

The 152nd Annual Convention of The Episcopal Diocese of Albany

(October 24, 2020)

Bishop's Address

By

The Right Reverend William H. Love

Opening Prayer and Remarks:

Dear Friends in Christ – Welcome! The 152nd Annual Convention of the Diocese of Albany will now come to order. Let us pray:

Almighty and ever living God, source of all wisdom and understanding, be present with all those who take counsel at this 152nd Annual Convention of the Diocese of Albany, for the renewal and mission of Your Church. Gracious Father, we pray for Thy holy catholic Church. Fill it with all truth, in all truth with all peace. Where it is corrupt, purify it; where it is in error, direct it; where in anything it is amiss, reform it. Where it is right, strengthen it; where it is in want, provide for it; where it is divided, reunite it. Teach us in all things to seek first Your honor and glory. Guide us to perceive what is right, and grant us both the courage to pursue it and the grace to accomplish it. Grant that Your Word may be truly preached and truly heard, Your sacraments faithfully administered and faithfully received. By Your Holy Spirit, fashion our lives according to the example of Your Son, and grant that we may show the power of Your love to all among whom we live. Inspire our witness to Your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, that all may know the power of His forgiveness and the hope of His resurrection, who lives, and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Before proceeding, I would like to take just a moment to remember in our prayers the nine diocesan clergy who have died this past year: “Almighty God, we remember this day before Thee thy faithful servants: Fr. Wayne Bowers+, Rev. Canon Clinton Dugger+, Fr. Fred Munro Ferguson, Fr. Ronald Gerber, Deacon Robert Heighton, Rev. Canon James Kenyon, Fr. John Kettlewell, Fr. Federico Serra Lima, and Fr. Michael Shank; and we pray that, having opened to them the gates of larger life, thou wilt receive them more and more into thy joyful service, that, with all who have faithfully served Thee in the past, they may share in the eternal victory of Jesus Christ our Lord; who liveth and reigneth with Thee, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever.” Amen.

Dear Friends, this year's virtual Diocesan Convention is unlike any other in our 152-year history as an independent diocese. This would have been our 22nd year to hold the Diocesan Convention at Camp of the Woods in beautiful Speculator, NY. Unfortunately, COVID-19 changed all of that.

Rather than three days of beautiful Spirit-filled worship, wonderful workshops, inspiring plenary sessions with outstanding guest speakers, a powerful healing service, and time to visit and socialize with family and friends from around the Diocese and wider Anglican Communion, as well as the Youth Rally for our older kids and Vacation Bible School for our younger kids, this year, due to our inability to gather in person and the limitations placed upon us by a virtual Zoom format, we are having to focus primarily on the essential canonically-required business of the Church, without all the added extras which we have come to love and appreciate these past 22 years.

By God's grace, we hope to be back at Camp of the Woods next June, but for now we give thanks to God for enabling us to gather, even at a distance, during these difficult times, in this virtual format. A tremendous amount of work went into making this meeting possible.

While many folks have worked tirelessly in preparation for today's meeting and are deserving of our thanks and praise, there are a few who we are especially indebted to. I want to say a very special thank you to our two top Diocesan technical experts, Christopher Fitz and Warren Wright-Sedam, without whose technical expertise we would have been hard-pressed to make this virtual meeting possible. We also owe a debt of thanks to Lay Canon Jerry Carrol, Secretary of the Diocese Deacon Marian Sive, Diocesan Communications Officer Deacon Meaghan Keegan, Mark Brittell, and Carol MacNaughton, all of whom have gone above and beyond the call of duty to make today possible.

I want to thank you -- the clergy, deputies, and people of the Diocese, who have stepped out of your comfort zone and spent extra time learning how to participate in today's meeting. Thank you also for all you do day in and day out faithfully serving our Lord and His Church.

Most especially today, I want to thank God, for the outpouring of His love and mercy and grace upon the clergy and people of the Diocese of Albany, and for all the mighty work He is doing in and through you. May all that we do today and in the days to come be in accordance with His will and to His honor and glory and the benefit of His Church and People. Thank You Heavenly Father! Thank You Lord Jesus Christ! Thank You Holy Spirit! Amen!

