

“See, I Am Making All Things New”
Bishop James J. Shand’s Address
to the 142nd Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Easton

Good morning and welcome! Welcome to the 142nd Convention of the Diocese of Easton. We are grateful you are here, participating in the life of this church that we love. Ana, we are grateful for your presence as well, and for helping us to use our voices, individually but also together, to create a wonderful energy in the beauty of holiness.

One hundred and forty-two years. We Episcopalians have been at this a long time in this part of God’s vineyard. And we go back even further, of course, before this diocese was created when we were part of the Diocese of Maryland. We have a great deal of faithful ministry to look back on.

We are good at looking back, maybe too good. It’s easy to get stuck in this safe place of looking back; it’s familiar territory, it’s known, there aren’t a lot of risks involved. But, if that’s the way we’re facing most of the time, either out of fear or sentimentality or nostalgia, the day may come when we no longer have much to say to younger generations who are seeking answers.

What I want to talk with you about today is this. What is the best of our past that we can take into our future? What do we need to discard? What do we not even see, that is right in front of our noses? And what can we create, when we are cooperating with the leading of the Spirit?

We chose as our theme this year, a quote from The Revelation to St. John the Divine, chapter 21 verse 5, “See, I am making all things new.” We chose this wording deliberately.

The Revised Standard Version says, “Behold, I make all things new.” I hear this as a statement about the nature of God, who God *is*: God is the One who makes things new.

But the New Revised Standard Version renders this text, “See, I *am making* all things new.” The difference is subtle, but it’s there. This describes, for me, what God *does*. God is not just somehow fixed in the past, but continually leading us into the future. Leading us into the future, leading, leading, like he did the Israelites with the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. “See, I am making all things new.” God’s plan, God’s purpose, is forever evolving, unfolding, as God leads and transforms humanity into the next phase of its development and enlightenment; and the church is evolving, too; and so is our diocese.

“See, I am making all things new.” How are things being made new? Let me share some evidence.

Over the past year, four new committees came into being, and every one of them has met faithfully and I would say, joyfully, to accomplish its task. The committee charged to evaluate how and where we hold **Diocesan Convention** made its assessment, and their report is in your Convention workbook. After this Convention, they will meet again to assess how things went this year, and plan for 2011, when our Presiding Bishop will be our honored guest; and to look beyond that to 2012.

The committee that is re-examining the diocesan **apportionment** has ideas about a new formula, and will be meeting with every parish in the year ahead to talk about this, and also to listen, to listen to your input about the realities you face, and how together we can fund the ministries we carry out in this diocese.

The **Disaster Preparedness** group has forged a connection with the Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health and the Centers for Disease Control, and is offering training to us for free, here at the Hyatt, our diocesan annex! The sessions will be March 13 and May 15, and friends, *I expect you to be there*. I expect every parish to be represented. We are fools if we let this slip by, for it is not a matter of *if*, but *when*, some sort of disaster befalls us.

The **Environmental Ministries** group is organized and energized. Nearly every month, our *Eastern Shore Episcopalian* features an article about what is being done, or what can be done, in and by our parishes, to be faithful stewards of our environment. They are building a presence on our diocesan website, and are sponsoring a contest to design a logo for "Water of Life" -- and there is a terrific prize for the winner: Dinner with ME! Now, how can you resist that? I know you all will be entering as soon as you can.

These four committees have come into being because, together, we saw a need. Sometimes the leading came from me, sometimes it came from one of our clergy, or from a parish that submitted a resolution to Diocesan Convention, or from a dedicated lay person who would not give up even when the odds seemed stacked against us. Together, and only together, will we move into the future God intends for us. Thank you, thank you for your enthusiasm and your persistence. I will never stand before you and say I have all the answers, because I don't; but I do believe that, collectively, we have some answers, and are living into them.

"See, I am making all things new."

Which brings me to one other thing I need to mention. In 2009, Shelby Morrison, our diocesan **youth** director moved to West Virginia. Those of you who know me, know that creating this position was a high priority for me; and you came through with the funding, and we were able to do it, and Shelby did a great job. But life brings new opportunities and changes. We needed to come up with a new plan. I extended an invitation throughout the diocese for people to come together to talk about youth ministry, and what the way forward might be. I can't tell you how encouraging it was that so many people showed up; and that this group felt we could continue vital youth ministry by *doing it together*. They were not discouraged that we had lost our staff person, but saw a way forward based on collaboration and shared resources. We are looking for what we can create together to nurture our young people, who are the church of *today*, not just the church of the future.

