

The Bishop's Address
101st Annual Council
The Diocese of Atlanta
November 9, 2007

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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ!

Building on a century of God's faithfulness to us, I want to talk about the future. I want to focus on what is to come and begin to shape a mission strategy for the next few years. I've thought a great deal about this in recent months, and prayed about it even longer. These are the things that are on my heart and mind and I want to share them with you. Between now and council next year, we will look more deeply into these things that God has laid upon my heart. Through prayer, conversation, and discernment, we'll discover together if this is the direction God wants us to go. There are five areas that I will concentrate on next year. I will be inviting folks from across the diocese to be in conversation with me and with each other about these things. When we meet together next year, I believe that we will be able to present the vision of our next few years together in service to the Lord of the Church.

The first thing close to my heart is the ministry with **children, youth, and young adults**. Our church has cared deeply always about the formation of our children and youth. We have great staff in this area. We spend a lot of money in this area. Many of our parishes have great strength in this area. This is a good time, I believe, to take a hard look at our ministries with children and youth and make sure we are responding to their needs and not working out our own needs on them.

As I travel around the diocese, the majority of our parishes seem to have lots of children under foot. The larger parishes have much to offer them. And I am particularly interested in how the diocese can support and help to offer formative activities for those young people in parishes that need support beyond the local parish level. I am also interested in enhancing the opportunities for kids in all of the parishes, small and large, to get to know each other beyond the framework of their own parish. It's never too early to help young Episcopalians understand that their church is a much larger reality than their local parish congregation. I am proud of Kim Smith and the work that she does as our diocesan youth coordinator together with all of the folks around the diocese who work alongside of her in providing a first-rate youth program. But this is the year to look at what we're doing, ask the hard questions, plant, tend, and water, so that the experience of growing up in Christ in the parishes and Diocese of Atlanta is the very best it can be. Our children deserve our very best efforts.

Let me tell you about two of the most encouraging things that have happened in the last year in the diocese. First, a group of young, adult, Episcopalians has grown up among us. They are mostly college graduates and mostly still single. They come from all over the diocese, but most live in metro Atlanta. Most are in their first "real jobs," although a few are still in graduate school. They have found each other largely by way of the Internet. What they have in common is that they grew up in the Episcopal Church, care deeply about their life of faith, and find meaning in being and working together. Some grew up in other dioceses and are in the Atlanta region for work or school, and like the others, sought out fellow young adult Episcopalians. The group meets regularly at Manuel's Tavern for "theological brew," they get together for movie nights

and conversations, they have invested sweat equity in several Saturday work projects, and about sixty joined Lynn and me for a Braves game at Turner Field.

What I find so exciting about this is that they found each other, formed the group themselves, launched their own website, printed their own brochures, organized their own programs, and named themselves DAYA – Diocese of Atlanta Young Adults. Once they had all this figured out, their leadership came to visit with me and wanted my encouragement and blessing. Make my day! They wondered if we might be able to find a few hundred dollars to help with mail and website expenses, and that sort of thing. And they planted the seed hoping eventually for a part-time coordinator for their ministry. I am pleased to say that the part-time coordinator they have asked for is in the proposed mission and ministry budget for 2008. Why wait? These folks are not the church of tomorrow. They are the church today! God is so good!

I am delighted to report that two new schools are in formation in the diocese. The first is Redeemer Episcopal Academy in Greensboro, which opened its doors this fall to its first classes. Late in the summer I was privileged to go to Greensboro to bless the new facility, commission and bless the faculty and staff, and meet a number of the students and their parents. I am grateful to Geoff Taylor, the Rector of Redeemer, and the good folks both in the parish and in the community who have worked so hard to make this new Episcopal school become a reality.

