

The Bishop's Address
One Hundred Thirty-Second Regular Synod
Springfield, Illinois
October 23-24, 2009

MY BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN CHRIST, ON THIS OCCASION OF THE ONE HUNDRED THIRTY-SECOND REGULAR SYNOD OF THE DIOCESE OF SPRINGFIELD, I HAVE THE PRIVILEGE OF ADDRESSING YOU AS YOUR BISHOP IN THE EIGHTEENTH YEAR OF THIS EPISCOPACY IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. *Amen.*

On behalf of Dean Robert Brodie and the Cathedral Chapter and all the Cathedral members and Archdeacon Shawn Denney and the Bishop's Committee and all the people of St. Luke's Church, Springfield, I welcome you to this Regular Synod of the Diocese of Springfield.

The Synod's theme is "Living the Resurrected Life: Walking Daily with Christ." Certainly the goal of every serious Christian is to live into the Resurrection and how do we do that except by daily inviting Jesus to abide with us that we might abide in Him.

Four (4) very special persons have joined us at this synod. There will be an opportunity for you to meet each of them later, but I want to introduce them to you now. I would ask them to stand as I call their names.

Representing the Central-Southern Illinois Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is their bishop, Warren Freiheit, who by-the-way is a preeminent Minnesota Vikings fan.

Representing our companion Diocese of Barbados is the Very Rev. Dr. Frank B. H. H. Marshall, Dean of the Cathedral of St. Michael and All Angels, Bridgetown, Barbados. Accompanying him is his wife, Mrs. Beverley Marshall.

And representing our companion Diocese of Recife is the Rev. Mauricio Coelho, Rector of Christ the Redeemer Anglican Church in Gravata. Brazil. He also is the Associate Archdeacon for the Center Archdeaconate and Diocesan Assistant for Foreign Relations.

On behalf of the Diocese of Springfield I am pleased to warmly welcome the four (4) of you.

Now, if you haven't already met him, I want to introduce you to the Rt. Rev. Dr. Donald Parsons, formerly the Bishop of Quincy and before that Dean of Nashotah House Seminary and before that Professor of New Testament at Nashotah House. He is present with us for the first time at our Diocesan Synod in his new status of being canonically resident in the Diocese of Springfield and serving now as an Assisting Bishop in this Diocese. Additionally, I am most

pleased that he has agreed to serve as the Chaplain at this Synod. As such, he will be the preacher at Evensong tonight and at the Eucharist tomorrow morning, and he will address this Synod in a few minutes and then again before we adjourn tomorrow. I look forward to hearing the words and insights of this venerable bishop, priest and deacon.

It is now my privilege to recognize those who have joined us in ordained ministry or whose ministry status has changed since our last synod. I would ask them to please stand if they are present as I call their names.

The Rt. Rev. Keith L. Ackerman was appointed an Assisting Bishop in the Diocese of Springfield effective December 1, 2008. He has been involved in our diocesan life in a number of ways since then, not the least of which was by participating in the most recent Holy Week services at our cathedral and ordaining to the priesthood on my behalf at Nashotah House last spring the following persons who were received as deacons from the Diocese of Quincy: the Rev. David M. Adams; the Rev. Colin M. Ambrose; the Rev. Joseph R. Hermerding; the Rev. Rodney S. Hurst; and the Rev. Joel A. Prather.

The Rev. Sheryl L. Black was ordained priest on the Feast of All Saints, November 1, 2008, and continues to serve in the Hale Deanery Team Ministry.

The Rev. Canon Dale D. Coleman has been canonically transferred from the Diocese of the Rio Grande and is now the Priest-in-Charge of St. George's, Belleville.

The Rev. William R. Easterling and the Rev. Mario J. Bergner have been canonically transferred from the Diocese of Quincy. Fr. Easterling serves on the administrative staff of Nashotah House and Fr. Bergner is a doctoral candidate and assists in a parish in the Diocese of Massachusetts.

And the Rev. Dr. Keith R. Roderick has come to us from the Diocese of Quincy and is now the Rector of St. Andrew's Church, Carbondale.

The Diocese of Springfield is blessed to have each of these ordained laborers for the Gospel of Christ among us, and we thank God for them and ask Him to richly bless their ministries.

