

Bishop's Address
157th Annual Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh
Saturday, November 19, 2022

A transcript of the remarks to Convention delivered by the Right Reverend Ketlen A. Solak, D.Min, IX Bishop of Pittsburgh:

Good afternoon Beloved Ones of God. Beloved Ones of our Lord Jesus Christ and of God's Holy Spirit!

What a joy to be together today, in person and online, for our first Annual Diocesan Convention! To be together for the 157th Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh!

What a joy to remember the faithfulness of God to us. The faithfulness of God to this Diocese since 1865 to the present!

What a joy to be together as Pittsburghers for Jesus!

What a joy to remember that, a year ago, as of last Sunday, November 13, together we celebrated the consecration of the Ninth Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh.

The Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh is beloved by God!

The Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh is celebrated and supported by our wider Church!

The Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh is continuing to rejoice in a New Day!

Of course, we must recognize that this Convention would not be able to take place without the diligent efforts of our Convention Planning Team, as well as that of the members of our Diocesan Staff, and of all of you who present here and online.

Our gratitude goes to each and every one for seeing after the details of this Convention.

I also want to say thank Pittsburgh Theological Seminary on our behalf, and especially to the President of the Seminary, the Rev. Dr. Asa J. Lee, and Father Charles Fisher, and all of the leadership of PTS for the opportunity to hold our Convention on the premises of this lovely campus.

When we gather together like this, as one body for the purpose of doing the business of the Church, it is helpful to lift our hearts and minds anew to see afresh the awesomeness and grandeur of God.

The testimony of the Prophet Isaiah reminds us of God's greatness as the prophet describes how he "saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty, and the hem of his robe filled the Temple. Seraphs were in attendance above him; And one called to another and said, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." (*Isaiah 6:1-2a, 3b, NRSV*)

This is the God who calls us to new life!

This is the God about whom Paul spoke to a large crowd of skeptical Athenians in an effort to persuade them of God's existence by saying: For 'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own prophets have said, 'For we, too, are his offspring.' (*Acts 17:28, NRSV*)

And so, today, as we engage in the business of the Church, as we engage in the business of our Diocese, I urge you to rejoice and remember this:

You and I are a people who have been called by God.

You and I are a people who have willingly entered into a personal and a communal relationship with Jesus Christ.

As such, we are a people who have been reborn; a people being regenerated, filled with God's Holy Spirit, and called to be partners with Jesus Christ.

Called to be Active partners with Jesus Christ for the noble purpose of showing healing-mercy, healing-grace, healing-love, healing-kindness, to everyone, especially to the people in our communities and beyond. Called to strive for justice and to be active seekers of peace.

Therefore, as called partners of Jesus, we are not alone!

Scripture reminds us that Jesus is the head, and we are His body with hands and feet ready for action.

We are constantly in the presence of Jesus, supported by him in our ministry.

In good times and in uncertain times, Jesus is the rock on which we stand!

Of course, it is important to acknowledge that, since 1865, the past has not always been an experience consisting of the proverbial bed of roses.

Our Diocese has known the many ups and downs of life.

What is more, you have experienced collateral damage caused by betrayal of the highest order.

You have experienced broken relationships. You have lamented the loss of parishes that held precious memories. You have suffered many kinds of injury.

Yet... yet, you have withstood the destructive power of division. You have remained steadfast and stayed alive despite the overwhelming power of trauma. You have been gracious, exhibiting the fruits of God's spirit at every turn. You have continued to be faithful to God, and, God has continued to be faithful to you.

In all of this, beloved, we can see the abundance of God's provision.

In all of this, beloved, we can see the resilience that you have shown.

Therefore, beloved of God, we can give thanks, unabashed thanks to God for God's abundant blessings!

Without a doubt, the past has left some scars. Yes. However, we are not here to rehash the past!

What is more, I ask you today, and going forward, to do your best to stop rehashing the past, even when there are and there will be inevitable reminders.

I ask you to stop rehashing the past, especially the past that pertains to the recent unpleasantness, to quote the great Harold Lewis.

Instead, I declare to you today that you are becoming a people who are eagerly pressing ahead... a people leaning forward to embrace the future, chomping at the bit to engage in God's mission and purpose.

God has given you and me a new assignment, and we better get to it!

We are here to rejoice in the present and to move toward the future together with confidence.

Most importantly, today, Jesus is inviting us, Jesus is inviting this Diocese to look ahead... to move forward with a keen sense of renewed mission and purpose.

You may remember how, even before I was chosen as your Bishop, you heard me say that I believed that wisdom is usually in the room.

I still believe that wisdom is most often manifest among those present together with open hearts and minds to deliberate and seek after helpful solutions.

During this past year, one of my primary tasks has been to get to know the diocese through parish visitations, and a host of various meetings. Many of you have attended these meetings.

All of these have brought to my awareness some of the challenges and needs of our Diocese.

In addition, this past spring, members of the Board of Trustees, Council, Standing Committee, and I met for our first, annual, collaborative leadership session.

And we will continue to do so every year.

The objective of this first meeting was to:

- Pray together
- Get to know each other
- To brainstorm together in order to:
 - Uncover the most pressing challenges of our Diocese
 - To reflect on and probe these challenges
 - To discover and discern new possible pathways to explore

We achieved these objectives, and we also recognized that our work was just beginning.

Today, I can share in broad strokes the challenges and needs that emerged.

I can share that the needs that emerged largely pertain to one all-encompassing category which is best described by the word "Connection."

We uncovered our need to recapture the joy of being church and of engaging in ministry; to discern how to re-connect with one another as a Diocese, especially in the midst of uncertain times and to grow together as a Beloved Community.

We also perceived the need to redefine who we are as a Diocese and to discover engaging ways to communicate and share the Gospel and be inviting to others in our communities.

Our work going forward will be to flesh out and to strategically prioritize specific goals in an effort to meet these identified challenges and needs.

Our work will consist of being open to God's leading, and to finding appropriate ways to do ministry in each of our varied and specific contexts.

What is sure, is that new vision is beginning to emerge and will unfold as we move forward together.

What is certain, is that God, who has called us to be partners in ministry is now leading us toward building and rebuilding our Diocese.

But, first, we must allow God to build us up as a spiritual house for all to feel welcome in, as the author of First Peter reminds us: *"Like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood."* (1 Peter 2:4)

Today gives us the opportunity to experience the joy of being together and re-connect with each other.

Today is a day to enjoy; a day to rejoice in the New Day that God has bought forth for our Diocese; to trust anew and by faith in the future that God is already preparing ahead for us.

Together, and with God's help, the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh will grow into a strong outpost of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the glory of God.

Together, and with Jesus at the helm, we will live into our call to show healing-mercy, healing-grace, healing-love, healing-kindness, to everyone, especially to the people in our communities and beyond. And we will continue to strive for justice and to actively seek peace.

So, I declare once more to you today that you are becoming a people who are eagerly pressing ahead, a people leaning forward to embrace the future, chomping at the bit to engage in God's mission and purpose.

God has given us a new assignment, and we better get to it! We are here to rejoice in the present and to move forward to the future together with confidence.

Most importantly, today, Jesus is inviting us, Jesus is inviting our Diocese to look ahead, to move forward with a keen sense of renewed mission and purpose.

Amen.