

BISHOP'S ADDRESS

*The Rt. Rev. Gary Lillibridge
105th Annual Council of the Diocese of West Texas, McAllen
February 20, 2009*

1. Good morning. It is a privilege to stand before you this morning as your bishop and share a few thoughts with you at this 105th Council of the Diocese of West Texas. I am always encouraged and uplifted by our time together in Diocesan Council, and I thank you for your willingness to represent our diocese and your congregation in this servant-leadership role.

2. I must begin this address by taking a moment to recognize the tremendous effort of the people of St. John's, McAllen, who are hosting us for this Council. The council co-chairs, Heath Smith and Rachel Davies, along with The Rev. John Badders and The Rev. Philip Cunningham, have assembled a wonderful team, all of whom continue to serve us over these days with great hospitality. In addition, I want to recognize all those valley congregations who have assisted and supported the members of the St. John's community and Council Committee in this effort. On behalf of a grateful diocese, please accept our thanks.

3. Diocesan council could not happen without the outstanding work of Nancy Stinson and the diocesan staff, who began preparations last year and have been in high gear throughout January and February to get ready for our time together. Your diocesan staff is an excellent group of dedicated followers of Jesus Christ who understand that our vocation as a diocesan staff is to serve the congregations committed to our charge. I am deeply grateful to them all.

4. While I cannot thank everyone individually for their part in this diocesan council, I do want to say a particular word of thanks to two other groups. The first are those persons who are coordinating our Youth Event, the third such gathering in as many years. Thanks and appreciation to Michael Hoffman, Scott Brown, Juan Jackson, Carrie Guerra, Mark Rentfro and all others who are working with this year's Youth Event. The Youth Event has become a very important component of our diocesan council. Tomorrow morning, these young people will lead our Morning Prayer worship service, and at that service they will be commissioned for the outreach work that they will undertake this weekend in this community.

5. I also want to thank the musicians from St. John's who are providing our music ministry in these sessions and throughout the council. Thank you all for strengthening our corporate life and leading us in our praise and worship of Almighty God through your music.

6. I need to say a word of deep gratitude to the retired bishops who continually support Bishop Reed and me in the work of shepherding this diocesan family. Having the ongoing support, fellowship, and counsel of Bishops Folts, Hibbs, MacNaughton, McArthur, McAllister, and Frey are valuable gifts that neither Bishop Reed nor I take for granted. I ask that this council join me in showing our appreciation of these friends and Godly spiritual leaders.

7. In this year's Bishop's Address, I want to frame my remarks in the context of our theme, **Abide in Me**, and in the **Core Purpose** and in the **Core Values** of our diocesan family. This morning you will notice that I refer to these three things often, and use many references from scripture, the prayer book, and the hymnal to bring together the message of the totality of our life in Christ. Likewise, I hope that you will engage the core value of "Scripture, prayer and worship" seriously this year by being intentional in your study of the scripture, praying on a daily basis, and actively participating in worship.

8. I want this address to be more than simply a report of what is going on in the diocese and the wider Church (though it includes some of that). It is my hope that this address will challenge you to deepen your commitment to Jesus Christ and encourage you to actively take your place and fulfill God's calling in your life as a *fellow citizen with the saints and a member of the household of God* (paraphrase of Ephesians 2.19-20); so that in Christ *the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom (we) are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God* (Eph. 2.21-22).

9. In the Gospel of John, there is a very brief statement which I believe summarizes our entire calling as the Church. It is found in the 12th chapter, and it occurs when "some Greeks" come to Philip and say, "*Sir, we wish to see Jesus.*" It is in that spirit that I offer this diocesan address.

In the Name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

10. In 2007, the diocese as a whole spent time in many venues exploring how we might best state our Core Purpose and Core Values. At the 104th Annual Council last year, the council approved our Core Purpose and five Core values. You have a card on your table listing our Core Purpose – ***Be Jesus' Witnesses*** – which is what people will do who wish to answer the request put to Philip, "*Sir, we wish to see Jesus.*"

11. Also on your card are the five Core Values adopted by council which guide our mission and ministry as a diocesan family: (1) **Faith**; (2) **Scripture, Prayer, and Worship**; (3) **Evangelism**; (4) **Mission**; and (5) **Reconciliation**.

