

BISHOP'S ADDRESS

UBI • CARITUS • ET • AMOR

Where true charity and love dwell, God himself is there

DEUS • IBI • EST

(The Hymnal 1982, #606)

+Let us pray:

“Help us O Lord, to become the master of ourselves that we may become the servants of others. Take our minds to vision your word made flesh here. Take our lips that only your words will be spoken here. Take our ears that only your words will be heard here. Take our hearts and let them burn here with your love, in Jesus Christ who is the Living Word dwelling here. Amen!”

We gather for the 39th Annual Convention of the Diocese of the Central Gulf Coast. Our theme is from The Hymnal 1982, # 606, “Where true charity and love dwell, God himself is there.” I come with mixed emotions this day: it is good to be the Diocese of the Central Gulf Coast, gathered even for a shortened one day meeting. However, it is not enjoyable, but necessary, to have to consider all of the cut backs and trimmings needed to present a balanced budget. I am distressed over the numerous cuts that are hampering mission and ministry. I am excited that this is also a time of possibility and hope for the church, to be the servant church in our midst as we re-assess who we are as the Diocese of the Central Gulf Coast. As we begin, I want to say a word about the offering that will be received at the Eucharist this afternoon. It is my hope and desire that we will be generous in our giving and designate this offering for the much needed ongoing work in Haiti, through Episcopal Relief and Development. Haiti needs our willingness to share openly and we need to do so, remembering that we are a very blessed Diocese with resources for which we do give thanks to God. Following the earthquake, most of our congregations received offerings for relief efforts, using various agencies over a three Sunday period. The estimate to date sent from our congregations is about \$90,000! I am very pleased and proud of our people and know that amount will increase over the next few months. This generous outpouring of monies to assist in this vital work is good news and a blessing for Haiti and for us. “Where true charity and love dwell, God himself is there.”

As Lent unfolds, we seek to live into the Gospel ministry of Jesus. The fabric of his birth, life, teaching, passion, death and resurrection are all part of what it means for us to be Christian; to be Episcopalian. I like Lent. I like it because it causes me to think and study, to pray and fast, to work and engage in active “on the street ministry” in a more focused and intentional way. But if I am not careful, I will like it because I can work “really hard” and do all the right things and believe I am doing better as a follower of our Lord. It is about saying and doing; but God’s grace is unearned and is a pure gift, and that is the Lenten focus of the Gospel. Several weeks ago I was rereading some Carl Sandburg who said, “I won’t take my religion from any man who never works except with his mouth.” And the challenge is to be able to do both word and deed. Each day during Lent as part of my Daily Prayer, I am saying the Baptismal Covenant which puts the work, ministry and our common mission into the context of

our living it out in the world. I find that helpful and meaningful as I seek to be faithful in my Christian journey.

In the past, I have asked the Daughters of the King and the Brotherhood of St. Andrew for their prayers for the Diocese, clergy and laity, as we seek to do the work to which we are called. This year I add the Episcopal Community, newly formed as the successor for the Episcopal Daughters of the King, to join in offering those prayers on our behalf. I hope within the next few weeks to meet with the Daughters and speak with them and the members who have already joined the Episcopal Community, about this new Episcopal Community and why I support it. I will be asking our Daughters to become a part of the Episcopal Community's work and ministry. In fact, to transfer and move from the DOK into this Community of prayer and study. I have not been pleased with what I have seen over the past year in a growing political front nationally, in the DOK. It is about prayer, mission and ministry and I look forward to meeting with Daughters and Community members alike to pray, listen and learn from each other.

The ongoing support of the Brotherhood is equally important and I remind you that the March 5th thru 7th conference at Beckwith on *Living in a Community of Faith* is open to all. It is in our corporate and collective special intentions in daily prayer, that God will turn our hearts and minds to find and work in ways that enables others to see Jesus through us. I believe all of us can learn from this social and economic upheaval, and as slow recovery unfolds, offer encouragement and support in how we do our work. We learn that God is in control and we are not. We learn that faith is proactive. We learn that we will have enough resources to do the ministry and engage the mission that God is calling us to do. We learn that it may not be what we thought it was or what we wanted to do. I am encouraged by our ministry and mission in this part of God's Kingdom.

