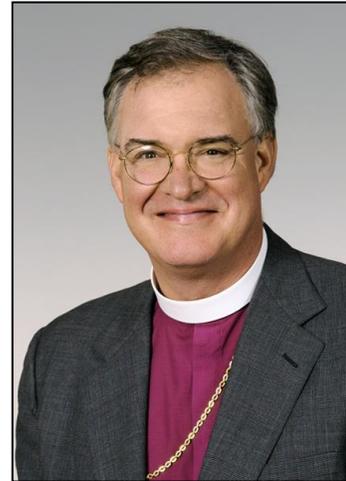


124th Annual Council of the Episcopal Diocese of Southern Virginia

Bishop's Address – February 5, 2016

The Rt. Rev. Herman Hollerith, IV

This, our 124th Annual Council, marks the first time in two years that I have stood before you to make a formal report on our diocese. As you may remember, at our 122nd and 123rd Councils, I chose to address you through the sermon during the community Eucharist – mostly out of a desire to break the routine somewhat and find fresh expression through the scriptures. But, now, it seems prudent to return once again to doing an annual address. We have come a long way in our diocese in the past few years – and while we still have many challenges – I think it's important to reflect on where we are right now and perhaps celebrate our place on the journey.



Today, I find that there is one thought in particular that frames all my other thoughts, that frames all my words. I've been your bishop going on 8 years now, so I have a pretty good idea who we are in Southern Virginia – who you are in your given faith settings. And yet, spending time with you is always a pleasant surprise for me. Seldom does a Sunday visit go by when I don't think to myself while driving home, "What a wonderful bunch of folks those people are – what a joy and pleasure it was to be with them, to worship our Lord with them, to celebrate life with them". I find that I am continually amazed by your generous hospitality, your perseverance in the face of difficult challenges, your resilience, your faith and your sense of joy. And so, I am deeply grateful to be your bishop, but more importantly, I am deeply grateful for what you are doing in your parishes to make our Lord's love a reality and a beacon for this crazy world. Maybe you don't always see it. It's hard to see it sometimes when you're doing it. But I see it. I want you to know that I see it.

Without a doubt, the greatest challenge of my Episcopate has been one of discerning and helping others discern what it means to be the Episcopal Church in the 21st century. It all used to be so simple. The unprecedented technological, economic and social changes that we all know about - and are probably tired of hearing about by now - have placed us in a new context where the old rules of thumb for doing ministry don't always work. So we have been trying to learn new ways of being church. In reality, the spiritual needs of the average person in our culture have not really changed that much. People still seek to be part of a loving community. People still wrestle with the same deep spiritual questions that they have always wrestled with. People still continue to seek God. But, what has happened is that the structures in which people now live, move, express themselves and do their seeking have been radically altered. Social norms have changed. Boundaries around culture are much more fluid, less defined by

geography or tradition or even ethnicity. As a result the question at hand – “the \$64,000 question” - has been “How do we “do church” within these new structures to powerfully convey the kingdom of God as a living reality?”

One of the blessings of my Sunday visits to parishes is that I sometimes get to dialogue with people during an adult class. We have smart folks in our churches and I am frequently asked thought provoking questions. The one question I hear more than any other is “Bishop, tells us about where things are really working in our diocese”. As a result, I’ve spent a lot of time thinking about that question – a lot of drives home on Sunday afternoons ruminating.

And here’s what I’ve come to learn by being with you: congregations in our diocese that are alive and vibrant and thriving tend to fall in one of two primary categories – just for the sake of example, lets call those categories “Type A” congregations and “Type B” congregations.

First, Type A: the defining feature of these congregations is that they offer a great multiplicity of programs including a variety of worship services, educational programs, programs for different age groups and interest groups, programs for inreach and outreach, and so on. In general, the Type A congregation possesses strong programmatic flexibility and a clear dedication to providing as many opportunities for spiritual growth to as many people as possible. Meaningful well planned liturgy also tends to be a high priority. Needless to say, Type A congregations are some of our larger congregations and are generally well-resourced. Type A congregations are growing and they will in all likelihood continue to grow in the future.

Second, Type B congregations: These congregations can be either large, small, very small or anywhere in between. Similar to the first type, Type B communities display a deep commitment to providing well planned, meaningful liturgy. While they may lack liturgical resources, they are very adept at getting the most out of what they do have. Above all – and this is what I find so interesting – Type Bs have one very particular distinguishing feature that sets them apart from all others - *they are deeply immersed in their surrounding social context* – whether it be urban, suburban, small town or rural. Type B congregations are generally well-connected to their immediate neighborhoods and actively addressing human need in those neighborhoods. The membership is *involved* in the community and access the church as a kind of “home base” for their activities. Consequently, there is a recognizable porosity between inner sanctuary and outer world.

In a nutshell, that’s my answer to where I see it “working” in Southern Virginia. And the really good news is that every one of our congregations *can* be - potentially at least - either an A or a B or some combination of both.

