

Christian Formation Critically Important

Bishop Chip Edgar Addresses the 2026 Diocesan Convention

The following is a transcript of the address given by Bishop Chip Edgar on Saturday, March 14 at the 2026 Convention of the Anglican Diocese of South Carolina, held at the Marina Inn in Myrtle Beach, SC. It has been edited for readability.

It has been quite a year since we were last together for the Convention in Charleston! We've encountered many challenges and we've had to work our way through hard places; some are now behind us ...some still lie ahead.

Legal Proceedings' Concerns Raised

First, after five years, a verdict was reached in the trial of Bp Ruch, (Diocese of the Upper Midwest). Our diocese was drawn into that fray last summer, and again in December when verdict was issued, as one of our own, Mr. Alan Runyan, both a hero to us and a godly man, was unfairly denigrated during the proceedings and then again in the final, 71-page verdict.

Having called for an independent audit of all the matters related to the trial, including the trial proceedings themselves, our Standing Committee was compelled to raise concerns with the verdict (to be clear, not with the ruling, we know that is not in our purview) to ensure that these proceedings be included in the audit.

I'm pleased to report that, so far, the ACNA's executive committee has responded to us largely positively and I am hopeful. We'll know more from them in the coming week, and we'll be reporting to you as of March 23rd, or a day or two after.

Throughout all of that, our goal has been that given we have upcoming prominent cases before the province, one including the Archbishop himself, this audit we've called for would be able to help restore some confidence that regardless of the outcome of those future trials, they'll be handled appropriately. Again, this case matters much to us as a diocese as it involves several of us who are members of the diocese who are involved in these legal proceedings. We want to do what we can as a diocese to try to ensure a fair outcome without crossing the line and tampering with that outcome.

Now, throughout all of this, I've heard people say from time to time they're tired of being asked to "trust the process" when they feel that the process has already been pretty bad and let them down. I just want to say to you all, I do not ask you to trust the process. I ask you to trust the Lord of the process and the Lord of all processes. Even as this works out, knowing that his promise is true, that all things, including mishandled church processes, will under his strong

hand end up for the good, the true, and the just. Even if we must wait until all things are made new and everything sad is going to come out untrue.

Aslan is On the Move in our Diocese

But let's not exhaust time this morning just in bad news because God has been at work in our diocese in wonderful ways this year. As Beth and I travel around, we're always blessed week in and week out to see our parishes growing, to see them increasing in ministry to their local communities. What Beth and I see Sunday after Sunday is simply this: Aslan is on the move in South Carolina.

We do have smaller congregations that are struggling more than they thrive. And so for that reason, we began the Thrive Together initiative. You've heard about it in the Jubilate Deo, you heard about it this morning. The Thrive Together initiative is very simple. We've asked for a gift this year of \$100 from each family unit. And I am excited to tell you that that "ask" I make every time I visit a parish — so clergy, if I'm coming to visit you soon, know that I'm going to be asking — But I ask simply for \$100 from each family from our diocese moving forward, and I can't believe that I get to tell you that as of today, since the middle of October when this campaign was first announced, we've raised \$175,000. And that money is going to churches that aren't able to afford clergy and help them to provide clergy and guidance for their future.

While we're on the topic of raised money, let me share some staggering figures with you. Since the settlement of our lawsuit with the Episcopal Church, our congregations, both those who lost buildings and those who are having — those who've lost buildings are having to start again, as well as those who had to make up for a decade of deferred maintenance and delayed growth, have raised well over — You ready for this? \$65 million dollars. And I don't know that in that figure I've accounted for every church that has done a capital campaign. In addition to that, we have a few churches that are engaged in capital campaigns that will add an additional \$21 million more.

The Spirit is at work. Restoring and rebuilding the church. And I know as well as you do that dollars aren't the measure of the Spirit's work, of course. But my experience is that dollars don't flow where the Spirit isn't at work. Except, for some ridiculous reason, in college football, but that's another thing.

Camp Jubilee: Building Far More than a Camp

On top of that, Camp Jubilee is moving forward with incredible results. The camp program is entering its fourth year hosting camps, evangelizing, discipling kids, training and forming

leaders, all the while in a place that is not our own. Now I believe that we have the best camp program in South Carolina, likely the entire Southeast. And we're doing it in small, rented facilities with nothing but the opportunity in the future to grow and expand when we finally move into our new facility that will be built on our property at Lady's Island. The challenge is — moving in is only \$20 million away.

But before you let that discourage you, remember what I just told you about how much has already been raised in our churches, and we can do more. As I said to the crowd gathered just a week ago at Camp Jubilee for our second annual Day of Jubilee, I want you to know that we're building more than just a camp. We're building, participating in something far older, far greater than that. I believe we're building something that's at the very heart of how, in the biblical story, God has been drawing people to himself.

