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Opening Comments at the first meeting of the triennium of the Joint Standing Committee on Program, Budget and Finance in preparation for the 76th General Convention.

It is good to be here with you.

First, I would like to thank you for your commitment to this ministry. Thank you for bringing your skills and wisdom, and most importantly your commitment to this important work. I am very aware of the significant sacrifices that many of you make to do this work. Not the least of those sacrifices are made by the chair of PB&F as she so competently balances a night shift job, school, family and her commitment to this work of PB&F. A special thank you to Pan.

I don't know if you are aware of it, but PB&F has it's own special Bible verse. It is

Mark 6:31

“so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat”

Like most crucially important tasks, yours is not easy task.

You are the money people and money, always a timely topic, is certainly an urgently timely topic today. Synchronicity brings us geographically today within miles of big time money discussions and, although those money discussions concurrently happening just miles away in Washington, D.C. are about a bigger pool of money in a much larger pond, the money discussions we will have together as the Joint Standing Committee on PB&F from now on and through General Convention, are discussions about money as a tool for doing God's work in the world. So maybe our pond and our pool are not so small after all.

I have a deep love for the southwest. Particularly for the land of Enchantment, also known as New Mexico. My husband has a t-shirt vibrantly tie-dyed in beautiful southwest colors with an outline of the state that says, “New Mexico: not really new, not really Mexico”. This message is a funny message of incongruity and in some equally funny and incongruous way this New Mexico message reminds me of PB&F. Here’s how:

PB&F is not really a legislative committee, but it has a legislative committee number

PB&F but it is not really like other Standing Committees or Commissions that meet regularly during the triennium and do no work at all at GC, but PB&F is a standing committee that meets rarely, if at all in whole committee face-to-face during the triennium and does most of it’s work at General Convention.

Not really a legislative committee, and certainly not in the norm of other standing committees. Not really new, not really Mexico.

All that is to say that PB&F is a creature of the insight of Episcopalians gone before us. And like, so much of what those wise Episcopalians before us have given us, it works. The function and responsibilities of PB&F have been tweaked along the way and over the years, but, it works. And it is critically important for you, the members of PB&F, to understand your job as prescribed by the canons and rules of order, to understand the numbers, and to understand the hopes and dreams that dwell within those numbers.

So how do you do that? Well, I think it is important to understand what is it like in our church today. What is our context, what is our venue, so to speak.

So here's my perspective, gained through on-site experience and observation:

1. We are a church who is becoming more intent on mission. Let me give you one example:

A few weeks ago I was invited to the Diocese of Southern Ohio. I spent Friday night with youth and young adults who invited me there because they wanted to talk in-depth about lay ministry, what it means to be called to that ministry. To really explore what it means to be a "minister of the church" as it defines the laity in our catechism.

Then Saturday, a beautiful sunny afternoon, the Procter conference center plenary room was packed with Episcopalians eager to learn about funding opportunities for parish community outreach ministries. What, in heaven's name inspires 200 people to spend a whole, early fall sunny Saturday in a room in the middle of a beautiful cornfield? What inspired these Episcopalians in the Diocese of Southern Ohio is exciting creative ministries being implemented by laity supported by clergy and the bishops of their diocese. The energy, the faithful commitment and the Holy Spirit all palpable in their presence.

2. We are a church who is becoming more interested in listening to and really getting to know our neighbors.

The Diocese of California recently sent flip cameras to the provincial secretaries in all the other 37 provinces in the Anglican communion asking them to film examples of how they are responding to the MDGs and to download those films and send them back so that a dvd of real time Anglican communion MDG work could be shared at the MDG events in NY this week.

3. For the first time in the history of General Convention, we are a church who will actually have a planned and enabled conversation within the context of General Convention. We are a church ready

to explore UBUNTU. We are a Church charged to talk about and do something about mission.

It is my opinion that over the years, our church has longed to be a people of mission. We have adopted mission initiatives and programs galore : Venture in Mission, Mission Imperatives, just to name a couple. But I do not think we have actually become a PEOPLE of mission. We have not internalized mission and now we are poised to explore mission through conversation embraced by the General Convention theme of UBUNTU.

An example: last week Province VIII held the first of the nine pre-General Convention provincial synod meetings. All dioceses in the Province were represented with the exception of Alaska. Deputies and bishops were present. And we took the initial step in having the mission conversation that the 75th General Convention directed the 76th General Convention to have. We are using a conversation tool called public narrative that has three parts. The story of self, the story of us and the story of now. The story of self can build bridges between people and lead us toward a story of us, an exploration of our identity as the Episcopal Church. After all, UBUNTU loosely translated means, I am because you are. Who are we anyway?

The story of now moves us into action. It is together finding the answer to “so what” it is the response to the tapping of our moral leadership roots that we explore in our stories of self and us. It is the story of our recommitment to mission. It is not the story of the how, but the story of why. Just like David who knew he had to do something about Goliath. He did not sit down and work out all the details. First he recognized the sense of urgency and he committed to do something about it. That’s what we need to do, and we can use this conversation tool, called public narrative, to help us. The public narrative is not the end in itself. It is a tool for conversation about mission that may lead us, with the help of the Holy Spirit, into a renewed commitment to mission.

From my perspective, that's the state of our Church. Is there angst? Yes. Does it hold us down? Does it keep us from being the people of God? No.

Here are my challenges to you:

First, Help our Church understand that TEC governance and TEC mission are UBUNTU. I am because you are.

I sense a growing competition over authority and money between the corporate/canonical section of the budget and the program/mission section of the budget. These sections need to be separate, but both need to know about mutual responsibility and interdependence. The lines of authority and accountability have become blurry. This ambiguity acts to inhibit our development of our understanding of ourselves and each other. It has to be cleared up.

Second:

A couple of weeks ago I was asked by a member of PB&F if I knew of any "surprises" coming at GC that would require funding. PB&F does not like surprises.

I don't know of any surprises. But just so you won't be surprised. There will be surprises.

So I challenge you to do this:

I challenge you to consider these surprises in three ways: as poor planning on the part of the surprisors, as the work of the Holy Spirit, or some combination of the two.

Third:

Remembering to whom we all belong, I challenge you to be bold and not to suffer from failure of nerve.

This committee walks a balance beam of calculated spirituality. That is what the General Convention budget is. We do the best we can to get the income and expense numbers to match. We do the best we can to get the infrastructure and mission numbers to support the hopes and dreams.

You bring everything you have to bear on those numbers on the printed page. But the numbers are simply one set of containers for promise and hope for God's Church. And when push comes to shove, you are not ultimately in charge, we are not in charge. God is.

Finally, the first part of the reading from Mark "so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat"

Is followed by a second part and it goes like this:

He said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest."

There is a place for you in the meditation chapel at GC. Join me there.