During this past year, the following Letters Dimissory were issued by me: the Rev. Howard Bolin to the Diocese of East Tennessee; the Rev. Rodney S. Hurst to the Diocese of the Rio Grande; the Rev. Colin M. Ambrose to the Diocese of Tennessee; the Rev.

Joseph R. Hermerding to the Diocese of Louisiana; and the Rev. Robert M. Lewis to the Diocese of Central Florida.

We pray that God will continue to bless them and their ministries in the months and years ahead.

As I am confident you know, the primary purpose of this address is to report to you on the state of the Church. If you haven't already, I pray you will take the time, as I have, to review the numerous and varied reports contained in your 2009 Synod booklet. I'm confident you will find them not just interesting but inspiring. These reports testify to the fact that a whole lot of really good ministry is taking place here in the Diocese of Springfield, and I thank God for it and for those who are doing it.

But that's not the whole story and God forbid we would ever be lulled into complacency or dwell in denial. Every indication is The Episcopal Church continues to erode. The latest statistics show Church membership is down, worship attendance is down and giving to the Church is down. The sea change for this negative direction can be traced directly to General Convention 2003 and the endorsement of Gene Robinson's election to the episcopate.

Since that time the situation has worsened. The 76th General Convention meeting in Anaheim, California, last July took definitive action to mainstream the sexual agenda headlined in 2003 by passing Resolutions D025 and C056. The first declares that non-celibate homosexuals may have access to any ordained ministry in The Episcopal Church. The second directs the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music to collect and develop theological and liturgical resources for the blessing of same sex relationships which then will be considered for adoption at the General Convention to be held in Indianapolis in 2012. In the meantime bishops, especially those in civil jurisdictions where same sex unions or "marriages" are authorized by law, "may provide generous pastoral response to meet the needs of members of this Church." In short, bishops may now authorize the blessing of same sex relationships with the full approval of the Church.

The fact is for years bishops knowingly have been ordaining unmarried, non-celibate persons and not only have allowed but encouraged blessing of same sex relationships. Moreover, the recent General Convention ignored the counsel and advice of the Archbishop of Canterbury in taking that action.

The real problem is this: The Episcopal Church is now on record as declaring moral what the Church, from the beginning, has taught is immoral. Additionally, it can be reasonably argued that Resolution C056 has transposed the word “needs” for the word, “wants.” The bottom line is this: A Church that claims to follow Christ as Savior and Lord cannot succeed if it endorses and adopts secular values, because it then will have turned its back on the fundamental mission of calling people to holiness through repentance and forgiveness. No one needs a Church that aligns itself with worldly values at the expense of eternal, biblical principles.

What we seem unable to comprehend is what the Rev. Dr. A. W. Tozer has said in his book, *The Set of the Sail*, and I quote, “The business of the Church is God. She is purest when most engaged with God and she is astray just so far as she follows other interests, no matter how ‘religious’ or humanitarian they may (seem to) be.”

If all of this weren’t enough evidence that The Episcopal Church appears to be committed to a path which becomes more and more self-destructive, just last Friday the Presiding Bishop chose to declare, which appears to be quite contrary to Canon, that Bishop Keith Ackerman had renounced his Holy Orders and, therefore, deposed him. Bishop Ackerman has categorically denied making anything remotely resembling a renunciation of his Orders. I have written to the Presiding Bishop asking her to share her rationale for the action she has taken. She contends this is the only administrative way to deal with clergy who leave the Providence of The Episcopal Church (USA). I contend that her solution appears to be “mean-spirited,” even as it appears to fail in its comprehension of the theological and spiritual nature of the Anglican Communion. Considering her concept, I am led to think that there is no reason why Bishop Ackerman could not function in the Diocese of Springfield if he is an Anglican bishop in good standing in the Diocese of Bolivia and the Province of the Southern Cone, even as another friend, Bishop Anthony Priddis, Bishop of Hereford, Church of England, would be allowed to minister in TEC with the appropriate invitation/permission.

I believe this is another in a series of actions wherein the Presiding Bishop has overstepped her authority, and I plan to pursue the matter in the House of Bishops when we meet next March if it isn’t resolved beforehand.

