

Episcopal Charities Celebrates a Milestone: 15 Years of Caring

In December 1996 Episcopal Charities was incorporated to begin its work as the outreach arm of the Diocese of New York. This month marks the beginning of a year of celebration of this organization and the programs it funds. On a rainy day in October 2011, several leaders of Episcopal Charities gathered to remember the beginnings of the organization, and dream about its future. Following is the transcript of that conversation.

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Nick Richardson (Editor, *The Episcopal New Yorker*): We'd like to start at the beginning and ask first why Episcopal Charities came about and how you reached the decision to create it.

David Shover (Episcopal Charities' first Executive Director): Nick, we've only got an hour and a half. (Laughter)

The Rt. Rev. Mark Sisk (15<sup>th</sup> Bishop of New York): It seems to me that Episcopal Charities really came out of the vision of Bishop Grein, my predecessor. There was a similar organization back in his previous diocese in Kansas, and he felt that this would be a good way to strengthen the outreach work of parishes. And I think it's been remarkably successful.

Shover: At the diocesan convention in 1992 there was a lot of discussion about changing about the assessment formula to relieve some of the financial pressure on parishes, and Bishop Grein decided to appoint a committee, which I chaired to look not only at the assessment, but also to consider some larger changes in the diocese that might affect not only parish performance and parish support, and also social ministry and outreach programs in the diocese.

So the subsequent assessment review committee report that had three elements to it: reformation of the assessment process; establishment of the congregational support plan; and the creation of Episcopal Charities. These three elements were intertwined to reform the way that the diocese did business and related to its parishes, and also how the diocese raised money.

Sisk: Going back roughly 20 years prior to that 1992 convention, the primary objective of diocesan funding of local parishes had been to fund programs. As some parishes began to struggle with funding of their core internal activities, they often became very creative in allocating staff time, for example, to programs. Basically what happened in '92, was a decision to clarify that parish priests were good to have, and so we would find a way to fund them—which is what the congregational support plan did. And to support the actual infrastructure of the church there were other direct funding programs. For example, property support grants would clearly be given to help pay the bills for upkeep of the physical infrastructure, and you didn't have to justify that work through some particular programmatic activity. And outreach programs were going to be given grants separately through Episcopal Charities.

So there really was a shift in philosophical underpinnings for grants; this was a successful attempt to separate out different kinds of support for local parishes, and to be clear about what we're funding.

Cecil Wray (first President, Episcopal Charities Board of Directors): I have a slightly different, but not incongruous recollection of those events. There was a predecessor of Episcopal Charities called the Venture Fund, which tried to raise money for mission but I think was notably unsuccessful in doing it. And there were also block grants made by the diocese to the regional Interparish Councils, which re-granted funds to outreach programs at various parishes.

Now, the diocesan budget was strained, as it is now and, I guess, always is. And a large portion of the diocesan budget was going out to support outreach programs. I think that the leadership saw that the creation of Episcopal Charities was a way of relieving the diocese of that large expense in the budget. Part of the overall plan was that financial support for outreach would come to parishes through Episcopal Charities, and support for the (for the lack of a better word) religious programming for parishes was going to come from the diocese through the congregational support plan.

And for that reason, at least early on, we made quite a point of what I call separation of church and state—that the funds granted by Episcopal Charities were specifically for outreach, not to support clergy or membership growth. Right at the beginning almost all of those parishes that had been recipients of funds through block grants came to us expecting to be funded. And we turned down the few that were to support religious programs like vacation bible schools.

Richardson: I'm presuming that it was hoped that the creation of Episcopal Charities would generate sources of funding that had not have previously supported the church's outreach work?

Shover: Yes, that was a fundamental part of the reasoning at the time: If we had an independent nonprofit that was not religiously but rather secularly focused, it would open up opportunities for support from corporations and foundations and other kinds of secular funding that was not previously available to the diocese.

