

Bishop's Address

102nd Diocesan Council, February 23 – 25, 2006

Part I

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (*2 Cor 1.2*).

Yesterday afternoon in my remarks about the history of the Chapel Cars in settling the west and in my sermon last night, I acknowledged what an honor and privilege it is for me to serve you as the 9th Bishop of West Texas. I am grateful to you for your ongoing prayers and support, and look forward to seeing where the Lord shall lead us together in the coming years.

This morning I want to do several things:

- (1) I want to share with you some of the exciting things happening in ministry through our diocesan life together.
- (2) I want to say a few words about changes in the diocesan staff throughout 2006.
- (3) I want to speak with you about Congregational Development.
- (4) I am going to say a few words about a new committee for leadership and a new committee for technology.
- (5) I have a few remarks about the Bishop Suffragan Election next month.
- (6) I am going to summarize The Windsor Report for you and share some of my personal reflections about it.
- (7) I want to share some thoughts about the state of church as we move into General Convention.
- (8) Finally, I'll offer some concluding words as we move forward together in faith.

1. Our Diocesan Life

Disaster Response Task Force

In a few moments, you will hear of the wonderful and significant response of our diocese to the hurricane relief efforts that began last fall following hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Let me say now, however, how absolutely proud I am of your generosity of time and treasure in responding to all those who were affected in so many ways. As a diocese, we

have raised almost \$300,000 in aid, and provided hundreds of people involved in “hands-on” efforts to “respect the dignity of every human being” (Baptismal Covenant, page 305) as they struggled with monumental needs in health care, housing, feeding, re-settlement, counseling, and so many other ways. And these efforts continue to this day.

These disasters served yet again as a wake-up call to the country. It got our attention in West Texas and we established a temporary task-force to meet the immediate needs of those coming our way. I want to offer a great word of thanks to those persons who served on our Katrina/Rita Resettlement Task Force and who have met regularly at the Bishop Jones Center on Monday afternoons since the hurricanes. Please stand and be recognized. In addition, if you served in any way in the relief efforts, I would invite you to stand. I am grateful to you as are so many others, known and unknown. In all of this, we also had cooperative efforts with many agencies, including Episcopal Migration Ministries and Episcopal Relief and Development.

Out of all of this has come a recognition that we need to be ready to respond to a disaster that would come our way. To that end, I am appointing a new committee this year entitled the **Disaster Response Task Force**. It will be chaired by The Rev. Kevin Johnson of St. Francis, San Antonio, and is charged with developing plans for a diocesan disaster response. Good and thoughtful preparation ahead of time will enable us to reach out to those affected by a disaster in a much more coordinated way when the need arises. And, as we all know, the need will arise.

Good Samaritan Community Services

As we “seek to serve Christ in all persons” (baptismal covenant, BCP page 305), this certainly brings to mind the tremendous opportunity that we learned of yesterday in the presentation by **Good Samaritan Community Services**. It has been a dream for the past several years to expand the work of the Good Samaritan Center in other areas of the diocese, and the ministry we are beginning in the valley is the first step toward that expansion. To think that we will be able to reach 6,000 young people ages 14-21 as they face an uncertain spiritual, educational, and vocational future is a great opportunity, indeed. A year ago, we had no idea this opportunity would be before us. It is as if God said, “*Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?*” And we responded, “*Here am I; send me!*” (Isaiah 6.8)

Bartberger Endowment

I cannot let my remarks this morning pass without saying a word about the Bartberger Endowment that the diocese has received. You should have received a letter from me about this recently, and if you haven’t it should be there when you return home. As a result of a seed sown over forty years ago by then Bishop Everett Jones, we have now received the largest single bequest in the history of our diocese. As I mentioned in that letter, the Bartberger bequest resulted in endowments totaling \$6.3 million dollars.

The Trustees of the Church Corporation, who are elected by you (the diocesan council), secured this endowment in three significant areas for the future ministry of the diocese. By their action, the Bartberger Endowment was created with an opening balance of \$3,382,721. In addition, \$1,000,000 was added to the Continuing Education Endowment, and the income from this endowment will be used to further leadership development in the diocese. The remaining \$2,000,000 was used to create a Diocesan Facilities Maintenance Endowment, and the income from this endowment will be used to underwrite the maintenance expenses of the Mustang Island Conference Center, Camp Capers, and the Bishop Jones Center. These endowments will enable several of the current expenses from the diocesan operating budget in these areas to be released for new ministry opportunities which the Lord places before us.