The other school is still a dream, but one that is well along the way toward that reality. Several years ago, a group of visionary servants at St. Teresa's in Acworth recognized the need for a special school that was designed to meet the needs of kids in the difficult transition years around middle school. Many of our primary schools do a great job and many of our high schools can provide the resources that are needed by our young people as they transition to either college or the workplace. In most places, the most vulnerable time for our youngsters is when they are between grades 5 and 8. This is a national problem and one of the successful initiatives to address it is the network of Nativity Schools. These schools focus their attention on students in these middle years with particular attention to kids who show great promise but who, for reasons beyond their control, might be thought of as high risk. The Nativity Schools are often affiliated with Roman Catholic, Episcopal, and Lutheran judicatories. From the originators at St. Teresa's, the vision has continued to mature and additional people have joined the effort to help make this dream a reality. One afternoon some months ago, as the leaders of the project were meeting in my office, I suggested they contact the Rector of the Church of the Holy Cross in Decatur. I knew that Holy Cross had recently completed a beautiful new Christian education building and that the second floor was largely unfinished. And I knew that Holy Cross just might be able to lead them to the sorts of students they were anxious to serve. I knew that Holy Cross had enough space to provide for outdoor play, food service, worship, and many of the other needs a Nativity School would need. Well, they were warmly received by the rector, Brian Jemmott, and meetings followed with the wardens and vestry who gave their strong support. While there are many hills to climb between now and next September, it looks like that vision born at St. Teresa's might well come into focus at Holy Cross. Edith Woodling and Sam Preston will be saying more about this later in our agenda. Sisters and brothers, I look forward to being there on opening day.

This is as good a time as any to mention Camp Mikell. Mikell is thriving in more ways than I can recount here. Attendance records are stronger than they have ever been and the place runs full tilt year round. The programmatic side of Mikell is vigorous and innovative. Our new art facility, the gift of generous donors called together by Bishop and Mrs. Allan, is a wonderful new home for all of our Mikell-related arts programs that take place throughout the year and will

enable the expansion of those programs in the years to come. I would be remiss if I did not note the extraordinary job that Ken Struble and his staff are doing. Since Ken has been at the helm of Camp Mikell things have improved in almost immeasurable many ways. Every time I go to Mikell I look forward to seeing what improvements have been made since the last time I was there. Whether it's facilities, programs, organization, or management, I have come to count on Ken and his team to have touched something with their creativity, ingenuity, and hard work. And I am grateful to them.

Most of you will remember that in my first years as bishop we put together a strategic plan for our life together. I am pleased to report that pretty much everything we set out to do – organizational, programmatic, structural, or canonical – has been accomplished, with one exception. In that strategic plan – *Connect, Transform, Grow* – we were to have figured out a fresh vision for camp and conference ministries in the diocese, cast that vision before our parishes and people, and take whatever steps are necessary to make that vision come true. Well, dear ones, that's the one piece of business have not yet finished and the time has come to put some fresh energy into figuring out the future we intend to pursue. I have no strong commitment to a particular outcome, but I am convinced that we must explore all of the options and make some clear decisions about the future of our camp and conference ministries. We have an old facility with significant deferred maintenance that was designed for the priorities and programs of another age. It does not adapt well to many of the things we need for it to do. So, I intend to appoint a task force made up of representatives of Mikell, other diocesan members with expertise, financial and program consultants, and charge them to bring – in two years – to the 103rd Annual Council a report of their findings, and hopefully a clear plan for the future, together with the enabling resolutions that this body will need to consider to make any plan a reality. I've set a deadline of year after next because I believe that to do this task well may take more than a year. I will be delighted, however, to be wrong about that and if the working group is prepared by next November, I will not hesitate to put their recommendations before Annual Council.

The second thing on my agenda for 2008 is **leadership development**. I intend to put together a team composed of members of the Commission on Ministry, our Institute for Theological Education and Formation, the Committee on Anti-Racism, and other groups among us, and take a serious look at leadership development. I am not talking just about clergy. I am talking about ways to develop greater leadership potential in those who put themselves forward for holy orders. Loving Jesus and caring deeply about the church's ministry is a great place to start, but "can they lead effectively?" one of the serious questions of vocational discernment.

Leadership development is also about the lay leaders who are mission critical to our life as a church. I am talking about doing a better job in resourcing our vestries and providing better training for those who serve as wardens, treasurers and members of parish vestries. But stopping there will not get the job done. We need to be intentional about raising up leaders to serve effectively at the diocesan level, and we need to grow effective lay leaders who can serve at church-wide and communion-wide levels. Although we have persons in key positions beyond the diocese, as one of the larger dioceses in the church we are underrepresented in the councils of the larger church. But it is more complicated simply just nominating people to fill slots. We have an obligation to raise up leaders -- thoughtful, well formed, and well informed leaders who can make a difference in the councils of the larger church. I am not at all sure what that needs to look like, but it is my intent to report to you next year on significant conversations and emerging

strategies designed to strengthen our efforts at leadership development at all levels of our life together.

