

+Philip M. Duncan, II Bishop
The Diocese of the Central Gulf Coast
The Convention Address; 23 February, 2007
The 36th Convention of the Diocese
St. James' Church, Eufaula, Alabama

“Preparing a Place”

+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!”

This is my sixth opportunity as your bishop to address the Diocese meeting in convention. We meet to experience our common life in Christ and to give thanks for the ministry we share in proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus, and faithfully offering the sacraments as we live out that mission, as we use the gifts given to us by the power of the Holy Spirit, as we seek to serve Christ in all persons. Our community is strengthened by the gifts we share both individually and collectively, for this work of ministry and the building up of the Body of Christ. “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” (I Cor. 12: 7) As I have expressed before, my daily prayer continues in offering “thanks for our congregations’ corporate life and the fellowship we embody as God’s people,” sharing our gift of leadership and service as we proclaim in our words and in our deeds the Gospel to all of God’s people. “Our common task continues as we remember the past, vision the future, and serve God in the present through our journey together.”

Kathy Miller in Alabama and Don Partington in Florida, have for this past year continued sharing their gifts and expertise with the Diocese as our two Chancellors. I appreciate their counsel which helps enable and facilitate our ministry. This year Don Partington’s term as chancellor ends and I will be asking this convention to approve my nomination for his replacement for that position. I again request that each congregation secure an “in-house chancellor,” to help ensure that appropriate legal advice is available in our local settings. To those who have agreed to serve as parish and mission chancellors, I express my thanks, knowing this gift is an important addition to the ongoing corporate life of congregation.

Our three Diocesan agencies continue to serve and minister on our behalf. **Beckwith Camp and Conference Center** witnesses to the power of the Gospel in a beautiful, “on the Bay,” setting where the staff welcomes and facilitates Christian hospitality to all those who visit. We are now engaged in the environmental educational program Coastal Wonders. What a wonderful opportunity we have to share with young people, and indeed all people, the theology of the Stewardship of Creation using the gifts which God has given us in this special and holy place. The

physical plant expansion program is underway and various building projects are being initiated, are in progress and are being completed as we continue to live into the overall scope of the expansion. If you have not visited the Beckwith Campus in a while, please do. I believe you will be pleasantly surprised and proud of the work being accomplished and the ministry being lived out.

Murray House continues to fulfill its mission as a loving and caring Episcopal community, offering a gracious place to live to those who are in need of either independent or assisted living. We are always invited and welcome to visit the Murray House residents and bring them greetings from our congregations and their friends in Christ.

Wilmer Hall is undergoing some leadership changes, which will continue to facilitate this agency moving forward in its mission to serve, love, and care for resident children in an environment which affirms that they are loved by God in Jesus Christ and a caring Episcopal Community. These children are some of the most fragile in society and regardless of race, color, creed or background they are welcomed into our midst. I encourage each congregation and our members to seek ways of being involved and engaged in the ministry at Wilmer Hall. Christmas gifts, birthday gifts or a willingness to paint, patch and provide needed resources, will help ensure that this is truly a home for the children entrusted into our care. To those who have volunteered and continue to volunteer, I express my thanks for your witness in this ministry.

Our agencies can use additional funds to expand and strengthen existing programs and meet new opportunities for growth. If you would like to participate in the ministry of generosity, please speak with your clergy or with the Diocesan office or with Beckwith, Murray House or Wilmer Hall directly. I thank each of the agencies' staffs, administrations, and boards for the gifts they are and that which they bring to their work. I also share with you that they also continue in my daily prayers.

I have found this past year that my public and private prayer life is taking more energy and intentional work and time. I am not pleased with this dynamic and I find that in part, it is rooted in the discontinuity of anxiety focused on public, national and international issues over which we and they have no control and in which persons and congregations seem to find their personal and corporate chronic anxiety an acceptable form of living out the Gospel faith. It is not! It is a lack of trust in Jesus Christ and his love and grace, and a negation of hope which comes through the cross and resurrection of Jesus. Being grounded in that relationship is vital, essential and an integral part of my religious life. The theme of this convention is "Preparing a Place" which calls us to both action and being grounded in Jesus Christ as Lord. We are called to live in the certainty of that hope; not the uncertainty of our own making. In Christ the "Preparing" has, is and will be accomplished and the "Place" is with him. We are called to work in faith with Christ and bring others within the enfolding embrace of that love. It is work - Holy Work - that brings us closer to our Lord as we share what has been given and graced to us. When we do not share this - it dies in us.

