



The 141st Annual Convention of the Diocese of Western Michigan  
DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel Grand Rapids Airport – November 6-7, 2015

“Starting A Movement”

## Bishop’s Address

The Rt. Rev. Wayne M. Hougland, Jr.

Good morning!

The Lord be with you.

Let us pray. (Silence)

*We thank you, O most gracious God, that you have called us to be your people. Help us to know the greatness of our calling, so that we, having one spirit of faith and love, may live in the world as a new and holy generation. Give to us, O God, a new vision and a new charity, a new wisdom and fresh understanding, the revival of our brightness and the renewal of our unity, that the eternal message of your Son, may be proclaimed as the good news of the new age; through him who makes all things new, Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN.*

I’m going to borrow a page out of our new Presiding Bishop’s Convention Address play book.

Bishop Curry always begins his comments to diocesan convention by reading and reflecting on a piece of scripture as a way to set the context for his remarks

Not a bad idea, huh?

A reading from the Gospel According to Mark.

### Mark 8:27-39

*Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, ‘Who do people say that I am?’ And they answered him, ‘John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.’ He asked them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Peter answered him, ‘You are the Messiah.’ And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him. Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, ‘Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.’*

He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, ‘If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose

it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this *adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.*’

We heard this passage on September 13 of this year. It was the gospel lesson for the day I asked you to read my first pastoral letter on the emerging vision the Spirit is calling us to engage. The diocesan vision for mission we are forming. Remember?

It’s funny how the Spirit seems to work, you know?

This passage was the perfect reading for that day.

Here’s why:

This passage sits at the pivotal turning point in the Gospel according to Mark.

It is a hinge passage between the first half of Mark’s good news story where Jesus’ gathers, leads and begins teaching his disciples about the Kingdom of God come near and the second half of the story where Jesus leads his disciples to Jerusalem and the cross demonstrating what the good news looks like.

In this passage Jesus and his boys are way up north far from home in Caesarea Phillipi, way out in the (boonies), in the middle of nowhere. They are as far away from Jerusalem and the temple as they get in this story, far away from everything known and familiar and comfortable. And in this distant unfamiliar place Jesus asks them his pivotal question, “But who do you say that I am?”

It’s a great question, isn’t it? Who(m) do you say that Jesus is?

This really is the question of questions for us. This is *THE* question for who call themselves Christian – for those who proclaim to be followers of Jesus and not just admirers.

Who(m) do you say that Jesus is?

Good ole Peter, my favorite of Jesus’ boys, gets it right. “You are the Messiah.” He says, even though he doesn’t fully understand what this means. So Jesus

tells him. To be the Messiah, my dear Peter, means I will undergo great suffering, it means I will be rejected by the powers that be, it means I will be killed, *and* it means I will rise again. It was hard for Peter to hear this.

And, if we are honest, it's a hard thing for us to hear, Jesus, our savior, my friends, is a loser. He is a selfless, sacrificial loser. Make no mistake about it. Jesus is a loser who throws the game, tosses in the towel, gives up the ghost on purpose, with purpose so that the world might finally see and know the true and awesome power of our God, a power and a grace that can and will and does overcome the very worst humanity can create by overcoming death itself.

Who(m) do you say that Jesus is?

He is not a winner like the ones we Americans traditionally worship and adore and long to be ourselves. Nor is a hero who rides in on his white horse like John Wayne or Clint Eastwood to violently beat down the enemy. Jesus does not, like a DC or Marvel comic book Super Hero, use other worldly powers to save us from our enemies.

No. He is, in truth, a hard truth, the anti-hero. The non-hero who loses badly and loses so completely it is embarrassing. They beat him badly. The score is completely lopsided. The "mercy rule" should have been called – it wasn't.

This is the Messiah, my friends. This is our Messiah, our savior, our Lord. He is a complete utter failure, a loser. And he is calling us to follow him. Calling us to follow him by denying ourselves, by taking up our cross, by losing our lives so that we might save our life. It's simply crazy utter foolishness to be a follower of Jesus the Messiah.

Who do you say that Jesus is?

