

**115th Annual Council of the Episcopal Diocese of West Texas
McAllen, Texas February 21-23, 2019**

**Address to the Council
Friday, February 22, 2019
*The Rt. Rev. David Reed***

Introduction & Welcome

Good morning! *Muy buenos dias y bienvenidos a todos!*

I give thanks to and for you all, gathered for the 115th Council of the Diocese of West Texas, and for the 85 churches from whence you have come. I give thanks also for the life, fellowship and ministries that we share as members of Christ's Body in West Texas. I count it all as blessing, and am always a little surprised that I'm your bishop.

I ask that you join me in thanking the plethora of churches hosting us. They are the MUVEC—the Mid- and Upper-Valley Episcopal Churches: St. John's, McAllen; St. Peter & St. Paul, Mission; Trinity Church, Pharr; St. Matthew's, Edinburg; and Grace Church, Weslaco. Will you members of our brave host churches please stand?

I am so grateful for our retired bishops. The 8th Bishop of West Texas, Jim Folts, is very happy to be sitting where he is this morning, and not where I am. My predecessor, Gary Lillibridge sends his greetings from Houston, where he is serving as interim rector, and (I hope) getting me a ticket to Opening Day with the Astros. The 7th Bishop of our diocese, John MacNaughton, is

prevented by infirmity from being here, but I know he and Shirley are praying for us. Bishop Bill Frey, retired of Colorado and Guatemala, makes his home among us, too--beloved and darn near beatified at Christ Church, San Antonio.

I would ask our novice Secretary to send greetings and the assurance of our love and prayers to our retired bishops and spouses, and to our bishops' widows, Nancy Hibbs, Madelyn Hauser and Helen McAllister.

And while you're at it, Mr. Secretary, I'd ask that you also send greetings to our dear mother, the Diocese of Texas, who continues to look really great, for her age. Given that we've had a bunch of fine clergy migrate from up north in the last couple of years, I feel we should be extra nice to our mother diocese, even as Bishop Lillibridge scouts for more clergy prospects.

I want to offer my deep gratitude to our Bishop Suffragan, Jennifer Brooke-Davidson. She hasn't quite made the entire circuit of all 69,000 square miles of the Diocese, but she'll get there soon. Her passion for the Gospel and her energetic creativity and strong conviction that the Spirit is up to something across the Diocese are a great gift to all of us, and to me personally.

The Staff (a Bit More)

You had a chance to see most of your diocesan staff yesterday, but I want to say a little more about the quality of the

people the Lord has called to this work. For the past two years, we have been a staff that's short-handed and a staff in transition, which is sometimes a euphemism for something like Mr. Toad's Wild Ride. We didn't have a Canon for Deployment, though Ed Dohoney and Don Lee gave generously of their time and wisdom to work with churches and clergy in the search process. They saved my bacon numerous times. I'm eager to begin working next month with our new Archdeacon, the Rev. Mike Besson, who will oversee deployment, among other things. Last March, Kaitlin Rogers (aka, my daughter) left the Department of World Mission. A few months before, Betty Chumney, the founder of our World Mission program more than 20 years ago, retired, leaving Marthe Curry to carry on alone for at least six months, until the arrival of Tatiana Hoecker. In August, our Communications Officer, Laura Shaver, left for a job closer to home, leaving another big hole in our staff. Marjorie George came further out of retirement to pick up part of the slack, and other staff members took on parts of the work. We were blessed to have Laura McGrew, already on staff and handling much of the communications for Camps and Conferences, step in as Communications Manager in mid-December. In January, Emily Kittrell joined us as Director of Marketing and Communications, coming over from Good Samaritan Community Services where she served as Marketing and Communications Manager. The two of them give us a much-needed restart in the quickly changing world of communications.

In November, Kirk Mason, who served faithfully as Canon to the Ordinary for 13 years, left to take a position with the Church Pension Group. That Caroline Mowen was available immediately to join the staff as Canon for Administration and Ministry Support is evidence that there is a God and that he loves us.

These changes have not always come easily, and the DWTX staff has endured much—not least, putting up with me—but they have been living reminders of the love, mercy and grace of our Lord, and examples of what walking in love as Christ loved us might look like.

Jennifer Wickham continues her vital ministry as Deputy for Disaster Response, as the recovery along the Gulf Coast following Harvey continues. She also is working to develop a response network across the Diocese, so that we might be prepared when the next storm or flood or other disaster hits. Jennifer's position is fully funded by grants from Episcopal Relief and Development, which continues to be a close ally in this work.

Bishop Brooke-Davidson's great love for congregational development, not surprisingly, has created an increase in the workload, as we find ourselves partnering with more churches desiring renewed vitality or to establish new ministries. We've been fortunate to contract with a consultant, Haley Bankey, who, to me, often seems to be in several places at once.

