

**The 151<sup>st</sup> Annual Convention of The Episcopal Diocese of Albany**

**(June 7<sup>th</sup> – June 9<sup>th</sup> 2019)**

**Bishop's Address**

**By**

**The Right Reverend William H. Love**

Dear Friends, last year we gathered at this time to celebrate the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Diocese of Albany. It was a grand and glorious occasion – one that we were able to share with our Presiding Bishop, the Most Rev. Michael B. Curry. I wanted it to be a positive experience for everyone. I wanted it to be a time to celebrate the life of the Diocese over the previous 150 years and all that the Lord has accomplished in and through the people and clergy of the Diocese during that time. I wanted it to be a joyful time in which we could all gather as brothers and sisters united in Christ to worship God and celebrate His many blessings in our lives and the ministry He calls us to as Disciples making Disciples. By God's grace and the hard work of a lot of folks, the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration was a wonderful success and blessed time, turning out even better than I had hoped.

And then – came General Convention 2018, and its aftermath. As much as I would like to come here this evening and spend the next 20 to 30 minutes talking about all the positive things going on around the Diocese, and there are in fact many positive things for which you are to be commended that I could highlight, I will leave that to others to share in their various reports. Tonight, I need to talk about the crisis that faces this Diocese and Christianity in general. The Diocese of Albany is in the midst of a battle whose outcome is not yet known. The very nature and character of this Diocese as we have known it, is under attack from forces outside as well as within. Each of us must decide how we will respond.

We have all read the final chapter. We know how the war ends -- God is triumphant! The question is - whose side will we be on when that final day comes? Will we "Stand Firm in the Holy Spirit, striving together as One" in Christ and His Holy Word, or will we cave under the pressure of political correctness and special interest groups, being driven by the shifting winds of culture and society? Will we speak God's truth in love, or will we embrace false teachings to the physical, spiritual and psychological detriment of others? Will we be "strong and courageous" as God commanded Joshua as he was preparing to lead the Israelites across the river Jordan into the Promise Land, or will we cower in fear of what others may say or think or do? The decision is ours.

Last summer, with the passage of Resolution B-012 by the 79<sup>th</sup> General Convention of the Episcopal Church, a ticking time bomb was launched into the middle of the Diocese of Albany, waiting to explode. As the clock ticked away, the level of tension and division between those

with differing opinions in the Diocese regarding same-sex marriage intensified. Old wounds were reopened, and much of the goodwill created by the 150<sup>th</sup> Diocesan Convention and the visit of the Presiding Bishop evaporated. Many throughout the Diocese (Clergy and Laity) found themselves on edge waiting to see how I would respond – some hoping I would give in to the demands of B-012, while the majority prayed I would remain true to the Holy Scriptures and the Church’s traditional understanding of marriage.

On November 10<sup>th</sup> with the release of my Pastoral Letter and Directive upholding Albany’s Diocesan Marriage Canon 16 in support of the Church’s traditional understanding of marriage as found in Holy Scripture and in opposition to G.C. Resolution B-012, the clock ran out and the fireworks began. As many of you know, the local news media launched a barrage of articles and editorial attacks against the Bishop and Diocese of Albany. Hundreds of emails, phone calls, text messages, and letters from literally all over the world (minus Antarctica) started pouring in and continue to this day – some angry and quiet creative in showing their displeasure, but the vast majority have been encouraging, supportive and thankful for the stance that I and we as a Diocese have taken. For all of you who have shared words of encouragement and have been holding me, my family, and the Diocese of Albany up in prayer, I thank you. Your prayers and support mean more than I can ever adequately express.

With that said, I did not issue the November 10<sup>th</sup> Pastoral Letter and Directive in an effort to either please or purposely anger anyone. I issued the Pastoral Letter and Directive in an effort to be faithful and obedient to that which I believe the Lord has called me to as the bishop of this diocese and a bishop in Christ’s one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.

