

The Right Reverend Andrew ML Dietsche
Bishop of New York

Address to the 243rd Convention of the Diocese of New York
November 9, 2019
The Marriott Hotel, Tarrytown, New York

Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is my pleasure and privilege to welcome you to this 243rd Convention of the Diocese of New York, my seventh as your bishop. I am deeply grateful to the Convention Planning Committee for the extraordinary work that putting this convention on takes. There are so many people who make this happen that it is dangerous to single out one person, but I would be remiss if we did not recognize today the leadership of Sara Saavedra in herding the cats and getting us all gathered together once again.

I am delighted to welcome the Right Reverend Enrique Treviño Cruz, and his wife Maru, to this convention, and to say that it was a pure pleasure to hear him preach at our eucharist yesterday. Enrique is the Bishop of Cuernavaca in Mexico, and largely through the work of Bishop Glasspool we have in these last years entered into an deepening and evolving relationship with him and his diocese. A number of us have participated in the Spanish Immersion pilgrimages in Cuernavaca over these last few years, and have had the chance to become Enrique's friends, and I invite you to take the time to greet Enrique today, and note that tomorrow at four o'clock we will formally receive him at the cathedral evensong to seat him in the International Ecumenical Cathedra. Please do join us.

In this address last year, I noted that we were gathered on the eightieth anniversary of Kristallnacht, the "night of broken glass," often considered the beginning of the Holocaust. As we prepared to come together this year, Stephen Holton reminded me that today is the thirtieth anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, and that the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia followed within a week, and that the Solidarity Movement in Poland came within months. November 9th is a day when we remember the worst things that people can do and the best. We see cowardice and courage. Unfaith and Faith. It is a day when we decry the monsters who have dwelt among us, but also when we never forget to honor the bravery of those who threw themselves into the breach of history for the sake of the dignity and integrity of ordinary people.

So that in August 1968, I was fourteen years old and living in Stuttgart, Germany, where my soldier father was stationed. One morning he left for work and then rushed immediately back upstairs to tell us that Soviet troops had invaded Czechoslovakia to shut down the Prague Spring. We were scared, with so many people afraid the tanks would not stop at the German border. But Stephen told me that almost alone of all the socialist countries in the world, Mexico condemned the invasion and the crushing of the flower of spring that had dared to bloom in the communist bloc. Enrique, we are grateful for your friendship and presence among us, and we are grateful for the love of freedom which Mexico held up before the world when the world needed friends and hope and courage.

I am also happy to welcome Cathy Roskam, the retired Bishop Suffragan of this diocese. She has been sojourning in Los Angeles for these last eight years, but will always have a home in the Diocese of New York!

I want to introduce, and have you see face to face, the new people who have come onto my staff in the last year. As I name you, please stand to be recognized. Masiel Jordan, our past controller, had a baby a year ago and moved to Massachusetts, and now Allison Epstein has filled that singularly important position in our operations. For the year that we did not have a controller, our Accounting Manager Karin Almquist took up many of those responsibilities, and did the work of two people, always somehow remaining a calm, non-anxious presence. I want, in your presence, to express my heartfelt thanks to Karin for the heavy lift that this last year has meant for her. Michael Rebic retired as Director of Property Support, and Egbert Stolk came to us from Landmarks Preservation to take up those duties. In a diocese with the number of old and architecturally significant churches as ours, we are already keeping Egbert very busy! Altagracia Perez has taken a teaching position at Virginia Seminary, and we were fortunate to bring Victor Conrado from Chicago to take up leadership in congregational vitality. Mary Cat Young left us for North Carolina this year, and Megan Sanders, rector of Saint Paul's in Pleasant Valley, has taken up the college chaplaincy with Canterbury Downtown, and brought thirteen college students with her to this convention. And Ryan Kuratko, chaplain for Canterbury Uptown has now assumed Mary Cat's role as chaplaincy liaison on my staff. Finally, Sharon Luke, the receptionist in Diocesan House, has taken up the administrative support for the Global Women's Fund.

While I was away this summer, Margaret and I had lunch one day with Bishop Mark and Karen Sisk, and Mark asked me how things are going at 1047. And I said that while I was away five new hires had been made and I hadn't met any of them. But, I said, if you surround yourself with good people and you are fortunate to be able to have complete confidence in them, you can set them free to do this work and make these decisions without anxiety. Bishops Shin and Glasspool, and Esslie Hughes, supported by Chontel Simmons from Human Resources, led all of these searches. They did incredible work, and made wise choices, and I am utterly thankful, and already we are all blessed by each of these new staff people.