In my address to council last year, I noted that in all of my previous addresses I talked about **growth**. I also said that I was confident I would talk about it again this year and every year that I am bishop. I have not changed my mind. As long as I am blessed to be the bishop of this extraordinary diocese, we're going to talk about growth. You know that I don't believe in growth for growth's sake. Numbers for the sake of numbers alone are simply another form of idolatry. But that's not why we grow.

We grow because we are the hands and feet of the Great Commission of Jesus. We grow because we serve a Risen Savior who invites everyone into a life-transforming relationship. We grow because there is much to do in mission and ministry in the Name of Jesus in our time and place, and we need all the recruits we can find to lean their shoulders into ours to get it done. We grow because we can be a voice of sanity amidst the cacophony of religious chatter, and there are countless souls out there who are more likely to hear the good news of Jesus if they hear it from us. We grow because we can offer a New Testament vision of an inclusive church, powered by the resurrection, driven by gospel justice, and nourished by holy living.

Lesslie Newbigin, one of the great bishops of 20th-century Anglicanism, put it so well: the renewal of the church, but more importantly, the renewal of the world "will only happen as and when local congregations renounce an introverted concern for their own life, and recognize that they exist for the sake of those who are not members, as sign, instrument, and foretaste of God's redeeming grace for the whole life of society." Sisters and brothers, that's why growth needs to be on the agenda of every parish in this diocese. Not for ourselves, for heaven's sake, but for others. Not for maintenance, but for mission. We grow so that others can share the treasures we enjoy in this incomparable church. That's why we need to continue to open new congregations. Few communities in our territory are not experiencing population growth, and in some places that growth is quite substantial. For example, many of these communities are underserved by The Episcopal Church. This year's efforts have been focused on the continuing development of our international congregation, Christ the King, in Atlanta's northeast corridor, and as the spadework necessary to develop St. Benedict's in south central Cobb County continues. Christ the King continues to grow and St. Benedict's will begin to worship together in mid-January with what promises to be very strong numbers from the beginning.

The new starts task force is a hard-working, visionary group, ably led by Dan Matthews, the Rector of St. Luke's, Atlanta, and Canon Alicia Schuster-Weltner of the diocesan staff. High on their agenda will be the advice, counsel and shared decision making, about what comes next. Will it be a new parish in South DeKalb County? Will it be in the Byron-Centerville area south of Macon? Will it be in the northern reaches of Athens? Will it be to the northwest in the fast growing areas of Bartow and Gordon counties? Will it be another plant in the Chattahoochee Valley? Will it be an underserved area of Gwinnett? All of these are places where few would debate that another Episcopal Church is needed and that's only part of the list. At Council next year I expect to announce what the top three places will be. And even more, I hope that by Council next year the mission developer will have been identified and called, and that the ground work will have already started for the development of the next new parish on the list.

The fourth area that is going to get my attention this year is **the environment**. We are not the owners, sisters and brothers, not the owners but the stewards of God's creation. We must

hear the call to lead the way on environmental issues, not simply as good citizens, but as people of faith, as daughters and sons of the God of all creation. To this end, I intend to form a working group to lead our efforts toward greater environmental stewardship. This task force will have three objectives: to provide the parishes and people with the necessary resources to develop deeper biblical and theological understandings of our obligations for the care of the earth, resources that will be available to all of our people at every age to deepen their sense of participation in the stewardship of creation; secondly, to provide practical tools for our parishes and our people to cut waste, reduce energy consumption, contain and reduce our carbon footprint, and other practical means to make a difference; and to organize appropriate advocacy at the local, state, national, and international levels that contributes positively toward the accountability of our government leaders for the wise use of the riches of creation.

Now we are not starting from zero here. The Diocese of Atlanta, for example, is a founding member of GIPL – that is, Georgia Interfaith Power and Light, a green power and energy conservation initiative in which a number of our people are involved and to which Woody and Carol Bartlett give important leadership. I want publicly acknowledge that the Church of the Epiphany was recently recognized by GIPL as the faith community in Georgia that has done the most to promote wise environmental stewardship and to live green. St. Bartholomew's received this award last year. It would suit me if an Episcopal parish brought home that award every year! There's lots of talent in our diocese to make this initiative a powerful witness to our faith. David Stooksberry, the official climatologist of the State of Georgia, a faithful Episcopalian, and a member of this Council from St. Gregory's in Athens, has already volunteered for service and I haven't even asked him yet. The members of our Commission on Architecture are committed to efficient, green buildings. So keep an eye out for the work of this group. Volunteer to support their efforts. Let's not wait for other people to come to us. Let's lead the way on the care of God's creation!

