

Address to the  
Twenty-seventh Annual Diocesan Convention

Saturday, October 14, 2006  
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Bishop  
*The Episcopal Diocese of Western Louisiana*

Holiday Inn Convention Centre Hotel  
*Alexandria, Louisiana*

**"One Lord, one faith, one baptism ..."**  
*Ephesians 4:5*

The Lord be with you.

*"O Risen Christ, you go before us and have always gone before us. Born as an infant, you assumed all of our helplessness. Growing as a child into adulthood, you endured the trials and enjoyed the joys of our lives. Living and working in Galilee, you learned the frustrations and the boundless hungers of human life, the temptations that entice us, and the splendors in which we find our lives hallowed and graced. Christ, you have gone before us into death, and risen to stand before us in splendor! We thank you and praise you, Gentle Saviour, for love that is one with us in compassion; for love that goes before us, opening the way of light and mercy; for love that stands before us, pointing the way, directing our steps and summoning us to follow. Amen. " [drawn from All the Seasons of Mercy]*

It is difficult to fathom that one year ago I stood before you endeavouring to maintain not only balance of thought, but balance period as I sought to hold myself upright on crutches. Much has taken place in these twelve months; many experienced a radical shift in their lives, and yes, sadly some have yet to recover from the ravages of Hurricane Katrina and Rita. As Susan and I have traveled about the diocese, and particularly across the southern portion, we witness a vast amount of recovery work yet to be done, and talk with folks who still are uncertain as to whether they will rebuild and return, or move on. Yes, I am speaking about people here in our midst, here in the Diocese of Western Louisiana. Yet there are so many outside of the diocese that believe the only real storm of damage was Katrina and that we were spared. But in the midst of these things, we have been blessed by the wonderful caring people who make their home amongst us, and continue to move forward.

I have paused and reflected upon the hundreds, yes hundreds, of people that were cared for at Camp Hardened over a period of almost four months, and the vast number of individuals and families that were provided not only a place to be, but the care and love of so many faithful people across the diocese and from a variety of different faith traditions. Competition was not existent, but rather, caring loving people of God that came together across ecumenical and interfaith lines in order to minister to those in need.

When Katrina made her entrance into Louisiana on August 29, the boundaries of our dioceses and different traditions melded as people focused on people seeking refuge, not canonical jurisdictions. The concern was not one of who is responsible or ought to be in charge, but rather, an overriding sense of the crying needs, and the knowledge that we all had to be a part of this. In an instant my heart went out to the people of Vermilion Parish as I realized they had been struck so severely, and yet, these were people, many of whom, were still struggling to rebuild their lives as a result of the damages wrought by Hurricane Lilly in 2002.

With the prayers, support and effort of so many from across the diocese and beyond, the multitude of evacuees were cared for and many given a new sense of hope and direction in their lives. The light was beginning to be seen at the end of the tunnel and the beginning of a degree of normalcy was coming about. But, as we all know well, this was not to be, for September 24 brought the onslaught of Hurricane Rita, and the face of our diocese was changed overnight and continues in transition today.

Once again the people of this fine diocese rallied and came forward in a multitude of ways as people ministered to one another and to the strangers in our midst. As I shared last evening at our convention banquet with well more than 200 people in attendance, those who helped out in significant ways are too numerous to name, but one person stood out especially, and this was Judy Bordelon of St. Timothy's, Alexandria. Judy virtually lived at Camp Hardtner for those three plus months and ministered to the needs of people at all hours of the day and night. It was my privilege last evening to honour her, and to name her the recipient of the "Bishop's Mount Olivet Award" for 2005. For her service and ministry, and that of the many people across our diocese who volunteered in many ways, I give thanks to God.

As a diocese we faced tremendous financial demands to meet the ministry needs of many; however, as previously shared, through the generous contributions of a vast number of people from across the diocese, the nation, and from abroad, God provided for us. Additionally, Episcopal Relief and Development and the Church Pension Fund provided important assistance for which I am grateful. An accounting of all of these funds was included in your convention packets, and as you will note, should we be faced with a natural disaster at some point in the future, we do have funds on hand to at least address this from the outset, as compared to this past year our funds were quite limited when we began.