Long before anybody ever went to a Christian camp, God was forming a people for himself by taking them away, taking them out of their normal routines of life, taking them out of their normal circles of families and friends and bringing them to places apart where he can order and form them as his own.

Throughout biblical history, God took people away from their ordinary environments in order to form them into his particular people. God took Moses out of Egypt, then he took Moses and all of Israel out into the wilderness for 40 years. And scripture tells us why. God had to get Egypt out of them. You see, the wilderness was no detour in God's plan. It was God's way of formation.

Israel wandered until an entire generation had the opportunity to be shaped into God's covenant people. And we need to be shaped too. Much in our own day and in our larger culture needs to be gotten out of us like Egypt was gotten out of Israel. We're hyperconnected digitally, overstimulated, Busy, all while we know that hurry and busyness and distraction act as enemies of spiritual growth.

So this then is what God does. He calls his people away, away to be formed. Look at the whole biblical witness. Moses, Isaiah, Moses, Israel, Elijah, all withdrew. Jesus withdrew.

And when they did, they heard They learned from and were shaped by God. So brothers and sisters, we're not raising \$20 million to build a camp. No, the \$20 million that you'll be asked to sacrifice will enable us to set apart a place where God can slow us down, remove the distractions to which we become so desperately addicted, to get the Egypt out of us. And to form us into his people. And all of our churches working together for the kind of ministry that's almost impossible to do in just the routines of everyday parish life.

I want you to think of this: the people who give and make sacrifices now will become the future, the spiritual ancestors of future stories. Forty years from now, you'll hear people say things like, "That week at camp changed my life." "That summer at camp clarified my calling." "That retreat restored our marriage." "That quiet morning reoriented my soul."

Now, those people will not know the names of those who gave and prayed and sacrificed and built, but God will. And that's all we want.

Christian Formation Critical

Now I've said that that kind of ministry can happen at a camp or a conference or a retreat, but I don't want you to think that that in any way diminishes the significance of everyday parish life. Don't hear me speaking negatively of routine parish ministry. That is the heartbeat of Christian life and formation, even if God sometimes has to pull us away in order to shake us up.

Today I want to call all of our parishes to the critically important ministry of Christian education. Last year I laid out three important ministry foci for the years of my episcopacy: robust Christian education, congregational support and development, and prayer book formation. That vision was summarized this way: "Rooted in Scripture and formed by the Anglican tradition, we seek to build a vital community of faith through planting, and developing local churches."

So this year I want to focus on the first of those: Christian Education. In my convention address last year, I said,

"We live in an increasingly complicated world where living out the Christian faith has become a challenge...Are we preparing people to bear witness to the faith when it and its moral vision is challenged? Can we say that people in our churches are being given the tools necessary to give an answer for the hope that they have? Brothers and sisters, we must be in the business of teaching the creeds, the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, the Holy Scriptures, and the Catechism of the Church, that we might be prepared to resist the great adversary who is always on the prowl, seeking whom he may devour."

Several months ago, during one of the most difficult times of challenge that we in the diocese were facing, we were heading home from one of our parish visits. And as we set out, Beth said, "You know what I miss?" And I said, "Happiness?" She said, "No, I was just going to say Sunday school."

You see, in 2004, when I was engaged in the challenging work of church planting, it was all the rage among church planters to focus on one thing on Sunday morning. Just worship. “Don't clutter up the morning with other things.” “Keep the main thing the main thing.” “You can move other things like fellowship and Christian education to other days of the week. Doing that frees up space for more growth, demands for less volunteers.”

All of those are good things. But then I met a really successful church planter who had not done that. His church ordered their Sunday mornings with plenty of space for fellowship and dedicated Christian education for everyone of all ages, from the youngest to the oldest. And I asked him, “When everyone else is going in the opposite direction in the church planting world, why have you chosen to do this?” And he said, very simply, “It's a matter of value. If you're a church, what you do on Sunday morning is the loudest proclaimer of what you really care about. And if you move it to Wednesday or Thursday, you let people know that no matter what else you might say, it's not really your priority.”

I can't honestly tell you which of our churches offer intentional, biblically and theologically grounded Sunday school for all ages and which don't. But what I can tell you is that I believe every single one of our parishes should.

According to the most recent Pew Research data, only about 62% of adults in the United States now identify as Christian, which is down significantly from 78% back in the mid-2000s. Yet nearly 30% of those 62% who identify as Christian call themselves “religiously unaffiliated,” what has been known as “nones,” not sisters.

So what does that tell us? First, it tells us that spirituality and belief is still something that's widespread in these United States.

But secondly, it tells us that Christian identity and formation are sorely lacking.

