

The following is a transcription of the Episcopal Address given by the Rt. Rev. Anne B. Jolly at the 207th Annual Convention of the Diocese of Ohio. Table talks regarding the information gathered during the bishop's previous listening sessions were held immediately following.

Fifty-one weeks ago today, we chose to be together. We chose each other. I remember that day, the joy, the feeling of belonging that I had. When we come together we are reminded that we belong to each other. We get to see it. All of us in this room are reminded that we are an active part of the body of Christ together, connected in joy and sorrow.

We also got to experience that connectivity at the Ordination and Consecration when 1,000 of us came together in one place. That's one of the reasons we gather at Convention. Yes, it's important to order ourselves well to elect people to do our work together. All of that is good and important and holy.

But the coming together is the most important thing so we remember that we are given over to each other again and again and again as a part of the body of Christ, which is one of my favorite parts of an ordination, confirmation, reception, reaffirmation, or baptism. In these liturgies people present each other as a part of the body of Christ. It's a physical part of our liturgy that tells us that we belong together. We can't do this without each other. We can't do it without reminding each other again and again and again. I belong to you. And you belong to me. And we are not we without each of us. And in this time of global turmoil, of horrific wars, political division and anxieties of all kinds, our gut may tell us to isolate, to curl up in a ball and pull the covers over our head and hide from the horrific-ness that humanity seems to be. But we must choose to be together. We consciously choose to fight that sense of isolation and come together and pull each other out of any malaise we may be in and to give ourselves again over and over and over to the body of Christ.

As spectacular as we are in the Diocese of Ohio, it's not just us. The 30 bishops who came to the Consecration in April reminded us that we are part of The Episcopal Church. We are part of the worldwide Anglican Communion. We are connected to each other. We are fully beloved. We are never alone. We have another point of connection that is new in the Diocese of Southern Ohio. They recently elected their new bishop, who is the Rev. Canon Kristen Uffelman White, who is a dear friend of mine. We are excited about the possibilities of our two dioceses partnering and being in connection because we are better when we are together. This is a truth that we know. The body of Christ, as manifested here in the Episcopal Diocese of Ohio, is beautiful. You are smart and incredibly gifted and creative and passionate about the church. As Canon Jessie Gutsell Dodson said in her beautiful sermon, you are precious, and you are essential. With these gifts that we have been given, our deep, deep prayers, and our willingness to listen to the still quiet voice of the Holy Spirit, we are ready to move forward together.

I started here in my time with Standing Committee, Diocesan Council and staff in an intentional weekend of structured onboarding that was facilitated by Church Reimagined. It

was a time of honesty, clarity, and direction setting. And since I started in March, I've been visiting congregations on Sundays for confirmations, baptisms, receptions, and affirmations. I even had one visitation where the entire congregation renewed their faith formally with reaffirmation and joy. I see you, St. Mark's, Sidney!

I've been meeting with groups of clergy and lay leaders, visiting congregations during the week to see what they're up to, and what they're doing in their communities. And we had our first Celebration of New Ministry just recently in Lakewood with the Rev. Mike Lager. I've participated in the Body of Christ more broadly by attending consecrations of other new bishops. I'm not the newest one anymore!

I've attended House of Bishops meetings and other conferences and gatherings representing the Diocese of Ohio and recruiting people to come to the Diocese of Ohio. Amid all this wonderful travel and being with you, we spent the summer together in intentional time of listening and gathering and coming together in conversations. We had 16 listening sessions this summer. Six hundred and sixty-four saints in the Episcopal Diocese of Ohio attended these listening sessions, 78 of our 80 congregations were represented. This was a tremendous outpouring of people, ideas, and creativity and coming together. In these sessions, I shared with you six priorities that I have been hearing as I've been meeting with you: systemic racism, administration, congregational development, connecting all congregations, innovation, and ministering to young families. We will keep talking together about these priorities, and how they help us share the Good News of Jesus in our communities and the world.

We need to be the church in the world today. Because you are here, because you are willing to put your minds and your hearts and your souls, your precious and essential selves to this work, that is all that we need. The meaningful conversations you're willing to engage in, the thoughtful reflections and the energy and desire to share the love of Jesus with the world. We can do this together. I don't want to downplay the very real concerns about the size and age of our church. If you look at any of the denominational numbers, there is no question that the denomination is declining, as are all mainline denominations. This is a real thing. I don't want to downplay the truth of that, that congregations across the board are declining. To look at it from a slightly different perspective, the early church was tiny. It was small. It was agile. It was fragile. It was worried and scared. And it was people who put their hearts and their minds and their souls to knowing who Jesus was and sharing love with the world. There's no question we have work to do. We know that. And we're talking about it, right? That's why we've been having the conversations we've been having. That's why we had listening sessions. That's why we will continue to plan and to talk and to work together in a systematic and thorough way. We're already working towards where God is leading us because we're already in prayer.