In preparation for writing this address, I reflected back upon the past twelve months and offered thanks to God for the relative calm of the hurricane season this year. In pausing and reflecting upon these things, I could not help but notice the healing that has taken place in a variety of ways in follow up to the storms, and this includes my own personal physical healing. Depending upon the weather and other elements, including my knee and Susan, I am made very mindful that fence jumping is a thing of the past for me.

Spending time in the past couple of weeks to mull over these things enabled me to realize more vividly the many wonderful ministries that are taking place in the diocese. Some of

these are a result of the work of the church in the past, and some related to the church today. We have witnessed death and resurrection; the story of Christian faith and hope.

In my address last year I shared that St. Philip's, Boyce was now being used by a small neighbourhood Baptist mission. Out of the death and resurrection of St. Philip's, Mustard Seed Baptist Church is now in their second year of ministry to the local community. While the diocese retains title to the property, the needs of the youth in this small African-American community are being addressed through a ministry of this mission, and in turn, the outreach ministry of us all.

The closure of St. Nathaniel's, Melville two years ago has borne another resurrection story as the property, with the approval of the Executive Committee, has been deeded over to the Women's Club of Melville and is being restored for use as a community center. Seeing the joy this has brought to the community is heartwarming, and I am proud of us being able to respond to this local need in this manner.

Many will recall the closure a couple of years ago of the Church of Our Saviour, Lake Charles and the vision to have the site serve as an ecumenical ministry to the community. Plans were moving forward well toward this end when Hurricane Rita struck and rendered severe destruction to the facility. I give thanks to God that the construction and restoration work has been completed, the work signed off, and the building released to us just a week ago this past Tuesday. It is important to draw your attention to the generosity of the contractor on this project, Phil Martin of Sunbelt Contractors in Shreveport. When the job was completed, Mr. Martin came to us and donated the insurance deductible that we had the responsibility of paying, and this being a gift to the diocese of almost \$20,000. In the months ahead, my prayer is the Open Door Ministry will begin to blossom and together, we can witness the resurrection of a new ministry at this site and become the truly ecumenical ministry for which it has the potential.

Yes, over and over again, the fulfillment of Christian hope and faith through death and resurrection is relived, and as Luke has written, we "*are witnesses of these things.*" [Luke 24:48]

Speaking of restoration brings me to a moment of great joy on behalf of the entire diocesan family, and this is the restoration of Mount Olivet Chapel. Many know of the several attempts over a number of years to restore this important historical site. In fact, Mount Olivet is one of the top ten most historical and endangered sites in the state of Louisiana. As shared some months ago, after having shared a vision of the restoration of the Chapel and renovation of Diocesan House, a blessed benefactor responded with a gift of \$500,000 to enable this dream of many years, and on the part of many people, to come to fruition. I must state that when the project was announced, heartwarming words were received from across the state and from people of all traditions. The committee appointed to oversee this project is at work, the architect hired, and work has begun. At this juncture all of the furnishings and appointments have been removed and placed in storage, the building now, for the moment, is an empty shell. Having gone into the Chapel several times since the removal of everything,

and just standing there in the midst of this space, one cannot help but experience the holiness of this setting in the midst of angels and archangels.

Once the restoration of the building has been completed, and this including the refinishing of all of the furnishings, a grand service of rededication will take place. Following this, Mount Olivet will once again serve as the Bishop's Chapel, and a midweek Mass offered. Other anticipated use will include special services such as the annual installation of officers for the Diocesan Episcopal Church Women.

With respect to the storage of the furnishings, the needlepoint and other fine items have been placed in a climate controlled storage facility that we have rented, and the pews and all of the other furnishings have been placed in a commercial building in Alexandria. For the latter, I must extend thanks to the Carrozza family, proprietors of the two Critics Choice restaurants in Alexandria, for their generous gift of providing storage for the duration of the restoration at no cost to the diocese.

Through the witness of the church reaching out and doing ministry in fulfillment of the Gospel, lives are being touched as people experience the presence of the Kingdom of God, and in turn the community is joining us in tangible ways.

