

Bishop's Address – Diocesan Council 2008

The Rt. Rev Gary Lillibridge

February 22, 2008

Good morning.

Praise God for those in every generation in whom Christ has been honored. Pray that we may have grace to glorify Christ in our own day.

1. I want to begin this morning with a word of thanks to the people of Christ Church, San Antonio, who are our hosts this year and are doing an outstanding job of taking care of us over these few days. In addition to spending this year planning for this council, Christ Church has been celebrating their centennial year; and it has been a very good celebration.
2. It is no easy task to host diocesan council, and year after year we are blessed with outstanding servant leadership from our hosting congregations. This year is no exception, and I would ask you to join me in expressing our thanks to the people of Christ Church, particularly their Rector, Chuck Collins, and the council co-chairs, Linda Camp and Leslie Kingman and their committee.
3. I also want to take this opportunity to thank the diocesan staff for the hard work and many, many hours that have been given, once again, to prepare for this council. Everyone has given 100%, but I must take a moment and thank our council coordinator, Nancy Stinson and her able teammates, because much of what you have seen thus far and will see today and tomorrow are a direct result of their outstanding organization, their many skills, and their unwavering dedication to this diocesan family.
4. Bishop Reed joins me this morning in extending our greetings and thanks to our retired bishops. These bishops (John MacNaughton, Earl McArthur, Jim Folts, Bob Hibbs, Gerry McAllister, and Bill Frey) are a constant source of support, reflection, spiritual guidance, and friendship and we appreciate them more than words can express.
5. And speaking of friendships with bishops, I also want to recognize our Episcopal colleagues from Mexico: Bishops Marcelino Rivera from Northern Mexico and Benito Juarez from Southeast Mexico.
6. I also want to thank Baroness Caroline Cox for being an integral part of this council and sharing so much of her life and ministry with us. Caroline, we welcome you once again and look forward to hearing from you later this day.

7. Last year, we began a “youth event” as part of diocesan council, and I am pleased that we are repeating that again this year. High school students from around the diocese will begin arriving after school today, and they have many activities planned tonight and tomorrow. Tomorrow morning, they will join us for Bible study and you will have the opportunity to greet them at that time.

Let me also add that I am deeply grateful to our musicians, the Ron Knuth Trio, for their ministry to and with us during this Council, and for Owen Duggan and his team who have coordinated so much of our music both in our sessions and at last night’s service.

8. You have heard and will hear from many people over the course of this council about the ministry which we undertake in Jesus’ name as the Episcopal Diocese of West Texas. My time this morning permits me to only mention a few of the dynamic and life changing aspects of this shared ministry as a diocesan family, but I must tell you of my deep gratitude to all in this diocese who continually endeavor to “glorify Christ in our own day.”

9. Since I became your bishop, I have selected a theme for our councils. However, these themes are not limited to the three days of diocesan council. They have been picked up throughout the year in all areas of ministry, and I am grateful that these themes continue to help us focus on our ministry and our life together. In 2006, the theme was *Bound for Glory*. In 2007, *Let Down Your Nets Into Deep Water*.

10. This year, 2008, *Deny Yourself, Take Up Your Cross, and Follow Me*. It is my hope that this theme will serve as a reminder that we are not children at play in the Church, but that Jesus calls us to difficult and life changing ministry, and certainly out of our individual and corporate “comfort zones.”

11. In addition to the annual themes, I have asked that the diocesan family take the study of scripture seriously throughout the year, and we continue to focus on a book of the Bible each year. In 2006, we read and studied the Book of Acts. In 2007, the Gospel of Luke. This year, I am asking that the diocese read and study the Gospel of Matthew. Matthew is the gospel read on most Sundays in Year A, our current lectionary cycle.

12. As I begin this reflection on “the state of the diocese,” I want to begin with our work over this past year in identifying our core values. These were shared with you at the Pre-Council meetings and are on your tables today.

13. Last spring, I spoke with the Executive Board and Standing Committee about the need for us, as a diocese, to chart our course in these challenging days. Your elected leadership considered the implications of charting our course, and we decided that before we could set a course, we needed to understand the overarching theological principles that would guide our spiritual journey. We then focused on our core values, those timeless principles which do not change, but do inspire change. Core values are closely tied to a core purpose.

