Good morning, colleagues. What an honor it is to welcome to this 201st Convention of the Diocese of Ohio some treasured and long-time friends, whom I will ask to stand when I mention them. Please hold your enthusiastic greeting until the end. Our Presiding Bishop Michael Curry, the President of the House of Deputies and our Parliamentarian the Rev. Gay Clark Jennings, the Vice-president of the House of Deputies the Hon. Byron Rushing, and their colleagues Sharon Jones, Canon Michael Hunn, and our own Betsey Bell; the Tenth Bishop of the Diocese of Ohio Clark and Wendy Grew; the bishops of our companion dioceses, Maimbo Mndolwa, Bishop of Tanga and Philip Wright Bishop of Belize and his wife Carla; the Bishop of Massachusetts, our colleague Alan Gates and Tricia Harvey; the 19th President of Kenyon College, Sean Decatur; and Bishop Abraham Allende, Bishop of the Northeastern Ohio Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Each of you honors us with your presence.

And it is, as always, a privilege to gather with all of you, the lay and clergy delegates of this, the first diocese of The Episcopal Church established beyond the 13 colonies, and offer, for the fourteenth time, the Bishop’s Address. No doubt the words of Hymn 637 are again echoing in your ears, “What more can he say than to you he hath said…?” You will be relieved to know that this Address will be considerably shorter than those in years past, not only because of the tight schedule of this Bicentennial Convention, nor because of the presence of our esteemed guests, but because, for the first time at a diocesan convention, my mother is here. I would like to introduce to you Carol Hollingsworth, whose gentle and firm advice is always: Get to the point.

Throughout the course of this Bicentennial year, we have had a wonderful opportunity to recall the many faithful souls who, beginning two centuries ago in fledgling towns like Ashtabula, Boardman, Medina, and Cleveland, formed congregations and, in time, sought recognition as a diocese of The Episcopal Church. Our traveling time-line banners, Bicentennial moments, and ChurchLife and e-Bulletin articles, have all reminded us how we stand on the shoulders of those who went before us – lay and clergy leaders, and untold numbers of committed communicants who, with perseverance and devotion, brought the Gospel of Jesus to life since before Ohio was even a state.

As a bishop of this Diocese, I am particularly aware of the fidelity and sacrifice of the ten bishops diocesan, four assisting bishops, one bishop suffragan, and their heroic spouses, who have served with you and those who came before you. From Philander Chase on, they have served in varying contexts, through world and civil war, times of both economic prosperity and hardship, periods of church growth and church decline alike, times of societal challenge and great social change. In spite of diverse contexts, there were consistent characteristics of both episcopal leadership and congregational engagement. To a one, the episcopacies of this Diocese were marked by sacrificial service and devotion to the church and her communicants. In the close to 500 visitations I have made so far, time and again people have voiced their appreciation for a cherished relationship with this bishop of that, laity and clergy alike, and for the staff that extends the episcopal ministry in countless practical ways. Communicants express appreciation for pastoral responsiveness, for a public witness or a personal touch, for a prophet’s courage or shepherd’s heart.

Because I have the privilege of succeeding the Tenth Bishop of Ohio, I regularly hear a thoughtful word of gratitude and affection for Wendy and Clark Grew, sentiments familiar to me. I know well on whose broad shoulders I stand, and have been given repeated insight into the innumerable occasions of encouragement and care, the patient listening and steadfast companionship, the thoughtful counsel and courageous presence that both Wendy and Bishop Clark provided to clergy spouses and families, clergy and lay leaders, and all the faithful of this Diocese. Doubtless, many more such acts of care and love are known to God alone. As I ask the Grews to join me here, I invite you to express on behalf of  the whole church our deep gratitude and affection.

In the midst of the endless challenges that the episcopal office so generously offers, you, Wendy and Clark, gave particular attention to the spiritual, emotional, and pastoral health of clergy families. In recognition of your fidelity to all those whom and with whom both of you served in this Diocese, the very first building to be named at Bellwether Farm is being named in honor of the two of you. It is one of the multi-room retreat residences to which clergy, their spouses, and their families will come for respite and restoration, for generations to come. (When it is completed we will send you a proper photograph of it.)

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In 1997, Bishop Grew instituted The Bishop’s Medal, to be presented from time to time, at the Bishop’s discretion, to laypersons who have “engaged in notable Christian service to the diocese or their communities.” The Bishop’s Medal is quite sparingly bestowed; only 18 have been presented in 20 years. It does not so much honor the recipient, but recognizes how the recipient’s life and service honors Christ and his church. I invite all Bishop’s Medal recipients present this morning to come forward. Bishop Clark, on this 20th anniversary of your awarding the first Bishop’s Medal to Sterling Newell, will you please join me in presenting the Bishop’s Medal to someone who has worked tirelessly, and for longer than many of us have been alive, reminding us of the true history of racism in both church and society, and the heroes who have courageously stood up against it. Through her teaching, writing, and witnessing by word and example, she has modeled for us how to meet the never-ending Gospel challenge of “becoming beloved community” through racial understanding and reconciliation. She is diminutive in physical stature only, for on her strong spiritual and prophetic shoulders, we and generations to come surely stand.

It is a singular honor for the Tenth and Eleventh Bishops of Ohio to present the Bishop’s Medal to Ms. Byrdie Lee.

