

Bishop's Address, 2010  
106<sup>th</sup> Annual Council of the Diocese of West Texas  
Corpus Christi, Texas  
Friday, February 19

1. Good morning. I want to begin by acknowledging the wonderful effort by the Church of the Good Shepherd in hosting this Diocesan Council. As we know, this is a major undertaking.
2. In addition to serving as our hosts, they are celebrating their 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year. And so, to the co-chairs, clergy, council committees, musicians, youth event coordinators, and people of Good Shepherd, we salute you all and we offer you our deep and abiding gratitude and congratulations to you on your 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary.
3. Bishop Reed and I are regularly reminded of what a privilege it is to serve this diocese and the wider Christian community in our calling as your bishops. We could not do this work without your love and support; your care and concern; and the sharing of your talents and passion for the well-being of our shared mission and ministry in Christ. We offer you our thanks for strengthening our common life as a diocese and our ministry as your bishops.
4. As you saw last night, we are blessed with the presence of many bishops at this council – our own retired bishops as well as bishops from around Texas and around the Anglican Communion. You've heard from some already; you'll hear from others as this council continues. I would like to ask all of our retired and guest bishops to stand so that we might express our welcome and our thanks to you all.
5. On your tables this morning you'll find a card with the Core Values and the Core Purpose of the Diocese of West Texas. These were adopted by the 104<sup>th</sup> Annual Council in 2008, and I want to keep them before us on a regular basis so that the focus of our efforts can be centered in what we proclaim as our core values. You'll notice that on the backs of the cards, we have added a specific question or thought so as to bring the core value "home" to each of us, particularly as we consider our Council theme. Of course, all of the core values should be before us all of the time.
6. At this council, our core value of Reconciliation (We are a community committed to living in reconciled relationship with God and all people) – is a particular focus, especially in light of our theme this year to *bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ* (Galatians 6.2).
7. As we began yesterday and will continue today, we are called to reflect on the question pertaining to our core value of Reconciliation, namely: *What can you*

*do, specifically, to foster a reconciled relationship with God and all people?*

When you take this seriously and prayerfully, you live into the commandment to love God with all your being and love your neighbor as yourself.

8. As we stated at the pre-council meeting and have been discussing thus far at this council, the idea of “covenant” is before us in several ways. God has a covenant with us, we have a covenant with God, and we have a covenant with one another because of our life together in Christ.
9. As you know, there is a proposed Anglican Covenant before the Anglican Communion as the Communion continues to struggle with the understanding of what it means to be and live as a family of churches.
10. Following my address this morning, we are going to have time for discussion of some of the principles which guide our Covenant with God and the proposed Anglican Covenant. So let me turn to the subject of the proposed Anglican Covenant for a few minutes.
11. As you heard at the pre-council meetings, the idea for such a document was introduced in The Windsor Report in 2004. After three drafts and a recent revision on Section four of draft three, the final draft of the proposed Anglican Covenant is now before the Communion for consideration. All of this has taken several years and it will take several more years for each Province of the Communion to consider it and either adopt or reject it.
12. General Convention 2009 passed resolution D020 which “commended the Anglican Covenant...for study and comment” before the next General Convention in 2012. This resolution invites “dioceses and congregations” to consider the Covenant as a “document to inform their understanding of and commitment to our common life in the Anglican Communion.” Our discussion today begins our conversation in response to this resolution.
13. I hope you have had the opportunity to read the information which was distributed at our pre-council meetings and have some familiarity with the proposed Covenant itself.
14. (From the Preamble) The proposed Covenant recognizes “the importance of renewing in a solemn way our commitment to one another, and to the common understanding of faith and order we have received, so that the bonds of affection which hold us together may be re-affirmed and intensified.”
15. The fragile situation in which the Anglican Communion finds itself has been described in many ways. Phrases used to describe the state of affairs in the Anglican Communion include, “the fabric of the Anglican Communion has been torn,” and “the bonds of affection have been strained/broken.”

