

Bishop Skirving's Address Transcript from the 141st Annual Convention of the Diocese of East Carolina

I'm happy to stand before you this day to offer my address to convention. We gather this day as leaders in the Diocese of East Carolina, "Children of God called to follow Jesus and to continue in the ways of the Episcopal church. God blesses us in the beauty and bounty of the land where we live and through the diversity of the people with whom we share life as church, we are called to be good stewards of all of God's gifts and to use them to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ." These words may be familiar to you. They were adapted from the language associated with the Mission Priorities, which we adopted at convention in June of 2020.

Words of Thanks

To my friends in Christ, I would like to begin my address to convention with some words of thanks. I would like to thank each of you faithful followers of Jesus who have given of your time and energy to gather here this day. Our annual convention is an important event in the life of our diocese, even if the shape and process of our time together continues to shift.

I would like to thank Judy Whichard and the members of the Convention Planning Committee who have been carrying a much heavier load this year, particularly with the departures of Jimi Paderick and Hannah Jarman Stotler from our diocesan house staff. Much of the work of supporting convention had been carried by Jimi and Hannah, so our thanks to you, the Convention Planning Committee and to the members of the local arrangements team who have worked with you, for all of your hard work and attention to the important details that make this event something worth attending. Thank you.

I'd like to thank our Secretary of Convention, Shurley Ray Weddle, and our Chancellor John Geiszler-Ludlum for their leadership in organizing the legislative side of this gathering. I would like to thank our Treasurer, Tess Judge, for her work with the Finance Committee and our staff in preparing the annual budget again this year. I particularly want to thank Shurley Ray, who has worked hard as our Secretary of Convention over time but had to also pick up an awful lot of responsibilities. Picture that in the things we inherited from our departing staff.

There was an 8.5" by 11" sheet of paper, single-spaced, with a list of all of the stuff we were supposed to bring for the convention office. By the time we were done, I think we brought the gavel. Thank you, Stephanie [for bringing the gavel]. Shurley Ray brought her own laptop and printer, and we didn't bring all that other stuff, because we have reimagined a little bit what it is to support our convention planning committee and what is the work that we need to do while we're here.

People have worked together so well. I'd like to thank the members of our diocesan house staff during a year of nearly continuous change and adjustment. I want to thank LaTonya Smith—who is our Director of Administration of Finance— Litisha, Emily, Sara, and Fred, who have been with us all year. You'll see how I've got this organized, offering us strength and consistency through their work and through their commitment.

I'd like to thank Stephanie, Tommy, Skip, and Evelyn, who have all joined us during the year, bringing new gifts, perspectives, and energies. I also want to thank Hannah, Jimi, and Mollie who have moved on to other jobs during these last months. Each new hire has given us the opportunity to more clearly focus on the mission priorities of the diocese and to strengthen our capacity to support the congregations and ministries of the diocese.

I don't want to spend time doing what I would call the math today and seeing how this equals that equals something else. Please do not assume that one person who's new on staff has necessary really taken the responsibilities of someone who's no longer on staff. We continue as many employee groups would need to do, to reorder and reorganize and set new priorities in our work, and we will do our best as we figure that out and to share from the website the responsibilities of who looks after what. But, as we tell folks, if you get hold of us at Diocesan House, don't worry if you get the wrong person because we know who to pass to, and we will do our best to continue the work at Diocesan House in supporting the life and ministry of the diocese.

I would like to thank every person who worked hard to prepare for the revival we had planned to host last October with Presiding Bishop Michael Curry and his team. We experienced great disappointment, certainly, when that event was postponed, but also a time of great learning about our capacity for ministry. Those of us who were closest to the center of the planning experience got to see the way in which several teams came together to do the work—teams made up of creative, diverse, and energetic leaders from across the diocese.

I remember some of the wonderful moments when people and pieces came together. Steve Thomas was the one who led the local arrangements committee. I think we called it that, and at one point we were struggling on what was a relatively short timeline to figure out how we were going to get the tents we needed. Well, you know, somebody who's been arranging for tents for years now: Kenneth Chestnut for the Ocean City Jazz Festival. So, Kenneth was added to the team and we had tents. Those were the kinds of stories that just continued to happen as we moved forward to get ready for the revival that didn't happen.

We had a whole team of people, some of them in the room today, who had planned for a ministry fair designed to showcase the congregations and ministries of the diocese so that we who were there and our guests who came with us could learn a little bit more about what it means for us to be church in today's world.