I would now like to briefly report on the "Official Acts" of the Bishop from June 16, 2019 to October 18, 2020. During this time, I had 31 Official Parish Visitations (as well as several unofficial visits); the de-consecration of two churches (St. James, Ft. Edward, and St. Paul's, W. Middleburg) as well as the Oaks of Righteousness Building in Troy. On a more positive note, there were 46 Confirmations; 11 Receptions of confirmed Christians from the wider Church; and 14 Ordinations, (10 priests and 4 deacons). The ordained include the following:

- Rev. Sonya A. Boyce – priest
- Rev. Jennifer H. Dorsey – Transitional Deacon
- Rev. Paul A. Guilmette – Vocational Deacon
- Rev. Helen I. Harris – Vocational Deacon
- Rev. Patricia J. Johnson – Priest
- Rev. Meaghan J. Keegan – Transitional Deacon
- Rev. Randolph E. Lukas – Priest
- Rev. William A. Lytle – Priest
- Rev. Laura J. Miller – Priest
- Rev. Landon M. Moore, III – Priest
- Rev. Richard B. Roessler – Priest
- Rev. Nancy Truscott – Priest
- Rev. Dale W. Van Wormer – Priest
- Rev. William J Wright, Sr. – Priest

One of the greatest honors a bishop can have is to ordain fellow Brothers and Sisters in Christ as deacons and priests in Christ's one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. That is a ministry that I take very seriously. During my 14 years as your Bishop, I have had the great privilege and blessing of ordaining 79 priests, 62 transitional deacons and 40 vocational deacons for a total of 181 ordinations. There are three more planned in the coming weeks.

I give thanks to God for each of these my dear brothers and sisters and for the ordained ministry we share. To all the newly ordained, may the Lord bless each of you and your families richly as you go forth in His Name, and may He use you to be a blessing to all those you are called to serve.

Unfortunately, many of this year's ordinations occurred during a time of strict COVID-19 restrictions, thus severely limiting the number of people who could attend. I am so sorry we were not able to invite and include all the family and friends who wanted to come witness and share in these special ordinations. Your presence was greatly missed.

As we all know, the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted far more than the ordinations, In addition to our health, it has touched virtually every aspect of our lives, both in the Church as well as our work, school, family life, social life, community life, the economy, personal finances, and travel. Nothing has gone unscathed. Who would have thought, something so microscopically small could cause such havoc and suffering throughout the world.

My heart goes out to those of you who have lost friends and loved ones to COVID-19, as well as those who have lost their job, their home, and are experiencing severe financial, personal and family struggles, all as a result of the Pandemic. May the Lord help heal the wounds and bring relief to each of you during this time of great need and sorrow.

The lasting impact of COVID-19 on our churches is still yet to be seen. We know the severe interruption it has caused thus far. I want to thank all the clergy and people of the Diocese for your patience and cooperation as we try to navigate through these difficult waters.

I also want to thank all of you who have continued to financially support your parishes, the Diocese and Christ the King Center, even when you were not able to be physically present. I know many of you have done so at a great sacrificial cost. Please know that your financial support is greatly appreciated and much needed. Our Diocesan Treasurer, Clark Curtis (who by the way is doing an outstanding job, along with our Assistant Treasurer Sharon King), will share more about the finances of the Diocese later today.

Recognizing that many of you are slowly making your way back to Church, thank you for your efforts. I pray in the very near future, we will all once again be able to come to church with family and friends to worship God and enjoy one another's company without fear, and all the current social distancing restrictions. How wonderful it will be to be able to see your beautiful faces without the need for wearing masks, or sitting six feet apart from one another.

We give thanks to God for the progress that has been made thus far in battling the Corona Virus, and all those who are working so diligently on trying to come up with a safe vaccine or cure for COVID-19. May the Lord bless their efforts. In the meantime, thank you again for your patience with the sanitation and social distancing requirements, as well as the absence of coffee hour and other social gatherings at Church. Your sacrifices have not gone unnoticed.

