

Convention Address 2018
The Rt. Rev. Pierre W. Whalon
All Saints Church
Waterloo, Belgium

Dear Ones,

As I have for the past sixteen Conventions of the Convocation of Episcopal Churches in Europe, I am delivering what is my seventeenth convention address, of the eighteen we have lived through together. My first convention was my consecration on November 18, 2001 as the 26th Bishop in charge, and now we come to our last time together, my last address.

Oh, I imagine that my successor will invite H  l  ne and me to attend from time to time, as I have done with Bishop Jeffrey and Anne. They have been invited at every convention since 2001, and have usually attended every other year, as they were able. Bishop Jeffrey told me that they would not attend this year, but there is no way he will miss the consecration of our successor on April 6, 2019! The Presiding Bishop, the bishop of the bishop-elect, and I will be the three canonically-required minimum consecrators, but Jeffrey Rowthorn will also stretch forth his hands, and sign and seal the official certificate of consecration. With a big smile.

And I hope one day, in the far future, also to stretch my hands and add to the consecration of the 28th Bishop in charge. Or will it be just "Bishop" by then?

But let me go back to my election on June 23, 2001. Then I believed I had been elected to help you all enact "Mission 2000", a strategic plan voted by the 1999 Convention in Nice. It had six points:

- 1.) Become a diocese, do a capital campaign
- 2.) Form a new Province of Europe
- 3.) Plant congregations using languages other than English
- 4.) Develop worship materials in languages other than English
- 5.) Build a department of education
- 6.) Expand youth ministry

So in my first years among you, I tried to implement these. Clearly, I was elected as Bishop in charge as a move toward these goals: first of all, let us elect our own bishop in order to implement our goals. There was a lot of confusion, beginning especially with my own confusion, about them. What does it mean to become a diocese? A province? To be Episcopalian and not use English? Or for that matter, how to be a bishop?

It slowly dawned upon me that the goals of Mission 2000 were not shared very widely. At first some resented me trying to pursue them, which I didn't understand for some time. I engaged a fundraiser, who concluded that a campaign was impossible, since Europeans didn't then engage in them. (And none of the parishes were willing to share their lists of donors...) She gave freely of her time to teach congregations about how to do them. Finally, at the 2004 Convention in Wiesbaden it became clear to all of us that I was trying to implement a goal to become a diocese that wasn't shared and wasn't wanted, but that was not merely an invention of my own. We decided not to ask to become a diocese.

Since then we have reiterated and reinforced that decision. Not only is becoming a diocese a difficult proposition in terms of geographical claims, over against the Diocese of Gibraltar in Europe. More importantly, just as the Diocese of Gibraltar in Europe is a non-geographical entity that exercises "spiritual jurisdiction" wherever its ministry is desired, so is ours. We are in the terms of the canon law of The Episcopal Church an "area mission." I prefer to call us a *missionary enterprise*.

As a missionary enterprise, we have developed over the years the form and function of a diocese. It exists, like all dioceses, to serve the needs of its congregations that they cannot meet for themselves. As an extension of the ministry of the chief priest, pastor, teacher and evangelist of the congregations, a diocese is first an expression of unity. Unity with Christ, with the whole Communion of saints, and with one another.

We needed a way of forming laypeople, especially leaders, as well as people seeking ordination. And so we created the European Institute of Christian Studies, which has become an effective means for that ministry of formation across Europe. We needed to continue to expand the Commission on Ministry of the Baptized, not only to become a sound resource for people seeking to discern a call to ordination, but much more. Under Bishop Rowthorn, COMB came into being for that ministry of discernment, but also to support what we call Youth Across Europe, and something else called Ministry in Daily Life. Today, it leads a vital work of discernment for anyone and everyone asking what the Holy Spirit expects that person to do in God's mission to the creation. COMB offers a conference to help people come to a deeper and wider life of prayer.

The Youth Commission separated from COMB to become itself a highly creative resource for ministry to and with young people from age 10 to 29. Youth leader formation, three retreats for young people that we call Youth Across Europe, and constant advocacy for people in those difficult years of life, have become hallmarks of the Commission's fine work. And we have recently begun to partner with the Diocese in Europe to help extend youth ministry to them as well in one overall program.

The Commission on Mission Congregations has come alive, after several attempts to develop one. They have started to develop those tools needed for congregations that cannot support themselves financially, that we call "Mission congregations." And as a result, new church plants are being envisaged, both parochial, like Saint-Esprit, Mons, Belgium, and diocesan, like a project in Erfurt, Germany, and elsewhere as well. And the Mission churches are getting support.