14. As you might remember from the video I made for the October convocational workshops, I noted that after an extensive exegesis of the last words of Jesus as recorded in the Gospels and the Book of Acts, I suggested that our core purpose as followers of Christ could be found in the words of Jesus as recorded in Acts 1.8, ...***you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.***

15. I translated this to something that I hope everyone in this diocese, adult and child alike, might easily remember – that our core purpose, our fundamental reason for being, is to “***Be Jesus’ Witnesses***”. I said at the time of these workshops that I believed these words are both specific enough to address what he wants his followers to be doing as well as broad enough to encompass all that he has taught and showed us about being “***salt and light in the world***” (Matthew 5.13-14).

16. Throughout 2007, much work was done on a diocesan wide basis as we began to focus on the task of identifying our core purpose and core values. The Executive Board and the Standing Committee got the ball rolling at a meeting on April 12. The clergy of the diocese met on April 30 to discuss core values. The Executive Board and Standing Committee then met again on August 30 to plan for diocesan wide workshops, which were then held in all seven of our convocations on October 27 with about 350 people present. These meetings were facilitated by your elected leadership. Following these convocational workshops to which everyone, especially congregational leadership, was invited, the Executive Board and the Standing Committee met on November 15 to identify the major themes which had emerged from these various 2007 gatherings.

17. The amount of theological reflection that was undertaken by the laity and clergy of this diocese was extraordinary, and this outstanding effort resulted in identifying five core values that are before you at this council. In this address this morning, I want to offer some thoughts about our ministry in light of these core values. I also want to say that while these core values are guides for our ministry and for our life as a diocese, congregations will certainly have core values that are particular to them. All of our core values, diocesan and parochial, should be complimentary to one another and I have no reason to think that they would not be.

18. I might also add that I intend to keep these core values in front of us in the years ahead. I hope that you will return to them, and your congregation’s core values, time and time again as we minister in this part of the Lord’s vineyard.

Personal Spiritual Formation

19. Let me begin by encouraging you and the members of your congregation to be serious about engaging the scripture, particularly the ministry of Jesus as recorded in the four gospels. Our core value of **Faith**: **We pattern our lives on the life and teachings of Jesus Christ**, can only be realized with a prayerful and deep understanding about what that life and those teachings encompass. Jesus is not simply the greatest person to ever live or a great moral teacher. He is the incarnate Son of the Living God and we should

not be reticent to share this wonderful, life changing news with others. To share it, however, it must be a deep part of who we are.

20. A fundamental way in which we are equipped for this holy work is found in our core value, **Scripture, Prayer, and Worship**: **We are grounded in Scripture, prayer, and sacramental worship.** To be grounded in something does not mean we can check it off after simply an hour of “attending church” on Sunday morning, important as that is.

21. It means that we are intentional about prayerful study of the Scripture throughout the week, individually or in a small group. It means that we pray every day. It means we take advantage of opportunities for adult Christian formation by making these opportunities priorities in our life. I am speaking here specifically about your participation in the Sunday morning adult class or other weekday opportunities that your congregation offers.

22. This core value means that we believe that sacramental worship is life changing because we believe that a sacrament is an outward and visible sign of God’s inward and spiritual grace in our lives. It means that we are serious about formation as witnesses, messengers and servants of Christ.

23. Last year, I asked the congregations of this diocese to observe **Guest Sundays**, one in May and one in September. Of course, every Sunday **should be** a guest Sunday. Many of our congregations accepted the invitation to provide an intentional Guest Sunday, and the reports of those who took this seriously reported that the people most changed by these Sundays were members themselves. This year, I am designating April 20 and September 21st as Guest Sundays. If those dates don’t work for your congregation, find a date in the spring and one in the fall that fit your calendar. The important thing is to create a mindset within our congregations that inviting someone to church is one of many important ways to participate in being a witness. The Spiritual Life Division has many suggestions and resources for you to access in your preparation.

24. Those of you who provided Guest Sundays followed in the apostle Andrew’s steps by inviting someone to “Come and see” (John 1.35ff). You then participated in providing a place of welcome when guests did arrive, continuing the Judeo-Christian practice of holy hospitality in the tradition of Abraham and Sarah who entertained angels unaware (Genesis 18). As we know, that was not only life changing encounter, it was – quite literally - life giving, namely the announcement of the impending birth of Isaac by these guests (Genesis 21). This does not mean, of course, that you will become pregnant when a guest shows up, in fact it better not mean that at all – we have policies against these sorts of things. You get the point.

25. (core value) **Evangelism**: **We proclaim, by word and example, God’s saving love revealed in Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit.** Evangelism does not simply mean inviting someone to Church, though it certainly includes that. Evangelism does not begin inside the walls of our church buildings. It begins in our communities, workplaces, homes, friendships – any and all places where we can tell the story of our faith in compelling

ways. Evangelism means participating in and sharing the life-changing good news of Christ and doing our part to grow God's Kingdom.