The placement of these funds in the Episcopal Foundation of West Texas ensures the continued integrity of this significant gift, as it does with all funds in the Foundation. Donors may have confidence in knowing that long after they have died, their intentions are still being honored and their gifts are well protected. The Bartbergers' generosity and Bishop Jones' vision will impact the ministry and future of this diocese for years and years to come. This is truly an extraordinary blessing and we are grateful.

Diocesan Development Committee

Let me say a word about the Diocesan Development Committee. At last year's annual council, you accepted the Development Committee's report to:

- create a Community Services organization within the diocese
- acquire land for new church starts
- establish a chapel and training center on the campus of Texas State University
- develop a revolving loan fund specifically to assist churches to relocate if they are landlocked and/or in "difficult to find" locations
- expand the capacity of the Mustang Island Conference Center
- fund immediate improvements at Camp Capers with reference to the dining hall, the activities building, and the waterfront
- assist TMI, the Episcopal School of Texas, in building a chapel on the campus
- provide scholarship monies to TMI
- provide funding for leadership training events for both clergy and lay

Last year's diocesan council endorsed the raising of \$19.75 million to reach these goals, and 2005 saw the beginning of some of the work in these areas. 2006 must continue this momentum and it will take the very best each of us has to offer if we shall be successful in this endeavor over the next several years. These objectives are wonderful, and will help us fulfill our imperative as a missionary church. Much hard work lies ahead in this area, and I'm confident that many blessings will indeed follow.

Bishop Jones Center

I want to invite you to come and see the Bishop Jones Center, your diocesan offices. The work on both the buildings and grounds over the last several years is nothing short of

spectacular, and the work continues. Paula Butt and her committee of dedicated volunteers are transforming our space from simply “offices” to an “urban sanctuary”. It is beautiful. In addition, we have added a columbarium which overlooks the hill, and the niches are now available for your eternal enjoyment. Your diocesan center is a jewel in South Texas, and I am grateful to the many, many people of this diocese who continue to support is ongoing beautification and ministry.

2. The Diocesan Staff

The shape of the staff

I want to say a word about the shape of the diocesan staff in 2006. These comments begin with a word of thanks to the staff as whole. This group of people works hard to assist you in ministry, and they are of tremendous assistance to me. I want to invite the diocesan staff to stand.

2006 is a year of transitions for individual staff members as well as for the staff as a whole. Seven persons are leaving the staff in 2006. I want to invite them to come forward at this time: Garry Schnelzer. Helen Schnelzer. John Brooke. Grace Underwood. Erin Shaver. Tom La Noue. Carolyn Lane. (recognize each and comments). As is true anytime there are personnel changes, we are looking at current job descriptions, reorganizing some things, and seeing how we may best serve you. These considerations will continue throughout the year.

In the midst of these seven that are leaving, at this time three new folks are set to join the staff. At this time I want to take this opportunity to introduce my new administrative assistant and right hand, Laura Woodall.

She has been in the Episcopal Church since age 4, and is now a member of St. David’s. Laura and her husband, Tim, are parents to four grown children. She was a “stay-at-home-mom” when the children were young. Once they were older, Laura has worked for two San Antonio businesses, most recently Edward Jones, a stock brokerage firm. She brings administrative gifts, grace, and hospitality to this work, and I invite you to welcome her to this exciting ministry. She joined the staff in January.

Lay Canon for Ministry Development and Administration

With Canon Schnelzer’s retirement, I want to announce to you that I have issued a call to Kirk Mason of Good Shepherd, Corpus Christi, to serve the Diocese of West Texas as the Canon for Ministry Development and Administration. I want to note here that the word “administration” has as its root the word “ministry”; and that Kirk will assist me in the ministry of the Bishop’s office and in the broad ministry of our congregations and our diocesan life. He will join the staff on May 1.

Kirk was born and raised at the Church of the Good Shepherd in Corpus Christi. He has owned and operated the family business for the past 19 years. For the past three and a half years, he has also served as the Lay Ministry Coordinator at Good Shepherd. He has spent the last 21 years in lay leadership, both at the parish and at the diocesan levels. He is served the diocese as an alternate to General Convention and to Provincial Synod. He is married to Lisa, and they have two teenage sons.

