‘Father, make Dabney a bishop in your church...’
Bishop Dabney T. Smith is presented after being consecrated as coadjutor of the Diocese of Southwest Florida.

Photo by Jim DeLa
Bishop John Lipscomb gave the first piece of advice to his newly minted successor: “This may be the last time when you’re in a room where everyone agrees with you.”

In a two-and-a-half hour ceremony March 10 punctuated with pomp, trumpets, tradition and humor, The Rev. Dr. Dabney T. Smith became Bishop Dabney T. Smith, the coadjutor of the Diocese of Southwest Florida.

“It’s like watching ‘This is Your Life,’” Smith told the nearly 1,500 people packed into the Cathedral of St. Jude the Apostle in St. Petersburg.

Acknowledging his friends and family, Smith said, “I am mindful of the fact that Jesus informed us, and informs us still, that in following him, we receive a hundredfold of brothers and sisters. I’m also mindful of the fact that as we gather this day, I get a personal glimpse of heaven that I share with you, a personal glimpse of the eternal relationship we share with God and with each other.

“I would ask us to remember this.

Love the Gospel. Proclaim the Gospel.

Live the Gospel.

“There is a great wisdom for people like us who share in an understanding of sacramental theology. You remember the teaching — a sacrament is an outward, visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace. The wisdom in this is Jesus is the sacrament of God. The Church is the sacrament of Jesus. You are sacraments of Jesus. He is why we gather this day.”

Guests at the service included members of his former parishes in New Orleans, (Continued on page 8)
Clear choice

Bishop Smith was elected by clergy and lay delegates on the first ballot of the Dec. 9, 2006, electing convention, the clear favorite over five other candidates. His consecration, originally scheduled for May, was moved up after Bishop Lipscomb announced he was beginning a medical leave of absence that could last up to a year.

“That’s when things got a little tense” for the planners of the consecration, the Rev. Fredrick Robinson, chair of the diocese’s Liturgy Committee, recently told The Tampa Tribune.

But the service seemed to go off without a hitch, thanks to the work of an army of volunteers and clergy and the help of the Roman Catholic Diocese of St. Petersburg, whose cathedral hosted the event. Chuck Miller of Sarasota, who coordinated much of the logistics for the consecration, praised the cathedral and the Catholic diocese’s staff.

“The hospitality and cooperation from the cathedral has been phenomenal,” he told the Transition Committee.

The bishop of the Diocese of St. Petersburg, the Most Rev. Robert Lynch, attended the consecration. In a recent column in the weekly diocesan newspaper, The Florida Catholic, Lynch described his relationship with his Episcopal counterpart. “Bishop Lipscomb has been a special friend to me,” he said. “As leaders of our respective churches, we have worked together on some difficult matters … He’s a great man and a good religious leader,” he wrote.

“Until we can all be one ‘as the Father and I are one,’ it will be moments like this that shape and encourage the dialogue in the future toward the unity of all Christians” (read the entire column on page 11).

Full plate

Bishop Smith will be taking on responsibilities quickly since Bishop Lipscomb announced in January he was taking a medical leave of absence due to complications from Parkinson’s disease and malaria.

He will have oversight over congregation development and new church plants in the diocese as well as the Commission on Ministry, the diaconate and diocesan communications.

Four days after his consecration, Bishop Smith, along with Bishop Lipscomb, attended the House of Bishops meeting at Camp Allen, Texas, where the main topic of discussion was a possible response to the Anglican Communion primates’ demand for a moratorium on same-sex blessings and election of gay bishops in the United States.
Nearly two dozen bishops participate

The bishops attending the consecration included:

