

The 141st Annual Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Albany
Bishop's Address
By
The Right Reverend William H. Love

Dear Friends in Christ – Welcome! The 141st Annual Convention of the Diocese of Albany is now in session. Let us pray:

Almighty and ever living God, source of all wisdom and understanding, be present with all those who take counsel at this 141st Annual Convention of the Diocese of Albany, for the renewal and mission of your Church. Gracious Father, we pray for thy holy Catholic Church. Fill it with all truth, in all truth with all peace. Where it is corrupt, purify it; where it is in error, direct it; where in any thing it is amiss, reform it. Where it is right, strengthen it; where it is in want, provide for it; where it is divided, reunite it. Teach us in all things to seek first your honor and glory. Guide us to perceive what is right, and grant us both the courage to pursue it and the grace to accomplish it. Grant that Your Word may be truly preached and truly heard, Your Sacraments faithfully administered and faithfully received. By Your Holy Spirit, fashion our lives according to the example of your Son, and grant that we may show the power of your love to all among whom we live. Inspire our witness to your Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ, that all may know the power of His forgiveness and the hope of His resurrection, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen. (BCP pp 816-818)

I've been looking forward to this year's Diocesan Convention and Family Reunion for quite some time. In fact, no sooner had we finished evaluating last year's Convention, than we began making plans for this year. It is such a blessing to be able to be here together with all of my fellow priests and deacons and so many of our lay leaders and Brothers and Sisters in Christ, representing each of our 123 parishes and summer chapels stretching all the way from the Pennsylvania boarder to the Canadian boarder and from the Vermont / Massachusetts line to just this side of Utica. I know many of you have been saving your pennies all year to be able to attend. I greatly appreciate each of you and the sacrificial giving of your time and your resources to come to Convention, representing your parishes and your Diocese. I trust and pray that the Convention and accompanying Youth Rally, and Vacation Bible School will not only be a blessing to each of us, young and old alike, but most especially that it will glorify God and build up His Kingdom.

As I have often stated, one of the great blessings of Convention is the opportunity to meet and visit with friends and brothers and sisters in Christ not only from around the Diocese, but also from around the wider Anglican Communion. This year we are blessed and honored to have with us for the first time, The Rt. Rev. Todd McGregor, Bishop of Toliara, Madagascar, and his wife, the Rev. Patsy McGregor. Bishop and Patsy, please stand up. Karen and I first met Bishop Todd and Patsy this past summer at the Lambeth Conference. Meeting and getting to know them was one of the highlights of Lambeth. Originally from Vermont, Todd and Patsy along with their two daughters moved to Africa to serve our Lord and His Church in both Kenya and Madagascar. One of the things that I have been most touched by has been their willingness to sacrifice and give up so much from a worldly and material standpoint, in order to be obedient to the Lord's call. I have invited them to address the Convention tomorrow morning, sharing a little about their ministry and also the message the Lord has given them to share with us. Bishop Todd and Patsy – Welcome to the Diocese of Albany.

We are most blessed to have with us once again, two very dear and special friends, ones well know to the Diocese of Albany -- Bishop Harold and Liz Miller, from our sister Diocese of Down and Dromore, in Northern Ireland. This is the 10 year anniversary of Bishop Harold's first visit to the Diocese. Bishop Harold and Liz are not only good friends, they have become invaluable mentors to both me and Karen as we continue to grow into the ministry which the Lord has called us to. I can't imagine what Lambeth would have been like without them. Having attended Lambeth in 1998, they were seasoned veterans and showed us all the ropes, teaching us not only what to do, but also what not to do. Bishop Harold and Liz, you and the Diocese of Down and Dromore have been and continue to be such a blessing to all of us in Albany. Bishop Harold will be our guest preacher tomorrow afternoon at the Eucharist. In addition to the Miller's, we are also blessed and honored to have with us from Ireland, The Rev. Dean Henry and Gerry Hull, The Rev. Canon Edwy Kille, Bill and Sally Ireland, Joanne Hamilton, Annette McGrath, Nicholas Lebey, and Alyn Jones. Thank you so much for coming to be with us. Welcome!