Those of you who were born before the early 60's can probably remember the days of the classic service station. I remember driving with my mother in our big Chevy station wagon. She would pull up to the pump, roll down the window and a nice young attendant with a white hat and white shirt would come up and ask which grade of gas to pump and whether to check the tires and oil. Then, while the tank was filling, he'd clean the windows. My mother would never actually leave the car. When everything was done, she'd just pay the attendant a couple of bucks through the window and off we'd go without a care.

I think the old service station model is not unlike how we tried to do church for many, many years. Church, for the longest time, was where one sat in the pew to have one's spiritual needs met. Like a service station, you'd pull in once a week for a fill up, pay a few dollars to the attendant in the clean white outfit, and drive away satisfied.

But, that's a type of church that's long gone now. We can spend our time being nostalgic or we can spend our time focusing on the mission of the future church. One of the things that both successful Type A and Type B churches have in common is that they have figured out how to be resource centers for people to practice their Christianity in the 21st century world. They're moving away from trying to be "full service" and embracing instead models which enable the ministry of the baptized. And it's this shift in their approach that I believe is enabling them to thrive as congregations.

John the Evangelist once wrote to his community. "Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not been revealed" (1John 3:2). There is no doubt that we have much to learn. So much has yet to be revealed. But, I see us moving forward. We are learning from one another. And I believe we are changing as our Lord would have us change – into a new likeness.

While on the subject of change, I want to mention some of the specific changes that took place in 2015 –both locally and in the greater Episcopal Church.

Within our own diocese, 2015 was the year we finally managed - thankfully - to reach closure in our conveyance of Talbot Hall! The finalization of the sale last spring marked the culmination of 6 and half years of hard, sometimes painful work. Please note: there is no Talbot Hall report on the Council agenda this year! This fact will surely come as a great disappointment to Ed Pickup and Gini Distanislao - so I'll have to find something else fun for them to do! In all seriousness, we owe them a debt of gratitude, and the same as well to all the members of the property committee and to our chancellors. We have exercised faithful stewardship around the Talbot Hall matter. Certainly, the diocesan staff and I are thankful for our new efficient office space in Newport News. Hopefully, by next month the new furniture will finally be in place there – making it a much more comfortable environment for everyone to use for meetings and events.

2015 was also a year for introducing two new diocesan initiatives. This fall Angelica Randle was appointed as our first part-time missionary for Latino Ministries. While the core of her ministry will take place on the Eastern Shore, Angelica will act as our first diocesan resource person for enabling interested congregations to establish ministry to Latino communities. Assisted by an oversight board comprised of clergy and lay people from four different convocations, Angelica will be available throughout the diocese for consultation and education. Funding for her work will be provided by diocesan "Mission and Ministry" grants. I am confident that in the next few years she will prove to be a real gift to all of us in Southern Virginia. The energy and joy and creativity she brings to her ministry are palpable.

The second new initiative of 2015 worthy of note came in the form of collaboration around the placement of a new transitional deacon in a parish which could not ordinarily afford such a curacy. It has been a dream of mine for some years now to have the financial where-with-all to place recent seminary graduates under rectors in parishes with limited budgets. A joint 50-50 sharing of the financial costs between the diocese and the parish creates a win-win scenario where the deacon receives valuable parish training and the parish enjoys the benefit of additional clergy support for up to one year. Even though funds for this are relatively constrained due to the structure of our endowed funds for seminary education, I was able to place for the first time a deacon - the Rev. Mark Riley - at St. John's, Hampton this past year. My hope and desire is to do more such placements in the future.

For the greater Episcopal Church, 2015 was marked by significant changes – three in particular emerging from this past summer's General Convention in Salt Lake City, Utah. 2015 is the year we embraced full marriage equality for same-gender couples by changing the canons to enable equal access for formally marginalized people in our church. Likewise the leadership of the Episcopal Church authorized new inclusive marriage liturgies for trial use during the next triennium.

While no further commentary from me on the matter of same-gender marriage is necessary, I will say that the recent decision by the Anglican primates came as surprise on the one hand, but on the other hand, might have been predicted. The world-wide Communion is radically diverse culturally, ethnically, and geographically. It should come as no surprise that the Church in Africa or South America would see the world differently than we do and view marriage through a very different theological lens. From my perspective, this little "time out" our Church has been given is simply the price tag of our having faithfully exercised leadership in our own social context. And as ridiculous as it all may be, if it allows the Communion partners to continue to "walk together" for the present, then I'm all for it. We are still part of the Anglican Communion – even if it means our now having to "walk" alone from the rest of the pack. But, given what the Canadian Church and Scottish Episcopal Church are about to do, it is doubtful we'll be alone for long.

Another significant change from General Convention - one which may have escaped your attention - was the passing of a resolution requiring all dioceses to give a mandatory 15% of their budgets to the greater Episcopal Church by 2019. In an effort to prepare us for 2019, the diocesan PB&R committee has included in your proposed budget a figure of better than 11% to be given to the greater church for the coming year. This will begin us on a process to reach the required giving level by 2019. I want you to know that I am certainly in support of what PB&R has done here. We have worked long and hard to get to where we are now in our giving to the greater church – having started out 7 years ago below 5%. We have tried to exercise strong spiritual leadership through our giving. However, a word of caution: If Council decides to pass this budget, then it must be certain that the parishes it represents will be fully committed to working toward making 10% *their* minimum standard of giving to the diocesan budget. That’s the responsibility you assume. If this is not the case, than I suggest you seriously rethink passing the budget as it stands now. Otherwise, your will be inflicting damage to your future diocesan budgets.