Canon Mason's duties will be many and varied, but a few of the highlights include the primary responsibility for the Stewardship Program of the Diocese, the operations oversight of Camps and Conferences, the Men's Retreat, and all of the administrative functions of the Bishop Jones Center. He will share the responsibility for Diocesan Council arrangements with Nancy Stinson, and share in the management of Dispatch of Business at Council with Archdeacon Lee. One of Kirk's main areas of responsibility will be in my old favorite, "other duties that may be assigned from time to time by the bishop". I invite you to join me in welcoming Canon Mason aboard.

3. Congregational Development

Interim Director

Congregational Development is one of the most significant functions of a diocese. We are facing into a rapidly changing world, and I want to carefully consider the shape and scope of congregational development in the coming months as we look to the future for the best ways to assist congregations in these challenging times. To that end, I have invited The Rev. John Rayls, who has been serving as the church planter at our Zarzamora property and clergy coach for us over this past year, to come in as the "interim" director of congregational development as we contemplate the myriad of ministries that fall under congregational development. John brings great skill to this area from his thirty years of experience of planting churches.

John graduated from a Southern Baptist Seminary in 1984, and was ordained in 1984 as a clergyman of the Evangelical Mennonite Church. Over the years, he has been drawn to the Episcopal Church, and that is how he has come to work with us. John has been directly responsible for 7 church starts and has served as the national director of church growth for two denominations. He has written two books, and is a national consultant for church planting, coaching, assessments, and church multiplication. He has been married to Sue for 32 years, and they have three children and three grandchildren.

Many of you have had the opportunity to meet John over this past year, and he will be speaking today at the Lay Ministry Luncheon. You will also hear from him when Congregational Development gives its report in a few minutes.

John Rayls' responsibilities as the interim director of congregational development over the next few months will be to monitor the progress of the congregations in the restart program. He is to bring some new ideas to the table regarding strategic planning for new

starts. He will be on the creative edge with regard to leadership training, clergy coaching, and internal assessments for congregations. He will also be blessed with “others duties that may be assigned from time to time by the bishop”.

In this interim period, Archdeacon Lee will assume the responsibility for the Congregational Development budget and finances, and John Rayls will have the responsibility for vision, programming, and planning. In these areas, they will work closely together for the spiritual health of our congregations.

Obviously, the question becomes, “What of the Zarzamora church plant if John Rayls is making this change?” Many of you have heard me say that as we think about new churches in this 21st century, we need to think in terms of a “missionary strategy” for “areas” in our diocese. Zarzamora falls into this category (South San Antonio). We need missionary strategies for all of the various parts of our diocese. Specifically, we need to honestly acknowledge the fact that Zarzamora has struggled and continues to struggle to get off the ground. This is unfortunate, but it is also an opportunity. Life is full of starts, stops, and re-adjustments, and this is no different. Rather than keep doing the things we are doing that are not working, let’s be honest and step back and look at a serious missionary strategy for what Zarzamora might become.

In all of this, our effort is to think outside the box and see what we might do better and different. I realize that not all new ideas are good ones and some should not be pursued; but we’ll never know where the Spirit is leading us if we do not begin to think creatively.

Trinity, San Antonio

I want to share with you a word of sadness as well. Some of you have heard of this already. Trinity Church, San Antonio, has petitioned the Bishop’s Office to close as of Trinity Sunday, 2006 (June 11). The leadership of that congregation has met with me several times and the congregation has been prayerfully considering this move for over a year. It is certainly not something to celebrate, but I want to commend the members of Trinity for looking a terribly difficult situation straight in the eye and making a courageous, and hopefully in the long run, a life-giving decision.

This is not without emotion for me, for this is the parish which nurtured me as a child and presented me for confirmation. However, due to many factors over the years that are too numerous to mention here, Trinity feels this is the move they must make at this time. I would invite the delegation of Trinity Church, San Antonio, to stand. As you move forward in your life in Christ, please know that this 102nd Annual Council thanks you and holds you in our prayers. We are grateful to you, our sisters and brothers in Christ.

I am not going to be in the practice of closing churches as your bishop. I am in the practice of expanding the kingdom, not shrinking it. However, sometimes there must be a death and resurrection experience, and Trinity feels this is one of those times. If a congregation is to close its doors while I am your bishop, it will be because that congregation has taken prayerful and careful measure of the situation and decided it

cannot continue. Steps such as these are taken with a heavy heart, and certainly with great sadness.