Also joining us is another friend of the Diocese, the Rt. Rev. Alpha Mohamed, retired Bishop of the Rift Valley, Tanzania. I first met Bishop Alpha about five or six years ago while I was still serving as rector of St. Mary's, Lake Luzerne. He was in the United States on sabbatical and was serving as Bishop Missioner for African Team Ministries, something familiar to most of us, visiting parishes throughout the Country. The weekend he was scheduled to come to St. Mary's

happened to be the Convention Weekend. We were blessed to have him join us for the Diocesan Convention as well as visit and preach at St. Mary's. I remember as we were driving late Saturday night back to Lake Luzerne through the wilds of the Adirondacks, I told Bishop Alpha that we needed to keep our eyes open for deer running across the road. He replied, "If we were in my country, we would be looking for lions." Bishop Alpha is one of the holiest and most prayerful men I've ever met. He is a powerful preacher and evangelist with a true heart for missions, with a long history of planting churches, schools and even an orphanage. Bishop Alpha will be our guest preacher at the Sunday morning Youth Mass. Bishop Alpha, we are honored to have you with us once again – Welcome!

I would like to extend a special welcome to Bishop David Ball, the retired 7th Bishop of Albany. While he is unable to be here this evening, he will be with us tomorrow.

We also welcome Sister Mary Elizabeth of the Sisters of St. Mary. Mother Miriam normally would have been with us as well, but she is currently in Africa. As always, we are richly blessed by the Sisters' Spirit-filled presence in our Diocese and their unceasing prayers. Sister Mary Elizabeth, thank you again for joining us.

While normally out on the road and away from my family almost every weekend, visiting parishes throughout the Diocese, or attending a meeting somewhere around the world, it is a real treat and blessing for me to have Karen and Catie here for the Convention. While Catie has always enjoyed Convention, an added incentive for Catie coming this year, now that she is 16, she got to drive here. Unlike her brother, who seemed to be oblivious to stop signs when he first started driving, Catie is quite observant. Speaking of Chris, unfortunately, he hasn't been able to join us for Convention for the last couple of years. This past semester he has been doing a semester abroad in Istanbul, Turkey, and won't be back until this coming Wednesday, June 10th. Last year, Chris wasn't able to be here either because he was in Montana meeting his girl friend Lauren's family. You might recall, I commented that I thought they were getting very serious! I was right – Chris and Lauren are engaged and plan to be married this August. We are very excited and happy for both of them and for our families. I am so appreciative to Karen and the kids for their constant love and support. They are truly a gift from God.

I wish time permitted for me to personally recognize and thank each of you who have come to Convention this weekend as well as those unable to attend, for the

multitude of ministries that you are involved in and for your many contributions to the life of your parishes, the Diocese and the larger Church, but we would be here all night. Knowing me, we might be anyway – just kidding. Please know how much I do appreciate and give thanks for each of you. I am honored to serve our Lord with you.

I would like to take just a few moments, however, to recognize a few people who are in key leadership positions and upon whom I greatly depend.

First, we owe a very special thank you to three highly organized, patient and gifted ladies, without whom this Convention Weekend would never have been possible. Carol Drummond, Convention Coordinator, Micki Thomas and Sue Ellen Ruetsch Workshop Coordinator, have been instrumental in planning, organizing and carrying out hundreds of details involved in putting on this weekend. I have termed them our “Convention’s Dynamic Trio.” Please join me in saying THANK YOU. God Bless you!

Archdeacon Harvey Huth, Secretary of the Diocese, also played a key role in organizing the business aspects of the Convention. He has done an admirable job, taking over for our former Secretary, Fr. Shaw Mudge, who as most of you know is now serving in a missionary teaching ministry in Peru, along with his wife, Mother Julie, and their daughter, Lydia. Stephen Hasslacher has once again demonstrated his outstanding artistic ability in designing the Convention Logo. Fr. Christopher Brown and his team of musicians helped organize and will provide our music. Dean Vang planned and put together the liturgy for the weekend. Deacon Nancy Goff has helped organize and arrange for all the vendors. Working side by side with them has been the diocesan staff, members of Christ the King staff, and countless other volunteers. Thank you for all that you has done.

The next person I would like to say a special thank you quickly to is someone that many of you already know, but not in his new capacity. I have asked Fr. Chip Strickland to serve as the Diocesan Chancellor. No sooner did he say yes, then I put him to work helping prepare for the Convention. I am very appreciative to Fr. Chip as well as our Assistant Chancellors, Tom Bell and Raymond Dague for their legal and parliamentary expertise. Fr. Charles King, head of the Constitution and Cannons has also been of great assistance.

