

I would like to begin this morning by expressing my gratitude to the good people of St Stephen's Church in Lubbock for your gracious hospitality, led by the Convention Planning Co-chairs, Julie and Dale Harris, and the rector of St Stephen's, Father David Perdue. Special thanks go also to Jane Ann Skibell and Robin McNeill for last night's reception; Larry Douglas and the St Stephen's choir for the beautiful worship at Evensong; Joe McKay for the set up of this space today; Mary Ann McKay and Stephani Windham for their work with our vendors in Exhibit Hall; and to Susan and Jim McCutcheon for tonight's Dinner Dance honoring Carolyn Hearn.

I want to publicly thank my office staff for whom I have gratitude, respect, and true affection. Together they form a team who understands that their vocation is to facilitate ministry within and beyond this diocese: Deacon Nancy Igo, Anna Mora, Elizabeth Thames, Canon Mike Ehmer, and for two more days as my Executive Secretary, Carolyn Hearn.

I would like to thank, also, Renee Haney for her work with our youth; thank you Renee and Jim, for another wonderful camp experience. We will hear from Renee later today. Mother Jennifer Holder continues the outstanding campus ministry we have at Texas Tech. We will hear from Jennifer, also. And I would like to recognize Nancy Igo for the outstanding new diocesan website.

Earlier, you heard me introduce the twelve students who are attending our local School of Ordained Ministry. It's an outstanding program, a part of the Iona Project in the Diocese of Texas (and we are grateful for their leadership on this). But it would not work without our local mentors and teachers. I'm certain that all

twelve students would agree that the program is effective because of our Dean, Deacon Melissa Wafer-Cross, and our four mentors – the two teams of Father Jim Haney and Father Dave Huxley mentoring juniors, and Father Robert Pace and Mother Susanna Cates mentoring seniors.

I want to recognize three people who have answered the call to serve significant positions: JoAnn Rachele is the new Province VII ECW President; Valinda Jackson is the new UTO rep, and Richard Partney is our new EFM Coordinator.

Several people have completed terms or resigned from various boards, committees, commissions, and councils. I would like to recognize those who have served the Youth Council, Bert Bostic, Bart Howard, and Katie Young; the Commission on Ministry, Mother Celia Ellery and Greg Westmoreland; the Executive Council, Father Edson Way, Jeff Kerr, and Fred Westmoreland; and the Standing Committee, Father Luke Back and Standing Committee President, Cliff Craig.

Cliff Craig has served the diocese on the Standing Committee, as Chair of the Bishop Quarterman Conference Center, as General Convention Deputy (6 times), as Chair of the Bishop Nominating Committee, and much more. On top of that, he is a relatively new clergy spouse, a role he takes quite seriously.

So, Cliff was serving as President when it was decided that the Standing Committee of Northwest Texas and the Standing Committee of Fort Worth should meet together. I'll say more about that momentarily, but Cliff's leadership, faith, and love for this diocese were both evident and needed during that initial meeting. I want to thank Cliff and the entire Standing Committee for your collective wisdom, leadership, and your care for me personally.

Three people have either announced their retirement or have retired since the meeting of our last diocesan convention. I'll keep it in the Craig family, and first

recognize Mother Jo Roberts Craig. Every year after our diocesan convention, we publish our annual journal. Within the contents of the journal is a listing of the active clergy of the diocese – in the order of canonical residence. The Reverend Nina Jo Roberts Craig – affectionately known as Mother Jo – is at the top of that page, as she was received from the Diocese of Texas on September 7, 1988.

Within Northwest Texas Jo has served our Canterbury campus ministry at Texas Tech, All Saints School in Lubbock, St Paul's in Lubbock, St Stephen's in Lubbock, and both St Andrew's School and St Andrew's Church in Amarillo. She has served the Church in more ways than I can count, but I know her service includes the Standing Committee, the Conference Center, the Executive Council, the Missions Committee, as Deputy to General Convention, and more.

There is a saying in the sports world about ballplayers who give it their all when they compete. They leave it all on the field, or they leave it all on the court, as there is nothing left in the tank at the final buzzer. Well, there always seems to be something left in the tank for Jo, because the Source of Love is inexhaustible. But Jo Roberts Craig gives it her all. And what she gives is love. The people she has served will attest to that. Jo retires at the end of May this year.

Father Edson Way retired this summer after serving St Christopher's in Lubbock as their rector for 7 years. St Christopher's is one of those congregations I'm referencing when I say that I've seen resurrection – something more than resuscitation (which also is a very good thing – Lazarus would agree). A few years ago St Christopher's went through the valley, and by God's grace, they now have new life as a new body. Certainly, Edson – and Jenny – have been key figures in breathing this new life into St Christopher's.