Shortly following this address you will see a dramatic presentation called "Red Altar," which brings to life a vivid and historically true story of Chinese immigration to America in the 1850s. The figure at the heart of the story is the great-grandmother of Cha Moy, and the actress who plays her ancestor. is Cha Moy's cousin. Cha Moy is a member of Saint Paul's Church on-the-Hill in Ossining, and she and other members of her family are with us today. I want to express our warmest welcome to them now, and then following the performance we will take a few moments to introduce Cha Moy and her family. We are confident that this story of one of our own sisters will resonate with our current travails over the biblical mandate to welcome the stranger. We rarely know the family stories and personal histories that each of us carries around all the time, but today we will be given a glimpse into what these memories mean for Cha Moy and for the Chinese community. And I want to thank Michael Hull and Kyoko Kageyama, without whose efforts we would not have been able to bring this play to our diocese.

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Our last convention happened in the Year of Lamentation in our diocese. That was the first of a three year journey which we committed to make together to take the deep dive into the horrific reality of American slavery, and the legacy, the shadow, of white supremacy which flows from our slave past and continues to poison the common life of the American people, and continues to impose extraordinary burdens, costs, hardships, and degradation upon people of African descent in our country. On the first day of that convention we experienced the tremendous play written by Chuck Kramer, rector of Saint James Church in Hyde Park, which revisited in a vivid and unforgettable narrative form the unvarnished truth of the slave trade past of this diocese, and what that history has done to black people and white people, and everyone in our churches, to this day. The burdens we have yet to meet, the costs we have yet to pay, the new day we have prayed for but which has not yet come. You will remember that our Reparations Committee

made sure that we filled those months with plays and lectures and book studies and every sort of intellectual and cultural entry into the truth of what slavery was, what it meant, and the untold suffering which it imposed on those consigned to lives of violence, brutality and endless servitude. The hope was that we might find in the midst of that exploration a place of meeting, where the suffering of African slaves might be known, and felt, and then shared, by modern day black people and white people and other people of color.

So that we might be prepared to go with open eyes and broken hearts into the second year of this movement, the Year of Repentance and of Apology. Yesterday we received another dramatic offering from the Reparations Committee, again written by Chuck Kramer. Out of that presentation, a resolution was brought before this convention which had already come before us earlier, in 1860, brought by John Jay, but which was tabled and tabled again, and when finally Bishop Potter forced the convention to permit Mr. Jay to speak to his resolution, enough people rose and left the floor of the convention to deny the action even the possibility of a quorum. That resolution has been waiting, still alive as a piece of legislation, for some convention to take it off the table, put it before our delegates once again, and stand for a vote. This has now happened, and as one first mark of our repentance, and as an act of apology, we have passed the John Jay resolution, and one hundred and fifty nine years later we have finally condemned the ownership and traffic in African slaves in the Diocese of New York.

During the eighteenth century the proportion of people in New York owning slaves was the second highest among all of the colonies, after only Charleston, South Carolina. We have records of churches in our diocese which owned men and women as parish servants or as property assets. Churches whose wealth was built on the traffic in human beings. Sojourner Truth was enslaved in this diocese. The State of New York had banned the importation of slaves in 1808, and passed legislation for a gradual emancipation of slaves, and finally freed all slaves in New York in 1827, 201 years after the first slaves arrived in this colony. Yet thirty two years later, in 1859, the year before the John Jay resolution, the London Times declared that New York City remained the largest slave market in the world, because of the ships which sailed from this city to patrol the West Coast of the African continent, continuing to kidnap slaves for the American south, generating untold wealth for the shippers and merchants in this city. New York was all in, and that is why the Episcopal Church, in this diocese, would not condemn slavery on the very eve of the Civil War, and would not accept the John Jay resolution, which, it must be said, was actually quite a modest proposal. We have a great deal to answer for. We are complicit.

You will have the chance to consider for vote today a resolution which will call on the diocese, and on me, to prepare a liturgy of repentance, with the language of apology, for our next convention. And that service, and that language, and all our hearts, will be the fruit of the Year of Apology.