Sisk: Yes—it was anticipated that particularly through events like our annual Tribute Dinner (Episcopal Charities' principal source of funding), corporations would be invited to participate and be supportive. The Dinner has raised millions of dollars over the years, so it's been quite a successful tactic.

The Venture Fund that Cecil mentioned was actually part of a national program, "Venture and Mission." The national church expected to raise a lot of money through this program for its operations, and by and large that didn't work. But it was successful in a way that was not anticipated: Dioceses and parishes raised a great deal of money, because everybody got to tack their project onto a national campaign. A lot of parishes in this diocese raised a fair amount of money for their own work. The diocese also raised some money for its work, but in the early 90s that money began to run out. And that produced the financial pressure we were talking about.

Shover: There was another undercurrent that wasn't prominent in the discussion at the time, but I think was at play: Under the block grant system, before Episcopal Charities, Interparish Councils made decisions locally about what parish programs would receive funds in their communities. As you can imagine, there was a political element to that process, and there were also some accountability and objectivity problems. It was hoped that an independent organization could increase the focus on accountability and objectivity in the process of determining who got the grants.

Sisk: The block grant system also presumed that everyone applying knew a great deal about how to get a grant from the diocese—it was one of those systems that rewarded a deep knowledge of how the system worked, instead of simply judging the value of the work. Creating Episcopal Charities helped develop a much greater transparency, so that applicants knew clearly who to go to and how to get a grant, and funders knew what their gifts made possible.

Wray: Before Episcopal Charities came along, I think the process by which outreach money was divvied up in the diocese was a little bit like Chicago ward politics. (Laughter)

Sisk: You give Chicago a bad name, but go ahead. (Laughter) I suppose Tammany Hall here in New York had some of those qualities too!

Wray: It did. And one of the problems we faced very early on was that outreach programs and parishes that had sort of “been on the payroll” in the previous system felt a definite sense of entitlement. But under David's leadership we made the whole operation much more professional in terms of accountability. So from time to time there were murmurings of discontent from people who weren't getting the support they thought they were entitled to.

Richardson: So let's move on a little bit and get into the period of operation. When Episcopal Charities started, how many programs was it supporting?

Shover: I think we made grants to 45 programs in our first round of grants in 1997. But they were not the same mix of grants that we make today. The grants pretty much reflected those that had been previously funded under block grants and under the Venture Fund. There were lots of summer programs and after school programs—a heavy emphasis on youth programs. I think there were some feeding programs, but their numbers didn't begin to grow until long after Episcopal Charities had been established. And very early we made it clear that we relied on congregations to determine the most critical needs in their community—that was not our call. The congregations needed to go into the community and develop program to address those needs. And if we thought the program had all the elements to address that need in a responsible way, then we would fund it, regardless of the focus of the program.

Wray: I think we operate in a reactive mode to the applications that are presented to us, maybe to a greater extent than I would have expected at the outset. From time to time, the board has asked if we might become more proactive in terms of initiating programs ourselves. But we clearly can't run a program and the whole purpose of the organization is to support parishes. Nonetheless, we're always dancing around with the idea that we might ask parishes to initiate programs that we might think are needed, but that relationship between being proactive and

simply reacting is a very subtle dynamic.

Shover: I think we also began to realize, that while we were asking parishes to take the lead in identifying need, we also had to recognize that most parishes operate these programs in a simple manner. By and large these are not sophisticated programs. There are some like the Grace Church Community Center in White Plains or the Holy Apostles Soup Kitchen that are in fact sophisticated social agencies. But for the most part, our programs are volunteer driven, and they have to be simple for that very reason. Therefore we can't expect that we many parishes will develop, for example, large sophisticated housing or legal services programs that require much greater resources than most parishes are able to provide.

Richardson: What percentage of the costs of programs did Episcopal Charities contribute in the early days? A has that percentage changed over the 15 years?