Turning now to those folks who work with me on a daily basis, carrying out the normal business and ministry of the Diocese:

Canon Bob Haskell, my Canon to the Ordinary, and his wife Margaret, have been and continue to be such a blessing to me and our Diocese, working side by side and often behind the scenes supporting the various ministries of the Diocese, particularly helping me to better minister to the clergy and their families. Canon Bob and Margaret, thank you for giving so much of yourselves in the service of our Lord and His Church.

Canon Jerry Carroll, my Lay Canon for Administration is another person who consistently goes above and beyond the call of duty. Jerry is often at work late at night, long after everyone else has gone home, trying to keep me organized and out of trouble, no easy task. Jerry, I continue to give thanks to our Lord for you and appreciate you more than you know. In addition to Jerry, I also want to thank his wife, Fran, for her patience with Jerry's long hours, but also for all her long hours of volunteer work at the Diocesan Office. Fran you are a tremendous blessing to us.

Beth Strickland, our Diocesan Deployment Officer, is doing an outstanding job assisting our parishes during their search process when clergy vacancies occur, in addition to assisting me with the interview of new clergy coming into the diocese and clergy assignments, as well as a multitude of other things. Little did she know what she was getting into. Thank you so much, Beth.

I am very appreciative to our South Swan Street Diocesan Staff -- Lorin, Kris, Carol, Joan, Sue, and Ray. They too, are doing a wonderful job, along with Clark Curtis, our Diocesan Treasurer. As Clark will share with you tomorrow, the audit for 2008 is complete and once again – it is a clean audit, with no qualifiers or areas of concern.

Canon Matt Baker, Director of Christ the King Spiritual Life Center, as always is doing a truly outstanding job, along with Maggie and all the dedicated staff at Christ the King. I can't sing their praises loudly enough. Day in and day out, they sacrificially give of themselves ministering to the people of this diocese and the larger Church. In addition to Matt and the staff, I extend a special thank you to the countless volunteers and others who contribute in so many ways to the life and ministry of the Spiritual Life Center. God is blessing and using Christ the King Spiritual Life Center in ways we could never imagine to minister to His people and build up His Kingdom. Through the grace of God and the hard work and generosity of so many people, The Spiritual Life Center ended the year 2008 having taken in for the first time, slightly more than we spent. We are about two to three years ahead of where we thought we would be when we first opened Christ

the King. With that said, finances continue to be very tight and therefore we are highly dependent on and appreciative of the generosity of so many who give of their time and resources in support of the Lord's work at the SLC. If you have never been to the SLC or haven't been there recently, I invite and encourage you to come and visit and bring a friend.

A vitally important part of that which goes on at Christ the King is the healing ministry. Fr. Nigel Mumford, Lynn, Sandra, and all the members of the Healing Ministry Prayer Teams at the SLC, as well as in parishes throughout the Diocese, are doing a phenomenal job, sharing the love and healing grace of our Lord Jesus Christ with all those who come seeking prayers for healing for themselves and their loved ones. Thank you for your faithfulness. May the Lord continue to bless you as you serve as an instrument through which the power of the Holy Spirit may flow mightily to touch, transform and bring healing to the hearts, bodies and minds of all those seeking healing prayer.

Last year we announced the launching of The Welcome Home Initiative, a new healing ministry geared toward ministering to combat veterans and their families. I am very appreciative to Fr. Nigel and Noel Dawes and to all those assisting them in helping to establish this greatly needed and invaluable ministry to those who have sacrificed and given so much of themselves in the defense of our nation and that of our allies. The Lord is really blessing this ministry. Lives are not only being healed, but also saved.

One other vitally important ministry taking place at Christ the King that we need to recognize and give thanks for is the Beaver Cross Youth Ministry. Tina Mitchell and the Beaver Cross staff are doing a terrific job reaching out and ministering to the youth in our Diocese. The Beaver Cross overnight Summer Camp and Day Camp is continuing to grow. If your kids haven't signed up yet, it's not too late. Scholarships are available.

