

Address at the 2011 Episcopal Diocese of Texas 162nd Council

Lemhi (LEMhigh) Pass is at the boarder of Montana and Idaho. There is a wooden fence there, a cattle guard crossing, and a logging road. The exact spot is today as “pristine” as you can get. One arrives there by way of the Missouri River from Fort Benton to Fort Peck Lake along the Lolo trail. And, when you stand there it looks as in many ways it looked when he stood there on the morning of August 12, 1805.

With friends nearby he made his way to the top. He described that moment clearly in his journal. He wrote: “We proceeded on the top of the dividing ridge from which I discovered immense ranges of high mountains still to the West of us with their tops partially covered with snow.”

Meriwether Lewis was the first white American to look on the great northwestern range; the first to take a step out of the Louisiana territory onto the western side of the Continental Divide.

One might wonder what he felt in that moment. We don’t know of course. Lewis was silent about his feelings on this and on most things. However, in that moment one can imagine two great worlds colliding. Two thoughts happening at the same time; neither one fully formed.

The first thought had to be the disheartening sight. Imagine “the shock, the surprise,” John Logan Allen (historiographer and author) muses, “for from the top of that ridge were to be seen neither the great river that had been promised nor the open plains extending to the shores of the South Sea...the geography of hope [gave way] to the geography of reality.” The whole journey to find a western portage that one might travel from East to West across the United States by boat was a failure. Everything he was sure of finding was not only not there it was never to be. The dream that had framed one year of study and preparation then two years of travel across wild country to this moment was over.

The second thought was the sight of the great empire of the Americas. In that look he took in with one measure from the east and all that lay behind him to the west and all that lay ahead a wealth and abundance of a new territory and the even greater spectacle of fertile land and spirit that was becoming the United States. In an age where transportation, energy, and food had not much changed since the Greeks, Meriwether Lewis saw in its rawest form the bounty of a quickly forming nation that we were to become.

Two thoughts not fully formed, which forever changed who we were and were to become and as Americans.

Two thoughts not fully formed. Today we, the Diocese of Texas, are becoming something new

but are not sure what yet. We are being transformed and forged in a fiery furnace of sweeping change.

Not unlike Meriwether Lewis that morning, this morning, our geography is giving way beneath our feet. We see clearly the past and the reality of our situation. And, we see the future and all that God intends for us.

The first thought is realizing our feet are firmly planted in a stale geography where the world and church we thought would carry us forward is no longer systemically viable.

As a church we have an economy. It is like any other at its very basic level one that is dependent upon income and expenditures. Our current economy, way of doing things, doesn't work. It is forever changed. When it happened I do not know exactly. It is probably an event that did not happen all at once but crept in and is even now more fully upon us; though we cannot yet fully comprehend its impact on our mission and ministry. We have been treating the symptoms while the system crumbles.

We have consistently believed...

...that those who are called by God to be Episcopalians will find us and come through our doors.

...that once they were inside our doors they would stay because of our awesome liturgy.

...that someday we will grow again -- then we can take care of our deferred maintenance.

...that all we need is the right clergy person. After all, we are not accountable.

...that if we just solved the issue of the day one way or the other we would surge in growth. If we were just true to the past...or if we were just true to the future....

The problem is that fewer and fewer people every year seek us out and react positively to our attempts to deal with the symptoms. Meanwhile, we are out performed by the culture around us. We no longer have the market cornered on community life, networking, social services, weddings, funerals, and care. We are out performed by others: social media, bars, gyms, sports clubs, funeral homes, JPs, hospitals and friends.

Our budgets themselves reveal that the economic reality of our ministry is not sustainable. In 1997 a congregation with 50 people could support itself with a budget of \$100,000. Today it takes a congregation of more than 100 and a budget upwards of \$150,000 to \$180,000 a year. Without debt this congregation, depending on the health of its buildings and deferred maintenance, might be able to afford a full-time minister and the cost of keeping the facilities open. However, this congregation has very little extra money for mission or outreach.

By the end of 2011 inflation is estimated to reach 2%. So by 2012 a congregation will see its

expenses jump some \$3,000 dollars without doing anything. That means this church will have to add a family who begins life as an Episcopalian giving the diocesan average pledge of \$3,508 just to cover the cost of keeping the lights on.

We are operating out of a model that depends upon assumptions about our culture that date to the mid-century of the last millennium.

This is a painful acknowledgement because we didn't ask for the dream to change; didn't have a whole lot to do with the change; and are powerless to make the change stop.

No matter how many times we blink our eyes or pretend it is not happening it remains true. We stand at the Lemhi pass like Meriwether Lewis. And, we see it clearly. The dream that has framed our very core of being, the one that we prepared our whole lives to undertake, the one we are structured and organized to run, the dream we have been supporting is over.

