

BISHOP'S PASTORAL ADDRESS - 2008

(Address to the 134th Annual Convention of the Diocese of Fond du Lac, October 18, 2008)

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Grace and peace in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to those gathered at this 134th Annual Convention of the Diocese of Fond du Lac, and to members of the Diocese who will be reading this as it is distributed.

I want to begin by thanking Mr. Tim Koehler, a young man from St. Paul's Cathedral, a freshman at UW-Milwaukee, for sharing his faith journey with us at the Banquet last evening. It was a moving story of the important part the church plays in the life of our young people. I hope you share my appreciation for Tim's reflections, and understand the importance of ministry to young people.

At the Convention Banquet I was honored to present the Bishop's Cross for this year to Sue Workman from St. Luke's Church in Sister Bay, who has served committees and commissions of the Diocese with honor and devotion.

At the banquet I also recognized and thanked all who assist with the varying ministries in and through the diocese. It was an extensive list because a lot is happening. If you were not at the banquet but are involved in any way in diocesan life, please know you are appreciated, and we extend out thanks to you for your continuing service in the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

I want to take this opportunity to thank every member of the Diocese for allowing Jerrie and me to represent you at the Lambeth Conference this past summer in Canterbury, England. It was an extraordinary encounter with the Holy Spirit working through more than 650 Bishops from around the Anglican Communion.

As my Visitations continue this fall, I will continue to speak informally with congregations during coffee hour about our experience and how it has made a drastic change in my focus on my episcopal ministry here in the diocese. I want to share some of my insights in this Pastoral Address, and challenge you to work with me in developing new and more effective forms for our life together in the coming years as *a community of disciples enthusiastically leading all people to transformation in Jesus*.

Let me begin by reflecting back on my Pastoral Address to the diocese in 2007. I talked about the diocese being at a watershed moment, as more congregations are moving from fulltime clergy to other ways of being the Church. I challenged you, as disciples of Jesus Christ, to have more than just opinions about your calling, but to have convictions; and I specifically challenged "every member of the diocese - be convicted in study and teaching - be convicted in prayer - and be spiritually convicted."

I still hold to those challenges, and was pleased to hear at several of the Pre-Convention Deanery meetings that a number of congregations responded by adding Bible study opportunities for members while others have add prayer groups. It is my prayer more congregations will do the same.

My Lambeth experience, however, brought me to the realization of how locally focused I have been. Most ministries, of course, are done locally through members in our congregations. And it is essential to build up the Body of Christ in our communities with a greater conviction to our local

programming. But there is so much more to being a follower of Jesus and being His disciple in the world.

The blessing of the Lambeth Conference was that bishops worldwide were able to establish personal relationships with one another, sharing the challenges we face, and beginning to understand the very different contexts in which we live and minister. I have come to the realization that we truly live in one global community.

This has become obvious in the past few weeks regarding the economic situation world-wide. I heard on the Thursday Night News that "Joe the Plumber" was news in Asia and across Europe. What we do here has an immediate impact on other parts of the world. And what happens in the Middle East or elsewhere, has impact here. In making decisions, we must now realize that they will impact more than just me.

I have been in e-mail conversation with the eight other Bishops who were in my Lambeth Bible Study group: this includes Harold from the West Indies, Albert and Robert from Zambia, Ron from Canada, John from England, Bob from Los Angeles, Jacob from Tanzania, and Muru from New Zealand. Our Convention is being held up in prayer in all of those places. (Harold asked us to pray for him this weekend as he leads a Christian Teaching Conference in Jamaica which will have as its theme, "Encounters with the Third Person of the Holy Trinity".)

My awareness of the challenges our brothers and sisters in Christ face in other parts of our global community was heightened when I received an e-mail last week from my brother bishop, Henri Isingoma, from the Province of the Anglican Church of the Congo.

They held their Diocesan Synod or Convention from September 30th to October 5th. Bishop Henri shared the following: "The 13th Synod by God's providence went as planned. Despite the war that had broken out two days after its opening around Bukiringi area 17 km from Boga, the delegates were able to carry on without fear visible on anyone's face. At its end, delegates from Aveba, Gety and Bunia had to travel in convoy with us by a seldom-used forest path because the usual route between Boga and Bunia was unuseable due to daily conflicts between government soldiers and rebel forces that seem to have become more powerful. We spent two days on a very bad road through the forest before coming to the city of Bunia.

"Bunia itself is still peaceful. However the price of food has skyrocketed because of the merchants being cut off from the local countryside and the prudence of businesses not try to bring merchandise into the city. We were told that yesterday some trucks filled with merchandise were shot up and pillaged as they attempted to enter the city. We are now called to support not only all the delegates of the synod of the region where the hostilities are but also several other displaced persons. We counted this morning 48 families waiting on the Anglican church. In the environs, on the road to Gety and Boga, there are already in Kotonu, a group of 7,000 persons gathered, while others are still arriving! These people come with nothing on their person. They need food, health care, blankets and tarps for shelter, for it is the rainy season. Certain NGOs like WVF (World Vision) are trying to intervene with a daily ration but they have been submerged because of the sudden outbreak of the war.