When we do not give it away - we lose it and it becomes a tarnished possession hoarded in the vault of our misunderstanding. The generosity of God's love and grace is in Jesus Christ!

I suggest that prayer moves us into a deeper relationship with God and with each other. Prayer allows God to be God and "us to be us." Prayer moves us from our being into our doing, where God calls us to ministry. It is about having open hearts for others and open hands to serve others. We are served even as we serve, and that is a paradox of the Gospel, that Jesus came to serve not to be served - the Word in our flesh - Jesus; and like Jesus, we are called to become a part of the drama of salvation. "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth, and we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father." (John 1:14)

Over the past several years I have witnessed to opportunities for spiritual growth for members of our diocese and I recommend them to you again. These opportunities are for all of us in our ministries; the ministry of the Baptised - the ordained and the laity. Occasions for personal spirituality, retreats, Happening, Cursillo, Bible study, quiet days, days of reflection, the use of spiritual directors, confessors, Education for Ministry, The Daughters of the King, The Brotherhood of Saint Andrew - all of these and many more - we can access with ease and they will produce wonderful growth if we allow them to work within us; if we make use of them and allow them to use us. We share with you this year our clergies' need for continuing education and sabbaticals. These are important times for learning and refreshment and integral to using resources for those who nourish and lead us. Without our ordained leaders growing educationally and spiritually, we become impoverished as the people of God in this part of the vineyard. We are all called to work and pray for the growth and deepening of our Common Life in relationship with the Lord in his Body, the Church. "Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints." (Ephesians 6:18) Beloved, to put it another way, we cannot give away what we do not have. We are called into community to glorify Christ and feed and nourish all God's people.

I am aware that February is Black History Month and as we are meeting at this time and in this place. I have asked the Tuskegee University Choir to join us this afternoon at 2:00PM. Not only will we have the opportunity, but also the privilege, of hearing the Choir perform for us, and the honor of hearing some of the important links between events and songs that allow us to recognize the contributions of the African American history and heritage within our society and expanding faith community. This event will follow lunch at the First Baptist Church where we were gathered last evening.

As Bishop, my daily log reflecting my activities from the 1st of January 2006 to the end of the year, I mercifully 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 eight (8) through ten (10) in your Convention packet.

Since the last annual convention, the following have died within the Diocesan clergy family.

The Rt. Rev. George Mosley Murray, resigned, died the 14th of July 2006 - husband of Beth and father of three children, and the husband of Margaret. He was the First and Founding Bishop of the Diocese of the Central Gulf Coast and sometimes Bishop Suffragan, Bishop Coadjutor and Bishop Ordinary of the Diocese of Alabama. He was a graduate of the Virginia Theological Seminary and ordained to the diaconate and priesthood by Bishop Carpenter in 1948 and for five years served as the Chaplain to the University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, until he was elected and consecrated as Bishop Suffragan on the 24th of June 1953. He served the Church with grace and dignity and devotion. He was vice-president of the House of Bishops, trustee of the Church Pension Fund, President of Province IV, member of the Board of Regents and trustee of the University of the South and the School of Theology, to mention only a few of his gifts to the Church. He was a friend, a mentor and a leader who envisioned the Diocese into being. In his memory last evening, we dedicated a Eucharistic Setting of the Mass for congregational use, written by Kevin Davis, organist and choir director at St. Paul's Church, Mobile. It was presented at the opening service and I thank those who led us in that worship. For Bishop Murray's ministry of ten years as Diocesan Bishop, The Ordinary of this diocese, and for his strength, wisdom, insight, love and life, we give thanks to God.