We are blessed this weekend to have a number of young people from around the Diocese with us for Vacation Bible School and the Youth Rally that is taking place in conjunction with the Convention. Would all the kids please stand up? Welcome! It is so wonderful to have you with us this weekend. I realize you are being pulled in a million directions and had a number of places you could have been this weekend other than here. I am proud of you for making your faith a priority and coming to the Youth Rally and VBS. We need you to help us bring life and vitality back into the Church. Come to Church and invite your friends. It's ok to bring your family as well. Don't be afraid to let your parents, your rector,

and the others adults in the parish know that you don't want to be just another pretty face seen and not heard, but that you want to be an active part of the Church, involved in the different parish ministries and outreach ministries of the Church. You have much to offer and we have much to learn from you. May the Lord bless each of you as you continue to grow in your faith and may He encourage you to share your faith with your friends and your family.

To all the adults out there, if we want and expect kids to come to Church, we need to invite and bring them and we need to make sure they have something to come to. If you don't have a Sunday School program or Youth Group, start one and then find the kids to fill it; not the other way around. There are very few ministries in the Church that kids can't be a part of – involve them. I recently received a letter from a parent who speaking of the “average teen” stated and I quote, “Their ministry is one of presence – they show up!” While “presence” is, in fact, vitally important, I expect far more than that and I know the kids want more than that. They don't want to be a pew potato. We have far too many of those as it is. Church does not have to be, nor should it be dull and boring, regardless of what age we are. While most of our churches don't have gymnasiums or fancy video games as a draw to get our kids to come to Church – we have something far better – the Lord of the universe. There is nothing more exciting, more captivating, more fulfilling than a true encounter with the risen Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus is not dead, He is alive. We are a resurrection people, it is important that we live like it, so that our kids can grow up in a living and vibrant faith. One of the things kids need most of in the troubled times in which we live is to be loved and appreciated. Let's help them meet the one who created them and the one who loves them more than any of us can fully comprehend. There is no greater gift we can share with our young people or one another.

I am very appreciative to Kathleen Trees and her dedicated team for heading up this year's Vacation Bible School. Thank them and their team. As challenging as this is under normal circumstances, as many of you may know, Kathleen and Fr. Tom just recently had a new son (Number 5) and they are in the midst of packing in preparation for their upcoming move to the Diocese of Western Louisiana. Fr. Tom and Kathleen, you and the boys are going to be greatly missed. Thank you for all that you have done and all that you continue to do. We ask God's blessing upon you.

Leading this year's Youth Rally is Pastor Shaw McBride, Chairman of the Youth and Family Ministries Department at the Washington Bible College in Washington D.C. In his more than ten years of youth ministry, he has been used

by the Lord to bless and minister to thousands of kids across the United States, in all different parts of the Body of Christ. Pastor Shaw, thank you for being with us this weekend and sharing the love of Christ with our kids. Welcome to the Diocese of Albany.

Also helping out this weekend are several members of the Brotherhood of St. Andrews, Cursillo, the Daughters of the King, and the Franciscan Community of the Holy Cross. I want to thank all the members of each of these special ministries not only for their assistance this weekend, but for all they do throughout the year. Welcome and thank you.

The final group that we need to take just a moment to recognize is all of our new clergy beginning first with those who have moved to the Diocese this past year. If you would please stand when I call your name: Fr. Colin (Penny) Belton – Trinity, Plattsburgh; Fr. John (Karen+) Henry – St. Georges, Clifton Park; The Rev. Dr. Grant (Wendy) LeMarquand – Trinity Episcopal School of Ministry, PA; Fr. Stephen (Angie) Schlossberg – Nashotah House, WI; The Rev. Margaret (Terrance) Shaw – St. John's, Essex; Fr. John Thompson – St. John in the Wilderness, Copake Falls. Welcome to the Diocese of Albany!

In addition to those moving to the Diocese or becoming canonically resident in the Diocese, we have had a number of ordinations this past year, to include the following individuals to the Diaconate: Deacons: Debbie Beach, Paul Carney, Maureen Demler, Scott Evans, Nina George Hacker, Vicki Hunter, Larry Hubert, Neal Longe, Scott Underhill, and Scott Walker.

Seven of our transitional deacons were ordained to the priesthood: Brock Baker+, Richard Chandler+, Jim French+, Richard Lehmann+, Jay North+, Chip Strickland+ and Sue Waldron+. Congratulations to all of our newly ordained deacons and priests and to those who are soon to be ordained. May the Lord bless you each mightily in your new ministry.

As attested to by the information just shared, the Diocese remains committed to calling and raising up gifted and holy men and women to the ordained ministry. We are also very committed to raising up and equipping godly lay men and women for lay ministries in the Church. As I am constantly reminding people, the Lord calls far more people to the lay ministry than He does to the ordained ministry. More will be said about that in a few moments.

