

The Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh



Bishop McConnell's Address to the 149th Diocesan Convention

The text of Bishop Dorsey McConnell's address to the Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh, delivered in multiple parts on November 8, 2014, at Trinity Cathedral:

Come. Learn. Rest.

Part 1

To clear up this mystery [of why I'm currently using a cane]: a couple of days ago, I tore a muscle in the back of my right calf. Nothing serious, just God's little finger saying "how about you just take it easy." And that is the theme of my address.

Let us pray.

O God of unchangeable power and eternal light: Look favorably on your whole Church, that wonderful and sacred mystery; by the effectual working of your providence, carry out in tranquility the plan of salvation; let the whole world see and know that things which were cast down are being raised up, and things which had grown old are being made new, and that all things are being brought to their perfection by Him through whom all things were made, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Last year, I articulated three strategic priorities in six words for the next ten years: Public Gospel, Missional Communities, and Leadership Formation. That is what I will be speaking about a lot in the future. These priorities also underlie my remarks today, which I offer in three parts. I want to talk about what we need as a foundation for all this work. And that begins with a little story about a river.

I was on the road sometime last winter, on my way to a meeting somewhere in the diocese. This was a highly unusual moment because I was not running late. I was actually running almost an hour early, and maybe that is why I let my mind drift. I was thinking about something going on in the diocese. I wasn't paying as much attention probably as I should have, and when my focus returned, I found myself on the wrong bridge headed the wrong direction across the wrong river. Now, if this hadn't happened to me before, I would have been pretty annoyed, but as it was, I was getting used to this kind of thing happening. So I thought, "This is going to be interesting; I wonder what will happen now!" I got off the bridge on the other side and tried to figure out how best to get back on it, pointed in the other direction – you know how this works – and I took one turn and then another, and I found myself face-to-face, right in front of me, with the water itself. So I stopped. And as I stopped, I just took a few moments to look.

That afternoon the river was running fast and high and dark. They're really impressive, the rivers around here. The late winter light was glancing off large pieces of ice. I thought, "You know, it's been doing that without me for thousands of thousands of years." And then I thought *how long this has been in the*

making. I tried to imagine the deep foundations of the earth underneath all that roaring water. Then my mind went off into a kind of film clip – of everything: geology followed by layers of human habitation on top; native populations and their migrations over centuries; waves of European settlers; African-Americans from the South; mines and mills with their successive waves of immigration; furnaces and factories coming into being: it was quite something. I saw all that spreading into the vast industrial network that blanketed the Mon Valley, then the collapse and the decline and the years of patient endurance, and then, what may now be the beginning of a new beginning in a lot of places, while a lot of other places haven't begun again yet. I thought of the hundreds, even thousands of churches – Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox – over the last 250 years built, expanded, shuttered, razed, moved, built again, and then I wondered a little over our future in this diocese. I thought I was on a roll. I tried to see into that future, but in the end, God wouldn't let me see it. I couldn't get beyond just seeing the river in front of me, its power and flow stretching back into a past and forward into a future I could barely begin to contemplate.

Then I thought of Jesus. I thought of His words about Himself: *Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst; the water that I shall give him will become in that person a spring of water surging up to eternal life (John 4:14)*. What the Lord has in mind here is not a quiet, bucolic little roadside spring, I realized as I sat there and looked. What He has in mind is rather a deep well fed from a river that makes the Allegheny, the Mon and the Ohio look like a trickle from a water tap. Titanic waters of grace boiling up from fresh currents whose sources lie deep in Him. *Living water*, Jesus calls it – the water of His own mercy and love and life poured out, the water of His blood and the water of His Spirit – flowing up from deep within us, enough to forgive any sin, answer any charge, heal any wound, reconcile any hatred, enough grace to change our stricken and blighted worlds, both public and private, into God's own garden, if only we will *ask* him for it.

And as I sat there and stared at that river, I thought, *I'd ask Him, but I'm a little busy right now*. And I blushed because I knew it was true. Like the woman at the well in that story in John's Gospel, I was busy with the things I thought I needed to be about, running here and there, and it is all good stuff. For example, I'm busy with prayer. I pray a lot, for what I think I need. I pray for you, all the time, it seems. But I couldn't remember the last time I had prayed for what God knows I need. I couldn't remember the last time I asked him to plant and renew again the deep waters of His life in me, not because I had an agenda in mind, but just to drink from the well Jesus wants to give me, which is the well of Himself. I couldn't remember the last time I had gotten soaked in the Scriptures, not because I had to preach a sermon or teach a class, but just walking in them, following the voice of my Lord wherever He wanted to lead me, across whatever bridge, down whatever road, by whatever river, to seek His face with no agenda but to become more fully His. And not just to give me biblical fuel for what *I thought* needed to be done next. I couldn't remember the last time I had spent unstructured time with Christian companions in fellowship, seeking only the heart of God, hearing your stories of faith, listening to what the Lord was saying to you so that I might know more clearly what He could be saying to me.