The Rev. Robert Clyde Johnson, Jr., retired, died the 1st of May 2006 - husband of Mary and father of six children, he was a graduate of the School of Theology at the University of the South - Sewanee - where he later would serve as a trustee. Ordained by Bishop West in Florida as deacon and then priest in 1964, he served as Curate in St. Andrew's Church, Panama City, 1974 - 1980, and again assisted there during his retirement. He was Vicar of St. Thomas by - the - Sea, Laguna Beach during those early years, serving them as deacon and priest "direct from seminary." He served congregations in North Carolina, Southwest Florida and was Vicar at St. Andrew's by the sea in Destin in the early 1960's. He gave of himself and served the people of God faithfully.

The Rev. Ernest Reamon Hafers, retired, died the 25th of May 2006 - husband of Bobbie, he attended the School of Theology at the University of the South following his career. He was ordained to the diaconate and then the priesthood in 1992 by Bishop Charles Duvall, served as deacon at St. Andrew's Church, Panama City and St. Thomas' by - the - Sea, Laguna Beach. He then served at the Church of the Epiphany, Enterprise from 1992 until 1994. As Vicar of St. Augustine's Church, Navarre, he served that community from 1994 to 1996. He loved the Lord and was a gift to those to whom he brought both word and sacrament.

The Rev Ernest (Buddy) Raymond Oliver, Jr., died the 1st of June 2006 - husband of Kathy and two children, he was ordained deacon and priest in 1991. He

came to our diocese in 1993 where he served at St. Thomas' Church in Greenville, Alabama for several years. He became non-parochial in 1998. He served in the Diocese of Alabama at the Church of the Holy Comforter, Montgomery and as a counselor at Union Springs Hospital. He is remembered for his humor and his pastoral care, his personal faith journey "with battles won and lost" and his love for God's people.

All of them served God in our diocese and were persons of faith whom we loved and we miss them! Please stand in silence as we remember them 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!"

To the good people of St. James' Church, I express this Convention's thanks for your hospitality and your welcoming us to your home. As the fourth oldest congregation within our Diocese, you have a rich heritage going back to the first services held by The Rev. A. Bloomer Hart in 1838 in homes of various Episcopalians. Later, services were held in The Tavern, a pre-Civil War home on Front Street and the oldest extant house in Eufaula. In 1844 the Parish was formally organized and as the organizing meeting was being held, the story is told that the stage coach arrived bringing news that James K. Polk was nominated as President. General John L. Hunter moved that the Parish be named St. James and it carried unanimously. It makes for a good story, true or not! Of note, Bishop Henry Melville Jackson, who was Bishop Wilmer's coadjutor, died shortly before Bishop Wilmer died and is buried here in Eufaula. It is my hope that later today a few of us will be able go to that grave and offer prayers of thanksgiving for the gift of his ministry in this region of our diocese.

The first Church was moved to its present location in 1883 next to the Rectory. The present Church was completed in 1911 and the new Parish Hall, recently finished, occupies the site where the Rectory was located. The 1928 altar was built in the Oberammergau manner and the 1911 Moeller tracker pipe organ was reconditioned in 1993. The stained glass dates from between 1905 and 1911 and depicts various Biblical stories proclaiming the Gospel.

The Church has been served over the years by a number of clergy, first from the Diocese of Alabama and now in more recent years our Diocese, including The Rev. Jack Habberfield, The Very Rev. Joe Reynolds (now dean of Christ Church Cathedral in Houston, Texas), The Rev. Eugene Sargent, Jr., The Rev. Dennis Brown (now at St. Michael's Church, Chickasaw and Chaplain at Wilmer Hall), The Rev. Lawton Riley and the present rector, The Rev. Robert B. Henderson, for whose leadership in this

community we give thanks. Fr. Bob please express our thanks to all your people who have worked so hard to ensure our visit will be productive and a joyous event. I especially want to recognize the Chairpersons of this convention, Courtney Potthoff and Ed Garrison. Without their leadership we would not have the gracious welcome and efficient organization evident in this gathering. Thank you both from those of us who are your guests. Please also express our gratitude again, to the Pastor and people of First Baptist Church for their hospitality last evening and later this afternoon and in allowing us to worship in their church facility.

Two other people join us this year to take part in and engage us at our Diocesan Convention. The Rt. Rev. Jeffery Rowthorne, resigned bishop of the American Convocation of Churches in Europe, and now teaching part-time at Berkeley at Yale. He is also our visiting bishop for the month of February and the Chaplain for this convention. It is wonderful to have both Bishop Rowthorne and his wife Anne with us this month. If you have not read Anne's new book, you are missing a very fine spiritual opportunity.

