

Presiding bishop's opening remarks to Executive Council

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[Episcopal Church Office of Public Affairs press release] Episcopal Church Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori presented the following remarks at the opening of the Executive Council Meeting at the Conference Center at the Maritime Institute in Linthicum Heights, MD (Diocese of Maryland).

Executive Council Opening Remarks June 8, 2013

The Most Rev. Katharine Jefferts Schori Presiding Bishop and Primate The Episcopal Church

I'm going to talk about the kinds of mission we're engaging in and beyond the Church, and where in recent months I've been particularly asked to enter into this work. I'm going to frame this in the context of the Five Marks of Mission, both as a witness to how they shape the work that my office is called to attend to, and as a kind of accountability exercise. None of us is called to do all of the work, but awareness comes from paying attention to how we and our communities are involved.

I Proclaim the good news of the kingdom is the First Mark of Mission

That's the basic work of the church – holding up a vision of God's dream for all creation – a world living in right relationship with God and neighbor, so that all people live in peace because there is justice. That vision prompts movement toward the reign of God that's more particularly addressed in some of the other Marks, but I think relationship-building belongs here – especially when focused on developing shared understandings and strategies for moving toward that dream. It also includes standing in solidarity with the oppressed, offering hope through personal presence and being opened to transformation. That's basic to the work of visitation asked of the Presiding Bishop. This year I've spent time in conversation, worship, teaching and learning, and solidarity with Episcopalians and others in South Carolina, Haiti, Virginia, Central Florida, Eau Claire, California, Washington (DC), Venezuela (in the country of Curaçao), and Europe (in the country of Germany). The mission initiatives I encounter in those places become opportunities to share stories with people and ideas. There's also a broader kind of relationship-building that can begin to share our vision of the goal of God in creation – in ecumenical efforts, like the National Council of Churches and its restructuring efforts, and in interreligious conversations. This year I've spent time in conversation with US Jewish leaders as well as Muslim Palestinians. The Board of the Anglican Center in Rome met in New York recently to discuss new and creative ways to work more effectively with the Roman Catholics, as well as how to be a more useful teaching resource. Our relationships around the Anglican Communion get some tending not only through work on the Standing Committee, with other primates, and the Archbishop of Canterbury, but with our particular covenant partners. I'm going to Costa Rica (part of IARCA) later this month to help celebrate the opening of a school begun when several of us were there for the Mission Conference in the Americas. Tending our long-standing relationship with Cuba is an ongoing responsibility through the oversight work of the Metropolitan Council. Our relationships with the Diocese of Jerusalem are also part of the portfolio of this office – I visited Israel/Palestine at Christmastime and more recently Lebanon.

II Teach, baptize, and nurture new believers is the second Mark of Mission

This Mark is particularly concerned with the regular teaching and formation work of congregations and dioceses. Baptism is not the endpoint – continuing development of capacity for service is essential. I want to frame this mark a bit more explicitly as the development of missionaries, through their increasing capacity to serve God's mission. We might call that the work of formation and teaching, as well as the encouragement of mature Christianity. The mission theologians of the mid-19th century included Roland Allen whose feast we are celebrating today, gave us a gift in re-examining Paul's missionary activity, and noting that a mature Christian community is self-propagating, self-sustaining, and self-governing. Later Anglican theologians dubbed this Mutual Responsibility and Interdependence in the Body of Christ.[1] We're encouraging that kind of maturation work through the self-sustainability initiatives in Haiti, Ecuador, and Navajoland, and throughout Province IX. But this is the work of the whole church, not only formerly or currently dependent dioceses. I understand my part in that as encouraging creative strategizing and more effective theological education, encouraging people to read and publish new books and resources (I get countless requests to write blurbs and forewords). The work I do with and for bishops is fundamentally about supporting greater capacity and effectiveness, through the College for Bishops, the formation program for new bishops, ongoing pastoral development, and sharing in consecrations. The communications work I am encouraged to do is certainly about that first mark, but it's also frequently a teaching opportunity – e.g., Lent, Christmas, Easter messages, climate change events, churchwide webcasts like the recent one on human trafficking. My participation in various meetings – the chancellors' network, with Church Pension Group, the federal chaplains, Global Episcopal Mission Network, Episcopal Relief & Development, Episcopal Preaching Excellence program – is an opportunity to offer a reflection of God's dream and the wider implications of a group's engagement in God's mission. And I get to learn more about their work.

