

Bishop's Address to Diocesan Convention November 11, 2017

Dear Family and Friends of the Diocese of Eau Claire,

Before moving into the main body of my address, I must thank some people in our Diocese who make my work much easier. To be effective a bishop needs to seek the counsel of many people. I try to listen to everyone and use my own good sense, experience, and ask the Holy Spirit for guidance. In the end God and you can determine whether I have done this well or poorly. I am especially appreciative of the Leadership Council, Bob Weathers as Treasurer, Jim Pelish as Chancellor, Aaron Zook as Canon to the Ordinary, and Jo Glasser as Chair of the Commission on Ministry.

I can keep going and at every juncture know I am leaving someone out. For example, I rely heavily on Scott Kirby for making this Convention run smoothly. I thank Mike Greene and the Cathedral for their hospitality not only in hosting this Convention, but also for the Cathedral's support of the Diocese all year long. I am proud of what our parishes are accomplishing. Some of you have done major upgrades to your property. Others are moving into exciting outreach projects. The work of Patrick Augustine in helping refugees in foreign countries is breathtaking.

At the Diocesan level there are three areas of significant accomplishment in 2017. You can read about them in the reports. These are around youth with Camp Horstick and EYE 2017, events concerning our Companion Diocese of Harare, and the full development of the medical clinic at St. Marc's Parish and School in Jeanette, Haiti. As a small Diocese of the Episcopal Church, we certainly show that we have a big heart. Through the wise and careful use of resources we have made a difference!

I have found myself involved with politics in the past twelve months as never before. Being Bishop of Eau Claire has forced me to consider something obvious to you but somewhat foreign to me. In a nation that focuses on two minorities, African American and Latino, our main minority in the Diocese of Eau Claire is Native American. When I speak of this to other bishops or even to friends in other parts of our state, they basically ignore me. Meanwhile, I made two trips to Standing Rock, North Dakota. The first was with clergy last November. The second was as a chaplain to veterans in December. In May I was a speaker at a Water Symposium sponsored by an organization known as Aiinoojiaki which means, "For the Children." This is supported by the Ojibwa Tribe in Lac Courte Oreilles. George Stamm is a Vice President of this organization. Also, I have worked with Michael Newago to support the Red Cliff Tribe in Bayfield. I am proud to say that last week Christ Church in Bayfield received a \$15000 grant from the Jessie Ball duPont Fund to refurbish its parish house. The reason behind this grant is the parish house is the center of three chemical dependency support groups that primarily or exclusively serve the Red Cliff tribe.

When Jesus says that what you do to least of these you do to me, I have come to experience that sometimes I am the minority and standing at the margins and other times the roles are reversed. When you recognize the wonderful hospitality of those different from you extended to you, the sense of isolation disappears, and you see life through their eyes. This was first true to me in traveling to Zimbabwe. I have discovered it again with Native American hospitality. It is hard to emphasize difference and feelings prejudicial when you are smothered with kindness. This is how the Gospel and the Holy Spirit work in breaking down the dividing wall of hostility expressed so eloquently in Ephesians 2:14.

As the Epistle to the Ephesians continues in chapter 2, can we as Americans find unity? The pessimist in me says we have always had divisions, but the optimist in me says we have also been effective in finding solutions that have allowed us to go forward. I recently delighted in watching a 1935 movie starring Charles Laughton called, "Ruggles of Red Gap." It is a comedy about a skilled servant to an English earl suddenly moved to Washington State and adjusting to a most different environment. In the end Ruggles changes, and the people of Red Gap do the same. Something new and wonderful emerges out of what should be a cultural divide.

I, like many of you, am upset that government sometimes doesn't function well. This is most notable in the legislative branch of our Federal government. In 2016 retired Republican Senator of Missouri, John Danforth, spoke to the House of Bishops. He pointed out that the very word Congress means that people of different interests, values, and geographical locations are to "congregate" or go into "congress" together and work through differences. Today compromise no longer implies finding solutions by yielding strategically on certain principles. Instead it is a sign of weakness, of caving into the demands of others, of betrayal to those who voted for you.

The result is our political landscape is one of extremes. The two major parties are more conservative (Republican) and more liberal (Democratic) than ever. There is a new phrase in Washington, DC. It is called getting "primaried." It means if you hold office and someone runs against you who is more extreme, you will lose. The result is the more moderate candidates, the ones who work for compromises and solutions, are disappearing.

