

*Bishop's Annual Address*  
*231<sup>st</sup> Annual Convention, Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts*  
*Nov. 5, 2016*

Most of you know that, during our 18-year sojourn away from Massachusetts, my family and I lived eight years in Chicago and 10 years in Cleveland. Thus, in the recent World Series, the question of whether our fan loyalty would lie with the Chicago Cubs or the Cleveland Indians loomed large.

The answer seemed easy enough. The Cubs had gone 40 years longer without a championship. The Cubs' perennial identity as lovable losers had always been familiar to us as pre-2004 Red Sox fans. Plus Wrigley Field and Fenway Park felt like familiar siblings. Naturally, we would cheer for the Cubs. ["Go, Cubs, Go!"]

But then Game One rolled around 10 days ago. Watching the game underway in Cleveland, I found myself pulling with all my might for the Cleveland team. Our 10 years in Ohio were, after all, more recent than those in Illinois. We attended far more games at Progressive Field than we had managed at Wrigley. More recent nostalgia was also at play--still missing our countless friends from St. Paul's whose eager excitement about this World Series was all over Facebook. ["O-H-I-O!"]

But my partisan pull to Cleveland was not just sentimentality. It has to do with what I hope for that city, far beyond its sports accomplishments or lack thereof. Throughout our decade there we were constantly struck (and often mystified) by the way Cleveland residents can seem so anxious for reassurance that their city is worthy of respect. Which, honestly, it really is! Cleveland has a venerable history, a spirit of civic responsibility, a warm and devoted populace and cultural institutions far beyond other cities of its size.

Cleveland was once the fifth largest city in the nation. But postwar economic transitions were hard on Cleveland. Some of the hits were especially humiliating. Infamously, in the 1960s, oil slicks would catch fire and burn on the Cuyahoga River. The image remained long after the ecological reality had changed.

The point is that too often Clevelanders are stuck feeling either nostalgic or defensive about their past, rather than attentive and hopeful about their future. As long as they are still hoping to reclaim the glory of Fifth-Largest-City Status, or feeling chagrined about flames on the Cuyahoga, they remain insecure about their solid, hopeful identity as a really fine, small city for the 21st century.

Which is why I was pulling for Cleveland in the World Series--as one more way for the city finally to look fully forward instead of back. As any Red Sox fan knows, it took 2004 for Boston finally to stop talking about the Bambino and poor Billy Buckner.

There's something about looking forward.

### **Embracing brave change**

Now, I have been dwelling on Cleveland at some length because I find this same dynamic at play too often in our life in the church. Making my way around the Diocese of Massachusetts, I hear many testimonies to some previous era. “The pews of this church used to be packed,” I hear. “We used to have a church school class for every grade level,” I hear. “This parish always had two priests,” I hear. And I understand that in many places letting go of such history can be hard, the trajectory can seem discouraging. But, like Cleveland, remaining in a permanent state of wishing for some earlier time of perceived glory will not help us to face the future. Strategizing to recreate the church of the past will not reveal to us how to be the Church of Jesus Christ today and tomorrow. We must celebrate and give thanks for the blessings of our history, to be sure. And we must listen for new ways in which God is calling us to respond to the world, even now.

And this, my friends, is what is meant by “Embracing Brave Change.” And this is what our proposed mission strategy is all about.

If you are a Process Junkie, has this been a year for you! Listening sessions; focus groups; online surveys; phone surveys; theme coding sessions; initial draft; feedback sessions; revised draft; more feedback sessions--man, you were in pig heaven.

If you are *not* a Process Junkie, then maybe you are weary of it. And I understand this. I am not by nature enthralled by endless process. But here are three things I want to say about our mission strategy process these nine months:

First: We had three really strong teams to lead us in this work. Team One designed the process; Team Two carried out all that listening and data collection; and Team Three worked together with your bishops to distill and reflect, and craft the proposed mission strategy which is before you today. These are smart, talented, faithful people, committed to articulating what they’d heard from you, and what they were hearing from the Holy Spirit. And we owe them a debt of gratitude for their work.

Second: We’ve all heard that “the medium is the message.” In this case it is absolutely true that “the process has been essential to the message.” It has mattered to me that the process by which we have arrived at the proposed mission strategy be reflective of the way that I hope we can serve together as bishop and diocese in the years ahead: broadly participatory; deliberate; listening for the Holy Spirit; patient; transparent; imperfect--no doubt--and open to hearing about that; consensus-seeking; candid, yet hopeful. The mission strategy is, I believe, an honest yet hopeful product.

