

Even if this is supposed to be the bishop’s annual address to the Convention of the Convocation, it still says “sermon” in the program, and I am still a preacher. And so of course the first thing I went looking for was a text in the readings for today, this feast day for James of Jerusalem, because I am an old-fashioned text-and-title preacher.

I thought about leaning on James’s own first words: “My brothers and sisters, listen to me!” But that seemed almost pleading. And I looked long and hard at Paul’s confession of faith to the church in Corinth, that formula of the faith he learned from James and the church at Jerusalem; but every time I read those words over, the text I kept thinking you might expect me to preach to was this: “For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle...”

I have always loved the subversion of expectations in the words of those neighbors of Jesus—“Is not this the carpenter’s son?” Who does he think he is, anyway? But then there is that perplexing moment of Jesus doing some expectations-management. I am not in my own country, but I am in my own house, and so perhaps that doesn’t bode well either for my outcome. So instead I will base all that is to follow on the decision of wise Saint James, when he finally speaks at the end of the debate at the *first* convention of the church. I edit brother James only slightly, for reasons that will become clear: and I take as my text this simple instruction: “We should not trouble those who are turning to God.”

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I have been spending a lot of time over the last six months listening, and learning. It would be fair to say that my learning curve has approached a vertical slope from time to time, and so you will perhaps forgive me if I share my excitement with you about what I’ve learned, even though most of you know all of this already.

I have learned that the Convocation of Episcopal Churches in Europe has the greatest concentration of diversity, no matter how you define diversity, in the entire international Episcopal Church. I have learned that about an hour from now, our Convocation from West to East will be more than three thousand kilometers wide.

And I have learned that the Episcopal Churches in Europe do their work and ministry in this vast space with a total budget of €2,873,203. That is what all of us together have to work with to offer the witness and ministry of the Episcopal branch of the Jesus movement in Europe.

Of course the vast majority of these resources we spend locally, in our parishes and missions. We choose together to devote some of it to our shared mission and ministry across the entire Convocation: €258,588. And the Convocation receives just a little less than that amount from sources outside our parishes and missions—from endowments managed on our behalf, from gifts, from grants.

So this is what we have to do what it is we do together as a Convocation.

And I’ve learned that we devote these resources very carefully to the things we do better together than we could possibly do separately.

We spend sixteen percent of what we share together doing this—running the Convention, and the work of the Council of Advice between Conventions, and the work we do to be part of the larger governance of the Episcopal Church.

We spend pretty much the same slice—fifteen percent—on the work of our commissions:
The Commission on the Ministry of the Baptized, which works to help all of us discern and give voice to our vocations;

The European Institute of Christian Studies, which works to provide the education and formation opportunities all of us need to be prepared for those vocations;

And the Youth Commission, which makes sure the young people of all our congregations have access to activities and formation experiences.

We spend more of our shared resources, nearly a quarter of all we have, twenty-three percent, on supporting our congregations and our clergy. The largest way we do this is through direct grants; many of your congregations have received, and benefited from, those resources.

But these are also the resources we spend supporting congregations searching for a new rector. It's what we spend on background checks for candidates, and on providing consultants to congregations in the midst of a search or conducting mutual ministry reviews.

And it's what we spend on the Committee on Mission Congregations, which in some ways functions a bit like a Standing Committee on the Future of the Church. It works to support our existing missions, to give us a clear strategy for planting new ones, and to imagine new ways that communities of faith might become part of the life of the Convocation.

This is also where we use some of our resources to provide support to clergy and their families for the work they do. It's where we provide for retreats for our clergy to gather in prayer, and for the spouses and partners of our clergy to do the same. And it's where we've set aside some resources to provide coaching and support for parishes and clergy who want to find ways to refocus their mission and ministry or develop particular gifts with which the Holy Spirit has equipped them.

We spend exactly the same slice of our funds, twenty-three percent, on the entire operations of the Convocation Office. This is the rent, the lights, the heat, the files, the archives, the processing of people moving through the ordination process and parishes searching for new priests, and our Convocation administrator, who manages literally hundreds of reimbursement requests each year, keeps our books balanced, and pays our bills.