The fifth area I want to highlight concerns our continuing commitment to **global mission and the Millennium Development Goals**. As I travel around the diocese, I rarely have a visit when someone doesn't speak with me about global mission and the MDGs. In forums and classes it is often the subject of questions that show positive interest in our work beyond the diocese. The success of our recent global mission event is yet another testimony to the importance of this work in the hearts of our people.

Across the diocese there are an endless number of connections that have been made with fellow Anglicans as well as with the work of other Christian groups, agencies, and development programs. There are multiple ministry connections in places such as Haiti, Honduras, El Salvador, and Liberia, and there are others. This does not include our work with our official partner dioceses in Tanzania, Ecuador, and Brazil. This is the sort of work that changes lives and the lives it changes most profoundly might well be our own.

Add to this the commitment of our parishes and people to the MDGs. Part of the genius of the MDG program is that every government, organization, faith community, or individual can make their own decision about where to send their support. The economic theory behind the MDGs is that wherever the funds are invested, the cumulative effect of a worldwide effort will be to reach successfully toward the achievement of the goals. The main thing is to give. Seven tenths of one percent is a manageable number for almost everybody in our part of the world.

One of the questions I get most often is, "Where should I send the money?" Or, "Are there specific projects you suggest?" I want parishes and people to direct their MDG support

toward ministries where they feel a strong and passionate connection. That being said, I want to urge your MDG support for the work we're doing in our companion partnership dioceses. Through the work of our global missions committee, the links that Canon Shew maintains with her counterparts in our companion dioceses and my regular communications with the bishops there, we have identified a number of programs and projects in education, health, food security, clean water, and similar needs that can use our support and that are consonant with the MDGs. By concentrating our support in our companion dioceses, the pooling of our resources has the capacity to provide enormous improvement in the quality of life of our sister and brother Anglicans and the communities in which they live. The diocesan staff will continue to make information, coordination and easy access to all of these opportunities a high priority. A rather modest contribution on the part of most of us, when blessed by prayer and offered together with the gifts of others, can have life-changing consequences in the lives of our sisters and brothers in other parts of God's world. Previous councils of this diocese have strongly committed us to this effort. We have made a good beginning. The difference we can make for good in this initiative in the next seven years is immeasurable.

I cannot, however, leave the subject of global mission partnerships without expressing my gratitude to those mission personnel of this diocese who are deployed around the world. The Rev. Leigh Preston and her husband Andy are serving in El Salvador. Marian Dickson is serving in Ecuador Central. The Rev. Sandra and Dr. Martin McCann continue to serve in Central Tanganyika. Magi Griffin, who served previously in the Diocese of Dar es Salaam, will soon be returning to Dodoma to join the administrative team in support of Bishop Mdimi. My daughter Kelly will be home for Christmas – yes! – after serving at Canon Andrea Mwaka School and on the staff of Carpenter's Kids for the last 18 months. Meghan Sweet and Lacy Nolan, two faithful Camp Mikellers, lived in Dodoma for a season and did all manner of odd jobs to support several of the programs there. Dr. Paul Elliott completed a second teaching stint this summer at Msalato Theological College. So you see, friends, its not just about offering prayers and sending money as important as those things are. It is about sending and receiving people, sister and brothers in Christ, who are making significant sacrifices to serve where the Lord calls them. May their tribe increase. In fact, just the other day a member of one of our parishes told me that he had been praying seriously about making a commitment for tour of duty in Africa. "What do you do?" I asked him. "I am a doctor," he answered, "a pathologist." "Well," I said, "I don't know how many Episcopalian pathologists from Georgia they can use in East Africa, but there's one over there already and I bet Martin McCann would like some company!" God is so good!

So there they are, friends. In the next year, when you're wondering what I am doing when I am not at your parish, you can pretty much guess I'll be working on those five things: children, youth, and young adults, leadership development, growing the church, new environmental initiatives, and global mission and the MDGs. We have a new century in front of us and we must make a good beginning. I cannot do it alone. I will be asking many of you to think with me, work with me, and strategize with me as we move forward in all of these areas. I am confident that I can count on your support. God is so good!