So all that went through my head. It's kind of a miracle I did manage to get back on the bridge pointed the right way. When I got to my appointment, I was almost on time. But I have been carrying the unexpected gift of that hour ever since. And it is this call to deeper fellowship, deeper immersion in the Scriptures, and deeper prayer in the coming year that I want to share with you at this convention. I know that this may seem like a departure from what I said last year, the "outward focus" of our three strategic priorities. They stress, after all, a Gospel proclaimed in public, communities engaged in mission, and leadership formed for ministry to the world. Those are three very active pursuits. You might say to me at lunch, "Last year you encouraged us to get going, to find our mission, to look around our neighborhoods and see what God would have us be about for the sake of His kingdom. You even gave us ten steps to help us get there. Now it sounds like you're telling us exactly the reverse, to pull back, to focus on what

sounds like ‘churchy stuff.’ Bible and prayer and fellowship with each other. Well, Bishop, what’s it going to be? Make up your mind because we’re getting confused.”

There are two things I want to say about that. The first is what Walter Brueggemann, one of my favorite Biblical scholars, says: “The Gospel is so full of paradox that, when somebody comes up to you and says, ‘Pastor, what you said this week is exactly the opposite of what you said last week,’ the appropriate response is ‘Thank you for listening.’”

But there are other reasons beyond that for my focus here on fellowship and study and prayer, which I hope you will see make them related to our three mission priorities. The first is that mission takes preparation, friends. That preparation involves taking stock. It involves refreshing our provisions for the road ahead, and some of that means just resting in God. It has always interested me that in the Old Testament, after forty years of wandering in the wilderness, when God brings Israel to the edge of the Promised Land, before they are allowed to cross the River Jordan, Joshua makes them “prepare their provisions” for up to three days. One might think they had had forty years to prepare, so what difference would another three days make? Joshua knows it is this time of preparation, of refreshing their provisions, that will give them what they need to be sustained over the long haul. I think we may be in a similar position. We’re out of the wilderness of the last few years. I really believe that. But I also believe if we are going to be fully useful to the Lord in a public Gospel, proclaimed through missional communities, served by well-formed leaders lay and ordained, we need an intentional period of provisioning.

The second big reason is that we all could use some rest. The years of conflict leading up to the split, the chaos and pain of the split itself, the huge work of re-building the basic structures of this diocese including looking for, electing, and consecrating me – you all have spent, we all have spent an enormous amount of energy. As my spiritual director put it recently, “This diocese hasn’t had a day off since 2008.”

When I say rest, I don’t mean taking all of you off to a nice beach somewhere in the Caribbean (although that’s not a bad idea); I mean resting in Christ, in His love for us, His promises to us, resting in His confidence in the Father. And sometimes, as I found by that river that day, our activity, our anxieties over how we will keep the lights on and the doors open, how we will sustain or build upon whatever level of activity we think is essential to our “doing Church” all gets in the way of the invitation from Jesus to rest in him: “Come to me,” he says, “all who labor and are heavy laden and I will refresh you: take my yoke upon you and learn from me, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” We all know that line, but notice the sequence of His verbs here: *Come, learn, rest*. I suggest that it is the last of these that gives sense to the first two. When we *come to Him* in prayer, we *rest*; when we *learn from Him* in Scripture, we *rest*; when we *join with Him* through the fellowship we have with one another, we rest. *Come. Learn. Rest*. That is our provision. So what if we set aside this coming year, the year leading up to our 150th anniversary as a diocese, as a year of provisioning and rest in the Lord Jesus? What might it look like, and how might such a year actually advance our priorities of Public Gospel, Missional Communities and Leadership Formation, if we just let ourselves be provisioned by resting in the Lord? How do these three priorities relate to His invitation to us to come, learn, and rest?

First, let’s explore the “rest” Jesus promises in the light of the Public Gospel. I should note that resting in Christ is not the same as idleness. I can hear my grandmother saying something like this: “You’re sitting down already?” It doesn’t mean just putting our feet up. It means soaking in the deep things of God through prayer, study and fellowship with Jesus. That is rest, yes, but it is a very purposeful sort of rest. And it is always mysteriously accompanied by wonderful fruit. Remember that beautiful story in the 6th chapter of Mark’s Gospel, after the disciples have been so crazy busy with so *many coming and going that they had leisure not even to eat*. They are invited to come away by themselves to rest with Jesus. I’m sure they had in mind something like the nice beach in the Caribbean I mentioned earlier; but when

