

194th Convention of the Diocese of Ohio
November 12 & 13, 2010
Convention Address

Sisters and brothers in Christ,

I am grateful to see all of you here and happy to be back in your company. The sabbatical time I have just completed was both restful and productive, providing me with an opportunity for exploration and study on a couple of topics important to our continuing ministry as a diocese. It has equally been helpful to step back from the daily detail of episcopal ministry and get a broader perspective on how and what I do as a colleague and companion to you, and how I might do that better in the future. Of course, I am very much aware that such a stepping back has implications on the responsibilities and workload of others, for whom I am greatly appreciative. I thank the assisting bishops, members of the Bishop's Staff, and particularly Alan James and Eva Cole, for their generous attention to the life of the Diocese during this time. Because this ministry normally takes me away from my family a great deal, it did not seem right that "Sabbath time" do the same, therefore I spent the majority of it working from home, allowing me to attend soccer games and school events, church with my family, even a youth group outing. A "stay-batical" is how my wife, Sue, has referred to it, and I doubtless owe her the greatest debt of gratitude for her patient toleration of my presence. "For better, for worse, but not for lunch" I believe is the sentiment. Suffice it to say that, at this point, she has limited yearning for my retirement.

Perhaps because I have had more time to read newspapers and listen to the radio, even to watch the news and some sports on television, these last few weeks presented an unexpected challenge as I have had little buffer from the political campaigning that came to a close ten days ago. The rancor, mistruths, and fear mongering that have been relentlessly hurled between candidates, often written and underwritten by organizations clothed in anonymity, has been disheartening in the extreme. While I recognize that the democratic process has historically been vulnerable to this sort of politics, it seems to have escalated this year to a perilous height, reflecting the polarization in Washington and the electronic media, and encouraging citizens to succumb to a win/lose mentality that appears bereft of any collaborative spirit. Our politics has become like the World Wrestling Federation, a simplistic good versus evil proposition, where, as Jon Stewart points out, "if we amplify everything, we hear nothing." I can't help wondering how well the 3.5 billion dollars spent on this mid-term election campaign might have been invested in education, for instance, preparing a new generation of thoughtful citizens, rather than entrenching an increasingly ill-informed and intentionally misinformed electorate.

All of this leads again to my appreciation of being here with you, the church, gathered in convention to listen to one another, to listen to the unique incarnation of Jesus in each of us, to listen for what God is beckoning us to be for God's glory and in service to the world God loves.

I am not so naïve as to believe the church is without some of the same destructive dynamic as is our political system. We are, after all, a product of our culture and prone to the same distractions. My wife recently reminded me of the story of a ship's captain who, while passing by an

uncharted island, noticed a plume of dark smoke coming from the beach. Leading a rescue party ashore to investigate, he found a shipwreck survivor who explained he had been living there alone for five years, praying to be rescued. Looking around, the captain asked him, “If you have been alone for all this time, then why are there three huts?”

“Well,” explained the survivor, “I live in one, and go to church in the other.”

“What about the third?” asked the captain.

“Oh,” said the man, “That’s where I used to go to church.”

Yet here we are, once again gathered in one hut, as one body, to discern what it means to be a diocese and what God is offering to us in this particular configuration of believers. The theme for our time together, taken once again from the diocesan mission statement, is “Building Healthy Communities.” I hope that this will be a time in which we can reflect on how we build healthy communities that grow, give, and serve, in our congregations, diocese, church, and communion. In this convention, we are taking another step in our journey of sharing with one another, listening to one another, and praying for one another. While the last two conventions we have conversed principally with those to our right and left, the size of this hut allows us to sit at round tables and engage with more companions, integrating our perspectives and aspirations, our experiences and enthusiasms, allowing the spirit of holiness to lead us to a new place and a renewed commitment. We will, over the next twenty-four hours, have five times for table discussions about specific topics: Mission Area collaboration, camp and retreat ministry, global mission, racism and diversity training, and spiritual formation. I encourage you to be thoughtful, creative, and attentive in seeking Christ in one another during those conversations.

+ + +

There are many things we do best as individual congregations: for example weekly worship, pastoral care, ministry to the local community, congregational growth, Christian formation for all ages, Bible study, and spiritual companionship. Some individual congregations sustain vibrant companion relationships with congregations and church institutions in other domestic dioceses and abroad.