Since Annual Council last year, a group of our sisters and brothers in Peachtree City decided to disaffiliate with the Diocese of Atlanta and the Episcopal Church. In doing so they sought to maintain control of the assets and facilities of the parish. Under the obligations incumbent upon me as the bishop of the diocese, it was necessary to pursue a legal process so that the substantial number of members who desired to continue their ministry as part of this

diocese could reorganize and have the parish resources at the disposal of their ministries. That was a long and at times difficult process, but I am pleased to say that it has come to an end, and that the property and assets of St. Andrew's in the Pines are securely in the hands of a new vestry who are faithful members of this diocese. The Rev. Paul C. Elliott is the priest-in-charge, a full range of parish ministries are thriving, the average Sunday attendance is nearing 200, and new people are crossing the threshold every week. For the first time in several years, St. Andrew's in the Pines is fully represented at Annual Council by its clergy and lay delegates and I know that Council joins me in welcoming them home. On behalf of St. Andrew's and all of us, I want to express heartfelt thanks to our chancellors, Richard Perry and Tom Christopher, and especially to Tom Harney, our church attorney, for their incredible work, not only as great lawyers, but as faithful churchmen of the highest order.

For the record, I want to formally ask Annual Council to establish a position for **an assistant bishop**. Since our conversations at Council last year, it seems good to me to proceed with the search for an assistant. What that means is that we'll be looking for someone who is already a bishop and who might be willing to give us three-to-five years of service on a full time, or significantly part-time basis. We have provided for this in the proposed mission and ministry budget for 2008. I am optimistic that suitable candidates will be available in the coming months. The search cannot begin without your consent, so during the legislative session tomorrow you will be asked to give your consent so that the Standing Committee and I can get about that work. In anticipation of the obvious question, should we get to September of next year having had no luck in the search process, then I will ask the chancellors to consult with the Standing Committee and the Office of the Presiding Bishop and prepare the enabling resolutions that will be necessary for Annual Council next year to discuss and approve the election of a Bishop Suffragan.

Before concluding this address, I would like to make a few comments concerning the **state of affairs in The Episcopal Church and in the Anglican Communion**. As you know, in September the House of Bishops met in New Orleans for its annual fall meeting. The Archbishop of Canterbury accepted our invitation to be present with us and we were joined by members of the Joint Standing Committee of the Anglican Consultative Council and the Primates of the Anglican Communion. The conversations were frank and clarifying, but gracious and productive. A spirit of goodwill pervaded the meeting.

After two days of conversation with our guests, and a workday in New Orleans to clear our heads, the bishops set about the task of responding to the requests of the Primates of the Anglican Communion expressed in the communiqué from their meeting last spring in Dar es Salaam. It is important to note that, although the Primates' communiqué has been read by some as an ultimatum, our guests from around the Communion made it abundantly clear that they did not understand it that way. Nonetheless, in a spirit of generosity and humility, your bishops decided that we would try to respond faithfully to their requests, to the degree that we could, fully recognizing that we could speak only as the bishops of this church and that we could not speak definitively for our church apart from the General Convention. Naturally, there are those who believe the bishops wimped out and should have responded more forcefully. There are others who clearly believe that the bishops overstepped our authority. Frankly, I believe both such viewpoints are quite simply incorrect. The bishops were asked to clarify the meaning of the actions of the 2006 General Convention in response to the Windsor Report. We did exactly and

only that. We declared absolutely nothing that was not already established, explicitly or implicitly, by the actions of the last General Convention. Many in the church are at odds with the decisions of the last convention with respect to the Windsor Report. Some believe the Convention went too far, others believe the convention did not go far enough. But, either way, I believe the bishops' response to the Primates is an accurate reflection of where we are as a church at this time, as painful as that place may be for many of our people. Here it is important to note that, unlike most communications from the House of Bishops, which are termed "mind of the House resolutions," we intentionally did not call our response a "mind of the House." Your bishops are not of one mind on the church's response to the Windsor Report any more than the church is of one mind. What we were able to do is to describe where we believe our church is at the present time. It is not a comfortable place for many of us and it is almost surely not the place to which the church will eventually land, but it is the place we find ourselves at this time. What is important for you to know is that by near-unanimous consent – with one dissenting and audible voice-- your bishops were able to agree, not on the issues, but on a response to the Primates of the Communion, a response that provides a clear and honest picture of where we are.