I pray each of you had a chance to read the Pastoral Letter for yourself. If not, it can be found on the Diocesan Website (by going to the Home Page and scrolling down to the bottom to Resources and B-012). In the letter, I clearly outlined why I have taken the actions that I have, and why I cannot in good conscience as your Bishop and a disciple of Jesus Christ support B-012. There is not time this evening to reiterate all that was said. Again, I would encourage you to read what I actually said, and not the words and lies the media and others have tried to attribute to me, or the things that were taken out of context. Please know that if I had it to do all over again, I would issue the exact same letter, believing it to be the message the Lord gave me to share with the Diocese of Albany and the wider Church.

Since November 10<sup>th</sup>, I have been in communications with Presiding Bishop Michael Curry, all the bishops of Province II, numerous other bishops of The Episcopal Church and the wider Anglican Communion, as well as most of the clergy and many of the laity of the Diocese of Albany, to include many who are in a very different place than I am on this issue. In all the conversations I have had, no one has persuaded me that I have misunderstood God’s intent for marriage, in spite of societies changing views.

With the passage of B-012 by the General Convention, a line has been drawn in the sand -- a line that I am unable and unwilling to cross. As all of you know, in January of this year, the Presiding Bishop placed a partial restriction on my ministry in regard to overseeing Title IV Disciplinary Proceedings involving same-sex marriage. In issuing the partial restriction, the Presiding Bishop stated, "Bishop Love's conduct in this regard may constitute a canonical offense under Canon IV.4(1)(c) ("abide by the promises and vows made when ordained") and Canon IV.4(1)(h)(9) ("any Conduct Unbecoming a Member of the Clergy").

As I informed the Diocese after receiving the partial restriction, I plan to appeal the disciplinary action taken against me as well as officially challenge the legality of B-012 and bring clarity as to which has more authority when at odds with one another -- a General Convention Resolution or a Diocesan Canon.

Unfortunately, my appeal is temporarily on hold, as I await a formal charge being brought against me. It has now been over four months since the Presiding Bishop took disciplinary action against me, and to date, I have still not been officially charged with anything. I have asked (for my sake and the sake of the Diocese) that this process not be drawn out. I was told an investigation into the allegations made against me would be conducted and I should hear something in a couple of weeks. That was in the middle of February. It is now June. As soon as I hear something, I will let you all know.

At the end of our 150<sup>th</sup> Diocesan Convention, as I was walking Presiding Bishop Curry to his car, knowing the potential problems that might result from legislation that was coming before the upcoming 79<sup>th</sup> General Convention, I told the Presiding Bishop how much I appreciated him coming to be with in Albany and how it was my hope and prayer (as a lifelong Episcopalian) that there would always be a place in The Episcopal Church for bishops, clergy, laity and dioceses that were theologically conservative and orthodox in their faith. He said that was his hope as well; that he had been richly blessed by his time with us and that the Diocese of Albany has much to offer the wider Episcopal Church.

The jury is still out as to whether The Episcopal Church is truly welcoming, inclusive and diverse enough for those of us who cannot embrace TEC's current progressive agenda. If we are to have a real place in The Episcopal Church, we must be provided a way to remain true to our understanding of Holy Scripture and the sacramental nature of the Church, and to differentiate ourselves from TEC's progressive actions and beliefs that violate God's Word (as we understand it), and are so offensive and problematic to the vast majority of the wider Anglican Communion and Body of Christ. Anything less is the equivalent of TEC's enslavement of its conservative and orthodox members. For a Church that is constantly touting "justice issues," I would argue it is currently doing a great injustice to its conservative and orthodox brothers and sisters.

I am very much aware that there are a few parishes in the Diocese of Albany that feel much more politically and theologically aligned with the wider Episcopal Church and feel stuck and

frustrated in the Diocese of Albany. While I have great love and appreciation for every member of this Diocese (even those who believe differently on these issues) and would hate to see anyone leave the Diocese, I asked the Presiding Bishop if it would be possible for those parishes who wished to be legally transferred to another diocese more in line with their beliefs to do so. I was told that there is currently no legal way to do that. Given the current deep theological divisions within the Church, it may be that it is time for The Episcopal Church to think outside the box and make provisions for non-geographic dioceses. I reminded the Presiding Bishop that when TEC wants to do something, it usually finds a way.