they get there, they discover instead 5,000 sick, hurting, hungry people. And the rest Jesus prescribes for His disciples is contained in His command to them: “You give them something to eat.” That doesn’t sound like rest to them, and they react exactly the way you and I might. “*Feed them? It’s not in the budget! Council would have to approve! We’re a small diocese! Let the Lutherans feed them!!!*” But you see, as Jesus speaks to that consternation they have, that is exactly His point. He knows they’ve been on high alert for a long time, just as we have. He knows they are exhausted and overwhelmed. So He asks them just to give Him what they have: a few loaves and a couple of fish. He blesses it, gives it back to them and they distribute it to the crowds. Voila! Five-thousand fed. Easy as pie. They don’t have to do a thing except feed the multitude out of the provision Jesus gives them, and it turns out to be more than enough. I bet, as they did this, they really started to understand what it meant to rest in Him. How wonderful it must have been! As their confidence in his provision grew, I will bet you they relaxed, even in the midst of their work. They probably even had fun doing it all, giving away the ever-expanding loaf, the always-multiplying fish. And the best news is, they do it together. As Mark’s narrative unfolds we see that whenever the disciples act out of their own plans and needs, they become competitive, anxious, mistrustful and, in the end, alone. That’s when they start asking Jesus whether they can sit at the right hand or the left, when they have that conversation among themselves about who is the greatest, and so on. But when they act together out of the common provision God has given them, they are relaxed and refreshed and joyful.

I know what that feels like, that refreshment. Every Sunday, Betsy and I get to visit one of your communities. Friends, I hope I hide this most Sundays, but I confess that sometimes when I walk in the door I am not always carefree. I may be carrying the burden of the past week. I may be chewing over a recent dilemma or anxious about something on the horizon. By the time I get to you on those Sunday mornings I have very little by way of natural resources in my bag. But Jesus says, “*You give them something to eat;*” so I do, and I discover again in fellowship with you, what it means to rest in Him. Honestly, I think if we knew what is written on our faces in the moment we receive communion we’d all go to the rail with a paper bag over our heads, because we telegraph the interior parts of our souls so readily. But if we started wearing those, it would be so sad. Because what I get to see every Sunday is Christ in you, in your faces. I get to see your hope for His mercy, your joy in His love. It’s all there in the moment I say, “The Body of Christ,” the moment I feed you from His ever-expanding loaf. I think the faces of the people of God in the moment they are being fed by their Lord are the most beautiful sight in the world. And whenever I see Him in you, I am at rest again, in Him; at rest in His forgiveness of me through the power of His Cross; at rest in His hope for me, through the life of His Resurrection; at rest in His love for me, through the Holy Spirit He pours into my heart through your hearts.

I am learning that this rest through our fellowship with Christ in each other is at the heart of the Gospel we take to the public. I am happy to distribute ashes in Market Square, but when several of our clergy did it without asking me or my asking them – it just happened in different places last year – the witness to Christ’s mercy was multiplied. Similarly, I am happy to make an occasional video, but what if the cast in the future just started springing up in different places in this diocese in other films among the clergy and people from many of our parishes? The bonds of love among us are really a great source of our rest, but they also produce the creativity that results in a Gospel we can take into the world. It was that love which most impressed the world in the early ages of the Faith. *See how these Christians love one another... how they are even willing to die for one another*, Tertullian hears the world saying. So provisioning our rest for the sake of a public Gospel may simply mean finding ways to deepen and multiply the occasions of our fellowship with each other, and then being attentive to what God says to us through one another about how we should share his Gospel with the world.

That’s actually the point of the Strategic Task Force’s Listening Committee (TLC). Leaders from other parishes come to yours and they listen to your story of your past and future, your hopes and fears, your gifts and needs. They write all that down and it becomes part of our collective treasure, part of the

common loaf we offer to Jesus, who blesses it and gives it back to us. The next steps will be for us in the leadership of the diocese, to see if we can't hear what God might be saying in all this information – to see common interests suggesting affinities between parishes, or differences that are interesting and calling out to each other, or needs in one community that might be met by resources in another, or charisms for ministry that might strengthen each other – and then we may suggest, out of that analysis, which of our communities might be an appropriate partner in mission for yours. But in fact, if you want to do it some other way, go right ahead. In any event, we'll be carrying forward the suggestion that whatever partnership you start, you start with someone else in this diocese and that it starts out with just a little fellowship – just getting together, just finding out who the folks are in that church up the road or across the diocese, what their lives are like, what they take in their coffee, what they like for dinner. And if you'll invite me, I'll bring something delicious in a pot, so we can just hear from each other and rejoice in the rest God gives us as we share in Christ's fellowship with one another.

So the first way of this Jubilee year is the way of fellowship. I believe that as we act on that, we will be refreshed and we will begin to see how to take that refreshment into the world, so that the world can indeed see say, *Look at that! They actually love one another and they seem to be really enjoying it.*

The second and third way, even better...