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But there is a third and final chapter to this movement, which begins now with this convention, and that is the Year of Reparation. The year of repair. What do we do with this knowledge? By what may we give expression to the depth of our sorrow and our repentance? How can we as a community make reparation for what our forebears did in this place? What heals history?

You know that our canons make provision for resolutions to come before the convention even at the last minute, if they come as a response to my address. I am going to ask for three resolutions in the address I am giving right now. The first has to do with reparations, and it is going to require some explanation, so I ask you to bear with me.

I am asking for a resolution, that this convention direct the trustees of the Diocese of New York to set aside 1.1 million dollars from the diocesan endowment for the purpose of reparations for slavery. Now I want to talk about how I came up with that number, and why, and what I believe this level of funding might mean as reparation. Right now, we have two examples, both of which have been widely publicized, and which I took as guides for my thinking about this. Earlier this year Virginia Theological Seminary announced that they would reserve 1.7 million dollars from their endowment to pay reparations to descendants of the slaves who helped to build the seminary. More recently Princeton Seminary announced that they would give 27 million dollars from their endowment for reparations.

Virginia Seminary has a 140 million dollar endowment, so the money they have pledged represents 1.1 percent of their endowment. Their endowment is some three and a half times larger than ours, so if we pledged the same 1.1 percent the amount of money which would be created would be too small to be substantive. Princeton Seminary has an endowment of 1.2 billion dollars, so that their 27 million dollar pledge represents a two and a quarter percent commitment. With these examples in front of me, I began to think about an appropriate level for this resolution, and arrived at 1.1 million dollars, which represents two and a half percent of our endowment. Much smaller, and the resources for significant reparation would be insufficient; much larger, and it might not be something we could do.

We already have a wonderful Reparations Committee, and the offerings of these last two years are just one small marker of the intelligence, creativity, the love of God and the thirst for justice which characterizes everything they do. But taking responsibility for a million dollars requires a broader diocesan effort and representation, and so I am proposing that by this resolution I will create a task force, whose work will begin within thirty days of this convention and will end at our 244th Convention - a task force which will include representation from our existing Reparations Committee and our existing Anti-Racism Committee, with additional appointments by me to achieve full diversity across our diocese, both geographically across our regions, and racially and ethnically. This task force will be asked to enter into a period of dreaming and imagining and hard deep research into what reparations could really mean in the Diocese of New York. What is possible for us? What can we do, with our strengths and our limitations, to address the moral imperative of repair, and the weight of our history, and then to return to the 244th Convention with the report of their work, and with their recommendations, in the form of resolutions.

Even as I ask you to create this funding, I worry about the effect that pouring money onto the process may have. I don't want the task force to reduce their work to the question "how can we spend this money?" *This money is dear.* I have carried a personal desire and intent to substantively raise the endowment of this diocese during my time, and I have seen and I understand that that is going to be very hard. Short of a major campaign, we may not be able to do it to any appreciable degree, and this resolution will set that back. And I know that we depend on the income derived from our endowment to support the budget of this diocese. When I ask that we remove this much money from our modest endowment I know that this is not a small thing. However, I am sure that any honest process of reparation must require sacrifice, and a commitment not only from our surplus, but from our seed corn. Obviously taking a million dollars from our endowment is not something we will ever be able to do again, so we have to get this right.

And what comes back to us from the task force must be serious, and respectful of what this is going to cost us, and be substantial, and it must have the real capacity to make a difference. It's actually okay not to spend all the money. Because what the task force is really being asked to do is to grapple with the legacies of slavery in this diocese, and the continuing unfairnesses that mark our common life; and the privations under which so many people and parishes of African descent live; and the barriers and roadblocks that keep experienced, seasoned, serious black

clergy from finding vocational calls outside Harlem and the Bronx; and the inequities in the places that white people, black people and people of color occupy in our church, from the local parish to the bishop's office. And White Supremacy. And most of that is not about money. It is about our hearts, and minds, and the quality with which we love each other. Or don't. And it is about our sorrow. And then to propose remedy, and to propose repair. And what I am asking you for today is that as they do that work, there will be funds available for it, to do the things we come to realize over these months we must do. And then after our next convention, with resolutions offered and passed, we will have the money and we can begin to invest in our own new future.