The Rt. Rev. David Jennings, Bishop of Warrington, England is our preacher this year. I have known Bishop Jennings for some thirty years, starting when he was the Vicar of St. Edmond's Church, Romford, where my Godsons were members of that congregation and sang in the choir. It is always good to visit with friends and I very much appreciate his taking the time to come over and share with us during this time.

"Preparing a Place!" "And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also." (John 14:4) It encourages us to focus as a diocese, our mission and our ministry together, remembering that the promise is in Jesus Christ and in his saving embrace. "Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, would I have told you that I go and prepare a place for you? (John 14:1-3) Over the past 37 years I have read and preached on that Gospel at numerous funerals - the Gospel of Hope, the Gospel of Promise - and I want it read at my funeral. In Christ Jesus is the fullness of life present and to come. I take great hope in that, as a sinner.

This past summer the 75th General Convention of the Episcopal Church met in Columbus, Ohio. Its repercussions have been varied. Some are distressed and some elated. First let me say that I am encouraged by our Presiding Bishop, The Most Rev. Katherine Jefferts-Shori, whom I know very well and value as a colleague. I appreciate her including people from various positions and theological opinions beyond her own. I believe she has been called by God to this position and ministry. To be clear - she has my support and I do not have to agree with every word she speaks or action she takes. This is the Episcopal Church! I am an Episcopal bishop and I am very proud and honored to be your bishop!

The General Convention did a lot more than elect a new Presiding Bishop. We

prayed, studied scripture together and considered various resolutions that would unite and divide us in our opinions and beliefs. Factions on both extremes and in both Houses of Convention sought to drive a wedge into the heart of the Convention by blocking conciliar resolutions. This was painful to witness and difficult to experience. Never-the-less, the center held; the moderates worked together and were able in some ways to move the Convention forward for the good of the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion.

Last year our diocesan convention embraced the Millennium Development Goals, joining with the General Convention which by resolution accepted those Goals as a major focus of our ongoing ministry in the Episcopal Church. “For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me. Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.” (Matthew 25: 37-40) The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) offer us a way to engage ministry in a profoundly Christian manner with both ecumenical and interfaith partners. The 75th General Convention concurred with the 74th General Convention to endorse United Nations Millennium Development Goals as amended, Resolved, that the 74th General Convention endorse and embrace the achievement of the United Nations' MDGs that pledge to:

1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
2. Achieve universal primary education
3. Promote gender equality and empower women
4. Reduce child mortality
5. Improve maternal health care
6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis and other diseases
7. Ensure environmental sustainability
8. Develop a global partnership for development.

The Episcopal Church has worked to incorporate the 0.7% as a way for individuals, congregations, dioceses and the Episcopal Church to help meet the needs of these goals. It is a daunting task, but it is also doable. “Give to everyone who begs from you; and of him who takes away your goods do not ask them again. As you wish that men would do to you, do so to them.” (Luke 6: 30-31) We will hear a good deal more about these exciting and challenging goals later this afternoon. I have invited Dr. Robert W. Radtke, President of the Episcopal Relief and Development agency (E. R. D.) of the Episcopal Church to be with us to speak about the M. D. Gs. He has held this position since July of 2005 and is a very good friend to our diocese, the entire Gulf Coast region and all those areas in need because of disaster and needed relief work. Welcome friend to our convention and thank you for your continuing encouragement and support.

The Windsor Report asked for several things to happen throughout the Anglican Communion and which in our Episcopal Church polity, could happen only at the General Convention which is our highest authoritative body. Some of these requests happened limitedly due to maneuvering from various groups. This was and is

deplorable! At the last minute the Convention in both Houses passed a resolution (B033) it is far from perfect, but expresses our corporate regret in not taking into account the needs of the entire Anglican Communion through various past actions over several decades, not just the precipitating events over the past few years.