12. Over the last several years, I have chosen a theme for the diocese. It is my hope that this theme carries over throughout the year in all that we do, not simply serve as a theme for a few days at diocesan council. As you know, this year's

theme comes from John 15: ***Abide in Me***. If we are going to take this theme seriously as we continue our spiritual formation as witnesses of Jesus, then we need to intentionally approach our Core Purpose and Core Values within the context of what it means in each of those to “abide in Christ.”

13. Let us begin this morning with our Core Value of **Scripture, Prayer, and Worship**: **We are grounded in Scripture, prayer, and sacramental worship**; and do this specifically by praying together a portion of the Litany for Ordinations (Book of Common Prayer) because as you will see, several of the petitions are in direct correlation with our Core Values. I will then want to come back to several of these petitions throughout this address. Please stand and let us pray, responding as indicated on the screens.

14. In the words of the Nicene Creed, “For the one holy catholic and apostolic Church”, of which we are a member, let us pray:
For the holy Church of God, that it may be filled with truth and love, and be found without fault at the Day of your Coming (pause), we pray to you, O Lord.
Response: ***Lord, hear our prayer.***

15. In the spirit of our core values of **Faith** and **Reconciliation**, especially in a world fragmented in so many ways and by so many wars, both military and cultural, let us pray:
For all who fear God and believe in you, Lord Christ, that our divisions may cease and that all may be one as you and the Father are one (pause); and For the peace of the world, that a spirit of respect and forbearance may grow among nations and peoples (pause), we pray to you, O Lord.
Response: ***Lord, hear our prayer.***

16. In the spirit of our core values of **Mission** and **Evangelism**, let us pray:
For the mission of the Church, that in faithful witness it may preach the Gospel to the ends of the earth (pause); and For those who do not yet believe, and for those who have lost their faith, that they may receive the light of the Gospel (pause), we pray to you, O Lord.
Response: ***Lord, hear our prayer.***

17. In the spirit of all our core values, let us pray:
For the poor, the persecuted, the sick, and all who suffer; for refugees, prisoners, and all who are in danger, that they may be relieved and protected (pause), we pray to you, O Lord.
Response: ***Lord, hear our prayer.***

18. In the spirit of our approaching season of Lent, of humility, confession, change and renewal, let us pray:
For ourselves; for the forgiveness of our sins, and for the grace of the Holy Spirit to amend our lives (pause), we pray to you, O Lord.
Response: ***Lord, hear our prayer.***

19. And in the spirit of our Core Purpose of **Being Jesus' Witnesses**, we remember those witnesses from times past who are on the liturgical calendar in this month of February:

Rejoicing in the fellowship of the ever-blessed Virgin Mary and all those on our liturgical calendar in this month of February; Brigid (523), Anskar, missionary to Denmark and Sweden (865); Cornelius the Centurion; The Martyrs of Japan (1597); Absalom Jones, priest (1818); Cyril (869) and Methodius (885), missionaries to the Slavs; Thomas Bray (1730), Janani Luwum, Archbishop of Uganda and martyr (1977); Martin Luther (1546); Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, bishop and martyr (156); St. Matthias the Apostle; George Herbert, priest (1633); Anna Julia Heyward Cooper, educator (1964); and all the saints, let us commend our selves, and one another, and all our life to Christ our God.

Response: **To you, O Lord our God. Amen.** Please be seated.

20. Let me now turn for a moment to our core value of **Faith: We pattern our lives on the life and teachings of Jesus Christ.**

21. As I heard said in a recent ordination sermon, Christianity is about Christ. Yes, it is. Jesus is the foundation - the cornerstone of the faith – and as witnesses, followers, messengers, disciples, it is our Godly responsibility to continually seek both spiritual formation and spiritual transformation in our own lives. We cannot share with others what we ourselves do not possess.

