

The Bishop's Page



The Bishop's Annual Address
to the 35th Convention of the Diocese of Fort Worth
Saturday, Nov. 4, 2017

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to all of you serving as clergy and lay delegates to this 35th Annual Convention of the Diocese of Fort Worth, and a special welcome to those of you who are visitors and honored guests. In particular, we wish to acknowledge the presence of the Most Rev. Mark Haverland, the Archbishop and Metropolitan of the Anglican Catholic Church, who will be addressing us briefly later this morning.

The theme for this Convention, "Abounding in Thanksgiving," comes from St. Paul's Letter to the Colossians, in chapter 2, verse 6:

As you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so live in him,

rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

Our annual gathering as a Diocese is a time to underscore these themes of being rooted in Jesus Christ and built up in him, of being established in the faith we have received and been taught, and it is for these reasons that we are “abounding in thanksgiving.” God has blessed us in this diocese with “a goodly fellowship of faith” where the Word of God is “truly preached and truly heard” and His Sacraments “faithfully administered and faithfully received.”



*Clergy and members of Christ Church,
Waco*

In particular, we give thanks for the continued growth of our diocese in starting new congregations and seeing mission churches grow to full parish status. Welcome to our newest mission station, Holy Cross Anglican Church in Abilene, under the pastoral leadership of their founding vicar, the Rev. Dr. Bryan Stewart. And congratulations and commendations to our newest parish, recognized and seated at this Convention: Christ Church, Waco, whose first Rector is the Rev. Lee Nelson, a son of this Diocese. We rejoice in

your fellowship and pray for your continued growth and success in building up the Kingdom of God where you have been planted. You give us hope for the years to come.

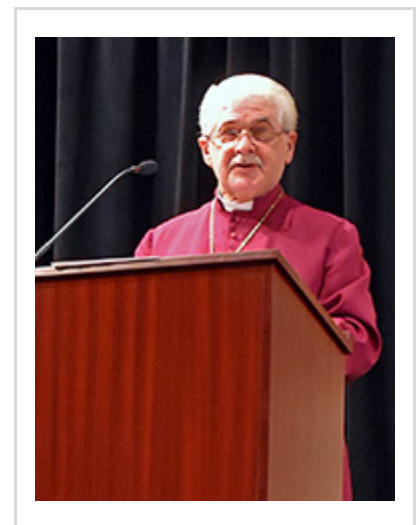
Of particular concern for us in the years ahead is the health and viability of some of our oldest, small-town congregations, whose beginnings date back to the 1870s and 1880s. Several of these missions continue to struggle with survival, with dwindling attendance and resources, over the last several years. They record more deaths than baptisms, and there is little or no population growth in their communities. The diocesan mission budget assists them with the cost for the part-time ministry of a priest on Sunday, but even then, some of these congregations are only able to have a priest once a month or every other week. The increasing costs of compensation, housing, pension, and health insurance for our clergy is more and more of a challenge for each year's budget for most of our churches, and especially for our smallest ones. We commend the members of these congregations for their faithfulness, service, and sacrifice, and we pledge to them our continued concern, prayers, and support. May God sustain and encourage you as you persevere and remain steadfast in trying times. I also want to express my sincere gratitude to all the retired and non-parochial priests who travel some distance on Sundays to celebrate and preach in these congregations. It is a labor of love and is deeply appreciated.

There are two events in the Anglican Church in North America over the past year that should be mentioned in this report. The first is the decision of the Diocese of South Carolina this past spring to become a full member of the ACNA. This became official at the Annual Assembly held in Wheaton, Ill., in June, when we welcomed Bishop Mark Lawrence and his people as the 30th member diocese. As now the largest diocese in the Province, South Carolina brings many additional resources to the ACNA that are much needed and very welcome. Like our own diocese, South Carolina has been engaged in a

long, expensive, legal battle with The Episcopal Church over the ownership and control of property and assets. As most of you probably know, they suffered a great loss in the South Carolina Supreme Court on August 2nd, which came as unexpected surprise to many of us who were following that case. The Diocese has filed for a rehearing as well as the recusal of one of the Supreme Court Justices who is an active supporter of TEC and has been accused of flagrant bias against Bishop Lawrence and his churches. At the same time these appeals are being considered, a federal judge has ordered both sides in the dispute to enter into formal mediation, in hopes of coming to some settlement in the litigation. This mediation takes place on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday of next week, and I commend to your prayers Bishop Lawrence and his diocese as they enter this process.

As to our own litigation with TEC here in Fort Worth, there is nothing new to report since our Convention last year. The appeal has now been before the Second Court of Appeals for a year and a half, and we still have no decision. We wait patiently and prayerfully upon the Lord, trusting in Him for the outcome, and hopeful that we will receive a ruling in our favor in the near future. The good news is this: We are closer to a decision now than we ever have been!

The second event on the Provincial level is the completion of the five-year study of the Task Force on Holy Orders, concerning the ordination of women, and the meeting of the College of Bishops to discuss the report for the first time at a conclave in Victoria, British Columbia, in early September. At the end of the meeting, a Statement was released stating where we are in this continuing controversy that divides us. It was the first time that all the Bishops went on record by stating their position on this issue. It was evident



that no Bishop had changed his mind as a result of the study and that a majority of the Bishops are opposed to the ordination of women priests on biblical and theological grounds.

It is interesting to note that when Archbishop Robert Duncan appointed the Task Force, he charged them with doing a study of the issue of women in holy orders, but instructed them not to come to a conclusion or to make any recommendation as to how to resolve the debate. The report simply summarizes the arguments for and against. This is in stark contrast to a similar study done by the Anglican Mission in America several years ago, known as the Rodgers Report, which concluded that women cannot be ordained bishops or priests, while leaving open the door to the possibility of women deacons. Those of us who agreed to the formation of the ACNA in 2009 did so with the clear understanding that a serious theological study would be done and that a decision would be made at that time.

So where are we? Most ACNA bishops and dioceses are opposed to women priests, but as it presently stands, the ACNA Constitution says each diocese can decide if it will ordain women priests or not. We now need to work with other dioceses to amend the Constitution to remove this provision. As you know, women bishops are not permitted in any diocese, and no bishop wants to change that prohibition.

I would underscore that the recent Bishops' statement declares that the ordination of women "is a recent innovation to Apostolic Tradition and Catholic Order" and that "there is insufficient warrant to accept women's ordination to the priesthood as standard practice." Needless to say, the women priests and their supporters are very unhappy about that.

We are in a state of impaired communion because of this issue. The Task Force concluded that "both sides cannot be right." At the conclave, I informed

the College of Bishops that I will no longer give consent to the election of any bishop who intends to ordain female priests, nor will I attend the consecration of any such bishop-elect in the future. I have notified the Archbishop of my resignation from all the committees to which I had been assigned to signify that it is no longer possible to have “business as usual” in the College of Bishops due to the refusal of those who are in favor of women priests to at least adopt a moratorium on this divisive practice, for the sake of unity. Bishops who continue to ordain women priests in spite of the received tradition are signs of disunity and division. I hope these brief comments give you a better understanding of where we are and what my intentions are for future discussions about this issue which must take place.

This coming April I will celebrate the 25th anniversary of my consecration as a Bishop, and this coming June Donna and I will celebrate our 50th wedding anniversary. It hardly seems possible, but most of our adult life has been lived here in the Diocese of Fort Worth. We have been deeply blessed by your faithfulness, encouragement, and support. Thank you for your witness and prayers as we have stood together over the years. It is because of you, the faithful clergy and laity of this diocese, that we are “abounding in thanksgiving.”