

LECUSA CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT
By
The Rev. Dr. Dee Wellington Bright
AT THE
The 14th ANNUAL GATHERING
IN
LAWRENCEVILLE, GEORGIA,
ON
APRIL 26-28, 2019

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INTRODUCTION:

In keeping with Article VII, Section 1, of LECUSA's Bylaws which provides for an Annual Gathering of the organization, we are thankful to the Lord for making it possible for us to convene yet again. This is now the 14th anniversary of our national conference during which we reflect on our activities, tract our progress, fellowship and strengthen ties, celebrate notable events of the past year and make projections for the future. This gathering allows us to also pursue strategic networking possibilities for the fulfillment of the aims and objectives of our organization.

It was the late Dean Emmanuel W. Johnson and other Liberian clergy who, in the early days of 2006, in the State of Virginia, led the pioneering effort that created this organization for the expressed purpose of support and collaboration among its members and for extending assistance to our home Diocese of Liberia. Since that time, we have continued to grow, not necessarily in leaps and bounds, but steadily and firmly. To God be the glory for his sustaining Grace.

NECROLOGY

In the midst of life, we are in death. In keeping with our global Anglican belief in the continuing communion of all saints (that inextricable bond of the living to the dead), and our African belief that the dead may be gone from this life but not from our lives, I ask that we pause for a moment of silence to cherish the memories and legacies of our members who passed from labor to God's eternal rest since our last gathering. (For Necrology as reported by the Pastoral Care Committee see APPENDIX C).

Highlights of the year under review:

Article I, section 2, of our bylaws enlists the purpose and mission of LECUSA. It is those aims and objectives that define our existence. Our relevance as an organization depends on the extent to which we fulfill our mission and purpose. The following events and activities reflect the extent to which we implemented some aspects of our mission and purpose in the year under review.

The Home-going of Dean Emmanuel W. Johnson:

These 14 years of LECUSA's existence have not been without their challenges. Last year, our convention was greeted by the passing of the patriarch of the organization, Dean Johnson. As heartbreaking as it was, we made it a true celebration of his life, legacy and ministry. He left this organization to us as one of his many legacies. During his final days LECUSA fully stood with him just as he was there for us as an organization. The commitment to keeping his legacy alive and strong is our ongoing tribute to his memory. As he often told us, "if you are a pineapple, show your juice", we need to continue showing our juice through our commitment to this organization. There is no doubt that he is surely cheering us on.

Current National Leadership

It was at our 13th Annual Gathering, (April 6-8, 2018), that the current administration of leaders were elected and installed as the 5th administration of LECUSA since its founding. The Current leadership includes:

The Rev. Dr. Dee Wellington Bright,	Chairman
Mrs. Marie Y. Hayes,	Vice Chairman
The Rev. Fr. Edward H. Thompson,	Secretary
Mr. John Mellish,	Treasurer
Mr. David Hanson,	Financial Secretary
The Rev. Dr. Matilda Dunn,	Parliamentarian

It is important to note that our duties as your elected leaders would not be possible without the dedicated men and women that make up LECUSA's executive committee. The executives comprise of the heads of our standing committees, chapter leaders, as well as our former national chairpersons namely, The Rev. Dr. James N. Wilson, Canon Wilmot T. Merchant, Brother Gerald Cooper and The Rev. Dr. James Yarsiah. We find their wisdom, experience and dedication very helpful. Please join me in thanking our executives for their hard work and commitment.

General Convention and LECUSA Night:

In July of last year, LECUSA was blessed to be among many institutions and organizations that sponsored dinner nights at the General Convention of the Episcopal Church, USA, held in Austin, Texas. Our dinner night was called LECUSA Night. We utilized the opportunity to promote awareness of LECUSA and of the Diocese of Liberia. The event was attended by representatives of CUAAA, UBE, the Church Pension Group, the president of the Colleges and Universities of the Anglican Communion, representatives of the Diocese of Texas, Bishop Hart and the Liberian deputation at convention. A number of our LECUSA's clergy and lay members were also in attendance.