The Windsor Report is a report, not a mandate! This past week the Primates meeting held near Dar es Salaam, Tanzania on the 15th to the 19th of February, received several reports including one from the Anglican Communion Joint Standing Committee meeting of the Primates and the Anglican Consultative Council, I particularly want to mark that document's following comments: 1) The Election of Bishops: "The group believes therefore that General Convention (of The Episcopal Church) has complied in this resolution (B033) with the request of the Primates." 2) Expression of Regret: "Taken with the apparent promise not to repeat the offences (Resolution B033) we believe that the expression of regret is sufficient to meet the request of the primates." 3) Public Rites of Blessing for same sex unions: It is therefore not at all clear whether, in fact, the Episcopal Church is living with the recommendations of the Windsor Report on this matter. This is therefore a question which needs to be addressed urgently by the House of Bishops of the Episcopal Church."

This material however, was and is, not the last word regarding the Episcopal Church from the Primates as their meeting concluded. The Primates as a group issued what is known as a final Communiqué following the end of their meeting. It tells of important mission work and also expands on the tensions involving the Episcopal Church. It is a long document, clearly the product of hard work and hard negotiation, where different people had different opinions. Although it appears that not all of the views stated were unanimous, the Primates as a whole agreed to issue the Communiqué. It will take a long time to fully digest, but I think the highlights are important.

1. First, the Episcopal Church remains a constituent member of the Anglican Communion. We were not expelled or kicked out.

2. Second, there is no separate parallel jurisdiction of the Anglican Communion authorized in the United States. That is, we are told that we are to work out our differences within the structure of The Episcopal Church as it currently exists, with certain suggestions.

3. Third, to address congregations that are still in conflict, the Primates have called for a Pastoral Council of up to five members: two to be nominated by the Primates, two by the presiding Bishop, and a Primate nominated by the Archbishop of Canterbury to serve as Chair. The Council will work with the Episcopal Church, the Presiding Bishop, and the bishops to create structures for alternative pastoral care for congregations that are still in conflict with the decisions of the General Convention and that have sought oversight from other provinces of the Anglican Communion, and to monitor the response of the Episcopal Church to what has been asked of it.

4. Fourth, for those few dioceses that have requested "alternative primatial oversight," the Primates accepted the initiative of our presiding bishop to appoint a "Primatial Vicar" from within The Episcopal Church.

5. Fifth, when the structure is in place, the Primates who have crossed diocesan boundaries into the United States without permission from diocesan bishops will cease those interventions.

6. Sixth, the Primates requested that by September 30 of this year the House of Bishops of The Episcopal Church make an unequivocal covenant that the bishops will not authorize any right or blessing for same sex unions in their dioceses, and that any candidate for Episcopal orders living in a same sex union shall not receive the necessary consents to become a bishop unless some new consensus on these matters emerges across the Communion.

How this all plays out, we will have to wait and see. As the Archbishop of Canterbury, The Most Rev. Rowan Williams said that the meeting hammered out "an interim solution that certainly falls very short of resolving all the disputes," and he ended by saying, "It's an experiment; pray for it."

My own view is that these recommendations should not greatly affect the work and mission of our diocese. Our policies and practices have been consistent with the stated standards of the Anglican Communion and of the Windsor Report, and indeed of the Primates' Communiqué. I note however, that we may fall short in one area of the 1998 Lambeth Resolution, which has been repeatedly affirmed by the Anglican Communion in both the Windsor Report and the Primates Communiqué, and that is "to listen to the experience of homosexual persons" and call "all our people to minister pastorally and sensitively to all irrespective of sexual orientation and to condemn irrational fear of homosexuals." I hope that we as a diocese take this listening process seriously, along with everything else.

To facilitate this process I have asked The Rev. John Rigg, rector of St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Mobile to chair a committee to fulfill the requests of the Windsor Report, Lambeth 1998 and the recent Primates Communiqué' and to explore more deeply the wider implications of the Dar es Salaam requests for our diocese. I have asked this committee to report and to share the information they gather with me in 2008. If it is available by our diocesan convention next year, we will have its findings reported. To be clear, this is an advisory committee for me and I intend to make use of this material at national and international meetings including the Lambeth Conference in July and August 2008. I appreciate Fr. Rigg's willingness to lead this committee and he and the Committee members have my thanks, prayers and support for the work in which they will engage.

