

We peer out into the world, and the storm will not abate. The ominous clouds blanket the sky, and gloom casts its relentless shadow. Then, as if a hole is punched through the darkness, shafts of light touch the landscape. We see details of the earth often ignored. A kaleidoscope of colors and life affirm depth, beauty, and endurance. A stunning transformation of hope.

Something new is revealed and deep inside, we know. Comfort and strength in Jesus words, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life." <sup>i</sup>We journey through this worldwide storm, and the light of life, Jesus Christ, leads us to a new day. His light reflects our hope, beauty, and life.

All gratitude to the Almighty for the gifts bestowed upon the diocese. Gratefulness for you, the people, and our life together. For Jesus Christ sustains, uplifts, and is our light and life in the harshest of storms. To the Trustees, Standing Committee, Diocesan Council, Treasurer, Deans, and the members of all our committees. Thank you. For Dean Sullivan and the Cathedral staff.

The clergy, we have prayed, laughed, cried, and dreamed. We are blessed by your faithfulness, strength, creativity, and love for our people. You trusted in our Lord and took the courageous steps into the storm. You did not relent and I am blessed to serve with you. To the laity, the apostles of our diocese. You give me hope, and I love you. Because of you, our ministries did not cease. You said, "let us do it." And you did. Your joyful urgency to proclaim Christ. You checked on one another, prayed, and shined His light for others to follow. Demonstrating the best way out of the storm is always through it.

The Diocesan Staff. 18 straight months serving unceasingly and without a break. Taking services when there was no one to celebrate in churches. Responding to crises, early morning to late at night. Ensuring communication, posting, encouraging, calling. Being present to alleviate the burden and allowing people to dream. You understand "taking up the cross." I am humbled by your ministry.

The Vicars of our Acts Churches. No longer called mission churches, they so much more. Living the life of the early Church as described in Acts. Laurie and Ryan from the Church Foundation. We are united family engaging in ministry, accountability, and care for our church. The Canons for Peace and Reconciliation, The Holy Land, and Education and Renewal; planting seeds that will grow and last. As we begin our 238th Convention, Diocese of Pennsylvania well done, faithful servants, well done.

Because of you, our diocese is a beacon to the larger Church. I'm unapologetically proud of you. You are courageous, faithful, and revolutionary. Despite a worldwide storm, tossing us to and fro, we did not lose our bearing. The words of Isaiah ring true: The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness - on them, light has shined.<sup>ii</sup>

We punched holes in the darkness of the storm, and light is breaking through. We made maximum use of technology, and some churches quadrupled attendance virtually. The Media Center at diocesan house is open, and yours to create videos, commercials, web and social media sites. We learn, teach and spread the Gospel through technology - a reflection of Christ's

light. Over \$100,000 in grants so our churches can purchase the latest technology. We hope to continue this funding. We are on television sharing Evensong with the larger community. You purchased Zoom accounts for churches. Our YouTube/One Love channel is reaching people throughout the day. Our college-age "tech disciples" are out and assisting our churches. They are a gift demonstrating our support of one another.

Priests now seek out our diocese. 12 calls to ministry and 5 ordinations. When the storm of COVID hit, we created and continue to use one of the most detailed COVID protocols in the Church. Additional grants so our churches would not have to worry about paying salaries or meeting expenses. \$1M for those churches that could not meet their sacred gifts. Diocesan staff assisting with PPP applications, grants, and loan forgiveness. 7 vaccine locations throughout the diocese with 3 weekly sites. Contacting and convincing public officials to place clergy and staff on the priority list resulted in over 300 members of the diocese being vaccinated.

Because of leadership in vaccinations, our diocese was featured in the *New York Times*. Part of our shared ministry is prayerfully discerning how your sacred gifts will empower God's work in the world. In 2022, sacred gifts remain at the 2020 and 2021 levels. There has been no increase in 6 years. In our commitment to communication and transparency, sacred gifts will not increase gifts without explanation or your input.

We are one diocese. This past spring, we held diocesan-wide conversations about sacred gifts and they will further meetings in 2022. We continue with the 6 extra budget hearings initiated in 2017 to keep transparency and listening at the forefront. Since 2018 all budget statements and investments have been posted monthly on the web. We continue to align all expenses and contributions into one budget.

Nothing will be hidden in the Church. We are in line with our budget despite the pandemic as we are proactive and care. Cutting \$250K, not filling positions, instituting COVID cost-saving measures while not sacrificing ministry or service. These measures have prevented a large deficit. Notice the careful preparation of this budget.

