

**Opening remarks at Executive Council
Friday, October 21, 2011
Bonnie Anderson, President, The House of Deputies**

Good morning-

I am glad to see all of you. A great deal has happened since we met in June, and I have been eager to talk about it together.

As you all know, Dr. Pamela Chinnis died in August. As I said at the time, Pam was one of my role models and has inspired my ministry. She has given me courage when the going has been rough, and I will miss being able to hear her distinctive voice speaking truth with humor and wisdom.

Pam was a tireless advocate for the full inclusion of women in the life and leadership of The Episcopal Church, and for that we owe her a debt of gratitude. She also was a champion of including the voices of all the baptized in the governance system she cherished and helped to lead. As we honor the memory of Pam's ministry and invaluable service to The Episcopal Church, I want us to recall and reclaim the ground on which she stood and from which she led.

Since we last met, I've also had the opportunity to reflect on the life and witness of another great laywoman of the church: Sister Margaret Hawk of the Church Army, to whose family I presented the President of the House of Deputies Award for Exemplary Service in September. Sister Margaret was one of the great pioneers of laywomen's mission in The Episcopal Church. She was a missionary on the Pine Ridge and Rosebud Reservations, and after retirement continued her work in her home community of Red Shirt Table. She was also one of the first women seated in the House of Deputies in 1970.

Now, we've had a lot of conversation recently about mission and how to structure our church in order to commit ourselves fully to God's work in the world. We could learn something about mission from Sister Margaret.

She was born in 1913 on the Pine Ridge reservation in South Dakota, and recalled growing up in a family of eleven children, all of whom went to church every Sunday. Until the advent of the Model T Ford, they walked, rode horseback or used a wagon to get to church a mile away.

Until 1963, Sister Margaret raised her four children on the Pine Ridge reservation and worked on and off at St. Elizabeth's Episcopal Church. But God called her to do more. So at the age of 50, she joined the Church Army. In Pine Ridge, at Holy Cross Episcopal Mission, she was involved in ecumenical ministry with Catholics and Presbyterians. They started the Wowakakiye Center- a helping center- for Lakota people who needed help: counseling, childcare, food, and other necessities. Sister Margaret set up a shelter

for abused women, was an advocate for day workers, and tirelessly served the people of the congregation.

When she died, her nephew, the Rev. Robert Two Bulls, wrote that Sister Margaret “served the Pine Ridge Episcopal Mission doing evangelism of hope, reaching out to people in despair and feeding the hungry.” She realized the needs of the people among whom she lived and worked, and she answered those needs through mission developed on a local level.

So as I reflect with you on where we stand at the opening of this meeting, I want to keep the lives and legacies of Dr. Pam Chinnis and Sister Margaret Hawk before us. *They serve to illustrate two of my fundamental beliefs: our governance system, in its fundamental form, works; and mission is best done by congregations and dioceses.*

Throughout the summer and fall, our governance system has been working.

1. At the end of May, the Standing Commission on the Structure of the Church held the consultation that this Executive Council asked them to hold with the Joint Standing Committee on Governance and Administration for Mission, the Budgetary Funding Task Force, the Standing Commission on Program, Budget & Finance, the Strategic Planning Committee and the House of Deputies Committee on the State of the Church.
2. The Joint Standing Committee on Program, Budget & Finance (PB&F) has had its orientation meeting and is aware of the work- and the opportunities- awaiting them. They understand that the discussion that our church needs to have about mission is happening at diocesan conventions and other gatherings.
3. Episcopalians across the church are preparing mission-oriented resolutions for consideration by General Convention, much like the MDG resolution that came before General Convention in 2006. That resolution, you may recall, has guided many of the local mission initiatives of the last five years. The Public Narrative tool introduced and practiced at the 76th General Convention is being used in dioceses and congregations to build capacity for mission.
4. At the same time, Executive Council, in keeping with our resolution passed at our last meeting, has been developing the triennial budget for 2012-2015. We will hear a report at this meeting and this work will continue.

These are just four ways our governance system is working, right now, to enable mission.

