



The
Episcopal Diocese
of New York

**244th Convention
November 7, 2020
At the Cathedral Church of Saint John the Divine and Online Via Zoom**

**Address of the
Right Reverend Andrew ML Dietsche, Bishop of New York**

Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Those of us whom you see on your screens are gathered in the almost empty Cathedral of Saint John the Divine. This is a vast space, and nothing could more communicate to us the strangeness of how we are conducting this convention than looking out on all that emptiness. And yet I think we may feel a kind of adventurous spirit in embracing the unexpected.

Little could we have imagined when we gathered in convention last year in Tarrytown that in 2020 we would be coming together in the midst of pandemic, and that that would require us to create a form for convention that would have us meeting remotely and virtually and online. Without question this is requiring of us compromises and limitations which are difficult, but we have also found avenues for creativity opened up by this that have actually, I think, enhanced this annual event. And chief among those are the Pre-Convention Rollout Meetings which have ended this week.

Beginning on the Wednesday after Labor Day and concluding three days ago, we hosted nine online Rollout Meetings. They were themed, and for the most part those rollouts served as the kind of short presentations we normally do at convention to introduce or to bring you up to date on ministries in the Diocese of New York. But some of them also contained essential convention business which took place in anticipation of actions that will happen today.

These nine hour-long thematic online presentations were a new thing for the Diocese of New York, and were produced to move much of the content of the Diocesan Convention off of the day of convention, and so reduce the amount of time we must all spend in front of computer screens today. As you know, a few years ago I asked Bishop Mary Glasspool to be my liaison to the Convention Planning Committee, and she has brought profound creativity and inexhaustible hard work to those efforts. She had led an executive team of people in the production of the Rollouts, and I want to name and acknowledge them. Along with Mary they are: the Reverend Matthew Heyd, Secretary of Convention; Sara Saavedra, Assistant Secretary of Convention; Alice Yurke, my Chancellor; Geoff Smith, Director of Technology; and Nicholas Richardson, Director of

Communications. They worked with other support staff, and later today in Bishop Mary's report you will hear all of them named as well, and I commend them to you. And on behalf of their diocese I thank all of these. Their work, and the Rollouts themselves, have made this virtual convention possible.

I want to be clear that each one of those Rollouts is actually a part of the convention itself. They are all recorded, and the videos themselves will be kept in our archives, and the transcriptions of those videos will go into our Convention Journal. For example, we will vote on the 2021 budget of the Diocese of New York today, but we will not have a presentation of the budget. The Reverend Matthew Mead, Chair of the Budget Committee already did that, and did that in full, as one of our rollouts. We will vote on resolutions today, but the opportunity to discuss the resolutions and propose amendments to them happened three days ago in the final rollout. At the end of this convention I will have the privilege of commissioning all of the people elected to diocesan committees and boards, but we will not elect them today. Those votes were cast over the last three days. A lot of the work of convention has already happened.

We fully expect to hold an in-person convention in November 2021 in the Cathedral of Saint John the Divine. We will no doubt still be observing protocols appropriate to a virus which may not be fully conquered, but I expect that we will be together. When we do that we will return to our customary practices of convention. But the very positive reception of the convention rollouts this year suggests to us that some of the programmatic presentations of convention can be done effectively beforehand, and some form of these rollouts is likely to become part of the way we do convention in this diocese going forward.

I have two staff changes to announce today. In 2019 we announced a new Controller for the diocese, but who ultimately did not continue with us after all. For Esslie Hughes and Sister Faith Margaret and me, it was obvious that we had our next Controller already among us. I am so pleased to announce that Karin Almquist, who had served as our Senior Accounting Manager, agreed to become our Controller, and has now been serving in that position for most of the year. It was fortuitous that our new Controller was already intimately familiar with every detail of our operations, just as we were about to have to move to remotely working from home. Karin has managed our business office beautifully, and has led the transition to remote working with a staff scattered from Long Island to New Jersey and across the boroughs of the city. I am so happy to welcome her into that leadership. We are only just now announcing the hiring of Karin's replacement as Senior Accounting Manager. He is Robert Santiago, and is no stranger to us either, having worked with us in 2017 and 2018 to assist in our audit. We bid welcome also to Robert, with gratitude for having a fully staffed business office again.

