



The  
Episcopal Diocese  
of New York

Address of the Rt. Rev. Andrew M.L. Dietsche  
16<sup>th</sup> Bishop of New York  
to the  
240<sup>th</sup> Diocesan Convention  
November 5, 2016

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

How's about them Cubbies? In my Chicago days I spent many a sunny summer day at Wrigley Field, and never thought then that we would see these days of miracle and wonder! And so are these all — all days of miracle and wonder.

This is the 240th Convention of the Diocese of New York, and it is my privilege to welcome you to this annual gathering of the faithful from our almost two hundred parishes. This year we are mostly about strategic plan, and yesterday we offered three caucuses during which the sections of the plan report, and the budget, were presented with the opportunity to ask questions or make comment. We have now offered six occasions to facilitate familiarity with the plan, and I trust that you who will be asked to cast votes on the resolutions connected to this work have taken the time to become fully informed. The report which is under consideration today is only a part of our strategic plan (and I will talk much more about that in a few minutes), but it represents a critical piece, and I am going to take some time this morning to talk about why this matters, and what it means for us to understand ourselves as all being one, and why the work of this report is so important for the diocese, and for every one of our parishes and communities.

At our last convention I announced that, with the approval of the Standing Committee, I had extended a call to the Right Reverend Mary Glasspool of Los Angeles to come back to New York as Assistant Bishop. You may remember that that announcement was met by thunderous applause, and shortly after Easter this year Mary came among us. For these months she has joined Bishop Shin and me in a partnership of episcopal oversight of this diocese, and her participation in our common work is already blessing us in countless ways. Each of us brings very different gifts to this work, but we like working together, we are coming to know and understand one another, and are having a blast. We don't need to like each other to do this work, but it's so much better when we're having fun.

Bishop Shin will chair Diocesan Council and have episcopal liaison to our ministries of Congregational Development and regional pastorates. Bishop Glasspool will oversee our ministries of global mission, ecumenism, and college and school chaplaincy. Yesterday you heard Bishop Glasspool's report and later today you will hear Bishop Shin, but please do take the time to

talk with them at this convention, and see what a gift they are to our common life, and what resources they are for our ministries.

I am also happy to invite you to introduce yourself to Esslie Hughes, our new Chief of Operations and Finance. Esslie began service here in January, and along with her management of diocesan administration, she has already become a resource to parishes looking for assistance in these areas. Much more recently Chontel Simmons joined us as our new Director of Human Resources. Initially much of her work will focus on matters concerning employees of the diocese, but we intend that half her time be given to provide consultation to parishes in human resource and employee matters, and she has already begun receiving calls from many of you. I know that both Esslie and Chontel will bless and enrich our shared life as a community of communities.

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The significant work of this diocese over the last year has had to do with the strategic plan, and the canonical changes arising from the report of that plan make up the bulk of the legislation we will do today at this convention. The recognition by Bishop Sisk that our diocese was at a place and time when some deep strategic work needed to be done came in the period following the economic catastrophe of 2008 and the election of the next bishop in 2011. Some initial ground work was begun, but it was clear that real work on a strategic plan was going to have to be the work of the next bishop, so when I was elected and consecrated, this was in the air.

The thing is that leading a strategic plan process for an organization as complex as this diocese, with its 200 very different churches and cultures was something I had certainly never done, and I knew when I began talking about this that we were going to be putting our feet on a road the end of which we could not see. I knew that we were going to have to figure this out as we went along. But I wasn't afraid of that. Whenever I am at a church or monastery and they have a labyrinth on the floor of the church or out in the garden, I always take it for a spin, and as I take my first step onto the path of it, I always stop at the start and pray, "The Way Will Teach You The Way," and what moves me about walking a labyrinth is that all the time, as you follow the wheeling path, there at the very edge of your sight is the center, journey's end. The thing about a labyrinth is that you can't get lost, and I try all the time if I can to remember that as I walk through the world and live in the confidence that when we are paying attention to God and putting our trust in God, we may follow any winding path through this wilderness without fear, for we cannot get lost.