Once again, to all those mentioned by name and the thousands unnamed, but each vitally important to the life and ministry of our parishes, this diocese and the building up of God's Kingdom – Thank You!!! The Lord is doing a mighty work in and through you, but there is still much more that needs to be done.

Several months ago, I organized a strategic planning committee made up of both lay and ordained leaders from around the Diocese, to assist me in taking a serious look at the life and ministries of our Diocese and parishes, in an attempt to identify not only our strengths and weaknesses, but more importantly to come to a better understanding of who we believe the Lord is calling us to be as this part of the body of Christ – known as the Diocese of Albany, and how we can best live into that identity and better serve the Lord and His Church. It has proved to be a very beneficial time of prayer, of reflection, and of vision. One of the results of our time thus far has been a slight revision to our Diocesan Vision Statement. Each of you should have received a copy in your bag of materials. It is printed on ivory colored card stock. It is my sense and that of the committee, that the Lord has given us the following vision:

The Diocese of Albany is One Church fulfilling the Great Commandment and the Great Commission, moving from membership to discipleship; equipping, emboldening and sending disciples to make disciples.

Included with the Vision Statement are ten specific Marks of Discipleship or Diocesan Values that we are to focus on. They include: Prayer and Worship, Scripture, the Catholic Structures of Anglicanism, Christian Education, Christian Fellowship, Spiritual Gifts and Healing, Christian Service, Generosity in answering God's call as Stewards of His Creation, Evangelism, and Mission at home and abroad.

Several references from Holy Scripture as well as a few references from the Book of Common Prayer are offered in support of these Marks of Discipleship and Diocesan Values. I would ask you to take them home and make copies of it to hand out to all the members of your parish. I am asking each of us – individually, as parishes and as a diocese, to commit ourselves to meditate on the Vision Statement and to read and study and pray through the Marks of Discipleship and Diocesan Values and the accompanying Scripture passages. As we do so may the Lord show us where we need to grow and how to live into the vision He has given us. The format provided, lends itself to a ten-week study. The Vision Statement is not intended to be a catchy logo that we can put on diocesan publications and then forgotten, but rather I believe it is truly who the Lord is calling us to be as this part

of the Body of Christ, and as such, we must be intentional about living into it, though the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit.

I am now into my third year as the Bishop of Albany. During these past three years I have traveled extensively throughout the Diocese, visiting almost every parish, with the final few parishes to be visited by the end of the fall. In addition, I have also visited many other parts of The Episcopal Church and the wider Anglican Communion. I have seen and witnessed a great deal – much to be proud of and to give thanks to the Lord for, but also much to repent of and seek God’s forgiveness for.

At its best, the Episcopal Church and Anglican Communion have so much to offer to the wider Church and to the world. Unfortunately, at the moment we are far from being at our “best.” Like many of you, I am deeply grieved by the growing division within The Episcopal Church and the wider Anglican Communion. I had hoped and still do that the proposed Anglican Covenant could help bring healing into the Communion. As many of you know, the most recent version, the Ridley Cambridge Draft, has been put on hold, due to concerns raised by some members of the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC) over Section 4, which deals with the possible disciplinary actions. I remain hopeful that it will be worked out and that we will have an opportunity to vote on the Covenant. In preparation for that, we as a diocese will be studying the Ridley Cambridge Draft and any changes that may be made to it over the coming year. In addressing the ACC, as reported in *The Living Church*, Archbishop Rowan Williams urged Anglicans not to “put off discussion of the covenant,” stating that, “The texts are out there. Please pray through them, and talk them through, starting now.” (TLC May 31, 2009)