Continuing this church economy, doing the things we have been doing for the last three decades leads only to greater conflict and loss. Continuing to be church, simply tinkering with efficiency and symptoms leads unequivocally to closure.

However, at this very same moment we stand on the pass with a second thought not yet fully formed but forming. That thought is that you and I stand on the edge of a new missionary age – a new geography of hope. We have not been called to be lords in an age of empire but entrepreneurs in an age of mission.

Our new missionary economy must add value to the culture around us.

We must be about the missionary work of transforming the world around us – our environment, the economy itself, and the societies of our neighborhoods and cities. People's lives must be better tomorrow because our Episcopal Church is there proclaiming the Good News of Salvation.

We must engage a new design aligning our church economy with the realities of the 21st century mission field.

We have the opportunity to rethink systematically how we will walk into this geography of hope.

The economies that will flourish in the 21st century will be ones that give life to people, their community, and the environment in which they live. We must invest in relationship oriented community and individual and environmental transformation.

We have the opportunity in this new missionary age to claim a sustainable mission deeply rooted in our values as Anglicans who are unabashedly Episcopalian.

The world around is hoping for partners who will join in providing healthy, fulfilling, life giving and dignity bound ministry to the communities in which they live.

The world is looking for partners interested in building a sustainable creation.

The world is looking for partners who will nurture relationships helping one another to have a better wholesome life.

We realize as we stand here on the edge between two different mission mindsets, two different church economic theories that our current system must change if we are to lead across the cultural divide into the new millennium.

A new church economy will serve as a system to take us into the future as a healthy community of Christians who benefit the world around us proclaiming and making real the salvation of Christ.

We must step onto the other side of the divide with all its unknowns. But we do not do that without friends or untethered. As the Episcopal Diocese of Texas we take our steps together tethered to our vision and mission. Who we are and how we understand our ministry helps us by being the bedrock and foundation of hope for every step we take in this new geography.

We are called through Jesus Christ to build the Kingdom of God together through worship, witness, and ministry.

We understand that as individuals and as a sacred community we are one Church reconciled by Jesus Christ.

We are reconciled to God and to one another through the power of Jesus Christ.

We are empowered by the Holy Spirit through worship, witness and ministry.

The Holy Spirit, the empowering agent of Godly life, transforms and binds us, individual sinners, into a divine community of virtuous citizens.

This is the family of God, the community called the Church, working outwardly, on a daily basis, the inner life of the Holy Trinity. The mission of true virtue is to create a worldly but divine community, the kingdom of God, on "earth as it is in heaven."

We can gauge our steps into the new frontier by the following marks of the new missionary age. In the life of our diocese and in our congregations we will realize: A ministry that transforms and restores – changing the world around us in concert with Christ's resurrection work.

o A great example of this is our renewed and collaborative partnership with Episcopal Relief and Development.

o Beginning with relief efforts focused on the Gulf Coast following Ike, we have put to work nearly a million dollars over a three year period. \$400,000 from the foundations of the diocese to aid congregations with expenses and to rebuild. ERD contributed \$200,000+ over the same period. And, people across the diocese and country offered another \$370,000 in additional dollars. Gutting houses, rebuilding, helping our churches get started again, renewing lives and transforming the lives of the thousands who served as volunteers.

o Our coordinated restoration and management earned recognition and our leaders including Russ Oechsel and Maggie Immler have been asked to help coach and assist others in responding to emergencies across the country.

o We are also taking steps to lead with a Nets for Life campaign which you will hear about later.

Another mark of the missionary age is exceptional stewardship – stewardship of the resources of time, talent, and money entrusted to us.

o St. Mary's West Columbia is a great example of a congregation who recently sold to the Nature Conservancy the last piece of pristine Texas coastal prairie. We were involved in restoring, caring for and ensuring for future generations a piece of Texas history and a section of land with geographical and species diversity. The impact is tremendous as the letter I received from the Houston chapter of the Audubon Society noted. The people of the diocese partnered with others in conserving and safeguarding God's creation and in so doing makes a permanent place where God in all of God's glory is revealed in the wonder of creation.

o This year we are partnering with The Episcopal Network for Stewardship in a collaborative leap to build connections across the country and raise our understanding of the meaning and impact exceptional stewardship can have on the church economy. The gathering will be June 3 and 4, 2011 this year at Camp Allen.

o Exceptional stewardship also means that we must rethink Mission Funding and the outreach ministries of the diocese. We can no longer fund the way we have been funding our common work for the past three decades. While the methodology changed slightly with "freedom of choice" and then "mission funding" the truth is that we continue today to fund and structure our common mission and ministry the way we did in the 1980s. No entrepreneurial mission minded organization funds the way they did in the 1980's.