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Now, friends, I know it is Lent, but could I get an Alleluia?

"See, I am making all things new."

It is this kind of energy and cooperation that I sincerely believe is the key to moving forward. So let me share one more illustration of how this is emerging in our diocese. Those of you in the Southern Convocation may have heard this at the convocation meeting a few weeks ago, but the rest of you probably have not.

Over a year ago, **Barbara Fisher** came on board as the program director at St. Peter's, Salisbury. Phyllis Tickle has been a spiritual friend and mentor to her, and when she invited Ms. Tickle to come to St. Peter's for a discussion about her new book, *The Great Emergence: How Christianity Is Changing and Why*, which many of you have read, Phyllis said yes. Then Barbara thought, Hmmm, what if we collaborated with the diocese, so everybody could benefit from this? So she contacted Canon Cook, and together they searched for dates, and wouldn't you know, instead of it happening in July, or in the fall, she had a weekend open in February, when Convention was scheduled. One of our parishes took the lead, for the benefit of all, and St. Peter's is sharing the financial cost. Thank you, Salisbury Parish. That is the kind of generous, wider-perspective thinking that we need to move into the future God intends for us.

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We can no longer afford to be islands unto ourselves. In a world that is awake twenty-four-seven, where roads and rivers are no longer the things that make connection possible, we need to be alert to how we can share the gifts each of us has been given, for the good of the whole.

This can happen as parishes form partnerships, and work together with the resources they have. We need to leave behind the old thinking that "it is all about my local parish," which may be part of the rugged individualism that is part of our American character. But that's not the way the Body of Christ works.

This can happen as our retired clergy share their knowledge and skills to lead congregations and mentor the newly ordained. The opportunities afforded us by having ten of our congregations served by **retired clergy** are their years of experience, professional expertise, knowledge of the church, and years of serving all types of congregations in all parts of this country.

Do their gifts meet all the needs of some numerically smaller groups of people? Especially when the family dynamics are such that chaplaincy seems to be what is wanted, not necessarily what is needed.

As a personal observation; I have certainly not moved beyond what I felt were time-tested models for ministry: parish calling, in-home visitation, hospital visitation.

I certainly have moved way beyond what I felt were time-tested models for ministry. Years ago, my former rector asked me how things were going, as a newly ordained priest. I answered, "Okay, but what I'm learning is not always helpful." The older priest said, "That's okay. You'll be learning what NOT to do."

During this next year, I intend to call together all the retired clergy who serve our smaller congregations and those who are not actively serving every Sunday to ask them to share their ideas on ministry with one another, look for ways of collaboration, and bounce ideas off one another. And to assist us, I have already enlisted the services of a retired bishop, Michael Creighton, formerly of Central Pennsylvania, who will help us get a handle on how to re-tool for ministry TODAY.

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Youth ministry can have a new look -- a convocational approach. Can you picture youth from each parish, regardless of size, meeting together on a local convocational basis? Can you picture them coming to an R & R Weekend at Camp Wright and actually knowing one another? Can you picture them going to The Episcopal Church’s EYE, Episcopal Youth Event, next summer, as a group that functions with a loyalty to our diocese, excited and energized by new relationships being forged and collaborative systems in place? I CAN.

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Can you imagine our **Companion Diocese** Relationship, which is in full place now, being expanded upon? The prayer list is in place, with intercessory prayer being used each Sunday; parish to parish connections are being established; visits of active and retired clergy, from both dioceses, are being undertaken; former Camp Wright counselors from 50 years are returning to be present for the 80th Anniversary of Camp Wright. I CAN!

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Can you imagine what can occur at **Camp Wright** as it looks into the future and enlists the time, talents, treasures of us in this diocese? I CAN!

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Can you imagine that what started out as a camp for 12 children of incarcerated parents has grown to 50 children? How will **Camp Agape** continue to make all things new? I CAN!