This is the pivotal question.

Everything hinges on your answer, on our answer.

With this question and Peter's response everything turns in the Gospel according to Mark.

With this question everything turns for us.

We are at a pivotal turning point here in the Episcopal Diocese of Western Michigan.

A year and half ago, at my first convention as your 9<sup>th</sup> Bishop I called us to "Change the Game." That was the theme – to change the church game by calling us all to live ever more intentional spiritual lives by creating and maintaining a rule of life as the way to perfect and strengthen our faith. I believe that the closer we are to God, the more intentional our relationship with God the better we come to know ourselves, the better we understand our calling and the better able we are to respond authentically to God.

As you've heard me say, it's all about relationship.

Our very understanding of God as Trinity is about relationship, about our mutual, intimate and loving God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. When we talk of God we are talking about a community of persons whose relationship emanates healing and wholeness, divinity and holiness. The Trinity teaches us that the nature of God is inherently relational, communal, connected, accepting, forgiving, vulnerable. So, if God's nature is inherently relational, then we must strive to be in community with each other as a reflection of God. **My deep and abiding hope for our diocesan community is we individually grow closer to God by practicing a rule of life and grow closer to one another strengthening our trust and bonds of affection so we might act faithfully in the world as the body of Christ!**

You see, it's all about relationships. Pursuing an intimate relationship with God leads to greater trust in God which leads to a stronger faith in God which will inevitably free us to take up our cross and follow God. Striving to be closer to one another leads to greater trust, greater honesty, greater vision among us setting us free to act faithfully in the world – together - as one.

Building and cultivating relationships has been my primary task these first two years. I believe doing so is the best most hopeful way forward for us. It is also an inherent, integral function of my role as bishop. One I take very seriously. I think this effort is bearing fruit. Hopeful, creative things are popping out there. We are starting to work together, starting to pull together, starting to see ourselves as more than just individuals in individual congregations. A beautiful spirit of collaboration is emerging among us. Here are some examples:

1. The Southwest Coalition of Episcopal Churches has been created among the congregations of Church of the Mediator, Harbert, St. Paul's, St. Joseph, St. Augustine's, Benton Harbor, and Epiphany, South Haven. They pulled together to host a Vigil for Climate Justice, at the Berrien County Courthouse. It was very well attended and garnered much media attention showing how our combined voices can be prophetic.
2. The congregations of St. Paul's, Dowagiac and Trinity Church, Three Rivers are working together in unique and creative shared clergy arrangement structured to ensure each congregation can continue Sunday Eucharist on a regular basis.
3. Holy Trinity, Wyoming and Holy Spirit, Belmont have also entered into a shared clergy arrangement that will benefit both congregations. For this to happen, both congregations had to give something up, sacrifice something. Beautiful.

4. Emmanuel Church, Petoskey and Nativity Church, Boyne City are working together on yet another shared clergy relationship that seeks to reach out beyond them to the smaller communities around them.
5. St. Andrews and St. Mark's, GR have a shared Youth Ministry program.
6. Leaders at St. Timothy's, Richland and Grace, Holland pulled off a first ever Progressive Youth Mission Trip this summer. Another is planned for next summer.
7. Holy Cross, Kentwood is not one but now part of Two Churches as it is successfully and creatively works with Ascension Lutheran Church.

These are just a few of the many emerging collaborative activities started in recent months and I have not even mentioned the continuing domestic and foreign missionary efforts we engage together including Reading Camp, (started in the diocese of Lexington under Bp. Sauls and his wife Ginger's initiative) Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, New Orleans and in the Dominican Republic where we just finished building the Church of San Mateo.

The Spirit is moving among us, y'all, drawing us together. A willingness to work collaboratively, a desire to share resources, a readiness to explore shared ministry is rapidly emerging in our diocese. This is a very hopeful and very, very healthy happening. We are the diocese of Western Michigan! We are one people, with one mission, united by one faith, one hope, one baptism. We need each other.