Slavery was a crime visited upon individual persons, and upon a people. The Diocese of New York played a significant, and genuinely evil, part in American slavery, so we must make, where we can, repair. All the while recognizing that it will never be possible for this convention or this diocese or even this country to ever make adequate compensation for the suffering of a great host of people bent under the yoke of four hundred years of servitude, violence and privation. And the whipping post and the lynching tree, and crimes unspeakable, and the horrors of children taken from their parents and put to hard labor, and of families separated forever, and of lives begun in bondage and ended in bondage who never drew a free breath and that was the only life they got out of this world. One point one million dollars divided among the people of African descent in the Diocese of New York would be less than one hundred dollars per person. Which would spend away all the money and do nothing. So what we engage to do must be systemic, a remedy for a whole people, and for a church - white and black and brown and Asian - trying to come back to itself across the divide of a terrible history.

I do not want to dictate to the task force the deliberations which will come. But may I say that this money could produce five ten thousand dollar college or seminary scholarships every year in perpetuity. This money could establish and fund an education and advocacy library and resource center in this diocese dedicated to racial justice and reconciliation. This money could support a first step program in this diocese to invite, nurture and prepare black young people, and men and women, to explore the possibility of ordained ministry. One point one million dollars isn't *so much money*, but it's not nothing either, and I look forward with anticipation to the creative possibilities that might come from this initiative.

What I ask each of you to do today is to approach this resolution and question with courage and integrity. If you cannot support this, if you think this is irresponsible, if you think it is unfair, then please come to the microphone so we can talk about it. But if you hold up your green card, then go from this convention and support it and explain it and help it along as we begin talking about it as a diocese.

Now there is a second resolution I am requesting, and you will be glad to know that it won't cost any money. The concern that drives this resolution comes from the Anti-Racism Committee. And while it is in itself quite simple, it really is a step toward racial transformation in the Diocese of New York. I ask for a resolution requiring that any candidate for election to an office in this diocese have already completed anti-racism training. This training is part of regular mandates that come to us from the General Convention, and here in the diocese we offer such training with great regularity. And really I am convinced that those who desire to be in leadership in a diocese that is some twenty-five to thirty percent people of color must be fully engaged in that conversation.

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You will remember that in 2013, in my first year as your bishop, we launched a diocesan-wide program called Indaba. This was a program which sought to create relationships among our churches across the boundaries of our diocese - geographical, ethnic, racial, economic. We

wanted to explore what I was calling “our shared understanding of our common life,” largely with an eye at that time toward embarking on our strategic plan. But the program turned out to be wildly more transformative for the diocese than I could have asked or imagined. Churches were placed in three-parish partnerships, and then spent three separate weekends in one another’s churches and communities, and perhaps most importantly, in one another’s homes. One person later told me that it was one of the most significant things she had ever done in her life in the church, and others talked about what it meant to enter communities and homes they were certain they never could have. People of color have told me of their trepidation in traveling to rural white communities, and then of the miracles that were born out of welcome and acceptance and generosity and love, and of what happened when we drew people whose experiences were so different into periods of intimacy and understanding with others that they had not thought possible. In the time since then I have received numerous requests for us to do this again, so I am announcing that we will do the Indaba again in 2020. If you are new to the diocese since 2014 you will certainly want to know much more about what this is, and how it works. Within the next month or so you will receive a mailing telling you everything you need to know about it, with some reflection on the experience of our first Indaba six years ago. Following this convention I will invite a small number of people to join me in planning this program, and we will look to a springtime launch. I promise you that you will be glad for it, and I want to say something more.

America is tearing itself to shreds. The divisions among people are deepening, and the fabric of our common life is fraying and coming undone. We are going into an election year which holds out little hope of helping us reach across the chasm which is widening among us, and every American should be scared to death at what we are becoming. Scared of the way we talk about one another. Scared of what it means that so much of our public discourse, from every part of the body politic, and from every political “side,” is driven by hatred. Scared of how quickly and how easily we fell away from one another into camps, and scared of how much we dig it. We in the church, though, are called to make a different kind of witness than we are seeing in the larger society around us. We are taught to love our enemy. To do good to those who hate us. To bless those who curse us. To pray for those who abuse us. To turn the other cheek and to give to everyone who begs from us. To heal the breach. *By that only is life.* And the witness we are called to make, it actually may be the whole point of the gospel, happens when we lay down the claims we may have on one another, lower the pointing finger, reach across the divide, and make relationship and holy communion where there has been strife and recrimination and rancor. In 2013 and 2014 we discovered that Indaba was the Great Coming Together of this diocese, it was the way we fell in love with ourselves, and made lasting relationships. And it may be that six years later in a bad season it could again be our healing. So that maybe we can then heal a little bit of the world too. There is much more to come on this.