Every listening session I gave a little bit of homework for everybody who participated. I asked everybody to pray, to pray daily for the Diocese of Ohio that we might listen, that we might hear the still small voice of God and be willing to set aside our fears to follow where

God is leading us. And so, I'm inviting you to do the same. Because what I know is that if we pray, and we're actually willing to do that hard work of discernment and to set aside our fears and worries, together, thoughtfully and cleverly plan how we can move forward to follow Jesus, we can do that work. And there is good news from the parochial reports from 2022 which showed increases in almost all congregations. Now, there's a caveat to these numbers – that your bishop did this calculation. And I did it fairly quickly. But while they may be off by a point or two here and there, the overall story is the same. Approximately 84% of our congregations stayed the same or increased in average Sunday attendance in 2022. 84%. The vast majority of those increased by 10% or more. This is good news. About 74% stayed the same or increased in operating income and most of them increased significantly. So there is movement in the right direction. There are good things happening in this diocese. You can see it in this room and you can see it on paper. So whatever type of learner you are, we have actual tangible evidence to that truth that the Diocese of Ohio is doing well.

Additionally, Bellwether Farm is an incredible resource of this diocese, and we have recently partnered with the Episcopal Camp and Conference Center (ECCC) to do a full audit of Bellwether Farm's operations. This is something that is good and prudent to do at this particular stage in the life cycle of a camp and conference center. While we're not quite done with that work yet, the highly respected consultant that we hired told me in an initial conversation how impressed he is with our operations and our bookings for 2023 and 2024. He says these bookings are outstanding given how young we are. He sees no reason that Bellwether Farm shouldn't be recognized as one of the premier retreat camp and conference centers in the country. Its reputation is spreading. It is a tremendous gift to this diocese.

And it's not just Bellwether. Every one of our 80 congregations has a story to tell. You all do. I know because I've been visiting you. Every congregation has their unique, beautiful story to share with the world. And I love sharing some of those stories in my Facebook feed. Telling our stories together is an important part of how we order our lives together. Our entire faith is built on the fact that we tell the story. We love to tell the story of Jesus. And one of the ways we do that is telling the stories of how each of our congregations shares the love of Christ with the world. And that's an important part of how we will continue to live our lives together. And as we work towards getting to our priorities, these six priorities, we need to do that intentionally. We must be intentional and thoughtful about how we move forward. And there are intentional ways in which we are structuring our lives already to work towards our vision living into core values of building community and the priority of connecting all congregations.

We're going to continue to gather together in many ways as part of our common life together. The Canons and I will continue Sunday visitations. We are on a three-year official episcopal visitation cycle because there's one bishop doing visitations. So once every three years, approximately, I will be at most congregations. But the Canons are also doing Sunday visitations, and we're also showing up occasionally during mid-week to do things

together. I'm working on the format of Sunday visitations, and I am going to work on tweaking it for 2024 so that we can do meaningful work together and so we can have more time together when I show up. In addition to Sunday visitations, we will be doing FunDay visitations to come to the fun things that congregations are doing with their communities. The Bishop's Staff and I can't wait to join you in the events you are most proud of.

We're also going to do some regional confirmations. The deans of the regions are working on setting those dates so we can announce them soon. We are also doing regional formation for confirmation. Canon Anna Sutterisch has done a wonderful job of putting together a program so that we can learn together. This is important.

Administration is also an important thing to talk about. While it wasn't the top priority in the six, I know that there is a lot of stress and anxiety about administration. And so I want to talk about it a little bit. We know that we need to ease the administrative load that are carried by congregations. That's an important part of life. And so we want to try to do some creative things to level that up. We're already working on several ideas to try and do just that, because I hear you saying in many ways this is an unbearable burden and, together, we will work to make the yoke lighter. We will have more things to talk about soon but I want you to know we are already working on ways to systematize easing that burden.

One of the things mentioned over and over again here is the need for partnership and collaboration. I've seen it to be critical in my own work. In the congregation I served at in Chicago, we created an intentional collaboration with three other congregations that was incredibly life-giving and fulfilling. I hear you talking about that here, which makes my heart glad, and it's a leading value of ours moving forward. How do we work together? We are never alone as Christians. We've been talking about that all day. And so why do we continue to operate alone? This doesn't make sense. It's counter to our order. An example of how one of the things we are doing moving forward: we recently announced a diocesan curacy for the Rev. Megan Allen at All Saints, Toledo and St. Andrew's, Toledo. We're excited about the possibilities for these congregations to think together and to pray together some and the possibilities for the diocese. Collaborations are good and fun and we're going to do more of it, and we're going to continue to invest in people because y'all are awesome. We're going to invest in the clergy and the lay leaders.

