Our Help is in the Name of the Lord. Some of the holiest moments in my life this past year, when I felt closest to Christ, came in places and among people in great need: in a remote, impoverished village in El Salvador, where we are helping to build a church; in Bible study with inmates at Somerset County Jail; and in a visit to Haiti, where I witnessed the extreme poverty of the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere and the faithfulness of our brothers and sisters in the largest Diocese in The Episcopal Church. In all of these moments I was so glad and so grateful and so proud to be an Episcopalian. I love my Church!

I especially recall an evening at Bishop Barahona's home in San Salvador last June. After a wonderful meal the Bishop told us of his work with several gangs and with one gang leader in particular. In the course of his conversation with this young man, the Bishop referred to him as "hijo" – "son." The young man later called Bishop Barahona back and said he wanted to talk some more. Why? Because he said, in all of his life, no one had ever called him "hijo."

Set that incident alongside the question asked of Constable's son that day: "How shall we mend it, my dear?" How blessed we are to know God in Jesus Christ! And blessed are we when we live and act as the mended, called to partnership with God in the mending of the world. Somos hijos y hijas; hermanas y hermanos. Somos una iglesia.

Right onward, then, with this ministry of mending and of reconciliation. Together, as one Church, let us love our Lord, love one another and love the world, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

The Rt. Rev. George E. Councill
XI Bishop of New Jersey

The story of John Constable and his son is taken from a Meditation by Br. Geoffrey Tristram, SSJE, published in The Anglican Digest, Lent, 2002.