22. Therefore, I call on all members of this diocese to seriously examine how your life exemplifies the life and teachings of Jesus. Ask yourself this question, regularly: *How does my life reflect the life and teachings of Jesus?*

23. The approaching season of Lent provides an opportunity to seriously engage this question. On Ash Wednesday, you will hear the words of the liturgy that invite you to the observance of a holy Lent – by self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting, and self-denial; and by reading and meditating on God's holy Word. These are all medicines for the heart.

24. There is much religious language emphasizing the word "heart," and rightly so. For hearts must be transformed before lives are changed. If you want to change something in your life, begin with transforming your heart.

25. Our Prayer Book tradition includes the words *Lift up your hearts*, and we respond, week after week in the Eucharist, *We lift them to the Lord.*

26. As we seek to follow our core value of faith – patterning our lives on the life and teachings of Jesus Christ – let us take seriously these heart medicines - self-examination, repentance; prayer, fasting, and self-denial; and by reading and meditating on God's Holy Word, and thereby bring our hearts before the Cross this Lent. I am reminded of the words in Hymn 598, verse 4, which pray:

27. *O wounded hands of Jesus, build in us thy new creation; our pride is dust, our vaunt is stilled, we wait thy revelation: O love that triumphs over loss, we bring our hearts before thy cross, to finish thy salvation.*

28. In bringing our hearts before His cross, may we be strengthened to be “imitators of God” (Ephesians 5.1); and thereby pattern our lives on the life of Jesus – or, put another way, to “abide in Christ.”

29. Now let me say a word about our core value of **Evangelism: We proclaim, by word and example, God’s saving love revealed in Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit.**

30. We just prayed, and I quote: *For the mission of the Church, that in faithful witness it may preach the Gospel to the ends of the earth; and, For those who do not yet believe, and for those who have lost their faith, that they may receive the light of the Gospel...*

31. We probably should have changed our response to these two petitions from “Lord, hear our prayer,” to “Lord, get us off our butts,” for there seems to be nothing more annoying to many Episcopalians than the topic of Evangelism – or, in other words – sharing our faith with others.

32. Who will do this proclaiming of the “Gospel to the ends of the earth,” and who will share this “light of the Gospel”? The answer is not some vague “they will,” but rather a specific, “I will.”

33. Laboring in this particular Gospel vineyard of evangelism is not something high on some people’s to-do lists, I’ll admit; but few things have the potential to transform both the Church and the world as sharing the life and ministry of Jesus with others. For when we do this, we ourselves are transformed because in the very act of sharing our faith, we must first seriously reflect on the impact that being a Christian has in our own life.

34. *So Come, labor on. Claim the high calling angels cannot share – to young and old the Gospel gladness bear: redeem the time; its hours too swiftly fly. The night draws nigh. (Hymn 541, verse 4)*

35. Yes, the hours too swiftly fly. If not now, when? If not us, who? How do you, personally, proclaim by word and example, God’s saving love revealed in Jesus Christ?

36. We are the beneficiaries of a great gift and a wonderful inheritance. Let us proclaim it, for we have been made alive together in Christ by grace: (8) *For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God – (9) not because of works, lest any one should boast. (10) For we*

are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them (Ephesians 2.8-10). People who are God's workmanship in Christ pattern their lives on the life and teachings of Jesus.

37. Our core value of Evangelism is of course closely related to our core value of **Mission: We reach beyond ourselves to serve all people in our communities and throughout the world.**

38. When we offer ourselves in mission opportunities by reaching into our communities and the world by serving others as we serve Christ Himself, we are participating in being evangelists. The core values of Mission and Evangelism are not mutually exclusive.

39. As I have said on numerous occasions, we have one of the finest World Mission departments in the whole of The Episcopal Church. In 2008 alone, we participated in mission opportunities in Belarus, Belize, China, Guatemala, Honduras, Israel, Kenya, Mexico, Nigeria, Russia, Uganda, the United States, Uruguay, Zambia; and perhaps other places of which I am unaware. We sent 60 short term mission teams, totaling at least 792 people, across God's globe this past year. As a diocesan family, either through the diocesan budget or congregational budgets or both, we support 14 long term missionaries in the countries of Honduras (1), Israel (3), Liberia (2), Mexico (2), Philippines (2), and Uganda (4).

