

Address to the
Thirtieth Annual Diocesan Convention
Saturday, October 10, 2009

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Bishop
The Episcopal Diocese of Western Louisiana

Alexander Fulton Hotel, Alexandria, Louisiana

“MAKING A PATH FOR THE LORD ...”
[Isaiah 40:3]

The Lord be with you:

Gracious and loving God, through Christ a precious treasure has been delivered to us. It is a living, vibrant hope, more precious than gold, more sturdy than diamonds, more enduring than any other gem. It is imperishable, unfading, the pearl of great price. Such is the treasure of your love for us. This gift does not exempt us from muddying our hands in the field of labour. It does not exempt us from hardship, loss, or tragedy. Instead, this precious gift is given in the midst of these, and strengthened by them. If our faith is tested, it emerges refined: stronger and more compassionate.

Grant us, God, that we might value this treasure of relationship with you. Let the Risen Christ go before us, calling and challenging us. Let him be behind us, for protection. And let him be beside us, as one who knows our struggles, our temptations, and our hopes. Strengthen and steady us in prayer; widen our hearts; open and use our hands for your service. And in all things, most loving God, keep us true to our promise to love each other and to love you. For nothing is easier than to love merely in our words and the inner speech of our prayers. Help us to love in deeds that are as visible as Jesus' acts of compassion.

We ask forgiveness when we lose courage and leave the sorrowing without comfort, the fearful without hope, victims of any trouble without aid. We ask you, Lord Jesus, to help us in these times, that your love may empower and restore us to a love that is forthright and passionately concerned for all. Impress upon our hearts in this time of chaos within the life of your Church, O God, the truth that nothing is so urgently needed in our world as love in action, and nothing so deeply desired as the shelter of your peace. O Jesus, risen in splendor and splendid in power, abide with us this day, and in the days ahead, that all we do is a faithful proclamation of your Word, that we may be filled with all the fullness of your Spirit and power, forever and ever. Amen. [drawn and adapted from All the Seasons of Mercy, 1987]

Where to begin? Much has gone before us and much is before us, and we gather here this weekend to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the founding of the Diocese of Western Louisiana as we share in this annual convention. One-hundred and sixty-eight years ago Bishop Leonidas Polk became the first bishop of the new diocese of Louisiana. A ministry that would see him covering vast amounts of the territory as he established congregations far and wide, a ministry that would be cut short as he dies at the hand of war on June 14, 1864 at Pine Mountain, Georgia. Though his death came prematurely during his role as Confederate General, his labour in the vineyard of our Lord bears a witness to his calling and faithful episcopacy as a bishop of the Church Catholic and to his ministry as he set about "*Making a path for the Lord.*"

As we look at these words from the Old Testament, we see there is much likeness in the man Elijah and that of the man named John. Both of them were one in spirit and office, and this being that both were sent to prepare the way of the Lord! But it didn't end there.

It continued down through the ages, for in every age this work is required. But how can it be done? As Elijah, John, Leonidas, and others have shown. By changing conditions that make difficult the entrance of Christ. By lifting the valleys, lowering the hills, and smoothing the rough road. And as Isaiah continues, "*and the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.*" [Isaiah 40:5]

To this day the mark of Bishop Polk's ministry across the rough roads of Louisiana is still most evident. Especially in a number of places as we look upon the following congregations established during his episcopacy, and still serving the people of the Diocese of Western Louisiana – St. James, Alexandria; Christ Church, Bastrop; Trinity, Cheneyville; Ascension, Lafayette; Grace, Lake Providence; Christ Memorial, Mansfield; St. Andrew's, Mer Rouge; Grace, Monroe; Trinity, Natchitoches; Epiphany, New Iberia; Redeemer, Oak Ridge; Epiphany, Opelousas; Christ Church, St. Joseph; St. Mark's, Shreveport; and Mount Olivet Chapel, Pineville.

With the exception of Mount Olivet Chapel, down through the ages each of them has offered worship to the glory of God through the provision of a Sacramental ministry, because of the path made for the Lord under the leadership of Bishop Polk.