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Can you see yourself not getting an *Eastern Shore Episcopalian* each month, and not being alerted to the vitality and various kinds of ministry that are being carried on in the name of our Lord Jesus? I CANNOT; but I CAN see us forming a Task Force to review our **communications network**, so that it will serve us better. We live in an age that seems to be going into the Third Industrial Revolution, that of the digital arena. It still overwhelms me, but it’s where new things are happening all the time. It’s where we are able to reach not only cradle Episcopalians, but seekers, too. What a tool for evangelism!

Can you see better communication that includes a ceasing of the duplication of parish energy and the formulation of alliances, connections, yoking, sharing, ending of petty jealousy, and the shouldering of **common projects** by county, perhaps, to implement the

gospel imperatives of feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, giving shelter to the homeless, and responding to the crises that occur here at home as well as oceans away?
I CAN!

Can you believe that one parish just last week invited another to their Pancake Supper, and did not charge them for a meal because their parish hall was under renovation? I can! It got snowed out – but St. Luke’s and St. Andrew’s in Northern Queen Anne’s County had their hearts in the right place when they invited St. Paul’s, Centreville, to supper.

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Can you see a diocese where parishes are all using the same percentage formula for their **apportionments**? I CAN!

Can you envision a new day when each parish contributes its **full share**? Then we could accomplish 100% of our mission and ministry instead of having the Department of Finance cut the budget. With each of us supporting a fair share, everyone, everyone of us, everyone of us sharing from an attitude of ABUNDANCE and not an attitude of SCARCITY, or hoarding, or being unrealistic and letting buildings and cemeteries, and not PEOPLE, be a priority. Remember that Jesus said these words: “From everyone to whom much has been given, much more will be required, and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be required (Luke 12:28). Can you imagine this? I CAN.

Can you see a diocese where the percentage of **asking was 100 % prescribed to** -- not 83% or 91%, but the total amount? What a witness this could be to our world and yes, change IS possible in attitudes toward giving and really making a new thing happen. Can you imagine what could happen to our budget if there were no holding back, or sliding resources into programs that hide support, or from just being obstinate or greedy or lazy because you do not like what The Episcopal Church is doing or how the General Convention voted on a particular issue? I CAN.

“See, I am making all things new.”

Let me tell you a little story.

There are these two young fish swimming along and they happen to meet an older fish swimming the other way, who nods at them and says, “Morning, boys. How’s the water?”

And the two young fish swim on for a bit, and then eventually one of them looks over at the other and goes, “What the hell is water?”¹

What is right in front of us? What is so much a part of us, that we don’t even see it? What is the obvious? Folks see things differently: what is apparent to me, what is water to me, may not be the water to you. Why can’t we have both, each respecting the other?

Maybe, just maybe, GOD is making all things new.

Maybe, just maybe God is formulating some new ways of approaching our common life.

Maybe, just maybe, God is energizing us in this Diocese of Easton into something new, something better than what we have been, something more apostolic, more holy, more catholic, and that could be a good thing.

Let me assure you that as I begin my eighth year as your bishop, I ain't done yet. We have miles to go before I quit, we have baptismal promises to keep, and we have new things that God is going to share with us.

As long as God continues to give me the strength and compassion to be your shepherd, your companion on the way, your pastor, and your friend, I will pledge to you my entire being, heart, body, and mind to love you, to serve you, and to share with you this world we share together.

How do we plan to let the **church of the future** emerge? What would it look like? Can we work together? The answers depend on keeping our energy high and having a spirit of collaboration.

Just as Ana Hernandez is inviting us to sing -- each one of us individually, but also together, creating a new energy that we couldn't create alone, which you can just feel in the room -- God is inviting us to sing also, adding our unique voices to the sound of the whole, singing a new song, everyone playing a part, where the sum of the parts is so much bigger than anything we could do alone.

This is the future. Can we discover it together? Help me discern the path.

What is it that YOU have to contribute, for the good of the whole? When every person, every parish, offers the piece God gifted them to give, then, my friends, ministry really starts to pop.

Truly, God is making all things new. Let's step into the future unafraid, trusting that God is already there, already there ahead of us, beckoning us forward. Let's step into the future full of hope, full of enthusiasm. Can we do it? I KNOW WE CAN!

AMEN.

¹ Quoted from David Foster Wallace, *This Is Water* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2009), pp. 3-4.