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On January 1, the New York Farm Workers Bill, establishing the Farm Laborers Fair Labor Practices Act, will take effect. Governor Cuomo signed it into law in July, and by this act farm workers in New York will enjoy the same work place rights and benefits as all the rest of us. Nothing of this magnitude is the work of only one person, but I am certain that this would not have happened as it did or when it did if not for the years of hard work and dogged persistence of the Reverend Richard Witt. I am happy to express to him the gratitude and congratulations of this convention, and I encourage everyone to stop by the Rural and Migrant Ministry booth in the exhibition hall to convey those sentiments personally, and to see the signed Bill, with the governor’s signature and pen.

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The Committee on the Care of Creation of the Social Concerns Commission, chaired by the Reverend Matt Calkins, has submitted a resolution to this convention with seven resolves. Each of these resolves calls upon us to embrace the goals set by our General Convention regarding the environmentally sustainable and responsible use of our buildings, to act on similar resolutions passed by our own earlier conventions in 2010 and 2015, and to support the state's Climate and Community Protection Act. It is an omnibus piece of legislation, but it is also a reminder of those things we have already said we needed to do and would do, and calls us to act on those principles now.

A month and a half ago 16 year old Greta Thunberg arrived in New York City from Sweden on a solar powered boat and leveled her fierce Viking glare at the member states of the United Nations, and demanded the attention of the people who have come before her, and who still run the world. She spoke as a member of that generation which will most immediately inherit the environmental disaster we have created through our contributions to Climate Change and Global Warming, and spoke from the outrage of one who sees her world slipping away. She has become for us in many ways the voice of a suffering future speaking back to us, with her angry condemnation: How Dare You?

The urgency of this crisis is more and more in front of us. It is almost certain that the world will pass the two degree mark in global warming by the end of this century, and that would approach or exceed the very definition of catastrophe. We have passed resolutions from our convention calling on our parishes to investigate the responsible use of their property, and we have called on our trustees to commit to environmentally and socially responsible investing. Which they have done. But the progress on our building use is much more slow-going. We are running out of time. I confess that I am not optimistic that those things which might truly mitigate Climate Change are likely to happen in the shrinking window we have before us, given the intractable reality of Original Sin, Newton's First Law of Motion (objects at rest tend to remain at rest), and the massed commercial and industrial interests pushing back against serious climate legislation.

But even Al Gore and Bill McKibben and others who have committed their lives to sounding the alarm on this crisis see reason for hope. But that hope depends on a massive change in will, and a commitment to reshaping the way we live, what we eat, how we power our lives and how we travel, for which so far there is little evidence. We must now, and for the rest of our lives, be all in on Climate Change, or the Greta Thunbergs of the world and our own children and grandchildren will not easily forgive us.

Earlier this year the mayor of New York City announced the New York City Green New Deal, which lays out principles intended to reduce the city's carbon footprint by forty percent by 2030, and a key to that plan is to require and mandate that the large buildings of his city work now to reduce their own carbon footprint by thirty percent in that time. I read this plan, and then I read that Houses of Worship and religious buildings would be exempt from the new requirements. And I think that exemption is immoral. There is no reason why the churches should not face their own complicity in this crisis, and meet their own obligations in addressing it. We are grown-ups, we are responsible, and we are also creatures and disciples of that Creator God who gave us this wonderful Garden of Eden and told us to take care of it, and we also believe that in some form or fashion we will stand before the great judgment seat of Christ and there we must proffer our account.

So the third resolution I am asking for will require every church in the diocese to do energy audits and building surveys of their property in a timely manner, to develop a plan to reduce carbon emissions by thirty percent in ten years (or to demonstrate that those reductions have already been made), to make a report of that work and progress each year in your parochial reports, and for the convention planning committee to include a summary report of that work and progress to each of the next ten conventions so that we may hold one another to account.