The last twenty-three percent goes to the two ordained members of the Convocation staff. Our Archdeacon, who works harder and more invisibly than virtually anyone else in the entire Convocation, and to me. When I came here last year as a candidate and visited with people on the walkabouts, just about the only thing I heard no matter where I went was: Things have been so much better since Walter Baer came. Walter makes sure processes work, makes sure the website is kept fresh, makes sure our parishes in search have a person to guide them, and makes sure the new bishop does not do anything too crazy.

The nine percent in this piece is what allows me to travel on visitations to our congregations and represent us in various Anglican and interfaith gatherings.

That is our whole picture. It is not a big picture; and it is a very lean picture. I am proud that we are setting an example for the rest of the church about thrift in our stewardship; we ask nine percent from you, when the standard across dioceses in the Episcopal Church is closer to thirteen percent; and we give nine percent of our total budget to the Episcopal Church, when the standard across the church is for dioceses to give fifteen percent. It might be suggested that getting to a point of tithing would be a good goal for us and a good example to set for the whole church; but I leave that for your consideration.

So, I've learned about the resources we all have together to offer to Europe our vision of the Christian gospel, and about the resources we chose to share together to do the things we do better together than we could do separately.

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The question I study is: Does the way we prioritize our shared resources align with the Strategic Plan we adopted two years ago? Do our budget priorities look like our strategic priorities?

Just to remind us all, here are the six objectives articulated in our Strategic Plan:

Be vibrant congregations, which more fully proclaim and live the Gospel of Jesus Christ

Develop new communities, where possible in association with ecumenical partners, including indigenous language churches

Foster ecumenical and interfaith relationships and projects

Be a progressive and prophetic Christian witness to secular post-Christian European Societies

Engage European policy-makers, along with other churches, in the promotion of justice, peace, and the integrity of creation;

Achieve financial stability and sustainability for the Convocation and its constituent churches.

What do you think?

I think we do fairly well. Actually, I think we do really well.

I also think it's difficult to map the way the Convocation works onto some of these objectives.

We certainly are providing resources into supporting all of our congregations to be healthy and strong. We do that directly by providing grants; we do that by supporting our clergy; we do that by providing formation opportunities for youth and adults.

We certainly direct our shared resources into developing new communities. The Committee on Mission Congregations has worked to develop a set of clear guidelines for where, when, and how we start new missions, and that means we will be doing this work in ways more clearly aligned with our part in God's mission in this time and place.

We are certainly a progressive and prophetic witness to the Christian gospel. We do that every Sunday in our parishes, and every moment we engage in work outside the church to show the world what it looks like to walk the way of love. And in the year ahead a new Communications Committee within the Convocation will work to help us tell that story more effectively in all of the communities we are present in.

We face hard challenges in strengthening the financial stability of our parishes. One of the ways we do that at the Convocation level is to build our own budget on an assessment level from all of you much lower than what prevails in the rest of the church.

But we are a do-it-yourself church in a culture where there is a kind of expectation that the church is something provided for you. Nothing about the Episcopal Church in Europe is provided for us by anyone other than ourselves. So when we talk about stability and sustainability, what we are really talking about is stewardship; we are talking about taking the responsibility ourselves to provide for ourselves, and increasing the number of people who take that seriously within our communities.

Very early in my ministry, I find myself thinking that some of these goals are better served at the local level than at the Convocation level.

The leaders in our parishes are likely much better placed to know, and to be able to communicate with, the civic leaders throughout Europe who have influence on issues that are the legitimate concern of all Christians. Mark Barwick, whom we still claim as one of our own, nurtures the sort of relationships with decision-maker in the policy sphere that represent all of us well and effectively.

And while we certainly play our part in the institutional forms of ecumenical and interfaith engagement at the Convocation level, I have the view that more of substance gets accomplished through the work of individual leaders like Chris Easthill, serving as a member of the national board of ACK in Germany; Helena Mbele-Mbong, serving as a member of the new Standing Commission on World Mission, established by last year's General Convention; and Walter Baer, serving as a member of General Convention's Task Force on the Coordination of Ecumenical and Interreligious Work.

So I think our Strategic Plan is having a clear influence on shaping our work, and I think our budget, small though it is, is effectively resourcing our Strategic Plan.

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All of that is good. What I'd like to invite us to reflect on together, as we do our work today under Canon Stephanie's leadership, are some words and ideas that are *not* in our Strategic Plan, and yet which I think may have something to do with God's mission and work here in Europe. And if I'm right about that—if these things are where God is calling workers into the vineyard—then it will be up to us whether, and how, we want to follow.