There has been some question as to whether dioceses will be allowed to officially vote on the covenant if and when it finally comes out. While some within The Episcopal Church believe that only provinces should be allowed to vote, I believe strongly that each diocese should be allowed to vote. That belief is based on my understanding of the true polity or organization and governance of The Episcopal Church, as outlined in its Constitution and Canons and as described in a recently published document entitled “Bishops’ Statement On The Polity Of The Episcopal Church,” signed by myself along with 14 other bishops in the Episcopal Church and three highly distinguished Episcopal theologians. Each of you have a copy of this document in your materials along with a summary of the document, prepared by our chancellor. It’s one of the things Chancellor Strickland has been working on. I signed the Bishops’ Statement because I believe it

accurately reflects the true polity of the Episcopal Church as described, again, in the Constitution and Canons of the Church. I came to that conclusion after reading and studying the document and consulting with several other bishops, theologians and canon lawyers. Fr. Charles King, our Diocesan Canon Theologian, also agrees with the accuracy of the Bishops' Statement. There is much confusion right now throughout the Church as well as the Courts concerning the true polity of The Episcopal Church and a diocese's constitutional and canonical relationship with the other dioceses within the province as well as with the Presiding Bishop. The Bishops' Statement is offered in an attempt to provide clarity in regard to these issues.

Moving now to other concerns, I remain greatly troubled by the biblical illiteracy that is so rampant and the resulting ongoing struggle amongst so many to recognize the Bible as the living Word of God -- that continues to speak to us today and has authority over our lives, containing all things necessary to salvation. I cannot stress enough the importance of taking time each day to read and study God's word. Every parish in this diocese, regardless of how large or how small they are, should have an ongoing Bible study. As I stated in the past, they don't have to be on Sunday morning and they don't have to be in the Church, nor do they have to be led by the clergy. They can be in people's homes during the week. The important thing is that they take place. In addition, I encourage each of us, not only to read and study the Bible, but to do that which at one time in my life I thought only Baptists do, and that is to memorize key Bible passages so that they become a part of who we are. As Paul reminds us in II Timothy 3:16, "All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." The Bible is a gift from God to be treasured, to be read and to be studied, not ignored or explained away or put on the coffee table as a decoration.

Every time I ordain a person to the diaconate, they are given a Bible with the understanding they are to give it away to someone who is struggling in their faith or has no faith. Similarly each of you have a New Testament in your convention material you can keep, but I encourage you to give it away.

Similarly, I am extremely frustrated by some who have been called to leadership positions within the Church and yet either fail to recognize, or stand up and proclaim the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as the Son of God, God incarnate, "The Way, The Truth, The Life," the ONLY ONE through whom salvation and entrance into eternal life with God the Father is possible.

While very cognizant of the politically correct society in which we live, and the belief by some, that to promote Christianity above other world religions would be regarded as offensive, yet as Christians we have a responsibility, given by Christ, himself, to share our faith. We cannot, nor should we force our faith on anyone, but we are commanded by our Lord in the Great Commission to share our faith with all people throughout the world.

Either Jesus truly is the Son of God as proclaimed by God the Father at Jesus' baptism in the river Jordan and on the Mount of Transfiguration, or He isn't. Either Jesus truly died on the cross as a sacrifice for the sins of all the world, or He didn't. Either Jesus truly rose bodily from the dead, conquering the power of sin and death, or He didn't. Either Jesus Christ truly is who He proclaims Himself to be, the one pointed to by the prophets, attested to by the apostles, and proclaimed by God the Father and revealed by the Holy Spirit -- or He isn't. There can be no area of gray as to the true identity and uniqueness of Jesus Christ.

If Jesus truly is who the Holy Scriptures proclaim Him to be, then may God have mercy on us if we fail to acknowledge and receive Him as Lord and Savior of our lives and do everything we can through the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit to share the Good News of Jesus Christ with all who will receive Him.

If Jesus isn't who the Holy Scriptures proclaim Him to be, than as St. Paul stated in I Corinthians 15, "...Our preaching is useless and so is your faith...If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied above all men." (I Cor. 15:14, 19). Ultimately every person must decide for themselves who Jesus truly is and how we will respond to Him. Just as Jesus asked Peter and the other apostles, He asks each of us as well, "Who do you say I am?" (Matt. 16:15) Our eternal destiny is dependent on the answer to that question.

As your brother in Christ, as Bishop of this Diocese, and as a bishop in the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, I am committed to doing everything I can through the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit to proclaim the Truth and Good News of Jesus as Lord and Savior of the world. I invite each of you, my brothers and sisters, to join me in that same commitment. The broken and hurting world in which we live is in desperate need of hearing the Gospel, and experiencing the love, mercy, healing grace that can only be found in our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Lord has put a real urgency upon my heart. Time is running out for millions of people in our own country and throughout the world who are dying

never having heard or come to believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior. Untold numbers of people are living in deplorable conditions and literally starving to death while hardened hearts turn a blind eye to their suffering. Countless souls are withering away with spiritual thirst, never having tasted the “living water” that the Lord has promised to all who believe in Him. It is not good enough to simply talk about or give lip service to the Great Commandment and the Great Commission – we must live them! They are not simply suggestions, but rather commands from our Lord himself, the one in whom “all authority in heaven and on earth has been given.”