As we think about structuring ourselves for mission, I want us to remember a few important facts that emerged during or since the structure consultation, when bishops, lay people and clergy gathered together at the request of Executive Council through the Standing Commission on the Structure of the Church:

- An earlier projection of a -1.2% decline in diocesan income for 2010 was based on the preliminary Parochial Report plate and pledge data from early in the summer. In fact, we have just learned that in 2010, diocesan income declined by 1.9%.
- Over 50% of our budget goes to program offices at church headquarters in New York, while only 7.5% goes to support General Convention, the CCAB's, the House of Deputies, the House of Bishops and Executive Council all together.

Now, as you're all aware, our governance structure's work hasn't been the only work happening recently. In October, Bishop Stacy Sauls presented a proposal for restructuring the church to the House of Bishops at its meeting in Quito, Ecuador. I wasn't there- coincidentally, I was meeting with my Council of Advice at the time- and so I heard about the proposal through Episcopal News Service and my friends in the House of Bishops who were kind enough to talk with me about what was being discussed. Let me tell you candidly, and I have said this to Bishop Sauls directly, that having this proposal released to the House of Bishops before it was discussed with all of you, who are working hard on structure and budget issues, makes me worry that we are forgetting what Pam Chinnis taught us about the place of clergy and lay people in the church and the witness of our governance. I am worried about the outcome of a structure conversation that starts by leaving out clergy and lay people.

I wrote to deputies about Bishop Sauls' proposal shortly after I learned of it, and here is part of what I wrote:

The topic of structural change is important to our church. Whether it requires a special meeting of the General Convention, in addition to our usual triennial gathering is not entirely clear to me. What is clear is the ability of the General Convention to deal successfully with complex and emotionally charged issues in its regular meetings. Within the last 35 years, we have conducted extensive debate and voted to ordain women to the priesthood, revised our Title IV disciplinary canons, and combated institutional racism- within the church and beyond. Recent conventions have included intense and respectful conversations about the full inclusion of lesbians, gays, bisexual and transgender people in the life of the church. It does not seem to me that the work of restructuring the church is demonstrably more difficult than tasks that the General Convention has already completed, especially since the House of Deputies modeled a productive means of conducting demanding conversations by convening for a time as a Committee of the Whole at the 76th General Convention.

We want any changes we recommend to be timely and carefully considered, but it may not be necessary to assign this important work to a special commission, as the model resolution would compel us to do. The reason we have no clarity on this is that we have had no time to consider the question as a House. Nor have we seen the other proposals that will come forward on the topic of restructuring God's Church. We have not heard one another's wisdom on this issue. We need

to move forward fully informed, equipped with the insights we gain from each other, considering all the options and not taking a “position” until we have had that opportunity. We need to have a conversation about mission first, before we change structures to enable our doing mission. All the structural changes in the world will not help us if our mission is poorly defined, or poorly understood. So I ask you to give some thought to this question: What is mission and what does it mean to us?

I am very glad that Bishop Sauls has joined me, the Executive Council and the Standing Commission on the Structure of the Church in encouraging conversations between bishops and deputies and all Episcopalians regarding change in the structure of God’s church.

I remain convinced that we need to slow down. We need to focus on what we do best at the local level- mission and program. And we need to focus on what we do best at the churchwide level- representative governance and coordination. We need to talk together about how we should change our structure- and why. The chair of the Standing Commission on Structure, Becky Snow, who reported to this council in June, has developed a sample resolution to help all of us- clergy, lay people and bishops- structure our conversations and work together toward change that best facilitates mission and best limits unintended consequences. In compliance with our General Convention mandates to Standing Commissions and Committees, the Structure Commission Blue Book report is being prepared and will be filed by the deadline. I’d like us to consider the Structure Commission’s work.

I’d also like us to consider, as we work on the draft budget for the next triennium, how we might realize savings by focusing our churchwide work on governance and coordination and leaving more money in congregations and dioceses to do the mission that we know God is calling us to do.

In June, I said to you that we the baptized are not called to stand idly by and watch change happen. We are called upon to use change and create the change that we believe will bring about a reconciled world. We have a unique opportunity now. Let’s move forward: laity, clergy, bishops- together.