We had planned a day of music and speakers and worship, including all sorts of different languages, Spanish and English musicians of almost every style we had. Picture the Presiding Bishop leading worship was Schola Cantorum as part of the backup choir, only part of it. We had lots of other musicians as well: Eric Moulton led in the gathering of that team.

But again, it was wonderful to watch the way in which different creative people came together in order to plan something that we hoped we would have been able to do. I've spoken already to the local arrangements team. One of the exciting things we saw through their work was the forging of a real partnership, I believe, with the people of the Episcopal Farmworker Ministry and La Sagrada de la Familia, an exciting partnership.

The Farmworker Ministry particularly had been going through a difficult time of transition, and it was our hope in hosting the revival on the side of the Farmworker Ministry to give something of a boost and some support. In the end, I know it meant a lot of extra work for them, and so I think for them especially, I was disappointed that the revival was postponed, and yet I continued to hear stories of the way in which they turned all of that hard work into good things that have continued and work that has continued to be important. Please, if you can get out and visit the booth of the Farmworker ministry, you can learn more for yourself.

We experienced a powerful moment of shared leadership when the deans of our dioceses engaged with me and with members of the Executive Council in a conversation that led us to the decision to postpone the revival. That's right. If you didn't hear this clearly when it happened, the revival was not canceled because of Bishop Curry's health, although we were certainly preparing for the possibility that he would not be able to with us be with us at full capacity (Please continue to pray for our Presiding Bishop, Michael Curry, his wife Sharon, and all of their family). But before he and his people made that decision, we reached the decision that we had not generated enough energy across the diocese for this event to happen in the way that we would hope that it would have happened. And so, our deans spoke up and shared their experience of what they were hearing from people in the areas where they served and brought that together for what I'm sure was a bit of a difficult decision.

It started it was something like “Dear Bishop, I'm not sure we want to tell you this, but...”, and then they were willing to sit down in conversation with members of our Executive Council. Prayerfully we reached the decision that we did not want that was easy to make. We had disappointment, yes, but we have to be honest and recognize that we also have real hope regarding our potential to respond to God's call to us so that when God calls us to the next big and important thing, we have some recent experience of what it means to bring together the people of this diocese in much the way that spoke of the lay ministry of the congregation being the leaders in the work that they shared with us.

The lay leadership of the effort that we made to get ready for a revival was incredible. I'd like to thank the leaders and members of all of the ministries of our diocese. I look forward to continuing to serve with you and to increase our capacity to work together effectively in service of the people of our dioceses and the people of Eastern North Carolina.

Finally, I would like to thank the members of the Standing Committee and other leaders of the diocese for the support I was given to complete the sabbatical originally planned for 2020. I got a little bit of it in 2020. But for those of you who've been paying attention, COVID kind of got in the way, so I returned early from that with full support that the time would be available when it was right to take it.

A Turning Point

So, this past summer I had about two months that I took much, much of it at Trinity Center, for which I gave thanks to the space that was given to me by the staff there and the support given to our family. The sabbatical time for me was a time of rest and refreshment, a time to refocus

during the ordination liturgy for Bishops. After a time of examination of the one to be ordained, that person is asked, “Are you persuaded that God has called you to the Office of Bishop?” Now, that's a subtle difference, but when a person is ordained deacon or priest, they ask if they are called; bishops-to-be are asked if they are persuaded, and the response is to be “I am so persuaded,” emphasis on whichever syllable you like.

Checking in to this hotel for convention reminded me that it was ten years ago, almost in 2014, certainly, that we gathered in Greenville for the ordination of your eighth bishop in worship that took place at the Rock Springs Center here in Greenville. I remember some of the conversations into which I was stopped about whether it counted, if it was not in a church. I think you know how I feel about that.

Before God and the people of this diocese, I declared that I was so persuaded. In the years since, that question has remained at the center of my own spiritual life, as I now understand that it does for so many of my bishop colleagues. Sabbatical time gave me the opportunity to reflect more deeply on this question, and I want to tell you that I was able to return to work last September with the conviction that I am still persuaded that God has called me to the office of bishop (you may want to convince me otherwise) and to the service of the people of this diocese. But, there was a single moment during my sabbatical I want to tell you about when this understanding became particularly clear for me.