Looking Ahead

This afternoon, I want you to come back for Part Two of the Bishop's Address. In that address, we are going to talk about the challenges facing Christianity and the Episcopal Church in a new century. We'll talk about the "Emerging Church". You will be asked to consider what an agile church might look like through discussions with your delegations. I'll have some thoughts to share about spiritual transformation and evangelism, and you will have the opportunity to respond to those thoughts in your groups.

Christianity needs a comprehensive and global vision. Something fundamental seems to be missing. The world is hungry for a vision that makes sense and offers hope. This vision must inspire people.

This afternoon holds the potential to be a dynamic time for us and we need you here, including all of you who are guests and alternates. We will be considering some new questions as we face into the future as God's disciples, and all of you are part of that future. We'll begin that after lunch and that will carry us throughout most of the afternoon.

All of this begins with reality. We really must expose the demon, which is that the Christian Church is declining in many areas and no one seems to be dealing with this realistically. We are in the ditch, and we are arguing about how we got into the ditch. "Because we turned left, because we turned right..." Let's focus on getting out of the ditch.

My focus, and I hope yours, in the coming months and years, will be to discern with God's help how we are going to use the present realities of stagnation and decline as an occasion to move into the future with hope.

It is not going to be easy. It is the classical strategic problem: *How do you build a bicycle while you ride it?* We are going to have to figure that out, and I have every confidence that we will. This will take excellence in leadership, for no organization ever rises above the vision of the leadership.

4. Leadership and Technology

Leadership Development Committee

To assist in these considerations, I am appointing **The Leadership Development Committee**. It will be chaired by The Rev. Jay George of St. Andrew's, Seguin, and this committee is charged with examining the whole arena of leadership development for both clergy and laity. They are charged with creating opportunities for leadership to emerge at

both the congregational and the diocesan level. This will involve identifying and equipping leaders for the emerging church of the 21st century. This committee will avail themselves of the best resources on emerging leadership development both from within the church and as well as from the business and educational communities from which we might be able to adapt best practices.

Technology

We also must figure out a way to make this rapidly changing world our ally, not our enemy. I am referring here, specifically, to technology. In this new century, we must look at the best ways that we can be effective in our ministries. Technology can assist us in this area.

I'm personally not very "technology adept". My "palm pilot" is a 3x5 card that I can discard and simply replace as the need arrives. I don't have to worry about how much "memory" my 3x5 card has left on it. My 3x5 card never gets a virus and crashes, but is always ready and available, unless it goes through the washing machine. I don't have to remember to "charge" my 3x5 card before I go to bed. If someone needs a note but doesn't have any paper, I can simply tear my 3x5 card in half and give it to them. Try that with your palm pilot.

On the more serious side, I am very supportive of this extremely important element in our life together. In this busy and fast paced world, we need to examine how technology may assist us in our communication, in our housekeeping and in our "committee" structures, all without simply turning us into a "virtual church", - for we do not want to become a virtual church. We must not lose our personal connections and face-to-face encounters, for that is where Christ can be most clearly seen.

We can however, use technological advances to enhance ways to be good stewards of our time and money in regard to the ministry we must undertake. To that end, I am appointing the final committee of this address, **The Information Technology Committee**, which will be chaired by our Communications Officer, Marjorie George. They are charged with evaluating our needs and examining available technology so that we can strengthen our connections throughout a diocese that encompasses some 69,000 square miles.

5. The Election of the Bishop Suffragan

Bishop Suffragan Election

We will elect a Bishop Suffragan on March 25. You people are choosing my "next best friend", so choose well. The Bishop Suffragan will share in the pastoral, sacramental, and administrative life of this diocese in a very deep way, and I am looking forward to having a colleague and friend in the office next door. Say your prayers between now and then, not only for wisdom in identifying who God is calling forth to this exciting

ministry, but prayers for all of those persons who have allowed their names to go forth. Pray also for their families. I know from personal experience the feelings one has leading up to such an election, and I know that each of the persons before us now as potential nominees will greatly appreciate your prayerful support.

