



The Episcopal Diocese of New York

Report of the Rt. Rev. Mary D. Glasspool
To the 244th Diocesan Convention
Saturday, November 7, 2020
Cathedral Church of Saint John the Divine

Good afternoon and thank you to all who have been engaged with Convention today, and all who remain engaged right now as we begin to wrap things up. You don't need me to tell you that this 244th Convention has had some unique challenges not the least of which is trying to bridge the gap of separation between this largely empty yet glorious cathedral and the 500 of you who are watching at home or perhaps in your church's parish hall. Thank you for your faithfulness in sticking it out!

Recently I read a very contemporary book titled *Ten Lessons for a Post-Pandemic World* by Fareed Zakaria, the host of CNN's international affairs show. [W. W. Norton & Company, 2020] You might be able to guess some of the ten lessons Zakaria writes about – for example “Life Is Digital” and “Globalization Is Not Dead.” Some of Zakaria's lessons make me happy: “Aristotle Was Right – We Are Social Animals” and “What Matters Is Not The Quantity Of Government But The Quality.” Others are scary to me, such as “Inequality Will Get Worse” and “The World Is Becoming Bipolar.” But what made the book memorable for me was its conclusion, in which he used a very striking scene from the 1962 award-winning movie *Lawrence of Arabia* to make his final point.

It's a classic part of the movie. It's 1917 and British diplomat/adventurer T.E. Lawrence, the protagonist, is traveling with a group of Bedouin tribes he has convinced to attack the Ottoman forces at the port of Aqaba. They approach Aqaba from the land side of the port, needing to cross an extremely dangerous desert to do so. While they are traveling at night, it is discovered that one of the Arab men: Gasim – has fallen off his camel and is missing. Lawrence rides up to Sherif Ali, the leader of the tribe, to say they must go back to look for him. Sherif adamantly refuses, saying that if they turn back it will only mean death for them in the scorching desert. One of his aides tells Lawrence: *Gasim's time has come. It is written.* Lawrence snaps back *Nothing is written!* and he rides off alone, to search for Gasim. Through scorching heat, visual illusions, and sand cyclones Lawrence searches and eventually finds a half dead Gasim. He puts him on the back of his camel and rides to a hero's welcome at the oasis outside Aqaba where the men and their camels are filling themselves with the precious water. Sherif approaches the thirsty Lawrence with a canteen of water, and before he takes a sip, Lawrence calmly repeats *Nothing is written.*

It's Fareed Zakaria's way of saying to his readers: *Look. I've written “Ten Lessons for a Post-Pandemic World” – but these ten lessons are not predictions of the future. They are not meant to say what's **going** to happen. They are simply my analysis of the way things have been going right up until now. We still have a role to play in shaping the future. The decisions we make and how we behave and relate to one another still matter.*

In early March of this year, when we were all still learning about the virus that would change our lives in unimaginable ways and forever, someone gave me what seemed at the time a very small gift. The House of Bishops' meeting, originally scheduled to meet in person at Camp Allen in Texas, was changed to a remote meeting via an app that I had only heard about but never before used: Zoom. **Michelle Chang**, the Executive Assistant to both Bishop Shin and me, taught me how to schedule, monitor, and use the settings for the Zoom account, so that I could host my Table Group during the course of the Bishops' meeting. Little did I know that *that* small act of kindness and patient education would do so much to help me through the next nine-plus months of virtual meetings and gatherings. Thank you, Michelle!

It was also in March, with the ominous forecast that the pandemic would not be sufficiently under control by the time of this convention, that we made the decision to plan for an unprecedented remotely held Convention, and Bishop Dietsche appointed a small, working executive planning team comprised of the Rev. Matt Heyd, Convention Secretary; Sara Saavedra, Assistant Secretary; Alice Yurke, Chancellor of the Diocese of New York; Geoff Smith, Director of Technology; Nick Richardson, Director of Communications; and myself. We began meeting via Zoom in the late spring and then throughout the summer and into the fall. The concept and development of the Convention Rollout meetings and the desire to work to make everything as accessible as possible were initial concerns and quickly became values we worked with throughout the process. We operated with the values of **transparency, trust, accessibility, and agency** in all that we did. Each person on the Executive Team had his or her own role to play and things worked well in the planning. Yet we soon found the need to reach out and network with others and ask for help to try to cover the myriad of details that go into planning a convention, amid the challenges of doing so remotely.

