

Bishop's Remarks
231st Diocesan Convention, Second Business Session
November 13, 2021

We heard this morning, one of my favorite images of abiding, the 23rd Psalm, our Psalm for Convention.

In order to get my first key to our house, my mother said I had to memorize the Lord's Prayer and the 23rd Psalm. I've thought about that a lot over the years—how those two pieces of our sacred texts are, when you think about it, the key to our lives. Mama knew what she was doing.

We often think of the 23rd Psalm as comfort—like a warm blanket. And it can be that. But this morning, I invite you to consider the structure of this psalm from a fresh vantage point.

It begin with being a stable and safe communities—where everyone can lie down in green pastures and walking beside still waters. No storms, just stable, calm. Abiding in the green grass.

Then, we go next right into the dark valley and into the presence of our enemies. We abide through the storms of this life because we know God is with us and we are with one another. We fear no evil because we are connected families.

Being connected to God and each other strengthens us to be courageous leaders, able to go to hard places without fear of evil.

Finally, the last section shows us what it's like to be visionary people who see the house of the Lord and then go to it to make our dwelling there.

As I've listened to many of you across the diocese—and anticipate meeting with more of you soon as I continue to travel our diocese, I've heard you express a desire for what the Psalmist describes.

You want us to have a season of stability. You want us to learn how to deal with the challenges this world brings with courage and hope, strengthened by our connections to the Shepherd and to each other. And you want us to see God's future and help bring it to pass in the world, now.

Several of you have said, "we need a strategic plan!" And so we do. But in a complex organization such as this, a plan is not something I create in the middle of the night by myself. Nor is a plan a set of answers to simple questions. And a plan made up of quick fixes for problems we are eager to resolve will soon wear thin.

Instead, I submit to you that our plan is best discovered not invented. We are discovering what God is revealing among us—through story and metrics, through the learnings from our successes and our failures, we are listening for what is next.

As I have listened carefully to you, here are the first areas I believe need our focused attention if we are to abide well in a new season:

We will nurture the vine that is our common life so that it will be - **Stable and Safe**. We do that by Practicing Good Governance and Healthy Processes. First steps include: Reformulation of *Strategic Transition Team*, which you will soon hear more about from the Rev. Denise Trogdon. This team will help us look at our current reality, including our current legal situation, and plan well for our future. I am also putting together a team to review our constitution and canons and update where warranted.

And we will nurture the vine that is our common life so that we will be **Connected**. We have to build our connective tissue at every level. First Steps include: Facilitating *Creative Partnerships* between congregations, Leveraging our deaneries as resources, Gathering and supporting our Deacons and our Retired Clergy.

We will nurture the vine that is our common life so that we will be **Courageous**, so that we can be people of Justice in the Public Square.

First Steps involve: Developing an Action Plan with our *Racial Justice and Reconciliation Commission*, which you will soon hear more about from Ms. Gail Decosta and the Very Rev. Dr. Adam Shoemaker. We will Secure Resources for their Work; We will Connect with other faith leaders in the gospel work of advocacy and justice.

We will nurture the vine in our common life so that we will be **Visionary**, Visionary in Leadership Formation for All Ages. First Steps include Restructuring and expanding scope of work of the Commission on Ministry, and you will hear more about that from The Reverends Dow Sanderson and Courtney Davis-Shoemaker.

In addition, we will support our ministries with Children and Youth. I am excited to announce the formation of a Children and Youth Commission and I am appointing the Rev. Laura Rezac of St. Stephens, Charleston, and Mr. George McDaniel, of Good Shepherd, Summerville, to co-chair this commission so that we can support those already working in vital ministries in this area and to expand our vision and reach.

We also need to be visionary in our growth strategy as a diocese. I will be working with staff and key leaders to determine opportunities in places of rapid population growth in directing resources.

We are aligning our staff in the bishop's office to focus in the areas. I'd like to take a moment now to recognize our outstanding staff. These women do more by 10 AM than most people do in a week. They gracefully and skillfully tend to just about every aspect of our life together in this diocese—bringing knowledge and wisdom that has been valuable beyond measure to me. Please join me in thanking Ms. Lauren Kinard, Ms. Andrea McKellar, and Ms. Molly Hamilton.

In addition to the amazing staff we already have in place, we are putting before you a budget that anticipates a new full-time canon to help guide work to support thriving congregations, new church plants, and our life in the public square. I believe this work will be vitally important to our future.

We are also funding the critically important function of our financial management, and committing to the structure and leadership of that area moving forward. We have been richly blessed by the volunteer service of The Rev. Dr. Jim Taylor. As you heard from Rev. Donehue earlier, the Rev. Dr. Taylor has accepted a call in the Diocese of Central Florida. I am grateful to announce that while he will no longer be serving as our Treasurer, he has graciously agreed to serve as interim comptroller for our diocese for a period of time, giving us the opportunity to put in place the solid leadership for our financial future.

Also, using funds already budgeted for staffing, we are adding a half-time Canon to the Ordinary to support our work in healthy governance, leadership development, and pastoral connections. I am delighted at this time to announce to you that The Reverend Doctor Philip Linder has accepted the call to serve in the capacity of Canon to the Ordinary. Rev. Dr. Linder brings a breadth of experience to this position, and I am delighted to welcome him to our staff. Please take a moment to welcome him with me!