Ester Mombu is a member of the Inter-Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission, which produced the Windsor Report. She has until recently, been the Academic Dean of St. Paul's Theological College, Limuru, Kenya. In an article entitled The Windsor Report: A Paradigm Shift for Anglicanism, published in volume 89,

number 1 of the Anglican Theological Review, she completes her essay with the following statement: “The Windsor Report challenges the Anglican Communion, especially, Anglicans in the African Provinces, to reflect critically on the missional priorities of the church. It challenges Christians to rethink the hermeneutics of sin, salvation, and reconciliation. More importantly, it challenges the worldwide Communion to redefine its organic structure and ask itself whether it is to be a monolith or a confederation of diverse organizations.” Of note is that the response to the Windsor Report given at the recent Primates Meeting stated the following, “We have to express our concern that other recommendations of the Windsor Report, addressed to other parts of the Communion, appear to have been ignored so far.” There is a need for mutuality in recognizing none of us are without sin before God and each other.

The Archbishop of Canterbury retired, George Lord Carey of Clifton, speaking at Duke Divinity School on the 5th of February this year said, “The establishment of an Anglican covenant is a task that may take years rather than days, weeks and months. It will require much hard and honest talking and no little patience and Christian love. The duty of leaders is to stay at the table, contributing to the debate as long as it takes. The imperative of unity in fact requires all Anglican leaders to desist from threats to withdraw, or refusing to talk with others.” I could not agree more! I am and will be an Episcopal bishop in good times and bad times. The work of minority groups leaving and seeking to take people and property is disruptive to the missional work of the Episcopal Church and, establishing alternative ecclesiastical bodies is contrary to the call “that they may be one, even as we are one” (John 17: 11b) and does not live out the reconciling love of God incarnated in us.

The Commission on Ministry continues its work to enable the process of discernment and formation for the ordained ministry. It seeks first to encourage and facilitate those who are called and recognized in their call to move forward toward attending seminary and becoming a deacon and then a priest within our diocese.

At the present time we have students who are studying at The General Theological Seminary (Norman Bray), The Episcopal Theological Seminary of the Southwest (De Freeman and Anthony MacWhinnie) and Yale Divinity School (Bill Bell). One of our seminarians has recently transferred to another diocese and we wish her God’s blessing on her journey. This past year we had no aspirants move forward in the process toward seminary. This year we will have only one postulant going to seminary, Marie Butterbaugh - that seminary has not yet been determined. These are all very fine people and I ask you to keep them in your prayers.

Additionally, we ordained three transitional deacons this past year; The Rev. Luke Jernagan, The Rev. Ede Plovovich and The Rev. Nancy Threadgill. All have been approved by the Commission on Ministry and the Standing Committee to be ordained to the priesthood this spring. Last Saturday, I ordained The Rev. Theodore P. Valcourt from the African Methodist Episcopal Church as a deacon in our diocese. He

will continue serving as an Army Chaplain under the direction of the Bishop of the Armed Forces and it is my desire to ordain him to the priesthood, with the Standing Committee's approval, this summer before he is deployed overseas. I am pleased and proud of all these people who are engaged in serving God as they move forward in the ordination process.

Through a developing process of discernment we are seeking a place within our diocese for those called to the vocational diaconate. As we continue work on the implementation of a permanent diaconate program, it is important that we be prepared for those whom God has chosen for this servant ministry. That process awaits the work of this convention as we define the canonical titles, roles and functionality of the ordained clergy. It is my hope and desire that the schema for those who will answer a call and move forward in discernment and diaconal formation, will be ready by this coming fall.

We have combined a number of the Commissions this coming year to better make use of our human resources and facilitate active ministry. The Commission on the Environment and the Integrity of Creation is working on various programs that will help us value and be better stewards of "this fragile earth our island home." The Annual Diocesan Men's Conference will host The Rt. Rev. Steven Charlston, dean of the Episcopal Divinity School, Cambridge, Massachusetts on the 2nd through the 4th of March. The Commission on Conflict Transformation has been consulted numerous times throughout this past year as it continues its work in helping resolve seriously conflicted situations within congregations. They offer assistance only when invited and the nature of their work remains confidential in order to foster trust and facilitate reconciliation. The work of the Fresh Start program for new clergy and clergy in transition aids in the assimilation process into our diocese as it assists the clergy in familiarizing them with the Diocese and getting to know the other clergy as colleagues.