It was on one of those hot days in August. We'd had a whole string of really hot days in August, and I was told that one of the effects of that heat was that the water at Trinity Center was more like the color of water that can be found in the Caribbean. It got bluer than ever, and I'll leave that to the scientists to say whether that's a good or right thing. I just remember around lunchtime floating on the water at Trinity Center in a very deep sense of being relaxed, at peace, supported as it were, floating in God's love. It was like a lot of those kinds of things that people call mountaintop moments, and that while it's happening, you don't necessarily have a full understanding or appreciation of what is happening.

Some of this is language that I was able to pull together more fully in the days afterwards, but I realize that in that experience of simply floating on the water—and I've spent my whole life around water and I was trained as a lifeguard—water's a familiar place for me. So that's part of my comfort, but I was able to just float in that spot warm and comfortable. I think I even said to my wife, “I could do this every day”. And as I came away, my sense was deeply that I had been sustained and supported by God's love.

I recognized and reaffirmed—reaffirmed from that experience that it is not my own power—that equips me for the work of being a bishop or even living life as a human being. But, it is God's power. Now, that might seem like one of those incredibly simple observations that someone who's become a bishop should have figured out a long time ago, and I have, but it's good to be reminded. It's good to be reminded in the midst of a busy life, which all of us have in various degrees, that it's not all about us.

It's not all about how hard we work. It's not all about the skills we acquired along the way. It's certainly not all about who we know and how we can manage relationships. And, it's absolutely

not about the balance of our bank accounts, but as followers of Jesus and children of God—a loving God—we need to know deeply in our hearts, in our souls, and in our being that God sustains us and that God carries us. A lot of people like that poem called “Footprints” that fits in well with the Trinity Center scenario of walking on the beach and seeing that where there were two sets of footprints, there is only one. I appreciate that poem. For me, that wasn't a “Footprints” day. That was simply a day of being sustained.

There are those who've been around Trinity Center with me when I've been there and at Camp Trinity over the years, which might be some of our young people; there was a summer where I made myself available because we were still keeping tight COVID protocols, and Mary Beth Bradbury was, I think, appreciative of the fact that I committed to being there for worship every week so there weren't a lot of strange clergy coming in and out with whatever diseases we might have brought. I preached every Thursday with camp, and the camp staff learned very quickly that I use the same sermon deliberately for their sake and tried to adjust it for the age of campers that were present. The sermon had to do about the vine and the branches and abiding in God's love, dwelling deeply, and the love that God provides for us and understanding our place on the vine, not as the one who created it, not as the one who prunes it, but as one who is simply called to abide and bear fruit.

I was reminded of this experience, this reality, again two Sundays ago when our reading from Mark's gospel described those in the synagogue as having been astounded that Jesus taught as one with authority and not as the scribes (Mark 1:21-28). This is simplistic, I know, but too often I believe that as we are those scribes operating from an authority of institution, of structure, of tradition, of place, of privilege, but too seldom from the authority that comes from God in the way that it did with Jesus in that story.

For those who are biblical scholars, students of Greek, the word that's used for “authority” in that story speaks of an authority and a power that comes from within, as contrasted with other words interpreted “authority” that speak of institutional power or positional power. People are hungry for words spoken with the authority that was witnessed in Jesus words of power, love, and forgiveness, words of deep compassion and of justice, words that do not simply conform to the wisdom of the world in which we live, but which point to the world that we proclaim God is ushering into our midst, into being.

Between Now and Our Next Convention

In the years that I have left as your bishop, I want to join you in leading from the authority that we have from God, rather than relying too often only on our own with wisdom and understanding, as this next section is tentatively titled between now and our next convention. I'm not sure if I develop that theme really well, so you can be the judge of that, but I've organized it into three sections in the time that we have between now and our next convention.

Relationships

I hope that we can focus well on relationships without telling the whole of their story. I want to invite your prayers for the people of St. Cyprian's in New Bern, who for years have struggled

with the reality that they face a church that has already suffered much deterioration over time and could not sustain Hurricane Florence when it hit a small congregation of aging people. It has been a struggle for them to remain a congregation. They have had help from lots of directions. They have had offers of support from the people of Christ Church in New Bern, but they have now reached that place where our canons are too restrictive.