At the same time, there are some things we often can do better in larger configurations, as Mission Areas and as a diocese. These can include youth ministry, congregational vitality, domestic and overseas mission work, camp and retreat opportunities, ministry discernment and leadership development, advocacy and justice ministries, to name a few. Over the summer and fall I have given particular attention and thought to a couple of these, and I want to report on them to you now, and invite you into further exploration with me and one another about them during this convention. Specifically I want to talk with you about mission collaboration and camp and retreat ministry, and how they contribute to the health of the various communities we constitute as the church.

Mission collaboration

In early July I returned to the Diocese of Tanga, in the Anglican Church of Tanzania, to join Brendan Knoblauch, who at that time had spent over a year there serving on our behalf developing working relationships and structures of accountability in support of the collaborative mission efforts that began between our two dioceses more than 30 years ago, during Bishop Burt's episcopacy. You may recall my having written you last spring about the resignation of Bishop Philip Baji in the wake of financial irregularities and the administrative breakdown of the Diocese of Tanga. I had meetings with Archbishop Mokiwa, Archbishop of the Anglican Church of Tanzania, and with the Standing Committee, Finance Committee, and Vicar General of the Diocese Tanga, to assure them of our intention to be faithful companions to them as they go through this difficult time of healing and rebuilding. Once again I visited congregations and deaneries where already we have been working together and have hoped to work together in the future. It was an encouraging visit, for both dioceses I felt, focused not on those things that have caused separation in the church and the Communion, but on those things that bring us together. It affirmed my conviction that what will offer the most healing to the global body of Anglicans is not something legislated by the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Primates, or the Anglican Consultative Council, but our rolling up our sleeves and serving side by side. I am convinced that the greatest "instrument of unity" is collaborative mission.

We know this from our parochial and diocesan experience. When we focus our hearts and hands on the service of others, when we work as one to meet the needs of those who suffer in any way, the things that separate us from one another tend to fall into a different perspective. We find ourselves in a different relationship with one another, a more right relationship, a more godly relationship. It doesn't remove the differences we have, but it empowers them differently. We are not diminished by them, but made more whole, more complete. Reconciliation often results not from the removal of old differences, but from being together a new way, in a context where our own needs are not central, but somehow displaced by the needs of others.

The strength of any relationship is measured not simply by how we live into good times, but how we work through the challenge of difficult times. As the Diocese of Tanga elects a new bishop, builds a new diocesan staff, and restores institutional trust within itself and among its partners, there is new opportunity for us to be faithful companions to its people and congregations. We have much to give and much to gain in that companionship, a companionship that stands to make us more whole and weave new threads of life into the fabric of the Communion we share as Anglicans. With Brendan Knoblauch's help we are discovering new and more effective ways to connect with the institutions and people of the Diocese of Tanga, ways that can beneficially serve both churches.

Three months after my stay in Tanzania, Brendan was forced to come back to Cleveland because of a problem with his visa that risked his being apprehended by the Tanzanian Department of Immigration. There is some uncertainty about why this came about after his working there on the same visa for the previous 15 months. Whether this action is connected in some way to the demise of the former bishop, we do not know, but are working to get it remedied. The good news is that Brendan's unexpected exit from Tanzania has meant that he is back here visiting congregations of our Diocese and building mission structures that will prepare us for whatever the future holds for Tanga. I am delighted that he will address the convention later, but I want to take this opportunity to thank him for his extraordinary work over the last year and a half.

In the year since the last convention voted to explore further the potential for intentional mission relationship with the Diocese of Tanga and the Diocese of Belize, the Bishop of Belize, Philip Wright, has been here to visit, and representatives from Ohio have been to Belize. Richard and Cindy Shaffer from Grace Church, Defiance, who have been instrumental in developing this relationship, have continued their mission work in Belize. I understand that a group from St. Peter's, Ashtabula, is planning to travel there in the coming year. Likewise, Gene Stacy from Old Trinity, Tiffin, and Mark Robinson, the Canon for Mission, have just returned from ten days as guests of Bishop Wright and the Diocese of Belize. There will be an opportunity to hear from Gene and Mark, and also from Brendan, in a special session following the close of business this afternoon at around 4 o'clock. I hope many of you will take advantage of it.

These relationships are critical to the Church's mission "to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ" and, as such, they are essential to our vocation as individual Christians and as a diocese to community building, both locally and globally. These relationships stretch our understanding of others and challenge how we see ourselves. I encourage you to have thoughtful and lively table discussion about them during this time together. Listen to one another's experience, seek new perspective on the challenges and opportunities they present, explore the possibilities they offer for collaboration, and invite the powerful spirit of holiness to inspire you to entertain whatever new things God may be imagining for us.