16. Let me say a word about what the Covenant can and cannot do. The Covenant will not, indeed cannot, solve all of our problems, nor was it designed to do so.
17. We should not look at the Covenant in terms of a political “victory” or a political “defeat.” Many times in the world, and particularly in political systems, if you can win the debate and get the votes, you claim victory. In politics, this may be true (and usually it is only true in the short term until the next election), but this approach certainly does not serve the Church well. Just think for a moment where all of the lobbying, posturing, scheming, planning, debating, and voting in the Church has taken us up to now.
18. As the Body of Christ, we can pass (and have, in fact, passed) all kinds of resolutions, statements and other “structural” actions. But without relationships grounded in Christ per Jesus’ own prayer to God: ***that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me*** (John 17.22-23); no real progress is made toward healing. I said a few years ago in my address that I am not interested in winning, I am interested in healing. This continues to be my focus.
19. Rather than view the Covenant in a win/lose political framework, we would be much better served to understand the conversation around the Covenant as part of our ongoing spiritual formation.
20. The principles behind the written words of the Covenant deserve our prayerful and careful attention. I believe that we should not see the Covenant simply as a “text” written on paper, but something that calls us to a deeper understanding of our belief that God has actually put us together for mission and ministry.
21. Jeremiah gets at this idea when he speaks of looking toward a new covenant not written on tablets of stone but upon the heart (Jer 31.31-34). This “new covenant” is fulfilled in the life and ministry of Jesus: heart, spirit, and mind.
22. Perhaps as we engage our conversation under our theme of ***bearing one another’s burdens***, we might be called to a deeper doctrine of the Church as the body of Christ and find ways which will help us discern the mind of Christ together (1 Corinthians 2.16).
23. All of this remains to be seen, of course. One of the reasons why it has taken several drafts and several years to present a final version of the Covenant to the Communion is that we live in a complicated and very diverse world – a world that Jesus loved (and loves) and for which He gave his life.
24. There are no easy answers. Reasonable people disagree with one another – so-called progressives, moderates, and conservatives. Yes, some have departed our family over the years from all of these perspectives. And yet, the great majority of us remain, living in and through this dilemma, because we continue to believe

that it is important to the Trinity that we “*make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace*” (Ephesians 4.3).

25. Perhaps our recognition yesterday about the “one another’s” in scripture will be your guide as you consider the life we share together in Christ, because as St. Paul warned the Galatians – “if you keep on biting and devouring one another...you will be destroyed by each other” (Galatians 5.15). I do give thanks that we have not experienced much of this in West Texas.
26. The purpose for our common life is to help us to “live by the Spirit” and “walk by the Spirit” (Galatians 5.25); in “the highest degree of communion possible.”
27. And furthermore, in all of this, our goal is to contribute to building up the body of Christ as it grows to maturity (Eph 4.1-16; Col 3.8-17).
28. What, then, does the proposed Covenant put before the Communion? Put plainly, the statements in the first three sections are nothing new to Anglicanism. These sections affirm the historic understandings of the Church in regard to Scripture, the Creeds, and Baptism and Eucharist.
29. This Covenant reminds us that Scripture is the “Word of God” and “contains all things necessary to salvation” – and it reminds us of the importance of the Church’s mission and our call to the mission field, whether local or international. It calls us to a careful and prayerful understanding of Scripture in our life together and speaks to the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in guiding our understanding and our transformation.
30. It acknowledges the complexities of the world in which we live, and seeks to identify the challenges in finding the balance between unity and uniformity, independence and interdependence, autonomy and accountability.
31. It recognizes that there are significant ecumenical dimensions to our actions and expresses hope that this family of the universal Church can continue its spiritual and historic place as servants of Jesus Christ who offer themselves as partners in God’s redeeming work in the world.
32. Section Four describes a process whereby disputes will be addressed. It remains to be seen if this will be effective and how in actuality it will be lived out.
33. The Archbishop of Canterbury has spoken several times of a kind of two-tier Communion and this idea is certainly new, untested, and in many quarters unpopular. It is also unclear what exactly this idea means at this point or if it will actually become a reality.
34. Certainly the responsibility of living in and with interdependence and accountability to one another is left squarely on the doorstep of each Province.