We did everything to keep it flat while giving our all to do more. Remember, we are blessed with a large endowment that grew during COVID. We published the first diocesan annual report in 2021 and will continue every year forward. Any questions or information about your diocese, you will receive. A long chapter is closed with the sale of Wapiti. The proceeds are in your investment accounts. All information on the sale and funds is on the website. As proclaimed in Luke, "whatever you have said in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in the inner rooms will be proclaimed upon the housetops."<sup>iii</sup>

Ministry continues to grow and develop with the 2021 Baccalaureate Service. The first annual Youth Summer Jam and the first youth pilgrimage to Navajoland. We are deeply engaged in the work of the Loving Presence Group. With Anti-Racism Commission and the Absalom Jones Committee, our work is progressing and will not stop. The document has been released. Ki Thoughtbridge has been hired to work with our clergy and churches. We will not forget nor ignore. It is a revolution of the heart, and God is leading us. We instituted the first diocesan-wide Absalom Jones celebration, which is part of our identity.

We continue to innovate and create, planting seeds of new life as we partner with our community. During a pandemic, we re-opened our third church in three years. Resurrection.

Our churches grew ministries to meet the increased needs of the poor, the unemployed, and the lonely. Mission outreach created housing for college students and adults using church property. We formed a partnership with DePaul and the first female moral injury program with the Philadelphia Veterans Association. We uplift the Tiny House Village in collaboration with the City of Philadelphia. We found hope with our summer youth mental health program attended by college students around the nation.

Our diocese fed, clothed, and healed. We have the confidence to make God known, and it is making a difference. Your life in Christ is attracting significant interest and media attention. ENS is featuring our diocese in a national article, and other dioceses are visiting; to see what we are doing. The most important and heartwarming thing we learned is we are stronger working together than apart. We are turning to one another more than ever. We need one another and our Lord. We cannot do it alone. We have grown stronger because we are better together -a new story for this diocese. The story of us.

Yet, we cannot rest on what we have done. What is next in the name of Christ. This is a chance to move forward. The storm may be hanging around, but every storm runs out of rain and every dark night turns into day. Let us lean into the storm. 2 Corinthians states: For it is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.'<sup>iv</sup> The dawn is breaking, and it will lead us to life.

Like oxygen to a fire, let obstacles become fuel for the blaze that is our faith. Let every impediment serve to make the inferno of faith, hope, and Christ within us burn with greater ferocity. <sup>v</sup> In a stable in Bethlehem, a hole was punched in the darkness of despair; the light became flesh and dwelt among us. By the Cross and resurrection, a hole was punched in the darkness of humanity, and the earth was illuminated by the light that allowed us to see God, the world, and one another differently. The brilliance of the light of Christ diminishes the sun. This is your light right now.

Last week we released Casting Nets - an innovative and creative plan. Casting Nets allows us to dream. To envision a church focused on the life-giving essentials of prayer, community, worship, and ministry to and with our neighbors. It emphasizes that transformation does not have to take decades. It will happen now if we have faith to embrace new possibilities and focus on what is essential. We are encouraging churches to think as a new startup. Not focus on more money or butts in the pews. Not the latest theories or programs; only a willing heart, desire and faith. I cannot say exactly where this journey will take you, but I can promise that if you dare to "cast your nets" and trust in Jesus, your Church will be transformed. And you will not be alone-we are with you.

Serviam is coming to life. A flickering light dreamed after my initial pilgrimage six years ago. You told me what you needed. The Pilot will launch in a few weeks October and public launch in March. Casting Nets and Serviam will transform our diocese and impact the entire Church.

Now, what new clouds to punch through? I propose two initiatives involving all our churches and partnering with the private sector, faith traditions, public entities, and neighborhoods. A focus on the needs of our children, teens, and young adults.

We have discerned six areas. 1.) Hunger. No child or young adult should go hungry. Hunger affects all aspects of development. No food deserts and access to fresh and healthy food. Let punch a hole in this storm. 2.) Partnering to ensure access to healthcare, physical activity, and wellness. 3.) Quality education job training. Training is essential for many young adults. With all the talent in our churches, imagine if we have job training programs in our churches. Provide internet access for our youth to do homework, mentoring kids on interviewing, and tutoring. 4.) Working with providers on the Mental Health Crisis specifically: suicide, anxiety, depression, and acceptance. Despite being connected technologically, this generation identifies loneliness as their great challenge. Let us create a place of belonging. 5.) Teen drug and alcohol abuse. We must step into this pain. Resources for recovery, safe places for conversation, and as well as support for parents whose children have become caught in addiction. Finally, 6) bullying, peer pressure, and violence. We must go to the people and listen. Not go in and stay to solve, or write a check. Listen, learn, and journey.