And in new staff news, I'm delighted to announce the appointment of Mary Katherine Duffy in a consulting role as

Deputy for Episcopal Schools. (With *two* deputies now, I think I should get a sheriff's badge.) Mary Katherine has been head of St. Alban's Day School in Harlingen for 17 years, and will retire in May. She has chaired our Episcopal Schools Commission for 13 years, and for several years has consulted with schools for the Southwest Association of Episcopal Schools.

There are 26 Episcopal schools in our diocese; all but TMI are part of parishes. Our schools serve more than 3,800 students, which means about 7,600 parents, with teachers and staff totaling 700. For many of our students, school chapel is their church, and their Day School is the only place they learn about the love of God for them. Our schools are a large mission field and should be a big doorway into the life of the church for many children and their families. Mary Katherine's work will be primarily with school heads, rectors and boards, and she'll bring her great love for Episcopal schools and our Lord into play beginning in July.

I'm also happy to announce that the Rev. Scott and Alice Lee Penrod have said "yes" to my invitation to serve as chaplains to the retired clergy, spouses and widows of West Texas. That ministry was vacated quite a few months back by the Rev. Frank and the Rev. Betty Fuller, who volunteered as chaplains for several years. The diocese relies a great deal on the many retired clergy who haven't figured out what retirement means and continue to serve faithfully in many of our churches.

I tell you all this to say I'm confident that staffing is where it needs to be for now, and that God has given us who we need at this time to serve and support the mission and ministries of the Diocese. I thought about using obscure pop culture references to describe where we are. But who would remember that "Atomic batteries to power; turbines to speed" is what Batman and Robin would say as they revved up the Batmobile in the old TV series? And who would remember that "Ramming speed!" is from John Belushi in Animal House? (Well, now I guess we all will.) So let me simply say that these are exciting times, and the staff is ready to come walk in love with you and your church.

I like to joke at various events where some of our clergy gather that "Our Diocese is blessed with the finest clergy in the whole Church...and I wish some of them could be here today." But since almost all of them are here, let me say that our Diocese is blessed with the finest clergy in the whole Church. They are not perfect. But then, neither are you. I know well how hard they work, and how much of that work you cannot see. I know how they show up day after day, serving faithfully and not knowing if they will see the fruits of their labor. They are among the last of the general practitioners and their days are often filled with trying to do well things they never thought they'd be doing at all. They love you, joyfully, stubbornly and with wounded hearts. I ask that you consider calling or texting or emailing—or radical thought—mailing them a card, not to inform them of a concern or

register a complaint about the hymns or the sermon, but to simply thank them. Be kind, be merciful, and know that they need you to walk alongside them in love.

It is my deep privilege and a source of joy and hope to serve with you clergy who serve so faithfully. What St. Augustine told his clergy back in the 5th Century is true for me as well: “For you I am a bishop, but with you I am a Christian; one is an office, accepted; the other is a gift, received. One is danger; the other is safety. If I am happier to be redeemed with you than to be placed over you, then I shall, as the Lord commanded, be more fully your servant.”

While I’m feeling all mushy and thankful, let me just say I’ve saved the best for last, and I am so lucky, blessed and thankful that Patti loves me and supports me in this ministry. Her spirit inspires and encourages me, and she gives me reason to look forward to coming home. And she hasn’t changed the locks. Yet.

Welcome to Special Guests

During Council, we will be graced by the presence and the words of several special guests, and I’d like us to welcome some of them now:

Bishop Daniel Gutierrez of Pennsylvania is with us for the first time, and we are honored to have him lead us in a

consideration of our diocesan theme at the luncheon today, and to tell us about his diocese this afternoon.

Bishop David Bailey of Navajoland was with us last year as we began, by the leading of the Holy Spirit, a new mission partnership with our brothers and sisters there. You'll get an update from him about ministries already underway, and we're delighted to welcome back Bishop Dave and Anne.

Tambien, bienvenidos al Obispo del Mexico Sureste, Benito Juarez-Martinez, su esposa Angelica, y su hijo, Eignar. Benito has been a good friend and companion in the work of the Gospel for many years, and as with all our mission partnerships, the life of our diocese is better for our friendship and shared work with Southeast Mexico. *Gracias a Dios para la amistad entre nosotros!*

Bishop Lloyd Allen of Honduras also will be with us again to tell us about new ministry initiatives along his border with Guatemala.

A great blessing of being part of Diocesan Council is that it works against our tendency toward congregationalism, and reminds us that we're part of something far bigger than just us, on our own, in our local churches. In the same way, guests from outside the Diocese, and outside the country, help us remember that the Diocese is not complete all by itself. We belong to the one holy catholic and apostolic Church, the Body of Christ extending through time and across geography, and we have so much to learn and receive from –and much to offer—other parts

of the Body. When we walk in love as Christ loves us we'll find ourselves among some unexpected traveling companions, walking together into places we hadn't known we would go.