I want to tell you how proud I am of my staff. Just prior to closing our offices for the pandemic, we asked everyone to move all files and documents they would need in order to work from home to some kind of "cloud" or something, and we sent everyone home. For all of these months the work of the diocese has happened remotely, with just a modest number of needed in-person meetings. This temporary solution to an unprecedented challenge has exceeded my expectations. There is no question that there are things we cannot do, and everything we do is harder now, but all of the

essential work of the diocese is happening, and is being done at a high level. We figured out how to do this. We are all “zooming” much more than we like, but we continue to function and to meet our responsibilities on your behalf. We hope before long to allow members of the staff to return to their offices on an “as-needed” basis, though never all-at-once. But in time we know that we will be back at 1047, and we are certain that we will not remain a work-from-home organization long term.

.

On Sunday, March 8, I was preaching at Catedral Santísima Trinidad, the Episcopal cathedral in Havana, Cuba, with Yamily Bass-Choate at my side as translator. The next day we were all back in New York. But during the week we were gone, the picture of COVID-19 changed in America. And I confess that it took me a few days to catch up. Over the next week I sent three letters to our parishes regarding practices of worship in the face of the pandemic, and if you read them all together now it feels as though they were written for three different crises. But by Sunday the 15th a great many of our churches had moved to some form of remote worship, and the following day I ordered the suspension of public worship until the middle of May.

But it became quickly apparent how vulnerable many of our churches are. Except for the churches with sizable endowment, most of our congregations survive, and fund their ministries, with the “plate and pledge” income which mostly comes in on Sunday mornings. This is how it works. Endowments are the exception. Most churches depend on the generosity of their members and their week by week offerings. Most people continued to pay their pledges electronically or by mailing checks to the church office, but the loss of cash offerings in the plates, and the donation and rental income from groups using now shuttered parish buildings, meant immediate and sometimes stark reductions in church income. It only took days for some of our churches to hit the wall.

Here is what we did. We immediately offered every church a 25 percent reduction in their Apportioned Share payments for the remainder of 2020. This did bring relief to parishes, but meant zeroing out a number of program and mission lines from our budget, and pushed our back against the wall in terms of our diocesan operations, and made any new discretionary spending impossible. We also gathered resources to help our churches apply for the PPP (Paycheck Protection Program) loans, and my Chancellor Alice Yurke was the primary agent of that effort, and we applied to the Church Pension Group for relief of pension premium payments for all parishes who requested them. Canon John Perris did the great bulk of that work. All of this helped our churches, but I was aware that giving reductions in Apportions Share payments is inherently more helpful to larger congregations than to smaller. For our largest and most resourced churches a 25 percent reduction in Apportioned Share can represent a savings of hundreds of thousands of dollars. But for small churches, whose Apportioned Share obligation may be only a thousand dollars a year, the savings are negligible.

So I went to Trinity Parish Wall Street, and said that I wanted to establish a system of Diocesan Emergency Grants to give additional help with COVID-19 relief, and as the diocese was now broke, asked if they could provide funding to help make this possible. I worked very closely on this with the Reverend Philip Jackson and Mr. John Talty of their

vestry, and in short order the vestry approved three million dollars for these grants. A granting committee of folks from across our diocese was gathered, and the invitation to make applications was extended. These grants were not intended for our most resourced churches, which those parishes clearly understood. But over the next weeks grants were approved for some two thirds or more of the parishes in this diocese. I am so grateful to all who worked on that and made those grants possible, but I am particularly grateful to Father Jackson and John Talty and the vestry of Trinity. They gave the diocese what we didn't have, but more than that, they expressed their conviction that this substantial church of international renown is proud and happy fundamentally to be a parish of the Diocese of New York, a partner with their Bishop, and a sister parish to the two hundred churches of this diocese.

