



## Message to Our Youth

MARCH 18, 2018

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**The Rev. Canon  
Kevin D. Nichols**

A special hello to the youth of the Diocese of Bethlehem. Presiding Bishop Michael Curry often reminds us that Jesus came to show us there is another way, and that way is love. And that love lived out in our witness and service, especially to the most vulnerable, can transform our communities into the dream that God intends for all of us. So let us not be afraid to love.

I want to share with you a few ways that we have been reaching out in love to the youth and young adults in New Hampshire and introduce you to a few people. This evening I am with the students from the White Mountain School in Bethlehem – Bethlehem, New Hampshire. Each year a dozen or so students drive 80 miles south to Concord. They camp out at Diocesan House, across the street from the State Capitol, and engage in a civics lesson. They come to better understand advocacy efforts, strengthen their own leadership skills and to meet state and government servants.

[Speaking with youth] “When I got older, sometimes I was finding happiness not just in things that made me feel good, but in things that helped other people. That didn’t seem to make any sense. I was sacrificing the time I could have been spent doing whatever I wanted to do. I was actually helping others. I found a deeper meaning then which sparked a sense that maybe there was more to life than just what made me feel good.”

[Speaking with youth] “Looking at the world and saying what are those places that are just so broken? Racial reconciliation - the fact that we can’t even get along. My son is a kid of color. He is from Cambodia, and he has had to walk through different things in his life because he’s of color than I ever did. I have had to say things to him as his father that I never thought I would have to say to a son. And that breaks my heart. So it is when I walk with people - people struggling, people during the most sacred moments of their life, that I really come to see God.”

Welcome to the town of Tilton, New Hampshire. For 135 years Trinity Episcopal Church was an active and vibrant community. This impressive brick structure, which was built on the Winnepesaukee River, had a long history of mission and ministry, but, like so many communities, economic issues and, in this case, the closing of textile mills led to a shift in the population. In 2014, a courageous group of parishioners came before diocesan convention and stated “you know we are a people who believe in the resurrection and when the maintenance of a building and the struggle to survive as a viable congregation has become so exceedingly difficult that the mission of the gospel can’t grow and flourish; closure can be seen not as an act of failure but rather as a trusting that God can do something new and in a new way”. The diocesan property renewal team began to explore a new mission to repurpose this once vibrant community, and a discernment process led to the wonderful transformation of this space - this undercroft - which is now the home for the Episcopal Service Corps program. So here we are in this space. The efforts of the Trustees, of community activists, of people working together led us to renovate this space and now it’s the home to four incredible Fellows who are between the ages of 20 and 29 - who live in an intentional community, a prayerful community, and they work at local non-profits. I want to introduce you to a few of those fellows - to Anna, Bailey, Niambi and Sandy.

I see it as our responsibility to reach out to all our youth whether they are in our congregations or in the larger community - we are called to reach out to all in love. And I look forward to walking with you and envisioning new ways that we can reach out in the Diocese of Bethlehem.



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**The Rev. Canon Ruth  
Woodliff-Stanley**

As you search for your ninth Bishop, I'm deeply glad to walk, pray and listen for God's direction with you.

Hey everybody! I'm Ruth. I'm glad to send you this message, though what I'm really looking forward to is a two-way conversation with you.

So, I was thinking about what I'd like to say to you, and I remembered this time when my son John interviewed me as part of an assignment about his ancestors. During the interview he asked me, "If you could go back in time and relive one memory, what would it be?"

This question caught me by surprise. In considering my answer, I saw lots of images pass by me. But then, one image settled into my mind. A moment...I'm very small. I'm half asleep. My father picks me up to carry me to my bed. I am being held.

With John on the sofa next to me, I was suspended between the present time and another time long ago. I teared up. I didn't want to leave that place that I had found.

Moments like the one John help me recapture with his question take us to this place deep within us that we don't want to leave. No matter how much darkness or boredom or challenge the rest of the world gives us, there's this place deep within us where we are held and known for who we really are. That's where God dwells in us.

I think when we live together in Christian community, we find that place within, our truest core. And in that place, we grow strong to face the challenges of life.

Sometimes the challenges seem like more than we can bear. Like right now, in the wake of the school shooting in Parkland and too many like it when you have to think about whether someone may come into your school and shoot you or your friends. Or like when you or people you care about get hurt because of senseless prejudice or cruelty or abuse. In the hard times, we need this place where we are held safe.

I'm not an expert in youth ministry, but I do remember going to the first Happening in Mississippi. I loved it, and I love what we do in Colorado. Our youth develop and design their own retreats called Quest twice a year on issues and themes they care about. And we have a number of other really cool programs I can tell you about when we're together. What they all have in common is that they're places where your truest core is held and honored.

What I know about relationships with youth I've learned mainly from my own sons George and John. The most important thing I've learned from them is to listen. To really listen costs you. It costs you time. Most of the best conversations I've had with George and John begin somewhere around midnight. I don't know why, but that's the way it is with our family.

Another thing listening can cost you is the security of thinking you have the answers or that you're right. Recently, our family got into this long conversation about God and physics. And I got asked some difficult questions that I couldn't really answer. I know it sounds crazy, but as a priest that was hard for me. But our family grew closer spiritually because of that conversation.

And listening can cost you your comfort zone. Like when I was listening to kids of color in the past who told me what it's like to grow up afraid for their lives on the streets in Denver. Or when my son showed me videos of the conditions of animals on factory farms. Those conversations have changed the way I live and have forced me out of my comfort zone.

When we listen well to each other, we feel safe and held in our community, like I felt the night my father carried me and put me in my bed. And when we feel safe, we find courage to change ourselves and the world.

If I serve as your Bishop, I want to listen to you. Really listen. And I want to ask that you listen deeply to each other and to those who have the least voice in our society. Then, I want your help in figuring out what God is asking us to do about what we hear. I want you to lead with me.

I also want to have fun while we're working together. As you may have heard, I love roller coasters. Seriously. And I like to dance. And hike. And swim. And eat. And laugh. And learn new music. So, pretty much anything you ask me to do, I'm game. I want to have fun—while we change the world. I think that's what Jesus would want.

I'll see you soon.