26. As I mentioned last year, evangelism is also part of the important process of formation and recognizing that people are in a variety of places on their journey in discipleship. In other words, what are you doing in your congregation to assist people in their spiritual journey along the path from guests to attenders-members-disciples? Discipleship is the ultimate goal, not simply more "church members." Hopefully, the two are not mutually exclusive.

27. Throughout this council, you will see and hear of many ministry moments. In numerous ways, this council is focusing on (core value) **Mission: We reach beyond ourselves to serve all people in our communities and throughout the world.** As we have said for many years, our involvement in world mission is one of the spiritual anchors of the Diocese of West Texas, and may it always be so.

28. If you stop by the World Mission booth downstairs, you will learn many things about our exciting work across the globe. In 2007, over 600 people went on 48 short term mission teams in 14 countries. The total funds raised for World Mission work by the family of the Diocese of West Texas in 2007 was \$1,137,900.00. Thank you. At the World Mission booth, you can also receive a handout on how we are participating in the Millennium Development Goals.

29. It is not possible to determine how many individuals around the globe are affected by our mission efforts, but we estimate their numbers to be in the thousands. Our teams are bringing the gift of faith and hope to so many in a world that often seems hopeless.

30. Our mission work, reaching beyond ourselves as this core value indicates, covers many areas, including bringing the Gospel to those who have little opportunity to hear it, medical/dental teams, building projects, education in all forms, micro-business initiatives, health education, scholarships, children's and women's projects, clean water to communities that have no access to this basic necessity of human life, and the list goes on.

31. Many of our long term diocesan missionaries first experienced mission work on short-term teams, and it is no surprise that whether long term or short term, we are profoundly changed as a diocese and as individuals when we reach out to others in the name of Christ.

32. (core value) **Reconciliation: We are a community committed to live in reconciled relationship with God and all people.** Our efforts in living into Christ's reconciling ministry begin with acknowledging our reconciled relationship with God - whose idea this was in the first place.

33. We live in a complex, multi-cultural global family and unfortunately differences often create division. Reconciliation requires humility, listening, fortitude, patience, an

open mind, and a willingness to engage this healing work because we recognize the lengths to which God has gone for our reconciliation.

34. Reconciliation with others affords us so many opportunities that it seems to be full-time work. Our families, our friends, issues of racism, living together in a “pluralistic religious” world, the fragmentation over the years within Christianity itself because of a host of issues, and the list goes on. There is plenty of reconciling work to be done, and this core value says we will engage it.

Let me turn now to some specific areas within our common life.

Camps and Conferences

35. You are going to hear a report from Camps and Conferences that highlights much of the wonderful work in this anchor of our diocesan life. This ministry is expanding at an incredible pace at both Camp Capers and Mustang Island. Once again, we set attendance records at both facilities in 2007, and the future is looking even stronger. You will also hear about the formation of the Camps Annual Fund in the presentation later in this council.

36. I reported to you last year that we are working on bringing the gift of the Brinsmade ranch on the Blanco River online as a wilderness camping experience for our older youth. That work continues. We also now have access (we don't/won't own it) to a fourth property near Duck Lake in Colorado for our senior high trip camps.

37. The Development Committee is busy working in many areas of diocesan life, including Phase II of the Mustang Island Conference Center. The Mustang Island Conference Center is an outstanding resource for ministry in the diocese and beyond, and bookings continue to increase year after year. We are seeing the ripple effect of spiritual renewal, leadership development, and discipleship formation throughout and beyond the diocese as the Center is used by many groups for the strengthening of their ministry and our common life. I encourage all of our congregations and groups to schedule a weekend or other time at Mustang Island to experience what so many have already learned – that the Mustang Island Conference Center is taking her place in our diocese as resource for our call to mission.

38. Phase II includes two additional housing units, which will double our capacity for overnight guests. This is critical for us to meet the needs of groups which we currently must turn away because of size limitations. Phase II also includes expanded parking, enhanced small group meeting space, and a caretaker's house and office. This phase is a \$5,400,000 expansion, and the diocesan development program is hard at work in raising these much needed funds, and I am deeply grateful to them.

39. In addition to these developments, we are entering into a partnership with the University of the South, Sewanee, for an internship with the Natural Sciences Department to create and teach curricula on environmental stewardship to our participants. This will

be done in conjunction with Sewanee's forestry, geology, and environmental studies program.