So I guess my approach to the strategic plan was to say "Let's go ahead and try something and see what happens, and if it goes OK then we'll figure out what to do next." That is very much how we entered into the first phase of this strategic plan: the Indaba. The Indaba conversations took place in 2013 and 2014, and we have talked about them so much that I will not take a lot of time today to do that again. Except to say that out of those cross-cultural, cross-geographical, urban and rural, big and small, rich and poor conversations, and in our engagement across the diversity of race and ethnicity and language in this diocese, we did begin to build something like the "shared understanding of our common life" that was my hope and purpose in calling us into that exercise. Just about half of our parishes took part in the Indaba, and for the whole diocese the way we talk now about our common life, and what it means to be a whole people marked by

mutual love and accountability and expectations, has changed. That first phase of the strategic plan set out to kindle in our own hearts and imaginations, and in openness and charity toward one another, the question of how we may be Christians together.

The work of 2016, and the work we will do today, makes up the second phase of the strategic plan. We are a very different diocese today than we were before the 2008 crash. Our budget has been reduced by 3.5 million dollars, and it is unlikely that any of that is coming back to us. A lot of ballast was thrown overboard in the wake of the financial collapse in order to right the ship, and a consequence of that was the falling off of and ultimately the sunsetting of the Congregational Support Plan. In time we have discovered that the canons and budgetary structures of our diocese, designed for a different kind of budget and a different kind of management, could no longer serve our missional purpose as effectively as once they had. The ground had shifted, and we saw that it was time for us to revisit the needs of our diocese and our parishes, particularly our poorest, smallest and most struggling parishes, that led to the creation of the CSP in 1996, and to revisit how we will best address those same needs twenty years later, and be prophetic and effective in our poorest communities. We also saw that we needed clarity and shared responsibility for assessments. We had revised the assessment formula in 2009 and re-constituted the adjustment board, which had given much-needed clarity, but four or five years later we realized we weren't finished, and we discovered unintended consequence of those earlier reforms that we still needed to correct. And especially we saw that we needed to face the intractable challenge of long term systemic decline in places across the diocese.

A lot of listening has happened in the diocese in the last twelve months, in processes facilitated by our strategic plan consultants, Gay Jennings and Steve Smith. An advisory board has worked with them, broken into three task forces, and what you have had reported to you, and what will come before us today in the form of resolutions, is fundamentally a reformation of the canonical and budgetary structures of the diocese upon which foundation is built our life as a church, our mission and our ministry to serve the church of 2016 and beyond. I will say much more about this, so first let me point to the work that will begin in the coming year: the third phase of strategic plan.

In the coming year we will return to Indaba-style gatherings, again across the cultures of our diocese, to engage facilitated conversations on that mission; on the direction we believe God is setting before us as a church, on the ministries to which we believe God is calling us, and toward the setting of measurable goals for ourselves. We will talk about a renewed campaign of new church planting, in a serious exploration of the regions and counties of our diocese. We have been expending a great deal of energy trying to maintain an old map of the diocese drawn before we were born. Now we need to spend some time with that map, and look at places where we are perhaps underserving, and other places where we may have become redundant. We will look at the assets available to us to expand the reach of our church, and develop some shared convictions for new church initiatives; for new starts and in some places restarts. Where do we want the diocese to be in five years? In ten? In twenty?

We will talk about alternative ministries, where we may see energy and vitality happening in non-traditional or non-parochial settings. For example, the leaders of our Asian congregations and communities have begun to talk to Bishop Shin about their vision for a Pan-Asian ministering

community. How might we give such non-parochial entrepreneurial endeavors a place at the table and a voice in our councils? We need to create a shared understanding and commitment to growing our Latino presence in the diocese, and to midwifing the birth of more broadly multicultural worshipping communities, and we need a strategy for growing, expanding and funding healthcare, college and military chaplaincies. What these things have in common is that they are all places which are wellsprings of missional vitality. They are places of profound religious conversion and possibility, and they require our greatest attention. And they will get it.