According to a survey in 2007, on any given Sunday in New York State, only between 14 and 15 % of the people of this State attend Church. While I have never been great in math, unlike my wife, even I can figure out that means 85 to 86% of the people living in our communities are not in church. Even if we are generous and double the number attending, assuming that 30% of the people have some connection with a church, that means we still have approximately 70 % of the people living in our communities that have no Church affiliation. Of that 70 %, studies have shown that approximately 50% would go to Church if invited. That means we have a one in two chance of someone saying yes, if we invite them. Dear friends, it is time to pray for holy boldness to step out of our comfort zone and share our faith with others – that they too may come to know the peace that can only be found in Jesus Christ.

I recently read a book entitled *Living Water* by Brother Yun, a Chinese Christian who came to faith when he was 16 and became a leader in the underground House Church movement in China. In reading this book, the Lord has both blessed and challenged me greatly through Brother Yun’s Christian witness and teaching. It has caused me to seriously think and reflect about my own faith and relationship with the Lord. In comparison to individuals who are truly willing to be imprisoned, tortured and even killed for their faith in Christ, the Christian faith, as many of us in the West have witnessed it, often seems to be superficial at best. What would our lives, our parishes, this diocese, the Church at large look like if we were more intentional about truly living what we proclaim we believe?

I have been so convicted by the Lord through Brother Yun and his book, that by the generosity of a friend, I was able to purchase and give a copy of the book *Living Water* to all the active clergy in our Diocese. You should have received it when you checked in. If not, we have one. I’m giving it with the expectation that they will not only read it, but share it with all the folks in our parishes throughout

the Diocese. I am asking that the clergy and lay leaders in each congregation organize book studies with an open invitation to everyone to read and study and share their thoughts, their fears, and their inspirations resulting from the book. While Brother Yun comes from a different tradition and culture, I believe he shares much that we need to hear and much we need to learn. As I shared in the letter to my fellow deacons and priests, I truly believe the inspiration for doing this is from the Holy Spirit. May we be obedient in that which He is asking of us.

After reading *Living Water* and visiting with Church leaders from around the world, one thing I have become increasingly convinced of, is that in too many cases continuing to do “Church as usual” does little to build up the Kingdom of God and is not particularly pleasing to the Lord. Far too many of our parishes remain stuck in a survival or maintenance mode focusing all of their time and attention inside the four walls of the Church building or on trying to keep a roof on the Church, rather than taking the Gospel into the world. In many cases we have become enslaved by our buildings and in some cases they are on the verge of becoming idols. In saying this, I am not suggesting that church buildings aren’t important or that we shouldn’t take care of, but rather if all our time, energy and effort is going into our buildings, we need to rethink our priorities. Far too many of our outreach and stewardship programs are motivated and geared primarily out of a necessity to pay the bills rather than a true desire to reach out to the un-churched and to share the love of Christ and to be good stewards of that which He has entrusted to us giving generously for the building up of His kingdom.

When I first became bishop, I spoke of what I have come to believe is a spirit of poverty that has a death grip on far too many parishes and far too many of our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. The current economic crisis has only intensified it. While several individuals and parishes have taken advantage of the Crown Ministry program offered through the Diocese, and have been blessed by it, far too many for whatever reason have refused to participate, therefore continuing to miss out on the liberation discovered by all those who have come to trust the Lord, submitting their finances and worldly possessions to His Lordship. While I admit from a worldly standpoint, tithing 10% or more of our income, especially when finances are tight and we’re struggling to make ends meet, doesn’t seem to make sense, yet from God’s standpoint it makes perfect sense. Who better to trust with our money and possessions, than the one who gave them to us in the first place and the one who only wants the very best for us. When we put God first, trusting in His faithfulness and generosity, He blesses our efforts. Speaking as one who first struggled with the idea of tithing, but has since come to discover the blessing of tithing and the Lord’s faithfulness in providing for our needs when we

trust Him, I invite and encourage you to trust Him and submit to Him as Lord of your entire life, to include your finances and your worldly goods. Some people try to ease into tithing, sort of like easing into a cold lake or pool. In so doing, chances are you won't get much past your ankles or perhaps your knees, or you can dive in head first. After the initial shock, it is quite exhilarating and freeing. It is time to cut the financial albatross that has enslaved far too many for far too long. Trust the Lord. Until you do, chances are very little will change with your individual financial circumstances and that of your parish.