All of that taken together forms the patchwork of the safety net we labored to create for our churches. I don't know what 2021 will bring, nor do I know what challenges we will be made to face. However, I will tell you that the 25 percent reduction in Apportioned Share will continue for another year, in a slightly different form. Despite being offered the reduction, a not insignificant number of our churches made the decision to pay their Apportioned Share in full. This was not something everyone could do, but we are profoundly grateful to all of those parishes which had the wherewithal and spirit to go the extra mile. But what we have learned is that the reduction in Apportioned Share is not needed by everyone and does not need to be done across the board. The 25 percent reduction for 2021 will be offered to all parishes whose Apportioned Share obligation is less than \$500,000, but it will need to be applied for on a quarterly basis through the Adjustment Board. It will be automatically approved, but will be administered by the Adjustment Board. Further information regarding this will be available, but I am asked to let you know that requests for that reduction for the first quarter of the coming year are due by December 1.

.

As we look at the financial health of the diocese in the coming year I want to comment briefly on the budget. You have seen the presentation of the 2021 budget already in a Pre-Convention Rollout Meeting. In order to give all of you the reduction in Apportioned Share for 2020 we had to zero out the budgeted line items of virtually all discretionary spending, including most of what we assign to program and mission. Our church planting budget was gutted. Congregational Development was slashed. Most of Global Mission lost its funding, save only for those finds needed to honor our standing commitments to our companion Diocese of Central Tanganyika and our grants to Young Adult Service Corps interns. But going into 2021 we recognized that we could not be the Diocese of New York if we could not continue to do the kind of work we believe is central to our calling. In the budget you have seen, most program and mission funding has been re-established, and our operations budget is balanced. In order to do that certain other cuts became necessary, but we are committed to those cuts being very temporary. Among those is our assessment to the budget of the Episcopal Church. For all of 2020 we have strived to remain current in our payments to the Episcopal Church, but for 2021 we are anticipating a 25% reduction. We don't do this lightly. The contribution of the Diocese of New York is by far the largest across the dioceses of the Episcopal Church, and we know we are depended on. We have sought for the coming

very difficult year to balance our responsibilities to the larger church with our responsibilities to our own parishes, programs and global mission. Reductions are happening across our system, but we believe that the budget we have presented minimizes the consequences of those reductions, and we are very hopeful that the budget for 2022 will see a restoration that will look more like our pre-COVID budgets. I ask today for your support of a faithful budget made during and for hard times. And I thank Matt Mead and the Budget Committee for their significant work.

.

I want to say a couple more things about COVID-19. First, is just to express my admiration and love for the clergy and parish leaders of all of our churches across this great diocese. Everyone has been required to figure out how to do church and to meet the church's responsibilities and to sustain their essential ministries under the hardest circumstances we have ever seen. Your resilience, your creativity, your commitment to the life and ministry of the church have made a profound witness to our common life and brought about miracles and wonders more than perhaps we knew we were capable. And you have done this while your parishioners were dying, you have done this while the ravages of COVID took away from you your normal practices of worship and pastoral care, and you have done this at a time when your own lives were in danger and when no one could see down the calendar and anticipate what was coming. I could not be prouder of you.

Second, I want to acknowledge the high cost in human life which COVID has demanded of us. Half or more of our parishes have had parishioners contract COVID, and of those a not insignificant number have lost people to the disease. Everywhere we are in grief, and our prayers are filled with the names of those who have passed beyond our sight this year. In some cases, those losses have happened in high numbers. I think we all know the numbers that have come from Saint Luke's in the Bronx, where at least fifteen people have died of COVID out of a single congregation. Fifteen people who just months ago were in the pews on Sunday, laughing with their friends and saying their prayers, who were living real lives and had real futures in front of them, and have been lost to us in the blink of an eye. Just as we have seen in the wider world, the ravages of COVID have landed more heavily on people of color, especially people of African descent, than on white people. In that the roots of that disparity lie in unequal access to health care and in the consequences of poverty we can see that it is another cost of racism in America, and perhaps the highest cost of all, that black people must die now in greater numbers when the virus comes. And that fact alone cries out for reparation of America's health care system, and reparation of a structure of wealth and poverty which consigns people of color to the poorest caste levels in America and has locked so many African Americans out of ordinary wealth creation at all times since the end of slavery.