In a spirit of collaboration, we've spent this year discerning who we might be and what we might do as followers of Jesus. I invited you to attend three "Town Hall" style gatherings early this year. The purpose of these meetings was to prayerfully discern how the Spirit is calling *us* to serve one another and the world around us. Your diocesan council gathered all of your comments sat with, prayed over and distilled these at our retreat in May and again at our June meeting. Here is what we have resolved to do based on what we heard the spirit saying through you and again, thank you for participating in our regional Town Hall Meetings:

"We resolve to create a three year plan for the Diocese, the primary goals of which are: 1. Reaching our younger generations; 2. Caring for creation, our neighbors and our place by supporting programs addressing the needs for food, water, and shelter; 3. Seeking to raise up a deacon in each parish as a catalyst for mission; 4. Engaging in a process of asset mapping to identify the gifts given us to do God's work. In order to achieve these goals, we have identified the necessity to improve internal and external communication: first, to communicate with each other for mutual growth

and learning and second, to the world around us explaining who we are as Episcopal Church, what we stand for and what we are doing in the world."

Now, I don't know about you, but I think this is pretty dang cool. And hopeful and important. We sat and talked together. We listened, carefully, respectfully listened to one another. We were open and honest and vulnerable with one another sharing how we believe the Spirit is calling us to be one.

There is a movement starting among, us stirring. A movement, a shared action is forming among us such that we not only are beginning to see an emerging vision of what to do and where to go but also a vision of our shared identity as Episcopalians in this part of the world. Again, this is really, really cool and exciting and energizing. It represents an important and critical pivot point for us a diocese. It helps us answer Jesus question, "Who do you say that I am?" See? Our brand new PB would call our emerging vision, living into the dream of God. He would say that our fledgling movement is part of the Jesus Movement. A movement that is really a revival for Episcopalians as we boldly seek to proclaim Jesus to the world around us through word and deed. This is an exciting time to be an Episcopalian, my friend. It is a pivotal time for us and for our denomination.

I want to show you Bishop Curry's recent video introducing himself to the Episcopal Church and unpacking for us what he means by being the Jesus Movement. (ENS Video)

We live in exciting, hopeful times. This is a great time to be an Episcopalian and we may be ahead of the curve a bit with our emerging vision.

So let's unpack this resolution a bit shall we?

First, please understand that Diocesan Council is seeking to create a process for living into this emerging vision. The elements of the resolution are not final, end of discussion, carved in stone commandments. They are the framework for a conversation, a framework for starting a movement, a movement which will change over time. Second, your reflection and feedback are essential to continuing the conversation so please, if you haven't, go to our diocesan website, click on "Our Diocesan Vision" and share your thoughts.

Okay, the primary thing you said was we need better communication. Looking at your responses it appears you want better internal and external communication. The desire for internal communication revolved around two things:

1. How we communicate with God through spiritual practices and
2. How we communicate with one another within the diocese.

The focus on external communication was to:

1. How do we communicate ourselves, our lives into the world as a faithful response to our relationship with God? And
2. How might we best communicate to the world who The Episcopal Diocese of Western Michigan how we are living out our calling?

Again, this is tremendously hopeful and exciting. What you are saying is you want to be connected to God and to each other. It says you want to be faithful and responsive followers of God. It says you desire to share your faith, your gifts, your resources so that all may know about the grace and peace of God. Not bad y'all! Not bad.

Four other themes were distilled from these gatherings. They are not listed in any particular order or priority.

1. **Reaching Younger Generations** seems pretty self-evident. If we want to leave this trust we've been given we must actively reach out to younger generations. We must understand that this effort should not be driven by a desire to save the church by bringing in ever newer crops of bill payers and pledge makers. No, this must be a sincere effort to share our faith with those who follow after us. The Gospel good news demands us to share it not to contain it or market it for the sake of saving the institutional church.
2. **Caring for our neighbors and nature and our place by supporting programs focused on food, water and shelter** was a huge constant theme distilled from our conversations. Many of us are already actively engaged in such important ministries ranging from Food Pantry's, to weekly feeding programs, to clothing and baby and diaper pantiy's. Thank you. Keep 'em going. The need for such, sadly, only continues to grow. I personally find the focus on water particularly intriguing. The state of Michigan is defined by waters. As a peninsula our borders are liquid gold. 20% of the world's fresh water surrounds us. It seems to me then, we have a unique calling to be stewards of this invaluable resource. How tragic it is that Flint, MI residents do not have clean drinking water when we are surrounded by such an abundance? Dumbfounding. Thank you must be given to your Diocesan Council who sent a \$2000.00 check to St. Paul's Episcopal Flint, to help overcome this water crisis. Thank you to all our congregations and individuals who raised and sent money to the same end. I see this tragic episode as an example of how our emerging vision can guide us moving forward. Another opportunity is looming in the Domin-

