

14th September, A.D. 2004
Feast of the Holy Cross

TO ALL CLERICAL AND LAY DEPUTIES AND ALTERNATES TO THE 139TH
ANNUAL CONVENTION OF THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF PITTSBURGH:

Beloved in the Lord,

It has been my custom each year to provide you with an overview of diocesan life as we prepare for our annual convention. My letter is sent with pre-convention materials (the pre-convention journal) and serves both as an introduction to the scope of the business before us and as my own pre-convention report.

THE MISSION OF THE CONGREGATIONS

One of the most important statistics of congregational life is average Sunday attendance. Despite the tumult of 2003, average Sunday attendance across the diocese actually rose slightly and the number of communicants rose between two and three percent. My sense from Sunday visitations had been of more balanced congregations (with some new and generally younger faces, especially families), but it is great that the annual parochial report figures bear out this perception. Since last convention, two congregations did disband, Epiphany, Avalon, in November, and Trinity, Connellsville, at the end of December. During the summer of 2004, the Standing Committee also gave permission for two congregations to merge, St. Thomas, Northern Cambria and St. Luke, Patton. At the same time, the first efforts of new congregations in Oakdale (south of Pittsburgh International Airport), in Robinson (between the airport and the City of Pittsburgh), in Latrobe, and in New Baltimore (between Somerset and Bedford) began to be overseen by our Church Planting Committee.

The mission of the diocese is chiefly the mission of the congregations. This is why the two bishops are in a different congregation each Sunday (about 40 of 52 Sundays) – to encourage, to confirm, and to challenge – and why the four-member Leadership Team (including Canon Hays and Mrs. Norton) spend the best of our energies invested in strengthening the parishes and their leaders “in season and out of season.” I can certainly say that of all the things I do as bishop, nothing gives me greater joy than Sunday by Sunday being present to worship, preach and connect with the congregations of this diocese.

There are many extraordinary stories of the work – the mission – of our congregations. One of our diocesan goals has to do with becoming multiple-congregation parishes. I cannot let this report fail to mention one particular triumph in this area: On Sunday, September 5th, Grace Church, Mt. Washington *and* Edgeworth, dedicated its second facility, Shields Chapel, Edgeworth, 14 miles down the Ohio from the old church “high atop Mt. Washington.” Bishop Scriven presided and some 200 people were present.

None of our congregations has been unaffected by the divisions brought on by the innovations in Faith and Order adopted by the General Convention of 2003. A few congregations have been deeply affected. On the other hand, many congregations are actually more united than they were a year ago – with clearer teaching, and clearer witness, and greater understanding than before. There has been some transferring of communicants between parishes. My personal sadness is that, as I have stood clearly and led clearly, some of the parishes, clergy and people, are now more estranged from me. Others across the diocese have had their own experiences of estrangement. While there are good things to report, there is also grief and sadness.

DIOCESAN STAFF AND STEWARDSHIP

We have a great staff. No diocese has a stronger Leadership Team. No diocese has a better Support Team. Changes, however, are always a part of the picture. Marjie Smith served as interim Communications Director into the spring, paving the way for the appointment of Peter Frank. Substantial improvement in our communications effort, both in print and in electronic media, were achieved in 2004. The Rev. Larry Deihle, Director of Development, since 2001, will be leaving the team at the end of December. Significant development work is proving impossible in the present circumstances of the Episcopal Church. Larry has done a great work in a hard season, but the 2005 budget recommended by Council proposes that the best stewardship of our common resources is served by the elimination of the development office for the time being. Gloria Clever, who worked most recently for Bishop Henry, retired for the second time from diocesan service, and has been succeeded by Nicole Pollard. Celeste Smithbower, financial secretary, also left us after a year of service. Whitney Bottegale, receptionist, also retired and was succeeded by Rachael Griffin.

One privilege given to bishops is the naming of canons. I intend to exercise this right in a new way at November's convention. I propose to name Mrs. Nancy Norton, Director of Administration, as a lay canon. Nancy will be Pittsburgh's first lay canon.

CONVENTION AGENDA

In consultation with the Convention Committee, a number of significant changes have been made to the proposed agenda. The most significant change allows for the administration of possible roll call votes on either day of convention. Convention deputies (or their alternates) will be required to register in a two-hour period at the start of each day. This will permit the preparation of the lists necessary to any roll-call. Late arriving deputies – clergy or lay – may be able to participate in other voting procedures, but will not be able to have their names entered on the roll-call lists and will not be eligible for any such votes. It is understood that the Constitutional Amendment to Article I, Section I, is of such significance that a roll call is anticipated. As bishop, my hope is that deputies will resist any wider use of the roll call vote. In order that we might show wisdom and restraint in the use of our convention time and parliamentary action, this is also the first time that the Convention Committee has proposed a time certain for the conclusion of convention business.

COMMON LIFE

Our Cathedral continues its recovery under the steady leadership of Provost Cathy Brall. In addition to the accustomed diocesan events hosted there, a 52-day ecumenical prayer initiative for the City of Pittsburgh began there on September 11th and the inauguration of Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry's fifth Dean-President, the Very Rev. Paul F.M. Zahl, will bring leaders from all over the country on October 9th. Additionally a week of noonday evangelistic preaching and teaching missions aimed at downtown workers is being planned for the first week of November and a week in Lent.

A House of Prayer, envisioned by the Rev. Jamie and Mrs. Sharon Forrest, has opened in the facilities which were Epiphany Church, Avalon. Clergy, lay leaders and congregations of the diocese are the chief beneficiaries of the focused intercession which is offered there.