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Now I want to talk in greater fullness about the work of the strategic plan which comes before us today. And I want to express my personal gratitude and that of the diocese to the chairs of the three task forces which created the work reflected in this report: the Reverends Bradley Dyche, Claire Woodley, and Matt Mead. This is an extraordinary amount of work, very well done, and they have earned my and your profound debt of gratitude. Will the chairs and members of the task forces rise to be recognized?

Two years ago, on the heels of the Indaba, you spent time at this convention in round table conversations about the signs of health and vitality you see in your own congregations. It was instructive. It was moving and it was delightful. In the stories you told we could see the infinitely various ways in which the Spirit moves through communities, lights fires, makes growth, serves justice, and transforms the lives and hearts of seekers and disciples. The Holy Spirit is like the wind, Nicodemus. It blows where it will. I sat up late into the night reading your table reports, moved sometimes to tears, and in the morning shared with you stories of the miracles and wonders you told me about. So a year later in this address I took all that and identified those things which I believed constituted the essentials required of every church for the making of health and increase in vitality: Christian education for children and adults; excellence in liturgy and music; relief to the suffering in your communities and support of Christian mission far away; commitment to social justice, and to peace and reconciliation; the care and preservation of our churches, and the participation in the larger life of the diocese by the payment of assessments.

The Task Force on congregations has expanded and developed those anecdotal beginnings to create two tools by which we may pay attention to, and assess, the life and strength of our own congregations and parishes. One of those considers the marks of parish viability. These are things which are required of parishes by the canons, or things which if a parish does not attend to them the parish will most certainly die. For example, we have discovered a parish which owns five buildings, three of which have tenants, and none of which have fire insurance. In a state of heightened alarm I said that I would find the money and we would pay the insurance out of my office, but the Church Insurance Company told us that they won't take the money: the buildings are too derelict to insure. So until we get that sorted out, my advice to everyone is to please stay out of those buildings. We discovered another parish which was spending its endowment at the rate of 25% per year. We've helped them get control over that, but not before their six million dollar endowment had been reduced to \$250,000. We could have gotten in front of that. We want to help churches manage these challenges early on, before they become too much, before

things spin so far out of control, and one resolution you will consider today makes regular review of these viability benchmarks mandatory.

The second tool created by the task force is a similar set of measurable benchmarks, but for vitality rather than viability. If viability is about surviving, vitality is about thriving. And it turns out that is what God wants for us. Jesus said “I came that you may have life, and have it abundantly.” Because of its length this text was taken out of the strategic plan report and published separately. It is *Open Doors, New Futures*, and it points refreshingly and thoughtfully toward what I believe the abundant life can mean for a community. It is in English and Spanish, and you have received it today. I think of this as Volume Two of the Strategic Plan Report, and today I ask that every parish vestry take this document, set aside some time to read and study it together, and do an assessment of your parish life and mission in the light of these principles. Set goals. Dream up some visions for yourself. But please understand that these measures of vitality and viability are not tests. They are tools, and together they paint a portrait of congregational health so rich and so full that if fully implemented they would work a transformation in your midst that will bless your church for generations. *Open Doors* comes with no resolution attached to it, and no mandate, but you may expect that when I come to your parish and sit with your vestry, these are the things we are going to talk about.

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A host of canonical changes are being brought to this convention from the work of the strategic plan task forces. There will be time later today to discuss them and to propose amendment. But let me say at the beginning that all of these resolutions taken together form a coherent whole, a vision for the diocesan structures that makes sense, corrects problems in our canons, reforms our structures to support ministry in rapidly changing circumstances, and addresses gaps in our governance which have cost us way too much. You have been elected to be here and given authority to act in freedom on behalf of your parish and diocese. You may and will do with this as you like. But it is my hope that our purpose will not be to break this down into a thousand small pieces and argue each of them at the microphone.