Part 2

Let us pray.

Blessed Lord, who has caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning; grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of Thy holy word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which Thou has given us in our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

I have always thought that this is one of the most beautiful phrases in any of our collects, *that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them.* Yet it is more than a beautiful phrase. It suggests that the Bible is food for us, at the very center of the common loaf with which Jesus feeds His hungry people. And the collect also suggests that we are fed by the Lord *together, fed by each other* through His Word, just as in the story of the 5,000 we started with earlier – “grant *us* so to learn that *we* may embrace.” The whole effect of that prayer is a very peaceable one, isn't it? Of course, in the story of the feeding of the 5,000, the disciples have a little struggle in getting to the peace Jesus first gives in His Word, when He says *you give them something to eat.* They don't like what they hear; but as they take the Word to themselves, in the form of the loaves which He has blessed, and they begin to feed others with the Word He has spoken, something changes. They start to relax. The whole tone of that story shifts. It moves from a state of high action and anxiety to a place in which the people sit down in groups of 50 in the green grass, and it turns into a wonderful meal by the end of which Mark observes they *all ate and they were satisfied.* As they learned to trust the Word of Jesus, they fed each other from that Word, and as they fed each other, they rested.

Now, bring that into the context of our second priority: Missional Communities. The danger in that phrase “missional community” is that it can summon up an image of a whole flock of busy Martha's, running around being missional. At the beginning, it looks tiring. That's the trouble with Jesus' disciples at the beginning of the story of the 5,000, isn't it; with *many coming and going so they had no leisure even to eat?* The Lord wants to move them from that kind of mission – which is man-based, coming out of human energies and initiative, and therefore completely exhausting – to something deeper, full of His

provision, and that is exactly what they find. And what they found, we can find. As together we feed each other from the Word of God, we rest in Him.

So, if the first key to our provision and rest for this Jubilee year is fellowship, the second needs to be the Word of God. We need the kind of rest we can only find when we come together to hear the Word of the Lord from one another, as we *read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest the Holy Scriptures*. A community that has taken the time to be fed and rested in this way, will become truly missional, will be able to do the work of God in the world without becoming drained or exhausted, will be focused on sharing the Good News of Christ's mercy and hope with those who have not yet heard it, and will be fed by the same Word they share.

So what might that look like here in the Diocese of Pittsburgh? I know there are any number of parish Bible studies around the diocese, and that is wonderful, but I have in mind something a bit different. I have suggested we connect with one another through fellowship across parish lines, exploring partnerships between and among our parish communities. I now suggest that we study the Word of God in exactly the same way: hearing the Word in informal groups from each other in different parts of the diocese will give us a clearer understanding of God's calling to all of us, and to each of us.

This kind of study is already taking place across the Anglican Communion, and there is a particular expression of it called the Bible in the Life of the Church. Mr. Stephen Lyon, who directs this project on behalf of Archbishop Justin Welby and the Anglican Consultative Council, is with us today. I have invited him to give us the view from 30,000 feet, as it were, regarding what Anglican congregations in different parts of the world are learning from each other, so that we might benefit from their experience

[Stephen Lyon addresses Convention]

First of all, I bring greetings from the Archbishop of Canterbury. He can't quite get everywhere so, when those connected to him go somewhere, we bring his greetings.

I've learned from experience that when you are asked to speak in a place where you know little about it, it's worth doing a bit of research. So I decided to have a look at your diocesan website to see what that would tell me about this diocese. I was struck by those three aspirations: Public Gospel, Missional Communities, Leadership Formation. I asked myself what is it that might link these three aspirations? The conclusion I came to is that one of things that links all three is this book, the Bible. Why? Well, first of all, it gives content to Gospel and Mission. If we're not careful in the Church, those two words can become extremely slippery. If anything is "mission," then mission is nothing. So where do we look to for the content? Secondly, it energizes and informs community, because we're not just any kind of community, we are a community of the followers of Christ. And thirdly, the Bible is a major catalyst for growth into formation. Quite a lot of research has been done in churches as to what helps people to grow. Engagement with Scripture, and a deep engagement, is the main catalyst that helps those to grow.

However, as Episcopalians, we engage with Scripture not just within the diocese, but also as part of a global family. I came across this quotation which I thought had an enormous amount of truth within it: *as we read the Scripture as part of the global church, as different emphases, reading styles, and interpretations are shared, we are all reshaped as readers, and our eyes are opened to what we couldn't see from where we stand*. I think that is true *across* the global family, and I think it's true in different places *within* the global family.