Shover: I think in the beginning, we probably funded a larger percentage of program budgets than than is now the case. The advisory committee and the board have wrestled with this issue many times over the years. In the beginning many programs had received a large percentage of their revenue from the diocese, and therefore would have reasonably expected to get that same amount from us. So we continued that for a while, but then we began asking questions about whether it was in the best interest of Episcopal Charities, particularly in evaluating the impact that we had on programs, to have programs so dependent on one source of funding. We began to explore what was the way for us to have the greatest impact.

Wray: We were coming to looking at ourselves as a foundation in many respects. And most foundations have guidelines about what percentage of a program's budget they will fund. So we adopted guidelines for these funding percentages.

Mary Beth Sasso (Episcopal Charities' current Executive Director): Currently we try to fund between 10 and 40 percent of a program's operations. There are a handful of exceptions that go below the 10 percent mark, and it's very rare for us, unless it's really a startup program, to fund more than 40%. That seems to be the mix that at some early point was decided upon, and it makes sense because we want programs to look for other sources of funding beyond Episcopal Charities. We know that if our funding is more than 40% for a program, it may not be sustainable.

Richardson: The advisory committee was mentioned—what is the role of the advisory committee and how do they relate to the board?

Sasso: Well, the advisory committee's responsibility is to do program evaluation and make funding recommendations to the board. The committee is made up of clergy and lay people, most of whom have either a social service, educational, or clerical background, and therefore, a much greater range of experience with programs to meet human need than the typical member of our board. They do all the reviews of applications, including site visits every year, and then come together as a whole to make recommendations on what we fund and at what level. Those recommendations are then approved by the board.

Wray: The advisory committee is specifically provided for in the canons, which are sort of our constitution.

Sasso: And the Advisory Committee is selected regionally—we have a specific number of members from each region of the diocese. That, too, is outlined in the canons. So they knew what they were doing very early on.

Sisk: And the board itself has a different function.

Wray: Yes. The board approves the grants—but in 15 years, I've never seen a recommendation of the advisory committee turned down.

Doug Mercer (President, Episcopal Charities Board of Directors): No—they might ask a question, but they've never changed the advisory committee's recommendation, which I think is a testament to their good work.

I want to add an historical perspective here. From where I sit now, 15 years after its creation, I think everyone would say that Episcopal Charities has been quite a success. I think we have made a much greater impact than even Bishop Grein expected at the beginning. And I think there are three reasons for that success. Number one, early on the intent of the foundation was really well thought-out. And the organization hasn't changed a great deal in that respect. The second point I'd make is that the need continues. We are well placed, and there is, unfortunately, a growing need in our community. I don't expect, unfortunately, it ever will go away. And the third factor contributing to our success is that Episcopal Charities has continually been able to tap into a great reservoir of volunteers, both from the lay and the clergy side. We've always enjoyed having a terrific board and advisory committee. And we don't seem to be running out of candidates who want to serve either. I think that says a lot about our diocese and our church.

Sisk: Often in church boards there is a certain lack of clarity of responsibility. But one of the things that's very impressive to me is that that's not the case with the Episcopal Charities board. The board members of Episcopal Charities understand that a major part of their responsibility is to raise money to do this work. And they rely upon the advisory committee to give them technical advice about which programs to support. Often in the church we combine these functions, usually to the detriment of both. In this instance, these functions have been clearly separated, to great effect.

When I go to a board meeting of Episcopal Charities, it's very evident that the members are motivated by their faith and by the integrity of the programs they're supporting. But the fact that we are there to raise money is foremost in everyone's mind—it's a clear, understood and accepted responsibility. In my experience, this board may be unique on that point; they know that's what they're here to do.

Sasso: And yet, another critical role the board plays is setting policy. And these board members, although they understand their responsibility is mainly to raise funds, are driven by the work of the programs and motivated by the programs. Doug will tell you the committee that everyone wants to serve on is grants policy. They want to know more about what's happening and understand what's happening and really craft a way that we can continue to help programs grow and be sustainable for as long as there's need in their community.

Sisk: And board members look for ways to go see the programs. They don't just tell programs

how to strengthen their efforts—they want to experience the work firsthand. I think that's where they get the energy. They're actually involved in supporting something they are excited about. So there's a lot of interest in fitting site visits into busy schedules. There's a lot of focus on those visits—we're not pulling teeth to get board members out to see programs.