- The Rt. Rev. John Bauerschmidt (Tennessee)
- The Rt. Rev. Bruce Caldwell (Wyoming)
- The Rt. Rev. Clifton Daniel (East Carolina)
- The Rt. Rev. Philip Duncan (Central Gulf Coast)
- The Rt. Rev. William Folwell (Central Florida, Retired)
- The Rt. Rev. Leo Frade (Southeast Florida)
- The Rt. Rev. Michael Garrison (Western New York)
- The Rt. Rev. Francis Gray (Virginia, Assisting)
- The Rt. Rev. William Gregg (North Carolina, Assistant)
- The Rt. Rev. Rogers Harris (Southwest Florida, Retired)
- The Rt. Rev. Julio Holguin (Dominican Republic)
- The Rt. Rev. S. Johnson Howard (Florida)
- The Rt. Rev. John Howe (Central Florida)
- The Rt. Rev. Telesforo Issac (Dominican Republic, Retired)
- The Rt. Rev. Charles Jenkins (Louisiana)
- The Rt. Rev. Donald Johnson (West Tennessee)
- The Rt. Rev. Charles Keyser (Armed Forces, Retired)
- The Rt. Rev. John Lipscomb (Southwest Florida)
- The Rt. Rev. Henry Parsley (Alabama)
- The Rt. Rev. John Said (Southeast Florida, Retired)
- The Rt. Rev. Calvin Schofield (Southeast Florida, Retired)

State’s bishops’ tree goes back to 1851

The line of bishops in Florida began with the Rt. Rev. Francis Rutledge, whose tenure started in 1851 in the Diocese of Florida, which at the time encompassed the entire state.

In 1982, the Missionary Jurisdiction of Southern Florida was created by General Convention. In 1922, that jurisdiction became the Diocese of South Florida.

In 1969, General Convention authorized further dividing the state, creating the dioceses of Central Florida, Southwest Florida and Southeast Florida.
A bishop must proclaim, protect and pastor

In his sermon at Bishop Smith’s consecration, Bishop Francis C. Gray Jr., said a bishop is called, above all, to do three things: proclaim, protect and pastor.

Bishop Gray, who was the diocesan of Northern Indiana when Smith was a rector of a church in South Bend, said Southwest Florida had chosen well. “You have elected a bishop who is a loving, thoughtful person and one who has a passion for the Gospel of Jesus Christ,” he said.

Gray said a bishop is to “give voice to the activity of God which is Good News. The bishop is to be a forceful proclaimer, not a proclaimer of force.”

With the House of Bishops meeting coming the next week, Gray cautioned against losing proper focus. “The message the people should hear when the bishop gather is of the Good News of the presence of God, and not the unfortunate news that the bishops cannot agree with one another on the phraseology of a prepared statement.

Speaking directly to Smith at times, Gray urged him to guard the traditional faith. “To guard is to protect and defend,” he said. “The guard is not to spend the treasure,
We are all servants of the Gospel

By Bishop Robert N. Lynch

On Saturday, March 10, I have invited the Episcopal Diocese of Southwest Florida to use our St. Jude the Apostle Cathedral for the ordination of their new coadjutor bishop, the Rev. Dr. Dabney Smith, who will succeed to the position currently held by my friend, Bishop John Lipscomb, sometime in the future. Our cathedral is the largest church available for this ceremony and the Episcopalians have no church of similar size and expect to fill St. Jude’s. I hope you will be happy that we have extended this hospitality and will rejoice for our Episcopalian brothers and sisters as they consecrate a new bishop for their diocese, which runs from Brooksville to Marco Island.

St. Jude’s will not be the first Catholic church in Florida used for the ordination of a bishop of another faith family. The Shrine of Mary Queen of the Universe near Disney has been used in the past for the consecration of both Episcopal and Lutheran bishops. When the Archbishop of Canterbury visited Rome late last year, he was invited by the Holy Father to celebrate the Eucharist at Santa Sabina Church on the Aventine Hill to accommodate the expected large crowd. Several cardinals and bishops were present for that celebration although they, like myself, did not and will not take part in the celebration other than to offer words of welcome and hospitality.