6. The Windsor Report

A Summary

As we all know, the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion have been in turmoil since the General Convention of 2003. In truth, the Church has been heading down this path for some time, and the decisions of that General Convention simply brought the church's disagreements into sharper focus.

In October 2003, four months after our General Convention, the Archbishop of Canterbury appointed the Lambeth Commission, comprised of 17 theologians from around the world. One of these 17 came from the United States. The Archbishop of Canterbury charged the Lambeth Commission to examine and report to him, within a 12 month period, *"on the legal and theological implications flowing from the decisions of the Episcopal Church USA to appoint a priest in a committed same sex relationship as one of its bishops and the Diocese of New Westminster (Canada) to authorize services for use in connection with same sex unions, and specifically on the canonical understandings of communion, impaired and broken communion, and the ways in which provinces of the Anglican Communion may related to one another..."*(p8). The result of the Lambeth Commission's work is known as The Windsor Report.

Issued in October 2004, The Windsor Report remains at the center of much attention and conversation within the Anglican Communion. Indeed most dioceses in the Episcopal Church are responding to it one way or another through their diocesan conventions as we move toward General Convention in June of this year. For many dioceses this is the document at this time in the Church which provides the framework to attempt to deal with our deeply divided communion.

The resolution tomorrow morning

You will have a resolution come before you tomorrow morning asking you to reaffirm West Texas' endorsement of The Windsor Report. This resolution is brought before you by several congregations of the diocese. At last year's council, you passed a resolution which welcomed The Windsor Report and endorsed its recommendations for the life within the Episcopal Church and within the Anglican Communion.

Tomorrow's resolution affirms last year's action, and also asks this year's council to send a message to the General Convention meeting this summer in Columbus, Ohio, that urges the General Convention to accept and comply with the findings and recommendations of The Windsor Report. I am on record as supporting The Windsor Report as the

framework in which we should move forward, so I support the resolution that is coming before you tomorrow morning.

But don't just take my word for it. You need to make an informed decision. My guess is that the average person in the pew has not read the 90-plus page report, much less studied it. How can you vote to support or not support something if you don't know what it says and what it calls for? That's where I come in. You can call me "Bishop Cliff-Note", because I am going to summarize it for you.

An explanation of The Windsor Report

Let me acknowledge that The Windsor Report is not perfect, and I'll also note here that the Book of Exodus does not report that Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the 10 Commandments in one hand and The Windsor Report in the other. But, in my view, it is the best (and in fact the only) thing on the table at the present time. I find it to be an even-handed attempt to maintain communion as we live into these difficult days.

It is a good teaching tool. I think we should receive it with humility. Perhaps if we as a National Church can accept its recommendations, we will put ourselves on a path that might lead all of us to remain faithful to both the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion.

The report is divided into 4 parts, and very briefly they may be summarized as follows:

Section A describes the nature of the relationship of Christian communion and how that relates to the mission of the Church. This section also describes the underlying tensions which give rise to the current difficulties.

Section B looks at the principles which form the basis in which the Anglican Communion lives its life.

Section C discusses what are called the "Instruments of Unity" (The Archbishop of Canterbury, The Primates, The Lambeth Gathering of Worldwide Bishops, and The Anglican Consultative Council).

Section D identifies the central issues facing the Communion and offers specific recommendations. There are also four Appendices to conclude the report.

My summary to you cannot begin to fully discuss the theology and the reflection in the report, so I will have to leave that to your reading. One of the central things that the report does discuss is the meaning "autonomous". In fact, the principle of autonomy is of great importance to everyone in the discussion, regardless of where they might be on the theological spectrum.

The Provinces of the Anglican Communion are autonomous in many understandings of that word. Section B covers the subject of autonomy in great depth, but let me pull out a few significant comments from the report.

Paragraph 75: *Autonomy...is not the same thing as sovereignty or independence...*”

Paragraph 76: *“The key idea is autonomy-in-communion, that is, freedom held within interdependence. The autonomy of each Anglican province therefore implies that the church lives in relation to, and exercises its autonomy most fully in the context of, the global Communion.”*

Paragraph 79: *“...some affairs treated within and by a church may have a dual character: they may be of internal (domestic) and external (common) concern. (If they are not compatible) while there may be no question about their legal validity, they will impose strains not only upon that church’s wider relationship with other churches, but on that church’s inner self-understanding as part of the ‘One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church’ in relation to some of its own members.”*

Paragraph 80: *“In our view, therefore, ‘autonomy’ thus denotes not unlimited freedom but what we might call freedom-in-relation, so it is subject to limits generated by the commitments of communion. Consequently, the very nature of autonomy itself obliges each church to have regard to the common good of the global Anglican community and the Church universal.”*

I cite these quotes because these points, and other points in the report, provide the grounding for The Windsor Report’s call for creating *“the space necessary to enable the healing of the Communion.”* (Paragraph 134)

Let me now cover some of the recommendations of the report that are at the heart of the matter for the General Convention’s conversation and action. These are not all of the recommendations in the report. And these are recommendations.