40. By reaching beyond ourselves through our missionary endeavors, both at home and abroad, we are being spiritually transformed as a diocese. And as we cast this bread upon the waters, it is returning to us many-fold in the forms of spiritual rejuvenation, renewed purpose, and a deep appreciation of the many faces that make up God's earthly Kingdom. Ask yourself, "In what ways might I participate in reaching out to serve people in my community and throughout the world?"

41. In our mission work, we are continually learning what it means, quite literally, to see the face of Christ in another – and most of these faces are in very different contexts from the contexts of our daily lives. Let me offer a deep word of gratitude to all of you who have, are, and will participate in any way (traveling, praying, financially supporting) in the efforts of our World Mission ministry. It is through humble service in Christ, not in worldly power of "church," that we Christians best exemplify the heart and mind of Christ. May it always be so.

42. Let me now turn to fifth core value, that of **Reconciliation: We are a community committed to living in reconciled relationship with God and all people.**

43. Again, we just prayed: *For the peace of the world, that a spirit of respect and forbearance may grow among nations and peoples, we pray to you O Lord.*

44. Why is reconciliation important? Well, I can't say it any better than St. Paul said it in his words to the church at Corinth (2 Corinthians 5.14-21). Listen carefully.

(14) For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died.

(15) And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them.

(16) From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way.

(17) So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything has become new!

(18) All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation;

(19) that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.

(20) So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

(21) For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin so that in him, we might become the righteousness of God.

45. Taken with the great unity prayer of Jesus as recorded in the 17th chapter of John's Gospel, wherein he prays that his followers "*may be one*" (verses 11, 20, 22, 23), we clearly have a Godly call to reconciliation.

46. Unfortunately, this reconciliation is precisely what many people, both in and out of the Church, are not seeing in the current witness of the Christian Church. As the world seems more deeply divided in a host of areas, so does the Church.

47. In our prayers for Reconciliation a few moments ago, we prayed *For all who fear God and believe in you, Lord Christ, that our divisions may cease and that all may be one as you and the Father are one...*

48. Notice how this petition begins, *For all who fear God and believe in you, Lord Christ, that our divisions may cease.* It is not addressing the world or people who have no spiritual faith; we are actually praying to God in this prayer that those of us who profess the faith might cease our divisions. That is very, very significant, and I think all too often overlooked.

49. And this divisiveness is not limited only to the Christian witness. The same is often true in the witness of both Judaism and Islam. In many ways, the three largest world religions are not only falling short in efforts to move the world

toward the Godly call to reconciliation, they are often actively working against a reconciled world in thought, word, and deed. In many quarters, “religion” is seen as a source of hurt, conflict, war, and division. For this, we should be ashamed of ourselves. We should also take this as a major wake-up call. Regarding this core value of reconciliation, what can you do, specifically, to foster a reconciled relationship with God and all people?

50. It is in the context of reconciliation that I want to make a few remarks about the coming year in Anglicanism. 2009 will be another crucial year in defining the shape of the Anglican Communion in years to come. 2009 won't be the final word, but it likely will be a highly significant one.

51. Let me say a word about Primates Meeting in Egypt, which concluded two weeks ago. You likely have seen the Communiqué they issued. I encourage you to read it all, but let me summarize some of the main points (relevant paragraphs in parenthesis):

- *We were able to talk openly and honestly about our experiences and perceptions. We were reminded powerfully of the sense of alienation and pain felt in many parts of the Communion(5)... Our honest engagement revealed the complexity of the situation. Matters are not as clear-cut as some portray(10)... The matters discussed are not solely issues of church politics; we are considering the spiritual health and well-being of our Communion(9)... there was a discernable mood of graciousness among us in our engagements(5)...*
- *We are called to mutual accountability...Together we share responsibility with the other Instruments of Communion for discerning what is best for the well-being of our Communion(7)... We affirm...that work will need to be done to develop the Instruments of Communion and the Anglican Covenant(11)...*
- *The moratoria (regarding ordination of partnered homosexuals to the episcopate, the blessing of same-sex unions, and diocesan boundary crossings) were much discussed...gracious restraint on all three fronts is urgently needed to open the way for transforming conversation(12)...*
- *Significant concerns were raised in the conversation about the possibility of parallel jurisdictions. There is no consensus among us about how this new entity should be regarded...(we support the suggestion of) a professionally mediated conversation at which all the significant parties could be gathered(14, including footnote 11)...*
- *We affirm the Archbishop of Canterbury on the development of a scheme for a Pastoral Council...and the Pastoral Visitors, whom he is appointing as a starting point for this idea, in line with the opinions expressed at the Lambeth Conference(15)...*
- *We welcome the Covenant Design Group's intention to produce a covenant text which has a relational basis and tone...It is about invitation, reconciliation, freedom, and robust accountability...we look forward to the*