As I give pause and think about the ministries that have taken place in each of these settings, and of those who have come seeking God and found themselves filled with the Holy Spirit through baptism; confirmation; Holy matrimony; and yes, the last ministrations of the Church, burial, I cannot help but be touched.

This emotional awareness was so much a part of my experience as I presided over the closure of the ministries of St. Philip's, Boyce, and St. Nathaniel's, Melville, early in my ministry here. To stand in these holy places and think about those who encountered God

in powerful ways in these tiny little rural churches brings about such a visible sense of the presence of God in our midst.

Possibly somewhere deep within the spirit of my soul was this sense of the importance of what the Lord has entrusted to us, the need to be good stewards, and maybe this is why I was moved to pursue the restoration of Mount Olivet Chapel.

Many will remember the spring of 2002 in Western Louisiana, the excitement and mystery in the air as to whom the new bishop would be. The walkabout as ten candidates were presented to the electing delegates and others in attendance at the venues selected for the question and answer sessions. Susan and I well remember this trip to Western Louisiana and the gracious hospitality that was afforded all of us. But what stood out most to us was the time spent at Mount Olivet. It was brief, and particularly our time in the chapel. Following great care being taken by our hosts to open the doors, care that would ensure they would not fall from their hinges, we were permitted to enter, but in turn had to be most careful of where we stepped due to the uncertain instability of the floor.

Even with the worn and frail appearance, I remember well the sense of being in a Holy place of God, a sacred place that obviously had been allowed to fall prey to the ravages of time and neglect. When we left to return to our home in Texas, a memory that accompanied me was how the folks of old, those who called this wonderful chapel their spiritual home, must have laboured and cared for this place of worship in order for it to still be standing then, some 144 years later.

What I didn't know was the place the chapel held in the history of the American Civil War, a refuge for the Union troops, a place of medical care and a staging center for ongoing engagement in battle. Because of this role, the chapel was spared the destiny of being burned.

What I also didn't know was that God, through the power of his Holy Spirit and the people of Western Louisiana, would elect me to become their third bishop, and that Susan and I would return to the setting of the chapel in the cemetery in Pineville.

Much has taken place since we returned, and together now, we have shared this morning in the culmination of much work as we participated in the service of rededication of Mount Olivet Chapel. A holy and sacred place of God that has been restored through the generosity of a faithful and caring clergy person in this diocese. As I have stated on previous occasions, while his gift of in excess of one million dollars is known, he desires to remain anonymous, and this I will see is done.

Many know that when embarking upon the endeavour to restore the chapel, one of my concerns was for an endowment fund to be established that would ensure that one of the subsequent bishops of this diocese did not have to set out to find money to do this all over again. Again, as shared a couple of months ago, this concern was put to rest through the

generosity of the Hardtner/Blake Foundation and their gift of \$500,000 for the purpose of an endowment fund that will preserve this historic place of worship for many years to come.

The staff and I returned to Mount Olivet and Diocesan House this past May, and now have the joy of sharing Morning Prayer each morning in the Chapel, as opposed to the conference room in Diocesan House. Additionally, the Eucharist is offered each Thursday morning at 10:00 a.m., and all of these services are open to those who desire to be with us.

In conjunction with the restoration of the Chapel was the renovation of Diocesan House as modifications made have provided more functional work space for all of us. The motivation behind the renovation was not the matter of work space, but rather a concern that I also had since coming to the diocese, and this was the fact we had a diocesan center that was not accessible to all. I am pleased to announce that Mount Olivet Chapel and Diocesan House are now, for the first time, accessible to everyone. Thanks be to God!

I have laboured long on this subject, but before concluding my comments about the restoration and renovation of Mount Olivet Chapel and Diocesan House, permit me to add two comments. One is to recognize those whose work continued without end, the Restoration Committee and others.