Camp and Retreat Ministry

Each of my two immediate predecessors, Bishop Moody and Bishop Grew, told me that the next thing they would have addressed had they continued to serve as Bishop of the Diocese was Cedar Hills. Indeed it is the kind of thing one can best approach after having spent considerable time serving among and building relationship with the people of the diocese. In listening to many who have been involved with Cedar Hills and the ministries for which it provides a physical setting, I have observed that, since its acquisition as a hunting lodge in 1960, the strategic approach to Cedar Hills has consistently been either "How do we make it fit the camp and conference needs of the Diocese?" or "How do we make our camp and conference ministry fit Cedar Hills?" This is a practical and reasonable approach. We have an extraordinary asset and we have an interest in camping and retreat opportunities, so how do we put the two together?

Pete Nielsen has done an exceptional job in answering that question by maintaining the property and developing programs for children and adults. He exhibits what it means to labor out of a love for the church and its people. He has also developed the property and its program into a ministry of outreach and mission to many beyond the church. The summer camping program now provides experiences for inner-city children, and the property has been extensively used by non-church groups throughout the year. At the same time, however, involvement in the summer program and use of the retreat facilities by congregations and communicants of the Diocese of Ohio has continually decreased, as has our capacity to underwrite its costs and address mounting issues of deferred maintenance. In the face of this, the questions that continually come up in my prayers, both for camp and retreat ministry in our diocese and for Cedar Hills, are these: "What is the vocation of the Diocese of Ohio to camp and conference ministries?" and "What is the vocation of Cedar Hills as a unique piece of land?" What is the future of camp and retreat

ministry in this diocese and, separately, is Cedar Hills suited to that aspiration or to something else?

A little over a year ago, I invited an insightful group of lay and clergy leaders to explore these two questions and undertake a wide-ranging investigation of camp and conference ministry in the Diocese of Ohio and The Episcopal Church. Chaired by Chet Bolling, the Camp and Conference Ministry Study Committee included Kay Ashby, Tom Austin, Liddy Hoster, Keith Owen, Jim Rich, Dick Wilkison, Percy Grant, Danielle Weiser-Cline, and Ruth Morris. Over a period of months, they studied facilities and programs in dioceses around the church, investigated what contributed to their various successes and failures, evaluated the benefit of such institutions to dioceses and their communicants, gathered reflections and hopes from members of the Diocese of Ohio, and made an initial assessment of the facility we currently have at Cedar Hills. In June they presented a report to the Diocesan Council, which has provided an important foundation for my own exploration this fall. Their work and findings were extensive, and resulted in four recommendations that I would summarize as follows:

First, that the Diocese of Ohio sustain a summer camp program intentionally focused on faith formation for Episcopal youth. The Study Committee referenced a 1994 Gallup poll reporting that 85% of people who have made a faith commitment did so before the age of 18. I can add that the American Camp Association in 2005 reported a Lilly Endowment finding that the single greatest commonality among lay and clergy church leaders was a positive religious camp experience.

Second, that the Diocese “create a camp facility that by its very existence speaks the values of its faith.” They explain that “to meet that goal the Diocesan camp would exceed American Camping Association standards, meet the Disability Act guidelines and be Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design certified, and be centrally located, naturally beautiful, camp and sports program conducive,” and able to house at least 100 people at a time (the equivalent of one youth from each parish in the Diocese and staff) during the summer.

Third, that the Diocese of Ohio create a non-residential conference facility, large enough to accommodate day-long retreats for vestries, clergy groups, youth events, Education for Ministry and other leadership and spiritual formation events, and committee and commission meetings.

And fourth, that we remain open and alive to the possibility of developing overnight accommodation year-round for longer and larger programs in the future.

The Study Committee concluded that the Cedar Hills property could not be reconfigured to meet these goals for reasons that include location, topography, accessibility, inadequate water supply, and proximity to the highway.

For those of us with a significant connection to Cedar Hills, integrating such findings into what we may have imagined for the future of that place may be painful. But it is important to recognize that this study did not find that Cedar Hills is not valuable, rather that it may not fit a renewed vision for camp and retreat ministry in this diocese. Discerning the future vocation of a property as remarkable as Cedar Hills is a stewardship imperative, and I am committed to that

endeavor. Ironically, Bishop Burroughs, who oversaw the purchase and conversion of Cedar Hills from a hunting camp to a conference center, would likely understand this challenge. As Rector of Christ Church, Cincinnati, he recognized and accepted the need to replace the beloved century-old church building and erect a new one, better suited to the needs of the future.