The Theme & Bible Study

“Walk in love as Christ loved us, and gave himself for us, an offering and sacrifice to God.” (Ephesians 5:2) *“Andad en amor, como tambien Cristo nos amo, y se entrego a si mismo por nosotros, ofrenda y sacrificio a Dios.”* (Efesios 5:2) I settled on this verse from Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians because it seems like a reasonable next step (so to speak) after our 2018 theme, “The Word is very near to you,” and our emphasis on Bible reading and study. To be prompted to get moving by the living Word is basic to Christian living. To be called by the Word that is near to us to walk the way of Jesus is at the heart of discipleship. We cannot be disciples at a distance, cannot follow Jesus only in our heads. In Jewish and Christian understanding, “hearing the Word” is so much more than just the sound waves tickling your ears—true hearing leads to a response. To hear the Word proclaimed in the midst of a worshipping community—or to read and chew on it in a small group—is to be nourished and strengthened, and then turned outward with a new lens for making sense of the world and your own life. Studies are consistently showing that churches that give the Bible a serious

hearing tend to be churches that are growing, vibrant, attractive and serving.

Who would have thought it? Studying the Holy Scriptures is good for us.

In 2018, I invited the diocese to take up some serious Bible study, even reading the whole thing. I have to say I was hopeful, but cautiously hopeful, and prepared for disappointment. Oh, me of little faith! So many of you picked up the Bible and joined in, and stories have come in from around the Diocese about how much it meant. I was at Trinity Church, Junction, last Sunday and Sr. Warden Art Mudge, told me, “I thought you were crazy when you asked us to do that—no way we could get people here to do that.” But they started, and are nearly done, and close to 100 percent of the church family is studying the Word. The Word, indeed, has come near to you.

I won't steal all the thunder from our Christian Ed. Committee chair, Sarah Kates, but the results of their short survey indicate that more than half of our churches had members participate in this year-long study, or are continuing in it now. Many people studied the Bible for the first time. About 75 percent of you reported a very enthusiastic and positive response from those who joined. Sixty percent of you used “The Story”, while 25 percent used “The Path”. Apparently, 15 percent of you went rogue and studied the Bible in some other way.

Full disclosure: not all the stories we've heard were positive. Some thought the Old Testament dragged on too long or had too many disturbing stories of sin, political power plays, violence and injustice. (Or maybe it was too much like the daily news.) A few told me "The Story" was "too Baptisty." But I'm thinking that for most of us, it might do us some good to hear Holy Scripture in a little less "Episcopalian-y" ways. One lady said I should've had you read it in the beautiful language of the King James Version, which I'm thinking about asking the clergy to do over the summer.

Having spent time together listening to and pondering the Word that is near to us, our baptismal calling is to "walk in love, as Christ loved us," which means to walk in the same way—and to love in the same way—that Jesus loves us. It's not an either/or situation, of course. It's not time to put our Bibles back on the shelves and get busy. Our work, our walking in the Way of Jesus, must continually be informed and illuminated by hearing and study, by this encounter with the living Word. "Walking in love" includes walking toward the Word. We are gathered, formed and fed...and sent walking.

We've bundled our theme this year with our Presiding Bishop's call to all Episcopalians to join in "The Way of Love." The seven spiritual practices that Bishop Curry raises up are a way of thinking about what "walking in love" looks like, individually and together. They are not new practices; in fact,

they are ancient time-tested ways of making and growing disciples.

I hope that you will take these spiritual practices to heart, that you'll explore and try on "The Way of Love" during Council. And not just during Council, but back home with your companions at church. And not just at church, but in your homes and communities, as Jesus leads you to walk in love toward so many people who are bumping around in darkness, desperately searching for a better way.

The Book of Acts in 2019

So if you read the Bible all the way through in 2018, now what?

You could read it again, as Clay Warren from Good Shepherd, Corpus Christi, told me he was planning to do. (Now he has to since I told you all.) Or you can dig deeper into particular books, returning to those that you struggled with or delighted in. But please keep reading.

I'm going to encourage you, and the diocese, to read and study the Acts of the Apostles this year. After taking on the entire Bible, anything will sound a lot simpler. I selected the Book of Acts because, as with our theme, it signifies action and movement. Having encountered the living Word—and having been encountered by it—we respond, we act. The Acts of the Apostles is sometimes called "the Gospel of the Holy Spirit," as

the risen and ascended Christ continues his mission of salvation and reconciliation in the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. The Church—birthed, called, gathered and fed—is sent out in that same power to be the Body of Christ everywhere.