Serving on the committee was: Martha Barton, Canon Dee Drell, Tish Fresh, (all of St. James, Alexandria), Robert Ratcliff (Calvary, Bunkie), Kathy Richey (Diocesan House staff), and Susan MacPherson (St. Timothy's, Alexandria), chair. Working with the committee was our architect, Wayne Coco of Simmesport; and believe me, this project would probably still be a work in progress if we had not had such a blessed attentive contractor, Ratcliff Construction Company. Robert Ratcliff watched over this project as a mother hen watches over her brood, and when he wasn't on the job, his supervisor, Donnie Robichaux, or their on-site coordinator, Radar, was. Additionally, Bob Harwell (communications officer and member of St. Paul's, Shreveport), and Denise Rox (St. Timothy's, Alexandria) did a grand job of providing photo coverage for the duration of the project and during our move to the temporary quarters and back. For all of these blessed people I give thanks.

You can well imagine that a project of this complexity had to have its moments, and the moment that stands out most for me took place while Canon Gregg Riley and I were in Jerusalem for a meeting a year ago this past summer. Midmorning, I stepped out into the lobby of the hotel to get a cup of coffee and my cell phone rang; looking at the screen it indicated a 318 area code. Stepping outside to answer it, a voice with an accent, not of the mideast, but rather the deep south, said, "mumble, mumble, mumble. My response was, "I am in Jerusalem and am having difficulty hearing you. Please speak a little more slowly and clearly." Then I heard with some clarity, "Bishop MacPherson, this is Radar,

do you want us to save the old commodes at Olivet for you?” After laughing, I responded, “You have made my day, and you may dispose of them.”

Being blessed with the project completed and endowment fund in hand, it is my pleasure to announce the establishment and appointment of the Mount Olivet Preservation Committee who will provide for the ongoing care and maintenance of the facility to ensure its presence for the future. Serving initially will be Martha Barton (St. James, Alexandria), Robert Brown (Ascension, Lafayette), Tish Fresh (St. James, Alexandria), Susan MacPherson (St. Timothy’s, Alexandria), and Robert Ratcliff (Calvary, Bunkie).

Thinking about all of this, it is very apparent that today we have experienced a blend of the old and the new, the past and the future, and this is what the Church is to be about.

In turn, reflecting upon the life and ministry of the diocese in the midst of this endeavour and the ongoing state of the larger church, brought to mind several times the wonderful passage from Paul in his Second Letter to the Corinthians, *“Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us.”* [2 Corinthians 5:17-20]

This my brothers and sisters is to be our mission, and this is what we are told in An Outline of the Faith, the Catechism, *“What is the mission of the Church? The mission of the Church is to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ.”* [BCP p.855]

As I stood at the altar of St. Francis Xavier Cathedral yesterday, I could not help but be mindful that ten years ago yesterday I was consecrated a bishop in the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. In just three weeks, I will celebrate my seventh anniversary as your bishop, and today, the words *“Receive the Holy Scriptures. Feed the flock of Christ committed to your charge, guard and defend them in his truth, and be a faithful steward of his holy Word and Sacraments.”* [BCP p.521] continue to be an echo upon my heart.

As I stand before you this day, my heart is filled with the knowledge that not only the fabric of the Anglican Communion is torn, but The Episcopal Church is fractured, and in some cases the fracture is compounded and the patient is on life support. But yet, in spite of this, we are called to a mission of restoring all people to unity with God and each other in Christ.

Pondering these feelings this week, and my work with Communion Partners, and particularly with the notion of restoration, I was made mindful of my Presbyterian upbringing, and the Protestant reformer, John Calvin. The Catholic historian Alexandre

Ganoczy wrote of Calvin: “ *He never stopped claiming his unshakable attachment to the unity of the Catholic Church, which he did not want to replace, but to restore.*”

Entering into my eleventh year as a bishop yesterday brought focus for me to the fact that my episcopacy amongst you has been embraced by the creative tension and difficulty in which the American church has found herself, and the need for unity with God and each other in Christ – not to replace, but to restore – which is restoration to the glory of God.