Edson brought to Northwest Texas his deep faith, his experience as a leader, his knowledge of all things Celtic, his motorcycle, and his fun personality. When he wears a kilt – and he has one for every occasion, and we wonder if he has a second home in Scotland – we can see that he also brought on the calf of his leg a tattoo of the Seminary Cross. And perhaps most of all, he brought with him, Jenny. Together they embody hospitality, grace, and generosity.

Now, Carolyn Hearn. 37 years. 4 bishops. As we say, “bless your heart.” Later this afternoon Bishop Wallis Ohl and Bishop Sam Hulsey will speak to their experience of working with Carolyn, and she is the honoree of tonight’s Dinner Dance. I will take a moment to express my thoughts now.

There is more to the relationship between a bishop and the bishop’s Executive Secretary than the tasks of secretarial work, such as keeping the bishop’s calendar, and booking flights and hotels, and making appointments, and answering mail, and keeping files, and so forth. As important as those tasks are – and they are exceptionally important in my book – the relationship can be characterized as one of vulnerability, and a certain degree of intimacy, and trust.

After all, Carolyn has all my credit card numbers, and has all my passwords. But seriously, it was within the first week of my new position in Lubbock that Carolyn told me that the root word of the word “secretary” is “secret.” She was telling me, if I had any doubt, that I could trust her. And I can. And I suspect you know this, but so can you.

For Carolyn knows something that most clergy know: most of the best stories of changed lives, or miracles, or poignancy, or resurrection – as well as the painful stories of our lives – cannot be told by us, because they are not our stories to tell, and because they are so deeply personal. And Carolyn respects that privilege.

You have heard me say that we will miss Carolyn's corporate knowledge – and that's true – but we will miss more than that. She is fun. She has wisdom. She is smart. She has a good theological mind, spiritual depth, and a thirst for knowledge. She has the right touch in highly sensitive situations. And many of you have been on the receiving end of her pastoral care, as have I.

In his letter to the Romans, the Apostle Paul says, "Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep." For thirty-seven years Carolyn has done that with us. So today we give thanks to Carolyn, for her presence and ministry among us – which has been for her nothing less than a vocation. And tonight, we party. As you know, Carolyn loves to dance. She even bought new boots. Now, we are not exactly saying goodbye, as Carolyn will remain on retainer and she will run next year's diocesan convention. But it is a time to rejoice and express gratitude to our friend and colleague, Carolyn Hearn.

Some significant events took place in the life of our diocese and in the Wider Church in the year 2015. In late 2014 I was contacted by the President of the Standing Committee of the Diocese of Fort Worth, Father Curt Norman, about the possibility of discussing ways that our two dioceses could partner in mission. I responded, yes, I would be open to ways we could share ministries. And so, we set up an appointment for Curt to come to Lubbock on January 27<sup>th</sup>.

It became apparent, as we approached that date, that Curt had in mind a specific way to begin to partner – and that was for the two dioceses to share a bishop. And he brought with him two other people – Norm Snyder, also a member of the Standing Committee, and Canon Janet Waggoner, the Canon to the Ordinary.

They came to the Hulsey Center, received the tour of our offices and met our staff. And then Mike Ehmer and I took them to the Tech Club for lunch. Three hours

later, we agreed to ask our respective Standing Committees to consider a joint meeting in Abilene.

And on March 5<sup>th</sup> we gathered in Abilene at the Church of the Heavenly Rest in what was called (with tongue in cheek) the Abilene Summit. Bishop Claude Payne, former bishop of Texas and Abilene resident, served as the moderator. Bishop Sean Rowe, currently serving as the bishop to two dioceses in Pennsylvania, served as our consultant.

The gathering included most of two Standing Committees, Treasurers, Chancellors, and Canons to the Ordinary. I believe we arrived with an interior posture of discernment, open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The event began with a “meet and greet” in the Bishop Garrett Room at Heavenly Rest (that was significant), followed by a celebration of the Eucharist in the chapel. Bishop Payne, the celebrant and preacher, opened his homily by reminding us of our common history, and how our first bishop in North Texas – a missionary bishop named Alexander Garrett – traveled this territory from the western edge of Louisiana to the eastern edge of New Mexico. And he did it on horseback. In that moment I realized that our moderator had discerned already the will of the Spirit. I thought, “At least I have a car.” At any rate, on May 16<sup>th</sup>, the Diocese of Fort Worth held a special convention, and I was elected to be their Provisional Bishop effective July 1<sup>st</sup>.

