

Presiding Bishop's Address to the Synod of the Episcopal Missionary Church

Monteagle, Tennessee, – July 13, 2017

Dear People of the Episcopal Missionary Church, and honored guests, we welcome you again to Christ Church Monteagle and to the Cumberland Plateau. Please let us know of anything that might make your visit more special and more of a blessing to you.

I am speaking to you in what I regard as a particularly challenging time in the life of Christians everywhere. Christianity itself is under siege. However, it is our calling to serve God all the days of our lives, and, for many of us, that calling has come through the Episcopal Missionary Church.

As most of you know, The Rt. Rev. A. Donald Davies was our first Presiding Bishop, and our church was first organized at a meeting in Texas in 1992. Bishop Davies had been my bishop in The Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Dallas. I had urged him many years before to leave the House of Bishops of the Episcopal Church and to form a true missionary church, which would have the great Anglican heritage intact, without compromise or fear of intimidation. He told me that six bishops would be following him. I told him that I believed that was very unlikely, but that he was doing the right thing. Almost immediately he was criticized on the grounds that the country already had too many continuing bodies and did not need another. He and his wife, Mabel, sacrificed much of their life savings buying a small group of buildings and chapel in Aiken, South Carolina. Sadly, that beginning failed in terms of being the headquarters for our jurisdiction. Intellectuals did flock there for a duration, but it was short-lived and the growth spurt did not materialize. At that time many people could not face the reality that their church lives would never be the same. I sought and secured a release in good standing from the Anglican Church in America (ACA) so that I could fulfill my promise to stand with Bishop Davies.

It is important to our history to note that Bishop Davies was the person who named Christ Church Monteagle as the Cathedral and Headquarters of The Episcopal Missionary Church. What an irony that even a small jurisdiction should have its cathedral in such a rural area. Yet we are, in fact, just off a major Interstate. The only way one can drive, logically, from Chicago to Miami, is over our mountain. If you will examine our Guest Book, which is now our third Guest Book, you will see

that we have visitors from all over. We take this responsibility seriously to be a beacon, a lighthouse, in a darkening world. Today is packed with adventures. You will hear Gabrielle Thompson, Fr. Charles Moncrief, Fr. Peter Nganga and others. You will join in the Ordination of John Greaves to the priesthood. You will be blessed by more of the great hymns of which you had a taste at Evensong last night and Morning Prayer this morning.

You will hear from other people today about how they are seeing the Episcopal Missionary Church as, in the words of former President George Herbert Walker Bush, "points of light."

You are sitting in one of them. I want to proceed to speak of some others. St. Andrew's in Cheyenne, Wyoming, is one of the oldest continuing churches in our country, but a few years ago it had dwindled to such a small number of people that its future looked uncertain. One of their rectors had taken them out of the E.M.C. and was attempting to lead them into a small Eastern Orthodox body. Since that rector is now deceased, I will speak only of what has happened over the last few years. The congregation began to grow again. Fr. Charles Moncrief and Ruth made a number of trips out there. Dr. Tim Davies, a professor at Colorado State became very active. David Ivester had grown up in St. Andrew's. I have known three generations of his family. Before long it began to occur to Dr. Tim that he was feeling a call to become not only Dr. Tim but Fr. Tim. A period of soul searching began and our talks intensified until Tim's calling was fully affirmed and concluded with his ordinations, first to the diaconate and then to the priesthood. David also was ordained a deacon and some time later a priest.

Martha and I love the west and southwest and were happy to travel to that area and especially to Cheyenne which is a very dear place to us- not to mention that the once fragile future of St. Andrew's has thrived under the inspired leadership of Fr. Tim and Fr. David Ivester, and the calling of Fr. Tim's incredible wife, Gloria, to help women faced with unplanned and unwanted pregnancies, to choose life, and in the process to meet the Lord of Life, Jesus Himself.