I recognized at the beginning of my episcopate that lay leadership had been essential to bringing the community of churches in Europe to be able to come together and elect your own bishop. The great expansion in depth and width of these three vital ministries would not have happened without the selfless devotion to each by volunteers. This is not to take away from clergy leadership, of course, to which I shall turn next. But consider the efforts of current chairs of our commissions, Janet Day-Strehlow on EICS, Lee Williams on COMB, Caireen Warren for Youth, and David Case and Adam Williams on COMC. God blessed us with great lay leaders in 2001, and has continued to raise up gifted people of faith to shape the Convocation to be able to meet the needs of our congregations that they cannot meet for themselves.

The Council of Advice has also been blessed with strong lay leadership. It has become a true diocesan standing committee, and has developed over the years from a timid group looking to the bishop to set the agenda for meetings and the budget for the Convocation to what it is today. Besides the commissions with their specific areas of ministry, it has been the Council that has steered the missionary enterprise to financial wholeness and security. Most recently, at Council's request, I appointed a Safeguarding Officer for the whole jurisdiction, to increase our efforts to make our churches safe places for children and vulnerable adults. The Youth Commission has also been strong advocates for safeguarding work, for which I am particularly grateful. Your new Safeguarding Officer is a valued and trusted leader of the Convocation, Dr. Yvonne Cockcroft. She is appointed for now, but future conventions will elect the Safeguarding Officer, as well as its secretary and treasurer.

I said I would mention clergy leadership, and first let me honor the Reverend Sunny Hallanan, Rector of our host parish this year, All Saints, Waterloo, and outgoing President of Council, a post she held for an unprecedented four years. I say unprecedented because she was elected president at her first meeting of Council, at Christ-the-King Frankfurt, in 2014. Under her administration, the Council has continued

to grow in the depth of its ministry, adding the COMC, perfecting our canons, policies and procedures, and keeping us on course and stoked with vast quantities of Belgian chocolate. She has been at the epicenter of setting up the Bishop Nomination process that I set in motion in 2016.

Now that Reverend Sunny, as she is known, is no longer president of Council, she can turn her considerable energies and intelligence to her three — yes, *three* — mission congregations, Christ Church, Charleroi, Saint-Esprit, Mons, and Saint Servais, Namur.

So far we have not had to call upon our Disciplinary Board, but it is important to note that we have one, trained by the Presiding Bishop's counsel, and we have Maria Grazia Rizzo of St. Paul's, Rome, to serve as our Intake Officer. It was a real struggle to convince certain people that we needed this, but without it (I argued for nine years) our clergy could not get a fair hearing in a disciplinary matter. I hope the Board's ministry will be a very quiet one, but I am confident that my successor will be well served — along with the Presiding Bishop — by this able group of clergy and lay.

The Council's Finance Committee is one major reason why our finances are in good shape. Under the chairmanship of our Treasurer, Denis Le Moullac, and Assistant Treasurer, Anne Swardson, its members cast a gimlet eye on our income and expenses. The treasurers also spend considerable time of the Convocation Office in Paris going over reports with our Administrator.

Which brings me to Sophie Plé. She is *une force de la nature*, as we say in French. It is very difficult to keep herd on a large group of brilliant talented volunteers, who are themselves scattered across the Continent, but she does it with grace and charm. Sophie does the real heavy lifting of our bookkeeping, working with our auditors, keeping up with Archdeacon Walter Baer and me, handling all the files and archives, as well as communicating with people around the world and down the street.

And I did mention Archdeacon Walter, the indefatigable, who has brought great energy, intelligence, and passion to his work, and I hope, will continue to grace the Convocation with his presence and ministry. People ask me what his job description is. I could reply with the list on his Letter of agreement, like communications including our website, but actually it is anything that needs doing. And well! He came at a hard moment, just 25 days before Melinda passed away, and has been of inestimable help to me, and I think, to us all.

Lastly in the list of committees, but certainly not least, are the Bishop Nominating Committee and the Transition Committee. You have met and heard the four nominees at the three presentations of candidates (don't say "walkabout"!), or you have seen materials on the website. I think you will agree that the Nominating Committee, chaired by the Rev. Mark Dunnam and David Case, has done an outstanding job. Now the Transition Committee, chaired by Anne Swardson and the Rev. Chris Easthill, is in the thick of things.