And we're not just investing in people. We're investing in congregations. It's clear that congregational development and innovation is important to this diocese because they were the top two ranked priorities. And so, one of the ways we are going to do that is implementing the College for Congregational Development here in Ohio. The College for Congregational Development was created out of the Diocese of Olympia and is a two-year structured training program consisting of two weeklong sessions over two summers that equip you with tools for leadership, organizational development, and congregational development. It's wonderful. It gives you tools you can implement right away in your congregational setting, in your business life, and in your home life.

We're going to create ongoing practitioner groups for people who are doing this work so we can share information again, to be in community, and to help each other learn and grow. This isn't just a program that you do once and you set aside. This is a way of life, a way of living into congregational development intentionally. It is not a flash in a pan. It is going to be the core of how we live and operate. It creates a common language and a common way of looking at things. It gives us a way of talking about things together that brings us together. We will build everything around this because the College for Congregational Development helps to build faithful, healthy, sustainable, and effective congregations that share the good news of Jesus where they are. And that is what we want to do. I know this is good because I have been a practitioner of the College for a long time and I am so excited for you to be able to do it. We are launching this summer, August 11 through 16 at Bellwether Farm, the premier Episcopal camp and conference center. There will be more information coming about that this winter. I wanted you to know so you can put the dates on your calendar. So to that end, our Winter Convocation this year, which is February 2-3 at Kalahari, will be a one-day preview of the College for Congregational Development. We're going to do some of the work that we would do at the college.

It's not going to be like we've always done it. We're going to come together for the entire time. We're not going to break out into workshops. We're going to do work together around tables. We're going to talk about how we develop our congregations to be faithful, healthy, effective, and sustainable. This work is best done in teams, so it's good if you can bring a team from your congregation. We're going to give a discount if you bring six or more people from your congregation. Registration is open now, so you can sign up now on the website. I encourage you to do so. It's going to be a great way to start our work with the College for Congregational Development. You get a head start on this work. I'm excited about us doing this work together. And as we work towards our priorities, we're crafting a clear vision together.

We have named some core values for the Bishop's Staff. Hopefully these are already clear in what we've been talking about today and how we have been operating in the past months. But I want you to know what we are about and what we care deeply for. We are rooted in Jesus. That is the reason we are here. Community matters. Beloved community matters. Everything we do should be oriented around how do we develop community and grow together in the body of Christ. We're connected to the wider church. The purpose of the Bishop's Staff is to serve you. We are intentionally connected to you and intentionally connected to people outside our diocese. We want to have those networks of community to remember that we are not just small. We are part of a whole. And so how do we talk to people and glean energy from them and learn things from them and share the good news everywhere we can? We resource and equip congregations. That is our job. We invest in people and communities, and every chance we get, we are talking about ways we can do that.

Innovation is a priority. In my mind, innovation means that we are faithful, that we ground ourselves in our tradition, and we discern where God is leading us through prayer, and we

follow the Holy Spirit where she blows. We try new things, and we are willing to fail gloriously. We need to do this. We will try, and we will try, and we will try, and we will fail, and we will fail, and we will fail. And that is okay because we need to go where we feel the Holy Spirit is leading and we need to keep trying. We talk about innovation as creativity and joy that is anchored in the spirit and tradition, and that is an important value of ours moving forward. And adaptability and resilience. You cannot live in this world today unless you have some level of adaptability and resilience. The church has to change. The world is changing, and so we have to be able to pivot.

These are the core values of our staff, which means it will be the core values of how we are all working forward together. To live into these values, and because we had many people retire this year, we had to do some restructuring of the staff to align with these goals and priorities.

We did have a significant transition of people in the summer. We are so grateful for Bishop Hollingsworth and the staff members that retired with him. We're grateful for their work, for their decades of ministry. It was more than 120 years of institutional knowledge that retired this summer. We are so grateful for their faithful ministry and the stability of the system as a result of their ministry. We are able to be where we are now and move forward from here because of their work and I am so grateful for that.

We've talked about all the people who retired, but a lot of people stayed and I am so grateful and I want to acknowledge their gifts. And we've been looking at who they are and what their gifts are so we can use their gifts for the better of the whole, because the body of Christ is built up by us sharing our gifts with each other.

We have done an organizational restructuring of sorts. This is a starting point, not the ending point. We have some other goals to work towards, but this is where we are today. There are only five people on the staff who are in the same role that they were, so there's a lot of change that is happening.