And third: This mission strategy strives to dwell between a 30,000-foot document that would have articulated general values and vision but be of no real use in guiding resource allocation and direction, or a 2,000-foot document that would have articulated a handful of tactical next steps, but be outdated very soon.

What we have is in between: a vision and some initial steps, while still requiring a good bit of strategic thinking, prioritizing, praying and fleshing-out. Those will be our steps in the next year and more.

### **At the heart of our mission strategy**

So here it is before us. Let me say a word about the three primary planks that I believe are at the heart of this document: Reimagining Our Congregations; Building Our Diocesan Relationships; and Engaging Our World.

First plank, **Reimagining Our Congregations.** Let's imagine deepening our relationship with Jesus, and more readily sharing our story of faith. Let's imagine being able to focus less on our buildings and budgets and more on our mission in the world. Let's imagine models of leadership which uphold the ministry of all the baptized even more fully. Let's imagine more bi-vocational clergy, not as a solution to a management problem, but as an opportunity for even more bridges between church and world. Let's imagine small congregations thriving in equal measure alongside larger ones, each offering its own unique gifts.

I hear in our congregations a growing anxiety about the ground shifting under our feet. I hear a yearning to have hard conversations about resources early enough that creative options are still available. I hear from some who feel worn out by the challenges of sustaining their institutions, and from others who are really excited about new possibilities.

In today's reading from the prophet Jeremiah: *"Surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, ... to give you a future with hope."*

Dear friends, let's imagine that future!

The second plank: **Building Our Diocesan Relationships.** Let's build more working partnerships, and strengthen existing ones. Let's build better networks around common passions and challenges. Let's build better communication channels. Let's build ways for deeper conversation about racism and other forms of oppression. Let's build a community that fully recognizes and rejoices at the global Anglican presence which is right here in our own diocesan congregations. Let's build trust, so that we can begin to say "our diocese" instead of "the diocese," not just because the linguistically obsessed bishop asks us to, but because the web of our relationships truly makes it *our* diocese.

I hear that when folks engage in opportunities like Fall Resource Day, they experience a real strength of relationships. I also hear that folks in some areas feel disconnected from others or from the rest of our diocese. I hear that some of us experience our diocesan assessment as more of a tax or a membership fee than as a common share in joint mission, and I hope we can change that perception. I hear that when mutual support is known and experienced within our diocese, it is a very great gift.

We experienced that gift in this room yesterday when after the first 45 minutes or so of legislative procedures, necessary procedures and important ones and part of the work of the church, we nonetheless were feeling, maybe, I'll say I was feeling a little bit sterile and spiritless in the process. And then we got invited into tables, into groups, into conversation, into sharing with one another about our hopes, and our experiences and our delights. And then we caught a glimpse of ourselves as community. Someone at my table said, This is why that icon of the Holy Trinity reminds us that it's in the nature of divinity to be in community. And I thought, wouldn't it be interesting if the icon of the Holy Trinity had its members sitting auditorium style, and one had a gavel. When we're really the Church, we know it and we sense it, because we know we are in community with one another.

In today's reading from Ephesians, Saint Paul invites us to *"grow ... into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament, ... promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love."*

Dear friends, let's build that body!

Third plank: **Engaging Our World.** Let's engage ever more fully in the mission orientation which so enlivens the Church. Let's engage in more collaboration with ecumenical and interfaith partners and all people of goodwill in our local communities. Let's engage, before it's too late, in the continuing struggle to be stewards of God's Creation. Let's engage in global partnerships, serving Christ in others and bearing witness to genuine Anglican communion.

I see you already engaged in the world. I see it when multiple congregations on Cape Cod join to conduct a camp for children of incarcerated parents. I see you engaged in the world when a deacon and her church in Haverhill create a safe place for women victimized by sex trafficking and domestic violence. I see you engaging the world when our B-PEACE for Jorge team advocates, on our behalf, for sensible legislation and safety measures to reduce the scourge of gun violence. I see you engaging the world when, just this week, some dozen of our members respond to an urgent call from the Episcopal Church in North Dakota to join them in a witness at Standing Rock Reservation. They're back with us today. We look forward to hearing from them a little later and a greeting from the bishop of North Dakota to us. I see you engaging the world in every corner of the diocese when I see you in afterschool and literacy programs that are lifting up "all our children" and their families. In all these ways and so many more.