One could say that the canon to the Presiding Bishop, Michael Hunn, is also a member, but he has gone off to succeed our own Michael Vono as Bishop of the Rio Grande. So while we thank Bishop-elect Hunn, and wish him well, it is a pleasure to welcome to this Convention Michael's successor as canon, Mark Stevenson.

You may have noticed that I haven't mentioned a number of laypeople and clergy who have done outstanding work in their various ministries. Some will receive awards tomorrow evening at the Bishop's Banquet. And perhaps you noticed that in the list of our ministries I just enumerated, certain names came up more than once? I will return to this in a moment.

But first I want to name and honor those people who were of incalculable help to me over these seventeen years. Let me borrow from the Service of Lessons & Carols: let us remember before God all

those who rejoice with us, but upon another shore and in a greater light, whose hope was in the Word made flesh, and with whom, in our Lord Jesus, we forevermore are one.

In our life and ministry in Europe, we have enormous help and strength that come from the Board of Foreign Parishes, along with the boards of St. James, Florence, and St. Paul's, Rome. I want to start by paying homage to Conner Fay. For twenty-five years, Conner chaired the Board, and under his leadership it changed from one single group of men in black tie and tails gathering with cigars and cognac to determine how much to give the two parishes and the bishop in charge with miter in hand, to three boards of women and men that meet separately, give the Convocation and the two parishes set funding from a well-managed set of endowments, and intervene when needed to support — and sometimes challenge — the churches of the whole Convocation. Among other things, the Board now has as members and trustees the Bishop and the rectors of the churches overseen by the Board.

We all owe a debt to Conner, as you can see, including the present members of the Board who continue to build on his vision of a strong support for all our congregations. In particular, he gently offered advice to me, and I soon learned to call him up with questions, like “Conner, what would you do to get this done?” His counsel was always on target, wise, and coming from a deep faith in Jesus and an equal love of our Church, in particular that crazy bunch across the ocean. He passed into Larger Life in 2015.

Another board member now on that greater shore is George Fowlkes, who died this year on January 25. Since I started attending board meetings, he chaired the Board of St. James, but he was a great support in many different ways to the other congregations and to me. George was a sounding board but also someone who came to me with ideas. He was indefatigable, always looking for new ways to increase the ministry of the Episcopal Church wherever he found it. George also served among other things as President of the Episcopal Church Foundation, as a Trustee of the Diocese of New York, as Warden of St. James' Madison Avenue in that city, as a member of the College of Bishops Steering Committee, and chairman of the board of Berkeley Divinity School at Yale.

A third person who served on the Board but who also was a great friend to me and the Convocation was the Reverend Canon Carl Gerda, who died last year in May. As Canon to the Presiding Bishop, Carl helped organize the election in 2001, and he often helped me not only with the sound advice of someone who knew the Episcopal Church but also solved issues like me not getting paid at one point.

I must mention also Jay Jacks, whom I knew only briefly on the Board, whose passion for our churches he communicated to everyone around him, including his wife Marla, who now chairs the Board of St. James. And I honor Evelyn Fay and Jeanette Fowlkes who really made their husbands the men they were.

In the Convocation, I want to lift up Peter Handford, husband to Felicity, who was the first contact I had with the Convocation in the 2001 search process (along with Helena Mbele-mbong). Peter became my “shepherd” after I became a finalist, then he became my chancellor. Soon he became a trusted friend, who could tell me the truth when I needed to hear it (and in inimitable British style), and whose advice was invaluable. He also served as president of the Council and at his parish, this parish here in fact, in many different ways. Peter left us in 2007 but to me, it still feels like yesterday...

At the Cathedral, I had two very different French allies. One was the Reverend Jacques Bossiere, who founded the Francophone Network that I now chair, and who as a theologian helped the Anglican Communion understand clearly that it is not just an Anglo-Saxon phenomenon but part of the Church Universal. Jacques always had a clear word of teaching and support, until he departed in 2015. The other *Français* was Dominique Dupard, who was a pillar of the Cathedral and to me as well, served on vestry, served on commissions, and also believed that our way of being church works in all cultures and languages. I received notice of his death during the 2006 convention in Paris.

Let me also remember Cynthia McFarland, who first published me and encouraged me to write, especially after I became your Bishop, in order to raise the visibility of the Convocation and your ministries. Cynthia also gifted us with a new website that pointed the way to our present design, as well as the email lists we continue to use, the “Europe” list that all of you should be on. She served the Episcopal Church in many ways through Anglicans Online, and in the dioceses of Central New York and New Jersey. We laid her to rest in February 2014 near her great-great grandfather, Bishop George W. Doane, third Bishop of New Jersey.