Third, I want to point out that we are not finished with COVID -19. On Thursday hospitals recorded more than 120 thousand new cases in a single day. That is huge. The corona virus is a burning wildfire across America. Cases are also rising in New York, but not yet at the alarming rates we are seeing in the midwest and elsewhere. In July it became permissible for churches to resume in-person worship in limited numbers, and following all the appropriate and necessary protocols for public gatherings. In-person worship

carries an increased level of risk for congregations, but I am pleased to say that churches which are offering in-person worship, and by no means are all parishes doing so, have been able to do this safely and with a good record so far. But while we are congratulating ourselves it must be remembered that this has all happened at a time when the overall risk of COVID in New York was very low. That's probably about to change. Even now, as I write these very sentences, in the last five minutes, I have a message telling me that in a part of our diocese where COVID is spiking local government has pretty much shut everything down, and our churches are following suit. It is the right call. It is possible, but it's difficult to imagine how, that New York will escape the worst of the winter surge. So I ask you to prepare for the possibility, if not the likelihood, of our having to renew the suspension of public worship and return again for a season entirely to virtual church.

What we have seen everywhere is that COVID thrives when people's impatience to get their lives back to normal leads them to hurried, ill-considered short-term decisions. About half the members of the Episcopal Church are at an age that put them at high risk. I am one of them. So are my colleague bishops. A quarter to a third of the members of this diocese are people of color, which puts them at higher risk. Every policy or decision made by me for this diocese, and I would ask that every policy or decision you make for your parishes, must have as their highest priority the protection of vulnerable people. If we cannot have communion right now, or if we cannot do confirmations right now, or if we cannot have our churches full for Christmas and Easter right now, still we know that all of that will be given back to us in time. But only if we can get everyone safe to the other side, all together. We are exhausted of COVID now, but we are still in the middle of it. Please do not lose heart. Please do not waver in your resolve. And if ever you do not know how to keep moving forward let me know, and let me pray with you.

.

Many years ago I read an article in the newspaper which talked about a syndrome identified and named by doctors who treat infants and small children. They said that normally mothers and fathers delight to hold their babies all the time, and hug them close, and bounce them on their knee, and kiss them again and again and again, and talk to them and feed them and sing to them, and lavish every kind of attention on them. And the babies respond to all of that in a big way. They learn to smile, and they reach out to touch their mother's face, and they laugh and they learn words, and they feel safe and loved. But sometimes it happens that people have babies but are not emotionally able, or don't know how, to give their children that attention. They don't hold them or rock them. They don't talk or sing to them. They don't enfold them into the warmth of their bodies. Instead they treat their babies with indifference. And in time these little ones stop looking for attention and caring. They grow thin and listless. They lie on the bed and turn their faces to the wall. Doctors call this Failure to Thrive. And when I read that I was struck by the sadness of it, but also by the implicit message that *thriving* is what we are supposed to be doing. We are intended to thrive. To flourish. It's what God wants.

Twenty five years ago I preached a sermon in which I talked about this, and about Jesus' promised gift of abundant life. And after the service a woman in my parish said to me, eyes filled with tears, "Father Andy, so many of us are not thriving." And I have never forgotten that. I have never forgotten the sadness of that. The loneliness. The unspoken but urgent needs that we dare not express to anyone except that we bring them with us to the altar of God. But I have also never lost the lesson that I took from that article, which is that human connection, which includes physical touch, is necessary for human beings if we are to thrive. We need one another, at the most elemental level. We need one another to keep us warm. And in the specialized language of the church we call that Communion.

This is why the sacramental tradition of the Episcopal Church is so powerful for me, and why I love our tradition as I do. It is sensual. It is immediate and it is personal. *We lay on hands*. In our rituals we feed and wash one another, and anoint with fragrant oil. In countless confirmations I look into the eyes and face of the person I am confirming, there right before me, and I take their head into my hands. I feel the weight of their heads, and their warmth, and I pray for them. It is holy and gracious and intimate. It can overcome me. Many years ago I heard a woman who had just been confirmed talking to her friends at coffee hour. They asked her what it had been like, and she replied thoughtfully "It is good to be touched." I totally get that.