ican Republic as we are in the early stages of planning a mission to get water to an isolated village whose water source was rerouted to service the growing island resorts literally leaving a whole village of farming workers high and dry. We are defined by waters, the fresh waters the surround us and the waters of baptism in which we are buried with Christ, by which we share in his resurrection and through which we are reborn by the Spirit. Food, water, shelter; everyone needs fair and reasonable access to these. Stay tuned for a presentation on the Michigan Good Foods Charter coming up later in our convention.

3. **Raising up deacon in every parish as a catalyst for mission.** We just simply need to get out there, out in the world, out where the people are. I've been saying this since Day 1. 1<sup>st</sup> we need to attend to our relationship with God through a Rule of Life. 2<sup>nd</sup> we need to GO! Remember the incense story from my Consecration at Calvin College? We set the alarm off and the Calvin folks chased us out of the building into the streets?! I so love that story. It speaks to the truth....we must go to where the people are.....we must carry what is good and hopeful, holy and restorative out into the world so that everyone might know what we know.....God is loving, merciful...grace is present in the world here – NOW! That forgiveness and healing and resurrection are real, are possible, and readily available to all who ask.

Did you notice the movement in Bishop Curry's video? There were 3 movements...1. He started in the church. 2. Then he moved out through the church front door. 3. And walks out into the streets. That was completely intentional. We must make the same move!!

Those congregations willing to humbly GO into the world carrying grace and hope will thrive and flourish. (Those congregations) that cling to their pews, that (seek to cling to their resources, their buildings – will eventually lose them.) Those who seek to save their lives will lose them, but those who deny themselves, who take up their cross will save them.

So, the third area of focus in our emerging vision is to

3. **raise up a deacon, a servant, in every congregation to help lead us out into the world** because this is essential to the Jesus Movement.

We currently have 4 people training for the diaconate. I believe we will have 8 by this time next year. We are working collaboratively with the Diocese of Michigan and Eastern Michigan on this training. It is a 3 year program of study. It won't be easy. It will require sacrifice, it will require money, it will require time

and energy. But, if you hear a call stirring to serve the least and the last, and the lost....If you have a heart for the poor.....then you may have a call to be a deacon. I am looking to create a “Disturbance of Deacons”!.... People willing to disturb the waters by calling us up and out into the world because that’s where Jesus is leading us and where WE must go.....(PAUSE)

I’ve got some energy around this Y’all. The church can simply no longer be a worship club. If our sole purpose as church is to gather on Sunday’s then we’ve not heard the Gospel imperative to go spread the good news. If we are focused on church maintenance on church survival then our congregations will most assuredly die. If we do not seek to share ourselves, our souls, our stuff in the service of others then we are merely a worship club and not much more.

The final area of focus is a bit surprising to me. Surprisingly hopeful and unexpected. Diocesan Council heard in the your sharing, a desire to identify our assets. Spiritual, missional, and financial assets. The question is this....If we want to communicate with each other better – relate and work with each other better – then we need to get a handle on what we have to know better what we might share.....Also, if we want to communicate to the wider world who we are and what we are doing then we need to list and catalog exactly what it is we are doing! Makes sense, doesn’t it?

So, the 4<sup>th</sup> vision work we might engage together is **4. Asset Mapping** ....identifying what we have.