One of the blessings that has come out of this Pandemic are all the outstanding online virtual worship services that are being offered at the diocesan and parish level. I am especially grateful for Christopher and Warren and Deacon Meaghan who have assisted us with the weekly diocesan service, and for all of you in the parishes who have provided technical support for regular on-line worship services and this year's virtual Diocesan Convention. By sharing your technical expertise, you are enabling us at both the local and diocesan level to reach and minister to countless individuals that we never would have reached otherwise, sharing the love and Good News of Jesus Christ. God Bless You for your efforts.

I am so thankful for all the clergy and musicians who have assisted me with the weekly Diocesan Sunday Service and all the services going on throughout the Diocese. You're outstanding preaching and music is to be commended and has been such a blessing and encouragement to so many, not only in the Diocese of Albany but in the wider community and literally throughout the world. The Lord is using you in mighty and wonderful ways.

As many of you know, my mother Frances, just recently passed away. The virtual Diocesan Sunday Worship Service, was something she and I cherished. It enabled us to worship together each week, despite the physical distance that separated us. For that, I am eternally grateful.

Before moving on, I want to take just a moment to thank all of you who have sent loving and beautiful cards, letters, emails, texts, and phone calls expressing your love, support and condolences to my family and I during this time of sorrow and loss as we mourn my Mom's passing. She was a wonderful and loving mom who will be greatly missed. I give thanks to God that she is now at peace in the loving presence of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In addition to our regular weekly worship services, the youth of the diocese have been richly blessed by the virtual youth group gatherings and other youth programs brilliantly led by Danny and Katie Hyde and Laura Adams.

Camp in a box was just one of the outstanding programs they offered this summer while kids were stuck at home and not able to go to Beaver Cross due to COVID-19. We will be hearing a little bit later today from Danny and Katie as they share some of the other exciting youth ministries going on in the Diocese.

Looking now at other challenges facing us, not only has the COVID-19 Pandemic wreaked havoc on the world around us, but the ongoing social unrest and racial injustice has also resulted in great hurt for countless individuals, and is doing tremendous harm to our society at large.

As I mentioned in an earlier communication to the Diocese, from the very earliest of days, beginning with Cain and Abel, human beings have lashed out in anger, fear, jealousy, greed, and hatred toward one another, resulting in untold devastation and suffering (physically, spiritually, mentally, emotionally, financially, and many other ways). Following the horrific and unconscionable death of George Floyd and others, we have seen this played out in the streets of our cities where rioting, looting, and further bloodshed and senseless killings have taken place.

It seems as though humans never run out of excuses to try to justify their hatred or ill will and demeaning attitudes towards one another, whether it be race or ethnicity, nationality, religion, gender, sexual orientation, social status, or some other excuse. Hatred only leads to more hatred, more violence, more injustice, more suffering, and more loss. Hate-filled revenge, or the tearing down of one group to build up another, is NOT the answer to abolishing racism.

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus states, "*You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven.*" (Matthew 5:43-45). If there was ever a time in which we need to take this passage to heart, it is now.

Racism is a condition of the heart and mind and soul. There is only one antidote – LOVE. I am not talking about a superficial love that is based on our emotions or feelings (that is here one day and gone the next), but rather the intentional, unconditional, self-sacrificial love that enables us to "turn the other cheek" and to "love our enemies," and to pray for "those who persecute [us]," the love that enables us to look beyond ourselves to the needs of others, giving of ourselves to help meet those needs.

The Lord calls each of us to be a channel of His love and mercy and healing grace in the fight against racism and other ills of society. If we are to carry out that call, we must first be healed and transformed ourselves. We can't give that which we don't have.

Governments can pass legislation outlawing particular acts and behaviors, and reform unjust systems or practices, but that only goes so far. As stated earlier, racism is a condition of the heart and mind and soul. Governments can't legislate love. That is a choice that only you and I can make, by God's grace. We either choose to love or choose not to. Love requires action. It requires relationship.

The Lord calls us to reach out in love, whether we are loved in return or not. True love takes work; it takes patience; it takes courage; it takes sacrifice. True love is needed, if racism is to be defeated.