When the Church Neglects her Teaching Role, Faith Becomes Shallow

Despite a continuing belief in God, Christian formation that can stand the challenges of our world just doesn't seem to be happening. All through the scriptures, the assumption is that intentional formative teaching is at the heart of what the church does. Moses in the Old Testament wrote, “These words that I command you today shall be on your heart, and you shall diligently teach them to your children.”

Diligently. That means with repetition and depth and rhythm and discipline. In the New Testament, in the book of Acts, Luke describes the habits of the earliest Christians. “They

devoted themselves,” we're told, “to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship and breaking of bread and prayer.” That's Sunday morning activity, of course, but it's more than that as well.

And the first item listed is teaching. This was not an optional activity. It was the foundation of their community life. The early church prioritized understanding scripture and the teaching of Christ as central to their identity before anything else. The church's vitality comes not just from ritual or fellowship, but from a shared depth of knowledge and understanding of God's word. That includes doctrine, ethics, and practical Christian living.

Note too that this was done in community. More and more we have fallen to the idea that this work can be done on one's own time through YouTube teachers and podcasts and recorded lectures. The early church didn't gather for teaching because they lacked better technology. They gathered for teaching because they knew that learning happens best in community.

We tend to think of teaching as something that's transmitted top-down. The teacher has knowledge, he shares it, or she shares it, and the student absorbs it. What you want in that model most is the teacher's skill. And so one of the things that we see is even though we have good teachers in our churches, our people are chasing fancy teachers from other places.

But the reality is learning is a highly social event. A community of learners is actually more important than the teacher in shaping the understanding and retention.

Studies show that the most effective learning happens when students interact with peers, discuss, explain, debate, and teach one another in a way that strengthens understanding. The brain encodes knowledge more deeply when learners teach, argue, and explain concepts with each other. And so the believers in the early Church devoted themselves to the Apostles' teaching together. When the Church neglects her teaching role, faith becomes shallow, members are ill-equipped to disciple others, and find themselves unable to share their faith with others.

So, this morning I am urging us all to begin with your own parish's life forming and educating more rigorously.

Again, as I mentioned last week, every single Sunday when I'm confirming Christians, I ask, have they been adequately prepared? And then, according to the prayer book, I add a definition of what that would look like. I say,

“It is essential that those who wish to be confirmed or received in this church publicly confess Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, have become his disciples, know and affirm the Nicene Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Ten Commandments, and have received instruction in the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments and the Catechism of the Church.”

Studying Scripture and catechism have always been at the heart of Christian discipleship. Again, I don't want you to hear me saying that knowledge equals formation, but I do want you to hear me say that formation that is not grounded in knowledge is weak and ultimately ineffective.

You might know that J.I. Packer spent his final decades devoted to what he called his last crusade, encouraging the church to renew the practice of the intentional formation of believers in Christian doctrine and discipleship. He believed that the church's neglect of systematic Christian education, especially with adults, was a serious deficit.

He described catechesis, that is the process of catechizing, as “the necessary process that unites core Christian doctrine with everyday life, helping Christians to know what they believe and to live what they know.” He had a favorite metaphor for the business of catechism. He said, “The faith has a basic grammar. To get the believing part straight in your mind, you must have a basic grammar of what you believe,” and the catechism serves that purpose. Happily for us, he served as the theological editor for our own ACNA's catechism, *To Be a Christian: An Anglican Catechism*.

And throughout that, he argued that catechism must be recovered and embedded into the life of the church as a discipleship tool that teaches doctrine richly grounded in Scripture and lived out in daily Christian practice.

I'll add briefly here that all across the ACNA, a kind of cottage industry is growing up around our catechism with great ideas on how to use it for instruction for all ages. I encourage you to pursue that. Think of it this way: catechizing builds a kind of theological scaffolding that allows our lives as disciples to be erected carefully.

One final Packer quote on the Catechism, and it's sort of dire in nature. Packer wrote not long before he died, “The church of the future will be a well-catechized church, or it will not be a church at all.” If the church is to survive and thrive in a secular world, it must recover the basic practice of systematic catechism.

Now you and I know that the church will survive. We have that on the good strong promise of Jesus. So, Packer is overstating for the purpose of making the case. But do note that Packer was not a man given to extremes. And we would do well to heed his conviction.

Like I said earlier, camp can't do it all. We need parish ministry. For camp to succeed in its role as a place apart, the local church must be doing its job in effective education and formation.

But in just that same way, and as critical as it is, and I hope that if I haven't convinced you, at least given you something serious to think about in terms of catechesis. The local church can't do everything either.

The Case for Anglican K-12 Schools

I've been focusing on the church's Sunday morning Christian education, but Christian education has to extend far beyond the parish classroom.