35. Each Province will consider the Covenant according to its constitutional processes. What that means for the American Church is that it will not be acted on, at the Provincial level, until the next General Convention in 2012.
36. While there is no provision for individual dioceses or congregations to officially “adopt” the Covenant on the Communion level, there is also nothing preventing these bodies from affirming/endorsing the Covenant and the principles that guide it. The Covenant certainly has the support of the Archbishop of Canterbury who has indicated that dioceses are welcome to affirm it.
37. It is my hope and expectation that this Diocesan Council and the diocese as a whole will seriously engage the scriptural understanding of “Covenant” in general and the theological understanding of this “Anglican Covenant” in particular – under the biblical themes of letting down our nets into deep water; of denying ourselves, taking up our crosses and following Jesus; of bearing one another’s burdens as we abide in Christ; and doing all of these things while we walk humbly with our God.
38. I am asking that 2010 be a year in which our congregations and our diocesan leadership give prayerful consideration and careful conversation to the proposed Covenant. I expect Diocesan Council in 2011 to express our thoughts about the Covenant as we continue to be a part of the Body of Christ, the Anglican Communion, and the Episcopal Church. This will also likely mean that we will continue to live into the Spirit’s call to *bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ*. To assist you in your congregational discussions, Saturday we are going to give you a “take-home” kit that includes (or points you to) resources pertaining to the Anglican Covenant and covenant in general.
39. Let me turn to our diocesan life for a moment. I continue to be very proud to serve a diocesan family that is so active and engaged in so many areas – an ever growing community outreach and neighborhood involvement focus; likely the most active camps and conferencing program in the Episcopal Church; one of the finest, if not the finest, World Mission departments in the Church, and the list goes on and on. I hope you realize what a blessing it is to be part of such an extended, yet connected, family.
40. Certainly we have challenges and we are not perfect. We all know the impact of the current state of the economy in our communities and in our churches over the last couple of years. Some of our churches are experiencing difficult budget challenges and others are experiencing some amazing increases in spite of the overall economy. The diocesan budget for 2010 shows a deficit for the first time in a long time. Everyone is being impacted at some level.
41. In your stewardship efforts, I want to urge you to think about your congregation’s budget as the “common purse” for Christ’s ministry that is established when you

and other members of your congregation come together to provide the necessary resources for your ministry – ministry that you otherwise could not undertake by yourself. The diocesan budget also represents a common purse – those resources which are brought together for the mission and ministry in our common call as workers in Christ’s vineyard, here and elsewhere.

42. Christian stewardship is not “fund-raising.” It is “faith-raising”; and it demands the best we have to offer, all the time. Even as we acknowledge the 10% tithe as the biblical standard of giving, the gospels remind us through several stories that Jesus asks for a 100% commitment.
43. As a diocese, we have not had a stewardship conference in several years. In 2010, we shall. It will be offered in two locations, Corpus Christi on August 21 and San Antonio on August 28. It is my expectation that the clergy and stewardship chairs from each congregation will attend, along with all vestry/bishop’s committee members and stewardship committee members.
44. In preparing for this conference, the Department of Stewardship will be conducting a short, on-line Congregational Needs Assessment. Dr. Robert Stephens, a pediatrician attending St. Andrew’s, Seguin, a consultant for The Episcopal Network of Stewardship, and the former Stewardship Chair in the Diocese of Ohio, will be helping us analyze and interpret the results. Our goal is to develop the stewardship tools to best equip our congregations for effective annual and year-round stewardship.
45. In addition, this will be a good time for us to be together and to focus on the theological understanding of good stewardship, as well as to focus on practical ways to move forward with a stewardship campaign. More details will be available throughout the spring. I am asking that all congregations have their stewardship chairperson named by April 15, and complete the Needs Assessment survey when you receive it.
46. Financial stewardship does not stand in isolation from the rest of a congregation’s life. The resources that are available for ministry are connected with the rest of your congregation’s purpose, life, and ministry. So, to be good stewards, we need to constantly be asking ourselves questions such as:
  - What was Jesus’ life for? What was the purpose of His life?
  - Based on those answers, what is “the Church” (big picture) for?
  - What is your individual congregation for – what is its purpose?
  - What might you do better in your ministries?
  - Why would someone want to attend your church?
  - What, exactly and specifically, is your current evangelism plan? Are you simply hoping/waiting to see who shows up?
  - How many people have you personally invited to church recently?

- What are people offered when they do attend the various opportunities in your congregation?
- Are your efforts aimed at new programs because you feel you need to be doing something; or are your efforts truly and intentionally focused on making, equipping, and sending disciples?