Many other signs of health are being experienced, but in many ways go unnoticed, but then, as Paul wrote to the people of Corinth, "*look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen; for the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.*" [2Corinthians 4:18]

It is through these unseen things that people lives are being nurtured and changed. Our new Commission on Spiritual Formation under the leadership of the Rev'd Paula Claire Hall of Grace, Lake Providence, is moving forward. They will kick off a major step in their ministry with a diocesan-wide spiritual formation conference and retreat in two weeks at Camp Hardtner. The Commission on Christian Education that was birthed this past year has already met several times as they work toward providing Christian education training and resources for all sizes of congregations. The commission, under the leadership of Dr. Cheryl White of St. Paul's, Shreveport, and professor at Louisiana State University at Shreveport, has an excellent website in place and linked to our diocesan webpage. This enables congregations of all sizes to go online and draw upon a multitude of curriculum offerings for all ages. Added to this will be a diocesan-wide conference on Christian education in the coming spring.

Plans are also underway with Judge Dee Drell, chair of the Commission on Evangelism, for a major evangelism conference in the first half of 2007, and working with the Commission on Ministry, I am in the process of preparing for a diocesan-wide conference on the diaconate. This is an area of ministry which I feel is misunderstood by many, and the conference will provide not only a learning setting for laity and clergy, but will prayerfully raise up some vocations for this servanthood ministry.

In the coming months the Institute for Lay Ministry will begin a series of training sessions in the convocations for the purpose of providing a uniform offering of training for the various licensed lay ministries. Dr. Jim Boyd, chair of the Commission on Liturgy and Music, is director of the institute and you will receive information on this from him.

Just three weeks ago the Commission on Stewardship sponsored an informative and valuable conference on the theology of stewardship as a "way of life lived" that was held at St. James, Alexandria. The conference was brought together by commission chair, Brenda Milam of St. James, Alexandria, and the approximately fifty people in attendance from around the diocese, were treated to an outstanding series of presentations by Terry Parsons, national stewardship chair and well sought-after speaker.

The recently held Celebration of Women's Ministries sponsored by the Episcopal Church Women once again provided spiritual nurturing for women as those present were blessed by the meditations offered by the Rev'd Deacon Diane Moore, and the musical presentations of B & B on the Rock. And I must add that we owe much to the diocesan ECW for all they do to raise up and enhance the ministry of women across the diocese and within their local congregations. Ladies, please know of my deep personal gratitude.

Utilizing the ECW as a segue to Hardtner Camp and Conference Center, let me share that Henton Hall is currently undergoing a renovation that is being funded by the diocesan ECW. Although not completed quite yet, the improvements made to date are truly noticeable.

In my address last year I shared that an anonymous gift had been received to provide for a full-time maintenance staff person for the first time in Hardtner history. As we heard yesterday from Pat Higgins, executive director, the fruits of this gift are most evident as you move about Camp Hardtner and see the wonderful work being accomplished by Cedric Holden. As Pat said to me, "Bishop, we had to wait a while, but it was sure worth the wait." To this I will add that we "had to wait a while" for the right executive director, but this was indeed well worth the wait, for Pat and his wife, Donna, have truly made an impact upon the life and ministry of our diocesan camp and conference center, and I give thanks regularly for their presence in our midst.

In the coming months you will note improvements being made to the grounds at Camp Hardtner, and much of this coming about through the Board of Trustees under the leadership of the Rev'd Deacon Boo Kay. Included in this will be a fire break which is desperately needed, and many of you are no doubt unaware of the terrible incident experienced during Hurricane Katrina involving a fire. At about 2:00 a.m., a fire approaching the camp grounds from the southeast threatened the evacuees at the camp. Unfortunately, at this hour of the morning, about 150 convalescent home patients that had been brought in by bus a few hours earlier from the New Orleans area, had to be loaded back up onto the buses and evacuated once again. Needless to say, this broke my heart as all I could think about was the frightening and harrowing time they were experiencing. But alas, all turned out well and they were returned to the camp. The funding for the fire ring will be coming from redirected pledges.

Also in keeping with Camp Hardtner, I am pleased to announce the receipt of another generous anonymous gift, and this for the purpose of completely repainting and re-carpeting the "Holy Day Inn." This renovation will begin in the next week or so, and will bring a much needed "face lift."

During the convention at St. Mark's Cathedral on October 23, 2004, I raised the question, "What will be the most important thing we can do during this period of time?" and this referring to the process that had been placed before us by the Anglican Consultative Council. My response was that we could "not be distracted by that which surrounds us; not allow ourselves to lose sight of the mission to which God has called us; continue to go forward as disciples of the Gospel, lifting up truth and a risen, living Christ; and importantly, doing ministry wherever the Spirit of God leads us." That which I have just shared are signs of this being fulfilled.

An important part of our ministry is that of *ALIVE!*, our diocesan newspaper. We are blessed through the ministry of Bob and Maryse Harwell in the area of communications, and much of what they do is indeed a ministry. In the coming months you will see a noticeable change in *ALIVE!* as we will be going with a different publishing company, better paper and the ability to utilize colour. Bob and I truly believe this will be appreciated by all. Another change with respect to *ALIVE!* is the institution of an advisory board. Bob and I have talked about this in the past months and I have already begun to make the appointments.

I am pleased to say that in addition to the myriad of ministry experiences that I have shared with you this day, the witness and ministry of the diocese has continued to blossom and grow. Our campus ministry is continuing to reach out to the young adults seeking a home away from home, and this most recently witnessed in the large number that gathered with me and others at Centenary College, Shreveport under the direction of the Rev'd Ben Songy. Monet Brashear and others have continued to build up the youth ministry across the diocese and two of our own have been selected to serve at the provincial level, Lauren Guillory of St. Paul's, Abbeville is a youth council member, and Monet Brashear of Holy Trinity, Sulphur was appointed to serve as chair of the Province VII youth work embracing twelve dioceses.

Our Summer Camping Program chaired by the Rev'd Canon Kirkland Knight of St. Mark's Cathedral, had a successful summer with tremendous participation, and especially in light of this following on the heels of the two hurricanes. The Rev'd Wayne Carter, rector of St. John's, Minden, has continued to represent me in ecumenical affairs and has also been elected to serve on the provincial level. Our Daughters of the King ministry continues to be one of the fastest growing in the country, and we have been represented well by Margaret Rachal of Polk Memorial, Leesville, and Carlene Riley of Grace, Monroe. Carlene has just completed a term as president of the Province VII Daughters, and I have just retired from six years as chaplain to the Province VII Daughters. Further leadership is being provided to the wider church by the Rev'd Deacon Boo Kay, headmaster at Bishop Noland School, Lake Charles, and chair of our Diocesan Commission on Schools. Boo is a member of the Board of Directors and accreditation team for the Southwestern Association of Episcopal Schools. As

such, this truly enhances her work with the schools across the diocese. The Rev'd Elizabeth Ratcliff, assistant at Calvary, Bunkie, is representing us well as the point person for Episcopal Relief and Development. In keeping with my comment yesterday, not only is she doing a superb job in this capacity, but also has done much for our diocese in her role as Disaster Relief Coordinator and the work of hurricane relief and education.

Another important ministry is the mission work that is being done in Honduras and the Dominican Republic. The mission trips from our diocese are continuing to grow and an additional medical mission to the Dominican Republic is being explored at this time. I am grateful for the work of Tom Dalton, chair of the Commission on International Missions and member of St. Paul's, Shreveport, and those who help provide leadership on these trips, the Rev'd Deacon Don Leger of St. Barnabas, Lafayette; Duane and Georgia West of St. Michael's, Pineville; and Dr. Richard Campbell of St. John's, Minden. Needless to say there are literally dozens of people without whom these trips would not happen.

Related to our mission work in the Dominican Republic is the story shared this past year, and endorsed by our Executive Committee, about the young girl named Crisla. The medical mission team first met Crisla a couple of years ago, and found that she had a tremendous disfiguring growth in her face. Further exploration revealed a massive tumour, which if not removed, would bring about her death due to suffocation. After more than one year of work and much effort on the part of several people, Crisla will be coming to Western Louisiana soon for life saving surgery. The five members of the diocesan mission team that have done so much in order for this to become a reality are Clare Nelson, Dr. Rhonda Webb and Dr. Bill Webb of St. Mark's Cathedral, Dr. Chester Finley of Epiphany, Opelousas, and Dr. Richard Campbell, St. John's, Minden. More information on this will follow in the next month, but recognition and thanks must be made to Dr. Ghali Ghali, Christus Schumpert Hospital, and Shriners Hospital all of Shreveport, and Angel Flight for donating all of the needed services to make this a reality. I might add that Dr. Campbell also serves with me on the Board of the Dominican Development Group, and for this I am grateful.

When I share this story about Crisla, I am repeatedly moved by the genuine caring nature of the people that represent the Episcopal Church in this diocese. Thanks be to God for their willingness to set all else aside and reach out with the compassion and love of Christ in order that Crisla may have life. May we, once again, be mindful through our shared ministry that indeed, and as Paul wrote to the people of Ephesus, there is, *"One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all. But grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift ... and his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, for the equipment of the saints, for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ until we all attain to the unity of faith ..."* [Ephesians 4:4-7,11-13]

Yes, we are people of God with a common thread woven through the fabric of our relationship with one another, and this is *"One Lord, one faith and one baptism."* [Ephesians 4:5] But something is wrong with the fabric, it is in danger of the thread being broken. This is not new. The early church was faced with this not once, but multiple times. However,

down through the ages the church has been drawn back to the source of that which sustains and strengthens us, God in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit!

Where are we and what are we doing? I am saddened by the increasing reports that I am hearing from within congregations of this diocese as people not only pit themselves against one another, but resort to public attack. We all need to pause and be mindful of that to which I called the diocese some months ago, and this being the corporate offering of the prayer attributed to St. Francis of Assisi, "*Lord, make us instruments of your peace. Where there is hatred, let us sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is discord, union; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy. Grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.*" [BCP p. 833]

My brothers and sisters in Christ, we must not let our differences tear the fabric of this diocese nor our community of faith. We must not let our differences destroy that which God has called us into, and this being a ministry of reconciliation. We must be mindful that "*the mission of the Church is to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ.*" [BCP p.855] Further, our Baptismal Covenant, just renewed yesterday, calls us to "*strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being.*" [BCP p.305]

To this end, I am going to be bringing together a group of clergy and laity in the days ahead to work with me in the development of a gathering, and at which we can both explore and plan a way in which we as a diocese can together live out that which God has entrusted to us, and to do this to his glory.

It is not just the church that is in danger, it is the society in which we live. Look around. What is happening to the moral fiber of the society in which we live, and what is the church doing to address this? I don't know about those of you gathered here this day in convention, but I know that I am personally distraught with the ever increasing violence and senseless killings that are taking place in school yards across the country, and many communities. This is not a cultural issue, but it is an issue of addressing the ills of society through the ministry of the church, and not just the Episcopal Church, but across denominational lines.

Some of you know that I chair the Faith and Order Commission of the Louisiana Interchurch Conference. Some of you may wonder what the Faith and Order Commission does. Well, I can tell you, we have spent time over the past few years addressing issues of baptism, confirmation and worship; the Anglican-Roman Catholic study on Mary; and Mutual Recognition and Mutual Reconciliation of Ministries to name just a few.

I have come to realize in the past couple of months that while these are important issues

ecumenically that unless we as the larger church, living in the context of "*One Lord, one faith, one baptism*" address the systemic issues before us all, the Gospel will have been abandoned. That which is before us are a violation of what God is calling us to be about.

I realize well the issues facing the Episcopal Church, and yes our diocese, and I will speak to this in a few minutes. But right now, I must confess to a deep and abiding concern for the environment in which we are exercising ministry and those who are affected by that which we do or do not do. What is our witness to a world that is presently functioning in a cruel and inhumane manner? Does the average un-churched person look upon not just the Episcopal Church, but other faith traditions, and observe the care and compassion of which Jesus taught and lived?

My commitment before you this day is that I am going to call upon the Louisiana Interchurch Conference for us to join together in addressing the issues that our young people are faced with. We must work together in facilitating change. To raise up an awareness of the need before us ... and before it is too late. In conjunction with this, I am calling upon the missions and parishes across this diocese to join with me in addressing the violence and lack of quality of life that exists in so many of our communities. To do this, we must focus on bringing a faithful witness of the Gospel into our midst, and move beyond our differences in order to make a difference.

Within the next thirty days I will be sending an invitation to every congregation in the diocese to join me in a meeting in order for us to begin to look at how we can pool our spiritual and financial resources. It is my vision that out of this meeting a task force will be borne and together, with our ecumenical brothers and sisters, we can begin to make a difference. Paul wrote to the people of Rome that "*there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and bestows his riches upon all who call upon him.*" [Romans 10:12]

What we experienced at dinner last evening with the Camerata Rapides is an example of the difference we can make, and Jude Geiger is to be commended for her work with these young people.

I realize that good works are being done through the Northern and Central Interfaith, and that some of our congregations are engaged in this work. But I also realize the participation represents less than 10% of our congregations.

If the mission to which God calls us to in Western Louisiana is going to be done, it is going to happen by us being mindful of our Baptismal Covenant; mindful of that which we stood boldly and renewed as we shared in the opening Eucharist yesterday morning; mindful that we must do this together, or in the words of Paul, "*If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together.*" [1 Corinthians 12:26]

If we really meant what we said yesterday, that we believe in God the Father; that we believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God; that we believe in God the Holy Spirit; that we will continue

in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, breaking of bread and in the prayers; that we will persevere in resisting evil, and yes, when we fall into sin, that we will repent and return to the Lord; that we will proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ; that we will seek and serve Christ in all persons, that we will love our neighbour as our self; and finally, that we will strive for justice and peace among all people, respecting the dignity of every human being, then we are going to have to pause and approach that which we are about differently.

As I shared a minute ago, our differences have already started to divide us from that which God is calling us to be about. Permit me to share a piece that is related to this, and this has to do with the various rumours that tend to float about. There is no health in any of us being perpetrators of rumours of any form. Much of what I am hearing is nothing other than unfounded fabrications of speculation, and of which I know with certainty, bear no factual basis whatsoever. This type of behaviour, and particularly on the part of a clergy person, does nothing more than contribute to the tear in the fabric of our community of faith, and I can assure you in the future this will be addressed as it comes to be ... for there is not health in it.

One particular example of this is a statement made at a recent clericus meeting and conveyed to me, and wherein it was stated that I had changed my position on the issues facing the church. I am not going to stand before you and reiterate my position for I believe you know it well, but can assure you that what I have said about the issues before the church and my position as it relates to these things have not shifted one iota. Where I have stood, I stand, and will continue to hold fast. I will not compromise my faith or relationship with Jesus.

Thus, before contributing to the rumour mill, I would urge us all to be mindful of James words in the letter bearing his name, "*So the tongue is a little member and boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire! And the tongue is afire.*" [James 3:5-6]

In the words of Paul to the Ephesians, we are called to a discipleship and faithful witness; the lifting up and proclaiming of the Word of God. We are called to do this in the context of "*One Lord, one faith, one baptism.*" [Ephesians 4:5] In the portion of scripture from which this is drawn, the setting to which Paul writes is one of instability. The stable factor was that God was one, and in turn this led to everything resting upon the foundation of the unity of God. The church today, as was the church at the time of Paul's imprisonment and writing of this letter, was one in body and in spirit and in the goal on which its hope is set because it owes allegiance to the one Lord and worships one God. Its unity is of the same order as the unity of Christ and of God.

"*One Lord, one faith, one baptism.*" Faith is the inward disposition of our heart, baptism the outward sign, by which we are joined to the one Lord. The theme of this convention has been drawn upon from the fifth verse of the fourth chapter of Ephesians. But pause and look with me for a moment at the verses which embrace this – verses four and six.

*"There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all. " [Ephesians 4:4-6]*

ONE! The word "one" is repeated seven times – one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God. As the early church wrestled with unity, so does the church of the twenty-first century. We, as those to whom Paul wrote are being called to unity. Yes, the church then as now was the broken body of Christ. But we are called to join together in one hope of salvation, and in the vision of the chorus of unity before the throne of Christ in Heaven. If we are truly going to be of God in Christ, then we must, through the Spirit of God, seek a way forward together.

This is what Jesus prays for in the portion of John known as "*Jesus' high priestly prayer.*" In this seventeenth chapter of John we have Jesus praying for himself, for his disciples, and for the church universal. He is praying for those whom he sees as a gift of God, and prays for their protection that they may be kept in unity of heart and mind sanctified in the truth ... to be made holy. It is here that Jesus prays for the church of the future, the whole company of the faithful won from the world through apostolic preaching. He prays for our unity in God that we may share in that fellowship which he and the Father share. This is Jesus' prayer for us today.

Do we fit the image of what he has portrayed? How are we going to go forward and be the faithful disciples that we are called to be in this portion of our Lord's vineyard? What is our next step?

Permit me to share my vision.