Much of our time has been spent waiting for reports and covenants, and yes, reconciliation or a new direction forward. After many prayers, much conversation and a great deal of hope, we still don’t know for sure what is going to take place, but we do know the gift of faith is ours and as Paul wrote to the Romans, “ *... in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*” [Romans 8:37-39]

We are further reminded of the faith which is ours in Christ as we draw upon the reading from the opening Eucharist yesterday in the words from Hebrews, “*Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, for the conviction of things not seen. For by it the men of old received divine approval. By faith we understand that the world was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was made out of things which do not appear.*” Yes, by faith the saints of God have gone before us, and they “*all died in faith, not having received what was promised, but having seen it and greeted it from afar ...*” [Hebrews 11.1-3,13]

My brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus, it is by this same faith that I seek to lead us forward, and in the spirit of unity, to appeal “*to you to contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.*” [Jude 3]

As I stand before you this day, I beseech all of you to be mindful of the “*faith which was once for all delivered to the saints*”, and in doing such let us also claim an “*unshakable attachment to the unity*” of the Church Catholic. Yes, the Church in many ways is in distress, but this is our Lord’s Church and we don’t have the option of replacing it. God has entrusted it to us and is calling upon us to restore it to his glory.

In the course of our Post General Convention Gatherings, and at which some 900 people turned out, I shared the dilemma of the nature of the Church at this time. Some feel that I have not done enough to move us away from where they feel we should be, and others live in the fear that I might.

But permit me to repeat why we must stay where we are at this time. We need to stay where we are because our Lord needs the faithfulness of the ministry this diocese has to offer, and does offer through the commitment of those who make this their spiritual home,

and in turn are striving to build up the Kingdom of God in this place and the life of Christ's Church.

We stay also because our historic identity with the Anglican Communion demands it of us. Without ordered processes there is no catholicity, no claim to the ancient Christian unity, which we claim is at the very heart of whom we are as members of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.

This is why we stay where we are at this time, but in the months ahead, and depending upon the direction taken by The Episcopal Church and Anglican Communion, we could well be faced with making a choice of being either provincially oriented or Communion oriented – for it is clear we cannot be both. We know who we are, and we cannot claim to be part of a catholic body and then seek to exercise “local option” over crucial issues. This, as I said two months ago, looms before us with uncertainty and remains to be seen.

What we do know is the Anglican Covenant does provide the framework for an ordered process of the wider Communion, and as stated by Canon Cheryl White in her essay, “A Future in the Balance: The Proposed Anglican Covenant,” the very essence of the Covenant *“is that it is the product of a legitimately convened process to preserve our unity.”*

In looking at the strain upon the unity of the Body, Canon White continues, *“how else are we to resolve tensions and conflicts among ourselves except to call upon the broader body of Anglicans as our authority and guide?”*

Many, I know, were disappointed with the announcement of the Archbishop of Canterbury this past week that “adoption” of the Covenant can only be done by Provinces, and not individual dioceses. Some saw this as a reversal on his part, but I must say he is just conveying to us the mandate of the Constitution of the Anglican Consultative Council.

What is not being said to us is that as a diocese we cannot endorse a resolution. We have before us this day, a resolution from our Standing Committee, a resolution that speaks to the very issues and needs of the Anglican Communion that also embrace The Episcopal Church.

It is important for us and our relationship with the larger Communion to act and endorse in principle, the Standing Committee resolution for it supports the Anglican Covenant in its entirety and contains the necessary language. This will bring further recognition of our diocese as a part of The Episcopal Church, as a constituent member of the Anglican Communion, and in communion with the See of Canterbury. When I shared with the Archbishop of Canterbury last month of the plans for a resolution of this nature, he responded favourably.

Not only has he demonstrated this, but I have personally received messages over the past few weeks from several Primates across the Communion urging our continued pursuit of this for it supports the entire Covenant, including Section 4. They conveyed to me their gratitude for our demonstrated faithful ministry to the larger Church and wider communion. While it may seem to some that we are not doing anything, this is far from accurate. By virtue of the ministry being lived out here in a manner, and this being in way which differentiates it from some of the actions of the larger Church, we are bearing a witness that we are continuing Christ's work in our own day, and sharing the Gospel with such clarity and conviction that others are being moved to share it as well. It is in this light that I urge you this day to show favourable support to the Standing Committee resolution as it specifically includes Section 4, by endorsing in principle the Anglican Covenant, and in turn convey to the entire Communion our commitment to share in the life of the whole Church.

