

**Convention Address
October 26 2007
San Angelo, Texas**

As I began preparing for this address to convention, which will be my last formal address to the Diocese of Northwest Texas, I decided to read the first address I gave to Convention on October 25, 1997, exactly 10 years and two days ago. It was startling to read the words written over ten years ago and to hear how relevant they are today. I guess it proves to me the old saying, “the more things change, the more they stay the same.”

There is a phrase in that address that in myriad ways has proven prophetic: “The road to the future is always under construction.” I chose that phrase as the theme of the convention was “Behold I am making all things new.” Had any of us known in 1997 how much construction we would experience on our road to the future, we might have trembled in fright and fallen back in fear.

In that first address I focused on four areas that I believed then and believe now are central to our life together. Those areas are congregational mission and ministry development, Latino ministry development, prison ministry—also now called restorative justice work, and finally development of younger Christians, sometimes called “youth ministry.” I am just as convinced today as I was ten years ago that we have a long way to go before we can say that we have finished our work in any of these four areas. We have made some significant progress in all four areas, but God still has work for us to do. I could probably read that first address, with only minor emendations and still be right on target. What has kept me focused over these years without fearing failure are the words from St. Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, “So neither he who sows nor he who plants is anything, but only God who gives the growth.” (I Cor 3:7) I know that I am building upon the foundation of Jesus Christ laid by

Alexander, Edward, Eugene, George, Willis, and Sam; hopefully I have added some to the foundation that the next bishop of Northwest Texas will be able to build upon further.

Today I am going to focus on three other areas: diocesan staffing, where the diocese is today, and our life together for the next year.

STAFF

We have one of the most remarkable group of dedicated and faithful ministers who work for and with this diocese of any staff in the western hemisphere. Carolyn Hearn is the inveterate veteran who has been with the diocesan office since 1908—actually 1978—and is the keeper of the history of the diocese. A comment she has made more than once is, “I know where all of the skeletons are, and I have put a few of them there myself.” She has seen three bishops come and go and has kept all of us on task, even when one of us was a bit of a day dreamer. She will celebrate her 30th anniversary as the Bishop’s Executive Secretary on March 1, 2008. Not many can keep up the pace of that job for half that time and do so with the aplomb and grace which Carolyn has exhibited. She has been Mother Confessor to many clergy and lay leaders, trail boss to many commissions and committees, pastoral care giver to all, and organized task master to her bishops. I am not sure how I would have fared but for Carolyn’s gentle—and sometimes not so gentle—nudges and encouragement.

Claire Cowden has been our ministry development coordinator—specifically Canon for Ministry Development—for almost exactly nine years. It is she who has been responsible for organizing, encouraging, and equipping congregations to see possibilities where none seemed to exist. We have the fruit of her direct involvement present today in ways which might have been lost. I would be willing to guess that more than one of our smaller congregations might have died from depression and hopelessness without her strengthening ministry, and today those congregations not only survive but thrive with the new life of Christ showing forth in

their midst.

However, Claire will soon be embarking on a new journey. This weekend she is in Santa Fe, New Mexico at a seminar where she is gaining instruction and mentoring into starting her own business—no it's not AMWAY. A registered nurse, Claire has heard God calling her to begin a practice of managing medical care for those who are homebound. She will be working with individuals and families to insure that the frailest of our community members have the best medical care possible. Claire will continue with the diocese full time through December, after which she will be working a half time schedule through June. Blessedly she will remain in Lubbock and continue as a member of St. Stephen's, where her gifts and talents will be enjoyed for years to come.

While lauding ministry developers let me continue with Father Larry Spanagle. Larry has been the Panhandle Regional Missioner since Father Bill Nix retired in 2003. However, for several years before becoming missioner Larry worked closely with Claire in ministry development in the Panhandle. Raised up for ordained ministry and trained in Alaska in the early days of ministry development in the US, Larry knows the ins and outs, the best roads and the potholes of congregational development. He has been a joy to work with and a strong servant of the Lord Jesus in helping raise up ministry and ministers in this diocese. Following the ordination of David Williams as local priest for Borger, Larry began work as priest in charge at St. Peter's Amarillo, while continuing his missioner work part time. Larry has attained the age of maturity and wisdom and will be retiring in 2008 to move back to the Northwest to be closer to family. His departure will also leave a hole in the ministry development work, but hopefully someone will emerge who has the convictions and strength of faith in community ministry to come and meet the needs of our diocese.