One of the other things I've learned to do, particularly when I have an invitation to stay with somebody, is to see if I can find out a little bit about them before I arrive at their front door. One of the best places to go is actually the blogosphere. And I discovered this on the blogosphere about our esteemed bishop:

Ask Bishop Dorsey why he's walking around toting a video camera and tripod through the hotel lobby? He's traveling the world, Taipei to the Philippines, Uganda to Pittsburgh, sitting with groups and inviting them to talk about a Bible passage. In each place, he listens, he dwells close, listens deep. The finished video will gather all these voices, so that we can sit and learn and discover Christ at each other's feet. That's how Jesus rolls! And we can follow.

That's a wonderful statement. I'm going to pick it up, because I think the Bible in the Life of the Church Project is seeking to roll alongside Jesus by offering three things that come from it. The first is that it offers some windows into the global family. Those were the places that we involved in the project. They have something different, but important, to say to wherever we are. It's by listening and looking at what other people are doing that perhaps we get insights into what we're doing. So the second thing it offers is insights from the global family, and particularly insights into the way we engage with Scripture. The way, that when we open the Scriptures, we get from what's on the written page to applying it in the way we live – which is quite a sophisticated process. But I think we've got an enormous amount to learn from other people. And thirdly, the Bible in the Life of the Church Project has and is producing resources that make our engagement more intentional and take that engagement deeper.

I put out on the pews this morning some of these postcards. You will find three Web addresses: two on the side with the picture of Archbishop Justin and one on the front. These will take you to all of the resources as far as the Bible in the Life of the Church Project is concerned. But I would say the Project needs you to add to it and share in it. I think it needs your parish, your diocese, your province – remember I'm from Britain – and our Communion to work together as far as this is concerned. You'll find all the details and goodies here. If though, you'd like a copy of the beautifully produced report, with the dynamic memory stick in the back with another 60 or 70 files on it, then I do have just a few left if you want to come see me afterwards.

But to finish on a serious note: if we're going to rest in Christ, then resting in His Word is vitally important. Thank you.

[Bishop McConnell continues]

It's so nice, isn't it, when you get good news out of the blogosphere?

Thanks Stephen. Someone asked me at dinner the other night, *what is the point of a diocese, anyway?* I wouldn't have felt so defensive if the question hadn't come from one of my own clergy. Still, it is a good question. And the answer lies in the kind of mutual learning that Stephen has just shown us, taking place through millions of lives across the Communion. Remember the Lord's invitation: *come... learn... rest.* When we step beyond the bounds of our own congregations, and get together in fellowship, we *come to Jesus.* When together we lay open His Word to us, we *learn from Him.* *As we learn, we will rest.* We will find the provision we need to become truly missional communities – sustained, not drained, by the service we undertake.

So, where do we begin? Well, as Stephen mentioned, I was inspired by the Bible in the Life of the Church Project to take a video adapter for my iPad and a tripod on the trips I was going to take because I wanted to bring back a treasure for you. I chose one text to study with them all, the parable of the sower and the seed from Mark Chapter 4. I read this parable with African women in rural Teso, with Chinese young people in two urban parishes in Taipei, and with a large multigenerational group of Abaknon people on the Philippine island of Capul.

So I'd like to try the same thing here. As we get together over the next year for fellowship and to hear and learn from the word of God with one another, just for the first session of whatever groups meet, I ask you all to start with this same text, this parable of the sower and the seed. Learn how we hear it differently, in each of our local contexts: where is the hard ground for each of us, where is the thorny ground, the stony ground in our lives, and where and what might be the good soil Jesus speaks of? And as we do so, I'd like to add the element I took in my travels. I tried to record on video a lot of the studies as they were happening. I have a huge amount of unedited footage, but my hope is that I might add to it some video of you as you share the Word. The result, I hope, will be a short film of all of these groups – five groups spanning seven or eight languages – Anglican Christians reading the Bible in four different cultures that can go around the world, back to all the groups who have contributed including you, so they and we can see and hear from their and our sisters and brothers, and hear ourselves as well. And perhaps we'll find in that enormous fellowship again another source of our rest in Christ.

The point of that, as well as the other resources Stephen has outlined (and which we will be actively helping and encouraging you to use), is to support you as you open the Bible with one another. The fact is, I believe, a lot of people in our parishes are intimidated by the Scriptures. Reading them seems like work, not like rest. Part of what these resources can do is to take the drudgery out of Bible study, so you can rest in the Scriptures knowing that you are getting something out of them. They can also provide a safe environment for conversation about Scripture. Someone said to me yesterday, *the reason it's easier, perhaps for some of us, to read the Bible with people halfway across the world than to read it maybe with another parish, is because in the past when we have said what we really think about the Scriptures, we have often hurt each other. Sometimes we have used the Bible as a weapon.* Well, you can't rest very well in a place that is not safe. So I will find ways to work with you to develop a simple framework that can be used in any setting to guarantee a peaceful and fruitful experience of the Word as we open it together, which (if we do it right) could become a real gift to the whole Church.