Acts is widely agreed to be the work of St. Luke. If St. Luke's Gospel were a movie, Acts would be the box office smash-hit sequel. Luke gives his purpose for writing Acts early on: "Since many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the events (of Jesus' life, death and resurrection) that have been fulfilled among us, just as those who were eyewitnesses from the beginning and ministers of the word have handed them down to us, I too have decided...to write it down for you, so that you may know the certainty of the teachings you have received." (Acts 1:2-4)

A primary work of the Church, an essential part of being disciples who walk in love, is to pass on the Good News we have received in Jesus Christ. To tell it well and truthfully, we need to know the story well. So keep reading, marking, learning and inwardly digesting. You will be blessed.

The Church Planting Initiative

We will have a most excellent reminder of this primary missional work of passing on the Good News and making new disciples throughout 2019 and in the years to come.

Our three years of planning for a new church start have now reached this point—the calling and sending of the Rev. Beth Wyndham to be our church planter. The commissioning of Beth and Jeremy last night was NOT about transferring all of the weight and responsibility of this new work to them, but about promising to be their companions on this way of love, walking with them in prayer, love and support. What can be more important to us as the Body of Christ than that we strive to offer the transforming, saving love of Jesus Christ to those who don't know him, or have forgotten him? What can renew and rekindle embers of faith in us more than seeing the wind and flame of the Holy Spirit light up fires in others?

You might wonder why you should get all excited about a church plant that could be hundreds of miles away. One reason is that there isn't anyone in this room who isn't part of a church plant, who isn't directly benefitting and being blessed by the church-planting work of saints who came before us, whether 150 years ago or in your lifetime. There was a time when the local church you love wasn't there. This diocese was begun in 1874 as a Missionary District, with a missionary bishop and missionary priests and lay leaders. We can find enthusiasm for this new adventure with Beth, as a start, by being thankful for what we have received.

My hope, and the hope of those who have spent much time in bringing us to this moment, is that we as a diocese will

reclaim our missionary heritage. We hope that planting new churches will again become as much a part of who we are and what we celebrate as world mission and Cursillo, and our camping and college ministries.

Another reason we can be excited about this is that we will surely learn much as Beth continues to learn about going out, inviting people into a life-giving relationship with Jesus, and bringing them into the Body of Christ. She will be eager to share with all of us, and will be available to come to your church, to help you connect her new ministry with the work of proclamation and transformation where you are.

As we began studying where to go first, I asked the original Planting Initiative team to identify not just one area, but several, so that the planter—unknown at that time—could have a say in where we planted, and also, so that we would be in a position to identify where we are going next, and the time after that, and the time after that. Those areas were presented at last year's Council: along the I-35 corridor between San Antonio and Austin; along Highway 281 north of San Antonio; the far West Side of San Antonio, beyond the Sea World area; and the far South Side of San Antonio. In all these areas, the population is booming and that's expected to continue for years. In fact, the population is growing in many parts of the diocese, and we've been slow getting back to this dance.

I've spent a lot of time over the last couple of years explaining why we need to start new churches; why the time is right to do this, even in—maybe especially in-- an era of decline in church participation in our country; why we're looking so carefully at some areas of the diocese and not at others; why we need to find and use the money to do this.

But a few weeks ago, during the Pre-Council meeting in New Braunfels, I had one of those a-ha moments, and it occurred to me that you all should have been demanding to know why we haven't been doing this all along. I should have been hauled before the Executive Board or a Happening Closing and asked to explain what part of the Great Commission or Great Commandment I didn't understand. "Go," Jesus says. "Go, baptize and make disciples." "Love God," Jesus says, "And love your neighbor as you love yourself." To "walk in love, as Christ loves us" pretty clearly assumes we'll be walking beyond our own places, our own churches. Wherever there are people who don't know the love, forgiveness and mercy of God revealed in Jesus—those are the places we are called.

But, of course, we have to start in one place. You can't make a decision like this only by crunching demographic numbers, studying maps and population trends, and consulting with consultants. You have to pray and listen for the Spirit. You have to be confident in your abilities, and humble enough to know what you're not good at. And you have to get out there and walk

in love into the places and see who's there. That's what Beth and Jeremy have done over the past two months, sometimes on their own and sometimes with our consultant or with Bishop Brooke-Davidson. And so, they and I, and others involved in the deliberations, have all arrived at the same spot.

Beth has felt led to bring her love for the Lord, bring her passion for the Gospel, bring her gifts and skills for ministry...and bring Jeremy...to the 281 corridor north of San Antonio, generally around Bulverde and Highway 46 intersection. This area did not win some beauty pageant. It is where Beth has felt most strongly led, where she believes-- and the rest of us involved in this over the last three years believe-- she is called to go.