"While we really appreciate your prayer support which has been effective in getting us out of much danger, we cannot but cry out an SOS for material aid for these thousands of very vulnerable people."

The relationships developed at Lambeth have had an impact I cannot describe - other than to say when I hear of situations like this - I can no longer say, "Oh, that's not happening to anyone I know – and it doesn't impact me." Christ has transformed my life in such a way that my leadership among you is already beginning to take a more mission-minded direction.

I am aware that some in this diocese are concerned about the practice of allowing restrictions for individual members when they make a pledge - but this practice allows for the Diocesan budget to have an outreach line-item that we might otherwise not have. I plan to ask the Executive Council, at its meeting next month, to designate a portion of those 2007 outreach funds for immediate relief in the Province of the Congo, in response to Bishop Henri's plea.

I want to share another encounter at Lambeth with one of the Bishops from the Solomon Islands, in the Anglican Province of Melanesia. This conversation took place following a plenary entitled "Given the Ecological Crisis, what is the role of the Church?" This presentation was given by Professor Chris Rapley, director of the Science Museum in London, and former director of the British Antarctic survey -- an expert in climate change.

The Bishop shared how proud the people of the Solomon Islands are, because of their assistance to John F. Kennedy during World War 2, when his ship the PT-109 was damaged and the crew was rescued. One of the islands even bears the name Kennedy Island. He said they always felt close to the US, but recently feel distanced by our lack of concern for the global environment and climate change. With global warming, he said, their land is threatened by the rising sea. He said if more isn't done, he and the 550,000 plus people of the Solomon Islands will eventually have no homeland. He asked us if we might not be able to do something to help.

Relationships started at Lambeth have put a face on problems like this; and that's when it really begins to make a difference.

I have begun to think about my carbon footprint and I need to reduce it, remembering my conversation about the Solomon Islands. I'm ready to commit myself to do what I can. But I need your help and support.

As a diocese, as congregations, and as individuals, we are called by our Lord to proclaim the Good News to all. We have been given the responsibility of caring for God's creation. We are called to assist our sisters and brothers and all those who are in need.

I have come to the conclusion that, in response to those obligations, I need to do my episcopal ministry in a more efficient and "green" way.

When I look at my recent Visitation schedule -- driving to congregations in the Northwoods three successive weekends, driving to Door County two successive weekends -- somehow this does not seem helpful to the environment that God has entrusted to you and me. What if I drove once, and in a day or two at the most, made two or three Visitations? Of course I wouldn't have the pleasure of being with every congregation at their main Sunday morning worship. Would that be possible?

In two weeks I plan to meet with the Deans to seek their advice on a new pattern for Episcopal Visitations. I have already asked the Standing Committee for their council. Matthew and I have already been in discussion about using technology more for meetings of committees and

commissions of the diocese. (I want to thank the Trustees for taking an initial step in this direction. Of the seven meetings they held this past year, four were done by phone using FreeConference.com.)

I believe I need to begin leading the diocese in a new way of understanding the ministry of the Bishop – and this will be even more important if our relationship with the Diocese of Eau Claire begins to develop.

Obviously the concerns expressed in my Address last year – of needing convictions, not just opinions -- have blossomed from the bud of the congregation to the bloom of the global community. However, be aware that I am still concerned about our local situations.

There was concern expressed at a couple of the Pre-Convention Deanery meetings about the lack of support the diocese seems to be giving to some mission congregations. There are different philosophies regarding aid; and rather than simply continuing to make decisions through the budgeting process, I am establishing a Mission Strategy Task Force to look at these philosophies, to consider what other diocese around the country are doing, and to make recommendations to the Executive Council and its Finance Committee about possible changes for the future.

My Lambeth experience, as I have implied here and have spoken of in a number of settings, was all about relationships – and the difference those relationships have made in my vision of what we need to do and be as a diocese.

I'm blessed to be on an e-group of a parishioner at Christ the King, Sturgeon Bay. John Ingrisano regularly sends out "thoughts for the day", and the "Thursday Thought" this week was a word from God summarizing my feelings in this Pastoral Address.

John said, "I come from a long line of tough, independent, annoyingly arrogant loners. I've watched family members stand on pride and surrender relationships with loved ones; or struggle alone in crisis against overwhelming odds, never blinking, never complaining; or not know how much others needed their support, understanding and compassion.

"I was once that way. But I found being a hard-shelled, tough loner just doesn't work. Such souls may become the best at something, but they never reach their full potential as people. That takes relationships.

John continues: "My point: I've learned that life is like a three-legged race. We need others to get along, and others need us. The best part: When we trip up and stumble, we get to laugh as we tumble, sharing the adventure and the bruises. Enjoy others. They are blessings."

My vision for the diocese for 2009 – be in relationship with Jesus and be a blessing to God -- be in relationship with others and be a blessing to them.

As I said a moment ago, as a diocese, as congregations, and as individuals, we are called by our Lord to proclaim the Good News to all -- we have been given the responsibility of caring for God's creation -- we are called to assist our sisters and brothers and all those who are in need.

What are we waiting for?