Sasso: Yes—we have board members who will sign up to work at a breakfast program that starts at 6:30 a.m., just so they can see what's happening.

Richardson: That is dedication! A lot of what you've been saying addresses the question of what are you most proud of over the last 15 years. What else are you proud of?

Wray: What I'm personally most proud of is the board we have assembled over the years. It's obviously turned over, but it's a very impressive board. And it's not a typical church organization board. The bylaws of the organization require two thirds of the board members be Episcopalians. In fact, we all are. But a great number of the board members don't have any substantial involvement in other church activities. It's a pretty power-packed board, and it has been from the beginning. I had to assemble the original board. When Bishop Grein asked me to take on this job, I thought he was handing me an organization that was already formed and in existence. But I discovered that what I got was an empty bag. (Laughter) Not surprisingly, the first board was made up of my friends. People who I think are still my friends. (Laughter)

Shover: That was your best achievement in 15 years, right? (Laughter)

Wray: I suppose.... And these are people who have the capacity to get things done.

Mercer: This is a key point. To really succeed, you need to establish an organization's board in the right way from the beginning. Cecil set a standard that attracted the attention of a lot of people in the diocese. It's been much easier to keep that going than it would have been to try and redo a bad start. I think generally people around the diocese think that being on the Episcopal Charities board is a privilege—that it's an enjoyable thing. In the last couple of years we've been able to recruit some younger members—at least people a lot younger than I am. It isn't very difficult. When these younger board members—and we took on three or four this year—ask around about Episcopal Charities, they find out that serving on this board is a very attractive, desirable, and maybe even prestigious thing to do. And that's because of the way you set it up, Cecil.

Wray: At least one of our most valuable board members, when I was putting together the original board, declined. And a year or two later, when he saw what we were doing, he came back and changed his mind. (Laughter)

Shover: If I think about the accomplishment of which I'm most proud, it's the fact that Episcopal Charities has really brought to life the impulse of so many congregations to do outreach work. I think an almost an unintended consequence of establishing this organization was that, by doing all the other things that we do, we inspire congregations to consider taking on work that they might not have otherwise. I think we've been able to initiate a discussion in congregations about importance of outreach as an element of their parish life. So many parishes were (and are) struggling, spending all their energy internally to keep things together and get people in the pews and raise money and all the rest. But I think they found that when

they reached outside themselves into their community, they not only helped their community, but they helped themselves and really brought the congregation to life. I think that's a lasting legacy of the things that we did and are doing now that will continue.

Also I think we can't look at the last 15 years and not remember the wonderful response of this church to 9/11—what the church did, what the diocese did, and what the diocese asked Episcopal Charities to do to coordinate our response to the tragedy of 9/11. It consumed us for a significant period of time, but it was worth it. And I think it made a significant difference in the lives of many, many people that would not have been touched if we had not done that.

Richardson: Can you tell us a few more details about that work?

Shover: Well, I think that many both secular and religious organizations in the city felt an enormous welling of support from around the world in those days after 9/11. I know Bishop Sisk's office was getting calls from all over the country and all over the world asking, "What can we do to help?" And Bishop Sisk said, "Well, Episcopal Charities, is the entity in this diocese that does that kind of work. Let's put them in charge." And so we started receiving those funds. Episcopal Relief and Development also received funds and gave a significant part of their money to Episcopal Charities to respond. And we developed a niche in the days after 9/11: We discovered there was a large population of people, many of them undocumented, that were the service workers around and in the World Trade Center. Many of them were limousine drivers, some worked in restaurants and shops in the World Trade Center, and they had nowhere to turn. They were out of their livelihood, but they couldn't go to the sources of funding that others affected by the tragedy turned to because many of them were undocumented—those sources weren't available. We carved out that niche for ourselves because that was where the need was. We became known among that community as the people to turn to. There were literally thousands of people that we helped as a result of the generosity of the church around the country and around the world.