And finally, there is Melinda. You all knew her and loved her along with me, and she loved each of our churches and the Convocation as a whole. And she loved Marie-Noëlle and me too. Who can forget that smile? And I will never forget your sustained support for the two of us after she died early last year.

I want to speak next about your future, as I take my leave and wish you well, wish you very very well. But first I am grateful that you have welcomed H  l  ne, my wife of only several weeks. We’ve had three weddings in fact, first the civil marriage in France, then the sacrament of Matrimony in my old seminary chapel in Virginia, and finally a beautiful renewal of vows on September 29, in which the Cathedral and Dean Lucinda outdid themselves. The more I know her, the more I admire H  l  ne. She has so many gifts and talents that I am just discovering. I thank God for the gift of H  l  ne to me. And also to Marie-No  lle, who served H  l  ne as maid of honor in Virginia. Now I can look forward to new life and new ministry with the woman I have come to love more every day.

I talked about the past, and now the present.

I made seventeen visitations since the last convention, and confirmed and received 29 people, the lowest I believe that I have reported to a convention since the first. This is due in part to the enormous personal load I have carried in the past year and a half, but also I think that we just had a smaller number of candidates. Certainly numbers are down in most of our congregations. Christ Church, Clermont-Ferrand, France, in particular has felt deeply the cutbacks of the Michelin company that now sends fewer American executives to its headquarters there. But let’s face it, the numbers of American expats continue to shrink, and perhaps equally painful, the influence of the United States of America continues to decline. It’s harder and harder emotionally to be an American abroad.

Our congregations are making up much of the membership loss with other expatriates and local people, who do not have the culture or the means to support their church in the same way. This is a natural development, I think, but it will mean rethinking to an extent our ways of being church.

We have come a long way together, and looking back, I am truly proud of so many extraordinary clergy and lay leaders that the Holy Spirit has blessed us with. We are the Episcopal Church Europe like our logo says, and that is an accomplishment. The number of our Deputies to General Convention who are solicited to join in the work of the Convention is proof that we are now recognized as a real asset to the Episcopal Church as a whole.

Now we also have to look ahead, and see the trends, and cast a vision.

First, we need to develop new lay leaders, because the current ones have done an amazing job, but are getting tired. By the time the new Bishop is consecrated and moved in, several folks will need to take a rest. For a while. You know who you are. And I am extremely grateful.

So after some rest, right onward! My ministry has been, and until April 6, 2019, will be about putting form and flesh on Bishop Jeffrey’s vision that has evolved since Mission 2000. The reason I called for the election of a successor is the sense I had that we had done together what was called for then.

My challenge to you is to seek and validate a new vision with your new Bishop. One regret I have is that we did not plant more congregations, though lately they are popping up all over. So part of my vision for your future is a new wave of church planting, including in other languages. It's started in Italy, as you know. In fact, COMB is discussing having a separate discernment conference *tutto in Italiano*... My greatest regret is that we have not planted new churches in France, in French. When I arrived, there were little francophone missions near Bordeaux, in Rennes, and at the Cathedral. All have disappeared, in God's providence, for their work was done — even if we didn't know it at the time. I organized two attempts to start efforts in my other homeland, but financial crashes and other circumstances prevented them. We have the means to try again. I challenge Dean Laird and the Vestry and people of the Cathedral to live up to the promise made to me when in 2005 the French congregation at the Cathedral was closed without consulting me: plant a new congregation outside the walls of the Cathedral among the French.

In convention addresses past I challenged you all not only to take pride in the institutions we have developed to meet the needs of our congregations, but also to question whether they are still fit to task. Let my successor have a year to size up his ministry, and then engage with him in a top-to-bottom assessment of the Convocation. Is it still a true missionary enterprise, adapting to meet new mission challenges? Is it able to function in other languages as well, or do we still have an Anglo-Saxon hangover? How have the needs of the congregations changed, and which ones remain the same? Do our structures adapt to change?

In other words, I challenge you all to remain missionaries, avoiding the temptation of institution for institution's sake. Remain open to work in other countries, as we did in founding the church in Krakow, helping the church in Zagreb, supporting the church in Bratislava, and as we once helped a house church of five families of Episcopalians in Almaty, Kazakhstan. Who cares whether they are part of our jurisdiction: the Gospel knows no boundaries or borders, and the Church catholic is everywhere, whatever its current labels might be.