At the end of December 2006 our staff at 1802 Broadway was

diminished by two key persons. Diana Pierce, who had served the diocese for two and a half years as financial manager and human resources person, responsible for insurance and other HR duties resigned to move back to Portales NM where she and her husband own a home. At the same time our Canon to the Ordinary Mike Ehmer resigned to move to Memphis TN to begin working for an entity called CREDO, a subsidiary of the Pension Group that works with clergy and laity on issues of “wellness.” Our own Father Mark Cannaday has been a group chaplain for CREDO for many years and continues to work on clergy CREDO experiences.

It was my choice not to fill either of these jobs at the time. We promoted Jennifer Porter from Assistant for Financial Affairs to Financial Manager in January, a post she held until September, when she accepted a position with the Church Insurance Company in New York, working with Episcopal dioceses on health insurance matters.

In September we entered into a part-time contract with Anna Mora who was working part time for St. Stephen’s parish in Lubbock as their bookkeeper. On October 1st Anna became a part of our permanent staff, while still allowing St. Stephen’s to continue to rely on her for their financial matters. This is a win-win situation both for the diocesan staff and for St. Stephen’s. If you have questions concerning anything financial, please do not hesitate to call Anna during working hours.

Questions about the tasks and duties normally handled by the Human Relations person and the Canon to the Ordinary have been taken up by staff members--including yours truly--during this year, and I can only express my deepest thanks for all in our office who have been able to keep us going for these past ten months.

Others on the Diocesan staff who do not work at 1802 Broadway include Jamie Goldsten, Director of the Bishop Quarterman Conference Center, from whom you will hear tomorrow; the Rev. Lauren Browder Kuratko, Chaplain for Canterbury at Texas Tech,

who will also be making a presentation tomorrow; the Rev. Bernardo Martinez Vicar of San Miguel Mission in Odessa, the first of our Hispanic congregations; and the Rev. Josie Rose, vicar of Santa Maria Mission, which is one of our Jubilee centers in NW Texas. These satellite staff members are all vital in the ongoing life of the diocese, and each has been a gift of God to me and to all of us for the ministry we share together.

The question still remains, however, how will we accomplish all of the work we are called to do. Having not filled the slots of Canon and of HR manager, and with the impending loss of both Claire and Larry, will we be able to continue to grow ministry in our diocese?

Hopefully before the end of November 2007 we will have on board a person to fill a position we are calling Program Manager. This person's job description includes insurance, both health and property, human relations issues, background checks for laity and clergy, and management of the Hulsey Episcopal Center facility. This person will be able to ease the burden of the office staff—and me as well—and to implement some new policies and procedures to make our diocesan ministry run more smoothly.

Before the end of May we will have elected a new bishop who will be able to assist in projecting the needs for ministry and how to staff the remaining positions. Will that person call a new Canon, replace either Larry or Claire, or combine other jobs into new positions? I cannot answer any of those questions. I believe it is best for my successor and the diocese to allow many of those decisions to be made by the bishop-elect.

The most important thing I can say about our staff is that they are all wonderful and understand their jobs as ministry which “equips the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.” (Eph 4:12) I am indebted to each one of them, and the entire diocese owes them all an enormous “Thank You!!!”

Although not technically staff I want to mention another group of folk who have pushed the ministry of outreach in the diocese forward in ways that are remarkable. I am referring, of course, to our deacons. These icons of servanthood have challenged us all to see the needs in our midst and do something about those needs. They are taking their ordination vows seriously, and have stretched our work into many places that we would never have dared to go. We all owe the deacons a debt of thanks for their tenacity and devotion to Christ's Church and our work together in the world.

There is one other person who is also not technically a member of the staff and who certainly is not compensated formally by the diocese. She has become a chauffeur—but one who does not tote. She is a companion in the journey, both the joys and the travails. She is one who has put up with me for lo these 43—yes I said 43—years. And she is one that I dearly love. I am speaking, of course, of Sheila, perhaps the most important part of my staff.

STATE OF THE DIOCESE

This morning we passed a resolution which saddens my heart deeply; we closed Trinity mission in Quanah. This is a congregation that began in 1887 and grew with the railroad and wheat farming enterprises of the early 20th century. It survived the Dust Bowl days, the Great Depression, two world wars, and the decline of small towns in the panhandle. However, the congregation has dwindled to three persons, two of whom are not able to continue with ministry because of health and advanced age.

I am concerned for several other congregations facing much the same scenario as Quanah. Many of our smaller towns are shrinking, and the populations are aging. The only possibilities in some of these communities would be the beginning of Latino/Hispanic missions. We

will need to think creatively if we desire to move in the direction of Hispanic missions, perhaps raising up local priests for such endeavors.