development of a covenant...which speaks of the mutuality that should characterize the life of Christians and of Churches...marked by a spirit of humility and integrity(16)...

- *The tone and substance of our conversations, though sometimes hard, have been honest, deep and transforming. Our engagement together in Christ during these days convinces us that God is calling us and our Churches to deeper communion and gracious restraint(21)...*

52. The Provinces of the Communion have been asked to respond to the Covenant Design Group (CDG) by March to the current (St. Andrew's) draft of a proposed covenant. Then, the CDG will meet in April to consider these provincial responses. Following their April meeting, they will then present a final draft to the May meeting of the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC). At that point, the ACC will either pass this draft to the Provinces unchanged; they might amend the proposal in some way; or I suppose, they could choose to do nothing with it. I think the third possibility is highly unlikely.

53. General Convention of The Episcopal Church meets in Anaheim, California, in July. Your bishops, deputies, and alternates will be there. Diocesan Council elected the West Texas deputation last year, and a list of your deputies and alternates is or will be on your tables today.

54. The Presiding Bishop has indicated that General Convention will not be in a position to either accept or reject a proposed covenant this summer because the final version of the covenant won't be available from the ACC meeting until May, and that won't give The Episcopal Church (TEC) enough time to seriously consider its content. I was concerned about this when she first announced this course of action, but the more I have thought about it, the more appropriate I think it is – though maybe for different reasons than others might have.

55. First and foremost, I don't think the Anglican Communion needs TEC to be the first member church to speak on the covenant. Part of the problem in the Communion at the present is TEC speaking often and going her own way. I think it will be beneficial for TEC to hear what other member churches have to say about the covenant before we speak. In other words, let us listen to others before we speak definitively on the matter.

56. Second, individual dioceses will not have had the opportunity to consider the merits of the covenant prior to General Convention. I think that we will get a more accurate picture of how TEC as a whole views the covenant if dioceses respond through their annual conventions/councils rather than just hearing from the General Convention deputations.

57. Deep spiritual thought, intentional prayer, and serious reflection on what it means to be a Communion of Churches engaged in the ministry of reconciliation, is needed if TEC and the Anglican Communion have any hope of offering a

relevant witness to a world that desperately needs to hear a message of hope for both our present day and the future.

58. Closer to home, let me say a word about our core value of reconciliation. There is a saying that goes something like this: *The world will not know peace until individuals in the world know peace.* I think the same thing can be said about reconciliation. It must begin at home.

59. To that end, and in specific response to our core value on Reconciliation, I am appointing a Reconciliation Commission this year whose focus and purpose will be to aid the diocese in living into this core value. The beginning of this work was under the leadership of the late Richard Thayer, who coordinated the efforts of the Anti-Racism Task Force. At their recommendation, the Task Force is now discharged and the Reconciliation Commission will take up this mantle, even as the scope is broadened.

60. The work of Christ-like reconciliation is to restore the fullness of all who proclaim Christ as Lord. This Commission will seek to identify opportunities that foster understanding, promote healing in relationships, and facilitate the biblical call to the ministry of reconciliation as given to us by Christ. The work of reconciliation is a process, sometimes painful but ultimately healing and liberating through becoming a new creation (2 Corinthians). The Reconciliation Commission will begin by asking questions and listening to stories of the diocesan family. They will also learn from others who have developed effective tools for accomplishing reconciliation, and will modify those tools and their presentation to fit the specific needs of our Diocese. They will then seek to share these efforts with our clergy and laity in useful and meaningful ways. I am grateful to them for undertaking this appointment. The Rev. Robert Woody and The Rev. Patrick Ormos have agreed to serve as the initial conveners of this Commission as the work begins.