In today's familiar Gospel reading, Jesus says: *You are the salt of the earth ... you are the light of the world!"*

Dear friends, let's engage that world, with the light of Christ!

### **Enough of paranoia**

Now, because I began this address with an analogy drawn from baseball, I need to return to the matter of winning and losing, with a corrective. This relates to how we will move

forward with our mission strategies. It relates also to our current experience of national discourse.

Last year our colleague Rick Stecker edited a previously unpublished work by the late John Snow, professor of pastoral theology at EDS and mentor to many of us in the 1970s and 80s. The book is entitled *I Win, We Lose: The New Social Darwinism and the Death of Love*.<sup>(i)</sup> John Snow presents a searing critique of the way that our American culture has unconsciously accepted the social theory of “survival of the fittest.” And how this, in turn, has caused us to see the world around us in terms of Winners and Losers.

Perhaps I fell into this trap myself with my opening baseball analogy. For John Snow describes “*the emergence of professional sports as the central metaphor for reality in American life.... Winning and losing, success and failure, victory and defeat became the only trusted categories of existence, and the primary motivation for work was not help with the maintenance of a human society but to succeed, to be a winner.*” [pp. 117-118]

Snow goes on to say that viewing ourselves and others as winners or losers results in a steady undercurrent of fear. He writes:

*Metanoia is the Greek word that refers to a change in mind, a different way of thinking. Metanoia is the opposite of paranoia. We cannot seem to learn the basic lesson of the New Testament and of history that fear is the cause of paranoid behavior. At its heart, it is the assumption that each person is a potential adversary of every other person. ... The more I imagine this anger in another, the more my behavior becomes defensive and hostile towards others, and the more that that happens, the more frightened and angry others become toward me. Paranoid feelings are apt to cause runaway escalation. ... Only love can cast out fear and allow us the luxury of metanoia.* [p. 101]

Snow’s description, penned 35 years ago, has a deep resonance with our current global and national experience. Fear is all about us. And if, as Scripture says, love casts out fear, I observe it to be true also that fear casts out love.

The metanoia, the change of mind to which Snow invites us, is a release from the winner-loser mentality, and thereby a release from the related tyranny of fear. I would submit that in an election season to be released from the winner-loser mentality does not mean we become indifferent as to the outcome, but rather that the object of our concern is not personal or tribal winning or losing, but rather the well-being of humanity itself. The dangers in our world are real. There's no mistake about that. But we must not allow them to divide us. We have had enough of paranoia. Let's give the world some metanoia!

Christians, from the beginning, have concerned themselves with a vision of the church and the world which withstood controversies from within and persecution from without. Again, from John Snow:

*Certain primary values of the community held firm through it all. It was simply and thoroughly understood that, until the last day, people were not left to starve while others ate*

*from their surplus. The aged, sick, and infirm were not to be left unattended. Children were to be cared for. Force was not to be an ordering principle of corporate life. The basic resources of the earth were to be shared, not accumulated or squandered. ...*

*Christianity was not a religion for winners. It was not concerned with success when it was most truly what it had been created to be. It was in the world to love, ... a human family concerned with each other's welfare, sharing those life-giving resources which God and the Earth provides them, seeking no victories that require the pain and humiliation of others. ...[Christians] seek only that gentle victory over terror or despair that they have always sought. They claim salvation in the reconciliation of the alienated, hurting and fallen humankind with the God who loves them, through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. [pp. 124-125]*

To seek that gentle victory over fear and despair that Christians have always sought. To claim salvation in sharing the reconciling ministry of Jesus Christ. Now there's a vision statement: a vision for our national decisions; a vision for our diocesan mission strategies in the next decade; a vision for our calling as Christians unto the Day of the Lord.

Finally, a personal word: A few weeks ago marked the second anniversary of our consecration celebration here in the diocese. I was on the phone with my mother. She said, "Honey, I was looking at the lovely pictures from your incarceration."

"No, Mom," I said, "No, no. It was a consecration."

"Oh," she said, "I knew that didn't sound quite right."

I am not, in fact, incarcerated here with you! However, I am, by the grace of God, yoked in Christ's ministry with you. And for that I am deeply grateful. And once more I thank you, dear friends--for the sacredness of your trust, for the depth of your prayers and for the very great joy of your companionship. Thank you.

(i) John Hall Snow, *I Win, We Lose: The New Social Darwinism and the Death of Love*, ed. By Frederick Stecker (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2016).