The Windsor Report does not have any authority except apart from our good will and our graciousness to pay attention to it for the sake of the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion. The Windsor Report is not a mandatory commandment from “on high”. The report is, however, a well reasoned and carefully considered way forward; submitted in mutual forbearance and humility.

I might add here that people who pledge to support and submit themselves to The Windsor Report do so by abiding with all of its recommendations, not just the ones with which they agree. If we just pick out the recommendations we like and ignore others, where is our credibility when we expect others to support and submit to the report?

One, *“the Episcopal Church USA be invited to express its regret that the proper constraints of the bonds of affection were breached in the events surrounding the election and consecration of a bishop for the See of New Hampshire, and for the consequences*

which followed, and that such an expression of regret would represent the desire of the Episcopal Church USA to remain within the Communion” (Paragraph 134).

Two, *“the Episcopal Church USA be invited to effect a moratorium on the election and consent to the consecration of any candidate to the episcopate who is living in a same gender union until some new consensus in the Anglican Communion emerges”* (Paragraph 134). This is the recommendation that prompted the House of Bishops last March to decide to withhold consents for **any** bishop’s election until General Convention this summer.

Three, *“While we recognize that the Episcopal Church USA has by action of Convention made provision for the development of public Rites of Blessing of same sex unions, the decision to authorize rests with diocesan bishops. Because of the serious repercussions in the Communion, we call for a moratorium on all such public Rites... We recommend that provinces take responsibility for endeavoring to ensure commitment on the part of their bishops to the common life of the Communion on this matter”* (Paragraph 144).

Four, *We call upon those bishops who believe it is their conscientious duty to intervene in provinces, dioceses and parishes other than their own...to effect a moratorium on any further interventions”* (Paragraph 155).

Finally, the report calls upon all parties to the current dispute to seek ways of reconciliation, and to heal our divisions (Paragraph 156), and to *“make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Ephesians 4.3)”* (Paragraph 157).

The Windsor Report is not the final word on these subjects. But it is **a** word on these subjects, and a word that I support as we move toward General Convention and work toward the gospel’s call for reconciliation. I commend the report to you for your reading and devotional study.

7. Moving Toward General Convention

Toward Columbus, Ohio, In June

I want to share some thoughts with you about the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion as we move toward General Convention. Some of what I am getting ready to say has been said by others, so we share in this struggle together.

General Convention is only about four months away (June 13-21), and the church is gearing up for it. As I have said, I believe it incumbent on the General Convention to deal with The Windsor Report in a realistic and significant manner. The Presiding Bishop has appointed a committee that is currently examining ways that the General Convention will consider Windsor.

We will also elect a new Presiding Bishop for a nine-year term, which begins in November of this year. Let me remind you that we are electing a Presiding Bishop, not a messiah, and the person chosen is going to need all the prayers and support that he/she can get; for the new Presiding Bishop faces a monumental task.

General Convention is often spoken of as if it is some horrendous monster on the loose, as if it is an entity all to itself. The fact is General Convention is “us”; it is made up of lay persons, deacons, priests, and bishops who gather all over this country on Sunday after Sunday to worship Almighty God.

Yes, the sheer size makes it unwieldy. Yes, it is not a mark of particularly good health when you have to hold your breath to see if your national meeting will undermine your ministry. Some parts of the church await General Convention with dread, other parts of the church await it with excitement. But at its core, General Convention is the people of God, chosen by their dioceses to gather and work on a vision and ministry for the church. It hasn't gone too smoothly lately, but my hope continues.

Please do not look to General Convention to be a panacea for all the Church's problems. It simply cannot “make everything all right” to everyone's satisfaction. Let us approach General Convention, therefore, with realistic expectations and generous amounts of prayer.