The second initiative is a covenantal relationship with indigenous communities. We will begin with The Episcopal Church in Navajoland. These proud and honorable people have been marginalized and often forgotten. They have to continuously seek support. Our journey with them will be more than funding or a companion relationship. Let's envision where we go to Navajoland, and learn. Our siblings come to our diocese and spend time in our schools, serve in our churches, work in our offices. We do the same on the reservation. An actual life-giving relationship. Each Church will have the opportunity to serve as a partner. We will do the same with our local indigenous community - The Lenape.

When we punch holes in the darkness of the story, the light of Christ will shine, and the Church, will once again as the center of cultural, social, theological, and economic life. I am even more excited about the future of this revolutionary diocese.

Aside from serving the Lord and being a husband and father, my time with you is the most important thing I have ever done in my life. I do not care about the title, recognition, or status. I am a simple man. I just want to work hard, serve you and tell of the extraordinary love of God through Jesus Christ in simple ways. I love looking in your eyes, listening, praying the big and small prayers, dreaming new ideas, envisioning a better world, failing together, and hoping always. I love Philly, this diocese - I love you.

Going on six years, you know I have a lot of grit and no quit. We cannot stop or step back now. We can't do this halfheartedly. Whatever the storm may throw at us, we are ready. We will not only survive, we will thrive. Finally, you know I talk about Jesus. We can discuss initiatives, money, accomplishments, savings, but they really do not matter. He is the only thing that matters.

We cannot do anything without Jesus. I am asking you to commit yourselves to him. Not as a philosophy, a thought or idea. Give your life to him. Today. If you have kept him at a distance,

step forward. Jesus will embrace you. If you have been indifferent, take a risk. Jesus asks more of people than they expected. He asks us to give everything—a radical restructuring of our lives, hearts, and minds.<sup>vi</sup> Jesus turns despair into hope, shame into glory, dry bones into beating hearts, graves into gardens, stale water into the new wine of life, darkness into light, Jesus saves us from a life without God. Jesus turns a diocese from an administrative institution into the body of Christ. To emphasize the importance, we are planning a series of transforming revivals in 2022.

Say His name, give your life to him. I promise. It will change you and transform the world. I have a personal request, from the heart. Be kind to one another. In social media, in public, the malice, games, suspicion, violence, us versus them. The ease in which we hurt one another. This is not who God created us to be. I believe in goodness. I would rather have my heart broken than not believe in goodness. Listen to one another. Support one another, encourage, give compliments. Be patient with one another. If you have to correct, do so with kind instruction and without judgment. Don't look down on one another or create worldly divisions. Smile. Compassion connects hearts. Allow people to be who God created them to be. Let them be them.

Be yourself, not what you think you should be or what someone expects of you. Allow yourself to fail; it means you are trying. Don't be too hard on yourself. Believe in yourself. And love. Love always. Perhaps if we love, we may see the light of that Kingdom that Jesus spoke of. That would be the greatest accomplishment of this diocese and a beautiful sight and light.

My siblings, the best days of this diocese are yet to come. Some say the Church is dying and enjoy prognosticating our demise. They have been saying that for over 2000 years. The world has been against Jesus since his birth. They tell us, don't try - people do not care. But they don't know. They do not see Christ working through you. They do not see our faith and light.

The Holy Spirit power. Go ahead write the eulogy and plan the funeral of the Church. Have your goodbye party, but don't expect us. We've got work to do - punching holes in the storms of the world. It is ok if they think we are going to fold and quit - they do not know our holy revolutionary spirit. Don't look back because we are not heading that way.

Let's dare to write the next chapter of our story. Do what they say cannot be done. Let us rise above that which seems easy. Let us be innovative, daring, trusting, and loving. Let us lead the Church. Let the Cross be the light of the nations. Let us laugh, cry, pray, lean on one another and rejoice. Let us give our lives and follow Jesus. The wind can rage, the storms can gather.

We are not afraid of the storm. We are punching holes through it. One person at a time, one encounter at a time, one loving action upon another. All because of Jesus. Our time is now, the storm is breaking, and the light is shining through. Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life."<sup>vii</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> John 8:12

<sup>ii</sup> Isaiah 9:2.

<sup>iii</sup> Luke 12:3

<sup>iv</sup>2 Corinthians 4:6

<sup>v</sup> Adapted from Ryan Holiday. The Daily Stoic.

<sup>vi</sup> Bishop Robert Barron Catholicism

<sup>vii</sup> John 8:12