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This Bicentennial Year has also provided us with opportunities to stretch and explore our vocational capacity to grow as children of God. Through the “What’s Your 200?” effort, individuals and congregations have set and exceeded new goals in their prayer disciplines, practices of generosity, and service to others. Here is a small sampling of individual 200s:

* 200 bulbs planted in the churchyard
* 200 prayers said on a parish labyrinth
* 200 notes of encouragement
* 200 acts of kindness

And a few examples of parochial and Mission Area 200s:

* 200 volunteer hours at the Food Bank
* 200 miles in the Relay for Life
* 200 children's books for toddlers and young children
* Not 200, but 570 bees for the Bishop
* 200 honey jars for the Bishop to fill
* 200 cards made by hand and sent to parishioners
* 200 pairs of underwear for shelters and hospitals, collected on Undies Sundays
* 200 art kits for cancer patients
* One parish has had a different “200” every month for the last year, including having collected more than 1300 snacks given to the Challenger baseball league for people with disabilities.
* Another had a goal of 200 diapers for the Family Promise shelter and 1500 were collected.
* Hundreds and hundreds of rolls of toilet paper have been collected, which cannot be purchased with food stamps

And the lists go on and on.

What is continually being reported is that these disciplines have strengthened relationships among communicants, relationships within the community served by the congregation, and relationships with neighboring parishes that have partnered on some 200s. Bicentennial Missioners and their communicants report “We had no idea we could do something like this,” and “There is no doubt that we will continue doing this.”

These ongoing accomplishments are the result of a diocesan wide corps of Bicentennial Missioners, supported by Bishop’s Staff member Laura Hnat. Their enthusiasm and creativity have helped all of us turn toward a new century of ministry with confidence in God and a spirit of adventure. Tonight at the Banquet, we will see a video about “What’s your 200?” and have a chance to celebrate the Bicentennial Missioners, but I ask that any present here stand and receive our great thanks.

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A week ago, I received a letter from the oldest canonically resident priest of the Diocese of Ohio, the Rev. Richard Morris. From 1965 to 1985 he served as the Rector of St. Peter’s, Lakewood, where his daughter, Martha Taylor, her husband Ken, and their family remain dedicated parishioners. Richard and I became friends many years ago, long before either of us had any notion I would become his bishop. He had retired home to the Diocese of Massachusetts, at which time we became clergy colleagues. In his clear and careful hand, Richard sent a message to this 201st Convention, reporting that, in spite of recovering from a broken hip, his mind is very active at 94½ years old. He wrote:

I am very active in Bible Study with a new discovery. In the translation from Hebrew into Greek a mistake was made. There is no present tense on Biblical Hebrew. When Moses was tending his sheep on the mountain, he saw a bush burning and a voice called out to him, “I want you to go down into Egypt and free my people.” Moses said, “Who shall I say sent me?” The story said “I AM sent you.” That is a false translation into the present tense by some copier. The statement is future tense and said, “I will be however I will be.” God promised to be with you and in you in the journey. As He always is, all the time. God is always with us if we will believe and know Him. So that is my message to each of you and to this Convention. God is with you and I am with you, as he is in me and I in God, grateful for my days in Cleveland, Ohio as your oldest ordained priest soon to be 95!! and blessed by God to be still doing Bible Study in the parish of Christ Church in Lonsdale, RI, where I celebrated H.C. [Holy Communion] last year. Love and God’s blessing be with you all. Richard.

Today, as we embark on a new century engaged in the mission of God who calls us always into what is yet to be, there is no more appropriate message for us to hear from a colleague who has been alive for nearly half of the life of this diocese. Just as I WILL BE sent Moses out of Egypt and into an unknown future, I WILL BE is sending us into a future that needs thoughtful leadership, uncompromising justice, and healing love. And, as Richard Morris assures us, God is with us all the time if we give ourselves to that future, without reservation and with confidence in God’s love.

Amidst the joyful remembrances, thanksgivings, and aspirations of our year of Bicentennial commemoration, we must not allow ourselves to be distracted from the needs of the world to which God has given us to minister as the body of Christ. As we celebrate how we have gotten here over the last two centuries, we must not forget for a moment why we are here, nor turn a deaf ear to the urgency of the broken world that calls out to us for help. In the last weeks of this Bicentennial year, we have witnessed the inconceivable reality that in our own society it is not possible to attend a concert, or worship in a church, or send our children to school with any real assurance of safety.

At a time when truth is so readily abandoned for fictions that serve individual desires and divisive power, we must not demur from our vocation to be a light to the nations and God’s salvation to the ends of the earth. That is the vocation to be Christian. At the last meal Jesus shared with his disciples before his arrest and crucifixion, he promised that we will not be alone in answering that call, but that God will give us “even the spirit of Truth…who dwells with [us] and will be in [us].”

To that holy end, spirit-filled generations before us have led the way into a future often unimaginable to them. On their shoulders do we surely stand, and their sacrifice is deserving of our own. Indeed, Christ Jesus’ sacrifice demands our own.

It is a humbling privilege to serve with you at the dawn of this new era in our common life as the Diocese of Ohio. May we, in our every action, bless God who has so richly blessed this Church.

The Rt. Rev. Mark Hollingsworth, Jr.  
Bishop of Ohio