We have a new Canon to the Ordinary, Canon Jessie Gutgsell Dodson. She is an integrator to vision, which is an important role in our system. She can take the insanity that comes out of my brain and order it. That is not a small task. And where Canon Jessie goes she speaks on my behalf. The Canon to the Ordinary always speaks on behalf of the bishop. We have Canon Margaret D'Anieri, who remains Canon for Mission and has added transitions to her portfolio. God bless Margaret for her flexibility, innovation, and willingness to do all the things. Canon Anna Sutterisch is the Canon for Formation. She has been the Canon for Formation, but we want to name specifically which was in her job description, but we want to say it out loud to all of you that her job includes people of all ages. And so now her work will also include Bellwether Farm activities, retreats and things at Bellwether, because those are formation. She will continue to work with children, youth, and adults – and will encourage you to help her work with children and youth and adults. We have a new Canon position that we have posted, the Canon for Innovation and Congregational Development.

We saw that this was a priority for the diocese through the data, so we went ahead and put the post out there. They will help bring systems in structure to support entrepreneurial efforts and to live into the trying of new things while we anchor in our tradition and set out to fail gloriously. Christina Butterfield is our Canon for Finance, and she has two new accountants that are working with her, Andrea Appling and Iasmina Tranca. They are now at full staff in the finance group. And they will soon be rolling strongly with these wonderful people focusing on our finances. They are doing a wonderful job through this transition and maintaining focus where it needs to be. Jessica Rocha and Beth Madden remain in communications as our Canon for Communications and our Missioner for Communications. Rebecca Miller has transitioned to Missioner for Stewardship and Resource Development. Rebecca is going to help us do things like be creative with our annual giving campaigns and that sort of thing. And also, resource development is more than just money. She's going to help us see where we want to go and what it might take to help us get there. Sometimes that's technology, sometimes that's aligning in new ways, but it's a great way to use her creative capacity for our help. Antoinette Taylor is now our Missioner for Administration. She has tremendous organizational and administrative skills. And Ruth Mercer is our Missioner for Human Resources. She has this background, that was her career before she came to the Diocese of Ohio. We need that skill set so that our congregations can call her if you have questions about benefits or hiring or firing. This is an important part of our ordered life together and we need to focus upon it.

In 2024, we will shift a little more to focus on beloved communities so we can address systemic racism in an orderly manner, so we can set a trajectory for how we will work at this. This is a lot of change. And I understand that you do not have to remember all of this. If you don't know who to call because we have been shifting, all you have to do is click on "Who to Contact at the Diocese" page on the diocesan website. We thank you for your grace as we have been transitioning. This is a large transition of staff and we will get there fully very soon.

My grandfather was a paratrooper – which was a very cool thing to be. He told me stories about preparing for the war. And this weekend, being Veterans Day, reminds me of him every time. He would talk about how he decided to be a paratrooper because they practiced a lot and they would go up and come down and go up and come down. And every time you jumped, you got a cold Coca-Cola. He loved Coca-Cola. So he decided to be a paratrooper. He would go and get in the plane and they would take him up and down. He said they would just do hundreds of jumps, just one after another, because they had to practice and to try and do it in different orders. They had a structure about how they plan, but they would do different orders of jumping out of the plane. They would bring different people up. They connected to each other. They trained together and they celebrated what they did together. And they were afraid because what they were doing was preparing for something that was scary. And they didn't know what that scary thing would be. And they didn't know when that scary thing would happen. They were always a little bit afraid but they trusted each other because they had to. And that reminds me of us. We're afraid. Maybe a little bit afraid. Maybe a lot afraid. Maybe because church isn't what we thought it

should be, or was, or hoped it would be. The numbers aren't where we want them to be. The people aren't who we thought they would be. We see people out there who aren't coming to church and we love the church. And so, it scares us. And it's okay to be afraid, because we have each other and we have Jesus. We have systems and structures, we will order and reorder and we will keep realigning who's jumping out of the plane. But we never jump alone and we never jump without support. We're going to be trying stuff that is going to feel like the pit of our stomach is flying up to our throats. But that's okay because we have each other and we have back up and we're not going to do it willy nilly. We're going to train and we're going to try and we're going to celebrate. And we're going to do it together. It's a hard time to live in this world. I'm grateful we're connected in the beloved community that is the body of Christ to face our fears together, to face our challenges, to celebrate our joys, to call bingo, to put on a bucket hat, and to have fun. We anchor in our traditions. We pray and discern together. We listen where the Holy Spirit is leading, and we try new things over and over again.

This is beloved community. This is the Diocese of Ohio. And I'm looking at you in person, 51 weeks after I looked at you on a screen from Chicago. And I am just as thrilled, maybe even more thrilled than I was 51 weeks ago today. I love being your bishop. And I am so excited about where we're going to go together.