61. On a broader scale, I want to call on all commissions, committees, and entities of the diocese to spend time in 2009 discovering how their call, purpose, and ministry fits with the core purpose of the diocese, one or more of the diocesan core values, and this year's theme of Abiding in Christ. Ideally, each commission, committee, and entity of the diocese will find their purpose and their reason for being in light of the Core Purpose and Core Values as we move forward with *the whole structure joining together and growing into a holy temple in the Lord* (again, Ephesians 2.21).

And now, to look ahead for a moment.

62. The Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, Katharine Jefferts Schori, will visit the diocese on April 24-26. The Canons of the Church require the Presiding Bishop to visit each diocese at least once during the 9 year tenure, and we are

arranging this visit so that the clergy and leadership of the diocese might meet the Presiding Bishop and so that the Presiding Bishop might learn of the life and ministry in West Texas.

63. She will be in the southern part of the diocese (Corpus Christi) on April 24 and in the San Antonio area on April 25. These are opportunities for conversation for clergy and clergy spouses, for congregational leadership, and for the elected leadership on the diocesan level. People may attend whichever location is more convenient for them. More details will be forthcoming in a few weeks with times and places, so look for those announcements.

64. In addition to the Presiding Bishop's visit in April, this year we are planning a special event on June 6 in light of the passage from Ephesians that I have quoted this morning about the *whole structure joining together and growing into a holy temple in the Lord*. The diocesan family will gather on the TMI campus for a day dedicated to sharing mission and ministry with one another. The focus on this gathering will be: ***Abiding in Christ: Congregations Growing Together***.

65. Please note that this is not an event when "diocesan" programming will take the lead, but rather when congregational mission and ministry will be shared from and with the congregations. Tomorrow you will receive a flyer about this gathering; please mark your calendars now and reserve the date. There will be a full brochure prepared and issued to you before Easter.

Epilogue

66. In 2008, it was my privilege and honor to serve on the Windsor Continuation Group (WCG) at the appointment of the Archbishop of Canterbury. As you know, this was an advisory group to the Archbishop regarding the situations before the Anglican Communion. We met twice in London, we met throughout the Lambeth Conference in July, and we had our final meeting in December. This last meeting was held at our own Mustang Island Conference Center.

67. The WCG issued a report to the Archbishop regarding the situations in the Communion at present and some thoughts about moving forward into the future. This report was discussed at length at the Primates' Meeting in Egypt. The report may be found on our diocesan website. I believe that, on the whole, it is a fair report of the situation in the Anglican Communion at present, and it has some important principles to think about as well as some recommendations to consider. Of course, the report has its detractors as well. All the more reason we need to continue to stay in prayer for one another in the challenging days ahead.

68. In 2008, one area of sadness for me personally, and the diocese as whole, was the splitting of the congregational family of St. John's, New Braunfels. Notice I did not say we "lost" a congregation. Yes, a congregation did split and it was and is painful – and I continue to believe, unnecessary.

69. At the same time, as we heard yesterday, this is turning into a wonderful story of resurrection, and I am deeply grateful to the people who are St. John's Episcopal Church in New Braunfels for their commitment to the Lord, their fellowship with one another, and their life as a valuable members and as a congregation of the Diocese of West Texas. I am also immensely thankful to the members of the Standing Committee, the Executive Board, the Trustees of the Episcopal Church Corporation in West Texas, and the diocesan chancellor who provided me with excellent guidance and grace as we negotiated this regrettable and difficult situation.