The Racism Commission has labored to develop anti-racism training for the leadership of the diocese and will bring recommendations and a resolution to the convention. Calvary Camp and Happening continue to be immensely successful ministries among the young people of the diocese. The Cursillo movement continues to shape adult disciples through three three-day weekends every year.

The plans to develop our common life property at Donegal Lake continue to evolve. During 2004 much effort went into a Leadership Retreat House project led by the Board of Trustees, but inability to raise funds during the present crisis of the Episcopal Church mean that any further progress on this aspect of the vision for the common life property must await more settled days. A four-phase sub-division plan for the 163-acre site (can additional 11-acres were given to us during 2004) was also developed during 2004. By the time of convention the leadership of the Board hopes to be able to announce progress on an amphitheatre, campsite and upgraded-lanes to enable group and event use as early as the spring of 2005.

THE TROUBLES

A front-page article of the Times of London for Thursday, September 1st, began: "The Episcopal Church in the United States faces exclusion from the worldwide Anglican Communion." A similar story appeared in the Daily Telegraph the next day. These stories were reportedly based on "leaks" from the Lambeth Commission, whose 19-members complete their work this month. The report and recommendations are due to be published just two-weeks before our 139th Diocesan Convention. Whatever the report and recommendations finally say, two things are clear: (1) the actions of the 74th General Convention last August far exceeded the agreed limits of Anglican diversity; and (2) the Lambeth Commission report and recommendations will have far-reaching consequences on the inter-relations of Diocese of Pittsburgh, the Episcopal Church (USA), and the Anglican Communion. Specifics will unfold in the months ahead.

In January I was elected Moderator of the Anglican Communion Network. As Moderator I was asked to testify before and make recommendation to the Lambeth Commission in June. The Network has grown to include eleven dioceses and to include parishes in some forty other dioceses. Our effort has now been recognized by fifteen Provinces of the Anglican Communion.

As most in the diocese recognize, my leadership responsibilities for the Network have required some significant re-focus of energies during 2004. This re-focus has been supported by all the leadership bodies of the diocese and is monitored by the Standing Committee. I cannot tell you how gratifying it is, in the midst of this difficult and demanding work, to preside at worship in congregations across the diocese, Sunday after Sunday. The faithful ministry of clergy, vestry members and parishioners of our diocese is incredibly uplifting and is a huge part of what enables me to serve.

It is in the shadow of last year's schismatic innovations, vigorously resisted by the leadership and the majority here in Pittsburgh as well as by others elsewhere and in the shadow of an international report not to be circulated before mid-October, that our convention will meet.

The most difficult parts of our upcoming convention will be generated by our continuing response to last year's General Convention. The second reading of an amendment to our local Constitution will be at the center of this. Among the materials distributed in the pre-convention materials is an opinion from our chancellor as to the content and justification for the constitutional amendment.

A second constitutional amendment, also before us for a second reading, restores to clergy canonically resident in the Diocese of Pittsburgh the right to vote here, even if they are not presently ministering here. Some explanation of how the constitutional provision presently in effect first got legislated, and of who the change would effect is also circulated in the pre-convention materials.

Various resolutions have been submitted for consideration. Proposers will be invited to speak to their rationale at pre-convention hearings. Until the troubles brought on by the 74th General Convention, the Diocese of Pittsburgh had consciously sought to eschew resolutions at our annual local convention. Some of the proposed resolutions seem to invite a return to the contentiousness of the 70's and 80's. Perhaps there is no way to avoid this. My prayer is that we will do only what we must do in facing into the conflict that is among us, and that even then we will strive to be "ourselves at our best" through pre-convention and convention debate and action.

As the Constitution requires, we shall also elect General Convention deputies at November's convention.

CONVENTION THEME AND UGANDAN PARTNERSHIP

Each year we have focused the Annual Convention on an aspect of our ten-year goals. The 139th Annual Convention will be no exception. This year's theme relates to our diocesan commitment to recruiting youth: "Reaching Young People – Reaching the World." Mission minutes interspersed through the convention will offer encouraging stories from youth and student ministry within and beyond the diocese.

One remarkable blessing deriving from the convention theme will be the presence of the Chancellor of Uganda Christian University among us. The Chancellor also happens to be the Archbishop of Uganda, the Most Rev. Henry Orombi. Our five-year diocesan partnership with Rwanda is completed at this convention and the proposal before us will be to enter into a five-year partnership with Uganda Christian University. Why this particular partnership? The UCU partnership was proposed to us by the Rev. Dr. Stephen Noll, Vice-Chancellor of the University, a missionary educator-priest canonically resident in the Diocese of Pittsburgh, who was for the twenty-years (before going to Uganda), a faculty member of Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry and a distinguished leader in the councils of our diocese.

Archbishop Orombi will be "chaplain" to our convention, its banquet speaker and preacher, as well as speaker for the ECW luncheon which follows the adjournment of convention.

Workshops relating to the convention theme are also scheduled for Friday morning, November 5th, at 10 a.m. and 11 a.m. Further information is in the pre-convention packet. Consider making learning a part of your convention experience this year.

PREPARATION FOR CONVENTION

The schedule of Pre-Convention Regional Hearings is enclosed with the pre-convention mailing. Please study all the materials in advance of the hearings and in advance of convention.

Please cover the convention – and its preparation – in prayer. Please, of your charity, also pray for me as your bishop in this season of leadership and labor among you.

Faithfully in Christ,
+Bob Pittsburgh