Many of our small parishes are currently struggling to keep full time clergy. Three of our parishes do not have full time priests but are moving on well: St Mark's Plainview enjoys the services of the Rev. Bruce Green three Sundays each month and some weekdays; St Mark's Abilene is privileged to have the Rev. Jim Smart, a local attorney, who was ordained several years ago for St. Mark's parish. St Peter's in Borger also has a local priest ordained in March 2007, the Rev. David Williams. Three other smaller parishes either are currently or have recently been involved in searches. St. Christopher's Lubbock has issued a call to Mr. Edson Way who will be ordained Deacon in December and Priest in June, and will begin his life with St Christopher's in late June or July 2008. St Mary's Big Spring and St. Peter's Amarillo are currently involved with the search process, hoping to complete a call by next summer.

Most of our missions do not enjoy the services of resident clergy. Those that share local priests with other missions in their area include: St John the Baptist in Clarendon, with the Rev. Jim Aveni serving there two Sundays a month and travelling the other two Sundays; and St. George's Canyon with the Rev. Bev Couzzourt who also serves St Thomas Hereford on a monthly basis.

Fifty years ago all of our parishes and many of our missions were served by resident, full time, seminary trained clergy. Because of economic exigencies we have not been able to fill every position with a seminary trained, full time priest. Blessedly many in this diocese have caught onto vision of Community Ministry—what is called in other places Total Ministry or Mutual Ministry. This allows congregations who are willing to change their understanding of congregations from “a church gathered around a minister” to “a church gathered to minister.” Two years ago, the Bishop of Nevada spoke to us about this

vision, from the perspective of a diocese where “total ministry” has been in development for almost 30 years. This is not a new concept, but rather one that goes back to the earliest Church patterns.

Over one hundred years ago, the Rev. Roland Allen, a missionary of the Church of England, wrote his seminal work *Missionary Methods; St. Paul’s or Ours*. His ideas have been developed in the Episcopal Church now for almost 60 years, beginning in Alaska and continuing around the world. We are indeed fortunate to have many in Northwest Texas who wish to develop this concept further, including parishes as well as missions. Without ministry development in our diocese we could soon become a satellite of the Diocese West Texas or the Diocese of Fort Worth.

In the past three years we have lost large portions of three parishes. Most of St. Nicholas’ parish left the Episcopal Church with the Rev. Jon Stasney to form Christ Church Midland which affiliated with Mityana Diocese in Uganda. Much of Good Shepherd parish in San Angelo left the Episcopal Church in January 2007 to form Good Shepherd Anglican Church, which also affiliated this year with Mityana Diocese. Holy Trinity in Midland has lost substantial numbers of parishioners to several other congregations in Midland.

Lest you think that the losses have ended ministry for those congregations, let me assure you that they are moving forward in Christ’s name. St. Nicholas parish has not recouped all of the losses, but they are on a firm enough footing that they called the Rev. Jim Liggett as their rector in September. St Nicholas’ Celebration of New Ministry is scheduled for Thursday December 6th in the evening. Good Shepherd Episcopal Church lost access to their building in January and began looking for a place to worship and re-start their life together. In February, Christ Church ELCA Lutheran Church invited the faithful community of Episcopalians to join with them for worship, fellowship, and education. Christ Lutheran has a building and no pastor; Good Shepherd had a pastor and no building. The

resulting blending of these two traditions has been a great gift to both congregations. Holy Trinity is pushing forward as best they can and need the prayers of all of us in the coming weeks and months.

The result of these three congregational losses has provided some financial difficulty for the diocesan budget. The Standing Committee, the only body which has authority to lower Apportionments, has granted relief to St. Nicholas for two years and currently to Good Shepherd for this year. We do not know yet the result of losses for Holy Trinity, or if relief will be needed. We are still in litigation with Good Shepherd Ugandan congregation over the property on Beauregard in San Angelo, and that process may continue for several more months. Any legal matter takes an inordinate amount of time and resources, and this litigation certainly is wearing. Hopefully Good Shepherd Episcopal parish will be back in their spiritual home sometime next year.