What concerns me is that much of the conversation seems to be framed in either-or categories and language. Needless to say, that's *not* a very Anglican way of thinking! There are those who insist that the church plow full-speed ahead on any and all issues that can possibly be framed in gospel-justice terms and let the unity of the church be damned. The opposing position is just as clear: preserve the unity of the church and our participation in the Anglican Communion at all costs, even at the risk of losing our soul.

The problem is that polar thinking is always shallow thinking. Polar positions are always as weak as they are strong. The truth, dear friends, is we have a moral obligation to pursue both – justice and unity – and to pursue both of them boldly, faithfully and tirelessly. Justice without care for the unity of the church will be selfish, shortsighted, and shallow. Unity without justice is a sham, a shame, and a sin.

In a recent column, Dean Candler reminded us that we cannot choose between the local and the global as the focus of our concern. We must hold the local and the global in tension and work faithfully at both levels at once, all the time. For centuries the theologians of the church have distinguished between the particular and the universal while reminding us that neither has meaning without the other. Friends, I want to be a part of a church that refuses to take the easy way out. The Holy Spirit does the best work with us when we are bold and faithful enough to live deeply into the tension. And I believe, dear ones, we resolve the tension at the peril of our souls.

Finally, I want to tell you how distressed I am about the proposals before the conventions of three or four sister dioceses of our church that seek to amend their diocesan constitution and canons purportedly to make it possible for them to disregard the actions of the General Convention and to position themselves for realignment with a foreign prelate. In our church and in our Anglican tradition, not to mention the apostolic and catholic tradition of the whole church, a parish exists because it is in communion with its bishop as part of the bishop's diocese geographically defined. In like manner, a diocese cannot exist apart from its establishment by the General Convention. Passing vestry resolutions to the contrary, or amending diocesan canons, does not change these ancient and well-worn ecclesial principles: Parishes are part of dioceses and dioceses are part of the church. That's the way it works in the Episcopal Church. That's the way it works in Anglicanism. That's the way apostolic faith and order work.

Long before you called me to be your bishop, I understood that a large part of what a bishop does is to be a connector: to connect clergy and people with each other so that their experience of church is always larger than their local parish, to connect dioceses to other dioceses so that their experience of church is always larger than the local church, and to connect the church with the Anglican Communion and the ecumenical church catholic so that our experience of church is always as whole and as far-reaching as possible. To put it another way, we expect our bishops to be for us signs of unity toward which Christ calls his church by the power of the Spirit. So you can see why it would trouble my soul when I see some of my brother bishops who seem to be working against the unity of the church and plotting its destruction. I believe that as a bishop I have every right to my convictions, to argue my positions, to declare my loyalties, and when necessary, to be difficult to live with. But I also have a solemn obligation to stay at the table no matter how unpleasant the company, to live within the discipline of this church, and to do everything in my power to build up the family of God no matter how difficult that might be on some days. It breaks my heart to see bishops of this church, who took the same ordination vows I did, disregard their solemn obligations to our common life.

Deep in the psyche of Anglicanism is a profound respect for the conscience of an individual before God. I will honor, I will respect, and I will defend anyone – layperson, priest, bishop, or deacon – who for reasons of his or her own conscience cannot stay in communion with us. That’s a long held and deeply honored Anglican position. But no one, no one has the right – no bishop or priest, in particular – to let their conscience in any matter lord it over their parish, their diocese, or their church. I can easily imagine, friends, multiple lists of things that our church could do that would make me unhappy. I’ll fuss, I’ll whine, and I’ll be cantankerous, but I shall also be obedient. I find it hard to imagine that the church would ever do something that would so trouble my conscience that I could no longer find some way, however tenuous, to stay in the family. I can’t think of anything that would ever keep me away from the table of *God’s generosity*. Being a faithful bishop means leading the people committed to your care toward the fullness of the church, toward the richness of the tradition, toward that deeper unity that comes only from the Spirit of the Risen Christ. It never means pulling them apart or leading them away no matter what troubles you.

Executive summary: I am not going anywhere, and neither are we. It is to the Risen Lord and to this beloved church of ours that I shall be faithful. It’s a little messy out there just now, but I am prepared to go and wallow around in that messiness to the glory of God and for the building up of this church! And unless and until you tell me differently, I’m going to assume you’re coming along too and that we are moving forward together in God’s mission!

To God be the glory!