Your "to-do" list for 2009:

70. Thus far this morning, I have issued at least two charges in this address:

71. (Charge One) That each member of the Diocese engage the Core Values of the Diocese by:

- Being intentional in your study of the scripture, pray on a daily basis, and actively participate in worship. (Scripture, prayer, and worship)
- And then by asking and answering the following questions:
- "How does my life reflect the life and teachings of Jesus?" (Faith)
- "How do you, personally, proclaim by word and example, God's saving love revealed in Jesus Christ?" (Evangelism)
- "In what ways can you participate in reaching out to serve people in your community and throughout the world?" (Mission)
- "What can you do, specifically, to foster a reconciled relationship with God and all people? (Reconciliation)

72. (Charge Two) That each commission, committee, and entity of the diocese spend significant reflection this year on how their purpose, their reason for being, is understood and "lived-out" in light of the Core Purpose and the Core Values of the diocesan family.

Let me add three more specific charges as I conclude my remarks this morning:

73. (Charge Three) I know that the uncertain financial situation in our economy is a cause for great concern. It is also a spiritual teaching opportunity on Christian stewardship. Therefore, I charge each congregation to appoint your Every Member Canvass or Stewardship Chair and committee during Lent of this year and then formulate intentional plans for your stewardship efforts. The "stewardship survey" sent out in December showed that many congregations did not have a well thought out and defined approach to stewardship in 2008 – some

being little more than sending out a letter and hoping for the best. The results of such efforts were hardly stellar for these congregations as the surveys indicate. So, don't wait until the last minute. Christian stewardship is not something that is confined to just one season, which in Texas is usually hunting and football season. Rather, Christian stewardship is an ongoing part of our life together as we seek to equip ourselves and the Church at large with all kinds of resources (money, yes – but not money alone) for the Lord's ministry.

74. Congregations have different ways and calendars of approaching stewardship in their local setting, so do what is necessary in your particular situation to meet the spirit of this stewardship charge. While always important, a clear teaching and understanding of Christian Stewardship is even more necessary in a very unpredictable national and world-wide economy. Counting the cost and making Godly preparations is an important part of abiding in Christ, so be intentional and faithful in your efforts. Help is available from the Stewardship Department of the diocese and will be a focus during the June 6 event as well.

75. (Charge Four) Over the past three years, we have studied the Book of Acts (2006), the Gospel of Luke (2007) and the Gospel of Matthew (2008). This year, I ask that the diocese read and study St. Paul's Letter to the Romans. While Paul was certainly a prolific writer, Romans is perhaps the most influential, and certainly the longest, of his writings. It conveys what has been called *the full richness of his experience of Christ as well as the full maturity of his thought* (from the introduction to Romans in the New Oxford Annotated Bible). It will take you into deep spiritual and theological reflection, and I commend it to you.

76. (Charge Five) Finally, I charge each vestry meeting and/or bishop's committee meeting to begin with a meditation or reflection on what is meant by "abiding in Christ." Specifically, I further charge that at least one of these meditations be focused on the Core Purpose of our life in Christ (***Being Jesus' Witnesses***), and that at least five of your other meetings begin with a meditation centered on one each of the five Core Values of the diocese. One component of these meditations should be the question: *How is this calling me to change?* As I stated at the outset of this address, it is our Godly responsibility to continually seek both spiritual formation and spiritual transformation. And I further charge that these vestry/bishop's committee meditations be led by the laity. Clergy, you're welcome!

Personal Reflections

77. It was five years ago this month that the Church made me a bishop. Some days, it seems more like five "light years." On other days, I can't believe how quickly the time is passing. All the more reason to *redeem the time; its hours too swiftly fly*. (Hymn 541)

78. At this point, I must say a word of special thanks to my Episcopal partner in this high calling of the office of Bishop. Bishop Reed is a first and foremost a blessed friend. He is a patient colleague and a spiritual guide to me, and to many of you as well. I could not have asked for a better companion along the way, and I deeply appreciate our opportunity to work together. David, thank you.

79. Since I've been a bishop, the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion have been wrestling with critically important life questions. Our struggles have many people wondering, as children sometimes wonder: *Are Mom and Dad going to get a divorce? What is happening to our family? Is my family breaking up? What is happening to me?*

80. While aware and engaged in these very important concerns, I have tried to lead our diocesan family by having us focus on the practicalities on the ground (our vibrant mission and ministry). I continue to call us to focus on the things that family and friends can do, or avoid doing, in order that we might stay in relationship when we disagree on subjects that are important to us. I have had an increasing awareness of the need to consider why family and friends need to stay together as well as to consider the unintended harm to others when family and friends do not stay together.