2008

The last area I want to discuss with you today is our life together for the next year. I have said any number of times that the leave-taking process for bishops is inordinately long. In most jobs an employee gives two weeks notice and leaves. An Episcopal Bishop gives two years notice and hangs around until the bitter end. I will continue to be around, but there are some months that I will not be quite so “around” as usual. Beginning in early February I will be taking about three of the five months of sabbatical leave I have earned. Part of that time I will be travelling and writing and part of the time I will be working on our home in Lubbock, preparing it for sale. We will return to the office in time to make the final preparations for the electing convention for the V Bishop of Northwest Texas on May 3rd 2008. I will be making a full round of visitations in May and June, with several mid-week Confirmations already on the schedule. In July we will be attending the Lambeth Conference in Canterbury England, the once in every ten years gathering of bishops from Anglican

provinces around the world. Then August and part of September we will complete the sabbatical leave and return in time to spend about six weeks with the bishop-elect, prior to the convention and consecration next year in Abilene.

I want to give you a reader's digest schedule of the election process for the next seven months. I believe Jackie Batjer will go over this with you also, but remembering that some individuals need to hear something as many as seven times before it becomes a part of their knowledge bank, let me begin.

In August, you elected representatives to the Nominating Committee from your deaneries. The Standing Committee also appointed four additional members and chose the Chair, Cliff Craig, and the vice-chair, Father Jim Liggett from the elected and appointed membership. They have been working since September to prepare the profile of the Diocese that will help nominees with their own discernment. From October 1st through November 15th you have the opportunity to nominate priests from across the Church to be our next bishop. The Nominating Committee will begin in November their discernment process as to who would best serve this diocese. In March 2008 they will announce a slate of from 3-5 priests who will be on the ballot. There will be a brief window of time to nominate others by petition, or "from the floor." In April, all of the nominees will be with us in the diocese in what is often referred to as a "dog and pony show" or a "penguin parade." I am sure we will have a more appropriate term for our "walk-about" when it occurs. On May 3, 2008 our Electing Convention will convene and, hopefully, elect my successor. Over the next several months the Standing Committee and the Presiding Bishop's office will collect the Canonically required consents for the consecration of our bishop-elect. Then, next year in Abilene, we will ordain and consecrate the V Bishop of Northwest Texas.

I do not want my last year among you to be a time of mourning or a time of stasis. We have much work to do together to proclaim the Good News of God's love in Jesus Christ to a fractured, unlovable, hurting world. It is up to us to proclaim by word and deed this Good News; we cannot simply hope others will do it for us. Our evangelism style is more subdued perhaps than other Christians, but every one of us knows someone for whom Church is not a regular part of their lives. Some of those may be people who have been hurt by the Church; others may have never been involved with a Christian community; others may be seeking for a community that will embrace them with the love of Jesus Christ. Lest you forget, let me remind you of some startling statistics. For several years we subscribed to Percept who provided us with more demographic data than we could use. In *every* county in our diocese, and there are 80 counties, the un-churched and under-churched make up 65% of the total population. "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send laborers into his harvest. (MT 9:37-38) Those laborers are you and me, brothers and sisters.

One other statistic that is stunning concerns church membership by age. The generation born before 1935 are called "builders; 70% of them are church members. Those born between 1935-46 are the "bridge generation"; 50% of us are members. The Baby Boomers, born between 1946-64, are about 35% churched. Members of "Generation X," born between 1965 and 1982, are about 16% active church members. Of "the Millennial generation or Generation Y" born after 1982, only 4% are involved. Do you see both possibilities and challenges? We need to get busy today!

I have been asked many times the question, "What are we going to do without you?" Always my answer is, "the Lord will provide exactly the person this diocese needs to move us forward, proclaiming Christ Jesus as Lord of all." I reminded the clergy at our annual

conference three weeks ago that ministry is not about “you”, it about Jesus Christ. I challenged them to give up the personal pronoun “my” when referring to ministry, the congregation they serve, or almost anything. I also ordered them to chastise me when I lapse into such “ownership” of ministry or the diocese.

I also want to share with you a wonderful story that I heard from the Bishop of North Carolina, Michael Curry. When he preached his first sermon as rector of a parish in Baltimore, an old man came up to him and introduced himself and said, “I’m part of the B group.” Michael looked puzzled and asked him to explain. The man replied, “Before you got here, I be here. While you are here, I be here. When you leave, I be here. I’m part of the B group.” Well friends, you are mostly the “B Group,” for which I give God thanks and praise.

You have nurtured me throughout these years and challenged me in ways I didn’t know were possible. You have called me to prayer and prayed along side of me. You have loved me when I was not very lovable. You have supported my ideas and dreams, even when they were not practical, and then you made them happen.

As St. Paul closes his first letter to the Christians at Thessalonica, I say to you. ”May the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, and he will do it. Brethren, pray for us.” (I Thess 5:23-25”)