Sisk: About \$2,600,000 passed through Episcopal Charities' hands in that effort, a considerable sum. The previous work and dedication had been to serving the community—that was our business, so we weren't trying to adapt some existing parish program. We were able to support those in need in a very effective way. I think our track record was so deeply dug in that event, that, God forbid another such occurrence would take place, I know that we would again be the one Episcopal Relief and Development would turn to in order to channel those efforts.

There are a couple of things that I'm proud of, in addition to our response in those remarkable times. One we've alluded to already is the really substantial engagement of a whole community of trustees. (I don't know how many it would be over the years, but really quite a few if you take all these years together.) I've been impressed to see the great work the church can do with this support.

But in addition to that, though the bulk of our programmatic work has always been properly in response to parish initiative, we have also been able to do a few things that most foundations are not willing or able to do. One is that we have made a limited number of multiple-year commitments to programs. Anybody who lives off the generosity of a foundation knows how

rare that is; it allows a program to plan in a way that they could not otherwise.

The other thing that we've done is to note that there are some programs that can be strengthened by collaboration with other congregations or other programs. And so again, on a very limited basis, we have been able to make grants to such collaborative efforts. I think that's something that is sort of logical, but it doesn't often happen. We've been able to stimulate some really creative thinking. In a larger sense, we live in a time when I think parish people need to learn to work together in a collaborative way—more imaginatively and more aggressively. This is an instance in which I think Episcopal Charities has anticipated a need that is coming very much into focus.

Sasso: Clearly I have a much shorter-term memory than most in this group, but the thing that I'm most proud of over the last few years is really the work we've done to sustain programs. In 2008 we created a series of workshop called the program sustainability institute. Initially, I think our grantees viewed the workshops as something they had to attend to maintain their funding, but over the last couple of years we've seen that the leaders of our programs want to come to these workshops, not only for the content that they receive, but also for the networking opportunities. They meet others who are doing similar work—people they would never have met otherwise, whether they are down the road or on the other side of the diocese. We see programs coming together to meet their peers, to learn from each other, and to learn from experts.

And in the last few years, when programs are really striving to keep their heads above water, we've been able to keep our funding stable and we've also found ways to offer assistance beyond financial support—help like consultants to advise on programmatic or managerial matters. In addition to meeting the financial needs of programs, we offer programmatic support that helps make programs sustainable, and also enhances the quality of those programs. I think that is assistance that is not only unusual but also very much needed.

Mercer: I agree with everything else that has been said, but I think the thing that I'm personally most proud of is that we really do make a difference in the lives of a lot of people. Many of the people we serve are either undocumented or they fall between the cracks—they're not able to receive much, if any, public support. And because our work is parish-based, and because it is offered by the local community, we reach a lot of people who, without our help, would not eat, or receive any of the other services our programs provide. And at the end of the day, I think one of the reasons we continue to receive strong financial support from our donor base (when some similar organizations may have suffered in the last couple of years) is because donors know that we deliver services, whether it's a meal or an after school program, in a very efficient way to people who otherwise would go wanting.

I don't think you can over-emphasize the value of the after school programs, the ones we support. Kids come in, they get a meal, they get support, they get a place to go when they would otherwise be on the street, not doing their homework and probably getting in trouble. I think Episcopal Charities shows that faith-based grassroots programs can make a real difference. And we do. I think that, God willing, that's what will allow this organization to go forward a long time into the future.

Richardson: You mentioned that similar organizations may have seen a drop in their contributions in this current economic downturn, but it is my impression that Episcopal Charities' funding has remained remarkably solid over the last two or three years. Any comment on that?

Sasso: We certainly know that there are plenty of foundations that support us whose funding has been affected by the economic climate. That trend has had a huge impact on our programs. Government funding cuts have been very dramatic, especially in this last year. We have programs that have lost hundreds of thousands of dollars in state and federal funding, especially feeding programs. If we weren't there with a consistent grant, there would certainly be an adverse effect not only on how many people they can serve, but also what they can do for them. And the need only seems to increase. The statistics indicating the growing number of people who have food insecurities in New York City and the metropolitan area are very dramatic.