I see this breaking down into 3 categories of asset analysis:

1. *Personal Spiritual Gifts Inventory*.....There are helpful instruments out there that can help us identify our personal, individual spiritual gifts....What if everyone in every congregation could clearly identify their spiritual giftedness? Many might be sitting on the sidelines doubtful about how they might engage the Jesus Movement. “How can I help?” some might say. A fair question. So, maybe we should help answer this question. Maybe we create a congregational database of spiritual giftedness. Remember, we are made for each other. We are made, designed to be in relationship with one another. We need each other. Christianity is not a sole act, an individual enterprise. We are the body of Christ – each one necessary and essential and valuable to the whole. The better we know ourselves, the better we know our gifts....the better those can be employed in the Jesus Movement, we have been baptized into.
2. A second area of Asset Mapping is simply *listing the ministries*, we, as congregations are doing. Feeding Programs, Baby Pantries,

Reading Camp, Youth Ministry, Young Adult Ministry, Water Purification equipment, providing medical equipment, etc.....there are literally hundreds of life-giving...life-saving ministries we engage in this diocese. Hundreds! We don’t even know the full extent of what we do and if we don’t know, how can the people of western Michigan know? They don’t. So let’s list them! Celebrate them! Share them with the rest of Western Michigan.....The church-wide office of the Episcopal Church in New York is already helping dioceses do just this and we are seeking to utilize this database. The platform already exists – we just need to engage it.

3. The final area of Asset Mapping is simple. It involves each congregation *listing our hard assets*. What physical property, furnishings and fixtures, financial holdings and investments do we have? What do we have? What do we own? How well are these gifts being utilized? What ongoing capital maintenance and improvements costs do we need to consider for roofs, boilers, organs, HVAC systems, stained glass windows, etc..? Do we have plans to address these? Might some of these be shared amongst our congregations? How might we think proactively about the stewardship of our physical assets? The better we know what we have the better able we can employ them in the Jesus Movement. Remember, we do not own our church facilities. We hold them in trust – for each other and for those who we raise up to join the Jesus Movement behind us, but most importantly we hold them in trust for those we are called to serve.

Imagine for a moment how identifying our assets, our spiritual, missional, and physical assets might change things. Imagine. How might this change how we see ourselves, understand our calling, our purpose, our potential? I believe that with this knowledge we will move from a position of fearful shortage to a position of thankful abundance..... see all we have?! We have so much my friends! There is nothing we need. We have everything we need. EVERYTHING! All we may lack is faith in God and trust in ourselves.

We have everything we need. Everything we need to start a movement or perhaps more accurately, we have everything we need to continue in Jesus’ movement. So, you might ask, how does a movement get started? How do I join the movement? Good questions. Let me show you a short, fun 3 minute Ted Talk video on starting a movement. It’s not as hard you might think. (Video)

Ok, so maybe Jesus is that shirtless dancing guy in the video the one willing to stand out and be ridiculed. The one willing to risk everything to dance to the

rhythm of God's song, a song that leads him to the cross. Maybe being part of the Jesus Movement is like dancing, dancing to the rhythm of God tune instead of our won. And, maybe, the first follower, Jesus' first dance partner is Peter, the one who recognizes and bravely proclaims Jesus as the Messiah. He answers Jesus' question, who do you say that I am by naming Jesus the Messiah, he joins the dance and everything changed for him, for Jesus and for us. So, maybe, when we hear in the Gospel according to Mark Jesus' question, "who do you say that I am?" what we are really being asked is, "will join in the dance?" Will you get up of your feet and come dance my crazy dance with me? Will you come to me, follow me, dance with me, throw your hands in the air and wave 'em like you just don't care? I'm a loser you know and I embrace losers, embrace the last, lost and the least. Will you risk embarrassment, risk ridicule, risk riches and come dance with me anyway? Wil you invite others to dance with us?

We are at pivotal moment my friends, in our denomination, in our diocese, within ourselves. We are being invited, always invited to join the Jesus Movement. We are being invited to join in the dance. And everything is hanging on our answering one simple, elegant but oh so difficult question, "Who(m) do you say that I am?"

What do you say Western Michigan?

Wanna start a movement?

Good, let's dance!