40. The requirements for oversight of a four site camping program mean that we must adjust our management to continue to meet the ever increasing growth and demand. To that end, we began looking for a Director of Camps and Conferences last fall. The Search Committee is currently evaluating a list of extremely qualified candidates from around the country who bring expertise to the administrative needs of such a large operation. We are taking the next step in growth for our camping facilities, and we join such institutions as Camp Allen in Texas and Kanuga in North Carolina with regard to the management needs to operate at these higher levels. All of this while not adversely affecting the outstanding quality and programming that are the hallmarks of our camping and conferencing endeavors.

41. Further good news is that we are blessed with four individuals in the diocese who have come forth to provide the funding for the first three years of this position, so this will not have an impact on the diocesan budget in the short term. As we have said throughout our history, Camps and Conferences is an important anchor in our diocesan life, and one where many lives are changed, leaders are developed, and spiritual formation is strengthened.

The Disaster Response Task Force

42. You will hear a report from Marthe Curry on the work of our Disaster Response Task Force at this council. They have been working on a very detailed emergency plan, and they are going to need the support of clergy and laity in each congregation. Currently, five separate activities are being developed by the Task Force, including Basic Emergency Response Training, obtaining Designated Parish Representatives, the appointment of Convocational Communication Coordinators, the development of Specialized Databases, and "Spreading the Word" – including the Church News, The Direct Line, and our E-News. We need your help in training, reporting, and communicating in these preparations, and I strongly encourage you to engage this important work so that we may be prepared in the event of a disaster or emergency.

Congregational Development

43. As I reported to you at the pre-council meetings, several congregations are in transition stages at this time. Let me just mention four.

44. First, Sts. Thomas and Martin closed their doors at the end of 2007. This closure was at their request which came early in 2007, when they realized they simply did not have the numbers required to continue as a congregation. Bishop Reed presided over a service of celebration on December 23, and they continue to care for one another and worship in

other congregations in the Corpus Christi area. We give thanks for their life and witness for over 50 years and continue to hold them in our thoughts and prayers.

45. As noted yesterday, Holy Spirit, Dripping Springs, entered into union with this council as a parish. What a great moment for that congregation and her leadership, and for our diocesan family. May God richly bless you in your ministry and in your service.

46. Christ Church Hill Country has been organized under diocesan Canon 17, Section 1, which states: "According to the Bishop's judgment, consent may be given for the arrangement of holding regular services by clergy or lay readers at any point in the Diocese, either on a temporary basis or working toward the eventual organization of a mission. The Bishop shall report to the annual Council the names of such places and of those in temporary charge of such work."

47. I am pleased to report to you that Christ Church Hill Country is currently meeting at the Chapel at St. Jude's Children Home in Bulverde, and the congregation includes many children from St. Jude's. The Rev. Eric Fenton is priest-in-charge, and we will evaluate this ministry throughout 2008 to see if it has the strength to eventually become organized as a mission congregation. Eric and Christ Church Hill Country, we hold you in our prayers and wish you blessings in Christ's ministry.

48. Also in 2008, we are going to begin the steps to establish a new congregation in the Camp Bullis area in north San Antonio on the property (23 acres) the diocese acquired several years ago which is adjacent to the campus of TMI - The Episcopal School of Texas. These plans will be developing throughout the spring and we will be able to make further announcement on this new work during the Easter season. At some point in the future development of this site, there are plans to have a parochial school, which would be another feeder school for TMI. So, the life of the diocese of West Texas continues to grow and expand. Praise the Lord.

49. In addition, Congregational Development is assessing a host of other plans, including new work in Laredo, the Kerrville area, Buda, and the potential of a partnership with the Zarzamora property (either the current property or selling it for a location near the new Texas A&M campus on the south side of San Antonio) and our congregations in that area, particularly Holy Cross and St. Stephen's. There are also conversations with several other of our congregations about their ministry and possible relocations and/or new thoughts with them. There are great opportunities for us throughout our diocese, and these also take vision, financial resources, and people – especially lay and clergy leaders with a passion for evangelism and planting congregations. These are just a few examples of what is going on in Congregational Development at the present time, so stay tuned.

TMI – The Episcopal School of Texas

50. You will also hear a report from TMI at this council, and it is an exciting one indeed. Current enrollment is up and climbing, a new residence hall (the 3rd one in two years) is

under construction, and an absolute stunning chapel is scheduled to be completed this summer. This year, TMI has successfully completed a capital campaign of over \$12,000,000 – an absolutely extraordinary result and one which you will hear more about tomorrow during TMI's report.