I know of only one person who got primaried and prevailed. In Alaska, Republican Senator Lisa Murkowski lost in the 2016 Republican primary. Many people asked her to allow her name to go forward as a write-in name on the ballot. In the end she won. As a result she stated that she was going this time to Washington as a Republican but not beholden to her party. She said she would vote as she believed was in the best interest of Alaskans and the nation. She knew this time she represented everyone in her state. It might be that Senator Murkowski's example needs to be followed by others.

Our nation must look to the future with two large goals in mind. First, we are a democratic and free society. We were formed in 1776 for this purpose. This is what I believe is the true meaning of American Exceptionalism. This does not mean that we are better than other nations. It is who we are, and although we may in practice fall short of this democratic and free ideal, we are committed to it. In recent years we have often rendered only lip service to this primary goal. It is most noticed in the rude and sarcastic responses of government leaders toward people who are different from the European/Caucasian majority. The outside world has noticed this change in us, and foreign nations and peoples see us as weaker than in years past. They perceive us as losing our moral compass. This is because our behavior often isn't reflecting the democratic and free ideals we proclaim.

The second goal is to do a better job of keeping our economic house in order. I recently read a history of Tudor England that shocked me. I knew that Henry VIII had only a few good points in the midst of being the bull in the English China cabinet, but I had thought Elizabeth to be a wise Queen and a kind and just ruler. The truth is both monarchs were tyrants who along with the short reign of Mary Tudor, executed far more people than monarchs before or after them. Also, these Tudor monarchs spent money without consideration of income. The result was it took England over 100 years after Elizabeth to recover its financial health.

We in the United States spend beyond our means. Changes need to be made, or we may be in England's situation at the end of Elizabeth's reign in 1603. When an organization, government, diocese, or family has the discipline to live within realistic budgets, new and

excellent choices reveal themselves. When you are mired in debt you forfeit opportunities because you lack the financial resources to make a dream a reality. We are capable of having our government manage a healthy and creative budget. By not increasing indebtedness, by keeping borrowing only in the current percentages, our powerful economy can reduce the proportion of dollars devoted to debt service when compared to tax income.

In American Christianity, our religious denominations have approached the larger society from two perspectives. Conservative Protestants and some Roman Catholics look at the world from a “We and Them” mentality. The Church is to be an institution unto itself in which nearly all personal needs are met. Here is where your friends are. This is where your social activities occur. When you go out to eat it is only Church connected. This is not only true for adults. This is also where you rear and educate your children. When it comes to government or public schools, or local community, you have little or nothing to do with it. Those secular institutions may have values hostile to Christianity. You are to avoid them.

The other approach is that it is the role of the Church to engage its communities and institutions. People can talk about the separation of Church and State, but there is no separation in the human heart. It is the responsibility of the Church to speak its values in a respectful manner and to work in a diverse world for the betterment of all. The Episcopal Church has always been in this latter group. We may have counseled the larger society wisely or poorly, but we have always acted as having a place at the community’s leadership councils.

Our Episcopal Church and other mainline Protestant Churches have always done something very well. Even when we can’t recognize it in ourselves, outsiders notice that we excel at respecting people of differing opinions. In living out the Gospel we consider what Jesus might say or do to find solutions to problems that involve politics and other matters. When you demonize an opponent you destroy a relationship. When that happens you might find a different matter on which you would both naturally agree, but you can’t work together because the relationship is gone. When we value our relationships even when opposed on particular issues, we find that our love for each other prevails.

We also know the power of prayer. This does not mean that we believe in “space shot” prayers where we speak to God by loading our words into a rocket and firing it into the heavens. Instead the other half of prayer is listening in silence to inquire what God is asking of us. The result is we are communicating with God in a two way conversation. The result is prayer brings forth new and creative ideas from fresh perspectives. This is the fruition of truly partnering with God.

It is through respectful listening to those different from us and understanding the creative power of prayer that we are different from other aspects of our society. In good times and in difficult ones, we hang together as community. This is where we can lead the way. We all respect the ideals on which our nation was founded. We know where we have fallen short of living into those ideals. We are aware of the cruelties of past behaviors. We all want a better future. The question is how do we accomplish it? This is where with mutual respect, prayer, and love we can lead the way. Perhaps the old 1970’s song sums it up best, “They will know we are Christians by our Love!” May God bless our parishes, our diocese, and our nation with his love!

W. Jay Lambert
VI Bishop of Eau Claire