As I said, the ground is fertile for new congregations in many places around the diocese. My hope is that we will continue on, going where we are not, walking in love as Christ loves us.

In the Commissioning last night during the Eucharist, we all prayed for Beth and Jeremy, and pledged ourselves to do all we can to support them in this new ministry. Beth needs us and is counting on us. She is not called to this work alone, but as part of Christ's Body that is West Texas. She is our planter. I ask you to remember the Wyndhams in your prayers, and I would call on all of our congregations, and the many Daughters of the King around the diocese, and others with a vocation of prayer, to continually lift them up.

Stewardship

At last year's Council, you unanimously passed four resolutions presented by the Budget Task Force, which had been ably led by co-chairs John Warren of St. Peter's, Rockport, and now-Canon Caroline Mowen.

One resolution called for the diocese—remember, that's all of us—to bring renewed emphasis and energy to stewardship education and practice. Nancy Stinson, the Queen of Council Planning, is also Czarina of the Stewardship Department. The reinvigorated diocesan Stewardship Department took their new charge seriously—so seriously they make me nervous. You will see this commitment in the significant investment in the budget for Stewardship.

Last June's Abide In Me Conference was all about stewardship, with Bishop Greg Rickel of Olympia as our challenging and hope-filled keynote speaker. The diocese contracted with Richard Rogers of Horizons Stewardship to work with us last year and this year. He was our main speaker at Clergy Conference in the fall, and will lead a series of workshops this spring and summer to train lay leaders in stewardship. Last month, I sent a letter to the clergy asking that they begin recruiting people to participate. (Now's the time for you lay delegates to look at your priest and see how he or she is reacting. And then, make their hearts glad by saying, "Sign me up.")

The dates for these training events are on the screen. You received them in your Pre-Council packets. It will be well worth the self-offering of a day to attend.

Our Council theme supports the intent of this re-investment in stewardship teaching and practice. “Walk in love as Christ loved us, and gave himself for us, an offering and sacrifice to God” is often used on Sunday morning as the Offertory Sentence before the offering is gathered up. The verse at that moment reminds us that our own offerings of money, time and talent are joined and blessed in the perfect self-offering of Jesus. What we offer God in gratitude from our own resources becomes a means by which we offer what God desires most—us...our hearts, our selves. And it also becomes a means by which we participate in the self-giving love of God that both gathers us and sends us.

The intentional, disciplined practice of stewardship is about so much more than money. It is about all we do with all we have all the time. But it is not about less than money. Jesus, who comes to set us free, knows he has his work cut out for him when it comes to getting us untangled from our money, our wealth, our stuff. He knows the power it can hold over us. He knows how many of us live with chronic anxiety around our money. He knows how many of our churches live with this same debilitating worry.

Jesus comes to free us, and “perfect love casts out fear.” (I John 4:18)

For much of my life, giving gratefully and generously—tithing and more—has been a habit and discipline that has lessened my fears and increased the freedom I know in Christ. Because I want my heart to be with Jesus—because I want to walk in love as he loves us—I understand that sacrificial self-offering is needed. Tithing has been a grace-filled way of not becoming possessed by my possessions or owned by my stuff. The practice has made me deeply aware of the abundant blessings I’ve received. Practicing stewardship as a spiritual discipline brings me joy.

This good news gets lost, though, when the primary focus in our churches is on the financial bottom line, or when anxiety over not having “enough” overshadows and stalls our churches’ mission. I’ve said often, since I first began traveling the diocese as suffragan years ago, that God has given us—given you in your local churches—everything we need to be his Church, to be the Body of Christ, right where we are. Trust his promises, and step out in love. Walking in his love—trusting in the grace and generosity of his love for us—we discover grace and courage to live more gracious and generous lives.

The Diocesan Budget

Just as your bank statements and your church’s budget are reflections of stewardship and priorities, so, too, the diocesan budget is a stewardship statement. The financial bottom line

certainly matters, but it is not the ultimate thing. The true bottom line—and my primary fiduciary responsibility—is the mission of the Church in West Texas, which is to restore all people to God and one another in Jesus Christ...to go, baptize, and proclaim the Gospel to the ends of the earth, to share the Good News of Jesus and to build the Kingdom of our God.

It takes regular attention to do all we can to align the diocesan budget—most of which is given by you—with the mission of Jesus, fleshed out primarily in the 85 churches of the diocese.

The Budget Task Force did prodigious work on all things budgetary in 2017, presenting their report and resolutions to Council last year. They accomplished much, but from their first meeting, they knew they wouldn't finish. On their recommendation, and by unanimous vote of Council last year, the Executive Board created three ad hoc committees to continue and complete the work. They are:

On Budget Priorities

On the Apportionment

On a Narrative Budget

The Priorities Committee began its work fairly quickly. Their task was not to name the priorities in the diocesan budget, but to explore practices that will help us craft budgets that align closely with our priorities and also give us more flexibility in responding to changing priorities. They worked closely with the

diocesan Finance Committee that developed the draft budget, and you can see some of the results of that work in the funding for World Mission, Stewardship and Episcopal Schools.

