

Address to General Convention
Patrick Melendez, Diocese of California

Good afternoon, I am Patrick Melendez of the Official Youth Presence and I am from the Diocese of California. First, I would like to thank the House of Deputies for this opportunity to speak before you.

My hope and dream for the Episcopal Church is for it to be a vibrant family for all and to increase this family. To achieve this goal it is important to protect and even increase youth and children's ministries, as well as work to love all the members of our church.

Our church is in decline and the budget is tight. Youth and Children's ministries, however, are a major key to reversing this trend. In my own parish we have witnessed this transformation.

When my family joined Christ Church Alameda it was an aging church in decline. But, a visionary assistant priest convinced the parish to put time and money into the children and youth ministries. We call it our "Youth Covenant" and the words of the Covenant are written on the church wall for all to see.

It has taken several years, but now our church is full of families. Even our elders comment on how much they enjoy the energy of the young people. This energy spills out beyond our parish into outreach. And we have been renewed. Families often choose a church based on what it can provide for their children. Many stay because of what it has provided for their children.

Diocesan and church wide Youth programs such as Happening and the Episcopal Youth Event (EYE) provided a different kind of family. These programs provide connections with other youth beyond our immediate faith community and thus create a new larger family. These relationships are necessary as they will provide the framework on which these future leaders will build the Episcopal Church of tomorrow.

We will need to grow our family. We need to look for ways to express our faith. I understand that evangelism may be a little uncomfortable, but it is a necessary part of being Christian. With new members our family, we will obtain the new ideas and the financial stability we need to live out our calling.

Families are made of individuals. They may interpret the word of God differently, yet they are still members of the family. I love that the Episcopal Church doesn't tell me what to think or believe. Unfortunately, this creates a lot of the discord within our church family, particularly with respect to lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, and transgender issues. I hope that we can support our LGBT members in their quest for equality while loving those who have

difficulty lending this support. In a vibrant, healthy family everyone is important and everyone counts. And now back to Nora.