I have spoken with a few folks about how to handle that, because when a congregation reaches the point that it can no longer function independently, then there are two options in our canons. They can come to the bishop and say, "We can't do this anymore." And, if you know the folks at St. Cyprian's, they are dedicated to never saying those words. Or, the bishop can come to convention and essentially ask convention to take over the congregation and then leave it for the trustees to do the work that would need to be done. I don't find either of those options acceptable. It's been a while now, but when I last sat with the leadership of St. Cyprian's, three of their four vestry members agreed finally, for the first time, that they would be willing to accept help in the governance level of the life of their congregation, and we don't have provisions for that.

I'm declaring right now, because I couldn't figure out a way to get a resolution to you that would allow me permission to do this. I'm declaring to you right now. There was support from some folks that the rector of Christ Church (The Rev. Paul Canady) has told me would be available and with the support of some other people in this diocese. I want to set a board, whatever it will be called, of people who will work alongside the vestry of St. Cyprian's in the work of making decisions about the life and future of this congregation, because, let me tell you, they have a history that we don't want to lose that is centered in the history of the African-American community of New Bern. I won't get their story right, and someday we'll get them to tell it again, but they served as a hospital in the midst of a great fire in that city.

I've been there for homecoming when the family comes back and the place is packed with people who live in places like Atlanta and they tell the story of what Christ was saying, St. Cyprian's has been for them. They have entered into a partnership with the local historical society, the African American Historical Society. I may not have that title quite right with the partnership that they're going to share space, so that that society will be present in their space, in their building, and they will work together in mutually beneficial ways.

We can't leave the three or four remaining active members of St. Cyprian's alone to do that by themselves, so I'm telling you that I'm going to do something I wish I had done a long time ago, and that's just: we're going to do it. And, if the chancellor doesn't come back up to the table, I'm guessing it's because she's calling some senior bishop to let them know what I did. Whatever the reality is, we've got a lot of congregations in this diocese that need someone to come alongside them as well, but our system pushes rugged individualism that says we need to make it on our own or not at all.

We've got a lot of congregations not represented here who have been represented here in recent years, but no longer have quite enough members—congregations who, even if they didn't have many to gather and worship, made that pledge year because they wanted to show their support, who this year have not made their pledge, four or five [congregations]. This has been going on for a long time.

Some of you have been hearing me say for a long time, our canonically mandated structures don't allow us or don't support us in doing some of the work we need to do, except in the way I described. I'm hoping that if we can support the peoples of St. Cyprian's well and get alongside them to support the way they believe God is calling that we can do that in other places too.

In attending to our relationships, we need to take seriously the reality of mutual accountability across the diocese. Working with our lay clergy deans to support ministries, which are regional, I could tell and they can tell (and they're going to have a chance to tell some stories of their experiences as deans a little later), we will have the chance to imagine ways in which we can be church together, not just within our own walls, but in relationship with friends and neighbors—mutual accountability between diocesan staff and ministry, leadership and deans and congregations.

We need to clarify the relationships between congregations and diocese and what those relationships need to be. How do congregations support diocese? How does diocese support congregation? What do we expect of one another? How do we move forward together? I can tell you lots of stories of what people tell me they expect of the diocese, and I can tell you lots of stories of ways in which individuals and congregation support the diocese. And, I got lots of other stories I could tell you where it doesn't go quite like that. We need to tend to the relationships and be the people of God that we are called to be, seeking God's new work and supporting it.

Resources

Want to speak of resources? A couple of particular resources: we have a School for Ministry. It's a good thing, because look at how many people we have forming for ordained ministry and that School for Ministry is still a relatively new group in our dioceses and they, like many, are struggling with the constraints of how we've always done it and the challenge of what we need to do. That's a reality that they face and a reality that's faced in other places in our diocese. And yet, there are so many more opportunities.

As I consult with friends and other dioceses, bishops and others, I recognize that some of those diseases that are most fully growing into their call to be church in today's world are also supporting formation for licensed lay ministries, worship leaders and preachers. Now, some of you in the bigger churches know you can do that yourselves. You don't need the diocese's help with that, but not every congregation has a staff of clergy. Not every congregation has veteran worship leaders. Not every congregation has even experienced lay preachers, and yet, in other dioceses, that's being seen as a part of the solution to the challenge we have of being church in a time where the world has changed dramatically and we still think the same old methods will work just fine. We need to support our School for Ministry and its developing work, and we need to continue to find ways of supporting the formation of lay and clergy leaders.