The Apportionment Committee is now organized. They are in the early stages of planning a series of meetings around the diocese to discuss all things related to apportionment within the context of the mission and ministries of our diocese.

The Narrative Budget Committee wisely decided to wait until there was something to narrate, and so they will take up their work this spring, seeking ways to effectively and clearly tell the story of stewardship, mission priorities, the financial bottom line and the missional bottom line. They will also be gathering stories from you about how all those things are experienced and lived out where you are.

A significant piece of our budget process since 2005 has been the option held by churches to designate part of their apportionment away from The Episcopal Church Asking. Since 2007, it's been known as Line 1a & 1b, by which all churches, through their Vestries or Bishop's Committees, may—but are not required to—designate a portion of their apportionment to support for either The Episcopal Church or for Missionary Giving Outside the Diocese, or to divide that portion between both. The percentage that Executive Board made “designatable” for 2019 was 12 percent. I reviewed the origin and history of 1a & 1b at length in my address last year; you can look it up if you want.

Some of you noted at the Pre-Council meetings that Line 1b remains in the 2019 budget, but there is no amount there. As our Treasurer Ted Burkhart has explained and will explain, the money that was designated for Line 1b, “Missionary Work Outside the Diocese”—a total of \$58,807.80—is included in the World Mission line item of \$150,000.

The ability of clergy and elected leadership to make the designation for their church remains in place, and those requests have been recorded and are reflected in the budget.

Two things changed around 1a/1b this year. First, rather than have the diocesan Financial Office send out a brief form requesting that someone from the church check a box indicating the designation, I asked the clergy to have their Vestry or Bishop’s Committee make the designation, if there was to be one, and then communicate to me their reasons for designating to Line 1b. Of the 85 churches in West Texas, 12 responded that they wanted all or a portion of their designation to go toward 1b. Three churches gave as their reason the importance of supporting World Mission; one explained that their pledge cards had already been sent, and, on those cards, individuals were given the option of designating a portion of their own pledges; and eight directed all or part of their percentage away from The Episcopal Church for a variety of reasons, from same-sex marriage to political positions to the assessment becoming mandatory.

Among the many significant learnings surfaced by the work of the Budget Task Force was that concern for support of our World Mission work had become much greater than concern for differentiating our diocese from actions of the larger Church. That's reflected in the large increase in the World Mission line item.

Another learning is that there was quite a bit of confusion around the diocese, with many people thinking that 1b, "Missionary Work Outside the Diocese" was the sole or primary source of funding for our many mission partnerships and initiatives around the world. This has never been the case. It has been the Executive Board's practice to ask the World Mission Department to recommend how the Line 1b money gets used, but Executive Board controls the spending of 1b, and the only restrictions are that it not go toward The Episcopal Church Assessment and that it be used in support of mission and ministry outside the Diocese of West Texas.

A third learning is that people with missionary hearts—and our World Mission staff are people like that—operate from a different perspective and with different priorities that I find both refreshing and humbling. They will tell you they don't have a dog in this lingering fight, and they don't like that World Mission has so often ended up in the middle.

A fourth learning is that, though fewer people in our churches are aware of, or care much about, the sad divisions that

afflicted us starting in 2003, and fewer feel the need to direct any of their apportionment money away from The Episcopal Church to differentiate or dissent from the actions of the larger Church, there remains a significant number of good and faithful church people for whom it matters greatly. They are present in virtually all our congregations, and not just in those churches that designated to Line 1b. They are our brothers and sisters; they are fully Episcopalians; they are fully engaged in the life and mission of West Texas; they love the Lord and love the Church.

The letters I received from clergy and leadership regarding their decision were as thoughtful and faithful as I expected. Reasons given were not simplistic. A great deal of wrestling and prayer were reflected in several of the letters. Not all of the Vestries were in full agreement with one another on what the “right thing to do” was, and most didn’t designate 100% to Line 1b. But they agreed that the unity of their congregation mattered more.

I didn’t ask for that information for my reading pleasure, but in an attempt to respond to one of the Task Force resolutions you passed at Council last year. That resolution called on me to continue to seek ways to improve communication between the Diocese and The Episcopal Church regarding actions of the larger Church that we agree with and disagree with.

I'm pretty sure nobody at The Episcopal Church offices in New York will look at Line 1a & 1b. But I'm fairly confident that I can get a summary report and copies of the actual letters I received into the hands of our Presiding Bishop, the President of the House of Deputies and the Treasurer of the Episcopal Church, and that they will read them.