Because it is also my hope, and I ask this with a heart filled with all that you mean to me and all that we may mean to each other, that when we consider the resolutions which accompany this strategic plan you will rise today above local parochial self interest for the good of the common life we all share. Our Indaba life. I am asking today for your most generous selves, and for your deepest commitment to the life, mission and ministry of this largest diocese, and of the two hundred diverse, complicated, varied, exciting, Christ-filled congregations of which it is made. Some of those congregations are rich and some are poor. Some are in the greatest of all cities, New York, and some are scattered across that most sublime corner of the Garden of Eden which is the Hudson Valley the Catskill Mountains and Upstate New York. Some are black and some are white, some Latino and some Asian. Most are English speaking, but some come before the altar of God in a dozen other languages. Saint Luke's in the Bronx gets nine hundred people on Sunday and Saint Andrew's in South Fallsburgh gets twelve. (Which actually means that they may be getting the same percentage of their community that Saint Luke's is in theirs.) These are your brothers and sisters. And everyone is counting on everyone else. Indaba taught us that. We saw our interconnectedness. They are all of them Saints of God, and I mean, God helping, to be

one too. Let us show today by the things we say and the things we do what we mean to one another and what it means to us that we have been lifted up all together and made one people by Jesus.

But that interconnected life brings mutual obligations. Earlier this year I met with the clergy of the Mid-Hudson Region, and the strategic plan was the subject of discussion. I told them many of the things I am saying here today, but I also said that if the strategic plan had a title it would be "Take Responsibility." All of this is about our love for each other but just as much about the accountability we owe to each other. So let me talk about two canonical provisions that I know have worried some of you.

The provision that no church's assessment could be increased by more than 12.5% in a given year was instituted in the diocese some time ago, so as to not penalize churches which were experiencing dramatic growth. This was a good idea, and we are not getting rid of that protection. But when the new canons related to assessments were passed in 2009, a simple error in the language of the canons meant that when the adjustment board would make what they expected to be temporary reductions in a church's assessment to give help in time of trouble, those reductions turned out to be canonically mandated as permanent. In effect the parish's assessment was reset forever at a new and lower level, and then the 12.5% cap kicked in and applied to that lower figure, making any return to the full assessment all but impossible.

There is a church in the diocese which, by the assessment formula on which we all agreed in 2009, should be paying \$22,666 per year. However, when the church was in hard times, the adjustment board temporarily lowered their assessment to \$1000, but because of the error in the canon, that reduction was actually permanent and therefore subject to the cap, so increases have been tiny and incremental. In 2016 the amount of assessment for which they were billed was \$1265. At a 12.5% increase each year, it will be the year 2040 when their assessment returns to its true apportioned share. My granddaughter Emmalyn will celebrate her first birthday tomorrow. She is one. But by the time that church is paying its full assessment she may well be a delegate here herself, if she can find a babysitter to watch my great-grandchildren. That's the unintended consequence of the perfect storm that happens when the 12.5% cap slams into the error in the assessment canon, and it is the very definition of what my father used to call CrazyMadInsaneGoofyNuts.

But I must also tell you that that parish recognizes the gross unfairness of this loophole and have said that they will vote today to close it, though it benefits them. And I am confident that we will see the same generosity, capacity for sacrifice, and Christian faith from everyone so affected by this.

Another parish received what they believed was a three year reduction in the payment of their assessment. They have a high assessment, and the relief they received was pretty significant. But they are faithful people, and were committed to full participation in the assessment, so when the three years were up they were surprised to receive an assessment bill that reflected the lower amount. They contacted the diocese to say they were ready and able to pay their full assessment, but were told that the diocese is not canonically permitted to bill for their full assessment because

of the cap. I hasten to note that you are actually permitted to pay more than you are billed, but this was another unintended consequence of the 12.5% cap. CrazyMadInsaneGoofyNuts!