Bishop Ackerman is a Godly man who has had a distinguished, ordained ministry and the Church has been blessed by his labor in the vineyard of Christ. It should be an embarrassment

for The Episcopal Church that the largest majority of Anglicanism is likely to continue to recognize Bishop Ackerman's Holy Orders and ministry.

Perhaps William Murchison, an Episcopalian and retired newspaper man from the Diocese of Dallas, describes the situation best in a book well worth the read entitled: *Moral Follies; Episcopalians and the Crisis of Mainline Christianity*. He says: "Episcopalians of the twenty-first century, like their counterparts in other churches of the so-called American mainline -- such as Methodists and Presbyterian -- seem to prefer a God (of which) the culture would be proud, rather than a culture (of which) God would be proud. While (people) work to rebrand and re-shelve orthodox Christianity for the modern market, exponents of the new thinking are busy reducing mainstream Christian witness to a shadow of its former self."

Part of the problem may be the tendency, as John Stott identifies in *The Preacher's Portrait*, that much of the so-called "testimony" today is really autobiographical and even sometimes thinly disguised self-justification and self-advertisement. What is needed, he says, is to regain a proper biblical perspective. All true testimony is of Jesus Christ, as he stands on trial before the world.

Realistically, the situation is dire. Add to this Rome's announcement just last Tuesday of the Apostolic Constitution for Anglicans Entering the (Roman) Catholic Church. Though it remains to be seen what effect it will have, it certainly has the potential of drawing a significant number of Anglicans away from our Communion, especially those of an Anglo-catholic bent. But I don't see this as much of an answer to the current difficulties in the Anglican Communion particularly for mainstream, orthodox Anglicans. An important clue to all of it is the re-ordination requirement.

All of this may seem more than we can or care to bear. Perhaps we prefer not to even think about it let alone deal with it. But avoidance is never capable of solving a thing.

From time to time, I'm not above feeling sorry for myself because of the situation in the Church. It's at those times some things have occurred to me that I believe are of God. One is: In every age the Church has been in crisis and in comparison, though it has the potential of being very destructive, this is relatively mild. Another is: We are particularly blessed to be present at this particular crossroads in the history of the Church. It doesn't take much character or commitment to minister in easy times. The challenges of the current time are significant and with the knowledge we, ourselves, are inadequate to remain faithful and lend ourselves to

accomplishing God's will, we are confident God's grace is sufficient to make us equal to the task.

As we open ourselves to allow God to work in us and through us, we should remember a rather simple formula for being faithful: Admit; Submit; Commit; and Transmit.

Realistically our mission, just as the mission of the Church, has not changed. As stated in the Catechism it is to know God and make Him known. It is to seek, by God's grace, to put Him first in our lives in every situation and to assist others to do the same. As that scenario becomes the norm, "associate Church members" who expect privileges without responsibilities become an anomaly and the expected standard is every member will be active in worship, study and service.

You might recall a story by Ernest Hemingway entitled *The Top of the World*. In it he talks about a father and his teenage son. Their relationship deteriorated to the point that the son ran away from home. The father began an intensive search across central Spain for his rebellious son. Finally, as a last resort, the father placed an ad in the Madrid newspaper. His son's name was Paco, a rather common name in Spain. The ad read, "Dear Paco, meet me in front of the Madrid newspaper office tomorrow at noon. All is forgiven. I love you."

The next day at noon in front of the newspaper office there were 800 Pacos, all seeking forgiveness, acceptance and a fresh start within a relationship they valued as important.

The Pacos of this world still desire and are seeking true forgiveness and authentic love, though they sometimes act as if they are unaware of it. You and I know there's only one place to find what we really need and that is at the throne of the Triune God. That's why the Church exists, and that's why God has called us to be members of it. I pray the words of First Thessalonians, chapter 2, verse 4, ring true in all our ears, "...As we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the Gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts." Being grounded there, none of our efforts will have been in vain.

NOW UNTO GOD THE FATHER, GOD THE SON AND GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT BE ASCRIBED AS IS MOST JUSTLY DUE, ALL MIGHT, POWER, MAJESTY, DOMINION AND GLORY NOW AND FOREVER. *Amen.*