Granted, some of what has been shared, I am sure, is not pleasing to all, and in some dioceses there are those who have made decisions that have brought about a separation from the Church, but this not the answer. Confusion abounds in a variety of settings, and this is being experienced with great regularity, and as recently as this week, as further court decisions have been handed down or upheld, and sadly, all of this through the expenditure of millions of dollars that could be providing ministry to those in need "*the hungry, the thirsty, the naked.*" [Matthew 25:37-39]

I realize well there are some within our diocese at present who are taking a more formal step in looking toward separation, and with the thought of their loss from this portion of Christ's Body, I truly grieve. On the other hand though, I know them to be faithful people and know the decisions they are contemplating have not come lightly, and that it is with much prayer that they are willing to leave behind the places that have been their spiritual home for many years as they seek to find a place anew. They go with my prayers.

But as for me, I am standing fast at this time to the commitment made to you, the people of Western Louisiana. As shared during the Post General Convention Gatherings, I am just as concerned about the direction we take as many of you are, but my commitment is to the whole diocese, and again, this includes those who don't necessarily agree with me. My position on the issues before the Church, and dividing the Church, remain the same, but as always, apply to all regardless of sexual orientation.

What is the approach for the months ahead? I suppose this is best expressed in the wonderful prayer for ministry. "*O God of unchangeable power and eternal light: Look favourably on your whole Church, that wonderful and sacred mystery; by the effectual working of your providence, carry out in tranquility the plan of salvation; let the whole world see and know that things which were cast down are being raised up, and things which had grown old are being made new, and that all things are being brought to their perfection by him through whom all things were made, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord; who lives and*

reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.” [BCP p.515]

Why did I choose this prayer? For this is what we have witnessed within the life of the diocese these past many months. I give thanks to God for each of you that have truly sought to set aside the division of the Church beyond the borders of this diocese and instead have focussed on the mission of the Church, and the work God is calling us to be about.

Possibly I have a better vantage point from which to see this, but permit me to say, we can stand tall and hold our heads high when you look at the work and ministry that are being carried out not just here in Western Louisiana, but in the broader mission field.

So many people are giving of themselves in a multitude of ways, and ministries are being reinforced through the work of a wide variety within the diocese.

Looking about the diocese we have seen the publication of the Confirmation Curriculum which provides a solid basis for formation in the Christian faith and preparation for the commitment made in the Sacramental setting of Confirmation. This is something that I have wanted us to be able to provide for some time, and the distribution of this publication to every congregation in the diocese this past summer brings this to fruition. My thanks to Canon Cheryl White (St. Mark’s Cathedral) for her instrumental leadership, and the support of Dr. Frank Fuller (Trinity, Natchitoches), and the other members of the Commission on Christian Education.

Two other important documents have been updated and made available, one being the Bishop’s Customary, and the other, Discerning Ministry and Ordination, the guide for those aspiring ordination under the care of the Commission on Ministry. Both of these notebooks are invaluable and contain the answers to many questions.

Speaking of the Commission on Ministry, I want to take this opportunity to thank Herschel Richard (St. Mark’s Cathedral) for his faithful service as chair of this body. Shortly after my arrival here, I asked Herschel to take on this responsibility, and I am confident that of late he probably thought I must have meant for a lifetime. Last year I asked him if he would serve for “just one more year.” Being the gracious soul he is, he concurred. Now Herschel, as you step down at this convention, I must say “Well done, good and faithful servant.” Within this same light, it is my pleasure to announce that Laura Boyd (St. Mark’s Cathedral) and a long time member of the Commission, has agreed to take on this responsibility. My thanks to you both.