Too often we find ourselves more effectively disciplined by voices other than the church's. Things like social media, and by the way, I have written a bishop's directive for social media engagement that will be provided to you today, offering some guidelines, especially for the clergy, on how we engage in that arena.

But we've been effectively disciplined by other voices, things like social media and news channels. They claim vastly more of our time and attention than the church is able to.

And so, if the church is going to compete, the church must be in the business of educating, of providing schools at every level. Now, not all of us are in a position to build schools, though I hope some of that will keep happening. We've seen amazing success in our diocese in forming disciples at places like Holy Trinity Classical Christian School in Beaufort, the Cross School in Bluffton, Hope Scholars Academy in Charleston, and there are many more.

But I want you to imagine our diocese, say, 20 years from now, where in every deanery there were options for Christian primary education. We could build schools, of course, but we can also easily get involved in things like homeschool co-ops and support groups. Imagine if each deanery had a few Christian middle schools and/or was involved in the area of Christian schools. Imagine if there was an Anglican Christian high school in each deanery.

And while we aren't likely to build a college or a university, our churches should be involved in helping students discern about their higher education as well, showcasing and guiding students toward Christian colleges and highlighting places at public universities where faith is nurtured

and supported. Places like St. Albans Chapel at the Citadel, Campus Communion at the College of Charleston, or places like the Christian Study Center at the University of South Carolina and many universities. A phenomenon that I have witnessed at several institutions is that honors colleges often offer uniquely friendly environments, encouraging to the faith because of their focus on the Great Books tradition.

Now what I'm advocating here is not a withdrawal from society. It's a deep formation for faithful engagement in all of society. Whatever the church does in this area, it must be education for people available at all income levels. This is a kind of crucial, in-depth, all-aspects-of-life education, touching science and technology, arts, history, all of that. For as the Dutch theologian Abraham Kuyper once put it, there is not one square inch in the whole domain of human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign of all, does not cry, "Mine."

That kind of education cannot be reserved for some sort of elite group in the Church. Earlier this year, Fr. Ted Duvall shared a story with me: a mom reporting on an assignment that her daughter had encountered in their homeschooling curriculum. One of the homework questions, she wrote, was, "How do you respond to the idea that 'The heart is what's used for religion, and the brain is what's used for science.'" A few days later, her young daughter came back to her with that question and said, "I thought a lot about what you said, but I went in a different direction. Every week we hear in church that we're supposed to love the Lord our God with all of our heart, with all of our soul, with all of our mind." This little girl said, "Christianity is meant to be integrated." Bingo.

Christian Education for Trades

And while we're at it, I'll just throw this in here. We can't think just of the education curriculum. What about the trades? They've been highly neglected in our culture for a long time. And the church needs to be involved in discipling and training people going into trades, too.

Years ago, when I was the rector of Church of the Apostles in Columbia, we went to the Falls Church in Virginia to look at their fellows program, to talk about bringing a similar fellows' program back to Columbia. And as we were flying home, I kept thinking, "Well, this is great, but once again, the church is focusing all of her attention on the highest level of education." What if we could have a fellows' program where we encourage students who didn't feel called to go to college to step into the trades joining with the church for a period of learning the trade, but also learning discipleship as a Christian, where they would be trained in all sorts of things. Who knows what the possibilities are?"

I want to encourage us all to begin thinking about those kinds of things, and I want to invite those of you who are concerned, with me about that, to join me. I'm going to try to call together a group of folks to think and talk together about what we might do all across our diocese.

Shaping Thinkers who Engage Culture with Discernment

Through all of that, our goal is simple: that as Paul writes in Philippians 3, "That I may know him." Not simply believe about him, not simply to assent to doctrinal statements, but to know him — incarnationally, personally, practically. Our Christian education in every venue, at every level, ought to nourish worshipers who pray with depth, shape thinkers who engage culture with discernment, and nurture Christians who serve their neighbors in love.

We're at an important place in our life together as a diocese. Our diocese is in a season of amazing building and growth and visionary planning for the future. Our commitment to Christian education needs to be at the forefront of all of that. If we hope to disciple Christians for the long haul and sustain churches for generations to come, we have to be about the business of Christian education. The church once emphasized rigorous Christian education on Sundays and built schools because we believe that truth is unified in Christ Jesus and that faith seeks understanding and that the love of God must shape all of life.

In the future, we will address more directly facets of the vision laid out last year, like congregational development and church planting, and how the prayer book's spiritual formation gathers all these things together and offers them as a part of our worship.

Until then, may God give us wisdom and courage to teach faithfully, to build institutions that proclaim Christ not only in word, but in mind and in life, so that future generations will rise up and say, we were taught him, we knew him, we walked with him.

Amen.