♣ William Isaac, former chairman of the US Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, wrote: “A financial system that does not take risks is a financial system that is not supporting entrepreneurship and growth.”

♣ We must employ in entrepreneurial fiscal leadership in this new missionary age.

o I have challenged the Church Corporation to work with David Fisher in our office to provide for the congregations of the diocese a planned giving campaign that helps congregations provide legacy giving for the future mission of the church.

The third mark of the new missionary age is excellence in mission

o Excellence in mission means that we will embrace a culture of evangelism that is particularly our own.

o To this end we will hold an Evangelism Conference November 11 and 12 of 2011. We will look at emerging and the leading principles of greenfield evangelism, front door evangelism, and evangelism through technology.

o We hope at that time also to roll out a diocesan wide evangelism project.

o Church Planting is another place where we must engage in missionary excellence. We are going to have to become strategic in our funding for new growth. I have outlined and am working with all of the foundations on a clear strategic funding plan for grants that will support new starts, satellites, evangelism and newcomer initiatives.

o Last year I formed a Task Force on church planting that is working on a theology in sync with diocesan vision. They are looking at types of new starts, potential sites and projects that will need new development in the years to come. They are taking the initiative and looking at how to drive excellence in mission throughout our diocesan structure and offerings.

We will know we are making progress towards the vision of the kingdom transforming the world because Average Sunday Attendance will increase in the diocese but more importantly:

- week day attendance on every campus will increase
- Church and community partnership will increase in frequency.

We will know we are making progress when we see Baptisms, confirmations, and receptions increase in the diocese, but more importantly:

- The numbers of people who associate themselves with the Episcopal church will grow
- The numbers of people who participate in common mission with the Episcopal church will

grow

- We will be known as a diocese and as a local church that welcomes, cares, and befriends

We will know we are making progress when the median age of the membership of our church decreases to reflect our mission context – the counties in which the diocese is located.

We will know we are making progress when our leadership (clergy and laity) is younger and more diverse ethnically – reflecting our mission context.

We will know we are making progress when existing congregations take the initiative for planting new congregations

We will know when we see our institutions show growth in numbers, finances, and in community impact

We will know we are making progress when we see:

- more churches
- more emerging communities
- more schools
- more clinics
- more outreach ministries and centers

We will know when we have three fully funded endowments:

- Great Commission Fund – which underwrites and supports new congregations
- Leadership Development Fund – which builds leadership formation and capacity
- Clergy Wellness Fund – which supports the health care cost and wellness initiatives for clergy and their families

We will know we are making our way into the new missionary age when no issue that is secondary to the basics of our faith divides us and keeps us from our mission.

No issue will keep us from our mission.

We are making progress today. Last year the resolutions committee worked to bring people together to help present legislation that united the council around a common issue of concern. We should be proud of their work.

This year in September and October our nation's headlines were filled with stories of people who were bullied. Our resolution committee has risen to the challenge after receiving multiple resolutions and has put together one resolution which in my mind captures our willingness to work together on a common issue of a Gospel importance.

Now, let me tell you what I think about this...The real test for us though will be if we actually do something about bullying in our communities. Passing a resolution is good, but as Episcopalians our baptismal covenant does not ask to enact the Gospel legislatively, Jesus wants us to change people's lives. I encourage you to not simply act here on the floor of council as your conscience dictates on these issues, but stand up and act to protect those who are bullied in your schools, workplaces, and within your families.

Another example of where I am seeing people come together is in a conversation with me around the unity and mission of the diocese as we move towards General Convention 2012. I have spent the last year preparing to call the Task Force on Unity together. Their task will be to present to Council in 2012 our plan for leading through the unfolding events of General Convention.

I did have to change the plan for the Task Force in mid-stream as it became clear that the Liturgical Commission was going to present their work in an alternative service book for the Episcopal Church. This particular approach meant thinking clearly about how I will personally approach the debate on sexuality in 2012. Instead of the role of mediator I am now in the role of leader and will be making key decisions about our future.

That being said I am working with Secretary James Baker on my leadership. He has been most gracious with his time and attention. I spent six months working on a proposal.

I have spent another six months editing with the help of individuals across every spectrum on the issue of sexuality. I have been in conversation with bishops in the House about their strategies and have listened carefully to their advice, and we have shared ideas. I have listened carefully. I am writing a text on the sacrament and theology of marriage. And, I am today half way through the very careful and intentional invitations to individuals across our diocese and across every theological spectrum to join me in this work of leadership. It is very clear we are not all of one mind, but we love the our diocese and we love the Episcopal Church and we are committed to one another as family members and are committed to listening and seeking a solution for our diocese.