The Church of the Heavenly Rest graciously lent us the services of three of their talented staff: Lucy Breidenthal, Lucas Thorpe, and Jillian Jameson with their grace and expertise on Zoom, all became part of the fabric of the Convention Rollout meetings. The Rev. Allison Moore, Cynthia Copeland, Jeannine Otis, Larry Marshall, and Lynnaia Main served creatively as a Liturgical Subcommittee, charged with providing the prayers and music that would inspire and hold the meetings together. They also reached out to others to take part in leading the prayers. We don't often hear the names of the behind-the-scenes tech crews, but this meeting would not be happening without the professional and faithful services of Tom Haggerty, Joey Wares and Marty Cole. Dori Griffiths, Antonio Goodwin, Shelby Edwards and Tyler Herron provided American Sign Language interpretation for all the meetings, and the captioning was expertly done by Randi Freeman. When we got down to the final Rollout meeting, considering the resolutions in advance, the chair of the Resolutions Committee: the Rev. Anne Sawyer, contributed her leadership skills to the presentations. These wonderful people all worked from the inside out, as it were.

But YOU ALL also played extremely important parts in our weekly meetings. We asked commissions, committees and some larger institutions to put together 5-7-minute videos to share with question and answer periods following each presentation. The Deacons of the Diocese, College Chaplaincies, Episcopal Charities, Congregational Development, Leadership Development, Social Concerns, the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, the Budget Committee, Global Mission, Anti-Racism, Christian Formation, Ecumenical and Interfaith, and Reparations all produced incredibly creative, thoughtful, thought-provoking, and informative videos that have enhanced our life together as a

Diocese. You can still view these presentations at our Diocesan website, and they are part of the official record of this convention. The many of you who participated firsthand in the Roll-out meetings contributed your presence and prayers and, in some cases, your helpful feedback, as well.

The main Convention Liturgy, an Evening Prayer Service featuring a powerful sermon from the Very Rev. Kelly Brown Douglas, also showed us the breadth and diversity of our Diocese. And throughout this intense week in our country's history, we have continued to do the work we needed to do, all the while *striving for justice and peace among all people, and respecting the dignity of every human being*. And so we come to today. I find myself needing to express my own profound *gratitude*, not only to the people I have already named, but also to some others.

It has been my privilege to continue to work with three of our commissions: the Ecumenical and Interfaith Commission, the Social Concerns Commission, and the Global Mission Commission. These Commissions are faithfully chaired by the Rev. Curt Hart, the Rev. Winnie Varghese, and the Rev. Nigel Massey, each of whom works diligently to fulfill God's mission. The Global Women's Fund, chaired by Judi Counts, the Reparations Committee, co-chaired by Cynthia Copeland and the Rev. Richard Witt, and the Antiracism Committee, chaired by Carla Burns, continue to function creatively and responsibly in serving the Diocese and the world. Curt+, Winnie+, Nigel+, Judi, Cynthia, Richard+, and Carla: *thank you, more than I can say*. I'm not the one to guarantee that your names are written in the heavenly book; but I can assure you they will be written in the Journal of this Convention – and with the gratitude of our entire Diocese.

The Bishop's Staff has also worked diligently from home and I haven't seen most of them, in person, since March. But I do remember what they look like in a two-inch by two-inch square on the Zoom screen, and I continue to count myself blessed to serve this Diocese alongside them.

Then there's Bishop Andy and Bishop Allen! I can't imagine having lived the last nine months as a single bishop in a more isolated part of the country. Each of you has given me counsel, comfort, and assistance, as well as challenge and companionship along this journey. We are very different people, yet we love the people of the Diocese of New York, we love the Church, and we love God – and we are bound together in that love. Thank you.

So, we come to the end of this 244th Convention. Our theme has been from the Book of Revelation: *See, I am making all things new*. (21:5b) Let's put that verse back in its larger context. The writer of Revelation, John, writes: *Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "See, the home of God is among mortals, he will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away." And the one who was seated on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new."*

My friends, as we conclude this Convention and go forth from here to begin to imagine Thanksgiving, Advent, and Christmas in new ways, continuing our work in the

world, let us give thanks to the God who has brought us thus far, and is with us still. It is often said and it is true: we are in this together! I pray that we will keep our eyes open, our ears tuned, and our hearts turned toward the God who is mysteriously yet faithfully making all things new.