I share all of this with you this evening, because it is important that everyone understands that the issues before us and their consequences are far more complex and involved than simply whether to allow same-sex marriage to occur in the Diocese of Albany. Besides for the fallout already mentioned related to B-012 and the issue of same-sex marriage, the Diocese as a whole is being negatively impacted in a number of other ways as well. One of which is our ability to recruit clergy to help fill the 11 vacancies we currently have. Some clergy are hesitant to come to the Diocese because of the uncertainty of what is going to happen to the Bishop. Will I be deposed or forced to resign? Others are under a false allusion as to the true nature of the Diocese, having believed the lies and misrepresentations being spread around by people who have no clue who the Diocese of Albany truly is. Others are concerned about the finances of the parishes they are considering. Clergy interested in coming to a parish look at its relationship with the rest of the Diocese and whether or not the parish is honoring its assessment.

That raises another issue that we as a Diocese have to take an honest look at. I realize no one likes talking about money and the assessments, but the reality is, it takes money to help finance the mission of the Church at all levels – as individual Christians, as parishes, and as a diocese and province. Tomorrow morning, our Diocesan Treasurer, Clark Curtis, is going to present the 2020 Diocesan Budget, as well as talk about the current financial situation of the Diocese and its impact on the 2019 Budget. We have some real hurdles to overcome.

The level of financial giving to the Diocese has taken a huge hit this year – so much so that diocesan programs that have been such a blessing to the clergy and people of the Diocese over the past several years are in real jeopardy. As of May 31, 2019, the Diocese has received \$81,937 less than the amount received at this time last year. The projected diocesan deficit has more than doubled from the beginning of the year going from \$24,200 to \$55,651 (primarily related to the loss of income, not increased spending). If the current downward spiral in giving continues, the projected deficit will grow even larger. The last time the level of giving in the Diocese was this low was in 2012.

I realize that not all of the drop in financial giving to the Diocese is related to B-012 and the Diocese's stance on same-sex marriage, but a significant portion is. There are people on both sides of these issues voting with their feet and their pocket book. For those parishes and individuals who are purposefully withholding assessment payments or pledges as a means of

protest, I would ask you to reconsider your actions for the good of the Diocese as well as yourself. We are all in this together and have a responsibility to one another.

In the coming days, I will be appointing a special committee to look at the growing budget crisis and ask them to make recommendations to me and the Diocesan Council on how best to deal with the growing deficit. Whatever corrective actions are taken will involve cuts that will impact all of us.

I am especially concerned for a variety of reasons about the 16 parishes that have chosen to pay nothing toward their Diocesan Assessment thus far this year. Parishes in the Episcopal Church and Anglican Communion are not independent congregations. We are not a Congregationalist Church where everyone fends for themselves. We are part of something larger than ourselves, and as a result have a responsibility to one another to assist in the financial support of the ministry of the wider body. For those parishes that have chosen to pay nothing or only a tiny fraction of their assessment, I ask you to think about the message you are sending to your fellow Brothers and Sisters in Christ around the Diocese who are having to shoulder the financial burdens of the Diocese with no help from you. They are paying the bills, while you are still reaping the benefits.

I am very aware of the financial stress that almost all of our parishes are experiencing. For all of you who are honoring your assessment, or at least making a gallant effort to do so, please know how very much I appreciate your faithfulness and the sacrificial offering you are making in support of the ministry of the Church and the spread of the Gospel of Jesus Christ at the local and diocesan level and throughout the world. God Bless You!

I would now like to shift for just a moment from the current struggles of the Diocese of Albany to the struggles and attacks against Christianity and the Church at large – something that impacts every one of us. Gone are the days where going to Church is the socially acceptable thing to do, especially in the western world. We now live in a post-Christian era where the religious freedoms we once enjoyed and this country was founded on, are not only in jeopardy, but are actively being attacked.

I was recently honored to have been invited to be the graduation speaker at Trinity School for Ministry in Ambridge, PA. The message the Lord put on my heart to share with the graduating class is the same message I believe He has for each of us as we face the ongoing trials and difficulties of sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ in this broken, hurting, confused and misguided world in which we live.

