

**76th General Convention**  
**President of the House of Deputies, Bonnie Anderson, D.D.**  
**Opening Remarks**  
**July 7, 2009**

Presiding Bishop Katharine, Secretary Straub, Deputies, Bishops, Members of the Triennial Meeting of the Episcopal Church Women, visitors and guests. It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to the 76th General Convention of The Episcopal Church and our exploration together of Ubuntu.

The General Convention, meeting once every three years is the world's largest bicameral legislature. The General Convention holds all authority in The Episcopal Church, other than the authority to change the Core Doctrine of the Church. Of course, the ultimate authority for all we are and all we have and all we do resides in our beloved Jesus Christ.

The General Convention can be fairly described in a variety of terms including constitution and canons, rules of order, legislation, politics, group dynamics, worship, this list goes on. The Convention can also be understood theologically. It is rooted in the promise of Jesus to be with us when we are gathered as a community and St. Paul's famous imagery of the Body of Christ. These foundations allow us to believe that God is present and can be known in conventions as well as congregations. The House of Deputies has a particularly important role in this theological construct. It requires the whole body – bishops, priests, deacons and laity – to be the full image of Christ for the church and for the world. The Episcopal Church has intentionally structured its General Convention to reflect this theology rather than one that relies on a special part of the Church to fulfill that role. We believe that God speaks to and through all of the orders and members of our Church.

God's Episcopal Church is my Church. It became my Church about 35 years ago for a reason that may seem simple. The Episcopal Church welcomed me. I don't mean the kind of welcome that gave me coffee and shook my hand,, although that is important too. The Episcopal Church welcomed me in a way that told me the truth about who I am. The Episcopal Church told me that I am a child of God. The Episcopal Church told me that the gifts that God has given me will be put to good use. The Episcopal Church welcomed me in a way that brings me closer to wholeness. Here is a short illustration of what I mean:

I grew up not too far from here, in a largely Hispanic, Roman Catholic neighborhood in a town called Santa Ana. I was the white kid with the divorced parents who lived with her mother and sometimes her grandmother.  
I was an anomaly.

But strangely enough, that neighborhood, that community not only welcomed me, they embraced me: There was always room at someone's table when I was hungry, when I

was lonely there was someone yelling outside my back door that it was time to walk to church. I was welcomed and included, no questions asked. I was and am thankful for that community beyond words. They literally saved my life.

All the neighbors knew about each other – what was important, who needed special attention. But the neighborhood church, where I walked to Mass every single morning for 15 years, there was not one single adult associated with the leadership of the parish, who knew my name. I was told about Jesus Christ at Church, but I experienced Jesus Christ in my neighborhood.

So years later, when I walked into a simple Episcopal church in rural Pennsylvania with my husband and our three kids of our own in tow, I was welcomed in a way that touched the place in my heart that I had kept in reserve for the generous and loving people of my childhood, not too far from here.

These kind caring Episcopalians fed the rural poor of our community where we lived and paid hired hands to do work they could have done themselves just so someone else would have the dignity of a job in hard times. The community was their mission field.

On the third Sunday we came to Church, Ellie sat next me. She had introduced herself to me the first Sunday we were there. She sat beside me each Sunday thereafter. She had a huge brown crocodile purse – the kind that has a small crocodile head a little tiny feet on it near the clasp – our kids were mesmerized by it. After church on a particular Sunday, she nudged me and dug down in her purse. She handed me a crumpled paper with a list of names and phone numbers written by a shaky hand. In a display of what I call uncanny “gift perception”, Ellie had decided that if the church had a babysitting co-op it would enable more people to be available to work in the community. She thought I would be the perfect co-op organizer. I did it. And for the second time in my life, God put me in the midst of a loving community of people who showed me what it is to love my neighbor as myself. The “penny dropped”. I got it. We find our place in creation where the story of Jesus Christ intersects our own stories.

So here we are today, ready to build upon the work done by 75 other General Conventions and all the thousands of bishops, deputies, ECW, guests, visitors, who have gone before us.

But, we say, these are tough times. Time to hunker down.