Also deserving of appreciation is Kem Hargrove (St. Mark’s Cathedral) upon the completion of his tenure as Chair of the Committee on Constitution and Canons. Kem has also served us all well for a number of years and in his absence this day, we thank

him for all he has done. Accepting my appointment to fill the chair of this important committee is Bradley Drell (St. James, Alexandria), and for this I am grateful.

When I spoke earlier of the wide variety of ministries that were being lived out in the diocese, it is important to note that this is a part of the differentiation of which I speak. This being the commitment on the part of many to seek to fulfill the mission of the Church in spite of what is taking place nationally. Or in Matthew's account of Jesus' words, being mindful, "*You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light so shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.*" [Matthew 5:16]

It is in this light that in addition to the program development of our Christian Education commission this past year, we have also seen significant programs offered by the Commission on Addiction and Recovery under the leadership of Reece Middleton (Holy Cross, Shreveport); the Cursillo community, headed by Ed Ryland (St. Thomas, Monroe), has held two excellent weekends this past year, and this past month held the Diocesan Ultreya in a new format and a larger turnout; Daughters of the King are doing a splendid expansion of ministry that included this past year the formation of several chapters in Honduras, and under the new presidency of Denise Rox (St. Timothy's, Alexandria) they will host the Province VII Spring Assembly this next year in Alexandria; and the ministry of the Brotherhood of St. Andrew is growing with the addition of chapters in the diocese this past year. I give thanks to Kevin Bordelon (St. Timothy's, Alexandria) in his capacity as diocesan coordinator.

This convention cannot pass without recognizing the ongoing ministry of the Episcopal Church Women, and the present Board headed by Cathie Fincher (St. Thomas, Monroe). The ECW was well represented at the Triennial held in Anaheim in conjunction with General Convention, and has held two outstanding weekends at Camp Hardtner - the Time for Joy retreat, and the Celebration of Women's Ministries.

Our Education for Ministry program recognized several graduates from this four-year program this past Spring, and the EFM program has expanded over the past couple of years under the mentorship of Brenda Milam (St. Michael's, Pineville). Brenda is also responsible for the efforts of our Stewardship Commission and she has done an exemplary job with several of our congregations this past year.

And speaking of education, we have had at least two congregations this year that undertook intentional training through the Commission on Evangelism and chair, Canon Dee Drell. While at the same time the Diocesan School of Theology, which is located at the Bishop's Centre for Ministry reported an increased enrollment, and in fact, later in this day we will share in the granting of certificates to three of the students who have completed the full curriculum of the school. I continue to be grateful the Rev'd Dr.

William G. McBride, who serves as dean of the school while fulfilling his responsibilities as rector at St. Matthias, Shreveport. The Institute for Lay Ministry, another extension of the Bishop's Centre for Ministry has provided a number of training programs this past year under the direction of Canon James D. Boyd, M.D., (St. Mark's Cathedral) and director of the institute. Canon Boyd also provided the coordination with our Liturgy and Music commission for the fine liturgy experienced at St. Francis Xavier Cathedral yesterday, and the service at Mount Olivet this morning. On behalf of us all, I want to thank Kathy Dungan, Cissy Galloway, Charlotte Sterling, and Roy Rosenthal for their work as the Convention Altar Guild, and to Missy Allen for her design work in the production of our convention liturgies booklet.

As we will hear from Pat Higgins, executive director of Hardtner Camp and Conference Center, the Board of Trustees chaired by Deacon Boo Kay and the camp employees have had a significant year. I am personally pleased with the effort these folks have expended on behalf of the youth of our diocese and the Diocese of Louisiana. Once again the Summer Camping Committee oversaw an excellent summer program, and I offer my thanks to Fr. Whit Stodghill (St. Andrew's, Mer Rouge and Redeemer, Oak Ridge) and the camping staff for this great program.

Also in keeping with Camp Hardtner is the gracious gift that was acknowledged a couple of months ago, and this being a one-half million-dollar gift from the Hardtner/Blake Foundation to establish an endowment fund for the maintenance of Hardtner Camp and Conference Center. We are so very grateful for this demonstrated generosity and stewardship.