ECL Special convention

In February of this year, LECUSA was represented at the special convention of the Diocese of Liberia. The convention was organized for the purpose of putting in place a strategic plan for the sustainability of the diocese since grants from TEC that have sustained the Liberian diocese over the years will terminate in the very near future. I like to thank LECUSA for having me attend the special convention. Also in attendance were Dr. Elwood Dunn who assisted in organizing the convention and Canon Wilmot Merchant who represented the Covenant Committee of the Episcopal Church of America. Even though Brother Gerald Cooper could not attend, he was quite involved with in the planning process on behalf of LECUSA. I ask that we review the ECL sustainability plan in full and identify ways in which LECUSA can participate in its implementation in the interest of our home diocese.

Dr. Elwood Dunn's publication. Dr. Dunn is working on the sequel to his initial book on the history of ECL. That publication will present the historical context of the

sustainability plan. He needs assistance to publish this special work when completed. I am asking that LECUSA considers supporting this very important initiative.

Strategic Committee And the MOU

As indicated above, our strategic committee works in collaboration with ECL strategic committee as a part of our common collaboration. That committee is our also lead representative on the MOU with Liberia. The MOU is the instrument that guides that relationship. During my trip to Liberia, we met with Bishop Hart regarding the status of the ECL/LECUSA MOU. The Bishop is supportive of having the MOU revised to better articulate the nature of our relationship. Brother Gerald Cooper will facilitate a discussion group regarding revisions to the MOU from LECUSA's standpoint.

Formation of Chapters:

The year under review saw an accelerated effort on the part our membership committee chaired by Brother Benoni Grimes to negotiate the possibility of creating additional chapters. He traveled extensively and met with Liberian Episcopalians in various states encouraging them to consider forming more chapters. As a result his dedicated efforts, we are looking forward to receiving a proposal for approval of a new chapter during this conference. Brother Grimes truly deserves our gratitude for his commitment and hard work.

Communication Methods:

During the year under review, we increased our organization's means of communication by utilizing available technology to broaden the effective spread of information throughout our membership.

Our Current communication methods involve:

Weekly Bulletins: We publish a weekly bulletin directly from my desk as the National Chairman. It journals the official news and events of the organization.

Website: We made some improvement to our website last year with plans to continue improving the functionality of the site. For example, we intend to diversify the tabs for donations soon. The happenings in LECUSA are now posted on the site weekly.

Social media: We are also utilizing social media especially with the use of *whatsapp* to increase engagement and strengthen connections. That chat room now has over 200 participants. Please join me in thanking Fr. James Wilson for keeping this aspect our communication going.

As our means of communication increase, I ask that we put in place some policies to ensure that the contents of our publications are consistent with our guiding principles.

Pastoral Care:

Article I, Section 2B, of our bylaws requires that we extend pastoral care to our members as needed. Accordingly, the Pastoral Care Committee was established when LECUSA was formed. Since then, the committee has endeavored to reach out to members in good and bad times. In some cases, when possible, this outreach involves making tributes and offering sentiments on our behalf in a variety of ways. The committee has reported that, during the year under review, it encountered two

problems in the discharge of these duties. Firstly, the committee has indicated that the activities of the outreach committee appear to be overlapping with their duties in terms of responding to bereavements and other occasions in the lives of members. Secondly, there is the problem of members not readily reporting events of bereavement directly to the committee or the general leadership. These situations are hindering their function. In order to effectively carry out their function, the Chair of this committee, Fr. John Mitchell, requests that we resolve these concerns.

Membership:

We have realized the need for improving our membership records so as to better track our diverse membership and keep in touch with everyone more adequately. The need to create a functional database is much overdue. As a growing “family” with many extensions we cannot defer this project any longer. Thanks to Sister Aquilla Ford who has offered her services to set up such a database as the initial step in the process of maintaining a professional membership record. She will be leading a table discussion at this conference in that regard.