I bet if we went back through history and interviewed Episcopalians from those 75 General Conventions gone before us, EVERYONE would say they lived through tough times. Their lives would reflect tough times in the form of such things as the dustbowl, famine, war, natural disasters, starvation, civil rights, racism, depression. Our time right now, is tough but it is marked by another TYPE of tough times marked by terrorism, and a declining economy. Ours is a tough time, but our forbearers would probably say that they had tough times too, and they did.

In our tough time, there is one major but very subtle difference. The difference is this: – because of technology, available travel, communication, we have the capability to SEE, and, to some extent, to UNDERSTAND not only our own tough times, but we know about the tough times of people all around the globe. In June it was announced that the first half of 2009 pushed another 105 million people into hunger, raising the total number of hungry people in the world now to more than one billion.

In our own Diocese of South Dakota, while I was visiting on the Lower Brulle reservation, which is in the #1 poorest county in the U.S., where there are several Episcopal congregations, at a free lunch program a young boy stuffed mashed potatoes from his lunch into his pocket so his grandmother would have something for dinner.

One of the toughest things about these tough times is that we can't hide from them. Our technology enables us to see and to know not only how we are effected, but how the global economic crisis is disproportionately affecting the poorest people in the world.

It is within our reach to do something about it and THAT is the toughest thing about our times. As economist Jeffrey Sachs said as he stood on the chancel steps of St. Mark's Cathedral in Minneapolis, "For the first time in the history of the world, we have the resources, the technology, and the capacity to wipe extreme poverty off the face of the earth. The only thing we lack is the will."

Some of us have the will. Over 50% of our approximately 7,000 congregations have embraced the Millennium Development Goals as a mission focus. 82 of the 110 dioceses have sacrificially pledged 0.7% of their diocesan budgets toward global poverty eradication and the MDGs. In 42 countries, Episcopal Relief & Development has touched the lives of 2.5 million people.

The vision of building the "Beloved Community" in the Diocese of Louisiana, for example, has been embraced by over 100,000 volunteers and a \$10 million dollar investment from contributions made to Episcopal Relief & Development for this purpose which has conservatively produced 20 times that amount in benefit to the community. Many of us are responding to God's call to mission, but what if ALL of us did it? What if all of us did it as if our lives depended on it? Think of it!!

As my friend Deputy Rushing says, "The church does not have a mission, God's mission has a Church". Mission is the reason we exist at all- to be out in the world serving as the face, hands, heart and feet of Jesus Christ, bringing healing and reconciliation and renewal to our broken world. We are called by God to be this kind of people. And we so badly want to do it. Since 1991, General Convention has concurred 58 resolutions about mission. Calling us out into the world to join God in the ministry of peace and justice. We are so clearly called to do this.

We say we want to do it. And some of us are doing it. But despite all this there still exists a huge gap between the needs of the world and the response of our church to those needs. Together, there is so much more we can do.

And there's the key word- together. We are only effective in responding to God's call to the extent that we fully grasp the reality that we cannot do this ministry alone, as individuals. In the Episcopal Church we have hundreds of thousands of ministers – over 2 million. We must learn how to identify, equip and build leadership for mission in our congregations if we are to be faithful to God's call to mission. We must learn how to call others into action with us and band together around places of common interest to do the work God has given us to do. We must no longer be afraid to ask other people to join us in action.

At this General Convention we will have mission conversations, we will explore the leadership art of Public Narrative as one vehicle through which we can call others effectively to act with us. Public Narrative is not an agenda, another congregational development gadget, or a spiritual autobiography. Public Narrative is a method, an art form even, that links the truth of who we are with individuals called to mission, to the truth of our community here also called to mission, to the specific and urgent needs of the world. Public Narrative is linked stories about ourselves, our church community and the need of the world, that, when mastered, has tremendous amount of power and capacity to call people to action.

So right here, right now, let us begin. Let us invest our love in the Holy Spirit, and set our hearts on mission with everything we have. Where we have already begun, let us intensify our efforts. Where there is need unmet, let us begin new ministry. Let us listen deeply to one another at General Convention. Let us learn a new leadership art that we can develop here, then take home with us and use if it works for us. For, we are the Episcopal Church and we have the community, the liturgy, the history, the intellect, the resources and the passion to make an historic and effective impact on the world's suffering. This is our moment. Let us claim this moment and let us celebrate this moment. Then let us go back out into the world together – and do it.

Thank you.

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