



To: Members of the Community of the House of Deputies

From: George L.W. Werner

Date: June 2001

Re: Pentecost Greetings

How charged and challenged was the public square on that first day of Pentecost. So many people, so many different tongues. Anticipation, anxiety and excitement were just some of the things Jesus' followers experienced on the occasion we now refer to as the Birthday of the Church.

One of the privileges of this office is having the opportunity to visit this branch of that Holy Catholic Church. In Oklahoma City the Dean of our National Cathedral reminded me that the Murragh Memorial is in many ways our Coventry. Imagine a tribute arrived at by the consensus of a 350-person committee. The members included survivors, loved ones of the victims, and "those whose lives were changed forever."

Our Cathedral was severely damaged in the blast. Yet, one of the survivors told us that as she was being treated it seemed every question was answered with, "Go to the church." The people of St. Paul's somehow helped everyone, including hundreds of workers who were fed in a hall, which just a few hours earlier had been impassible with debris.

It occurred to me that we are called to be vulnerable. In a society, which too often seems to be obsessed with security and certainty, the Cross and the Gospels remind us to be vulnerable. After all, how can faith, hope, and gracious love exist without vulnerability?

I saw a different kind of risk in Vail, Colorado, where one Jewish and five Christian congregations share a chapel, offices, and meeting place. Tremendous cooperation is required to schedule services and events equitably. Such a situation removes many of the elements, which in my pastoral experience, gave me a sense of "security and ownership." Yet, "flying without a net" these pastors clearly have become a team. They are family, support for one another, and a unified witness for God in a valley deeply challenged by the conspicuous wealth of a resort.

As I am in almost constant conversation and engaged in reading about shaping ministry to meet new challenges, I will often recall my experience in Vail. In one place, I preached to an ethnically and economically diverse cross section of people meeting in the gym of an elementary school. The Church was engaged in overcoming the artificial divisions between "classes" of God's children and building community in a powerful and effective way.

Our community in the Episcopal Church continues to deal with change. In the aftermath of a treasurer's defalcation, Steve Duggan gave up his well-deserved retirement to commit to a two-year effort to restore trust in our financial system. That short term has stretched to five and one half years. The positive commitments from an overwhelming number of dioceses indicate his success. Beyond the numbers, Steve's commitment to mission, ministry, and justice have enhanced the good work of many lay and clergy serving the needs of God's children.

A search committee for a new treasurer has been appointed. It will be chaired by the Bishop of Nebraska and includes the chairs of the Executive Council's Committees on Administration & Finance and Audit, the Program, Budget & Finance Committee of General Convention, and a former treasurer of the Diocese of Chicago. Since the Treasurer also serves General Convention, I will join the Assistant to the Presiding Bishop for Administration as part of the committee. Ultimately, I will assist the Presiding Bishop in making the appointment. This gives me another opportunity to thank the Presiding Bishop and his management team for graciously and appropriately including the House of Deputies in the management decisions of the Church.

The Commissions, Committees, Agencies and Boards are working diligently during this triennium. Episcopal Relief & Development is pursuing exciting new strategies, which will further enhance an agency which distributes more than \$10 million annually throughout the world. Our 20/20 Task Force is working creatively and industriously to enhance the making of disciples. Archives, a splendid and underappreciated service of our church, is searching for new headquarters. As you are probably aware, we are studying the possibility of selling the current Church Center on Second Avenue and reestablishing ourselves on the grounds of General Seminary. We hope to have the pertinent information for preliminary decisions by this fall.

This month, our Council of Advice will be discussing many of the suggestions I have been gathering for improving the ways we do business in our house. My predecessor encouraged numerous changes, which have worked well. However, as you have made it clear to me there is more to be done. I am particularly interested in technological improvements and expect to appoint an ad hoc task force to that end. Please feel free to send me ideas for improvements as well as for potential members for that task force.

Whether it was a meeting of the Urban Caucus in Connecticut or a Diocesan Convention in California or a Clergy Day in Florida or an Evangelism meeting in Texas, the stories of exciting witness to God's gracious love and the faithfulness of so many of you give me great hope. So many different people, so many different tongues.

Robert Louis Stevenson was forced by ill health to spend much of his childhood in bed. One evening he watched the lamplighter come down the street, touching his flame to the gas jets of each street light. Stevenson's mother called to ask what he was doing and young Robert replied, "I am watching someone punch holes in the darkness."

I am grateful to you for allowing me to visit this Church and to see so many examples of people punching holes in the darkness to let the light of Christ shine through. Though we are sinners needing to be saved by Grace, each of us has the opportunity to do something that will increase the light in a world that remains much too dark. God bless you all.