Immigration Committee:

In the year under review, we took an important step in setting up an immigration committee to consider ways in which we can respond to the immigration needs of members. This committee is headed by Fr. James Wilson. Counsellor Edward Neufville has offered to provide guidance in this effort. We will first identify what we can and cannot do as an organization especially as it relates to our 501-C3 status.

LECUSA’s Bylaws revision:

Most recently, our executive members took steps to put forth the necessary revisions to our bylaws. Those revisions and amendments are necessary so that our laws will reflect the current realities of the organization. Counsellor Mohammandu Jones has offered some legal guidance on this process. The document with the proposed amendments was sent to the membership in advance to allow for your input as we engage that process during this conference.

Partnerships

Article I Section 2D of our bylaws requires that LECUSA networks with other groups and entities as strategic partners in fulfilling its mission. Accordingly, we are glad to report that LECUSA still maintains partnership with the following: ECL, TEC, CUAAA, UBE, CPG, PIMIL, Bromley, the Covenant Committee and others. (See Appendix A for details)

LECUSA’s Support to ECL

Our relationship with ECL is one of the primary missions of our organization. Due to this relationship, LECUSA has and continues to support ECL in a variety of ways. In the past, some of our support included construction of clergy housing, provision of classroom chairs for schools, provision of Christmas funds to the clergy, making of donations to bereaved family of the clergy, attending ECL’s annual conventions and other major ECL

events, etc. This past year, we investigated the possibility of assisting with a fraction of the clergy salary arrears but that was resolved before we could make final determinations.

Next Project in ECL:

Our next project in ECL remains to be determined. Last year, after the salary arrears were resolved, the Bishop requested that we consider assisting with the construction of a new church in Ganta, Nimba County. That request might still be on the table. As we make decisions on this question, I am proposing that we focus on priorities of ECL's Sustainability Plan. If our project can line up with the sustainability plan, we will be moving in the right direction. That document was also forwarded to the membership.

FOCUS FOR NEXT YEAR WITHIN LECUSA

GROWTH AS OUR NEXT FOCUS FOR (2019/2020)

In the interest of maintaining a unified focus, I ask that we cast a mutual vision for our next convention year. This will help us have a common sense of direction. In that regard, I propose that we focus on GROWTH.

It has been said that any organism that stops growing, starts dying. I ask that we prioritize and strategize means of growing LECUSA. Growth can be quantitative, qualitative and organic. Let's take all of these into account but none of these will happen automatically.

We recommend the following:

Growth of our Resource Base: our financial report will reflect that we are still heavily dependent on dues to run the organization. As a result, we have had to rely on CPG to fund our annual conference over these past years. We need to come of age and take on this responsibility fully. Brother Paul George was recommended when I requested someone to be appointed to lead a national committee on fundraising for the organization. He and others will be leading group discussion on that subject in hope that that committee will take off as of this conference.

Growth of our Membership: There are thousands of Liberian Episcopalians in the US. Our membership has yet to reflect a significant proportion of that reality. We need to grow by increasing membership and forming more chapters. Numbers do not say everything but they do say something. There is power in numbers. Let's work with our membership committee to identify more ways to boost member in the coming year. Let's remember that growth will elevate our capacity to do more.

Honorable Mention:

Like many institutions and organizations, LECUSA seems to also operate on the basis of the Pareto principle by which 20% of the people performs 80% of the work. I hope we can somehow reverse the Pareto Principle so that we can function to our fullest capacity. For now, we are grateful to the faithful minority for their labor of love and sacrificial efforts. I thank "the faithful few" from the bottom of my heart. While we are

eternally indebted to each person, **I like to seize this moment to name the Minnesota Chapter as the National Chairman's Honorable Mention of the year.** Since Minnesota became a chapter, they have shown consistent growth, increasing financial support, great leadership skills and maintained the highest record of attendance at our National Gatherings compared to any other region of the country. Their performance continues to be unmatched. They are here this year with more than two dozens of their members. Please join me in giving them a rising ovation as our Honorable Mention of the year.

