



The Diocese of New Jersey

THE RIGHT REVEREND GEORGE EDWARD COUNCELL

November 11, 2009

Dear Friends in Christ,

I love our Lord and I love our Church and I'm crazy about the Diocese of New Jersey – *our* Diocese.

Our Diocese is *one family of diverse and unique congregations, belonging to Jesus Christ and belonging to one another, for Jesus' sake. Together, we are a missionary community, celebrating the abundant life of Christ (John 10:10) and sharing that life with the world that God so loves (John 3:16).* (From the Vision of the Diocese of New Jersey.)

I don't just believe in that Vision, I've seen it! At Convocation meetings this fall we have taken time to hear "good news" stories from each of our churches. At every one of these gatherings we heard powerful testimonies to the Christ-centered, Spirit-guided, joyous, generous, creative and courageous ministries that are being carried out in every corner of our Diocese.

And there is more good news: the Lord is answering our prayer to make New Jersey new. There is new life in our companion relationship with the Diocese of Central Ecuador; in expanding outreach in campus ministries; in new initiatives in urban ministry, prison ministry and youth ministry; in programs for spiritual formation and liturgical renewal; in the education and formation of laity, deacons and priests; in new Spanish-speaking congregations; in a Cathedral that is a center of hope and hospitality; and so much more.

But, even with all these signs of grace and vitality, there is, still, much about which to be concerned. In our current economic conditions we all face tremendous pressures. I know that we will all do our best to practice faithful stewardship and address our challenges responsibly. But I hope that, as we make hard decisions about reductions in funding, we do not fall back into fear.

These are days to trust as never before. As the Rev. Dr. Francis H. Wade said in his sermon at our diocesan rally in Ocean Grove last week, "Together we hope, believe, trust and even rejoice because we can affirm the Easter-ness of life in the Good Friday-ness of the news. Being faithful in troubled times has been one of the consistent challenges of life and at the same time it remains one of the consistent expectations of our God."

What does our Lord expect of us in these anxious days? That we not be afraid. That we affirm Easter. That we trust and rejoice and sing. With that in mind my wife and I have, this week, returned pledge cards to the two congregations that we support. In 2010 we will continue to tithe our income as we have for over 35 years. It is an expression of our confidence in God and of our thanksgiving for all God's gifts. Signing those pledge cards makes us smile and brings us closer to our God. For us, there is no other way to live.

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I am sending this letter to all clergy, wardens and vestries of the congregations of the Diocese of New Jersey. I write with thanksgiving for all that you are doing to shepherd your church through these tough times. I write with confidence that you are giving sacrificially of your time and talent and treasure in support of Christ's mission. Nothing less is required of us who have the privilege of leading and making decisions. If you have not yet committed to give a tithe or adopted a plan to reach that standard, I urge you to do so. You will never regret it. It will bring you closer to Christ. It will make you smile. See the attached statements from other church leaders re: the standard of the tithe.

Enclosed with this letter is the Fair Share pledge form for 2010. Please handle it with prayer. Call upon the Holy Spirit to grant you courage and wisdom as you make your congregation's financial commitment to support the mission of our Diocese. Let it be a testimony to your confidence in God. Let it be a generous, courageous and joyous expression of your trust in God. Let it proclaim Easter-ness in the midst of the Good Friday-ness of the news. Let it be an answer to our prayer: *Lord, in your mercy, make New Jersey new!*

I write this with deep and abiding gratitude, respect and affection in Christ Jesus.

Right Onward.

Faithfully yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "G. Cuncell".

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

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