Address to the 42nd Annual Convention

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Fifth Bishop of the Diocese of Southwest Florida

I begin this morning by expressing our heartfelt thanks to Bishop Wayne Smith for his mission focused preaching last night and for serving as our convention chaplain today. I also want to thank his wife, Debbie, Smith for speaking to our clergy spouses gathering today on the topic of her experiences with mission work in the Sudan.

The theme for this 42nd annual convention of the Diocese of Southwest Florida is “The Five Marks of Mission.” This is a statement of mission adopted by the meetings of the Anglican Consultative Council, and addressed to the Anglican Communion. The Episcopal Church meeting in General Convention adopted them. The Five Marks of Mission are:

1. To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
2. To teach, baptize and nurture new believers
3. To respond to human need by loving service
4. To seek to transform unjust structures of society
5. To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth

The Five Marks of Mission point to and express that the Mission of the Church is the mission of Christ. The problem associated with a list like this is that it may seem to omit regular features of who we are as the Church, such as worship. It is, though, a useful summary statement. Helpfully, an article on the Anglican Communion website notes, “All mission is done in a particular setting – the context. So, although there is a fundamental unity to the good news, it is shaped by the great diversity of places, times and cultures in which we live, proclaim and embody it. The Five Marks should not lead us to think that there are only five ways of doing mission!” It is to our particular diocesan context that I now turn.

One of the marks of mission is “to respond to human need by loving service. Over the past two diocesan conventions I have focused attention on the need to establish and build The Episcopal Charities Fund to aid in mission initiatives and collaborative efforts for issues and circumstances that are chronic, critical, or catastrophic. This enterprise has begun to develop some muscle and was the resource that enabled us to financially assist Bishop Duracin's family after the horrific earthquake in Haiti in January of this year.

Responding to human need is complimented by the mark of mission that seeks to transform unjust structures of society. Looking through this lens we have established a Jubilee Network of Churches in this diocese to be the foundation of our future community based charitable works. Jubilee Centers are recognized for their existing Community Leadership and Outreach programs in response to the Jubilee Ministry Mandate of the Episcopal Church, which is:

“To be a ministry of joint discipleship in Christ with poor and oppressed people, wherever they are found, to meet basic human needs and to build a just society.”
Furthermore, Jubilee congregations must meet the criteria of their mission and ministry being rooted in worship, and, must include several programs, including at least one human rights advocacy program and one human services program. Once designated as a Jubilee Center, the congregations ministry must be willing to demonstrate the operation of its programs to others, maintain “how to” files, and act as a resource center.

I am pleased to announce that our initial Jubilee Network churches are:

- All Saints, Tarpon Springs
- Church of the Ascension, Clearwater
- Church of the Redeemer, Sarasota
- St. David’s, Englewood
- St. Giles, Pinellas Park
- St. Marks, Marco Island
- St. Marks, Venice
- St. Mary’s, Bonita Springs
- St. Peters Cathedral, St. Petersburg
- St. Augustine’s, St. Petersburg
- St. James House of Prayer, Tampa

As we celebrate this particular recognition of these congregations I also want to thank the rest of the diocese for the multiple congregational efforts in outreach ministry. The evidence is overwhelming and compelling. There are efforts in our diocese that deal with the scourge of human trafficking, feeding programs, pursuit of the Millennium Development Goals, prison ministry, health care, children and family ministries, elderly assistance, homeless ministry, migrant ministry, and more. I strongly encourage you to open the Congregational Life tab on the diocesan website and explore the Ministries in Southwest Florida section within the diocesan pages.

You will discover an immense amount of information regarding the hundreds of ministries active in our diocese on this Outreach Ministry database. I particularly want to thank Archdeacon Dennis McMannis, the Canon for Outreach, and Mr. Jim DeLa, the Director of Communications, for making this information available to us. This database will prove to be an invaluable resource for generating ideas and creating helpful networks for congregational mission endeavors. The congregations, within the framework of the diocese, work together to be the people of God’s mission.

Last year at this time we had a congregation absent from our convention. I do not need to dwell on the regrettable realities regarding the congregation of St. Dunstan’s, Largo, but I do want to publicly thank Fr. Norman Howard for his healing leadership work there and heartily welcome the delegate members of this convention from St. Dunstan’s: Nancy Campbell, Larry Crisp, Richard Auger, alternate Barbara Sherman and Fr. Stuart Swann. I thank them for their boundless energy. The line item for mission and aided congregation support is larger for 2011 so as to assist in their journey towards restoration and recovery. I would be remiss if I did not also thank the congregation of St. Alban’s in St. Pete Beach for their partnership with St. Dunstan’s
in this recovery. The congregations, within the framework of the diocese, work together to be the people of God’s mission.

I repeat, the congregations, within the framework of the diocese, work together to be the people of God’s mission. This diocesan gathering today includes the further joyful celebration of the achievement of parish status for St. Mary Magdalene.

In 1996 a presentation was made to Diocesan Council for a Manasota Deanery Mission. The new mission organized and began meeting in 1997 with its first vicar Fr. Jack Kline with a proposal to construct facilities in 1998. The second vicar, Fr. Jim Williamson further developed the congregation for the next six years. Before I was even consecrated as a bishop, the first service of installation I presided over was for Fr. Jim Hedman in February of 2007. His leadership has ushered in an era of maturation at St. Mary Magdalene. He, the wardens Mr. Robert Douglass and Mr. Chuck Binkley, the vestry and people are to be commended and congratulated this day.