Leadership Development

51. Our Leadership Development Committee has met several times during 2007, and is under the chairmanship of The Rev. Jay George. He will have a report to you at this Council, but let me say at this point that leadership development is absolutely crucial to the Church, and we are working hard on a variety of venues to develop and equip lay and clergy leaders in and for the Church.

52. The Examining Chaplains are also working in this leadership area, and have made preparations for the first seminarian retreat in May for our current and upcoming seminarians. We currently have 11 persons in seminary and others in the pipeline for next fall. This effort of the examining chaplains shifts their ministry from primarily an "examination" at the end of seminary to ongoing spiritual, theological, academic, and leadership formation throughout the seminary years and beyond. I think this is marvelous work, and I am grateful to them.

The Diaconate Study Group

53. Last year, I appointed a committee to reflect on the vocational, or permanent, diaconate. I asked them to carefully address several questions regarding the vocational diaconate with regard to possibly implementing this in West Texas. They met seven times throughout 2007, and their report will be on your table this afternoon (two copies per delegation). I received this same report on February 1. I am most grateful to them for the enormous amount of excellent work that they undertook over the past twelve months.

54. The committee identified many of the blessings and challenges in implementing the vocational diaconate, as you will see upon a careful reading of their report. They recommended to me that these questions and issues must be addressed before we would or could take the necessary steps to raise up and ordain persons to serve as deacons.

55. In addition to the issues surrounding the canonical, structural, discernment, educational, formational, and financial concerns raised in their report, they note that "it seems essential that the bishop stay very involved in deployment and oversight" and that "it seems likely in our diocese, at least for the first few years and/or until the ministry is firmly established, that the bishop would necessarily be highly involved in most aspects of the diaconate."

56. Based on the entirety of their report, I must seriously consider whether or not we are equipped to move forward with this ministry in the near future. In addition, given my current responsibilities and workload both within the diocese and beyond, I will need to

seriously reflect on whether or not I can give the time needed from the bishop's office as identified by the committee.

57. The Commission on Ministry, the Examining Chaplains, the "who and what" of the staffing issues, the financial planning necessary, and the time available that I could give the establishment of the vocational diaconate are all important questions. I will ask the Commission on Ministry, and others, to begin exploring the questions raised in the Diaconate Study Group's report. At this time, I would ask that you join me in thanking this group of dedicated servants who have labored hard this year to deliver to us a thorough and carefully considered examination of what is needed to implement the diaconate should we move in this direction.

The Anglican Communion

58. Let me turn now to some thoughts about our corporate life as the Anglican Communion. In many ways, our own house is a mess. Some days I understand why the Church is viewed by the world as hypocritical and of little relevance to their lives. If we, the body of Christ, cannot live as a reconciled people, why in the world would the un-churched or lapsed want to join up? Where is the example of Jesus in our servant-hood and submission to one another as sisters and brothers in Christ? You might remember a passage from the Gospel of John:

59. After Jesus had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord – and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them" (John 13.12-17).

There are all kinds of ways to "wash feet," but we don't hear much about that part of the Gospel these days.

60. As you probably know, the Archbishop of Canterbury has issued an invitation to me to be on a working group known as the Windsor Continuation Group. In his Advent Letter of 2007, he outlined many of the questions that need to be addressed as we move toward Lambeth later this summer. I prayed about this invitation with great care, for I know that this is going to demand much from me and from some of you.

61. In his Advent letter, he stated his intention to "convene a small group of primates and others" to work with "the primates, the Joint Standing Committee, the Covenant Design Group, and the Lambeth Conference Design Group, to work on the unanswered questions arising from the inconclusive evaluation of the primates to New Orleans and to take certain issues forward to Lambeth." He notes that this will "feed in to the discussions at Lambeth about Anglican identity and the Covenant process."

62. He also suggests that this working group “will also have to consider whether in the present circumstances it is possible for provinces or individual bishops at odds with the expressed mind of the Communion to participate fully in representative Communion agencies, including ecumenical bodies. Its responsibility will be to weigh current developments in the light of the clear recommendations of Windsor and of the subsequent statements from the ACC (Anglican Consultative Council) and the Primates’ Meeting; it will thus also be bound to consider the exact status of bishops ordained by one province for ministry in another. At the moment, the question of ‘who speaks for the Communion?’ is surrounded by much unclarity and urgently needs resolution...Not everyone carrying the name of Anglican can claim to speak authentically for the identity we share as a global fellowship.” These are enormous challenges and I, and the committee, need your prayers in the days ahead.