So I've outlined two out of three "ways" leading through our Jubilee year, our time of provision in Christ: fellowship with one another across the boundaries of our parishes, and reading and feeding together on the Scriptures, two ways of holy rest that will deepen our public witness to Christ's love and strengthen our communities for mission. If you'd like to help lead in either area, or if you have got ideas for strengthening either venture, you can talk to me, to the Canons, to our Archdeacon, or you can just go ahead and do it and tell us about it later. Please do tell us about it. Let the rest of us know what God shows you on the road so we can share in your joy.

And the third way? The best is yet to come.

Part 3

Let us pray.

O, Jesu, my Master, on whose errand I come, let me hold my peace, and do Thou speak Thyself: for Thou art love and when Thou teachest, all are scholars. Amen.

That prayer was written by the English poet and parish priest, George Herbert, one of my favorites. In his little book, *"The Country Parson,"* he has a number of these gems, which he would casually drop as he visited and prayed with his people in their homes, in the fields, on the road. It's a brief prayer, but absolutely beautiful, isn't it? You can hear at least four biblical texts running underneath it, welling up like living water and going out again. That was Herbert. He wanted his community to become a place that didn't just hear the Bible on Sundays, but rather he wanted them to become a people who embodied the peace and the promises of the Scriptures. He wanted them to be full of what his contemporary,

Richard Baxter, called *heart-work and heaven-work*. Herbert himself didn't intend "*The Country Parson*" as a description of the way he actually was. It turns out he was ill a lot of the time he was a parish priest, and spent a good deal of it as an invalid. But nonetheless, he wrote it as a mark to aim at. He wrote it as a description of what he and his people might look like if they became filled with *heart-work and heaven-work*. To be filled like this is the work of prayer, and prayer is the third way into which I am inviting us over the coming year. So it's *fellowship, Scripture, and prayer*. I am going to talk a bit about prayer, and then share a few thoughts on what this may have to do with our third priority, the formation of leadership.

Now, I know, of course, that we all pray a lot in church on Sundays. I know the corporate prayer of our parishes is very rich and beautiful. Yet at the same time I wonder how much we let that prayer spill over into the rest of our lives. I will be the first one to admit that, when I consider the work of prayer, as *heart-work and heaven-work*, the thing that stands out is the word *work*. Like Bible study, prayer can seem a burdensome thing, oddly, something we suspect we ought to be doing, but we're not sure how to go about it, and we're very busy, and we don't have much energy, and then no sooner do we turn to God that we're thinking of our to-do lists... and with all that, we think *what's the point? Sunday's coming and I'll pray then*. With all that baggage, we can be tempted to think of prayer the way the great American essayist H. L. Mencken thought of exercise: whenever the urge to do it struck him, he would lie down until it passed.

If that is our attitude, then we are in good company, actually. As I recently pointed out in a sermon at our clergy conference, if you read the gospel narratives carefully you will notice that, in them, the disciples themselves never actually pray. They watch Jesus pray, they're with Him when he prays, they let Him pray for them, they even ask Him to teach them how to pray – which He does, pretty compellingly – and yet in spite of all this, they don't pray, and on the one occasion Jesus explicitly asks them to watch and pray with him, they respond by immediately falling fast asleep.

But then something remarkable happens. Turn the page from John's Gospel into the Acts of the Apostles, and suddenly you see the disciples praying all the time, constantly, joyfully, on any number of occasions in any number of modes. Whether they're praying demons out of people, or giving thanks or interceding for one another, prayer seems like a constant companion, not like work at all, but rather more like a wave on which they are riding, being carried forward by the sheer torrent of a spiritual presence and power that actually isn't the product of anything they do. Prayer isn't *something they do*, but rather *something they experience* – that wellspring that Jesus promises the woman at the well, the living water of Himself within them surging up to eternal life.

Of course what has happened between Gethsemane, when the disciples fail at prayer so ingloriously, and Pentecost, when they are so full of praise to God they literally can't shut up – what has happened is the Cross, the Resurrection and the Spirit. Those, the three greatest works of God, have nothing to do with any human work. They happen, as Scripture demonstrates again and again, in spite of the disciples' best efforts to keep them from happening, not because of their cooperation. And the passion of Jesus, the mystery of His suffering and death, is filled with the prayer of Jesus. He prays, *Thy will be done*. He prays, *Father forgive them, for they know not what they do*. He prays, *Into Thy hands I commend my Spirit*. And at the threshold of all of that prayer, He prays for us, for those who have believed through their word, that we will be one with Him, one with the Father, perfectly one with one another. That is the promise and the work of His prayer, which the Father honors through the Cross of the Son in the power of the Spirit, power He gives to them and to us. So prayer isn't anything I do at all. It is the praying presence of God in around and through us that is going on all the time; whether we are thinking of God or thinking of our grocery list, the prayer continues because God continues.