The Commissions on Health Ministries, Recovery, and Clergy Wellness will be combined this coming year. Health Ministries enable our diocese to work with the parish nurse program and coordinate health programs needed within our local communities. Programs for the homeless, the aged, children at risk, those living with HIV/AIDS, migrant farm workers, and the marginalized within our various communities are opportunities to ministry in the Name of Jesus. Recovery offers a supportive ministry to those of us who live daily with addictions. It responds to the real needs and offers a Christian response to "assist us in getting well."

The Disaster Relief Committee continues to work within the Diocese for preparedness for future emergencies including hurricanes, tornadoes and pandemic disease that might affect our diocese or the other dioceses throughout the Fourth Province. Duane Leifur has done an impressive job in putting together a Disaster Preparedness manual for our diocese. A manual was prepared for each congregation, which should have been received at the clergy registration table. If you did not, please check with a member of my staff.

The Diocese of Guatemala continues to need our prayers and support; Bishop Guerra is seeking new ways of dealing with the political systems that hamper meaningful mission work. I have, with the aid of the Commission on World Mission, entered into an additional companion relationship with the Diocese of the Dominican Republic. This past summer several of us visited the diocese to scope out the missional landscape. A few weeks ago a small group visited the D. R. to join with them in celebrating the 110th Anniversary of the Iglesia Episcopal Dominicana and their expanding work and growth during the last century. Bishop Julio Holguin is a long-time friend who has welcomed us to share the faith in medical and construction ministries. Under the direction of Florence Crawford, a full team leaves tomorrow and next Saturday for the first expanded mission trip to the D. R. and I ask your prayers for them and the work they will do.

The Commissions on Planned Giving and Stewardship have also been combined for the coming year. They continue to offer a very fine program for our diocese. The Planned Giving Manual should be in every congregation and be used to assist our people in the area of gift planning and our churches in establishing endowment funds. Stewardship, the ministry of money, is not about a campaign, fund raising or meeting a budget. It is about using the resources with which God has blessed us. It is about our commitment to giving to God, through God's Church, a portion of the gifts with which we have been blessed.

My vision continues in missional opportunities and new programs for the work of ministry, mission, evangelism, church growth and outreach within our diocese and beyond. Our diocesan budget restricts the work to which I believe we are all called. This address must make reference to the financial state of the Diocese which, to be very clear, is not good!

This past year, 2006, the Diocese experienced a \$49,000 deficit, primarily as a result of inadequate giving from congregations paying approximately \$81,000 less than was budgeted for the year. We needed cash reserves to cover the 2006 deficit. Deficit spending is inappropriate and cannot continue. There are some congregations that are giving far beyond their asking and the Standing Committee and I recognize their willingness to give sacrificially beyond their own needs. It is because of their generous giving and commitment to our diocese we did better than we would have without their extra support - but \$49,000 in deficit spending is still a significant shortfall. There are a number of congregations that are not contributing as asked or as needed to meet the budget.

Because of this giving pattern, the 2007 projected budget is not much better! Income from congregations is almost flat for 2007 (versus 2006), while expenses were originally projected to be up nearly \$200,000.

The Commission on Finance was faced with a \$219,000 projected deficit! The

Commission removed valuable programs along with some internal obligations to reduce that deficit to \$64,000, requesting that the Bishop secure a way to balance the budget.

The Standing Committee, after serious and heartfelt debate, agreed with me that staff positions would need to be eliminated in order to stop spending money we do not have. I decided we would need to eliminate two positions at the Diocesan office: Receptionist/Secretary and the Coordinator for Youth Ministries. These are very difficult decisions and ones that we do not make lightly. They affect peoples lives! They affect our work and ministry! We are aware that the Diocese has said it wants an active youth program; therefore I have asked The Rev. Mark Wilson to chair a committee of churches who have youth ministers now, to assist the Commission on Youth with that work. In the office, we will manage the receptionist position with volunteers. However, if the current pattern of giving continues, we will need to eliminate other more key positions as well.