While on the subject of youth, we have indeed been blessed by the leadership of Debbie Slater (St. Mark's Cathedral) as she assumed the role of chair of the Commission on Youth and Young Adult Ministry from Monet Brashear. Monet served this ministry well for many years and for this I give thanks. The work of this commission has expanded under Debbie's leadership this past year and for this I am most grateful, and give thanks also for the presence of McKenzie Pugh (St. Mark's Cathedral) in her role as Provincial Youth Representative for our diocese. Not to be overlooked are all those who labour on our behalf with the Safeguarding God's Children training program across the diocese.

One of the ministries showing growth is that of our Commission on International Mission. Tom Dalton (St. Paul's, Shreveport) is chairing this work, but this entire area of ministry is a team effort on the part of many from across the diocese. You may recall that last year I asked everyone that was involved in mission work to stand, and much to my surprise almost everyone on the convention floor stood. I am not going to do that this year for I know the number is even greater. Our work in the Dominican Republic has expanded with a new medical mission site established there, and two teams will return there again this next July with Dr. Richard Campbell (St. John's, Minden) directing the efforts. I am pleased to say that Susan and I will return to the Dominican as a part of this journey.

The ministry to Honduras has been challenged of late due to political unrest, however, Bishop Lloyd Allen has given provisional clearance to Dwain and Georgia West (St. Timothy's, Alexandria) to make the trip there this January.

Looking beyond our borders to the regions of Africa, Dennis and Verda Anders (Grace, Monroe) are very instrumental in the work of Hesed Ministries in Kenya, East Africa. Deacon Polly Anderson (Bishop's deacon) continues to do much with the Mustard Seed Babies project and this work has grown with the help of Tom Dalton (St. Paul's, Shreveport) and has increased the ministry in Uganda, and particularly the area of Hoima.

Through our budgetary commitment with Millennium Development Goals, we have worked directly with an orphanage in Haiti, and this past year were able to fund a project which has brought them fresh water for the first time.

It pleases me that several of our Canterbury ministries are growing and the fruits of their labour is visible. This is not the case with all, and in turn Diocesan Council will look at each of these campus ministries in the coming year as we review diocesan funding. One area that has shown significant growth this year is the Canterbury work at Grambling, and much is to the credit of Fr. Thomas Nsubuga, vicar of St. Luke's Chapel. Susan and I will join with this mission family for the celebration of their 50th anniversary on October 18.

In a few weeks the Commission on Spiritual Formation will be offering their annual retreat, and this event is coordinated by the Rev'd Paula Claire Hall, chair of the commission and the commission members, and has shown growth this past year.

Also in a few weeks the hurricane season will be drawing nigh to conclusion, and for this we give thanks. We also give thanks to the Rev'd Elizabeth R. Ratcliff (Calvary, Bunkie) for her role as Disaster Relief Coordinator and contact person for Episcopal Relief and Development.

And our light continues to shine from the lampstand as we celebrate the expanding ministry of St. Luke's Medical Van ministry, a project sponsored by the Shreveport Convocation that is providing medical care in the Shreveport/Bossier City area as well as into the Delta region and St. Joseph; and with the benefit of this light we can see so many, many various local ministries touching nooks and crannies all about the diocese, and bounding from some of our smallest congregations to some of the largest as the quality of ministry outweighs their respective sizes. We are privileged to have some members of the team and the van here at convention this weekend, and I trust many of you will take the time to visit the mobile unit and convey your thanks to those on duty. *[Note: The medical van was not present after all due to severe weather conditions.]*

Another new area of ministry is that of the immigration work being done through a joint

effort of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Alexandria, the United Methodist Conference of Louisiana, and our diocese. This project is designed to provide assistance with the various processes involved as local immigrants seek to become settled here. This endeavour has been in the works for some time, and continues in a developmental stage, but is progressing with the help of Northern and Central Interfaith. We are represented through the work of Canon Larry Wilkes, and up until this past week, the participation of Rita Klock (St. James, Alexandria).