There are four missing words, and one final suggestion.

The first missing word is "Climate." It's true that our Strategic Plan reminds us of the importance of the "integrity of creation"; but we haven't yet put any organization or substance behind that idea, or made any clear sacrifices in the way we do our work.

For thousands of people raising their voices in the streets of the cities we serve, this is *the* defining moral issue of our day.

Here's where that came home to me: Hearing from Walter Baer in late March that thirty-four bishops had signed up to attend my ordination in April. As Judy solemnly reminded me—"they're not coming for you, dear." But indeed they came, from New York, and Boston, and Washington, and Atlanta, and Lisbon, and Madrid, and Spokane, and Bogota. And Brussels.

One evening when I was looking for a distraction from writing the sermon I should have been working on, I began working on trying to come up with an answer to a troubling question. How much carbon is going to be put into the atmosphere with all of those flights bringing all of those people to our party in Paris? And because we live in the age of the internet, it turns out to be possible to answer that question. And here is the answer: 42,380 kilograms of carbon.

Now, that is an embarrassment—pure and simple. The good news is, you can do something about this. You can go on line and find social entrepreneurs who will support projects that either reduce or remove an equal amount of carbon from the atmosphere, that you can help to pay for. These are known as "carbon offsets." The price of a carbon offset for 42,380 kg of carbon turns out to be about €600.

So, that's what I did with six hundred of the Euros people graciously gave as gifts in the leadup to my ordination. I'm glad to say that our gathering in Paris was a carbon net-neutral celebration—at least so far as the bishops who traveled there.

And here is my question: what if we were to say that we want the Convocation to be a carbon net-neutral enterprise?

I wish we had a gathering of people with devotion and wisdom about practical ways we can address the crisis of our climate to raise the awareness of all of us in the Convocation. I'd like to see us move toward being a carbon net-neutral Convocation. I am working hard to reduce the bishop's travel budget, but with some of the money I save I plan to make sure that my travel has a neutral carbon impact by buying offsets. And I hope we can do the same for all of the travel that we pay for.

Here's the second missing word: "Race." Our Presiding Bishop has called us to a deeper, daring, and reconciling conversation about race, and about systemic racism in our society and in our church. He is leading our church in doing this work, and I think we need to follow that lead. Let me say this right up front: I am deeply aware that the European experience of race is not the same as the American experience of race. The experience of slavery in the United States, that original sin of America, set in place the deep foundations of white supremacy that we are now unearthing in difficult conversations.

I realize that this was not Europe's experience. But I am afraid we are in some danger when we dismiss this conversation simply by saying, this is all about America and not about us. Because while the sources and structures of racism may be different, the sin of racism exists in Europe as surely as anywhere else.

By almost any measure, our Convocation comprises the most diverse collection of people anywhere in the entire Episcopal Church. On any give Sunday morning, the people in our pews have probably at least half of the Anglican Communion covered. I hope that we can find ways to follow the lead of our Presiding Bishop in ways that are suited to our context, our congregations, and our communities, because I am persuaded beyond any doubt that God calls Christians everywhere to confront the harm that racism has caused, and to stand squarely for the radical equality of all people.

The third missing word is, well, two words: "Refugees and Migrants." I don't know whether to laugh or cry when I hear political leaders in the United States whipping up fear among the people by blovating about an "invasion of illegal immigrants." Germany alone has accepted more refugees seeking asylum than the United States, and the European Union as a whole has accepted nearly three times as many.

I am immensely proud to be the bishop of a gathering of churches doing so much to provide compassionate and effective outreach to the least, the lost, and the last. I know how hard many of the people in your communities work to engage in ministries that help people who are displaced or refugees. Many of our congregations do this work.

I wonder whether it is now time for us to find some way to create a community of practice across the Convocation of people involved in these ministries. They are an example for the entire Episcopal Church of how to translate our words into work.

Creating a community among the leaders of these excellent ministries, in Rome and Frankfurt and Paris and Waterloo and in other places I haven't even learned about yet, would help us to do three things:

Create a supportive community for people involved in this work;

Provide a resource of expertise for people aspiring to begin similiar ministries in their own communities;

And raise the awareness of the whole Episcopal Church of the work being done right here on the front lines of ministry to people who have fled places torn by violence, instability, and chaos.