The sin of racism has inflicted this country from its earliest of days. We have come a long way from where we once were, but as we have been reminded in recent months, we still have a long way to go. If our society is to be freed of this infliction, it will be one person at a time; one relationship at a time, one act of intentional, unconditional, self-sacrificial love at a time. It is going to take God working in and through us as a channel of His love and mercy and healing grace. Are we up for the challenge? If not, the current racial unrest and injustice will only get worse. The Lord is calling us, the body of Christ, to go forth in His Name and make a difference.

The "Fish and Loaves Ministry" at St. Francis Mission on Clinton Ave. in Albany is one such example. I am so appreciative to Fr. Jacob Evans, Dick Malchow and all the faithful volunteers who are helping with this ministry. It has been going on for several decades now. I pray by God's grace and the hard work and generosity of many of you, it will continue as long as there are hungry and needy people in need of a good meal, a friendly smile, a safe Christ-filled place to come and enjoy one another's company and experience God's love.

Kingdom Ministries headed by Lay Pastor Billy Carter (in North Central Troy) is another very worthy ministry the Diocese of Albany (through Oaks of Righteousness) has been blessed to be able to support and partner in. I am so thankful and appreciative of Billy and his faithful team who give of themselves sacrificially day in and day out ministering to some of the neediest folks in one of the most difficult and dangerous neighborhoods in the area. God is using Kingdom Ministries to be a channel of His love and mercy and healing grace. Although the Oaks of Righteousness ministry has come to an end, Kingdom Ministries is alive and well and is worthy of our ongoing support, especially during this time of increased racial tension.

I offer these two ministries (recognizing there are many others), as examples of what God can and will do when we work together as brothers and sisters in Christ (black, white, Latino...) ministering to those in need. If we are to help bring healing into the racial divide and its associated ills in our communities, we must all work together, recognizing that EVERY human

being is created in the image and likeness of God, and is loved by God. May God give each of us the grace to see His image and likeness in one another, and in so doing, love one another, as He has loved us.

In addition to racism, there is another great injustice or social ill that has been perpetrated against countless innocent victims over the years that must now be dealt with. For far too long, it was swept under the rug or ignored by much of society, to include the Church. I am speaking of the sexual abuse and exploitation of underage children.

Last year, New York passed the Child Victims Act (CVA) which lifted the statute of limitations (for a time) on purported cases of sexual abuse, regardless of how far back the abuse allegedly happened. As you are probably aware, this has opened the flood gates on thousands of alleged cases of sexual abuse. The Roman Catholic Church and Boy Scouts of America have been particularly hard hit.

Tragically the Diocese of Albany has been named in three lawsuits filed against it for alleged sexual abuse of minor children by former clergy of the Diocese dating back to the 1960's. The accused clergy in each case have been dead for years. In addition, we have been notified that there may be three more suits filed, for alleged sexual abuse by three other deceased clergy, the most recent of which dated to the mid 1980's.

While not knowing whether any of the allegations against the former Diocese of Albany clergy are true, we pray for all individuals who have been victims of sex abuse. May the Lord heal them of the wounds and scars resulting from past sexual abuse.

These cases are a reminder of how important it is in all of our parishes, to follow the Safeguarding God's Children guidelines, to ensure that all our children and adults are safe and protected in Church. I am especially thankful to Fr. Michael Gorchov and all those throughout the Diocese who are helping train the clergy, Sunday School Teachers, Youth Group Leaders and other parish leaders in Safeguarding God's Children and other sexual abuse preventative programs to ensure the safety of all our children as well as adults.

The sexual abuse of children or anyone else cannot and will not be tolerated in the Diocese of Albany. If you are in any type of leadership role at the parish or diocesan level, either as clergy, warden, vestry member, Sunday School Teacher, Youth Group Leader or any other position of authority, please make sure you have taken the Safeguarding God's Children training, or other appropriate sexual abuse preventative courses.

In regard to the current lawsuits facing the Diocese, please know we have excellent legal counsel assisting us, as well as our insurance company. We will keep you advised as things develop. Tragically these cases can drag on for years.

The year 2020 will undoubtedly go down as one of the most challenging and turbulent years in modern history. This year's Diocesan Convention theme, **2020 Vision – “Fix Your Eyes on Jesus”** (Hebrews 12:2), provides the key for getting through all the trials and tribulations before us.