Gratitude:

- Again, I like to thank my fellow officers and the executive members for their commitment to the mutual leadership we share.
- We extend special thanks to our brothers and sisters in Georgia, (Sister Wilhelmina Wilson and the host committee) for stepping to the plate to host our 2019 Gathering.
- We extend thanks to the Church Pension Group (CPG) for walking with us and holding our arms up throughout these years.
- Many thanks to Bishop Wright and the Diocese of Atlanta along with the congregations of St. Matthew's and St. Edward's for opening their doors to us.
- Special thanks to Chief Justice Harold Melton of the Supreme Court of Georgia for accepting our invitation, amidst his very busy schedule, to offer the key note address at this conference.
- Overall, thanks to all of our LECUSA members across this country, those who are here and those who could not be here, for all you do to make LECUSA's existence possible.
- Most of all, we extend words of congratulations to The Most Rev. Jonathan B. B. Hart on becoming the Primate of the Anglican Province of West Africa. This is now the second time that Liberia is serving as the head of the province. We ask your prayers for him.

Last but not least, it is said that if you do not say I am, no one will say you are! I take this moment to thank my wife, Monyue, for her support and understanding as I serve in this capacity. Last year, our family relocated from Oklahoma to Florida. It was a good move but was very overwhelming. As always, she stood by my side as I endeavored to fulfill this leadership role and hold other demands in the balance. She is just special!

Conclusion

As we meet under the theme "*Liberian Episcopalians United to Make a difference*", I remind us of Fr. Johnson admonition to us that we have been blessed to be a blessing. Let's keep that focus for the sake of our own wellbeing in the diaspora and for the good of our country of Liberia and of our home diocese, The Episcopal Church of Liberia.

"If not us, then who? --If not now, then when?"

Faithfully Submitted:
Dee Wellington Bright, (The Rev. Dr.)
LECUSA NATIONAL CHAIRMAN

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: LECUSA'S PARTNERSHIPS:

Episcopal Church of Liberia

This relationship with our home diocese was and still is one of the primary purposes of our organization. Our MOU with ECL is the guiding document of this relationship. That document is pending revision.

Cuttington Alumni Association in the Americas (CUAAA)

This partnership exists in the interest of Cuttington University. The current alumni president, Mrs. Glendy Reeves has been very supportive of LECUSA

The Episcopal Church, USA- (TEC)

This relationship is based on the fact that TEC recognizes and supports our existence as an Episcopal organization. LECUSA is an integral part of the American Church

Church Pension Group (CPG)

This relationship is based on the Pension coverage that CPG manages for Episcopal employees. CPC has provided us educational, moral and financial support since our founding.

Union of Black Episcopalians (UBE):

This relationship is based on our shed Afro-Anglican heritage. UBE is always very responsive to our call. Fr. J. Wilson is our representative on the UBE board

Partner In Mission In Liberia, (PIMIL):

"This relationship has allowed us to channel LECUSA's educational project in partnership with ECL towards the 60 Ebola orphans in Mbaloma through this ministry. PIMIL is successfully established at St. Matthew's Episcopal Church, the Diocese of Southern Ohio in response to the personal and national tragedy of the Liberian Civil War for education for the students through the initiatives of Bro. Clifton and Rev. Abeoseh Flemister, members". (Revised)

Bromley: The Bromley Mission Project

This relationship is based on the mutual support of the initiatives of both our organizations and our common interest in supporting historic Episcopal Educational institutions in Liberia.

The Covenant Committee:

This relationship is based on the fact that the Covenant Committee represents the terms of the ongoing ties in mission and ministry between The Episcopal Church of the United States and the Episcopal Church of Liberia and ministry.

