

CONVENTION ADDRESS, OCT. 8, 2011

I recently had to check my dog---the best dog in the western hemisphere---into a kennel. A new facility has opened in Helena, and it advertizes itself as a luxury condo facility. This is it, I thought. Lizzie deserves the best. I had to produce a record of shots and other information as I checked her in. A few days later, I came back to town and hurried to the kennel. I paid the bill and was about to leave, when the person behind the desk said: Don't go yet. I have to give you Lizzie's report card. A canine report card is a new concept for me, but I accepted the official looking and signed document. She, by the way, got A's in everything.

I don't want to issue a report card on the Diocese of Montana, but I do want to give you a report on developments over the last five-to-eight years. You remember, I hope, that the vision of this diocese is that we are a community of the resurrection, transformed and transforming by the power of the Risen Christ. What I wish to list for you are what I see as resurrectional developments among us, signs of the transformation wrought by the presence of our Lord in and among us. So here we go.

- We no longer have any assisted congregations. This is a major change of direction, and for most of the churches involved it has been a positive development that has challenged the members to stand up and own their church.
- The diocesan budget has been reduced by more than fifty-percent in the last eight years. Some of this is, of course, that we are not giving assistance, but it also reflects a number of other changes that have allowed us to operate more efficiently and effectively.
- We have developed and continue to maintain a good web-site. It has been evaluated by experts in this area and pronounced to be easy to use, complete, and effective---in fact, it is an excellent example of a diocesan web-site. Please remember that almost anything you want to know about the diocese and the churches can be found at mtdiocese.org.

- We have regularized most of the procedures of our common work. This has been irritating to some, but our procedures benefit the churches of the diocese. For example, we have a way to do background checks on anyone who has contact with children; this requires time, money and attention, but it allows us to hold our heads high and say that our churches are safe places for the young.
- We have begun offering workshops to help both our lay and clerical members do their ministries better. This began with the diocesan staff dealing with such issues as treasurer training and the role of vestries. But this is expanding to include nationally known experts in congregational life, and there are plans in the works for most of this in the future.
- We are nearly finished with a restructuring of the committees of the diocese. Because we operate with one of the smallest staffs in The Episcopal Church, we depend heavily on diocesan committees to help equip and develop our common life. Besides the canonically required groups such as the Standing Committee and the Diocesan Council, we now have a newly formed Christian Formation Committee, a Congregational Development Committee, and you will soon be hearing about a new Social Outreach Committee. I hope to present to the Diocesan Council soon a plan for an Environmental Stewardship Committee. These are not committees for the sake of committees, but working groups to help promote the ministry of this diocese.
- The Diocesan House has been updated and repaired. This has been a gradual process over a number of years, and it has addressed the urgent need for new windows, plumbing and wiring. This is not an extravagant facility, but it is pleasant, workable and professional---in short, a place of which you can be proud.
- At Camp Marshall a UTO grant opened the door to installing a new and critically needed drain field.

- We have received two Americorp grants (that is unusual!) which has allowed 7000 hours of project work to be done. As a result the look of the camp is now more open and less cluttered.
- The chapel has been renovated and handicap access to the chapel added.
- As a result of a generous grant from St. Stephen's Church in Billings, Canterbury Lodge has been renovated.
- This summer the campers were able to use a new media center to produce a wonderful video about Camp Marshall. The video will be shown at next summer's General Convention, and the staff of the national church has been using it as a model.
- Grace Camp, the program for children of incarcerated parents, continues to be a huge success.
- Day Camps have been held in a number of churches around the diocese.
- The presence of the camp site director, Julie Sisler, has allowed all sorts of good things to happen, not the least of which is freeing David Campbell to pursue youth ministry in various forms throughout the state.
- Finally, the last two years have set all-time records for attendance at Camp Marshall.
- We have become an electronic diocese in terms of our communication. We are seen as a model of this approach around the wider church. This sort of communication is more timely, much less staff intensive, and vastly cheaper than paper and postal media.
- The Sacred Order of Deacons has become an exciting and vital part of our life. Further, our School for Deacons is widely hailed throughout the church as a model of local, diaconal formation.
- Again around the wider church we have a reputation as a leader in the area of promoting the ministry of the baptismal ministry and ministry of the laity.
- We have been able to begin a redevelopment of Emmanuel Church in Miles City.

- We have begun the first new mission in the diocese in many years at Holy Cross Church in Billings. They have had some recent break-through's in terms of new members.
- Nearly all of our churches now have a significant, resurrectional, outreach ministry. I suspect that is some sort of record in the history of the diocese and in the wider church.
- Our quick-read newsletter, Bishop's Round-Up, has proved to be effective.
- We have seen a nearly complete turn-over in the priests serving in parish settings. The clergy of our diocese are as fine and as interesting a group of priests as you will find---that's the opinion of the previous Presiding Bishop.
- We are well down the road of moving from a maintenance model for church life to a mission model, where our primary task is to worship and serve. Another way to say this is that we have moved from a dependency model to an independency model.
- The atmosphere of our annual conventions is no longer characterized by conflict and confrontation. The conventions are now focused on worship, education and fellowship as well as carrying out the legislative life of the diocese.
- The staff works long and hard to serve our Lord among you. In their individual areas they are the equal of anyone else in the wider church.
- We have embraced ERD as a major mission thrust of the diocese. In the last five years we have contributed almost \$330,000 to ERD.
- We are moving from being a congregationalist church to a diocesan church.
- We have a number of people serving on the provincial and national levels of leadership.

Now I have saved the best till last. This past year we have turned the corner and are now a growing diocese! This is the first positive growth year in many, many years. And this signals a healthy diocese. It would be hard to overestimate the importance of this fact.

There are a couple of areas that can be considered growing edges for our life together.

Let me ask you, as leaders of the diocese, to help with these.

- We will not be able to make the next step in our growth to full maturity in Christ until we earnestly address the issue of giving. Everywhere we turn we are limited by our income. I am just as aware as you are that these are tight times for our economy. But if we can get on with giving that is based in a sense of gratitude and a sense of mission, and giving that is proportional and tithing-oriented we will be able to step up to the transformational work to which Christ calls. Let me add one more comment, and then I will move on. For middle class Americans, conversion and discipleship are not real, not genuine, unless it involves money, giving and generosity.
- We need to move further along in our awareness that we need each other. For all Anglicans the basic unit of the church is the diocese. Indeed, for us the definition of the church is: the people of Christ gathered around their bishop. It is no accident that that is our view of the church. No one person and no one congregation can go it alone. God calls us to community, to be together in Christ.
- Finally, we need to continue to grow in treating each other with forbearance and gentleness. In honor of the presence of the Lutheran bishop let me quote from that document that every Lutheran has studied, the Small Catechism by Luther. Here is his explanation of the commandment (Lutherans number it as 8!) "You shall not be a false witness." He writes, "What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we do not tell lies about our neighbors, betray them, slander them or hurt them, but defend them, speak well of them, and explain everything in the kindest way." I think he is on to something here. An aspect of my job is that I tend to collect the detritus of

anger, suspicion and fear from around the diocese. Most of this is baseless. All of us need to give each other a graceful break and explain everything in the kindest way.

As is always the case at a convention, there is a tendency to be preaching to the choir, and I probably have done a bit of that just now. But what I have said I believe bears repeating.

In closing I want to assure you of my love and commitment to you. I want you to know that I am committed to you and wish only resurrection blessings for all of us. It is an honor and privilege to serve Christ among you.