This next thing is a bit of an announcement, but more information will come out publicly very quickly. Some of us in this room have had good experience working with a group called Project Resource. You'll learn more about them as their work is announced. With funding from a family

foundation that was given to us a number of years ago—the Foreman family of Elizabeth City, a trust that we have cared for carefully over the years and have only used a little bit at a time—we going to be funding Project Resource to come into our diocese for two sets of events. Their work is to encourage yearlong stewardship, theologically rooted and solid stewardship.

To help us get started, there's going to be a Friday night and Saturday in March, that will be mostly by invitation, with diocesan leaders who are invested in the care of some of our institutions and who will work together to strengthen our ministry as a diocese in stewardship—annual campaigns, online giving. It's things like plan gifts; it's the whole works. And then, there will be, starting in April, a five-week virtual conference for congregational leadership. April and May is not a bad time for members of congregations who are involved in stewardship ministries to learn some new tricks to ground their experience with some solid teaching, and then to have that in hand in order to work with their own congregations to help the congregation to build and augment their own ministries of stewardship. So watch for the details in all the usual ways. Just because convention's over doesn't mean we'll stop trying to communicate. We've sent lots out lately, but this this will be coming soon.

There will be no cost to participate in these things unless you're doing an overnight with the first one; the costs will be covered. And, not only will they be covered, but they're covered in such a way that even if you can't get to the online meetings, we have them as a set of resources that we can share afterwards for those who want to get at them again, so please watch for those resources as a way of supporting your ministries in our congregations and our ministry together as a diocese.

Realignment

I've heard some interesting conversations in these last couple of months related to the fact that some have learned that my wife Sandy and I have relocated from Kinston to Beaufort and with some humor. I guess the idea that maybe putting convention off until November 2025, if we decide to do that, will be so I can retire and get out of the way quickly. You've heard me on retirement. You'll hear about it when I'm not persuaded anymore.

Our conversation about shifting the timing of convention is rooted most deeply in the reality of the challenge that congregational leadership faces in hosting annual meetings that might be somewhere in the December-January period. At the same time, they're setting budgets, and yet we're asking for pledges to diocesan budget at the same time that people are being elected at annual meetings. We're already trying to get them registered for convention and, if we get everybody registered, as we seem to have done again, there's hardly any time to engage you in preparation for convention or in the wider life of a diocese.

You might be almost thinking that when you go home tomorrow, you're done by moving convention into the November slot, as many other dioceses have already done. We're hoping that next year when you elect delegates to convention, those people will serve from when they're elected at the end of '24 through the end of the convention: if it's adopted, that will happen in November of 2025. There's a way to reset some of the rhythms to allow you to become more deeply engaged in the life of the diocese, to participate in identifying and calling leaders into

ministry roles, to developing and putting forward resolutions about things that are important to you, your congregation, your ministry for us to consider.

There are, we believe, a lot of reasons for making this shift. And as we make this shift, I can simply commend to you a promise to you, commit to you, that those of us who will have responsibility will look to renew existing rhythms and consider new patterns. I've already had conversations with others who care deeply about events that normally happen in November and wonder what a convention in November might do to that. We'll get at those things. We'll work at those things.

The idea of bringing this resolution with all the details is so that you all can say “yes” or “no” before we go and do all of that work. But, assuming that this convention says “yes,” then in the time to come, a lot of us will do that work, beginning with the Executive Council who worked at this at the first set of meetings we had right after convention last year and stayed with it as we needed to through the year, including the Finance Committee, who have already figured out how to change their year long process to come with a budget for us. If we adopt the resolution that's been put out, there'll be time to debate that later. But, as chair of the meeting, I don't normally engage in presentations for resolutions.

As one who's been deeply involved in it (Resolution 2024-03), I want to share with you how I see this realignment as an important part of our life together. I am almost certainly going to invoke opportunity given to me in the constitution and canons that I haven't used before, and that is to call together something that is named in the canons. I consult in committee. It's one of the few things I can find in the canons that the bishop can do by the bishop's own self, up to 18 members for one year to do whatever they're asked to do. My hope is that in gathering a consulting committee together of people who understand and appreciate our life as diocese (but who are able to look at the big picture and think outside the box ,to use those phrases) might allow us to sort of recalibrate or realign some of the things about our life as diocese we have proven ourselves unable to do when we stay in our separate ministries, committees, and commissions. Stay tuned.