Fixing this is not just a matter of fairness. It is a matter of living with our eyes open. If someone from another diocese was to ask me what people in New York pay in assessments I would have to answer that I have no idea. Everyone is paying something different. In 2009 we clearly and carefully re-set the assessment formula with overwhelming support of this convention, but seven years later we are just all over the board. It's not the adjustment board's fault. It's nobody's fault. A simple and small error in the language of our law, compounded over time, has injected sheer chaos into our assessment life and budget.

We know that churches who have had significant reduction in assessments and have gotten used to living with the lower obligation will in most cases not be able to jump immediately back to full compliance with the assessment formula. This is not about forcing crisis on anyone. We expect churches affected by this to come back to the adjustment board and relief will again be given -- temporary relief, time certain, with reasonable steps back to full participation, so that this change will not be an unbearable burden. But everyone, even those receiving assistance, will be accountable again to the same assessment formula. All this is about is just fixing a mistake. That is not crazy.

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The report also proposes a canon for aided intervention to vulnerable congregations. The Diocese of New York is unusual in having had no canon that identifies benchmarks which would demand definitive intervention by the bishop and diocese. This is needed, and the language of this canon is directly based on similar canons in other dioceses.

When I was a candidate for bishop of this diocese, during the "walk-about," the most common question I heard was about whether I was going to close churches, and about whether I had any strategy to address the long term pattern of systemic decline in some of our congregations. Five years later, this strategic plan, but especially this canon, is the answer to those questions.

I know that there are churches who read this canon and see themselves in it, and I know that you feel some uncertainty about what might be coming and what this might mean for you. Do not be afraid. I am convinced that we have to hold every one of our churches, even the most vulnerable, to the same expectations of health and vitality. And I believe that that is really what everyone wants, even, and maybe especially, those heroic people working so hard to keep their declining churches going against all odds. How is it that we love our churches so deeply? What is this mystery? How do places become so invested with holiness? But once I asked a vestry if they do anything beyond trying to pay the light bill and find a priest to come in on Sunday, and they admitted that they don't. That was the saddest thing I ever heard. I want a really big and important and brilliant and adventurous life for those people, and I mourn that they don't have it and don't know how to ask for it.

I know that there are some who suspect that this canon is only about closing churches. And in truth, within the canon is a process to help churches which have come to the end of their life end

well. But that is not why this canon has been written. Rather, for most of these churches this is how we are going to keep you open. I have no desire to close churches, but I watch in alarm the number of parishes that are speeding toward a cliff and no one is reaching for the brake. And I need to say that closing a church is not the worst thing that can happen. The worst thing that can happen is drifting year to year with little sense of purpose, afraid of the future, afraid of the bishop, with no vision and no energy. So let's get in front of that. Let's take a stab at resurrection. In the language of this canon you will see another set of measures, of benchmarks. They are cries for help, and the purpose of this canon is to provide to parishes, together with the Bishop and Standing Committee, a common lens by which we may identify unsustainability and sometimes crisis, and a common vocabulary of urgency. And then to create clear processes for help. This canon is about helping. But really, so are they all.

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On Tuesday evening in our cathedral, and on Thursday at Trinity Parish, services of funeral remembrance were held for Deborah Danner. She was one of us. Faithful, devout, Episcopalian. She was also schizophrenic, and vulnerable. Two weeks ago she was shot and killed by a police officer inside her apartment. She was alone, she was in bed, she was naked. Therefore she was also afraid, and being afraid, behaved erratically and threateningly. Because she was mentally ill. Everyone recognizes the excessive force and the failure to follow protocol that happened when Deborah was shot.