In addition to these personnel reductions, the budget is not funding other commitments already in the budget, some programs are being reduced and for the third or fourth year in a row, no deposits have been made to the reserves for major maintenance, Diocesan office depreciation or reserve for the Episcopal transition. The pledge to the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society (the Episcopal Church) is set at 10% percent of unrestricted pledges from congregations. This is not a wise or healthy thing to do. We are not congregationalists and we cannot continue as a diocese going down this road.

In the external section of the budget, we have added approximately \$11,432 (0.7%) for the new and exciting Millennium Development Goals initiative. Several questions now come to mind: What is the effect of restricted giving on our work and the budget? What effects do our feelings and beliefs about National Church issues have on our Diocesan budget? What effects do our feelings and beliefs about the Diocese and Diocesan programs and ministries have on the budget?

Although we may not get all the answers, we are hopefully going to get feedback from the Diocese and be able to turn this financial trend around. To accommodate that process, I am appointing a Blue Ribbon Committee to look at the Diocesan mission, vision, strategy, structure, staffing, funding, location of office and other long range concerns. I have appointed The Rev. Thack Dyson to chair this committee. I encourage everyone as leaders gathered here, and those throughout our diocese to help us identify the needs of and direction for the viable future of the Diocese of the Central Gulf Coast. The archives of the Diocese show that a similar effort was undertaken by Bishop Duvall when he had been the bishop for 5 or 6 years. It is obviously now again time to review our diocesan call to ministry and how that will be lived out.

After Hurricane Ivan destroyed the Diocesan office and we spent 22 months as

the “temporary guests” of St. Christopher’s Church, Pensacola, we moved back into the newly renovated space in July of 2006. What a blessing their hospitality was for us and for the entire Diocese. Our thanks to the Rector, The Rev. Lester Durst, the vestry and congregation for the welcome and care they showed us during that time. Paradoxically, the new offices are wonderful and again allow us to have our resources and equipment available within easy access. The facility is slightly reconfigured and expanded so we can better engage our ministry. I dare not say, but hope we are, more hurricane proof. Please come and visit us and have a look around. As the Diocesan staff, our ministry is to be available to serve and assist in the various ministries of the agencies and congregations of the Diocese.

The staff continues doing very fine work. Vince Currie, the Diocesan Administrator, continues to serve the Episcopal Church on various boards and agencies and to move us forward in the work before us. The Rev. Canon Mark Dunnam continues to offer the gift for discernment in the deployment process and for the Missions as they seek to grow in members and resources. We presently have only a few congregations looking for clergy. Let me remind you, prayer is key to getting the right person called (not hired) to serve the church and God in those places.

We were blessed to have had Gloria Nix on the front desk and we will miss her smile, energy and kind words. Carmen Kimmons offers her expertise in insurance matters, computer magic and the Green Sheet to name only a few of her gifts. Jennifer Godwin continues as Financial Secretary and is a blessing to us as we seek to ensure that our finances are transparent. Mary Poss assists me in keeping my records, mail and calendar current and works to support my ministry of episcopate’ in your midst. Peter Wong has done fine work as the Coordinator for Youth Ministries and we will miss his work with the children and young people throughout the Diocese And we will also miss him. The Rev. Bob Graves offers to the retired clergy, clergy spouses and surviving spouses the hospitality of the Diocese as their Chaplain. We are blessed to have Cindy McCrory, who has taken the place of The Rev. Jerald Hyche as the new editor of the Coastline. We are well served and blessed by all our staff, and I thank each of you for your good work and the care you each bring to your position.

The Diocese has tasks and challenges that are before us and as a diocese, can seem daunting. They are not! Our vision reminds us to proceed with prayer and in prayer, to know it is God’s ministry we share and God who is calling us. We are called to be about “Preparing a Place” joining with Jesus who brings us to the dwelling that God is making ready for us. We are called to ministry. We are invited to share who we are and what we have with others. “For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake.”(II Corinthians 4:5) We are called to be the Church, the Body of Christ, the people of God. Thank you, for your witness and faithfulness during this past year. May God bless us and give us the grace, courage and strength to be about the work we are called to do. Amen!