We have made real strides in my time toward ecumenism. The 2018 General Convention finally agreed with the Church of Sweden that we have always been in full communion. A Swedish bishop will be among my successor's consecrators next year. And Convention approved our resolution that the conversation with the Bavarian Lutheran Church would become an official dialogue, and they will send someone to the consecration as well. Our relationship with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has brought fine clergy to us, the Revs. Scott Moore and Katie Osweiler. Of course, all the Old Catholic bishops will be invited, as is only natural with our oldest full-communication partners, now for over 87 years. Protestants, Orthodox, Jews, and Muslims will also be present. And of course, bishops of the Spanish and Portuguese churches, as well as the Church of England, will be part of the laying on of hands.

But this is still just a lot of palaver until we make real use of full communion. I challenge you, Convocation, to lead the way in developing real structures for mission and ministry with all these partners. The Archbishop of Utrecht Joris Vercammen and I have for years presented a common vision of a Communion of European Churches with a light but concrete means for common decisions, sharing of resources and people, and to ensure the effective proclamation of the Good News of Jesus in all the varied contexts of Europe. This Communion could become another Province of the Anglican Communion as well. One initial step we have proposed is that the Episcopal Bishop also serve as the Old Catholic Bishop of France and Belgium.

Why undertake this? Because it is abundantly clear today — and will be even more so tomorrow — that none of us can go it alone. There are too many challenges: a secularism in intellectual decline becoming ever more intolerant; an environmental catastrophe just over the horizon; the lack of opportunities for young people and the withdrawal of aid to the elderly, both left adrift on pitifully small resources. We all face the rise of virulent nationalisms whose rhetoric and action all too clearly

call to mind the terrible years of the 1930s. And we all know refugees, especially since 2015, when all our congregations strengthened their ministries to them, in response to a call from the Council of Advice and myself. All these phenomena I describe mean that there will be ever more people desperate to escape war and grinding poverty.

And there is an obvious drop in culture and education. Dystopian violent fantasies fill screens and books, and they sell. Cynicism about democracy is growing. The intellectual level of public discourse is lower and it has become much cruder. In a 1954 book, *The Bent World*, a theologian named J. V. Langmead Casserley opined that the Church would have to teach people how to think clearly again. If anything, it's gotten worse in 64 years.

It is all too much. But it is not too much for God, for whom "all things are possible." And God has given you the means to continue in our part of God's mission. So you can, you must rise to these challenges.

Let me enumerate some strengths. I paid homage to members of the Board of Foreign Parishes who on now in Larger Life, but one strength many of you do not know is that the present Board, presided by Fred Reinhardt, is committed to becoming a supporter and sustainer of all our congregations. Treasurer Bob Edgar has been of great help navigating currency issues for many, while Peter Trent and the investment committee continue to keep the funds growing. Secretary to all three Boards is Nancy Treuhold, whose ministry is to make all the meetings happen in good order. Add the strong leadership of Marnie Dawson Carr for Rome and Marla Briggles for Florence, as well as the personal knowledge of our churches and love for them of all the board members, and you can see that we are more than we appear to be.

We have been blessed with great lay leadership, but also a corps of dedicated clergy that has been described as the best clericus in the Episcopal Church by many knowledgeable observers, including former Presiding Bishops Frank Griswold and Katharine Jefferts Schori. The fact is that to be able to lead one of our churches requires a degree of flexibility, faith, and confidence that is not found among many priests and deacons. Moreover, we continue to have clergy from all over the Communion as well as America. When Deacon Edda Wolff is ordained a priest, we will have no fewer than five German priests, along with clergy from Ecuador, Ireland, Belgium, Uganda, and Italy.

All this gives me great confidence that you the Episcopal Churches in Europe have all you need to continue to accomplish that work that Jesus has called you to do. I always say that the future belongs to God no matter what. The question and the challenge are where we fit in that future. The theme of my episcopate, as you all know, comes from the second post-communion prayer on page 366 in the Prayer Book: "send us out into the world to do the work you have given us to do, to love and serve you as faithful witnesses of Christ our Lord."

Soon I will hand over that crozier to the man you will elect in the next two days. As for me and H el ene, we will continue to hold you in our hearts and our prayers as you continue to go out into the world to do the work of faithful witness to Jesus, who is the only real and lasting hope for you and me, for all of humanity, for the whole creation.