There's one last word that, at least for me, is missing from our Strategic Plan. That word is "Youth." Yes, we have a budget line for Youth, and yes, we have a terrific and committed group of people led by the irrepressible Caireen Stewart who plan and deliver the events we offer to our young people. And yes, our own Caitlin Mahoney has been invited to serve on the planning team for the next Episcopal Youth Event next year.

But somehow I think we have to make this a centerpiece of our work together as a Convocation. I come from a diocese that made ministry to young people one of its three most important goals going back now nearly twenty years, and the fruit of that investment is now showing forth in the

form of young people who become young adults engaged in the life of the church and as leaders in their communities.

All of our congregations work and sometimes struggle to provide adequate spiritual sustenance to families trying to raise children in the faith, and to leaders who volunteer to lead church school programs. We as a Convocation need to do more to support these folks, to bring them together, help them find a resource in each other, and honor the important work they do. To speak in hard practicalities, I'd like to see us double what we presently invest in our young people, so that the Convocation can be a resource to all of our congregations.

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I will end with a small suggestion, that comes from having spent a fair amount of time these past six months studying, not only the Convocation, but the rest of our church.

For at least thirty years now, at least since the time of Bishop Rowthorn, we have done our work on the basis of the Constitution and Canons that we now have. That document gives shape and structure to one of the things most distinctive about the Episcopal Church, our commitment to the shared governance of the Church.

Much has changed in our church over the past thirty years, and much has changed here in the Convocation as well. We have fully grown into structures that were in some ways aspirational when we first wrote them down; we have grown in other ways that our present documents could not possibly have anticipated.

Over those same years, the Episcopal Church itself has changed. New forms of governance are emerging that reflect both changed circumstances and a desire to share more fully the authority and responsibility of ministry in our church.

I think it may now be the time for us to convene a group of people whose task it would be to review our Constitution and Canons from top to bottom, and to propose revisions to these documents that would equip us better for the future of mission and ministry God is calling us into.

This group could be a place where all voices, lay and ordained, parishes and missions, could be represented and heard. It could go out and survey ways the rest of the church is responding in adaptive ways to the challenges of the future. It could take counsel with key groups of stakeholders across the Convocation. And by including people from the Presiding Bishop's office, it could help us to find the greatest possible benefit in our unique relationship to the senior leadership of our church.

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There is a great gathering in Jerusalem to debate nothing less than the future of the church. It is the first Convention of the Church. Paul is there. Peter is there. The argument is over a simple, profound question: We are exceptional people. We, the people of Abraham, the people who have been given the Torah, the people who made a covenant with God—we are an exceptional people. Should we, or should we not, demand of all those who come to join us that they join in our exceptionalism in order to join the Jesus movement?

James, the first person to be the bishop of Jerusalem, listens to all this. And at the end of the debate he is the one who speaks. And what he says is: No. No, they don't have to be exceptional in the way we think we are. No matter where they come from, no matter what nation, what tribe, what experience, what language, the freely offered grace of God in Jesus Christ is for them, too.

Now, my brothers and sisters: We all say of ourselves that we are no longer expatriate communities. And that is true. We are no longer churches gathered by little communities of American expatriates. By God's grace, that is not who we are anymore.

But here is our danger. We are *exceptional* communities. We are communities of exceptional people.

Some of us are exceptional because we came from one place we knew as home, and chose to make our home here. Some of us are exceptional because we come from this place, but chose to make our community of faith in a church that comes from American origins. *All* of us are exceptional because we choose to be in Christian communities in a secular culture—because we dare to be known as Christians.

And the message Saint James of Jerusalem has to offer us, is: Beware of our exceptionalism. Because if we are not careful, it can become a barrier to entry to our churches, rather than a message of welcome.

We must beware placing on people who come to us the demand that they have the same exceptional path in life that we have had. That they have had the same experiences, learned the same languages, endured the same transitions, made the same choices.

Because when we do that, we forget the choice the earliest church made. The church we have inherited is a church that welcomed all people regardless of their histories, regardless of their backgrounds—regardless of whether they were exceptional, or not.

So as we gather together over the hours to come, as we pray and reflect and talk together about God's mission in this place and our hope to be caught up in it, let's remember the responsibilities that come with the gift of our exceptionalism. Let us find ways of increasing our circle, of welcoming those with different stories, of including all who come to us drawn by this countercultural message of ours about this Way of Love—which for us has become a way of life.

Amen.