

CONVOCATION AFTERNOON

In 1998 I stood on Mount Nebo in Jordan looking across the Jordan River Valley into Israel. It is the place where Moses died. God would not let him lead the Hebrew people into the Land of Promise, but God allowed him to glimpse where they were going and what that “land of milk and honey” offered them. Clearly it was a trip in Moses’ imagination, for he saw no visions, and dreamt no dreams.

I have often identified with Moses. Oh, I have no delusions of grandeur; that’s not it. But Moses is the only person in the Bible with a role much like a modern-day clergyperson, with either a congregation or a diocese, and I have often wrestled within myself and with God in ways similar to his experience. Just now I stand here looking across Golden Valley with you, knowing I shall not cross over to the other side of our mission planning. I may be the only one in this chapel today who will have no consequences for what we discern and plan here and during the remaining months of my episcopate. Like the Hebrew people, I believe the Diocese of Minnesota, namely you and all our brothers and sisters in Christ, is on the threshold of a new day, with some major changes to be lived into as part of our common life. I would like to speak to that to encourage some of your reflection and sharing this afternoon.

This morning I described a Diocesan Council meeting early in my episcopate in which I said, “You may adjust or change any of the line items in our budget as we do our planning except for two: our apportionment to The Episcopal Church, and the proportion we spend for Indian Ministry. All the rest are about what we do in God’s name, and those are about who we are.” No one questioned or opposed that view. Today I am not so sure it is any longer true. I say that because of our behaviors rather than our words.

Last month we proposed changing our apportionment to TEC for this year because our apportionment revenues are down. We have never done that before. No one raised an objection in the meetings that led to that decision. Secondly, while it is politically incorrect to talk about cutting Indian Ministry, I hear the rumblings that we spend too much, the questions about what we get from those dollars and how successful those ministries really are. What is most telling is this: some congregations have lessened the amount of their apportionment that they pay so that they can give more to local outreach in their community or to some foreign mission work in which they have become involved. Mission, according to that thinking, is local congregational option, not necessarily diocesan. So the level of giving is changed, but we have not together changed our commitments. That puts our budget in a squeeze that cannot be maintained.

That is a new way of thinking in this diocese. Local mission was always something we did in addition to our apportionment to the diocese. We seem to have been proud of the

fact that our diocesan budget included approximately 20% for TEC, 20% for Indian Ministry and 10% for other special ministries and chaplaincies. That may be the largest proportion spent in any diocese for something other than service to congregations and administration. We saw that as the common good and our shared mission, and I think we and our predecessors were proud of that.

As I said, that thinking seems to be changing. Until this year, we have held those two areas harmless from budget cuts—which amount to several hundred thousand dollars per year since the apportionment change in 2003 or 2004 and the one year additional reduction we made this year. There are proposals to cut the apportionment further, and there are many budget implications in the MSN Report for additional expenditures. That will entail serious realignments. I cannot imagine a single line item being left untouched if we go ahead with a significant reduction in the apportionment formula. That will be your call. I am simply naming what I see.

My biggest concern is how similar this is to the 2003 Diocesan Convention, when we voted in seven mission areas with goals and expected expenditures and in that same convention decided to change the apportionment formula so that we cut a half million dollars from the budget. I am not sure how it was that we did not notice our dreaming and our visioning were totally out of sync with the practicality of paying for them. It is interesting that Diocesan Council and staff got the criticism for being unfaithful to the new goals, and we as a body seem to be unaware of our role in that. Are we going to do something similar this time?

There is an attitude shared among many of us that being the diocese should not cost much, and yet there really are few things that move along without staff time and attention and skills. Networking takes support and coordination. Canon Holmgren in Total Ministry, Canon Two Bulls in Indian Ministry, Canon Skov in Faith Formation spend a great deal of time on behalf of those networks. The proposal to add regional deans to the payroll for one day a week apiece amounts to more than two full time salaries and benefits. That will require additional monies or the cutting out some positions we now have, which would necessitate stopping some of the things we now do. My concern is that I have yet to hear people say what they want to live without. We always want more and want to pay less. We shall have to take off our rose colored glasses, analyze what we now do carefully, and make some hard choices between competing needs and demands. Voodoo economics will not work.

There has been an ongoing change in thinking in another area as well: keeping more dollars in the local congregation. That may be the right thing to do. I do not want to argue with that as a concept. I do want to point out two things that will require deep honesty if the diocese goes in this direction. 1) When we did this in 2003 to keep more money at home, we voted to do it *for the express purpose of evangelism and mission*. It was the rare congregation that actually did anything new for evangelism and mission, perhaps a handful in the diocese. The monies kept home went for business as usual. Unless our congregations are spiritually transformed, the same thing will happen again, for costs continue to rise, and we do not want to drop anything we are now doing. 2) As I

said this morning, if mission comes from God, it is always for something or some ones beyond ourselves.

Who are those we might consider “beyond ourselves?” What about youth and young adults? In my forty years in ministry, I have seen us in the Church at large cut budgets every decade on the local, diocesan and the national level, and we always start with youth and young adults and culturally specific ministries. We then cut stewardship and development, which is about income and touches our pockets, and simultaneously we cut communications. So what do we complain about? No youth or youth programs. No young adults. Not enough money. Not enough communications. And somehow it is always someone else who did this to us. We have often acted like the victims of other people’s decisions.

We or people very much like us in earlier generations make those decisions.

There is more I could say, but I hear voices speaking strongly on both sides of every issue, every concern, and I leave it to you to continue those discussions and keep pushing for further discernment and strategizing for mission—not for maintenance. We are the Church of the *via media*, which is loosely translated as *the middle way*. Let’s not be simplistic and seek to cut the baby in half. But let us wrestle with each other, with our own consciences and with our own levels of generosity while listening to what God wants of us. Surely it is more than any or all of us are *able* to give. And yet let us seek always to *want* to give. We may have to settle for doing less, but let us dream big, let us dream hugely, audaciously, for we humans always do less than we dream. If we dream small, we shall give up on God, who never gives up on us. God dreams that we can be part of the creation and the restoration and the resurrection of the world.

+James L. Jelinek
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