I pray that for those of us who are still struggling with trusting the Lord with their finances as well as their time, 2009/10 will become the year of the tithe. Not only do I believe God is calling us to tithe our money, but I believe He is also calling us to tithe our time. To do so means that we are to be intentional about dedicating at least 2 hours and 24 minutes a day to the Lord and His service through prayer, the study of His word, various ministries, and reaching out to serve or assist others in the name of our Lord, remembering that in serving them, we are in fact serving Him. It might require getting up a little earlier in the morning or giving up a favorite TV show, yet the blessing we receive by spending time with our Lord, far outweighs any sacrifices we might make. The Lord wants us to be open to His presence and intentional about inviting Him into all aspects of our life, not just when we are in a crisis. There is no greater person to hang out with, yet far too many of us allow the daily demands and circumstances of life to shove the Lord off to the side, or even worse, totally out of the picture. He created us to be in relationship with Him and through Him with one another. It is only then that we can truly live as God intends, experiencing life to its fullest in His love and peace.

One final thing I would like to briefly mention this evening, if we are to truly rethink how we "do Church" is the need to rediscover the extreme value and necessity of active lay ministry. As mentioned earlier this evening, we have far too many pew potatoes who have been conditioned into believing that ministry is simply one of presence. Regardless of how well trained, motivated and hardworking our clergy may be, the Church will never grow into its full potential, and the building up of the Kingdom of God will be severely hampered if the rector and or deacons are the primary ones carrying out the majority of the ministry. Please don't misunderstand, while the clergy have a vitally important and unique role in administering the sacraments of the Church, as well as leadership and training responsibilities to equip and encourage the rest of the body, much of the day to day ministry of the Church can and should be carried out by the laity. In some cases that will mean clergy will need to learn to let go of some things and trust others. Believe me, I know how hard that is. In some cases, it will also mean

that the lay members of the parish will need to take on added responsibility. We are all members of the one Body of Christ and as such we each have a responsibility to the rest of the body. May the Lord, through the power of the Holy Spirit guide and inspire each of us to know how best to live and exercise our various ministries within the body of Christ – lay and ordained alike in order that we may truly be “One Church fulfilling the Great Commandment and Great Commission, moving from membership to discipleship; equipping, emboldening, and sending disciples to make disciples.”

We have put a lot of work and effort these past several years into raising up and training men and women for the ordained ministry. It is time to do the same in raising up and training men and women, young and old alike, for lay ministry. That is going to become a major focus over the coming year. We have begun the effort by redoing the entire confirmation curriculum for our young people. It is well underway and we hope to have it finished by the fall. More will be shared on the confirmation curriculum tomorrow morning. I am very appreciative to the confirmation team for their tremendous dedication and hard work.

Last year, I announced the lowering of the minimum age for confirmation from 16 to 13 and I have met lots of faithful and mature thirteen year olds. I ask each youth and adult to write me a letter prior to their confirmation, not as a hoop to jump through, but rather to assist them in learning how to share their faith with others. In addition, it helps me get to know the confirmed a little better. Many love the Lord and have a strong faith, but don't know how to share it. If you can share your faith with me, you can share it with anyone.

As we gather here this weekend, we do so not in our own power or authority, but that of our Lord Jesus Christ, for as we are reminded in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus proclaimed, “For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with you.” (Mt.18:20). It is in Jesus' name that we are united one with another as brothers and sisters in Christ. It is Jesus' name that we are called and empowered to carry out the work before us. It is in Jesus' name that we come here this weekend, to worship and to serve the Lord; to be fed and nourished by His word and sacraments; to enjoy one another's company – supporting, upholding and encouraging one another as we continue on our faith journey, going forward boldly in His Name – “...the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

May the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be upon you and remain with you mightily this night and always! May He watch over you and protect you. May His light shine upon you and radiate from you. May He fill you with His Holy and life giving Spirit as we go forward in His name, in accordance with His will and to His honor and glory and the benefit of His Church and people. Amen.