Now we are distanced. We do jazz hands and elbow bumps instead of touching or hugging. We make light of it, but it is costing us something. I speak here only for myself: it's costing me my thriving. I cannot tell you how much I miss you. How much I miss the hand laid on a shoulder or the hug at the church door. It really is good to be touched, and it is in our religion. Way back in the beginning I said that the biblical passages that were resonating with me for COVID and the emptying of our churches were those of Exile. How can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land? These are not days when the normal measures of thriving are available to us. Too much has been taken away, and the road home is long and we don't know the way. Instead, we look for patience, and endurance. We turn our longing into hope and pray for the restoration and return which we trust is surely coming. We can and must prepare ourselves for that, and in the meantime, here in the cold, by the side of the grave, find that otherworld beauty that belongs to the wilderness, and to endurance, and to waiting, and to that final prayer "Even so, Lord, come quickly."

.

I need to take a minute and make you think about something we have already been bombarding you with. A couple of weeks ago all bishops and our chancellors were asked to attend an online meeting with the Presiding Bishop and his lawyer. The subject was the Boy Scouts of America and their bankruptcy. We learned that the scouts are facing over 26 thousand claims of sexual abuse. This is ruinous for the scouts, of course, but it is a big deal for churches, too, because church parish halls have always been prime locations for scouts to hold their meetings, and many churches themselves are sponsors of scout troops.

We were told that every church which is at risk for being named in a lawsuit by the victim of such abuse needs to file a Proof of Claim before November 16, nine days from now, and a deadline which is firm. Here is what the Proof of Claim does. If a person who used to be a Boy Scout brings a lawsuit for having been sexually abused, they will sue the Scout troop and the Boy Scouts of America, and they will include your parish in the lawsuit if it was in your parish building that the Scouts used to meet. If you are then forced into a financial settlement, you can turn around and bring your own claim against the Boy Scouts and hope to have them cover your obligation. But you can only do that if you filed a Proof of Claim before November 16, 2020, even if the lawsuit doesn't hit your desk until 2021 or 2031.

You may be unaware of any claim of abuse being brought against your church. That doesn't matter. Any parish which ever had a scout troop back to World War II is subject to a claim appearing at any time. It is our recommendation that every church which ever hosted a Boy Scout troop, or thinks it is possible that you might have, get a lawyer to help you and file the Proof of Claim next week. You can always withdraw the Proof of Claim later if it turns out you don't need it. On Thursday we hosted a Zoom meeting with Joe Harbeson, my Vice Chancellor, to talk through all of this and answer your questions. About forty people signed on. The video of that Zoom call, along with all the information that Alice Yurke put together, is all gathered and posted on our website. It's all right there, but please note that the diocese cannot do this for you. Nor can the diocese file a kind of blanket Proof of Claim that would cover all of our churches. We asked that question already and got shot down. Take note: on November 17 it will be too late.

I was a Boy Scout for a while. I wanted to learn how to pack a backpack, and how to sleep beside the trail, and to pitch and strike a tent, and to kindle a fire with flint and steel, and to identify edible plants and cook them outdoors. The adult leaders of my troop taught me these things and no one laid a hand on me. They were trustworthy and true, and I am grateful to them. So it breaks my heart to think of men my age now who as boys entered the scouts for the same reasons I did, but who became pawns of predatory men, and knew only use and abuse and are still carrying that pain. They deserve to be compensated, and we the church will support them in that and help them in that. But those damages need to be paid by those responsible. File your Proof of Claim before November 16 and protect your parish while you protect those who were victimized.

.

We held a presidential election on Tuesday. As I write these words on Friday we do not know who our next president will be, though it is possible that by the time I read this tomorrow we will. This has been called the most important election of our lifetime, and that is being said by supporters of both parties and candidates. But it is also an election which has seen greater polarization and division in America than we are used to. All commentators are talking about the divide, the breakdown of the social compact, the hatred with which people on opposing sides of the political landscape view one another. People are asking how the president will bring us back together again. Or even if it is possible. Something fundamental to the American experiment seems to be

slipping away from us, as the language of political discourse in America has devolved too much into rage.