We meet today at Christ Church, Pensacola, founded in 1829 on Seville Square in the newly acquired territory. Not easy times then with Yellow Fever, short term Rectors, and war, which all took their toll on the congregation. When Civil War broke out, the seventh Rector, Dr. Scott, went "south" to Montgomery, Alabama and established The Church of the Holy Communion. This was a time of turmoil. Dr. Scott returned to Pensacola in 1866, where he exercised a ministry for almost forty years. New congregations were planted: St. Cyprian's Church, Pensacola; St. John's Church, Warrington; St. Mary's Church, Milton. Population shifted at the turn of the century; Christ Church moved to its present location at Wright Street and Palafox, and then expanded its facility to accommodate the growth in members. In 1936 The Rev. Henry Bell Hodgkins began a thirty-year tenure as Rector. The Church facility continued to expand and additional new missions were opened: Holy Trinity Church, Myrtle Grove; St. Christopher's Church, East Hill; St. Francis of Assisi Church, Gulf Breeze. The Very Rev. Dr. Beverly Madison Currin (Matt) served the congregation for more than six years, built up, added to, and restored the fabric of the Church and its facilities, including the restoration of the "Old Christ Church" on Seville Square. We thank The Rev. Neal Goldsborough, Rector; the clergy; staff and members of Christ Church for

their continuing a long and gracious tradition of welcome and hospitality. I especially express our thanks this year for hosting this one day Convention, as we seek to exercise prudent leadership and fiscal responsibility. We are pleased to be in your home and thank you one and all!

Once again we meet as a diocesan family during Black History Month, and we wish to acknowledge and celebrate the heritage and contributions of our African American sisters and brothers. The sin of racism persists. As Episcopalians we are called to stand over and against racism in its many forms. Anti-racism training is still needed and an important part of our work. This past summer at the General Convention in Anaheim, California, our Church sought to continue speaking out against racism in its many incarnations and continue for these next three Triennia “to design and deliver anti-racism, classism and ethnic discrimination training..”
(*RACISM:A142*)

Among numerous other equality resolutions adopted, we as The Episcopal Church apologized to native/indigenous peoples for the Doctrine of Discovery. Additionally, we “repudiate(s) and renounce(s) the Doctrine of Discovery as fundamentally opposed to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and our understanding of the inherent rights that individuals and peoples have received from God...”
(*RECONCILIATION: D035*)

We all have work to do in our Diocese and in our communities. Please remember the Jonathan Myrick Daniels Pilgrimage in Hayeville, Alabama on Saturday the 14th of August this year. We give thanks for his witness during the Civil Rights Movement and see in his story and the many stories of the Alabama Martyrs, the true cost of our “liberty and justice for all.” May they continue to inspire us to work for reconciliation among the richness of our diversities.

My daily log and the summary list of my official Episcopal acts reflecting my activities in 2009, I file by title. I also file by title the official list of clergy of the Diocese, which can be found on pages 7 through 9 in your Convention packet and will be printed in the Diocesan Journal.

During this past year, my term on the General Board of Examining Chaplains and several other agencies concluded. I continue on one seminary board. Following this recent General Convention, I was elected as the Chair of the Standing Commission on Ecumenical and Inter-religious Relations. I continue on the theological team working for full communion between the United Methodist Church and our Episcopal Church. As in the past, I commend to you that study document for congregational use, published by our two churches, “Make Us One With Christ”. There is a link on our diocesan website. This is an exciting time in ecumenical and interreligious dialogue and I am pleased to be able to do this work.

“Make Us One in Christ” a study guide, can be downloaded 1 in electronic form from the website:

www.episcopalchurch.org/ecumenism or www.diocgc.org.

I want to thank the Planned Giving and Stewardship Commission for their fine work this past year. The three day-long conferences, offered across the Diocese on Planned Giving were well attended and productive. I believe that every congregation should have the legal financial mechanisms in place, to receive gifts from legacies and estates, that protect the giver and the use of gifts. If your congregation does not have this in place, please do so. The Planned Giving opportunities are available. Over the past year, we have had stewardship conferences for the clergy and congregations' leaders, by well known stewardship and professionals from around the church and within our Diocese. We published several plans for Stewardship campaigns, theological principles and numerous sermons. This is an ongoing process and we need to do more! "But let me be clear, information does not change hearts or attitudes about money and our relationship with God, unless it is used. Stewardship is a way of living and giving thankfully for all that we have received from God." Each of us as leaders, needs to be able to say: What does stewardship mean to us; Why it is important to us; Why do I give and why is it important to me and the work of the Church? When I give, I give to the Church in thanksgiving for what God has given me. For me, a tithe is not just 10%, it is a place to begin or to move toward; it is Biblical, and that is not magical." It is a privilege for me to give! It is about my relationship to the community of faith! It is not about fund raising! It is not about my need to control others with my money!

The Standing Committee, under the leadership of Dr. Bill Hamilton took on the work of Operation Redesign. It began with the work of the Blue Ribbon (Special) Committee that studied the Diocese. Last year's convention considered those findings and recommendations, the work centered on creating a common and owned vision, to be articulated by the gathered community. I am pleased that the Standing Committee has claimed vision, mission and commitment statements as well as a Five Year Plan.