63. Perhaps the Archbishop got to the bottom line when he illustrated the issue as being “whether or how far we can recognise the same Gospel and ministry” in one another. We’ll see if we have both the wisdom and the will to arrive together at the yet-to-be-determined far shore. We’re stuck, and we need to look for ways to become un-stuck.

64. The Bishop of the Diocese of Christ the King in the Province of South Africa, Bishop Peter John Lee (not to be confused with Bishop Peter Lee of Virginia), recently posted some very interesting thoughts from a clergyman named Giles Fraser. Let me share a portion of this with you, for these thoughts offer an explanation, in part, of how and why we are stuck.

65. The sanguinary (bloody) years of the English civil war some 350 years ago “may have caused the English church to conclude that anything is better than conflict; therefore it developed a forceful culture of conflict-avoidance, labeled ‘toleration’ but actually incapable of addressing any of its inner tensions. It then exported a model to the globe in which there were no mechanisms for addressing disagreement, and compromise was entrenched in the name of tolerance.”

66. Fraser then argues that America “learned a different lesson from their civil war; namely that if your cause is righteous, you must fight for it, no matter how sanguinary (bloody) the outcome. In our present scenario the two wings of the Episcopal Church both have that crusading conviction, and both use the rhetoric of war.”

67. He goes on, “So we have a scenario of English conflict-avoidance which has never been geared for processes of healing and reconciliation, and beside it another model in which victory is more prized than healing. That calls into question whether we have the will needed for reconciliation over coming years.”

68. There must be a better way than either of these alternatives, and I pray that with God’s grace we might find it. We face a crossroads during this historic time in our Communion, and the hard work that the Anglican family faces at the present moment on

all levels will define the future of Anglicanism, at least for our day. This work, therefore, must include constant prayer and Christ-like care for one another.

69. The Covenant Design Group has issued a second draft of a proposed Anglican Covenant which will be the focus of the covenant discussions at Lambeth and indeed throughout the Communion in 2008. The Lambeth Conference meets in July in England, and while at this time over 70% of the bishops of the Anglican Communion have said they will attend, others have indicated they won't attend and still others remain undecided about their attendance. Bishop Reed and I will be there, for we believe that we have a duty to you and a responsibility to our ordination vow to "share with your fellow bishops in the government of the whole church" (BCP, p518).

70. Let me return to the appointment of the Windsor Continuation Group for a moment. When I told someone about this appointment, they responded, "Are you crazy?" I said "probably"; but I do believe that one must do all they possibly can in times of great stress and crisis to participate in the reconciling work of Christ. Furthermore, I believe that the Diocese of West Texas has much of significance to offer to the wider Communion and the Episcopal Church, and I am very confident that we will rise to the challenges before us. As we are faced with many possible changes in Anglicanism, I am reminded of the old saying: *If you don't take change by the hand, it will take you by the throat.* I know which I prefer.

71. I could not undertake this invitation without your support. I very much appreciate the willingness of Bishop Reed and others to adjust their schedules to accommodate my schedule, which will necessitate three meetings before the Lambeth Conference as well as much preparation between meetings. Our first gathering will be in London from March 3-7.

72. I also accepted this invitation because I believe that we have a responsibility to live into the core values that we just identified as a diocese, and in this particular case, our core value regarding **Reconciliation: We are a community committed to live in reconciled relationship with God and all people.**

73. As I contemplate the deeply held and divergent views in our Church at the present time, and the divisions that those views are causing within the body of Christ, I am reminded of St. Paul's words to the Ephesians (2.13-22) when he was writing to them about reconciliation (listen carefully):

74. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us...so that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the

Father...In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.

75. On this passage from Ephesians, John Chrysostom (bp Constantinople, c347-407) notes: Jesus ***did not pass the task of reconciliation on to another. He made himself the means of combining one with the other. He himself was the first instance of this reconciliation. He brought them together, doing away with all that estranged them.***

76. Paul doesn't indicate ***to some degree reconciled***, but fully reconciled in Jesus. When Paul writes, "***through (Jesus) both of us have access in one Spirit***" to God... he means not less access for the one and more access for the other...but rather equal access by a single grace. For Paul, the hostility/the dividing wall is broken down through the cross.