Will it change anything? Probably not, though I hope it may help overcome some stereotypes other parts of the Church seem to have of us. Does it matter?

Absolutely. In 2004, I heard Bishop Folts say, "We will not cease to be Anglicans. We will not cease to be Episcopalians." And by grace, we have stayed steady on. We have not walked away, we have never refused to come to the table. Walking in love as Christ loved us includes walking toward those with whom we profoundly disagree, respecting their God-given dignity and worth, even as we ask for the same respect.

When Executive Board proposed and Council approved the designation of a percentage of apportionment in 2005, it made a profound difference in the life of our Diocese, for the good. It eased pressure and anxieties in local congregations, and helped us stay together and maintain unity, even in disagreement, at a time when much of the Church seemed to be fracturing. Line 1a & 1b has been a source of unity within the Diocese for many years.

But as I said earlier, passionate interest in this has waned. Support for Line 1b has decreased greatly. I get lots of blank

looks or glazed eyes when I talk about it. (Like now.) There are delegates here today—thanks be to God!—who were middle-schoolers in 2005. There’s at least one who was in pre-school. But again, for those for whom it matters still, it matters a lot.

I have begun to see a shift, though. For years, the opportunity to designate was, for most of our churches, and for the Diocese, a source of unity, a way of binding us together in spite of differences, I’m concerned now that it’s impact might be shifting from unifying us to separating us. Not a division, but a mark of distinction. So that some will be tempted to say, paraphrasing Paul, “I belong to 1a, or I belong to 1b,” when what matters most is that we belong to Christ. First and last, we belong to Christ, or none of the rest matters. And in him, we belong to each other. In Christ alone will our disagreements and divisions cease to be central to our identity and to our regard for others.

Unity among Christians is part of the prayer Jesus prays at the Last Supper: “Holy Father, keep them in thy name...that they may be one, even as we are one.” (John 17:11) I believe he must pray it still. Unity is not a nice add-on to the Church’s mission, not a byproduct. To be the Body of Christ, to know and celebrate that we are one in him, is central to the mission. It’s not an option. If you’re tempted to think that, then I encourage you to walk in love outside this Convention Center—or outside your own church-- and see what division and suspicion and the dismissing

and debasing of others are doing to our world, what that is doing to us. “Be imitators of God, and walk in love as Christ loved us, and gave himself for us, an offering and sacrifice to God.”

Immigration

Let me move on to an easier subject: immigration.

How many of you cringed when I said that?

Here’s where I remind you of the larger portion of Ephesians that our theme comes from:

“Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for edifying...that it may impart grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, in whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.” And THEN we hear, “Therefore, be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself for us, an offering and sacrifice to God.” (Eph. 4:29-5:2)

THE WORD OF THE LORD...

If the response to the letter Bishop Brooke-Davidson and I sent to the diocese in June regarding the now-rescinded federal policy of forced separation of children from their families is any indication, some of you will think I am wimping out by not saying more, some of you will think I’ve gone from preaching to

meddling, some of you will think I'm saying things I'm not saying, and some of you will wish I didn't say anything at all.

That's how it goes these days. There is so much relentlessly angry shouting, so much graceless belittling, so many voices assuming the worst in others that it becomes really hard to stay engaged, to truly listen. Last week, Columnist Michael Gerson reflected on a hospital stay that forced him to give up all electronic media for awhile. He found it healing and life-giving, and wrote, "A day without Twitter is like a day without anthrax."

Our diocese shares about 500 miles of border with Mexico along the Rio Grande, from above Lake Amistad to Boca Chica Beach, and we are sitting just 8 miles from the river. As the diocesan staff worked on Council plans, it seemed ridiculous that we say nothing, or that we not consider how as followers of Jesus we might bring his love and power to bear. You will hear several presentations during Council, none presuming to tell you what to think or to do, but offered in the awareness that our knowledge is imperfect and our perspective is limited, and maybe we can all learn something.

First, I should tell you that I was born and raised in Brownsville. So I am a "Valley rat" with a particular perspective. I have some strong opinions about what's going on, but my strong opinions are not shared by everyone in this hall or by everyone who lives along the border. My perspective is not the same as congressmen or state representatives from Dallas or the

Panhandle, and very different from many in Washington. It seems odd to me that fear and anxiety seem to grow the farther you get from the border. Those who live along the border, when they hear “U.S.- Mexico border,” don’t think of a neat red line on a map. We think of the river, of street names and streets that lead to bridges and then continue on. We think of farmland and golf courses and parks bumping right up against the riverbank. We think of shops and restaurants and bars we visit—or used to—of family members and friends who live “del otro lado.” My experience growing up doesn’t make me an expert in immigration policy; it simply gives me a perspective that is, I think, valid and based in a reality. Like yours. Mine cannot separate the real political issues from the real people and real communities affected.