The message the Lord has for us is: **“Be strong and courageous!”** (Joshua 1:6). That was the Lord’s command to Joshua as he was about to lead the Israelites across the river Jordan into the Promise Land, and that is His Command to each of us as we live out our Christian faith in response to the Lord’s call on our lives, and all the uncertainties before us.

As Christianity finds itself coming under ever greater attack here at home and abroad, the Church is in desperate need of strong and courageous leadership (lay and ordained). It needs godly men and women who are willing to pick up their cross in obedience to our Lord Jesus Christ and follow Him where ever He might lead, even to Calvary if necessary.

In an article entitled “The Countries where It’s Most Dangerous to Be a Christian in 2019,” Joe Carter, referencing a report from Open Doors USA, stated “One in every nine Christians in the world lives in an area, or in a culture, in which Christianity is illegal, forbidden, or punished.” He went on to state that in the top 50 countries identified on the World Watch List 2019 reporting period [for the previous 12 months], “a total of 1,266 churches or Christian buildings were attacked; 2,625 Christians were detained without trial, arrested, sentenced and imprisoned; and 4,136 Christians were killed for faith-related reasons. On average, that’s 11 Christians killed every day for their faith.”

Not included in these numbers were the recent terrorist attacks targeting Christians in Sri Lanka in which approximately 253 people were killed and 500 injured on Easter Sunday. To be a Christian today in many parts of the world can be quite dangerous. As witnessed in the numbers above, it may cost you your life. Are you willing to die for your faith? When push comes to shove, how much are we truly willing to sacrifice for the Lord? Jesus gave His all for us on the cross. How much are we willing to give for Him?

I am reminded of the 20 Coptic Christians and 1 Ghanaian citizen who were martyred on a Libyan seashore in January 2015 by ISIS. The picture of the 21 men kneeling side by side on the sand with a masked jihadists standing behind each man holding a knife to their throat is permanently engrained in my mind. Reportedly each man was given the option of denying their faith in Jesus Christ and having their life spared, or being beheaded. Each man chose to die for Christ rather than deny their faith. It is said that the Ghanaian who was not a Christian was so inspired by the faith of the 20 Coptic Christians that he too chose to die for Christ along with his co-workers.

The Lord never promised that living a Christian life would be easy, or that once we signed on the dotted line and said I believe, all would go well and that we would never experience pain or sorrow or suffering or loss. In fact He said just the opposite.

Jesus said, *“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?” (Mark 8:34-36).*

It is amazing that as we look around the world today, the places such as Africa and Asia where the Church is growing the most and where the Holy Spirit most seems to be at work, are the very places where Christians are suffering the most for their faith. Despite the attacks and threats of violence directed against them, by God’s grace, they have remained “strong and

courageous” and the Lord is blessing them and using them to be a blessing and encouragement to others. May He do the same with us. While I don’t look forward to or invite persecution for myself or anyone else, the growing attacks on the Church in the West may be the very thing needed to help bring the Church alive and recognize our utter dependence on Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Here in the United States, the level of physical attacks against Christians is on the rise, as witnessed by recent church shootings and the burning of churches), however certainly nothing on the scale as that found in parts of Africa and the Middle East where entire Christian villages are being annihilated, and in China where the Communist Government is systematically rounding up and imprisoning thousands of House Church leaders and their members.

For those of us in the West, I believe the greatest threat to the Church and individual Christians is currently being manifested under the guise of social justice, anti-hate rhetoric, and political correctness. Whatever the source or justification, let there be no doubt that Christianity and our religious freedoms are under attack.