Saint Paul underscores that. Saint Paul, one of the busiest people in the Bible (just think of his calendar), completely gets this point, that prayer is not something he does, but that God does. He is so encouraging

in this; listen to him with me. He says things like this: *We don't even know how to pray as we ought to, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. And God has sent the spirit of his son into our hearts crying, "Abba, Father."* And again, *When we cry "Abba, Father," it is the Holy Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are God's children.* What could be clearer than that? So my "prayer" – which really isn't my prayer at all – is simply a matter of my turning my attention to that which God is already doing in me, for me, around me, through me. I find it's powerful enough on my own; but in fact, there is no such thing as praying on my own, because even when I am praying alone, apparently by myself, I am in fact riding on the prayer of the Spirit which is the prayer of the whole Church, the whole communion of saints across the globe, across history, across time and eternity in heaven and on earth. And when I join with others in prayer, praying with two or three or in a larger group, I find this power becomes more and more visible, tangible, available. That is why the Acts of the Apostles is so full of turbo-charged incidents of God's power – doors falling off prison cells, jailers getting converted, people with lifelong illnesses being healed and restored – it's all to get across the point, as Saint Paul puts it, that we are not doing a thing, but rather we're like *earthen vessels filled with a glorious treasure, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God, not to us.*

Now if all that is correct, and I believe that is all correct, it has huge implications for the way we look at leadership. I know last year I talked about forming lay and ordained missional leadership together, through a locally-based institute, and I believe that this will happen. Canon Jay Geisler and I have been team teaching a course called The Anglican Way at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, and we have been invited to develop with them a track specifically for Episcopal students and those interested in exploring lay or ordained ministry and leadership in the Episcopal Church. And that is wonderful, and I am looking forward to seeing how this develops. However, I think this year we are being asked to look at leadership from the perspective of the kind of prayer I have been talking about, which is a little less formal. You see, the corollary to prayer being God's work, not ours, is that God wants the Church, and our leadership in the Church, to look more like Jesus and less like us, especially less like us-on-a-bad-day! And Jesus leads first from the Cross, not from the place of his exaltation, but from the place of his humiliation, suffering and death. If we take that trajectory seriously, and over the coming year dedicate ourselves to resting in this prayer of the Spirit in the whole Church, we're going to find leadership welling up from unexpected places as we do so – a kind of self-organizing leadership in remarkable ways; from the world's point of view, you might look at it being from the ground up, as opposed to the top down. And we need to be attentive to the work of the Spirit as God calls and anoints that leadership from among us.

For example, last night at the Eucharist we blessed several dozen "pray and play" bags, prepared by the junior members of the Girl Scout troop at Saint Paul's, Mt. Lebanon. These are bags full of fun items – crayons and pipe cleaners and pages from a coloring book that all point to Jesus, and that are a present to kids who may come to church but want to stay in the pew with their mom or dad because they are a little shy about going to Sunday school, or because the parish doesn't have a Sunday school. So here we had all these Girl Scouts bringing these bags to be blessed – older kids helping younger kids pray. And we blessed those bags. All the girls and I got together around this big plastic tub, and laid hands on the bags. We prayed that Jesus would use those bags to remind us all, that *whoever receives one such child in his name, receives Him, and whoever receives Him receives the Father who sent him.* It was a beautiful moment of prayer. I was so carried away that I left my mitre in the tub and our Archdeacon Jean Chess had to chase it down for me at the end of the Eucharist, so that I'd be dressed right to bless you all! It was only later that I remembered what else Jesus says about these his little ones: that *whoever does not become like them cannot enter the Kingdom of God*, echoing the prophet Isaiah, who promises that in the day of the Lord *a little child shall lead us.* I thought of that last night as I drifted off: leadership in prayer by the junior members of a Girl Scout troop, not one of whom was wearing a collar. I wonder what's God going to do to build on that?

So I want you to know that while we have been in here attending to the business of the Church, a few of our young people have been exercising leadership in prayer out on the street. I walked outside to talk to our diocesan youth coordinator, Brent Hansen, and asked him how it was going. "Really good," he said, "Actually, Margaret and Austin, they ought to go into sales. It's starting to slow down now, but they've been out there pushing coffee and snacks and inviting anyone who wants to, to write a prayer on the wall in chalk, in the color of their choosing." I went out and saw it first hand. Margaret and Austin were standing there and as anybody came by, they would say, "Have some coffee? Need to pray? Want to write one down?" again and again and again. We have them recorded here and there are over forty of them. So, please, on your way home, be blessed; go out there and have a look at what God is doing in leadership in prayer from our children. Because there they were, still smiling after a long morning and next to them, all those prayers stretching like a river down the length of our cathedral wall. I was a little tired when I walked out, until I saw that prayer; and I just have come back in feeling very well indeed!