At this convention two years ago, we awaited the grand jury decisions regarding those who took the life of Michael Brown in Ferguson and Eric Garner on Staten Island in our own diocese. This convention last year followed the killing of the Charleston Nine at Emmanuel AME Church, and a year of the constant reporting of mostly young black men shot by police in cities across America. At both conventions we passed resolutions calling on our parishes to engage more deeply their relationships with local police precincts, calling on parishes to study their own histories related to slavery and race, and to join all of our churches in reading *The New Jim Crow*.

These were good things, and important, but they are not enough. "Black Lives Matter" is a movement slogan, but it is much more. It is a claim — a cry of hope and promise and our insistence on the integrity of peoples and families — made against the dehumanizing dismissal of the lives and loves and passions of people of color by a yet unredeemed majority culture. Moses said "I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live." Black Lives Matter is the choice for life, for blessing. Therefore it is sacred and holy, and our partnership in that movement must be the work of the church. But it must also be effective.

I have had some very preliminary communication with Winnie Varghese this week, and with Pierre-Andre Duvert, toward the creation of a task force or body that will look at how we may better exercise our voice as a church in this city, and our influence in the corridors of power. We must much more deeply engage our mayor and police and all people of good will and integrity on these substantive matters of mental illness, excessive institutional force, black lives, and our responsibilities one to another. Some of you will be invited to be part of such a task force. When



we have more to say about this we will, but you and your churches will be asked to commit to this work of life, of love, of justice-seeking and of reconciliation.

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For each of the last two conventions I have had occasion to talk to you about the founding of a diocesan credit union. You have passed resolutions at both conventions to support and further this work, and it is all bearing much fruit. We need consider no legislation today, but I want to give you a report. A partnership of the diocese and Trinity Parish has met the initial obligation to capitalize the credit union, and the process of seeking the charter is underway.

Over a quarter of the people of New York City are underbanked. In the Bronx that is one in three. In the state it is twenty percent. The unbanked pay an average of \$2400 a year for payday loans, check cashing services, car title loans, and other high-cost non-banking financial services. When you consider that the median household income in the poorest parts of the South Bronx is less than \$10,000 per year, it is obvious that the lack of access to banking services is ruinous, and is digging the hole of poverty deeper and deeper. Think of this as the “poor tax” — the extra money it costs just to be poor. When we talk about economic justice we are talking about the capacity of all people to live in freedom, and the simple opportunity for people to bank their money and cash their checks for free, to build up savings, and to apply for loans at non-predatory rates — simple services that most of us take for granted — all constitute the foundation of that economic freedom. This credit union is how we as a diocese can answer this need and invest ourselves in the blessing of the poor at, frankly, no cost or risk to ourselves.

I confess that when I was first approached about the idea of creating a bank, it seemed to me a little bit like an old Mickey Rooney movie: “Let’s put on a show in the barn! Mom can make the costumes!” But this is real. We are making a bank.

Two weeks ago the organizing committee — Jennifer Reddall, Winnie Varghese, Paul Sheehan (our banker in the group), Matt Heyd and Nora Smith — held an event in my living room with invited rectors and financial leaders of some of our parishes of significant capacity for a presentation on the credit union. No asks were made that night, but they were told that churches with endowments are going to be asked to put some of that money into the credit union. These are federally insured deposits as with any bank, completely safe, and which in the end cost the depositors nothing. The financial officer of one church responded to the presentation by saying, “This is a no brainer,” and some expressed disappointment that they couldn’t make pledges of deposits that very night.

Soon you will all be invited to make pledges of future deposits, and before long you will be able to deposit your money. Expect that some of you will be invited to serve as directors of our new bank, and to offer service in other ways. This whole endeavor is something of which we should be very proud. It’s about Christians being Christians together.