Clearly, the issue of immigration is complex and without easy answers. It’s divisive and polarizing, as are many other issues in our day. Our strong feelings around immigration—if we have them—need to be balanced by humility and a curiosity to better understand the perspective of others. My knowledge is partial. So is yours. We will not grow in wisdom and love by yelling at each other via social media or talking only to people who think like us or by refusing to listen. In considering this, or any other volatile issue, we should seek to understand our opponents’ best and strongest arguments, not simply demolish their weakest ones and write them off as fools.

We also need to be on guard against our tendency to link issues and to make assumptions. Not everyone who opposes the wall is a left-wing, no-borders socialist. And not everyone in favor of the wall is a redneck right-wing hater.

What might walking in love, as Christ loved us, and manifesting his reconciling love, look like on the border?

Our churches in the Valley, and all along the river, have much to add to our understanding. They are not bicultural, but multi-cultural. We can learn a lot from them as they live with this complexity on a daily basis. In our churches on any given Sunday, you will find recent immigrants and naturalized citizens and those whose families owned this land when it was part of Spain. You'll likely hear Texas drawls, Spanglish and the exotic foreign accents of Minnesotans. You'll worship alongside Anglos who grew up in Mexico and speak Spanish fluently, Latinos who can barely order Tex-Mex in Spanish, border patrol officers and their families, immigration officials, illegal immigrants, people who want to see more walls built and people who are assisting those in the amnesty process. It is beautiful, messy, nuanced and complicated.

Individuals and churches along the border have been responding in a variety of ways, primarily in ministries of outreach and pastoral care. Our history and our DNA as a diocese lead us most often to care for the people in need right in front of us. So we have congregations and individuals serving the needs

of immigrants, working to make life better in *colonias*, helping immigrants become fluent in English, offering space or funding for other groups who offer services, ministering to those held in detention centers or just released from them. We also have congregations and individuals who support those who serve in law enforcement and the border patrol, providing welcome and pastoral care to those whose work can swing from great tedium to great danger in a moment and who are often caught in conflicting or contradictory policies.

And, across the whole diocese, churches and individuals are deeply engaged in mission work—just across the border in Northern Mexico and in Southeast Mexico, in Honduras and Guatemala and other countries of Central America. In the Name of Christ, our diocese has been sending mission teams for decades into the areas from which many are fleeing, seeking to improve the health, education and living conditions of vulnerable populations. I'm proud to report that, thanks to the mission work so many of you have done, other dioceses along our southern border have just begun to notice and take an interest in these ministries.

Wherever we might fall politically, as Christians there are always Christ-like responses available to us. Whether it's advocacy, or prayer, or giving a blanket to an asylum-seeker getting on a bus, or handing a taco to a border patrol agent, or heading south on a mission trip...there are things you and your

church can offer as followers of Jesus to share his love with others. Just remember to walk in love...don't yell, listen, and be humble and kind as you go.

Conclusion

I've spent a great deal of time this morning, as I should, talking about the Diocese of West Texas, planned and ongoing diocesan ministries, diocesan staff, diocesan budget, diocesan initiatives. Please understand clearly that I have been talking about you, about all of us together. I prepared this address with you all in mind. The diocesan center is not "the diocese," though it is beautiful and important. The diocesan staff is not "the diocese," beautiful and important though they are. I am not "the diocese," though a primary part of my call, shared with Bishop Brooke-Davidson, is to help you remember that the diocese is all of us, all of our congregations, knit together by the one Spirit, and members of the one Body, of which Jesus Christ is the head. Your own churches, scattered across 60 counties, and living and serving in an amazing variety of circumstances—you are the Diocese of West Texas and the local, embodied, fleshed-out, Spirit-enlivened Body of Christ in and for your towns and cities. If you get nothing else from this Council—and I think there is a great deal for you to get here—but if you get nothing else, I hope that the act of being scooped up into this place together will help you remember that we—all of us, together—are on this Way of

Jesus. We are the Diocese called together and sent for and toward the Kingdom. You—and we together—are called to the most wondrous stewardship: “stewards of the mysteries of God” (I Cor. 4:1) and “stewards of the manifold grace of God” (I Peter 4:10)— empowered by the Spirit to be the bearers of Good News of the forgiveness of sins, reconciliation, salvation, hope and eternal life. By God’s grace and mercy given in Christ, we have received everything we need to be the Body of Christ here and now.

Trust that to be true. Test it. Take a step. And walk in love, as Christ *loves* us, and *gives* himself for us, an offering and sacrifice to God.

Thank you. Thanks be to God for you, the Diocese of West Texas.