81. A few months ago while making a visitation, a parishioner asked me, "Do you like being a bishop?" If that isn't a leading question, I don't know what is. As usual, I thought of my best answer fifteen minutes after I drove off.

82. And my answer is this: I do find genuine Christian joy in most (not all!) of the responsibilities of the office of Bishop. But whether one "likes" it or not is not really the most important theological question. The better theological question is: "Do I feel called to serve as a bishop?"

83. I wonder if some of the heroes of the faith "liked" their calling; Moses comes to mind, for example. Remember Moses' story? He's called to the lead people out of Egypt, which he does. Things go from bad to worse in the desert. After building the Golden Calf, God's had it with them. He tells Moses, *Go down, because **your** people have become corrupt. I have seen these people and they are a stiff-necked people. Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them.* Moses intercedes with God on behalf of the Israelites: *Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people* (Exodus 32). That's a good example of leadership and intercession, but even Moses will change his tune after spending some time with these people.

84. Later, *the rabble with them began to crave other food...and Moses heard (once again) the people of every family wailing. The Lord became exceedingly angry, and (in one of the greatest understatement in all of scripture) "Moses was troubled".* I'll say. Moses to God: *Why have you brought this trouble on your servant? What have I done to displease you that you put the burden of all these*

people on me? Did I conceive all these people? Did I give them birth?...They keep wailing to me 'Give us meat to eat!' I cannot carry all these people by myself...if I have found favor in your sight, do me a favor and put me to death right now! (Numbers 11)

85. Unlike Moses, I haven't asked God to strike me dead yet. However, even Moses on his worst day would probably be able to say in the final analysis, "I feel God called me to this ministry and I am totally committed to it." Amen to that. That is where I am in my life and work as your bishop. It is because of the scriptural witness that I am able come to work on a daily basis and say, "What might be a Christ-like, generous, and hope-filled response in times such as ours?" I hope that this is true for you as well.

86. This past summer Bishop Reed and I attended the Lambeth Conference. While there, we spent quite a bit of time at Canterbury Cathedral. Like all the great and ancient Cathedrals, it was built by stone masons. As these ancient artisans went about their work, most of them likely hadn't seen the overall look for the final design. Rather, theirs was to labor faithfully in their small area of the overall design, doing what they could with the stones they had, to make a contribution to the overall work. It was only the architect who had the full picture of what it would all look like in the end.

87. In our own day, we are stone masons for the Kingdom of God. We are not building the Kingdom, God has already built it. Rather, our role is to build FOR the Kingdom. Like those ancient stone masons, we don't have the full picture of what the Kingdom will look like in the final analysis, but we know that the Architect of the Kingdom knows what it shall be. So, we continue as artisans for the Kingdom of God, working hard in the areas that have been entrusted to us, with the stones that we have been given, and we have confidence that in Christ *the whole structure is joined together and (will grow) into a holy temple in the Lord* (Ephesians 2.21).

88. I quoted an ordination sermon earlier in this address, in which the preacher said "Christianity is about Christ." So, then, what about Christ? The full character of Christ is found in the historic Christian doctrines of the Incarnation, the Atonement, and the Resurrection. It is found in Scripture, prayer and worship. It is found in mission, and evangelism, and reconciliation, and social justice. It is found in faith. It is all of these things (and more), not simply one or two of them, which define the **fullness of Christ**. Don't ever forget that it is a holy privilege to be engaged in the fullness of Christ.

89. One day, "some Greeks" appeared before Philip and said, "Sir, we would see Jesus."

90. I hope that such seeing in our own day is reflected in how we live our lives; in our thoughts, in our words, and in our deeds...so that others may see Christ in us.

91. St. Paul told the Galatians (1.16) that God, *was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles...* I hope that each of you feels honored, humbled, and encouraged that God is pleased to reveal his Son to you, so that you might preach him as well.

92. And so it is that the Jesus goals will be achieved by the Jesus way. Amen.