III Respond to human need by loving service is the Third Mark of Mission

This is not only about corporal works of mercy – the hands-on relief of hunger, thirst, loneliness, and illness – but it involves developing capacity for this mark of mission. I don't get many opportunities for the traditional kinds of hands-on work, but I do get to see remarkable examples of engagement, and point people to resources. Resources of people and ideas as well as funds. An example – when we visited the Princess Basma center for disabled children in Jerusalem, we saw abundant needs and encouraged them to apply for a UTO grant. They have just received a grant to rehabilitate their therapy pool. Service comes in a variety of forms, and the work of advocacy for immigrants, trafficking victims, and the poor and oppressed has deep resonance with the reasons and causes of human need that the Third Mark points to.

IV Transform unjust structures of society, challenge violence of all kinds, pursue peace and reconciliation is the Fourth Mark of Mission

As this year began to unfold, I realized that a new depth of engagement was being asked of me in this area. Middle East peace has been a challenging conversation in this Church, particularly since General Convention, and it seemed deeply important to return to Israel-Palestine at Christmas for more conversations and to build opportunities for solidarity. Then the Japanese church asked for an

address about the American bases in Okinawa and the church's role in peacemaking, as part of the second Worldwide Anglican Peace Conference in March. The first one was held in Korea in 2008. A few weeks later the Methodists held a peace conference about Korean reunification and wanted a contribution about the wider church's role in that conflict. And then came an invitation from the World Council of Churches and the Middle East Council of Churches to participate in a consultation about peace across the many lands of the Middle East. I have been moved beyond imagining to hear the stories of people living in deeply conflicted areas, and by the need of the wider world to constructively engage in transforming violence into greater possibility for abundant life. That is the foundation of our vocation as baptized members of the body of Christ.

Yet peace-making and anti-violence work is not only needed beyond the bounds of this Church. The divisions in this particular nation are abundant, and the current state of our federal government is a scandal. The good news is that there are opportunities to build bridges across the chasms between positions – by prayer and dialogue at least, and by forming our members as peacemakers. The inaugural prayer service in January offered a glimpse of transcending division; the Better Angels project that is being encouraged by the Faith and Politics Institute is another. The Christian religious leaders involved represent vastly different constituencies and positions, together we have committed to expanding our shared public witness to civil discourse.

The opportunity for direct advocacy work in the US Congress, and occasionally with other governments, has been focused on human trafficking, immigration, and poverty, as well as the epidemic of gun-related violence in our culture. Our United Nations work continues to engage issues of migration, trafficking, indigenous peoples and women. We are in the midst of application for ECOSOC[2] status, which will permit us somewhat greater access to the UN. Lynnaia Main has borne the greatest part of the burden in moving that work forward. There are other sorts of advocacy in which I continue to be involved across the Church, particularly around the consequences of slavery and our need to become a thoroughly anti-racist society. Dioceses continue to learn about their history and to commit to transformation. It's a particular privilege to join celebrations and observances like the one Virginia held in recognition of the anniversary of the emancipation proclamation. We will webcast a churchwide conversation on the State of Racism in Mississippi in mid-November. It will originate in Mississippi but will apply across the church.

I have begun to wonder if this Church might lead a truth and reconciliation initiative about not only the aftermath of slavery, but also the depredation of Native Americans and their lands, and the history of American colonialism.

Another major area of ongoing advocacy work is directly related to the last mark of mission.

V To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth is the Fifth Mark of Mission

Climate change, environmental racism, and the exploitation of the earth's resources, and their consequences for the poorest among us, bring together many of the marks of mission. Along with peace-making, attention to these issues has been a significant part of my work this year. Early this year, a church in Milwaukee hosted a gathering to discuss environmental issues and faith. It brought together representatives of the interfaith council of that city, the scientists of the major Water Institute, parishioners, and activists. Then Province I hosted a Climate Revival in Boston days after the bombing event, and it was a remarkable witness both to those who attended and to pilgrims visiting the memorials in central Boston.

Soon afterward, this Church co-hosted a major event on climate change in Washington, DC with the Church of Sweden. Again it was an opportunity for witness to the wider community, education, and a sacramental expression of full communion with both the Swedes and the ELCA. The videos are posted online.

I also sit on a committee of the National Academy of Sciences that oversees research for the public good. It is an ongoing opportunity to build bridges between the church and the scientific community as well as the varied business, entrepreneurial, and academic communities that are represented on the board.

I'd invite you to reflect on how and where your engagement in God's mission reflects the Five Marks, and where you are working in partnership with the communities in which you live and move and have your being. Our work here is meant to support and encourage the church's engagement in God's mission in ways beyond our imagining. The Five Marks are a good tool for reflection and accountability.