I am asked two questions frequently. In one form or another, I am asked about the future – the relationship between Fort Worth and Northwest Texas. And having no crystal ball, I cannot answer that beyond saying that I think we are natural partners. Fort Worth is where the West begins; we are bordering dioceses, sharing a common culture. And with our shared talents and resources – and most of all,

faith – I believe we will discover some innovative ways to participate in God’s mission.

And the second question is more personal to me: “How are you going to do it? You were busy already?” I sincerely appreciate the question, but I’m not going to do it alone; we are going to do it together with God’s help – and both dioceses have great staffs. That’s part one of the answer.

To give a more personal answer, I enjoy my work (most of it), and I believe I am called to it. When one’s vocation and work are aligned, that’s a gift – and not a gift to take for granted. And I count it a privilege to be part of your lives, and to serve you.

When we were in discernment about this call, Kathy reminded me of one of my all-time favorite baseball players, Chicago Cubs Hall-of-Famer Ernie Banks. Also known as “Mr. Cub,” Ernie Banks loved playing ball, and he knew how privileged he was to play the sport he loved. Some of you sports fans may know where I’m going with this, but every day when the team was poised on the dugout steps, ready to take the field, Ernie Banks said aloud, “Let’s play two!” Like every little boy playing all day long on the sandlot, Ernie Banks said, “Let’s play two.”

Kathy said, “Let’s play two.” I am privileged to serve two dioceses of faithful, dedicated Christians who serve sacrificially, and love the Episcopal Church, and who know that we Episcopalians make a difference in this world.

This summer’s meeting of General Convention in Salt Lake City will prove to be significant in the life of the Church. There is no way to cover all of the events and developments which are deserving of more attention, such as the march against the epidemic of gun violence, and budgetary dollars designated for initiatives

toward racial reconciliation –as we gathered one week after killing of nine people in Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina.

I want to highlight three things. First, we increased our budget for evangelism, and we passed a resolution to lower the percentage of diocesan contributions to the Wider Church, as we are moving more of our common resources to the local level. And informed by the Task Force for Re-imagining the Episcopal Church (of which today's guest speaker, Bishop Andy Doyle was a participant and leader), we took steps toward reforming our Church Wide structure. We are taking steps toward moving out of the 20<sup>th</sup> century business model of the modern machine era to a model that is more de-centralized, mobile, responsive, and connected. It's not romantic. It won't save the world, nor the Church. And, it's not a reflection on the talent, dedication, and hard work of the people who serve at the Church Wide level. But I believe it will align us better to participate in God's mission in this post-modern, post-Christendom world.

Second. By now you know that General Convention passed resolutions calling for the Trial Use of liturgies for same-sex marriage. I know there is a range of theological perspectives on this decision. It's important to note that clergy and congregations will be permitted to perform and use these liturgies, and that no one will be required to perform them.

Beyond the letter of the law, I think it's important, also, to remember who we are as Episcopalians. Dating back to our roots in 16<sup>th</sup> century England, we have been a tradition which chose common prayer over common doctrine as what unites us. We have a history of respecting diverse theological perspectives, and we have maintained that such diversity is a strength – not a obstacle to overcome.

Whatever one's perspective on the question of marriage, I hope that we can be grateful to be part of a tradition which has made a decision out of compassion, and is guided by the impulse to accept, welcome, and include all people. And I hope we can be grateful to be part of a tradition which encourages respect for differing theological positions.

Third. Perhaps the most significant and historical event of this meeting of General Convention was the election of the next Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, Michael Curry. With God's guidance we have elected an evangelist at heart. His love for Jesus is palpable, contagious, and inspirational.

Bishop Curry believes the chief work of the Church is making disciples. He believes disciples of Jesus are called to be "crazy Christians." And he believes that the most important word in the Great Commission to "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations," is the word, "Go!"

To quote him, he says in his sermon at General Convention, "And the reason I lift up that word 'go' is because we are the Jesus Movement." Referring to Jesus, he says, "This brother didn't come into this world to leave it the way he found it. He came to change it." He refers to the mission statement in the Diocese of Ohio, which says, "Love God; Love your neighbor; Change the world" – and says, "We are part of the Jesus Movement, and he summoned us to make disciples to transform this world by the power of the Good News."

Love God. Love your neighbor. Change the world. I'm going to modify that this morning to: Go. Make Disciples. Change the world.

