

WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM MY FRIENDS

ADDRESS TO THE 225TH CONVENTION OF THE DIOCESE OF MARYLAND

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Last year you heard my address through a recording. So why not try it again?

(A few verses from *I Get by with a Little Help from My Friends* by the Beatles)

Jesus in the 15th chapter of the Gospel of John calls his disciples *friends*. They are no longer called servants, even if this is the most often used title for the disciples, but friends. Not simple to be nice to one another or to raise the level of comradeship, but because for Jesus to be *a friend* is to be one who does what our Lord commands. We are called to be friends and we have been called to build up friendship as the Diocese of Maryland. The “sacred bundle” that I want to share with you today is that to build up the sacred friendship that our Lord demands of us is that we are formed in the fullness of Christian discipleship. My part of these addresses is to look at what we have been doing, and in particular what we are doing for the development of ministry, which is the work that friends are called to be about.

Formation for discipleship is life long and we are most fortunate to have had the excellent leadership and vision of the Rev. Amy Richter, Missioner for Lifelong Christian Formation. We just finished a wonderful diocesan wide Festival of Christian Formation. Our vision is to have full formation, for all ages, in all of our churches. Your bishops earlier this spring met with the clergy and with two fine scholars, John Orens and James Thurrell to look not only at confirmation but at how it is part of the whole formation of the baptized people of God. I see more Christian formation in our churches, but wish to see even more! We never stop learning, for as St. Paul says:

But be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect (Romans 12:2)

We cannot be transformed nor discern the will of God if we are not fully engaged in our formation. We must work at the holy friendship demanded by our Lord.

For the past nearly eleven years I have had as a major priority clergy leadership, both priest and deacon. While we often get anxious at the processes we have for discernment and for formation let me point to some results. We have consistently had in formation fully one quarter of our postulants as being under thirty years of age and/or persons or color. The effective deployment of our deacons and priests speaks to the fact that by good discernment, careful recruitment and screening and quality formation we can be sure that the deacons and priests serving our congregations are the best they can be.

Currently working with the Archdeacons, the Ven. Kerry Smith and the Ven Lauren Welch, we are looking at a revived and strengthened deaconate. We simply need more deacons! The deaconate is a distinct, full and equal order. With the leadership of the Chair of our Board of Examining Chaplains, Dr. Steven Fowl, we have strengthened the curriculum. We are undertaking an in-depth and careful evaluation of the entire program and actively seeking more deacons. The archdeacons have been on visitations with both bishops to create more visibility and opportunities. This year I have forty-three congregations who wish deacons and only twenty six available, and this includes the two to be ordained in June. Why do we need more deacons? The most often repeated commandment our Lord gives us is “Whosoever will be first of all will be last of all and servant of all.” The church by its essence is called to servant hood for all of God’s people and we need to servant leaders to symbolize, teach and lead the church to follow our Lord’s call to servant hood.

We now have four Mutual Ministry teams: St. James, Westernport, St. John’s, Frostburg, St. Peter’s, Lonaconing and Garrett County. This process has been about ministry and while we have used local discernment and formation for lay and ordained leadership, has seen growth in all of the churches as well as dynamic ministries. Notable are the Latino/Hispanic Ministry at St. James, the Canterbury House for university students at St. John’s, Frostburg and the planned relocation of Our Father’s House in order to reach people in north Garrett County.

We learned many things from this process and the idea of ministry teams was behind creating a four person team for west Baltimore. The Rev. Glenna Reed with two deacons, the Rev. Jane Mayrer and the Rev. Marshall Thompson and a soon to named other professional are serving Holy Nativity, Pimlico and St. Luke’s, Carey Street. We will be looking at other models and ideas for ministry – urban, rural and suburban. The task is to be able to witness to gospel in the most effective way possible.

We have had as an organized mission of the diocese for several years Los Tres Santos. I am pleased to say that they are now occupying the building once home to St. James in Irvington. However with the leadership of the Rev. Wes Wubbenhorst on the diocesan staff, a wonderful partnership with the Diocese of Honduras, the work of the Rev, Miguel Vilar and Hector Rodriguez, who will be received from the Roman Catholic Church this summer, we now have Spanish speaking services at St. James, Westernport, The Cathedral of the Incarnation, St. George’s and St. Matthews in Dundalk and soon at St. Mark’s on the Hill in Pikesville. Hector is now our diocesan coordinator of Latino and Hispanic ministries. We envision more services in the coming year.

The Commission on Ministry working especially with the Igbo speaking communities in our diocese and the Virginia Theological Seminary is developing a process of formation for Igbo speaking ministries. The commission is also going to be looking at the Sudanese community meeting at St. Thomas, Towson. We are most pleased with the on-going ministry of Trinity Korean Episcopal Church and the leadership of the Rev. Paul Kim. The great increase in non-English speaking services in our diocese is one of the most

significant outreaches we have done as well as building up new communities of faith – of friends.

I remain convinced that the church needs the strongest and best equipped leaders for mission. I noted earlier the good work in Christian formation. The Commission on Ministry, the Standing Committee and I continue to want to have the strongest formation for priestly formation. We also want to have formation that mission directed and mission flexible. We continue to lead all dioceses in the church in ordained persons under the age of thirty-five. At the same time we have benefited greatly from the gifts and skills of priests of all ages.

A critical part of the pastoral ministry of your bishops and the diocese is to clergy families: spouses, partners and children. Last year at convention we launched FOCUS (Families of Clergy United in Support). We are all in grief over the death of our first convener, Barbara Smith. And we extend our sympathy to John, her entire family and St. Luke's. FOCUS is underway and has already had a retreat as well as other gatherings. A fund in Barbara's memory has been established to ensure that the good work of support for clergy families continues and that we honor the great legacy she left us.

Ministry development is all about the church moving forward in mission as we are called to do. I stated at the Lambeth Conference that we need to guard against "false" choices. It is a false choice to speak of having to choose between following the dictates of Matthew 25, that serving the least of all is to serve Christ himself and the dictates of Matthew 28 that we go out into the world proclaiming the gospel and baptizing in the name of the Trinity. The gospel is never a multiple choice! It is both to serve and to evangelize! We need to be compassionate and about the work of justice and we need to be about the work of evangelize. As the Rev. Dr. Walter Brueggeman told the House of Bishops this spring the Old Testament always being about holiness and about justice, we cannot do one without the other. Too often we have set up false choices and divide ourselves against one another instead of standing firmly against the devil!

We are in difficult times. I want to say to you as I did to a protester at Lambeth who asked me what is going to happen to my church. Nothing. It is Christ's church and not even the gates of hell can prevail against it. We need to realize this and start living and working as the church that Christ is counting on us to be. Also the difficult economic times require attention and good stewardship. But we are the Easter people – the earliest name given to the followers of Jesus. We are the people of hope because we know as Christ is Risen, God is in charge and God is making all things new! So let us go out and live and work as the people of Easter offering to the world true hope and true meaning.

The last thing a broken and contrite world needs is timid Christians, anxious and fearful. We need to show the world what it truly means to be "friends," fully living out the faith and hope of our Lord. This is what the "sacred bundle" of ministry development is all about!

Finally it is much better to be speaking to you in person and not into a recorder in the intensive care unit. I cannot thank you all enough for all of your love and prayers as I regained my health. So how am I doing? Well I will let Paul, John, Ringo and George tell you.

(A few verses of *Will You Still Love Me When I am Sixty-Four*)