Wray: How many programs are we now supporting?

Sasso: We currently support 90 programs, and the majority of those are youth programs. And the majority of our basic human needs grants are for feeding programs.

Wray: That's a change over the years—the predominance of feeding programs.

Richardson: When was Holy Apostles Soup Kitchen established?

Sasso: They were founded about 30 years ago, but we only started funding them 10 or 12 years ago. They didn't apply for a grant in the first years.

Shover: No, I think in their early days they were very successful and didn't need our financial support. Then I think circumstances changed, and they realized that they could use support from us.

Wray: They are a big exception to our policy to fund ten percent of a program at a minimum. Their budget is so big that we are unable to provide ten percent of their income, but we said, "How can we call ourselves Episcopal Charities and not give to Holy Apostles?" So we do, although it's an exception to the minimum funding rule.

Sisk: One of the things that's difficult in an organization that is so decentralized as the Episcopal Church (we have a hierarchical structure, but a decentralized way of life), is to find out exactly what parishes are doing as they reach out in their own ministries to serve their members and their community. A couple years ago, we did conduct a survey and discovered that about 75 percent of the congregations in the diocese have some kind of feeding program. So the issue of hunger is one that I think is sort of well behind the curtain, but nevertheless is widely present in our communities. We just choose, as a community, not to pay attention to it. But one of the great things about the church and about our work, is that it's through parishes. Parishes are in their communities, and therefore know (even if the political leaders don't want to admit it) that there are hungry people. That's why we have become so involved in this nettlesome, ongoing problem. It's a problem that has to be dealt with daily because people get hungry every day.

Richardson: Are there any things that Episcopal Charities has not yet been able to do, but you might have wished it had been able to do, or would like to do going forward? Has there ever been an urge to run programs, for example?

Shover: Not when I was around.

Sasso: Not on my watch. (Laughter)

Wray: Interestingly, there are, in various parts of the country, other diocesan programs called Episcopal Charities, and they are as different as night and day. I guess some are like us— basically a fundraising and grant-making organization—but others own hospitals and schools.

Richardson: So David, back at the beginning when your committee on the assessment was working, was there a decision made at that time about the format of Episcopal Charities?

Shover: Yes, the basic thrust of the organization's work was determined at that time. I was re-reading that committee's final report last night, and it says very specifically that the focus of Episcopal Charities will be to support programs and not to manage programs, and that will be its distinction. You know, it's easy for me to dream, now that I don't have to do anything about it. (Laughter) I always thought, and it's really alluding to something Cecil said very early on, I always thought that the next logical step for Episcopal Charities would be to become more proactive; that is, to identify pockets of need around the diocese and then do some things to encourage congregations to respond to that need. And I think at some point that may still be a possibility. Things like healthcare programs or housing programs that are larger in scale and proportion, if we had the resources to do that, I think that would be a logical next step for Episcopal Charities to consider.

Sisk: The way to do that, obviously, is to say to congregations, "What are the programs you'd like to do that you don't have the funds to do?" And then you've got a tidal wave of ideas—and raised expectations. Several years ago when we had a particularly successful tribute dinner and therefore more financial resources than anticipated, that gave us the courage to step forward and come up with the modest initiatives that I mentioned, the three-year collaborative grant initiative. I think if we came into a windfall of resources, it would be very exciting to figure out how to tackle those extraordinarily pressing needs, like housing and healthcare, for example, that are not being addressed otherwise. But those are, by their nature, long term kind of commitments.

Wray: Long term and big ticket.

Sisk: Yes, yes, exactly.