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In 2018 I learned that the Order of the Holy Cross was interested in selling Huntington House at their West Park monastery and retreat house. Huntington House was the original home of the monastery when James Huntington, having founded the order in New York City, moved the community up river to West Park in 1902. I was a bit concerned about that acre of property going to public sale, because it forms the dividing line between Holy Cross Monastery and the Church of the Ascension, and it was not beyond reason to imagine that one day we would be sorry that these two Episcopal properties no longer abutted one another. So some conversations with the monastery ensued, and in the end the order offered to lease the property to the Diocese of New York for one dollar a year for thirty years. In 2019 we have been making the necessary improvements on the house and property in order for us to put it into use, and we are just weeks away from opening a northern diocesan office. Val Stelcen, the Bishop's Executive Assistant for the Mid-Hudson Region, and at least two members of my staff, Probably Canons Jeanne Person and Victor Conrado, will immediately move their offices into the house, and it is my own plan to spend part of one week each month there as well. This will enable greater availability and closer attention to a part of the diocese where it feels as though church after church is falling to half time or less. And people need to see me and talk to me more than the distance currently supports.

Canon Nora attended the Transition Ministers Conference last month, and sent me a text message from the meeting. She reported that there were 31 dioceses attending, and that 57 priests were presented who were looking for positions. Among those dioceses, 374 vacancies were announced. 64 of those positions were full time, and 310 were half or part time. That reality is landing very hard on churches in certain areas and regions of the diocese. Staten Island to some degree. The Bronx. The entire Mid-Hudson Region. And so many clergy and lay leaders are falling into great discouragement. I want to go there, and listen and dream together, and find a way for us to wrestle anew with the realities of decline, and find a way for us to recapture the hope that is essential to our faith.

We do also expect that Huntington House will be available for one day vestry retreats or meetings as well, in a very beautiful location. Val has directed the renovations of the house, and has done a wonderful job. I would move into that house in a heartbeat. And I am most grateful for what this will mean for us.

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Does your parish office have a copy of Elliott Lindsey's *This Planted Vine*? If it doesn't it should, and we have some copies of the book we can make available. *This Planted Vine* was the last history of the Diocese of New York to be published, it is wonderful, and it stands as a modern classic in our common life. But it is now over thirty years old, and I believe it is time for us to publish a new history. There are stories which have not been told and must be: of the movement of women into the leadership of the church; of the full inclusion of LGBT people in the sacramental life of the church; of the lives, contributions, and (it must be said) the sufferings of people of color. There are painful parts of our history from which we might want to turn our eyes but must not, and glories, triumphs and sacrifices whose telling must inform and inspire those coming up behind us.

I would like this diocese to publish a new history, to be completed for our 235th anniversary in 2022. With this address I extend the invitation to published historians to communicate to me their interest in this project, with samples of their published histories, that we may embark on this project early in the coming new year. Clergy and lay leaders here today may be our best

resources for identifying and extending the invitation to such historians and writers in our churches.

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You will see, elsewhere at this convention, an exhibition of some saints and worthies who came before us, and who “redeemed the time” in their day. All were deeply connected to the Diocese of New York. Some were ordained, but most were not. Some were not Christians but all were our very good friends. All made their witness here among us, and as we seek to know and understand the witness which God is calling us to make now in our day, in our time and in this place, it is worth taking a minute to consider what that has meant for others who walked the same road we do. Sam Shoemaker, parish priest, who helped found Alcoholics Anonymous and fashioned the twelve steps that have transformed countless lives. Pete Seeger and Franny Reese, whose Clearwater campaign helped birth the environmental movement in America. James Baldwin and Elie Wiesel and Cesar Chavez, each who preached liberation and courage from our cathedral pulpit to the city and country they loved. And there are others.

Among them is Eleanor Roosevelt. Eleanor was an active and committed Episcopalian all her life, and was a member at different times of Saint Paul’s and Trinity Parish in Tivoli and Saint James Church in Hyde Park, both in Dutchess County. Her memory is truly venerated up there. But she was also the First Lady of the United States, and she chaired the commission charged with writing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and her name will always be associated with those transcendent principles of the dignity and worth of every person. She was a person whose faith informed her public advocacy, and her commitment to civil rights, and was the foundation for her indomitable courage. Our exhibition draws us to these words of Eleanor: “Where, after all, do universal rights begin? In small places, close to home - so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world. Yet they are the world of the individual person, the neighborhood he lives in; the school or college he attends; the factory, farm or office where he works.” Or, as you have heard me say of our own parishes and communities, large and small, rich and poor, “We’re just practicing being the Kingdom of Heaven together.”