47. Last year, we had a wonderful June event called *Abide in Me*, which addressed many of these questions. 500 people turned out to spend the day together, to worship together, and to share best practices at the congregational level. How many of you attended? Evaluation after evaluation called for another *Abide in Me*, so we have Saturday, June 5, 2010, reserved at TMI for our second gathering.
48. Related to this year's plans for *Abide in Me* is the experience from our annual clergy conference which was held this past October. Our presenter for that conference was Reggie McNeal, author and speaker on life in the Church and life in the culture. Reggie challenged us, entertained us, and drove us to ask serious questions about our life as Christians and about the life of our congregations.
49. The clergy expressed the strong desire that Reggie be brought back to the diocese, and he has agreed to be our speaker at this year's *Abide in Me* conference. I will have more to say later at this council about this, and we will have a short video promo to show you before we adjourn. For now, mark the date on your calendar: June 5, 2010.
50. Bishop Reed and I are regularly in conversation about how we might serve the diocese better. To that end, beginning in 2010, Bishop Reed will have primary responsibility for all mission congregations in the diocese. In many ways, this merely formalizes what we put into effect toward the end of 2009.
51. His office and John Rayls' office of Congregational Development and Strategic Planning will work with our mission congregations in a variety of ways. By doing this, our mission congregations have a centralized location for planning, questions, and coordination. I am very grateful to Bishop Reed for all that he does, and especially this new initiative to help our churches.
52. I also want 2010 to be a year of review; both for our committees on the diocesan level and within the committees in your congregations. We need to look at what we're doing, why we're doing it, and perhaps even if we need to be doing it. As the saying goes, "If the horse is dead, dismount."
53. In addition, we need to look at what we are not doing and see if we need to start doing it. In taking this "inventory", we'll find our strengths, discover how to make some of our efforts stronger, and may even give ourselves permission to let some things go so that we might increase our effectiveness in making stronger and more able disciples.

54. I mentioned earlier that we are in the midst of some tough times and that is true on several levels. And tough times require visionary leadership, both lay and ordained. I want you to be encouraged in your leadership of your congregation; and please let your bishops know how we can help you in this.
55. If you as leaders are not passionate, visionary, and hopeful about the fact that God placed you here and now – in this time in history – for a purpose and to make a difference, your congregations will drift along and you’ll simply be managing decline.
56. I want to encourage all of you to recommit to your baptismal promises and the clergy to renew, in a solemn way with your Lord, your ordination vows. I don’t mean to for you to simply stand up and do this in a liturgical setting – I’m talking about our laity using the baptismal covenant and the clergy using your ordination vows as something you read, pray, and think about on a regular basis.
57. Make this a part of your daily devotional and prayer time throughout Lent. If you don’t have a daily devotional and prayer time, establish one. Catherine and I began an early morning devotional time together in Advent. We use a variety of seasonal meditations, the daily office scripture readings, theological reflection questions, and what is going on in our own life and marriage for these morning offerings.
58. Whether you have a partner or partners in this or do it alone, it is very important for your spiritual vitality and in your daily re-commitment that you do it. It should be part of what you mean when you say, “give us this day, our *daily* bread.”
59. And speaking of devotionals, I want to encourage you to read Galatians and 1 & 2 Thessalonians as our reading this year as a diocesan family. As you know, for the last several years I have asked the diocese to read and study a book of the Bible. This year, I commend these three epistles to you in whatever formats you might choose at your congregation. I want to especially recommend that vestry and bishop’s committees begin with a devotional time using these books as a guide for your meditations. As I did last year, I also want these vestry/bishop’s committee devotionals to be led by the laity.
60. Life is not all about getting to the office or wherever you spend the day, so that you can get things checked off your list. And I am one of the people who keep a list and like to check things off of it. Sometimes, I’m tempted to add something to my list that I have just completed so at least I’ll feel like I am making some progress on getting something finished!
61. But we’re not running “franchises” whose highest goal is “efficiency” at the expense of theological and spiritual well-being. We are participating in the living body of Christ, and we are called to a deeper understanding and a higher standard.

62. Reach for this higher standard; because “clergy wellness” and “lay wellness” are tremendously important to our mission; and frankly, not everyone is well. Yet, all of us can be well – but usually not in isolation.
63. Yes, the devil is always whispering to us, “You can’t do this; you can’t do that; blah, blah, blah.” Fear can come to dominate. Maybe that’s why the scripture is full of stories where messengers come from God with the words, “Do not be afraid.”
64. As Bishop Reed and I move about the diocese, we do see visionary and hopeful leadership, both for the present time and for the legacy we shall leave for others. I could mention many specific examples of what I am talking about, but let me just say a word about a few of the places we’ve visited in the last few months; and some of this is all the more remarkable considering the economic times in which we find ourselves. Time does not permit me to mention all the good work going on, but let me offer a few examples.
65. St. Mark’s, San Marcos, just dedicated a wonderful new facility this past Sunday. Epiphany, Raymondville, is building a new parish hall, classrooms, and office space; and Grace, Llano, has a new building underway.
66. Reconciliation, San Antonio, has become the first church in South Texas to install solar panels. Land acquisitions have been completed or are underway at St. Paul’s, San Antonio; St. Michael’s and All Angels in Blanco; and Holy Spirit, San Antonio.
67. Grace Church, our new church plant near TMI, has spent the last year and half developing relationships and building community in Christ. We expect them to petition for mission status at next year’s council.
68. St. John’s, New Braunfels, and St. Bartholomew’s, Corpus Christi, finished major remodeling in the past year. Redeemer, Eagle Pass, rededicated their school house after substantial improvements. St. Mark’s, Corpus Christi, and St. Mark’s, San Antonio, are both in beautiful new and newly remodeled facilities.
69. To all of these and to all of you who are improving your facilities; thank you. Buildings are important, yes, but they are not the most important things. They are simply tools for our most important callings.
70. These callings include, but are not limited to, aspects of daily Christian life such as spiritual development, discipleship formation, reaching out to others in need, daily pastoral care, and sharing the love of Christ with friend and stranger.
71. Many of our congregations are deeply engaged in thinking new thoughts for these and other extremely important callings in shaping and building their ministries;