It is possible that when we are no longer in an election cycle we may see some calming of the waters, and some possibility of better conversation across our differences. Elections, and the political process itself, are inherently divisive. So it is worth remembering that as Christians we live under two models of collective life at the same time. As citizens of our country and world we live under the Political Model, which is based on dynamics of power. Elections divide the populace into winners and losers, and uses that language. Rather than seeking consensus or common purpose, each side seeks fifty percent plus one majorities and whoever gets fifty one percent of the vote gets one hundred percent of the power. As I write this the counting of ballots in our presidential election is taking place, with margins in some states of fractions of a percent between the two candidates. But it is in those tiniest slivers of difference that the right to exercise the power of the executive branch over the next four years resides. In the political model of our common life a fifty one percent majority and a ninety nine percent majority get you exactly the same thing. And with so much power up for grabs, it is not a surprise to find out that the line between our best selves and our worst selves is very fine, and it is easy to slip back and forth across it without noticing.

But we are also citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven. And in the Pastoral Model held up by Jesus Christ power is defined and derived differently, and in any case power as the world understands power itself is of little value. Rather than making winners and losers, in the Pastoral Model we find our victory by getting everyone across to the other side together. Losing no one. Using language like loving our enemies. Doing good to those who hate us. Blessing those who curse us. The lion who lies down with the lamb. Those who would be great must be servant of all. The Pastoral Model prizes humility and modesty, and cherishes the voices of the most marginalized, and loves the minority.

The worst thing about the political divisions which have infected America in the last four years is that they have too often been replicated in the church. And that is the one thing that may undo us altogether. We cannot allow the measures of the political model to overwhelm the invitation and call to the pastoral life of Jesus. After the killing of George Floyd, and through the early fall, I wrote four letters to the Diocese of New York about the mandates of racial justice which history and our day were laying before us. Whenever I write these letters I get some emails in response, almost always from people who take a different view. After I wrote a letter explaining why the president's use of an Episcopal Church as a political backdrop was offensive, I heard from a few people. I was told to go to hell. To go to hell. On another day I received a long letter from an angry person from a leftward political view. She began, "You are a disappointment," and then over several pages told me why. If the purpose of these letters was to wound me or to impose upon me sleepless nights, they succeeded.

But what was more troubling than my bruises was the inability of both writers to see the days in which we are living and the issues which present themselves to us through the lens of a gospel spirituality. They were just all about raw politics, and that is not the work of the church. I have not been able to forget either of those letters, because I believe I have failed both writers, though not for the reasons they think. The beginning

and the end of the work of the church is the building of Beloved Community. Full stop. Of course we are all of us part of the larger world about us and we will feel the same passions about the political movements around us as anyone else. As we should. Because these passions are about racism, and misogyny, and the stranger at the gate and the border, and children in detention centers, and war and peace and environmental collapse. Because we are in the world which God hath made we must love the world and everyone in it, and that will move us into participation in the larger social justice life of our country. And move us into activism. But what we do with those passions, and how we engage those battles will say everything about who we really are and what we ultimately believe to be important.

Martin Luther King was adamant that for those who would build the Beloved Community the hatred of segregation did not excuse one from loving the segregationist. The Beloved Community is not a club of like-minded people. It is an icon of the Kingdom of Heaven in which all are invited to share in the love of God. And the shocking truth of that teaching is that our enemies and adversaries are as loved by God as we are. The Beloved Community is built on the kind of Love that will lift us up and then shatter us. That will drive nails into us. Loving our enemy means loving them in the full force of their outrage, even as we stand against that outrage with the fullness of our being. Like Jesus. Like Martin Luther King. Like John Lewis, whom we lost this summer. Possibly the most powerful witness to nonviolence in our day or any day. This is really hard work, and requires a strength of spirit that takes everything we have, and calls on us first to shelter our own hearts.

I believe that the church has something to say and a witness to make in the face of the divisions which are rending American apart. We have it within us to create communities of character on the model of the Beloved Community, and to approach the divisions among us through the pastoral model of Christ. And make that witness before the world. Ultimately this is our special gift. It is our super power.