This is a very important General Convention, because over these past three years (and even before), much has been discussed, argued, and written about the actions taken and the responses made. The result is that very few minds seemed to have been changed. No matter how sincere the debate, the fruit of all of this has yet to be consensus. The outcome, thus far, seems to have been more division. But we press on, in our generation, and we continue to run, with perseverance, the race that is set before us.

No one knows how this will end. But we certainly can't live by “you did this to me, so I'll do this to you”. “An eye for an eye” doesn't work because when you follow that path, everyone ends up blind. And we are not seeking blindness, but a clear vision of a way forward. Our conflicts are better viewed as opportunities for growth, not as contests for domination.

If we are splintered by division rather than united by vision, we will be well down the road to losing our way. There is a very real danger in all of this, on the national and international levels of losing our way. I don't intend to let that happen in West Texas, and I need your assistance in making sure that it doesn't.

The gospel truth is clear, at least to me: we conservatives, we liberals, we moderates are each other's family; we are each other's brothers and sisters - because God is our parent and Jesus is our brother. We may not like some of our siblings, but we cannot change what God has done in bringing us together at the Eucharistic table as God's family. So, we must decide how we are going to choose to live together, and this won't be easy. Much of my episcopacy is likely to be concerned with this very challenge.

So let me caution you with a reminder: our longings can be our downfall, so we should choose our dreams wisely.

In this apostolic age, as in the first century, unresolved issues will be settled, in time, on the basis of mission. The church is not an arena where the winner takes all. Rather, “it is a community in which the humble are raised up and the righteous are recognized by their efforts to know the will of God and to bring peace”. (*Reclaiming the Great Commission*, page 35).

8. Concluding Thoughts

Each of us needs to obtain a measure of clarity and decide how it is we shall live as Christians. Much has been made of mission statements over the last decade or so. They are indeed important. But one thing that is equally important, if not foundational in establishing a mission statement (as a diocese, parish, or even as an individual), is to figure out what core values drive your life.

I want to share with you the core values that shape me as a Christian person and in turn will shape my episcopacy.

1. I am scripturally centered and Gospel focused.
2. I am sacramentally grounded.
3. I am committed to the missionary call of Jesus Christ.
4. I am positive and hopeful for a fresh emergence of the Episcopal Church.
5. I am actively engaged in empowering creative and innovative leadership.
6. I am committed to spiritual growth (formation) and numerical growth (evangelism).

I’m sure there are those of you out there saying to yourself, “How can the bishop be optimistic at a time like this in the church’s life?” Let me answer it the same way the writer of the Book of Hebrews stated it, in two words: by faith.

That may sound a little thin to you; you may think saying “by faith” is a naïve cop-out and a papering-over of our differences.

But before you make those judgments, consider this recounting from the 11th and 12th chapter of Hebrews:

Now ***faith*** is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

Indeed, ***by faith*** our ancestors received approval.

By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible.

By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain’s.

By faith Enoch was taken so that he did not experience death.

By faith Noah built an ark to save his household.

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going.

By faith he stayed for a time in the land he had been promised.

By faith he received power of procreation...descendants were born, as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by seashore. All of these died in faith without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them.

By faith Abraham, when put to the test, offered up Isaac.

By faith Moses was hidden by his parents for three months after his birth because they saw that the child was beautiful.

By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called a son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to share ill-treatment with the people of God.

By faith he kept the Passover.

By faith people passed through the Red Sea as if it were dry land.

By faith the walls of Jericho fell after they had been encircled for seven days.

By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient because she had received the spies in peace.

And what more should I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets – who through **faith** conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength in weakness.

Others were tortured, refusing to accept release in order to obtain a better resurrection. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment.

They were stoned to death, they were sawn in two, they were killed by the sword, they went about destitute, persecuted, tormented.

They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground.

They confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth, for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland.

But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one.

Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God.

*Yet all of these, though they were commended for their **faith**, did not receive what was promised since God had provided something better.*

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our **faith**.*

So you see, when I say we will prevail “by faith”, I don’t think it is “thin” at all.

I view my episcopacy as a marathon, not a sprint, so I am committed to you for the long haul, wherever that journey may lead us.

You deserve nothing less from your bishop.

May Grace Abound.

Thank you and God bless you.

Amen.