In the first chapter of John's Gospel, two disciples ask Jesus, "Rabbi, where are you staying?" And Jesus answers, "Come and see." And the next day, a brand new disciple named Philip goes and finds Nathanael, and says to him, "We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth." And Nathanael replies – now famously – "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip responds: "Come and see."

You and I have lived our lives on a place on the timeline of history in which the church culture has operated out of "come and see": "come to our church, and see." We have lived in a time and place in which society itself understands "church" as a place to go on Sunday.

And I would like to take a moment to suggest what is good about that. Millions of lives have been changed by "going to church" – whether in an awe-inspiring urban cathedral while experiencing God in a solemn high mass, or at a country revival, singing "Just As I Am" at an altar call.

And those places are sacred. One doesn't need to search far in the Hebrew Scriptures to find the occasion and impulse to build an altar to declare God's presence and action. And those of us who are Anglican and are influenced by Celtic spirituality know that there are "thin places" where God seems particularly present. And it was the great 20<sup>th</sup> century Anglican theologian, Jon MacQuarrie, who said, referencing the sacraments, "If God is everywhere, as we claim, then certainly God is particular somewhere." And it was Kenneth Leech, one of our tradition's great spiritual directors, who claimed that worship is the most vital of all human activities, and the church building is a sign of Transcendence. Sacred spaces and sacred buildings are sacramental to us – outward, visible signs of God's presence and God's action in the world. (Anyone who has been exiled knows there

is more to our being drawn to sacred spaces than sentimentality and fond memories.)

So, we have operated out of an interior posture of “come and see,” and I would suggest that’s how the North American culture understands our mission: “come and see.” It’s the water in which we swim. And frankly, that’s the church I personally was trained to serve. So, I’m right there with you.

We know that there is a fundamental shift taking place in the Church throughout Western Civilization – whether we call it a new reformation, or a metamorphosis, or the emerging church. I’m not sure we can boil it down to one particular change, but I wonder if the fundamental shift is a move from an understanding of the Church as a place to go to understanding the Church as body called to participate in God’s mission; a shift to understanding the Church itself as part of a movement; a shift from “come and see” to “Go!”

Now, we are Episcopalians. We are not inclined to say “either/or.” We more often say “both/and” than “either/or.” That’s one of the beauties of our tradition. I’m not going to discourage anyone from saying, “come and see.” But Bishop Curry is correct, I believe, that our context today calls for an interior posture of “Go” – and not simply send someone else to “go” to Africa or China, but for the baptized to go into our own streets and neighborhoods. Years ago Bishop Payne wrote a book entitled, “Recovering the Great Commission,” and now Bishop Curry says the most important word in the Great Commission is “go.”

And if we are honest, we are trying to learn how, and some innovative, creative people are taking risks in the ways they proclaim and embody the Gospel. And they will be our leaders, as I doubt this will be a top-down movement (the Spirit is not limited to top-down movement). I’m mindful of something Sean Rowe said

when he served as our consultant at the Abilene Summit. He said, “I’m tired of hearing about how we need to think outside the box.” He said, “There is no box – except for the boxes we make for ourselves.”

One thing we know: the Holy Spirit is not confined to a box – not even a box with a steeple or a bell tower. The Holy Spirit is present, yes; but confined, no. And neither is the Body of Christ. We are part of a movement – the Jesus Movement. And our context calls for a new interior posture – a shift from “come and see” to “Go!”

Go! Make Disciples. Bishop Curry says we need “crazy Christians.” He points us to a story in Mark’s Gospel, when Jesus’ family tried to restrain Jesus, for people were saying, “He has gone out of his mind.”

Other biblical translations say, “he is mad,” or they thought “he was crazy.” And as Bishop Curry tells us, “His behavior was crazy. ‘Do not repay evil for evil, but rather repay with a blessing.’ That’s crazy. ‘The greatest must be your servant.’ Crazy. ‘Blessed are those who are poor, and merciful, and make peace, and who are persecuted.’ That’s crazy. He was crazy, he is crazy. And those who follow Jesus are summoned to be just as crazy. We need some crazy Christians. We need Crazy Christians to change this world.”

Go! Make Disciples. Make disciples who know they are called to change this world. One current observer of Christianity in North America who noticed long ago that the Church universal is emerging into something new, is an author named Brian McLaren. McLaren raises a question about the church-culture’s focus on the afterlife. In no way does he deny heaven or an afterlife, (and certainly, neither am I) rather, he wonders about our focus in North America.

He wonders if we have chosen the wrong destination – that we have chosen a destination he calls, “Escape from Earth to Be with God in Heaven.” And maybe our destination, our way, our path, should be called, “Joining God in Healing This Earth from ... Evil.”