The third significant change that occurred at General Convention was the election of Michael Curry as our new Presiding Bishop. I’ve said this before, but those who might assume his election was just about “political correctness” would be very wrong. Michael was elected overwhelming because of his natural humility, personal charisma, gracious manner and powerful commitment to the evangelical ministry of the Episcopal Church. His gifts are “spot on” and he is exactly the kind of leader we need right now. I look forward to watching his ministry unfold.

Before concluding today, I want us to look toward our work in 2016. In the Diocese of Southern Virginia, as in most dioceses, the primary committee that oversees budget and vision is the Diocesan Executive Board. With its leadership being elected from each convocation, the Executive Board acts as “Council in recess” – although a better way to think about it may be as a board that functions similarly to how a vestry functions for a parish. For the past 5 years when the Executive board has met it has spent half of its time doing ordinary business together and the other half working in 3 task groups – each task group being charged with some aspect of diocesan mission.

I believe that the task groups have done some excellent work for the diocese. I want you to be informed about their work so I will say a brief word about each of our present ones.

Stewardship Task Group: Charged with the responsibility of developing stewardship programs for parishes, as well as enabling diocesan giving, the Stewardship Task Group is the longest ongoing group. As a result of their efforts, in the last few years parishes have been able to take advantage of a variety of stewardship conferences, workshops and brainstorming sessions. Likewise, in the last few years giving to the diocese has significantly increased with 2016 promising to be the best yet in terms of number of parishes pledging 10% to diocesan mission. In light of its great success, and the strong

commitment of its members, the Stewardship Task Group will be concluding its work within the Executive Board and evolve into an ongoing *diocesan-wide stewardship commission* whose purpose will be to assist parishes in developing programs for both annual and planned giving.

Chanco Support Task Group: This newly created task group is charged with finding ways to both support and evaluate the ministry of Chanco, paying particular attention to its long-term future as a viable camp and conference center. Given the fact that Chanco is at present programmatically and financially stable, a perfect opportunity is at hand for strengthening the relationship between the Chanco Board and the Executive Board and for the Executive Board to broadly oversee and promote possible development plans for the Center - should such plans come to fruition.

Local Formation Task Group: Established in 2015, the Local Formation Group is exploring ways for diocesan leadership to address the ever increasing need to raise up clergy in areas where clergy have heretofore been unavailable. The high cost of traditional seminary education and the scarcity of local part time clergy demand that alternative models be explored and considered. For the next year this group will be reviewing various options based on the experiences of other dioceses and dialoguing with me around possible models for local ordination that might work in Southern Virginia. The diocese's recent success with the new vocational diaconate program (shared with the Diocese of Virginia) suggests that it might be possible to "scale-up" a similar model for local priesthood.

There is certainly more that could be said about the work of the Executive Board, but this should give you an idea of what they will be doing in the coming year. In light of the fact that the Stewardship Task group's evolution will leave a vacancy in the near future, I will be assigning an additional Task Group to address social justice issues in Southern Virginia. Even though it is yet unclear as to what exactly is happening nationally around the matter, our part of Virginia may very well see an influx of refugees in the near future – specifically refugees from Syria. I am going to ask that this new task group help us prepare for that possibility. The Church seldom speaks more powerfully about God's love than when it shows compassion for the homeless refugee.

As a final word this morning, I want to end by orienting you to our theme at Council this year - *Continuing the Sacred Conversation: Racial Justice and the Role of the Church*. I know that race is a difficult subject to talk about. I know that it makes us feel uncomfortable. I also know that some of you are tired of talking about the subject – because some of you have told me how you feel. But what I hope we can do here this weekend is set aside our concerns and take an important spiritual risk – the risk of looking deeper into who we are and how the "Original Sin" of our great nation still infects our lives. Our society does a lousy job of talking about racial issues – partially because we are so polarized right now and partially because society really has no safe context in which to have a meaningful conversation. We, on the other hand, are a

Christian community. We have a context in which to have a conversation and that context is our shared love for the Lord Jesus. This is precisely where the Church can lead the rest of the world and demonstrate what it means to live a holy life, what it means to “do justice and love mercy and to walk humbly before our God” (Micah 6:8).

So I invite everyone in this room to open your hearts and your minds, to hear what Sandye Wilson and Mike Kinman have to say, *and to walk together*. This is not about feeling shame or about accusing anyone of anything. You are simply being invited to learn something new. And if in fact you do, I pray that the Holy Spirit will inspire you to take your learnings back with you so that all the people in Southern Virginia can be part of God’s movement to heal and redeem God’s world.

Thank you so much for giving your time to be here this weekend in support of diocesan ministry. May God bless us all in the coming year.