Each of the examples cited, and the many not, is the continuing work of *“Making a path for the Lord.”* Brothers and sisters, this is work that has been entrusted to us, work that is expected of us, not a selective option in the event we don’t like what is happening beyond our borders. I have said, and will continue to say, that if we place our displeasure with the behaviour of others ahead of the ministry to which God has called us to in this diocese, then shame, shame on us. Ours, like Isaiah’s may well be *“The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.’”* [Isaiah 40:3] *“A voice says, ‘Cry!’ And I said, ‘What shall I cry?’ All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows upon it; surely the people is grass. The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand for ever.”* [Isaiah 40:6-8]

We as a diocese will go forward, and again, I trust it is expressed this day in the endorsement in principle of the Anglican Covenant.

We as a diocese will work in the coming year on developing a plan for differentiating us from that which is contrary to the ministry placed before us, and the authority of Scripture under which this ministry is empowered.

We as a diocese will be participating in the Dioceses in Missional Relationship in response to Resolution B030 of General Convention 2009. This will be done initially with at least six or seven other dioceses and preliminary work will begin on this the first week of November. I am pleased to say that Fr. Guido Verbeck (St. Paul’s, Shreveport) and Cindy Fisher (Grace, Monroe) have accepted my invitation to join with Susan and me for this initial meeting.

Yes, *“Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places plain.”* [Isaiah 40:4] The prophet Isaiah is describing the difference between a good road and a bad road, and on the road which Isaiah holds before us *“the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”* [Isaiah 40:5]

Why do we stay where we are at this time? In order for our light to shine and the efforts of our collective commitment provide the course that will enable us to continue to *“Make a path for the Lord”* and for him to be glorified in all that we do.

Now, before closing, permit me to first and foremost, thank our guest preacher and his wife, Bishop Don and Wendy Wimberly. They are not only guests, but cherished friends, and Susan and I give thanks for their place within our lives and their presence with us this weekend. Almost born in this diocese (Baton Rouge), he has been a bishop for almost as long as I have been ordained. This is not to imply he is old, but rather, that he just started very young.

For those who were with us for the convention dinner last evening, you had the privilege of learning of my choice for the Bishop's Mount Olivet Award, and my joy in naming Joseph P. McKee of Leesville the recipient. Joe, as many heard last night, has served unselfishly and endlessly for the good of the Leesville and Fort Polk communities, and we give thanks to God for his faithful witness on behalf of us all.

Now in closing, I want to say once again that it is my honour to serve as your Bishop, and to share with you for these past "almost" seven years in the ministry that God has entrusted to us. I pray we will always be mindful that it is not our ministry, but our Lord's, and that we are truly blessed to be here together.

As always, an important part of this ministry are those who labour with me at Diocesan House each day, and for whom I am indeed thankful, and they are Dianne White, Kathy Richey, and Canon Larry Wilkes, and for Bob and Maryse Harwell who share in this work with us from afar, Shreveport.

The last person, who is really the first person, is my beloved wife, Susan, who is truly a helpmate in the ministry we share and to which God has called us. Please join me in showing our appreciation for all she does on behalf of us all.

Let us pray.

"O Christ, it is no wonder that in every age men and women catch a glimpse of your splendour and become your followers. Though we are among the least of all people, common folk bearing no great distinction, you stand at the threshold of our lives with the promise that our barren lives can yield unexpected grace. Even though we have laboured through long and fruitless hours, though we claim no talent and feel unworthy to bear your love into the world, you still call, pouring the fullness of divine care into such unwitting vessels as we are. As you directed the disciples to a great catch of fish, you can wrest forth a surprising harvest in our lives as well. O Christ, may your gracious promise to us not be in vain. Grant us an openness and eagerness to follow you and to show forth God's glory to the world. Send us out now in order that we may make a path for you, O Lord of Lords, and King of Kings. Amen." [drawn and adapted from All the Seasons of Mercy, 1987]

Thank you.