Singing the Lord's Song in a Foreign Land

This morning, during our morning devotions, the passage of scripture offered to us was Psalm 137. Many people, who realize that when I speak or preach I don't do that from notes, have the idea. I just am making it up as I go. I think a lot of preachers get that. Maybe some work that way. I've had in the corner of my desk for months a theme for this convention that is rooted in Psalm 137, not the first words: “By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down and wept when we remembered Zion.” Though truthfully, those words are pretty powerful.

We seem to spend a lot of time sitting down and weeping. We spend a lot of time regretting that the church isn't like we think we remember it, whether it was ever like that or not. We have a hard time giving up things that are dear to us—which might not mean anything to those who are on the other side of the kind of generation which were mentioned when our young people spoke to us—but we hold on tightly.

I used to have fun teaching from the Book of Common Prayer that when people were joining the congregation and wanted to become, in my case, most of the Anglicans, now Episcopalians, that the first thing they needed to do is learn 16th century English. That should not be a requirement for membership in our church. As much as I love and have been shaped by the Book of Common Prayer, in a number of its manifestations “by the Rivers of Babylon, there we sat down and wept when we remembered Zion.”

The people who were sitting, the people who were on the banks of the River of Babylon, were being ridiculed by those who had taken them into captivity. They were living in an alien land. They were living amongst people who had no respect for their traditions. I don't know if that sounds familiar at all, and yet we sometimes speak as if we still think we have the influence in our society that we maybe once had and no longer have. And so, our voices sound empty. Our voices have little impact. Maybe some of us have been ridiculed for our faith. I love the comparison of well, anyway, I grew up as a teenager who had lots of other Christians around me who thought that the way I was a Christian was not right or even Christian. I get that; I can't lose somebody—share that story.

“By the Rivers of Babylon, we sat down and there we wept when we remembered Zion.” Friends, we can spend the rest of our existence weeping and longing for the Zion, longing for that which is a part of our heritage, that through which value and faith have been shared for generations, but that which is perhaps not even possible and may not be particularly life getting, life giving.

Let's move a little further into that Psalm. The psalmist then writes a little bit later, “How could we sing the Lord's song in a foreign or an alien land?” I had pages and pages of notes of songs that have been of influence to me over my life. I even had a pair of songs that were rooted in our cultural experience of 1971, and I was going to do an explication of all of that. You know, that was my preparation. It's still on my desk. It's in my desk upstairs in my hotel room. I've had a few people say to me, “Bishop, why is it we're always talking about God's doing a new thing, new wine skins? Why do we have to keep talking about things?” Well, because God is always doing new things in our midst, and we need to have eyes to see.

God is always calling us into new relationships that won't be just like the old ones that we've had. God is always inviting us into a relationship with God. Just when we forget that, we can come back and trust that God will support us and that we can float in God's love, as I was reminded this summer. Friends, I think that for folks who live in a foreign or alien land, as I believe we could be understood to be doing, we need to carry what we can from our homeland.

We need to carry what we can that has been of value round about All Saints Day. I preached at Saint John's Church in Fayetteville this year, and I don't remember the readings anymore, but I remember telling a story. I think Sandy and I were starting to imagine what might be possible if God was really inviting us to move and pack and all of that. I remember I told people a story of a cartoon I had seen where there was a woman standing in front of her china cabinet and essentially lamenting the fact that her children didn't want any of it. How many of us have been collecting things to pass on that those who follow us will never want? Our kids proved that to us this move.

We need to carry what we can and travel lightly. We need to share the story that's got us from there to here—the story of God's love, the story that God is in our midst. We need to have eyes to see the new things that God is doing. Not only looking back to what we remember from some generations back, we need to watch for God's new work and we need to affirm it and support it in all the ways that we can.

It's good to be with you. It's good to share this convention experience. I hope that besides what Ken and Alan and I have offered you—by the way, didn't you do a pretty good job last night?—I hope that in the conversations you have in the hallways or while you visit with people who have set up booths, I hope those are meaningful conversations for you. I hope that as our young people rose and as the people from Church of the Servant rose and another as others will rise in the rest of our day to tell their stories and to invite us into conversations around our tables, you will be able to be aware of the possibilities that God is offering us for the path forward and that you will be able to people be people who love Zion, who love that church that has raised us, but then you will be people excited about where God is leading us. Amen.