77. And Paul wrote on divisions of the Church frequently. On the 3rd Sunday of Epiphany, the epistle was taken from 1 Corinthians: ***I appeal to you brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ...that there be no divisions among you. For it has been reported to me that there are quarrels among you. What I mean is that each of you says I belong to Paul or I belong to Apollos or I belong to Cephas or I belong to Christ...Has Christ been divided?***

78. I wonder what Paul might write to us? Here's a possibility: ***I appeal to you brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ...that there be no divisions among you. For it has been reported to me that there are quarrels among you. What I mean is that each of you says, I belong to Remain Episcopal, Claim the Blessing, GAFCON, AMiA, Via Media, Windsor, Common Cause, Integrity, CANA, Lambeth, Network, West, Global South, I'm Progressive, I'm Orthodox...Has Christ been divided?***

79. We can spend all day labeling ourselves and others, but in the final analysis, Christ is not divided no matter what is going on with us. Paul spent huge amounts of his time and energy trying to reconcile members of the church with one another.

80. In the scripture, Godly reconciliation begins with Christ and the cross. It is through Christ and the cross that people are brought together, *doing away with all that estranges them*, to use Chrysostom's language. At such times, the Kingdom of God comes near.

81. This is not to deny the fact that there are serious difficulties in our Church, far from it. Simply reciting the mantra "Christ is not divided" doesn't settle the issues. Indeed, far from **settling** these issues, this mantra offers the **beginning point** from which our divisions should be addressed.

82. "Starting with Jesus" must be done with careful and deliberate theological language, a careful Christology, and herein lies part of our problem. We are plagued by a problem I will call "linkage." I mean by this that if one holds an opinion about something, they are assumed to hold a host of other opinions as well. For example, in the arena of human

sexuality, if someone is in a more “conservative” place theologically, they are labeled by some on the other end of the spectrum as homophobic, intolerant, or referred to as bigots. On the other hand, if someone is in a more “liberal” place theologically on this issue, some on the opposite end will assume they deny the divinity of Christ, that they are heretical, and that they deny the basic core doctrines of the Christian faith.

83. While these linkages might be true of a few people on each end, it is my growing experience around this diocese and the wider church that these linkages are not accurate for most of our church. That is why it is all the more important to get the big picture clear first and see how we begin in and with Jesus in our efforts. In my view, core doctrines of the faith such as the Incarnation, the second person of the Trinity, the Resurrection, and the Creeds are not up for a vote as if these are somehow out of date or politically incorrect.

84. I believe these to be bedrocks of the very essence of Christianity. Jesus is not simply the greatest person who ever lived or just a wonderful teacher who had an interesting way with words. Jesus Christ is the Incarnate Son of the Living God, and that must be our beginning point. It is ludicrous when some in the Church, the Body of Christ, see this acknowledgment as a stumbling block, for the whole reason the New Testament Church was founded in the first place can be traced back to this core belief.

85. And with regard to reconciliation with the community of Christ’s body, again the words of Chrysostom: Jesus *made himself the means of combining one with the other. He himself was the first instance of this reconciliation. He brought them together, doing away with all that estranged them.*

86. This whole missionary endeavor, this venture in mission, is built upon the foundation of Jesus’ reconciling work on the cross; and without it our efforts don’t mean anything. In fact, if we understood our conflicts in the Church as being, literally, at “cross-purposes,” we might come to really believe that in Christ: *the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple* (Ephesians 2.21)

87. Paul, writing to the Colossians (1.17) also says that Jesus *is before all things, and in him all things hold together*. Really? If this passage is accurate and “all things hold together” in Jesus, as one looks at the current landscape of our Church, you have to wonder, *Are we in Christ?* And this is not some vague “Are we in Christ,” but more specifically, “Am I in Christ”?

88. If Jesus is our beginning point as Chrysostom says, then we need to make sure that we are building on solid biblical Christology as to what we hold in common regarding Jesus as Lord. If our beginning point is faulty, the whole house collapses. For my money, then, this is where the conversation needs to move. Perhaps a serious engagement with these questions will make addressing the issue of human sexuality easier to engage as well. Certainly something different is needed for we are not making much progress, nor are many minds being changed, simply by concentrating on the complex question of human sexuality.

89. While we argue about who has the true faith and wipe the dust of others off our feet, does the world – which is the object of God’s venture in mission – see a body worth joining? I mean, what kind of example are we, the Church, setting in a world already racked with division? Are we being *built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God?* (Ephesians 2.22) Are these the words that the world would use to describe us, the so-called Body of Christ?