APPENDIX B: **List of LECUSA CHAIRPERSONS**

The Dr. James N. Wilson
The Rev. Canon Wilmot T. Merchant
Mr. Gerald Cooper
The Rev. Dr. James Yarsiah
The Rev. Dr. Dee Wellington Bright

APPENDIX C: **Necrology (Prepared by the Pastoral care Committee)**

- **Dean Emmanuel Johnson:** LECUSA founder
- **Tetama Cooper:** aunt of Sis. Marie Hayes
- **Degbeh Yarseah:** Cousin of Rev. Dr. James Yarsiah & Sis. Marie Hayes
- **Hele Merchant-Toe:** Cousin of Dr. Wilmot Merchant & Sis. Wilhelmena Wilson
- **Leticia Hill:** Sister of The Most Rev. Jonathan B.B. Hart
- **Sayblee Mellish:** Mother of Bro. John Mellish
- **Mother Marilyn K. Robertson:** wife of the late Rev. Fr. E. Bolling Robertson
- **The Rev. Fr. Alphonso M. Dormu:** Priest of ECL (Was Rector of Church of the Good Shepherd, Paynesville Monrovia)- *(Revised)*

APPENDIX D: LECUSA' STANDING COMMITTEE

The Executive Committee

*Chaired by the National Chairman
The National Officers
The former National Chairpersons
The Heads of Standing Committees
The Chairpersons of Chapters*

The Finance Committee

*Mr. John Melish, Chair
Mr. David Hanson
Chairpersons of Chapters
National Chair and Vice National Chair, (Ex-officials)*

The Pastoral Care Committee

*Fr. John Mitchell, Chair
Mrs Emily Benjamin
Mrs Cynthia Gilmore
The Rev. Dr. James Yarsiah
The Rev. Abeoseh Flemister*

The Strategic Planning Committee

*Mr. Gerald Cooper, Chair
Mr. Richard Thorpe
Mr. Elwood Dunn
The Rev. Canon Wilmot Merchant
The Rev. Canon John Harmon
Mr. Clemenceau Urey*

The Bylaws Committee

*Mrs. Marie Y. Hayes, Acting Chair
The Rev. Dr. James Wilson
The Rev. Canon Wilmot Merchant
The Rev. Dr. Matilda Dunn
Ms. Germaine Dunn
The Rev. Dr. James Yarsiah
The Rev. Dr. Allen George*

Membership Committee

*Mr. Benoni Grimes
The Rev. Dr. James Wilson
Mrs Emily Benjamin
Mr. Jonathan Pearce
Mrs Louise Asanji
Mr. Paul George*

APPENDIX E: *HONOREES for 2019*

HONOREES	Purpose/Award	
John Mellish and Roselind Mellish	The Faith Men & Faithful Women Award" For Commitment	The 'Faithful Men & Faithful Women award' is presented to John Mellish and Roselind Mellish in appreciation of your joint commitment to the service of LECUSA...
David Hanson and Delores Hanson	The Faithful Men & Faithful Women Award" For Commitment	The 'Faithful Men & Faithful Women award' is presented to David Hanson and Delores Hanson in appreciation of your joint commitment to the service of LECUSA...
Benoni Grimes and Caroline Grimes	The Faithful Men & Faithful Women Award" For organizational skills	The 'Faithful Men & Faithful Women award' is presented to Benoni Grimes and Caroline Grimes in appreciation of your organizational skills in the service of LECUSA...
Sam Abdullai	The Faith Men Award" For Leadership	The 'Faithful Men award' is presented to Sam Abdullai in appreciation of your leadership skills in the service of LECUSA...
Mother Ophelia Yarsiah	The "Faithful Women Award" For Innovation	The 'Faithful Women award' is presented to Mother Ophelia Yarsiah in appreciation of your innovative skills in the service of LECUSA...
Wilhelmina Wilson	The Faithful Women Award" For Leadership	The 'Women award' is presented to Wilhelmina Wilson in appreciation of your leadership skill in the service of LECUSA...