Would any members of the Study Committee present please stand? I want to thank Chet and all the members of the Study Committee for their dedicated and extremely helpful work, and encourage their assistance as we come to terms with their findings.

Following the presentation of the committee's report to Diocesan Council, I spent some of my sabbatical time visiting other diocesan camp and conference facilities, speaking with bishops and facility directors, and researching why so many church camp facilities, Episcopal and otherwise, have gone out of business in the last 20 years. Last month I attended the National Council meeting of Episcopal Camp and Conference Centers, Inc. (ECCC), the formal association of all the camps and conference centers of our denomination. There, I listened to and spoke with camp directors and board members from around the church, as well as with the Executive Director of the American Camping Association. In addition, I have read and listened to dozens of reflections on why our communicants are not invested in the place or programs of our camp and conference center, and likewise to an equivalent number of reflections on why some are. And I have tried to integrate these findings with those of the Study Committee to see where it all may lead.

Here is some of what I have found:

Dioceses with viable conference centers either operate them as large commercial ventures (150 beds) or have substantial facility and program endowments, and often both. Given our setting and resources as a diocese, I do not imagine us getting into the conference center business. Northern Ohio, with its numerous state park and other facilities, does not need to rely on the church for a large conference site. I can, however, imagine us someday providing a modest retreat setting for our own use and use by others, one that meets the privacy and amenity needs of adults.

Dioceses with vibrant camp programs have widespread buy-in from congregations and families, usually reflecting generational loyalty and parochial leadership commitment. Almost all actively supported camp facilities have ample playing fields for a variety of sports, and are situated on ponds or lakes for multiple water sports. They have buildings that are appropriate for their range of constituencies, are accessible to all differently-abled users, and whose maintenance is affordable.

A few centers are beginning to experiment with sustainable gardening programs, mostly growing produce for their own consumption, and going beyond traditional nature programs to develop curricula that seriously address environmental responsibility and stewardship of creation. As well, a few centers have made efforts to employ green energy and expose their users to alternative power sources. What they are finding is a keen interest in young people and adults alike in learning how their lifestyle choices make a difference. Of particular interest to me was that, while a number of centers provide experiences in diversity sensitivity and reconciliation training, and some have programs for specific groups like returning veterans, children with

serious illness, or families of the incarcerated, none that I found was directly involved in ongoing justice ministries as an integral part of programming for diocesan youth and adults, for instance feeding programs, advocacy projects, or environmental reclamation.

There are dedicated communicants of the Diocese of Ohio, both children and adults, who have had excellent experiences at Cedar Hills and value it highly. At the same time, it is a fact that a majority of our congregations are not currently invested in using our camp facility and program. 121 children were enrolled in Camp Cedar Hills this summer, up three from last year, less than 60% of whom were communicants of our congregations, and representing only a fifth of our parishes. By comparison for instance, consider Sheldon Calvary Camp, an Episcopal camp owned by Calvary Church and the Diocese of Pittsburgh. Situated in Conneaut, Ohio, the northeastern-most corner of our diocese, it accommodated 900 campers this summer, as well as an additional 300 children and adults in their Family Camp program.

If you find numbers helpful, as I do, here are a few more:

The Legacy Campaign of ten years ago included a goal of one million dollars for Cedar Hills, of which less than \$58,000 was raised, \$50,000 of which was from one donor.

Our diocesan endowment stands at about \$30 million which includes \$1 million designated for Cedar Hills, generating about \$40,000 annually. While the diocesan endowment includes some \$7 million for support of the elderly, sick, and needy, it has less than \$71,000 for youth. While it has \$4.8 million for loans and grants to congregations, it has less than \$71,000 for youth. While it has \$4 million for clergy education and support, \$1.5 million for hospital chaplaincy, and \$1.4 million for mission, it has less than \$71,000 for youth. \$71,000 generates less than \$3000 a year.

In addition, over the last ten years we have reduced our annual operating budget contribution to the ministries of Cedar Hills from \$180,000 to \$122,000.

When we do the math, we have to recognize that our heart is really not in it.

Yet the further I immersed myself into the challenges and possibilities for camp and retreat ministry in the Diocese of Ohio, the more it felt in my prayers as if God was playing a high-stakes game of “What if?” with me.