While we don't know how everything will turn out, our Lord does. Nothing that is going on is a surprise to Him. In Hebrews we are told, *“Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight.”* (Hebrews 4:13). In the 147th Psalm, the Psalmist writes, *“Great is our Lord and mighty in power; His understanding has no limit.”* (Psalm 147:5).

Jesus has promised to be with us always, even to the end of the age. He has not and will not abandon us. May we be open to His presence, trusting in Him as He leads us through the storms and trials of life.

Before moving on to the business portion of today's meeting, there is one other major item I need to share with you. As you are all aware, the Hearing Panel, convened by the Rt. Rev. W. Nicholas Knisely, reached its verdict on October 2, 2020, regarding my issuance of a Pastoral Letter and Directive to the clergy and people of the Diocese of Albany on Nov. 10, 2018, in response to the 79th General Convention Resolution B012.

As I reported to the Diocese on October 5th, the Hearing Panel has found me guilty of failing to abide by the Discipline and Worship of the Episcopal Church, and thus violating my ordination vows. They issued a 42-page document outlining their decision, a copy of which has been posted on the Diocesan Website.

The **Summary of Opinion** outlining the Panel's report, states: “This Panel unanimously concludes that TEC has met its burden of showing, by clear and convincing evidence, that Bishop Love has violated Canon IV.4.1(c) in that his November 10, [2018] Pastoral Directive violated the Discipline of the Church, as Resolution B012 was properly constituted and passed as an authorized revision to the BCP as expressly provided for in Constitution Article X, thus requiring that all Bishop Diocesans permit their clergy the option to utilize such rites. TEC has further met its burden of establishing that Bishop Love's Direction also violated the Discipline of the Church in that it violated Canon I.18. The canonical legitimacy of Resolution B012 rendered Canon I.18 mandatory, requiring adherence by Bishops Diocesan in permitting their Clergy the option to perform same-sex marriage rites. TEC has also met its burden of establishing that the Direction violated the Worship of the Church in that Resolution B012 added canonically-authorized same-sex marriage rites to the Worship of the Church pursuant to BCP.”

As I shared in my October 5th communique to the Diocese, I am very disappointed and strongly disagree with the Decision of the Hearing Panel, particularly their belief that I violated my ordination vows and their argument that B012 was passed as an authorized revision to the Book of Common Prayer. The Episcopal Church's case against me, hinged on their

interpretation of the nature of B012. Was it properly constituted and passed as an authorized revision to the Book of Common Prayer (BCP) or not?

It is my belief and that of my legal team that B012 was presented as an alternative resolution to one which would have changed the BCP. It was intended to ensure that same-sex marriages would be allowed in every Diocese, regardless of the Diocesan Bishop's theological views regarding marriage, while at the same time not changing the 1979 Prayer Book.

With that said, while I don't agree with the Hearing Panel's ruling, they have issued their judgement. Unfortunately, given the nature of this case, and the Episcopal Church's demonstrated intent to ensure all dioceses (where civil law permits) allow for same-sex marriages, I have no reason to believe that appealing the Hearing Panel's Decision would result in any different outcome.

A second meeting of the Hearing Panel under the leadership of Bishop Knisely, was scheduled for this coming Monday, October 26th, to determine what disciplinary action should be taken against me. After much thought and prayer, recognizing that whatever disciplinary action would be offered would not be anything I could in good conscience agree to, I have made the very difficult, but necessary decision to resign as Bishop of Albany, effective February 1, 2021 – the 14th Anniversary of my becoming the Bishop Diocesan. Given all that has happened, and that which was still to come, I believe that to stay any longer would be more of a detriment to the Diocese than a help.

The Most Rev. Michael Bruce Curry, Presiding Bishop of The Episcopal Church and I, the Rt. Rev. William H. Love, Bishop of Albany voluntarily entered into an Accord which became effective October 21, 2020, with the unanimous approval of the Disciplinary Board of the House of Bishops. The Accord resolves the matter of my case, thus discharging any further action from the Hearing Panel.