There is the outline of our Jubilee year, this 150th, a call to provision and rest in fellowship, Scripture and prayer for our service in a public Gospel, missional communities and leadership formation. So at the end of this day, perhaps we can take just a moment to remember why any of this is important.

I said at the beginning of the day that as a diocese we're out of the wilderness, and while that is mainly true, it is not entirely true, for the simple reason that once you've been in the wilderness, not can't pretend you haven't been in the wilderness. We cannot undo the losses we have suffered, or the pain, or the sorrow. It's a little like grief. Actually, it is grief. Perhaps you know how it is, when you lose someone close to you, and years later, after you think you have gotten over it, you walk into a room and see their picture, or hear their favorite song, or discover an old shirt of theirs in the closet and it still smells like them, and suddenly it all comes back. Here in this diocese, I know that sometimes we still walk in that way, suddenly recalling all that happened and it feels like barely yesterday. I said during the walkabouts, which now seems like 50 years ago, that the Diocese of Pittsburgh was really standing at the foot of the Cross. I think that may be God's gift to us, that that's something we want to carry with us, that it isn't something to be avoided or forgotten, but something to be treasured. Because, even though there is pain in our experience, nonetheless we serve a God who raises the dead, who heals every wound, who forgives every sin, who makes bonds of love between people who have forgotten how to love, who then raises us and calls us and sends us to be His messengers and to do the same thing in the world. That's a gift, sisters and brothers. That's a gift.

I want to say that thousands of people are around us all the time who have similar or greater grief in their lives that they just cannot get over, because they don't know there is this God. And so they think that life is just a matter of resignation, of blaming themselves and each other, of bearing by themselves a huge legacy of darkness that they can't get rid of, and can't forget, and can't give away. The simple reason they think this is that no one has every *shown* them the God we know: who has turned all of this into a gift to us, the God who is alive and who looks like Jesus. We are the ones Jesus has chosen as His vessels. That's why all of this is important.

So, sisters and brothers, let's assume that we are the messengers they need. As we deepen our knowledge of the Lord's love through this year of provision in our fellowship with one another, in study of Scriptures, and in deepening dwelling in the prayer that Jesus himself prayers in us and through us, let us see if we can't hear again the voice of the One who says, *Come to me all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Learn from me and you will find rest for your souls, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.*

If we can hear and see Him together, then we can be certain that others will be hearing and seeing Him through us; and then through our mission, we may have the greatest and most priceless gift of walking with them into the Kingdom to which the Lord calls us. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Postscript

Earlier I mentioned the work of the Strategic Task Force's Listening Committee (TLC). Our Canon Missioner, the Rev. Cathy Brall, reports that, to date, the committee has had conversations with 21 of our parishes and has identified at least 107 different forms of missional activities taking place in these parishes alone.

These activities span a broad range of categories where our congregations reach out in loving service to their communities and beyond. Here are a few examples:

For the past 30 years, the good people at Atonement in Carnegie have invited their community to enjoy a feast. They cook and serve a full and absolutely free Christmas dinner. The meal usually draws about 200 people, with another 70 to 100 carryout meals prepared or delivered to folks in their own homes. Efforts like this help make this small church known in their community as "The Church that Helps People."

At the Church of the Advent in Jeanette, a group has started converting those ubiquitous plastic shopping bags, which we all have far too many of, into mats for the homeless at the shelter in Greensburg. They cut the bags into strips and then crochet the strips together to form the mats. They're not sure this very labor intensive activity will be sustainable for them in the long run, but they gave it a try as a "holy experiment" to paraphrase the Rev. Dwight Zscheile, this year's St. Andrew's lecturer and author of the book, *"People of the Way."* More recently, the people at Advent addressed a growing concern about youth hanging around their property and the potential for vandalism. They threw a party for these neighborhood kids the night before Halloween so they could get to know them in a more personal way. Approximately 50 kids came and several brought their families along, too.

And, St. Peter's, Brentwood, has started a worship and fellowship event they call "Patriot's Day for First Responders," on the Sunday nearest September 11th (9/11). Invitations are hand-delivered to police, fire, and EMS stations in nearby communities. They return to re-issue the invitation on the day before the event to make sure these first responders feel genuinely invited and remember to attend. The Sunday worship is shaped to honor these brave men and women through special prayers, music, and a relevant sermon. After worship, the parish hosts a festive lunch for the first responders and their families to further recognize and honor their service.

We want to share your story, too.

(The Right Rev.) Dorsey W. M. McConnell, D.D.
Bishop of Pittsburgh