It’s been going like this:

What if we were to partner with Lake Metroparks or some other conservation agencies to explore what the vocation of the Cedar Hills property could really be, how it could best be used by us or by others if it were freed of some of its current uses?

And what if we, here on the edge of the bread basket of America, the agricultural Midwest, built a centrally located camp and retreat facility around a working farm? What if, in addition to playing fields, ropes course, and worship space, we established a tangible ministry of justice and mercy, one that allowed our children and adults to roll up our sleeves on behalf of those in need, and developed the center and its programs around that mission? What if we partnered with our

parish feeding programs and the local community, on the model of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), establishing, as it were, an ecclesiastical CSA, thus beginning with a commitment to the sustainable farming of produce for the camp facility and for the feeding programs of our churches and the surrounding community? What if our camp and retreat center became, for instance, a model of and a teaching resource for urban gardening and nutritional diet in all of our parishes?

What if we partnered with a progressive architectural school whose graduate students could help us design and build a camp and retreat facility using renewable resources like straw-bale and cob construction, recycled building products, and non-fossil fuel dependent materials, in order to expose all who visited it to living more lightly on the earth? What if we established this sacred and lively space and powered it with alternative energy sources, partnering with high-tech industries to create a proving ground for solar, geo-thermal, and wind energy products, to stretch the imaginations of our young people and adults and set for them a new bar for the stewardship of creation? What if we partnered with an environmental studies program like the remarkable one at Oberlin College led by Daniel Orr's father, to build a year-round destination for elementary school classes from which students would go home thinking in new ways about the food they eat, the natural resources they consume, and the positive impact their lives can make on the lives of generations to come? What if the place we built to retreat from the demands and habits of our daily living that so often distance us from the way of Jesus was a place whose every attribute led us into a radically more faithful way of living in and with God's creation? What if the place our children have traditionally gone to learn what the creation does for them becomes a place where they discover what we can do for the creation?

As we look toward the future, might it not be both sensible and meaningful to establish a place for spiritual growth and faith development that engages the practical challenges we are bound to face as a society and world, and reflects the Christian values of justice and stewardship of God's creation? Could we imagine and bring into being a place for Christian formation that integrates the wholeness of our identity as Christ's own – worship, prayer, study, fellowship, evangelism, service, advocacy, justice, and stewardship of all that is God's?

In this and in so much of what we do as a church, I want to break free from the struggle of trying to make what was valuable in the past survive the cultural and financial pressures of the present, and move toward building a present that inspires hope for the future and addresses the needs of tomorrow. Everything I have learned in my exploration of camp and retreat ministry tells me it is not worth trying to nickel and dime our way toward these goals. When we do that, we are just loading up burdens upon those who come after us. If we are to have a vibrant camp and retreat ministry, we will have to be bold in developing it.

So where might all of this lead? Of course it would lead to feasibility studies and exploring creative partnerships and possibilities not yet imagined. It would lead to working committees and transitional planning for the short and long term of both camp program and Cedar Hills. It would lead to subsequent decisions by Diocesan Council and Diocesan Convention. And it would lead to raising the assets needed to undertake such an endeavor.

But first it leads to you, the elected and ordained leadership of this diocese. Is this our vocation as a diocese? Could camp and retreat ministry of this sort contribute to building healthy communities that grow, give, and serve, and might we be inspired to take it on in a substantive and forward thinking way? In short, do we have the heart for this?

Tomorrow, when we have time for table discussion about camp and retreat ministry, I will invite you to reflect on your own and other's experiences of going to camp or making a retreat or participating in ministries of justice, and how those formed your faith. Be adventurous in imagining what we might do. And continue the conversation with me and one another in the months ahead. As a result of my study of this in the last few months, I have been offered funding for feasibility studies and had expressions of genuine interest in helping plan and develop strategies for realizing such a center. But I am not interested in taking any next steps without a clear sense that this is a calling we are committed to, together. So engage with one another in this convention, in your households and parishes and mission areas, and in your prayers. And let me know where you feel we are being led.

+ + +

Building healthy communities that build up the body of Christ, at home and abroad. I believe that is our vocation as a diocese. And I am certain that collaborative mission and camp and retreat ministry are essential elements of that common calling. It is a privilege to serve with you to the glory of God and to that worthy end.

The Rt. Rev. Mark Hollingsworth, Jr.
Bishop of Ohio