Mercer: Right from the beginning we have debated and continue to debate the number of programs we should serve. There's one point of view that says we should have much fewer programs—that we should spend our money in a much more concentrated way, on fewer programs probably in only two or three programmatic areas. We've debated that in the past and we probably will again. But the discussion always comes down to the point that we are the outreach arm of the diocese and we're here to serve as many congregations as we possibly can. We must be both responsive and proactive. Thanks to the staff and some great resources,

we have been more proactive in recent years, and will continue to be. But if we ever move away from being the outreach arm of the diocese, I think we won't be serving either our past or our future.

Today, looking forward, we're trying to raise more money because the need is there, and I think we can raise more money. We have a new development director and a new plan aiming toward increasing our total budget up to \$1.5 million. We're being more proactive and trying to see if we can't link some of our fundraising to our programs. We think there are some donors out there, institutional or otherwise, who might make restricted gifts for particular purposes. That's something we haven't done in the past, but I think this approach may have some real potential, so we're actively looking at that. So, a bigger and better Episcopal Charities is what I see in the future.

Sasso: Yes. We will also continue our work in capacity-building. We have many programs that are well-run, but what could they do with enhanced resources? What if they had \$20,000 to build a new program or expand their base? We're also trying to help programs think strategically. There are many program leaders that are so busy trying to keep their fingers in all the holes that they don't have the time to step back. So we're working with them to think about the big picture: What are your long-term goals, what resources do you need to do that work, and how can we help?

Sisk: One of the things that we really don't talk much about is the stability of our resource base. At this point, a large percent of our giving (maybe 85 or 95 percent) depends upon money that we raise each year. In addition, there's modest support for Episcopal Charities in the diocesan budget that's been quite steady, and there is a modest endowment for our work. But it seems to me that one of the things we need to think about is how we might increase that endowment. We wouldn't want to have endowment earning become our only funding source, but it would be nice to have a bit of a cushion. Then we could look forward each year knowing that we have a certain amount of money in hand to give away. Of course, I think that giving is the way people connect to organizations like ours, so I would never want to do away with that element, but it would be nice to have our resource base augmented by either a larger endowment or other funds for which we would be the dedicated.

Mercer: I don't think we've emphasized enough, looking back and also going forward, the support that we've had from both Bishop Grein and Bishop Sisk—and all the other bishops, for that matter. That support has been critical. Without it we wouldn't be anywhere near where we are today. This is both a thank-you and a comment looking forward.

Sisk: I'm sure whoever is elected to be the next bishop will be very happily engaged with Episcopal Charities, because this is such important work.

Mercer: I certainly hope so.

Richardson: Finally, what is your view on the role of faith community in the work of outreach?

Sisk: Faith is what gives the motivation to carry on even when things are very difficult. Faith motivates people to look behind the curtain to see the problems that need to be addressed, and

sustains them even when society is frustratingly non-responsive to those issues, Take hunger, for instance. How long do people need to be fed? Well, they need to be fed their whole lives. I think that the faith community is extraordinarily important, both in identifying issues that need to be thought about by the larger community, and also in addressing those needs. The faith community most often has the commitment, the staying power that other in the community might not possess.

Mercer: I couldn't agree more. I think that at some times we've been concerned that our relationship with the Episcopal Church might hurt our fundraising. But I actually think it has actually helped our fundraising, not only within the church but also outside of it. Many people of other faiths who come to our tribute dinners often say to me, "This is really important." And, of course, they're doing the same kind of work. I perhaps had a different view about the place of our religious affiliation some years ago, but now I think it's not only critical to the way we do the work, but it's also an important part of how we raise money.

Sasso: I think it has been interesting to see the number of programs we're supporting that are inter-faith efforts in their communities. Many programs and parishes understand the power of a collaborative effort with Methodists, Lutherans, Roman Catholics, Jews and whoever else is in town. It's wonderful to see that our work is not just about what Episcopalians can do in their community. It's really about people of many faiths coming together to serve their neighbors in need.

Shover: I think a faith community would not be a faith community if it wasn't doing this work. It's part of the mandate of being a faith community. We must reach out to other, and if you don't, we're not complete. So this work serves the faith community as much as it serves the larger community.

Sasso: Thank you all.