Those materials have been critiqued by a panel of experts outside our Diocese. Another recommendation had to do with leadership. The Standing Committee has defined specific programs and activities in this area and they have been assigned to the Diocesan office, various clergy, congregations, committees, coordinators, agencies and boards, with target dates and specific reporting mechanisms in order to track progress toward the defined goals. In the area of communication, improvements in our usual venues have continued (Coastline, Green Sheet, Bishop's Notes, Web site) even in the face of limited resources that have caused us to move almost entirely to electronic means rather than the use of paper and postage. This work was accomplished under the guidance of Dr. Melinda Henderson as facilitator, and she will present a short power-point program as the Convention considers the implementation resolution. Thank you Mendy for all your hard work.

At the pre-Convention financial and budget workshops we shared that finances of the Diocese continue on a downward trend. For the fourth year in a row, pledge receipts were less than pledged at the beginning of the budget year; \$135,000 less in 2009. Eight congregations gave \$5,000 or more less than they pledged, totaling \$152,000

less than was pledged. This creates a very challenging management crisis in the Diocese. If The Rev. Canon Mark Dunnam had not left the Diocese in September and not been replaced, the Diocesan deficit would have been more than we would have had funds to cover.

When we get a pledge from our congregations, we expect that pledge to be paid. Church treasurers and vestries might discount the pledges some, based on historical facts; but other than that, they use the pledge figures to set their budgets. When a pledging unit pays only 10%, 20%, 50% of what they pledged, the negative impact is obviously dramatic!

You are aware, 96% of income to the Diocese comes from congregations' pledges. We are not an endowed diocese. Fortunately we have had special funds over the years to draw-down, to balance deficit budgets. Over the last fourteen years, the Diocese has drawn more than one million three hundred thousand dollars (\$1,300,000) of such funds, or an average of \$130,000 dollars per year over ten years!

But as the financial picture is not favorable, so also the 2010 budget represents the most dramatic cuts in Diocesan history, including, but not limited to the following:

1. discontinuing the Deacon-in-Training Program
2. discontinuing Continuing Education Assistance for clergy
3. continuing Coastline and Green Sheet publications electronically only
4. eliminating Medicare Supplement premiums for retired clergy
5. passing Workers Comprehensive Insurance premiums to the employing congregations
6. not replacing the Canon to the Ordinary
7. eliminating the position of Receptionist/Secretary at the Diocesan office
8. the Bishop and Diocesan Administrator taking a 10% pay and pension cut
9. the Bishop cancelling his sabbatical work this year
10. no other staff salary or benefit increases for the second year in a row

The financial phenomenon we have experienced over the last couple of years has exacerbated a negative trend in Diocesan finances. But, at the same time, many of our congregations are sprucing up, adding new buildings and personnel to meet their needs for expanding mission and ministry and, unfortunately, in these times of the "perfect storm" - the two are not compatible.

Hopefully the current dilemma is a way to start over! Operation Re-Design brings us hope. The energy of the Standing Committee and commitment of the Commission on Finance brings us hope. The Commission on Planned Giving/Stewardship is continuing its work on stewardship plans. I am going to ask these groups and several others to help me look into financial alternatives. Ideally, there should be enough financial resources to be more responsive to the Diocesan needs, and still support the vital and important work in our local churches. I ask for your prayers for the future before us, as a diocese!

I express my thanks to our staff who work on my behalf for our diocese. Thank you for the work you do: Jennifer Barnard, Carmen Kimmons, and Mary Poss. That work is appreciated and important to the functioning of the Diocese. Vince Currie continues to work for the mission and ministry of the Diocese. He is now part time - that is working the hours it takes to get the job done. Thank you Vince.

Cindy McCrory, working part-time, has done very fine work; not only with the Coastline, but with the on-line communications in the Diocese. Venessa Riutta as the part-time Coordinator for Youth Ministries has come on full bore with us and St. Christopher's. Sally MacDonald is missed for her good work and energy. The Rev. Mark Dunnam, is the Rector of St. James Church, Florence, Italy; a wonderful, vital and dynamic congregation. We miss his ministry and work with us. In recognition of his 23 years of service to our diocese, I am pleased to announce that I have named him the first Honorary Canon of the Diocese of the Central Gulf Coast. Canon T. Mark, thank you for being you and the ministry you have shared with us over many years.

As this is a difficult time for the Diocese and for many within our society, this period of economic recovery is also an exciting time, filled with challenge and hope. "Where charity and love dwell, God himself is there." I believe we are called to be a blessing to others through our faithfulness and witness, through our stewardship, mission and ministries. The future is before us! How will we respond? Can we meet the challenges to be Diocese? I believe we can make changes that allow mission and ministry to grow and deepen in this part of God's Kingdom, The Diocese of the Central Gulf Coast!