So: at last year's convention I announced that in 2020 we would embark on a new round of Indaba conversations in the Diocese of New York. We have an Indaba committee making the preparations for that, and we are hoping to be able to launch the actual conversations in the Fall of the coming year. We did this before, in 2013-2014, to help us find the way toward what I was calling at that time "a shared understanding of our common life." The experiences of that Indaba were profound, even surprisingly so. And it did what we wanted it to. People crossed over every geographical, racial, economic, cultural divide in this diocese to worship together, to stay in one another's home, to cook for one another, and to take for a little while a deep dive into one another's lives. One black priest from the urban core of New York City stayed in the home of a white person in a very white upstate rural town, and said to me, "I went to places, and was welcomed, that I would never have seen otherwise in my life." A woman from one of our churches said to me "This was one of the most important things I have ever done in the church; it may be one of the most important things I have ever done in my life." We could never have planned or effected such transformations. What we did was to make, for a little while, a clearing in the tangled thicket of this world into which we invited one another. And then the Holy Spirit came and lit it all on fire.

We want to do it again. We have an imperative laid before us, and that is that we take a chance on each other, to listen to one another, with compassion and understanding, in honesty and candor. And experiment with Beloved Community, and the sacrifices and humilities that that will impose on us, that by the grace of God we may also know the glory.

.

The Reparations Committee of this diocese has been busy, and has made offerings over the last year to our common life that have been nothing less than transformative. Following the landmark Year of Lamentation, the Apology Retreats in 2019 and 2020 received great attention and participation, with particular mention of the Knee On Our Neck retreat led by Chuck Kramer and Masud Syedullah and held virtually in July, which attracted huge numbers, and became oversubscribed even with attendees from across the country. Then together with the Anti-Racism Committee they sponsored a diocesan-wide reading of Ibram Kendi's book *How to Be An Anti-Racist*, and then actually brought Dr. Kendi himself to the diocese to engage us in conversation. This is first class work. These are world-class offerings of which this diocese should be exceptionally proud. And I believe which have put this diocese on the map in new ways and made us a wellspring of resource for the larger church.

A year ago I asked the convention for a resolution to set aside over a million dollars from the endowment of the Diocese of New York to help fund the endeavors we might take in making Reparation for American Slavery. And you did that, and the Trustees of the diocese affirmed that. Over the next weeks I was in conversation with the Reparations Committee about a process by which this might be done. We expanded the number of people on the committee, in preparation for this work. And then COVID-19 landed on us, and work that we hoped might happen in 2020, and reports that we imagined might be made to this convention are necessarily now the work of 2021. But trust. This is really happening.

So let me say something about what this means to me, coming from a slightly different direction.

In the 1850 census my great-great-great grandfather included in his household eight slaves. Two adult black women and six biracial children. You have never heard me talk about this. I don't know how to. His son-in-law, my great-great grandfather, listed ten slaves. He ran a hotel, so they were cooks and maids and livery drivers. Every adult male across the whole extended family fought in the Confederate Army or the Confederate Navy, and some lost their lives in that service. But it didn't end there. After the war my great-great grandfather refused to take the oath of allegiance to the United States for the rest of his life. Our family threw itself into the Lost Cause romanticism of the Confederacy, including a National Commander of the Sons of Confederate Veterans, and officers in the Daughters of the Confederacy. My grandmother's brother was elected to public office on a slate of candidates created by and endorsed by the Ku Klux Klan, of which he was a member. My grandmother's brother-in-law was killed in a car accident while counter-protesting *against* a Civil Rights demonstration. When I came to understand this history I came also to the shocking realization that every story I had ever

been told about my family was a lie. It was a lie bolstered by never talking about things, especially to the children, and by tired old Gone With the Wind fantasies of the Old South. It was Our Lie, and that thin lie was stretched over a deep well of the groans and cries of the suffering of other people.