At last year’s convention I reported “the process of planning has begun for the return of the major operational aspects of the diocesan office to DaySpring.” I added that I thought it “essential that we proceed with an approach that is thoughtful and responsible….I want the decisions to make sense for us and for generations to come.” “We need to be intentional about program development, asset improvement and diocesan operational presence.” The DaySpring Development Steering Committee was then established to pursue this course of action.

The members are: Chair, Mr. Michael Kline from Church of the Ascension, Mr. Kyle Jones also from Church of the Ascension, Mr. Peter Hayes from St. Boniface, Mr. Phil Beauchamp from Calvary Church, Mr. Ted Tripp from St Hilary’s, Mrs. Sarah Hill from St Peters Cathedral, Ms. Sheree Graves from St Peters Cathedral, Fr Ed Henley from St Marks Tampa, Fr. Fred Robinson from Church of the Redeemer, Mother Kathy Schilriff from St Monica’s, Fr Michael Basden from Trinity by the Cove, Mrs. Carla Odell, Executive Director of DaySpring, Mrs.Anne Vickers CFO, and Ms. Jan Nothum Executive Assistant to the Bishop.

The DaySpring Development Steering Committee has functioned by dividing into subcommittees and reporting in stages to diocesan council. It has completed a Civil Engineering proposed site study that included a tree survey, and selected the architectural firm of Apex-Studio Suarez. I want to take this opportunity to thank the members of the Steering Committee for their energy and efforts.

In August, the Diocesan Council received a summary report of completed decisions and actions with a schedule for the future. The October 2010 item in this summary report included the intention to offer an update of progress and plans to the Diocesan Convention. What you are now going to see are the conceptual plans from the detailed conversations with the architect. Please note that these are conceptual and not final blueprint style decisions. They show the footprint on the DaySpring property and the conceptual layout. Further design decisions need to be finalized under the leadership of the Diocesan Council.

The next stage of work the DaySpring Steering Committee will pursue will be the DaySpring Program assessment. The approach will be to conduct a form of assessment to receive input from
multiple stakeholders who are important to the diocese and to DaySpring through qualitative research that provides rich data from targeted research subjects. The thoughtful decision making and intentional process approach will continue in terms of DaySpring's program development and asset improvement. The diocese will be kept informed.

I stated at the recent Fall Convocations that the systems within the diocese are functioning well. The Congregation Development Committee, the Standing Committee, the Diocesan Council, the Commission on Ministry and the Chancellor and Vice-Chancellors have all labored intensively this past year. I want to thank Canon Michael Durning for his capable administrative stewardship. I also want to thank, in particular our CFO, Anne Vickers, for helping to usher in such clarity, transparency and organization in diocesan finances. In addition, this diocese is blessed to have such a wonderful, talented corp of clergy who bring multiple gifts, talents and skill sets to our congregations. Furthermore all of the members of the diocesan staff are superb. They continue to live into a servant-hearted mindset and attitude.

This is my fourth diocesan convention. There were dimensions about being bishop that I didn’t know early on and I have learned many important lessons over the past several years. For example, I did not realize the slower pace that the machinery of the diocese takes in terms of canonical revisions and financial reorganization. Having said that, as I have matured into the office, I remain so blessed and grateful to be the bishop of Southwest Florida.

I have high hopes for the Diocese of Southwest Florida. The last year witnessed so much diocesan staff and diocesan council energy in the management of last years adopted Canon 2. This is the diocesan canon having to do with our Convention, congregational arrearages, and voice and vote. In the coming year there will be mission focused conversations with the Diocesan staff, the Congregation Development Committee, the Commission on Ministry, and the Diocesan Council on targeted revitalization efforts in existing congregations and on proceeding towards the planting of a new congregation. I am not announcing anything specific beyond saying that we should now use our energies to think strategically to initiate opportunities by using the resources we have and continuing to build more resources for the future.

We will also need to establish a diocesan Task force on the canonical lay pension plan and denominational health plan. The Dayspring Steering Committee will continue its tasks and reports for diocesan council decision-making. I also want to encourage you to utilize the Development Officer for the diocese, the Rev. Chris Gray. He is a diocesan resource for you in dealing with stewardship programs, planned giving, and endowment planning. Finally, the Episcopal Charities Fund of the Diocese of Southwest Florida is now in the position of being able to provide assistance and financial support as we live into the diocesan desire to have Mercy in Mission. I am asking the Council on Deacons to function as the body that makes recommendations to Diocesan Council for the use of Episcopal Charities financial grants.

I recognize that I did not elaborate on the fullness of the Five Marks of Mission. Please know that I encourage each congregation to use them as a tool for congregational life evaluation purposes. I will close by touching on the mark of “to teach, baptize and nurture new believers.”
I was talking with one of our 13-year-old youth members recently. She started the conversation by saying to me, “Remember me, you confirmed me last year!” She then informed me of some difficult moments she has experienced in school. Those moments could only be characterized as times when she was uncomfortably ridiculed for being a Christian believer. She told me that when she was ridiculed she just walked away saying to herself “God Bless them.” I would say she has been taught and nurtured very well into living baptismally as a believer.

Our congregations are doing good and holy work. You are a joy to work with in the Lord’s service. We can all, though, seek to do more excellent service. Use the Five Marks of Mission to re-energize your congregational and individual perspectives and approaches. Jesus Christ sends us, just like our 13-year-old youth member, into the world everyday. And remember, the congregations, within the framework of the diocese, work together to be the people of God’s mission.