As this calling for Gloria intensified, we know she sought others with whom to surround herself who had a like-minded spirit for helping often very troubled and confused pregnant women, and their counterparts, those who had had an abortion and had grown guilty about it and needed spiritual help to move on with their lives. Her vision, her witness, and her efforts have paid off well with the outpouring of support locally including Life Choice's banquet in 2017 and the raising of \$140,000 "to begin the process of securing and customizing a Mobile Unit to be part of this

life-saving ministry. This Unit will offer pregnancy testing, sexually transmitted infection (STI) testing, limited obstetrical ultrasounds, and individual counseling.” We are full of gratitude to God and to all of those responsible for the support that Gloria and Life Choice is receiving through her vision of this ministry. And we are proud of Fr. Tim Davies and the team at St. Andrew’s for the re-birth and growth of this parish. They humbly plead that St. Andrew’s was only one of many churches which came together to support this good work. That makes my point even more clear. We do not bear the light alone. We are not an Anglican club, or even a part of an “ism.” We are missionaries in a pagan, and sometimes hostile, culture.

Our culture has caved further since we entered the Continuum so many years ago and Martha incorporated many of our observations into her speech at the Synod held in Columbus, Ohio. Our entire history as a nation has been waylaid by revisionists who intend, it seems, to throw our “unalienable” rights (those written into our founding documents) and replace them with those which no longer allow us to see ourselves as “endowed by our Creator.”

In Blue Ridge, Georgia at St. Luke’s some years back, a group of men, saw that while Women’s groups were flourishing, men did not seem to claim the high calling of both understanding and sharing with others that would bring men to Christ and His Church. Modeled on the Tennessee Laymen’s Conferences which once drew hundreds of men to this mountain, St. Luke’s blazed a trail that continues to attract men each fall. It has been my honor to attend each of these conferences and also to be a chauffeur and servant to do my part in participating in this “point of light.” The clergy of St. Luke’s, The Rev. Victor Morgan and The Rev. Ron Wikander back the efforts and devotion of Roger Johnson and his team of laity in planning and carrying through on these conferences. Come join us in October in Blue Ridge.

About ten years ago, it seemed that the light was dimming severely at Holy Cross, Franklin, Tennessee. One of my closest friends told me that “the Anglican moment has passed” and I should accept that fact. God, however, seems to have thought otherwise. I believe God guided me to bring Fr. Tim Williams to Tennessee, where he has deep roots, and to encourage him and his family to enjoy our little church and to use their gifts alongside the fine tent maker priest, Fr. Vaughn Cooper, and the small but vibrant group of laity still there. Now Michael Hogue is a deacon and the parish hums with activity and deep theology and Celtic Evensongs on St. Patrick’s Day and other special occasions.

In Warrenton, Virginia and that whole area the light is shining. Christ Church, Warrenton realized some years ago that addiction was a problem which cuts across

all lines. They opened their doors to A.A. This is not unusual for churches, but the numbers which began to go up meant the rector and vestry had to be firm in saying that A.A. would continue to be holding meetings. Bishop Jeff Anderson has been a recognized leader in every sense of that word, and Bishop Vince McLaughlin has come alongside our West Point Bishop, and brought a bit of Scotland with him. Now more and more men are presenting themselves for consideration as postulants and tiny churches are sensing that the Anglican Tradition is more than just a beautiful flower in God's garden.

In Columbus, Ohio, in our Christ Church there, in the entrance hall, you can examine the actual copy of the Affirmation of St. Louis, which has been read to hundreds of faithful men and women. The rector of Christ Church, Fr. Michael Cochran, and his wife Gretchen planned to be with us today. But yesterday Fr. Mike called to say that they could make the trip at this time. Fr. Mike and Gretchen have been faithful friends, even finding our services when we were renting the Monteagle Seventh Day Adventist Church. When I was invited as one of the speakers at the 25th Anniversary of the St. Louis meeting, I referred to the quiet and strong who make our lives better. Wale Fafiade, who emigrated from Nigeria, also part of the team in Columbus, brought his family alongside Fr. Mike. So we have another 'point of light.'

I could keep you here all day by speaking about what I have seen, just in the last few years, in terms of the ministry of The Episcopal Missionary Church. We love our Anglican brethren, and we believe we are already one with them, whether we are invited to sign Concordats or not.

One of my favorite passages from Holy Scripture is Acts. 2:42. "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, and in the prayers and the breaking of bread." These words never cease to thrill me, and to inspire me to proclaim the Gospel and to seek fellowship and pray with others. When we come together, especially in the Eucharist, we are fulfilling this passage. May we have a great time here, and go forth strengthened for service and rejoicing in our ministry!