But my mother, who was the daughter of that family, carried no hate in her heart, and raised me up to be a Christian and an Episcopalian and taught me to respect the dignity of every human being, and taught me the common and equal humanity of all people of every color. The longer she is gone the more I appreciate who she was and what she gave me. And I am grateful that I had my growing up time and my coming of age time during the earthly prophetic ministry of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and I am grateful for all those who in those violent days and by their sacrifice and martyrdom and witness guided me and forced my eyes open and helped me to rise above the bad history of my family and my country. Some of those were preachers when I was young and needed help to understand the gospel. Some were teachers, who gave me books and answered my questions. Some were just friends who were better people than I was. Or more grown up. Some are still doing these things now sixty years later. I give thanks for all those who encouraged me and sometimes admonished me and helped me to come into myself as a true Christian with a heart for justice and equality. And I give thanks for the communities of black people in the Diocese of New York who said come be our bishop and then began to teach me how to do that. And still do.

I've read the verse in Jeremiah which says "Never again let it be said that the fathers will eat sour grapes and the children's teeth be set on edge." We do not each of us have to take the blame for the crimes and offenses of our forebears. We've all got enough of our own stuff. We do not have to be held hostage to a history we did not make. But we do have to take responsibility for the world we have received as we have received it, and are in right now, and the hour we have been given in which to carry it forward. If we are bound to engage in the work of repair, of reparation, if that is our choice, then that's why we have to know where we come from. We have to look into our history and own it. To see the sins and crimes done in our name, and the forces which would steal our very souls, but also the host of angels who were working all the time to save us and make us brave and strong and faithful to face the new day. To see our need for redemption and our redeemer all at once.

There is nothing unique about my story. It is an American story, shared by thousands of thousands, and whether a person is the descendant of confederate or union, or slave holder or abolitionist, it's all the same story. And the dive we make back into our own deep stories, ferreting out the sinners and the saints, seeing all with unblinking eyes, will teach us something. Whether we do that as individuals or as institutions. It's what we were doing last year in the John Jay dramatization. Looking at the lambs out there among the wolves. When I did that in my family I found evil and glory side-by-side, and what it taught me was that every person has an obligation to do something real and positive in the day they have been given to bring healing and restoration, to make justice, and with our lives and the decisions we make to begin to write a new story. Like my mom. This is the day we have been given. What did you come out to see? A reed shaken in the wind? This is the day which the Lord hath made. I came to you last year and asked for a bunch of money. Not for me, it's not about me, but for this diocese, and for

the Reparations Committee, so that all of us together could signify our faith and trust that no matter how ugly the road that brought us here, no matter how criminal the stories our forebears made, we still believe that it is possible, God being our helper, for a people to remedy some of the wrongs of the past and write a new story. And inch this tired old world a little bit closer to the Kingdom of God.

All my adult life I have heard people say of reparations for slavery that it is politically impossible or too divisive or that we're just not ready or that we need a little more time or who gets the money and who has to pay. It was always something we would get to some day. Or not. Which I think a lot of the time what we really meant was that we were going to run out the clock and let our kids deal with it when we are gone. But those things we do now are the story they are going to have to dive into and learn and redeem. How long, O Lord? And God protect us from that day when a generation yet to come will look back at us and say, "Well, they talked a good game." "Their hearts were in the right place." The Diocese of New York is too small to take responsibility for that which really belongs to the United States of America. But we are big enough to own our own obligations and debts. I could not have more love or confidence than I do in the members of the Reparations Committee, and out of the work they do in the next twelve months will come the outline, the skeleton, the draft, of a story worth the telling and the living. Richard Witt and I were talking about these things last week, and at one point I said, "You know, the thing about money is that it does focus the mind." You should be expecting great things, because that is what you are going to get.

.

This country hit a tipping point in May when George Floyd was killed by a policeman who knelt on his neck until he strangled. We have seen the strongest resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement across America. A time of reckoning has come for a country and its systems rooted in White Supremacy. The Diocese of New York is not immune to this. I believe that the work and the offerings of the Reparations Committee and the Anti-Racism Committee are exactly right to help the diocese live into this moment and live into the reckoning. One more thing is needed. From this convention I will ask the Trustees to organize, with the Anti-Racism Committee, an audit of the polity and policies and practices of the Diocese of New York, and how we use our money, and how we frame our ministries, and how we raise up leaders, and equality and inequality of opportunity. That we may see ourselves anew, make correction, and frame a way forward for the diocese which more fully honors the high calling we have been given to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God. I am convinced that that is the work of the day, on the day we have been given. Amen.