90. We need effective means to bring such a dwelling place together and we are not going to be able to identify these ways if mutual recrimination continues to be the preferred way of people dealing with one another.

91. I’m finding that when I speak with people all over this Church, there are many, many people who are growing weary at being pulled one way or the other...in what is becoming an increasingly tense tug of war between some on one end saying they have had enough and they are leaving...and some on other end saying “good, if there is going to be a divorce, let’s get on with it.”

92. There are many who find both of these positions unacceptable. This is a critical time in Anglicanism and we don’t have the luxury of drifting around in our separate groups pointing fingers and wringing hands – “milling around” in the light of Christ as it were.

93. We are approaching a cross-roads (there’s that word again, cross) in our life in Christ and the world, *the mission field*, is watching. Yes, there are difficult days ahead. And like the Israelites in the wilderness, there are days that all you have to fall back on is miraculous manna from heaven, even when you would rather have meat to eat. And I suppose that’s not all bad, because it makes you dependent on God. As Moses learned one afternoon in the wilderness, a dependence on God often results in an overflowing abundance even when you, like Moses, seem to be cracking up because of the pervasive anxiety which sweeps through your community.

94. Differences and divisions have been with humanity and with the Church since the beginning. They often run deep and are profound. But that is not to be unexpected, because, you see, endeavors with human beings tend to be complex matters...and rarely are there simple answers to the complexity of human beings and of human nature. We humans are strange creatures even as we are created in the image of God.

95. So the question before us is: *Will you go? Will you sign up*, then, as lambs among wolves, even in those times when the wolves appear to be in your own house? Or, heaven forbid, people think that you are one of the wolves.

96. The Kingdom of God – far off or near? In some very real ways, it is up to us. 2008 and 2009 are going to continue to be years in the wilderness so we might as well face into them head on.

97. Being the Church is a complex and often messy endeavor. Sometimes being part of it means we have to die to self. All the more reason we should re-double our efforts to love the Church – to love Christ’s body. I am not talking about loving an institution, I’m talking about loving the body of Christ. All of it. Loving the body of Christ means loving people. Even those with whom we profoundly and passionately disagree. Jesus had a few thoughts about loving our enemies just as he had a few thoughts about loving our neighbors.

98. Some people apparently hold a position that says, in effect, “God loves us best.” Let that not be us. Let us walk humbly with our God and be instruments of reconciliation, for Jesus loves the whole Church because it is His body and he died and rose again for it.

99. Henri Nouwen once wrote a meditation on loving the church. Allow me to share it with you:

Loving the Church often seems close to impossible. Still, we must keep reminding ourselves that all people in the Church – whether powerful or powerless, conservative or progressive, tolerant or fanatic – belong to that long line of witnesses moving through this valley of tears, singing songs of praise and thanksgiving, listening to the voice of their Lord, and eating together from the bread that keeps multiplying as it is shared. When we remember that, we may be able to say, “I love the Church, and I am glad to belong to it.” Loving the Church is our sacred duty. Without a true love for the Church, we cannot live in it in joy and peace. And without a true love for the Church, we cannot call people to it.

100. And when we are caught in days like those of Samuel when ***The word of the Lord was rare...; visions were not widespread*** (1 Samuel 3.1); we must be very careful not to lose hope.

101. If you understand the word “rare” in this context as “lacking,” hope can indeed become scarce. But if you understand the word “rare” as “precious,” hope, like the Kingdom of Heaven, need not be far off, but near. The word of the Lord was precious in those days. The word of the Lord is precious in our own day.

102. The writer of Psalm 139 understood that the word of the Lord is precious wherever we may find ourselves. I imagine that one evening the writer of this psalm sat down, looked up at the stars in the sky, reflected and prayed for a few moments, and then penned these words:

*Where can I go then from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?
If I climb up to heaven, you are there; if I make the grave my bed, you are there also.
If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
Even there your hand will lead me and your right hand hold me fast.*

103. In conclusion, let me say that I am deeply appreciative to you who are here today, and to the people throughout our diocesan family, for you provide a stable place for a

person to minister as a bishop. This diocese has supported and nurtured me since my birth and I am grateful.

104. We are called and we are sent to a great venture in mission, and it will demand many things from us... not least of which is **hope**. In this great venture in mission, let us *praise God for those in every generation in whom Christ has been honored*. And let us *pray that we may have grace to glorify Christ in our own day*.

105. In the final analysis, I'm not interested in winning. I am interested in healing. And I am confident that in God's time, we will discover that the stream does, in fact, find the ocean.

Thank you.