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Day before yesterday Imam Mohamad Bashar Arafat, whom you may remember as a speaker at this convention in 2010, led an interfaith delegation of Egyptian Muslims and Christians on a visit to our diocese, as the guests of the Episcopal–Muslim Relations Committee, chaired by Father Masud Syedullah, and the Ecumenical and Interfaith Commission, chaired by Father Joe Campo. It was a happy group, and a delightful meeting at Diocesan House. But we found that it was necessary to address some of the hateful anti–Muslim rhetoric that Muslims around the world are hearing from America. We found it necessary to explain that that rhetoric does not reflect the thoughts of all Americans, and that exploring good, fruitful interfaith relationships is an integral part of our lives in and love of Jesus. We embrace people of other faiths not despite our being Christians, but because of it. And we warmly welcomed our guests. And I think we were reassuring. But it was humbling to stand before these representatives of the wider world and acknowledge that this election season has been marked by some of the most extraordinary language we have seen.

In three days this country will elect its next president. The candidates hold very different positions on many issues of public policy, and on these matters Christians may honestly disagree. Our faith does not point us toward any one particular candidate in this or any election. This is why, even as we speak directly to issues in the body politic or questions of social justice from the pulpit, and must do so, our preachers do not publicly endorse particular candidates. Because we do not confuse the message of any political party platform with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I will vote on Tuesday. And you too should fulfill your responsibility on Tuesday, and vote for the candidate you believe will best lead our country over the next four years.

But the act of voting inherently raises an existential question for people of faith. Are we first citizens of the body politic, whose religious convictions are quite separate from and unconcerned with the public life, are simply personal and which have regard only to our own salvation? Or, are we first citizens of the Kingdom, and proclaimers by the things we say and the things we do of the the Gospel of Jesus Christ, through whose teachings and by whose inspiration we view and understand the political world in which we live and act? I know the answer to those questions.

The former is the lie told by the Prince of this World, who would have us put our full trust and hope in anything other than the God we know in Christ Jesus, while the latter is the holy and sacred call to an ever more deeply rich experience of and participation in life. Pope Francis referenced this passage from Mark’s Gospel: “[Love compels us] to go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation,” and then said “Here, ‘the creation’ refers to every aspect of human life; consequently, the mission of proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ has a universal destination. Its mandate of charity encompasses all dimensions of existence, all individuals, all areas of community life, and all peoples. Nothing human can be alien to it.” (Evangelii Gaudium, no.181)

For those who have answered the call to discipleship, there are some basic, unambiguous principles of ordinary godly love which all Christians must bring with them into the public square, and into the voting booth. They are not debatable for Christians, for they are revealed truths, deriving from the commandment to love God and love neighbor, and may be superseded by no political rhetoric or claim.

The equality and dignity of all persons of every race and gender and sexual orientation, for we are every one of us made in the image of God and redeemed by the One who took our flesh upon himself and dwelt among us. Who said, "I came that all may be one, as the Father and I are one."

The welcome of the stranger at the gate, remembering that once you were strangers in Egypt. And more recently, immigrants on the American shore. So Christians claim solidarity with, the oppressed, the vulnerable, the refugee and the outcast who stand at the gate and knock.

Compassion and relief for the poor, and economic justice for those who are shut out of the human possibility of the abundant life, all in the name of the One who said, "When you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Because they cannot repay you."

A commitment to non-violence, and to peace, and to the sacrifice of self-interest for the sake of that peace. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

And the gracious stewardship of creation and all that God has given into our hands. Before it slips away.

Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, whatever is excellent and worthy of praise. Train your mind to these things only.

Paul said, "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." If you are to be a Christian, you must be a Christian all the time, and in the public square, be that reconciliation in the world.

In the last year it has seemed that too many voices have appealed to our worst selves. You are my beloveds, my brothers and sisters, my Christians; and I pray that in all that we have said or done at this convention, or might have done, in the work we have been given to do in our lives in our church, our communities, our nation and in the world, in this life we have been given to share, we may be of one purpose, and that is that we will always always always, in the name of Jesus Christ, be only and all the time our very best selves. Amen.