He says, “If your goal is to produce doctors and nurses and health care workers, you have to produce people willing to get close to the disease. They do this not because they love diseases, but because they hate diseases ... and the damage they can do to people and their dreams.” “If your goal is to produce firefighters and rescue workers, you have to produce people willing to enter burning buildings. They do this not because they love fire, but because they hate ... the damage it can do to people and their dreams.”

McLaren wonders if by making “heaven after this life” the focus, we are spiritually forming people who will run away from the disease or the danger in our world. What if we believe, instead, that God’s goal or destination for creation is a healed and healthy earth?

Jesus says, “Go. Make Disciples.” Make disciples with the courage to go toward the disease or toward the danger. Now, I’m going to suggest something we don’t hear that often in our tradition. I’m going to suggest that courageous disciples who don’t operate out of fear can do so, because they believe – wait for it – they are “saved.”

Stay with me here; I know I’m pushing the envelope. One of my favorite theologians, Beatrice Bruteau, speaks to what she calls the “terrible, rock-bottom, existential fear” which is the root of sin, and alienates, separates, and divides us from one another.

She says that the only way out “is to be really convinced that someone else IS sustaining you, that you don’t have to sustain yourself . . . . If you can really believe that someone else is sustaining you, then all the self-defense operations which result in sins are going to evaporate, because they are no longer needed.”

“It is at that moment when you perceive this truth and really accept it, believe yourself to be loved – permit, agree, allow, consent to be loved and sustained by another – it is at that moment that SALVATION takes place. It is when this deep metaphysical need to be loved and sustained is met and satisfied that one’s life is really saved, preserved, kept from destruction.”

Believe it or not, Dr. Bruteau is a Roman Catholic – not a Southern Baptist. And I’m still an Episcopalian. Dr Bruteau argues that those who are convinced they are unconditionally loved and sustained (“saved” as she says) can let go of their defenses and live the abundant life, the risen life. And furthermore, those who believe (and perhaps only those) can love others without conditions. Only those who are saved – according to Dr Bruteau – can love their enemies, for example. Salvation has to come first.

Jesus says, “Go! Make Disciples.” Make disciples for a purpose: to change the world. As Bishop Curry says, “this brother didn’t come into this world to leave it the way he found it. He came to change it.”

I’m mindful of the story of when Jesus healed a leper. As the story goes, a leper comes to Jesus, and says, “If you choose, you can make me clean.” Moved with pity, Jesus stretches out his hand and touches the leper, and says to him, “I do choose. Be made clean!” And immediately the leprosy leaves him, and he is made clean.

Remember, that according to religious law the leper is unclean. The leprosy is seen as a result of sin – an obvious punishment for sin. So the religious community bans the leper. The leper suffers, but it's not simply the disease causing the suffering – it's the forced isolation. He is not allowed to worship. He is socially ostracized from family and friends. He has no way to make a living; no way to contribute to society. The leper who comes to Jesus –as the story goes, begging and on his knees – suffers from a disease, but even worse, he is cut off from community.

In the story we are told that Jesus is “moved with pity.” It's almost a throw-away line, it's so understandable. Of course, Jesus is moved with pity. Jesus is compassionate, a word which means “suffer with.” Moved with pity.

This is one of those times when the English translation does not capture the meaning of the original Greek language. It's more than feeling sorry for someone. It's more than being empathic or sympathetic. Unpack this phrase, “moved with pity,” and we are told his “insides churned.”

In our culture we describe feelings as located in the heart. In that culture, it was the liver, the bowels, the gut. His insides churn. We would say, “his blood boils.” When Jesus is confronted by the leper, he is moved with pity (his blood boils). And by healing the man, Jesus restores the unworthy, unclean cultural outcast to community – a counter-cultural act of love and grace.

As baptized people, living members of the Risen Body of Christ, we are called to be the embodiment of such love and grace. I would suggest that everyone gathered here today has been to someone (and is to someone) the embodiment of the Gospel, that to someone you have been (and are) hope en-fleshed, or mercy, or grace, or love en-fleshed. For on our clear days, when we see someone alienated

or isolated – someone overlooked, someone on the margins, or lost or without hope – we are moved with pity. Our blood boils. And we are moved to change their world – to change this world.

“Go! Make disciples. Change the world.” I think we are about to be in for a ride: the Jesus Movement. Who knows, we may restore some words to our lexicon, words like “evangelism,” and “discipleship” – maybe even “saved.” Now, to paraphrase Bishop Curry – and Jesus of Nazareth – “Let’s Go!”