There is also a personal reason why I offered our cathedral for this occasion. The priests of our diocese and I have a special affection for Bishop John Lipscomb, who now suffers from a challenging and serious illness. Bishop John spent a day with us at one of our recent convocations and shared with us his experience as a pastor in the Episcopal Church. The priests present still remember those hours together and the bonding that took place that day. We are not able or desirous of wiping away or ignoring the differences that have separated us for years, but we acknowledge that we are all servants of the Gospel and ministers of Jesus Christ in our own churches.

Bishop Lipscomb has been a special friend to me — coming to my side at a difficult moment to pray and offer encouragement. It is always wonderful to get together with him and swap stories. In fact, sometimes I think we play a pseudogame of “Can you top that?”

As leaders of our respective churches, we have worked together on some difficult matters, including sexual misconduct by our clergy, and he, for his part, has been as strong and unrelenting in his approach to guaranteeing the safety of the young as I have attempted to be. We also face similar challenges of providing priests to our parishes. He’s a great man and a good religious leader.

When he was consecrated about three weeks after my own ordination, I attended the ceremony — my very first ecumenical venturing out — and I was welcomed warmly. I hope to return that favor to Bishop-elect Smith. I invite each of you who read these words to pray for Bishop Lipscomb that he may recover his full, good health and remain among us for many years as a leader of his faith community.

So I wish all of you to know about this forthcoming event at St. Jude’s, to understand the reasons for it, and that permission has been given to allow it to take place. By midafternoon, our cathedral will be again ready for confessions and the vigil Mass. I hope you would want me to welcome our Episcopalian brothers and sisters and assure them of our love, prayers, and best wishes. Until we can all be one “as the Father and I are one,” it will be moments like this that shape and encourage the dialogue in the future toward the unity of all Christians.

Additional coverage:

Links to view the complete webcast of the consecration, as well as audio slideshows and coverage from News-Channel 8, The Tampa Tribune and the St. Petersburg Times can be found on the diocesan web site: www.dioceseswfla.org/coadjutor.htm

Gray also said he was sure Smith will succeed as a bishop. “I know you will do good. I trust you will do well,” he concluded.

“Your family loves you. Your diocese trusts you with its future. And your dad, whose Lenten journey is long over, and who sits at the Eucharistic banquet not far from another carpenter in heaven, is so proud of you.”
Celebration

After the consecration service ended, most of the 1,500 in attendance filled the adjoining parish hall at the cathedral for a reception and refreshments.

**Top Photo:** Bishop Smith was presented with many gifts, including a purple cope and miter from the Episcopal Church Women of the diocese.

**Photo above:** As he worked his way to the back of the hall, Bishop Smith took time to meet and greet, and sign autographs.

**Photo right:** The City Council proclaimed March 10 as “Bishop Dabney Smith Day” in St. Petersburg.

Photos by Jim DeLa
Signed, sealed and delivered

One consecration ritual done for every new bishop was performed privately two hours before the service began, in a small room in the sacristy of the Cathedral of St. Jude the Apostle.

A bishop’s ordination certificate bears the signature and wax seal of each bishop participating in the consecration.

Actually, there are two nearly identical certificates created. One is delivered to the archives of the Episcopal Church; the other, decorated with purple ribbons, is given to the new bishop.

The Rev. Canon David L. Seger of Northern Indiana, who served as the consultant for the coadjutor nominating committee, and Judy Stark, co-chair of the nominating committee, oversaw the signing and sealing process.

Armed with a saucepan, hot plate and long spoon, Stark worked to get the maroon wax mixture to its proper consistency. “Too hot and it’s too runny,” she said, adjusting the hot plate controls.

As bishops stood by, she slowly let wax drip from the spoon, forming a small puddle on the edge of one of the certificates. After a few seconds, a bishop pressed his signet ring into the goop, letting it harden for another few seconds. A slight tap on the top of the ring allows it to be freed cleanly, leaving the imprint of the ring in the wax.

—Jim DeLa