and I thank you all as well. We have people all over the diocese participating in Bible studies; tending faithfully to worship; forming disciples who are growing spiritually; and reaching out to others in hundreds of ways. May God inspire and bless us all as we seek to align our ministries and the use of our facilities with God's desires.

72. Now, some final thoughts. Fifty three years ago, I was in my parents arms as they stood in church to have some water sprinkled on my head and some prayers offered on my behalf. I had no idea what God was up to that morning. And yet, that morning began to change my life.
73. Twenty-eight years ago, also in a church, I was ordained a deacon; and I didn't really know what God was up to on that day, either. And yet, even as those hands were laid upon my head that evening, my life began to change once again.
74. Though I didn't know it at the time at either of these events, I was being called – as you are being called – to be a leader in our church through perhaps the most tumultuous time in her history.
75. Six years ago, also in a church service, hands were once again laid upon my head and I was ordained a bishop. Like other pivotal times in my life, I really didn't know what God was up to on that morning and in fact wondered if God knew either. And yet, my life was changed again that day.
76. So I stand before you ready to begin my seventh year as a bishop in God's Church, and my 54<sup>th</sup> year as a baptized member of God's family. In all of these things, I've come to believe something, and I pray that I am seeing this correctly.
77. I think that God might have been thinking at my baptism, at my confirmation, and at my ordinations, "Gary doesn't know it yet, but I'm going to need him later right where I put him and I'm counting on him to stick with it."
78. Now, I say these things to you, not because I think of myself more highly than I ought to, but rather because each one of you can believe the same things about God's activity and purpose in and through the events of your own life.
79. God had and has a plan for you throughout the moments of your life; and you are needed right where God has put you. God is counting on you to stick with it. I'm staying right here in what I understand to be faithful obedience to God's call as Bishop of West Texas. I hope that you are committed to our journey together as well.
80. Every Sunday morning at the beginning of the Eucharistic prayer we join in a simple, yet profound exchange: ***Lift up your hearts. We lift them up to the Lord.*** Have you ever taken a moment to reflect on what this might actually mean?

81. To me, it means getting caught up in the promises of God by lifting our hearts. It means renewing your trust in God. It means opening and lifting your hearts to God and experiencing the gift of God's grace. It means offering yourself to the Lord's service and contributing to the body of Christ.
82. All of this begins when you *lift up your heart*. I hope that the simple exchange *Lift up your hearts – We lift them up to the Lord* helps you understand that you are the Church, the body of Christ.
83. If you want to know what the Church thinks about the issues of the day, what the Church is doing to relieve suffering, how the Church is manifesting God's will on earth as it is heaven, how the Church is bringing about peace and justice, what the Church is doing to heal the sick and bring hope to the hopeless...look at your own example. You are the Church.
84. The Holy Spirit calls each person and each congregation to love God, and to participate in transforming the world for Jesus' sake. In living into our diocesan theme this year *to bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ*, I hope that you will be intentional in discovering ways in which you can put the needs of others ahead of your own – for when you do this, you'll be as close to Christ as you will ever be, this side of heaven.
85. So our task is to find ways by which we may encourage one another, assist one another in becoming the kind of disciples that Jesus calls us to be, and in taking this great Good News out from our places of worship into the world which needs to hear the message that we have been told to bring.
86. My prayer for you, then, is a prayer of joy. As you *lift up your heart unto the Lord*, may your joy be complete. May you find ways to bless others by doing what you enjoy.
87. *Glory to God whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine: Glory to him from generation to generation in the Church, and in Christ Jesus for ever and ever. Amen.* (Ephesians 3.20-21).