The Accord stipulates the following: I will resign as Bishop Diocesan of the Diocese of Albany, effective February 1, 2021; I will begin a one month terminal sabbatical beginning January 1, 2021; I agree to continue to abide by the January 11, 2019 Restrictions placed upon my ministry by the Presiding Bishop until the effective date of my resignation as Bishop; I will work with the Presiding Bishop through the Office of Pastoral Development to help foster a healthy transition from my leadership as Bishop Diocesan, as the Diocese begins a new chapter in its history; and lastly, I acknowledge that upon February 1, 2021, the effective date of my resignation as Bishop Diocesan, my November 10, 2018, Pastoral Directive regarding B012 will lose force. Until then, however, it remains in effect.

In signing the Accord, the Presiding Bishop has agreed to allow me to notify the clergy and people of the Diocese of Albany of my pending resignation, before he sends out an announcement to the wider community. I am very appreciative of his willingness to agree to that pastoral request.

I met with Fr. Scott Garno, President of the Standing Committee, on Thursday afternoon, to inform him of my decision to resign and of the Accord between myself and the Presiding Bishop. I pledge my full support to Fr. Garno and the Standing Committee as they enter into their new role. I also pledge not to interfere with their deliberations.

Please note, that in accordance with Article IV of the Constitution of The Episcopal Church, the Standing Committee serves as the Ecclesiastical Authority of the Diocese in the absence of the Bishop. In addition, in accordance with the Diocesan Canons, the Standing Committee oversees the election of the new bishop of the Diocese.

The Diocese of Albany is blessed to have an excellent Standing Committee that will serve you well. I ask God's blessing upon them as they prepare to lead the Diocese of Albany during this period of transition.

During these past 14 years, I have tried as best I could by God's grace and the empowering and leading of the Holy Spirit to be faithful and obedient to the Lord's call on my life as a Bishop in Christ's one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. I have tried to be faithful and obedient to God's Holy Word as best I understand it, as revealed through the Holy Scriptures, recognizing its authority over my life and the ministry entrusted to me.

I have tried by God's grace and the guidance and empowering of the Holy Spirit to faithfully uphold my ordination vows, despite the recent ruling of the Hearing Panel, and to carry out the unique ministry of bishops, as "one with the apostles in proclaiming Christ's resurrection and interpreting the Gospel," testifying to "Christ's sovereignty as Lord of Lords and King of Kings."

I have worked hard to "guard the faith, unity and discipline of the Church...celebrating and providing for the administration of the sacraments of the Church...and sharing with my fellow bishops in the leadership of the Church throughout the world."

It has been a tremendous honor and blessing to work with the bishops and clergy and people of our Sister Dioceses of Down and Dromore in Northern Ireland and the Diocese of Maridi in South Sudan, the Diocese of Northern Malawi, and the Diocese of the Arctic, as well as numerous other friends from around the wider Anglican Communion. Their faithful Christian witness, friendship and support means more than I can ever say.

It has been my goal these past 14 years to help the Diocese of Albany remain Christ centered, focusing on the Great Commandment and the Great Commission, working together as one Church, faithfully proclaiming Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior of the World. To the degree that I have succeeded in these things, I give thanks and praise to God. To the degree that I have failed in these and other things, I ask your forgiveness.

I deeply love and care for the Diocese of Albany and each of you by Brothers and Sisters in Christ. Serving you and our Lord Jesus Christ these past 14 years as Bishop of Albany has been one of the greatest privileges and blessings of my life. I have been blessed to work with one of the greatest Diocesan Staffs any bishop could hope for. I can't imagine what these past 14 years would have been like without them.

My wife Karen and I and our family will be forever grateful for the friendship, love, and support you all have shown us these past many years. Please know that you are and will continue to be in our thoughts and prayers.

I want to close by encouraging you. At every level our Diocese is filled with incredible Spirit-filled people (lay and ordained) who love and faithfully serve our Lord Jesus Christ day in and day out. Over these past 14 years, you have accomplished so much together, through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. God has used you to help bless countless lives in our communities and beyond. The Lord is powerfully present in the Diocese of Albany and will help lead you through the uncertainties of the coming days – if you fix your eyes on Jesus. In Him, we find hope, truth, unity, strength, and peace.

And now, may the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with you and your loved ones, this day and always as you faithfully go forth in the Name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen!