

+Philip M. Duncan, II Bishop
The Diocese of the Central Gulf Coast
The Convention Address
The 34th Convention of the Diocese
St. Paul's Church, Daphne, Alabama
18 February 2005

Engaging the World; Engaging God's Mission

+Let us pray:

"Help us O Lord, to become the master of ourselves that we may become the servants of others. Take our lips and speak through them. Take our minds and think with them. And then take our hearts and set them on fire with your love. Amen!"

I am pleased that this thirty-fourth Diocesan Convention of the Diocese of the Central Gulf Coast is my fourth year as your bishop. We have the opportunity to gather as the people of God in this place and celebrate our common life together. The mutuality of our ministry is focused in prayer that is corporate and communal as we seek to serve Christ through our mission and ministry. We are challenged in these times to both serve and lead the people God has invited to journey with us. What a blessing, honor and privilege that is for each of us as we engage in the ministry of Christ's reconciling love. "Engaging the World; Engaging God's Mission" is the theme of the convention and it calls us to not only respond to a world in need but also to be proactive to a world we believe needs to hear the Gospel and experience the love of Christ Jesus through the ministry of all the baptized within this community of faith. Who we are, what we do and with whom we engage in ministry and mission is important to the life and witness we make.

We are blessed to celebrate the work of the three agencies of the Diocese as visible signs of God's blessings. They are a living witness within our common life through the mission to which we are called by God. They are not incidental to our identity; in fact they are at the core of our historic and ongoing work and ministry in living out our communal faith together.

Beckwith Camp and Conference Center is located on a site that is a gift from God and the many people who over the years had the desire to make it a place of refuge and a haven for generations to come. The beginning of the environmental center, which is scheduled to open next year, and the numerous camps, conferences and retreats make this a lively center of learning and gathering to celebrate and share our Diocesan life together. It is about environmental stewardship. Christian hospitality is at the center of this ministry. For those who offer welcome and incorporation in this ministry, we are grateful. As we seek to expand our ministries, I invite each of you to participate in giving to the many opportunities for Beckwith's growth and spreading of the unique Beckwith experience for those we seek to serve.

Murray House, continues to offer ministry for those seniors who are nurtured by the environment of an Episcopal community and who desire Independent or Assisted-Living accommodations. "Aging is not for the faint-hearted" and we are blessed to minister with those who are living in community as those who hold the sanctity of life as a gift from God.

Wilmer Hall is working to ensure that its mission is keeping pace with the demands and needs of the resident children we are blessed to serve. A loving and caring environment is still an important part of what we offer as we share through our faith in the Christ of Compassion. The board, administration, staff, teachers, and volunteers all comprise that area of hope that wells up in the lives of those whom we touch. I continue to invite you individually and as congregations to become involved by both financial commitment and active participation in the life and work of this Home. Those who are working there and volunteering there need our ongoing support and commitment and thanks for a ministry well done. To that end, the Standing

Committee has called together a Focus Committee to enrich the possibilities of what we as a Diocese might envision for the future of this ministry.

We are blessed by the ministries that each of these agencies offers to those they serve on our behalf, for they are “Engaging the World; Engaging God’s Mission” with those people who are in our midst. The attention and care exercised by the staffs, administrators and boards of Beckwith, Murray House and Wilmer Hall are important and I value their work and continue to hold them and those they serve in my prayers.

My private and corporate prayer life has continued to be important to me and has sustained me from the time of my election as your bishop. It has been essential over these last several months. “Engaging the World; Engaging God’s Mission” has been reflective not only of the work through our many diocesan spiritual opportunities for growth but also through the action prayer can lead us to embrace. Prayer is relationship, it is growth, it is about ourselves and others within and outside the faith community. The Daughters of the King (DOK) are a powerful force for our mutual prayer life and are praying for the Episcopal Church, the Anglican Communion, the Diocese and our Convention throughout this weekend.

Many of us on the Diocesan staff are members of the “Blue Tarp Society” compliments of hurricane Ivan. A friend who flew over Pensacola said, he had not expected to see so many houses with swimming pools in our area. Those “swimming pools” are roofs covered with blue tarps. The Diocesan Office continues to reside temporarily at St. Christopher’s Church in Pensacola. I am grateful to the rector, vestry, and people of that congregation for their hospitality and welcome as we seek to rebuild the Duvall Center and move back into our permanent office space. It is our hope that transition will be accomplished within the next eight months.

Equally, I want to thank all of you for your prayers and kindnesses to the staff and me as we continue to live with the losses that most of us have experienced. Some of us have begun to rebuild our homes while others still wait for that process to begin.

Each year I thank the staff for their work and generous giving of self to the ministry and mission we share together in the diocese. This year is an exception. Not only has the staff worked long and hard to complete the ministry before us, they have done so under very difficult situations. We as a community are blessed by having them with us and I am proud and pleased that God has called us together for the work of the Gospel in this place. David Clothier, Jennifer Godwin, Gloria Hicks, Carmen Kimmons, Mary Poss, Peter Wong, Canon Mark Dunnam and Vince Currie you have blessed us with your moving forward, taking charge, and getting the job done; well done! Thank you each and every one of you!

None of us is homeless. We may be out of our dwellings, but we have places to stay and for that we give thanks. There are more than 51,000 people within our area who are out of their homes. We are a community in transition and that allows us as a Christian Community to focus in a different way in living out our ministries. I commend the work of Rebuild Northwest Florida and those governmental and interfaith agencies in both Florida and Alabama which are working to repair, rebuild and restore our communities along the Central Gulf Coast. I also want to thank those congregations who were affected by Ivan for their continuing witness throughout this time of rebuilding and repairing. Our concern has been for that to happen in a timely fashion. Equally, we are concerned for the needs of the people throughout the diocese whose lives have been very much affected by this event. The response of the Episcopal Relief and Development agency of the Church has been most helpful and for their gifts and the gifts which have come into our diocese from the Church throughout our country, I express our profound thanks at this time. We have received more than \$150 thousand and distributed to date more than \$120 thousand in grants to meet emergency and care needs.

I would be remiss if I did not also mention the outpouring of prayers, gifts and monies from the people and congregations of this diocese to those congregations in need, as well as very generous and substantial giving to those in Southeast Asia who were devastated by the Tsunamis at the end of last year. I thank each of you for your caring and your giving in this important and personal way.

Last year at the Diocesan Convention the Cathedral Committee presented an enabling resolution which, through a Diocesan canonical change, approved the establishment of a cathedral system in our diocese. Throughout this past year the Committee continued its work as it functioned to select a site for the Cathedral. I am pleased to announce that they have completed their work and for their work and the outcome, I am most grateful. The process was involved and lengthy as several congregations throughout the diocese were considered as the possible Cathedral. The Committee chose to employ a system of data collection that was used to inform their discussions and decision. This included information on the practical and necessary requirements for the cathedral and the assets that each considered congregation possessed. We believed it was helpful to consider the demographics, the aesthetics of the facility, seating capacity, meeting rooms, available parking, parish hall, offices, kitchen, conference rooms, chapel availability for the diocesan use, diocesan ownership of property and the congregations desire to function as a cathedral. After a process of discernment and conversation with the rector, the vestry and a congregational meeting, Christ Episcopal Church, Mobile has accepted my invitation to become the cathedral pending this Diocesan Convention's approval of the Cathedral Resolution #4, as specified by Canon 27 of our Diocesan Canons. I am grateful for their trust in our Episcopal Church and our diocese and for the support they have given the diocese as we have sought to move forward in this relationship. Their sense of hospitality and inclusion will welcome us all into their community of faith and grace. On Saturday morning the Cathedral Committee will present the resolution naming Christ Episcopal Church, Mobile as Christ Church Cathedral, Mobile. I am very grateful for the work of the Cathedral Committee and for the attention and thought they have given to this project. Our product is evidence of their care and concern, and I want to acknowledge their very fine work at this time. It is no surprise that the attention to detail exercised by The Rev. Albert Kennington was superb and his leadership commendable. To say that no stone was left unturned nor a page unread would be an understatement. With my deepest thanks to this Committee for a job well done and presented to us, I simply say, "Thank You one and all for your gift to us in this fine effort." The Rev. Albert Kennington will present the resolution today on behalf of the Committee and with the adjournment of this Convention the Cathedral Feasibility Committee will be "Discharged with thanks," their work having been completed.

As Bishop, my daily log reflecting my activities from the 1st of January 2004 to the end of the year, I file by title. Also, filed by title is the summary list of my official Episcopal acts. Both of these records will be printed in the Diocesan Journal. Additionally, I file by title the official list of clergy of the Diocese which can be found on pages 8 through 10 in your Convention packet.

Since the last annual convention, the following have died within the Diocesan clergy family. **The Rev. John R. Scheel** (Jack), retired, read for orders and served in Alaska and Virginia before moving to Fort Walton Beach, Florida where he served at St. Simon's Church for almost 30 years. He was canonically resident in the Diocese of the Central Gulf Coast and for his ministry we give thanks. **The Rev. Lee J. Humphrey**, retired, was canonically resident in the Diocese of Western Louisiana and who with his wife Shirley lived in Pensacola, Florida where he has served in various congregations throughout our diocese and in building up the Body of Christ in many congregations. **Mrs. Martha Metcalfe Barnes Hill**, widow of **The Rev. William R. Hill**, was a member of our diocese and worked with her husband for many years at St. James, Fairhope, Alabama. She gave throughout her life to the work of our church. **Mrs. Jean Brimley Newton**, wife of The Rev. Albert (Bert) Newton, attended St. Paul's Church, Daphne. Her funeral will be this Saturday afternoon following the Convention. Canonically resident in the Diocese of Alabama she served with her husband who was the rector of All Saints',

Montgomery, Alabama for 28 years.

Please stand in silence as we remember these persons and their living witness as a part of our Diocesan family (silence).

REQUIESCANT EN PACEM

“Into paradise may the angels lead you. At your coming may the martyrs receive you, and bring you into the holy city Jerusalem. + May their souls and the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen!”

We are blessed to be present here at Saint Paul’s Church in Daphne for this convention, and give thanks for those who in 1925 had the foresight to purchase land for the building of an Episcopal Church. The first Church was built as a memorial by the Malone family honoring their son and it was consecrated in 1928 by Bishop McDowell of Alabama. There followed a succession of clergy who served this mission congregation until 1952 when The Rev. John Scott Marks became vicar and guided its spiritual destiny until his retirement in 1971. During this time, land was purchased in the Lake Forest area and a church building was erected in 1972, the same year The Rev. David Barney became vicar. As the church grew rapidly, other facilities were constructed and by 1979 Bishop Murray consecrated those structures and celebrated the congregation becoming a parish. The Church continued to grow under the leadership of The Rev. Larry Thornton, rector from 1982-1989, and then The Rev. Richard Schmidt, rector from 1990-2000. The present Church was built in 1995 and The Rev. Thack Dyson became the rector in 2001. These are exciting times for St. Paul’s Church with its numerous outreach ministries and parish pastoral care, Christian education and life offerings and opportunities to serve others. We thank the Rector, The Rev. Thack Dyson, The Rev. Bert Newton, Priest-Associate and The Rev. Walt Howard, Deacon and the many people who have made this convention possible. On behalf of this Convention, our thanks to the co-chairpersons, Glenn Boom and Ken McNamara, for their work in the “gathering of the family.” Please share with St. Paul’s congregation our appreciation for your most generous hospitality while “**Engaging the World; Engaging God’s Mission.**”

Our theme is a way to consider our ongoing work in this diocese for this year. We are reminded that our Diocesan mission and ministry moves us beyond our various stages of work and centers us within the life of the congregation, the Diocese and the global Church.

During the past two years many have been distressed by unfolding events within our Communion. Following our General Convention in 2003, the Archbishop of Canterbury, at the request of the Primates, established a special commission to report to the Anglican Communion on various aspects of our common life together in community. This past fall, under the leadership of Archbishop Robin Eames of Ireland, the Windsor Report was made public and is currently in the process of being received, studied, discussed and evaluated by the various entities within the structure of the World Wide Anglican Communion. Later this month, the Report will be received by the Primates Meeting and will respond directly through our Primate, The Most Rev. Frank Griswold, to the Episcopal Church. They will share their desire for a response to aspects within the Windsor Report and to the actions of our General Convention that have seemed to many both precipitous and to strain the “bonds of our mutual affection.” The report is lengthy, complex and involved, and was offered as “part of a pilgrimage toward healing and reconciliation.” I think it is a good Report. It is not perfect and not without error, but then whom among us could claim that for ourselves? I ask your prayers for those who will be called upon to deal with this document and those of us who find this a painful time in the life of the Episcopal Church and the Communion. I was reminded several weeks ago that when the Church is right, God is in charge and when the Church is wrong, God is in charge! God is in

charge and I believe the health of our Episcopal Church and our Anglican Communion is good. We are not perfect, but as people of good faith we are working and praying together as we seek to hear the voice of God in these times. God is in charge and we pray God will give us all the hearts, ears, and words to become more the living Body of Christ.

Youth work continues under the leadership of the Commission on Youth Ministry and Peter Wong, the Diocesan Coordinator for Youth Ministries. The National Youth Event (EYE), this summer in Berea, Kentucky, and our diocesan events are an important and visible sign of Christ's love and generosity. I plan on being at the EYE this summer as I was three years ago and ask you to encourage your young people to also attend. The work of the Commission on Campus Ministry continues to expand and for that I am grateful. Our vision for this ministry also includes work on our military bases scattered throughout this diocese. We do not lack a vision but we are now dependent upon the financial support and generosity of gifts from outside our budget equal to the task.

The Commission on Christian Education and the Commission on Church Growth and Evangelism will work to bring in quality speakers as they have done in the past so that we all may learn and grow together in the faith.

The Commission on Ministry continues to do thorough and impressive work to encourage discernment and formation for those called to the ordained ministry from within our diocese. We have seminarians at The General Theological Seminary, The Virginia Theological Seminary, Seabury Western Theological Seminary, Berkeley Divinity School at Yale and The Episcopal Theological Seminary of the Southwest. I continue to be pleased and proud of their work and progress. This spring, five seminarians will return to our Diocese and be ordained as transitional deacons and one individual will leave our Diocese to begin the three years of seminary training. The Commission on Ministry continues to work on the implementation of the new canons on ministry and a permanent diaconate program. The latter is consuming more time than any of us imagined as we continue to work on the full process for ordained servant ministry.

Hispanic/ Latino Ministries have not yet begun within our Diocese. That is a need and a ministry which brings us to "Engaging the World; Engaging God's Mission" for Spanish language speakers are in our midst and I believe we are called to serve them in the name of God.

The Commission on the Environment and the Integrity of Creation is working on various programs and along with the Beckwith program, we will be hearing from them later this year.

The Commission on Conflict Transformation continues its work in helping resolve seriously conflicted situations when invited to do so. Confidentiality is an important part of that ministry in order to foster trust and facilitate reconciliation.

The Commission on Clergy Wellness ministers with clergy and clergy families so that our leaders are healthy and whole people of God. The Rev. Bob Graves is the part-time chaplain to the retired clergy and spouses, and surviving spouses. With the number of new clergy in the Diocese the work of the Fresh Start program assists and supports in the transition process and helps them in getting to know the Diocese and clergy with an emphasis on collegiality and shared collaborative ministry. I thank our clergy for their work and ministry. There are a number of new clergy in our midst and we celebrate your presence among us. There are times that we get tired and feel overburdened. It is Christ's ministry we all share and I want you to know that you are appreciated and valued as a vital part of the ministry in this diocese.

The Committee on Clergy Continuing Education continues to encourage the ordained in renewal, growth, and enhancement needed for maturation in the practice of ministry. For those who have been in the ordained ministry awhile I want to encourage you and your vestries to begin conversations about sabbatical work. This is important and I would be pleased to come

and speak with vestries about this opportunity for your priests to study, grow and deepen in their faith while taking time to be refreshed and grow in Christ's grace.

The Commission on Health Ministries includes programs for the homeless, the aged, children at risk, those living with HIV/AIDS, migrant farm workers, and the marginalized within our various communities. The parish nurse program continues to be a vital part of this ministry as it directly impacts the congregation. The Commission on Recovery offers its quiet work as a supportive ministry to those of us who live daily with addictions. It responds to needs and offers education and support as the Church's response to "those who are our neighbors."

The Commission on Stewardship wants to assist every congregation with programs for stewardship campaigns. The Commission on Planned Giving offers a Planned Giving Manual that can assist churches in the area of gift planning and setting up endowment funds. Stewardship is about our commitment to giving to God, through God's Church, a portion of the gifts with which we have been blessed.

February is Black History month and it is a time to learn, reflect and give thanks for those men and women within our Church whose voices have led the way for equality and full inclusion for all people into the work and ministry of the Body of Christ. "Looking back is a good thing, as long as we don't stare." The 203rd anniversary of the life and ministry of The Rev. Absalom Jones, the first African American priest in the Episcopal Church, was observed in many congregations this past weekend. (Absalom Jones Day was observed on Sunday, February 13th). We give thanks for St. Cyprian's Church in Pensacola and Good Shepherd Church in Mobile for their visible witness that each of us "respect the dignity of every human being." I have been much moved by the book, *"Claiming God Reclaiming Dignity"* by Edward Wimberly, and offer it to each of us as a work that models conversation and action on a personal and community level. The Diocesan Commission on Racial Reconciliation will continue to offer anti-racism training to the congregations of the Diocese this year and I encourage you to take advantage of this opportunity.

The scope of the Commission on World Mission and their work with The Diocese of Guatemala continues to be an area that needs our prayers and caring. It is my desire, this year, to enter a new formal Companion Relationship with an overseas diocese, that will lead us into partnership ministries of "Mutual Responsibility and Interdependence" with those from whom we can give and receive within the Christian Gospel and "Our Bonds of Affection." To that end, I will appoint a committee to research, establish and implement the beginnings of a new Companion Relationship within our Anglican Communion. I thank those who, over the past years, have been on numerous medical mission trips and share with you the importance of those ventures into areas of need and concern. I believe the time has come to broaden the scope of that ministry as we seek ways to strengthen our Episcopal/Anglican partnerships even as we continue to meet real human needs.

At this time, I offer my sincerest thanks to Bishop Henry Parsley from the Diocese of Alabama, who was our preacher at the opening Eucharist last evening; Bishop Sam Hulsey, retired from the Diocese of Northwest Texas, and who as our visiting bishop for the month of February is also our Convention chaplain and will lead us in Noonday prayers today. The Rt. Rev. and Rt. Hon. George Carey, retired Archbishop of Canterbury, will be the preacher at the Saturday morning Eucharist. We thank each of you for the apostolic gifts you bring to us and for your witness among us and your commitment to our church and its mission. At this time I also send our greetings to the two previous bishops of this Diocese, Bishop George Murray and Bishop Charles Duvall who remain in our prayers and deep affection. Additionally, I express my thanks to the Rev. Keith Brown and Dr. Matthew Parker for their willingness to share with this Church and especially our Diocese from their perspective on Church Growth and Evangelism later this afternoon.

My vision continues to seek opportunities for ministry, mission, evangelism, and outreach

opportunities for our diocese. Budget constraints are a part of the ongoing financial state of the Diocese.

Even though Congregations gave more than they pledged for 2004, Income from Congregations was less than the previous year, for the third year in a row. For the first time in the history of the Diocese, Parishes and Missions “redirected” some pledges to the Diocese, so that none of those Redirected Pledges went to the Episcopal Church, The Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society. In 2004, approximately \$265,000 in pledges were “redirected”. In 2005, the initial figure for Redirected Pledges is \$160,796. We will continue to accept these pledges and honor those wishes.

Notwithstanding the Redirected Pledges, we have been balancing the Diocesan Budget by reducing giving beyond ourselves. Until 2003, the Diocese gave its full asking to the Episcopal Church and a total of 25% of its Income from Congregations for work beyond itself. We ask parishes and missions to support that effort by giving 20% of their plate and pledge to the Diocese. In 2003, we reduced our giving to the Episcopal Church to \$300,680 and our total outside the Diocese to 20%. In 2004, these figures were \$396,303 reduced to \$175,000 for the Episcopal Church for a total of 13.5 percentage giving outside the Diocese. The 2005 budget is balanced by reducing the Episcopal Church from an asking of \$356,138 to a pledge of \$181,500, and giving beyond ourselves at 12.7%.

As I have said the last few years, this is not sound stewardship. We do have strong worthwhile programs in the Diocese, and I would hope, opportunities for even more. However, we must turn our attention to work beyond ourselves if we are to be true to the biblical mandate to “Love your neighbor as yourself.” (BCP p. 351) and “Go therefore into all the world and make them my disciples...” (Matthew 28:19).

I would appreciate your prayers, comments and suggestions, as we work towards renewed giving in this Diocese. Giving with open hearts and hands.

The ministry and gifts offered by the two chancellors from Alabama and Florida have been important to the ongoing diocesan life we share. My thanks to Don Partington and Jim Newman for their giving wise counsel throughout this past year. They have looked after our temporal matters and for that we are grateful and blessed. As Jim Newman concludes his chancellor’s duties, I want to recognize his many gifts and talents which he shared during these last several years. Thank you Jim for being there and for being an advisor and witness in the faith.

We are called to the task of “Engaging the World; Engaging God’s Mission” that others may come to know Christ in our midst. “We can do more! We can do better!” “For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, or things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us for the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:38-39) We are called together so that we will seek and serve Christ in all persons in all places for the glory of His Holy Name and for the blessing of the world to which we are called to minister. I thank each of you for your faithfulness and ministry this past year. The vision and the promise continue before us. God bless us and give us His peace as we do his will and work. Amen!