When you have a masked jihadist holding a knife to your throat demanding that you denounce your belief in Jesus Christ, you know your faith is under attack. When the forces of culture and society encourage you to embrace a particular agenda all in the name of social justice or women’s rights, or political correctness we can sometimes compromise our faith and violate God’s Holy Word before we realize what has happened. Again, I would argue that the greatest threat to the Church in the West comes from the ongoing cultural wars over human sexuality and same-sex marriage; abortion; “hate-speech legislation” and court rulings by judges who seem to have little to no regard for the U.S. Constitution (particularly the First Amendment and its guarantee of religious freedom and freedom of speech). I am convinced that the day will come in our lifetime, when a person who stands up and speaks about sexual morality (particularly in regard to homosexuality or transgenderism) and quotes Leviticus or Romans – will be charged with a “hate crime” and either fined or imprisoned for doing so. The current “Equality Act” just passed by the House and now before the U.S. Senate may very well create that scenario. Are you prepared to go to jail for the Gospel’s sake? What is happening in other parts of the world is at our doorstep.

The Apostle Paul warned Timothy that “...*the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions.*” (*II Timothy 4:3*) Looking at all that is going on in parts of the Church today in regard to human sexuality, marriage and abortion, a case could be made that Paul was speaking about our generation.

Tragically, as I look at the shrinking numbers in the main-line denominations in the United States, to include The Episcopal Church, I see an ever growing number of churches that are drifting as if in a rudderless boat blown to and fro by the political and societal winds of the day.

Many of our church and political leaders and people have been deceived and led astray by modern cultural forces and political correctness.

Unfortunately as pointed out by Pastor Matt Chandler (the lead teaching pastor at The Village Church in Flower Mound, Texas and President of Acts 29) “When the voice of a culture, and not the Word of Christ, governs the Church, then it is no longer the church of Christ. It’s just a social club of people desperately trying to keep up with the zeitgeist.”

My dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, THAT IS NOT who the Lord is calling the Diocese of Albany to be -- He has called us to be “Disciples Making Disciples!” If we are to be true to our calling; it essential that we have godly people and leaders (men and women, lay and ordained) who:

- Are willing to stand up for their faith and not be afraid to be identified as a Christian;
- Who don’t accept the popular politically correct belief that all world religions are essentially equal and lead to God and salvation;
- People and leaders who believe in the one true God -- “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” as professed in the Nicene Creed and who can say the Nicene Creed without crossing their fingers;
- People and leaders who accept and proclaim in word and deed that Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior and that He meant what He said when He proclaimed: *“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” (John 14:6);*
- People and leaders who recognize and will uphold the authority of Holy Scripture, believing the Bible to be the Word of God and containing all things necessary for salvation;
- People and leaders who are prepared to be in the world, but not of the world (enslaved by materialism and all the ways of the world that easily lead us away from God rather than to God);
- People and leaders who will humble themselves and be guided and led by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, recognizing that *“apart from [Christ], we can do nothing” (John 15:5);*
- People and leaders who are committed to serving God and His Church, sacrificially giving of themselves as they share the Good News of Jesus Christ in response to the Lord’s command as outlined in the Great Commission to *“Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” (Matthew 28:19-20)*

Jesus didn’t send the Apostles, nor all those who would come after them (to include you and me) -- into the world to be of the world (adopting its sinful and fallen ways), but rather He sends us, His Church into the world to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ -- to speak His truth, and to be a channel through which His love and mercy and healing grace may touch and transform the world around us, calling people to repent and turn to the Lord, in order to receive

His gift of salvation, that He promises to all who believe in Him and accept Him as Lord and Savior of their life.

Dear Friends, I know I have hit you with a lot tonight. Some of the things I have raised are not easy to hear, especially some of the financial, political and societal struggles facing the Diocese and the Church at large, but they are things we need to be aware of and talk about and work through if we are to be the People of God our Lord is calling us to be. There is certainly much that could divide us if we allow it to. However, that which unites us – Jesus Christ -- is far greater.

Just as Peter discovered when he stepped out of the boat, if we focus on the storms raging around us, we will sink. If we keep our focus on our Lord Jesus Christ, He will bring us safely through all the storms of this life to the other side.

My dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, God calls us to be “Strong and Courageous;” To “Stand Firm in the Holy Spirit, Striving Together As One,” (Philippians 1:27) as we go forth boldly in the name of Jesus Christ, trusting in His promise to be with us always, even to the very end of the age. I pray you all have a very blessed and joyful Convention Weekend. Come Holy Spirit! Come! Amen!!!