For at least the eighteen years I have been around here, there has been conversation among our churches in Dutchess and Ulster Counties to include Eleanor Roosevelt in the commemorations of the Episcopal Church in our liturgical calendar. This October the town of Tivoli erected a memorial to Eleanor on the grounds of our church there - Saint Paul’s and Trinity Parish - and in the conversations borne out of that event, I have learned that more than one parish has already developed scripture readings and collect for her commemoration, and are using them in their own parish worship.

I have asked the authors of that work to come together in 2020 to harmonize their different versions, so that at our next convention I may authorize a set of propers for the Feast of Eleanor Roosevelt to be used across our diocese. Eleanor died on November 7, her “great getting-up day,” which in the custom of the church will be her feast day. That is also the date of our next convention, and it is my hope that our convention eucharist might be a commemoration of Eleanor, with the new liturgical propers employed at the altar of our cathedral. That liturgy will also be our service of apology for slavery, which I am sure would please Eleanor to no end. And then, in time, this convention might memorialize our local custom to the larger Episcopal Church for inclusion in whatever version of Lesser Feasts and Fasts we will be using at that time.

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This last summer a letter was sent to me, together with a check to the diocese for ten thousand dollars. It came from a man named John, who lives in Michigan. He is 94 years old, and sent

the gift as a thank you to the Diocese of New York, and in the letter he told me his story. In 1930, John was five years old, and had a seven year old brother and a nine year old sister. Their father had lost everything in the Depression, and their mother was a drinker. Things fell apart. It became known that the children were not being properly cared for, school attendance was sporadic, they had not seen a doctor, and none of them had received their vaccinations. The family was summoned to juvenile court, where the children were removed from their parents and made wards of the state. They were taken to Woodcrest in the Bronx, a large Victorian house which had been turned into a sprawling, crowded foster home. "To this day," John wrote, "I remember my sister consoling me, telling me that all is going to be O.K.," though how that little girl could be so confident I don't know.

They were there for a couple of months, and then John wrote, "the Episcopal Diocese of New York showed up." The children were told that they were going to be taken to live at Hope Farm, a mission of our diocese up in Dutchess County. There they would find a working farm with animals in the barns and vegetables in the fields, an active chapel with a choir, an infirmary and a full-time nurse, and a good school with a football field and a baseball diamond. John's description of life at Hope Farm was wonderful, a "God-send" he wrote, where he learned to sing the hymns and found his love of God and his love of all the other children. And it saved their lives. (At some point I was reading his letter through tear-filled eyes.) When John graduated from the school he went off to fight the Second World War as an aerial gunner on a B-24, and on his return earned a degree in law and got married and embarked on a full life as an attorney and family man. "At a time we were bereft," he concluded, "it all started with Hope Farm ... I should say, with the New York Diocese and its generous and kind donors and leadership, in honor of whom I enclose this small token of my gratitude forever."

I know that we wrestle every day with issues of sustainability, with worries of decline, with crumbling buildings and not enough people and not enough money, and all the profound challenges which every church faces, and which are daunting for everyone and often crushing for our smaller churches. It seems hard to be the church in our time, but actually it was ever thus. And it's supposed to be hard. That's the point of it. All of these concerns are real, but with all that, it was not first for the institutional life of the organized church that we were called by God into the paradoxical, confusing, mystical, magical, discouraging, complicated, adventurous, sacrificial, painful joyful and sublime life of a Christian. Though those worries occupy so much of our thinking and drain us sometimes of our courage. And I think that if we get the loving, forgiving, compassionate, communion-making, giving, sharing part right, all the rest of it will be less frightening, and it may even be that we will see ways open into a new future yet hidden from our frightened eyes. And it's easy. All we have to do is lay down our lives. So don't forget to say your prayers and ask God to make you brave and strong and faithful, and please remember always to love your enemies and your neighbors and your friends and the stranger at the gate. Especially your enemies. Everything we do, when we do it in the name of Jesus, matters. And we may never fully know or understand the worth of the work we do, or what it means, until the five year old turns ninety four and writes us a letter to tell us. But my own deepest hope in this day and this life is that when it is said that "then the Episcopal Diocese of New York showed up," that will always be good news. Amen.