My brothers and sisters in Christ, we along with the larger church are truly at a place of division. There may be some that do not feel this way, but I can assure you that I am seeing it not only in the larger church, but yes, here in our own diocese. People on both sides are feeling set apart. This is not in keeping with that we have just heard that was drawn from Paul's Letter to the Ephesians nor in John's account of the Gospel.

Following General Convention 2003, I asked that we not allow ourselves to get into ditches on either side of the road, but rather, take to the road together and seek to fulfill that which God was calling us to be about in Western Louisiana, and this being the mission of his church, the building up of the Kingdom.

Now, following General Convention 2006, further erosion has set in. People are choosing sides and making alignments on both sides of the road. This is an impediment to the fulfillment of the Gospel. It is imperative that we establish a way forward together that is faithful to that which has been handed down to us through the ages.

Thus, as shared earlier in this address, I will be bringing together clergy and laity to share with me in the development of a gathering in order for us to begin a process of reconciliation and healing in the ministry we share.

I have previously shared why I feel it is important, in fact imperative, for us to embrace the Windsor Report as a diocese. Yes, there are people of either side who have concerns, but by embracing this document as delivered, we are simply saying that as the Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Western Louisiana, an integral part of the Episcopal Church in the United States of America, and constituent member of the Anglican Communion, in communion with the See of Canterbury, we want to be part of the continuing process called for by the Anglican Consultative Council and Archbishop of Canterbury. We are saying that we share with our brothers and sisters across the Communion in a desire to walk together as we allow the process of the Windsor Report to unfold before us, and as we do, live within the framework to which we have been called. Or in the words of Paul as he wrote to the people of Ephesus that we will "*make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*" [Ephesians 4:3]

Later today we will have before us resolutions pertaining to this, and passage is urged. For the past three years, I have called us to live into the process the Communion placed before us, and have reaffirmed my commitment for us to see this process through. What is before US is a part of this one and same process. It is not something new, nor something added.

Granted, I am identified as a "Windsor Bishop" as a result of the position that I took when the report came forth. In keeping with this I have participated with other bishops who support the acceptance of the Windsor Report as has been delivered to us. This has included my trip to Lambeth Palace this past May to meet with the Archbishop of Canterbury, and the most recent meeting at Camp Allen in Navasota, Texas. Repeatedly we have been assured of our recognition for being in full communion with the wider church, and this includes the congregations committed to our charge. Our endorsement this day of the related resolutions will not only affirm this on the part of the diocese, but will also affirm our desire to remain as a faithful part of the Episcopal Church in Communion with the See of Canterbury.

Again, I urge you to support the embracing of the Windsor Report as delivered to us by the Communion.

Permit me to draw toward the end by sharing the following. It is a story of a young lad that went to visit his Grandmother in the country out west. Following his arrival at the train station, he was walking with her toward town and suddenly, upon seeing the cowboys walking about, hollered out, "Grandma, look at all the bowlegged cowboys!" She was horrified and filled with embarrassment, and immediately upon arrival home, sat him down and explained to him the inappropriate nature of his comment. This having been done, she spent some time working on a refinement of his language. The next day as they walked in town, the same setting, the same cowboys, the lad shouted out, "Grandmother, what manner of men are these that walk with legs shaped like parenthesis?"

Yes, the words were appropriate, but in the heart of this young boy, the cowboys were still bowlegged.

I share this to draw our attention to the fact that we can seek to say all the right words, but it is our actions that will count and be counted.

Now in closing, I want to say once again that it is my honour to serve as your Bishop, and to share with you in the ministry that God has entrusted to us. It is not our ministry, but it is our Lord's and I truly feel we are blessed to be here together. An important part of this ministry are those who labour with me at Diocesan House each day, and for whom I am truly thankful, and they are Dianne White, Kathy Richey, and Canon Walt Friese. Lastly, and I believe all of you know this, but I am most grateful for the one whom God truly blessed me with, and this is my supporting helpmate and wife, Susan, and for this I offer thanks each day.

Let us pray.

*"Almighty Father, whose blessed Son before his passion prayed for his disciples that they might be one, as you and he are one: Grant that your Church, being bound together in love and obedience to you, may be united in one body by the one Spirit, that the world may believe in him whom you have sent, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen. " [BCP p.255]*