So, we are making progress in our unity and respect for one another.

How do we move from where we are today, at the edge of a new era, capitalizing on our strengths and resources, to become the diocese intended by God?

We will realize the expectations of our missionary contexts through Formation, Leadership, and Connecting People.

We are making headway now in the area of Formation.

We are launching the Communion Covenant Curriculum developed by a task force with a feedback loop to the Executive Council of the Episcopal Church. The task force will report to us at next year's council.

I have made it clear that I support the proposed Anglican Covenant and that this is a landmark moment for our communion. I believe this an important opportunity and deserves time by every congregation to understand better who we are and the changing communion and world around us.

I have heard people say that the Covenant moves us from a generous flexibility toward a brittle rigidity. The statements of faith presented are those that have for a long time been part of who we are as Episcopalians and Anglicans. There is no prescription in the Covenant that does not embrace the middle way for the sake of comprehension or require less generous flexibility within our missionary contexts.

I encourage you to take seriously this important moment in the life of our church and our communion and to engage the Covenant curriculum materials.

The focus of the curriculum helps members of our diocese better understand who we are as Anglicans and Episcopalians.

Understanding who we are as Episcopalians is the same undergirding principle I had when I put together the search committee led by the Rev. Susan Kennard to discern and find a new Canon for Life Long Formation. After doing a national search they offered to us three candidates. Your diocesan staff interviewed all three, and we together selected Mr. John Newton who until two weeks ago served as the Missioner on the college campus of the University of Texas. We are excited about the vision Canon Newton brings to this ministry and the new ideas and creativity that he will offer to the diocese.

We are making headway today in Leadership.

We are expanding our Iona School ministry and will be partnering with the dioceses of Mississippi, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Northwest Texas, West Texas, and Nebraska to build communities and share our classes. This work is a leadership partnership between the Seminary of the Southwest and our diocese. We have Bishop Harrison to thank for this incredible work.

I am also very pleased with her clear leadership of the Seminary. Along with Dean Doug Travis and the faculty the Seminary is not only becoming the largest seminary west of the Mississippi but in my estimation will soon be the second largest seminary program in the country next to Virginia Seminary.

Bishop Harrison's leadership with a number of other institutions is revealing itself as a gift not only to me but the vitality of the diocese.

Last night we had a wonderful roast and toast of Bishop High. We are grateful for his friendship and for his ministry. He has been a leader and he has truly given us, the people of the diocese his very best. He has not done that alone, and so it was right that we celebrate Pat and her ministry too. Clergy spouses know of her kindness and her love of them. You don't get Rayford without Pat smiling next to him. It has been a pleasure.

I am asking that the Diocese of Texas raise a purse for Bishop High in gratitude for his ministry and that it be collected and given to him upon his retirement.

One of the gifts that Bishop High has given us is that he has formed and made clear an understanding of the importance and vocation of a regional bishop.

I had originally been counseled and perhaps out of my own newness as bishop thought that we should have an assisting bishop. However, the suffragan bishops of the diocese have been beloved, bishops Goddard, Cilley, Charlton, Alard, and Sterling to name only a few. I have realized in the last year that I trust the diocese in this work of discernment and that we do need to elect a suffragan.

However, as I have mentioned in the past elections are expensive and we need to save and prepare in order to do this election well. I am proposing therefore the following plan.

I am asking the diocese by way of this council to allow me to call an assisting Bishop. This will give me the canonical permission needed to hire if I indeed find one. The money is in the budget and we are ready to do so. This has already been approved by the Standing Committee.

I am also proposing that in the event I do not find someone that the monies are used to provide Episcopal presence throughout the diocese by inviting visiting bishops who are retired to help with the work load.

I will also propose saving the funds not used and placing them in an account that can grow in 2011 and 2012 into an election fund.

I will also appoint a committee to work under the direction of the Standing Committee and Executive Board for the development of a profile and description of a regional bishop for East Texas and that such a process begin immediately.

As a point of clarification, I will plan to return to the 163rd Diocesan Council in 2012 and call for the election of a Suffragan Bishop for East Texas to be held at Council in 2013.

We are making headway today in the area of building and making Connections locally and globally.

We launched our new website yesterday. The new site moves us from a site devoted to telling people what we want to a site committed to helping people find what they need, connect with

others doing great work, and provide an online tool for the sharing of news and information between congregations and institutions.

This launch is part of an overall communication plan which is connected to a new magazine that will share the good news of Christ at work in and through the diocese.

This new look and new presentation of the Diocese is placed firmly within a news strategy of pushing information out through various forms of social networking, creating an ever greater web of communicators throughout the diocese.

We are reaching more and more people across our diocese and across the global church.

Carol Barnwell and LaShane Eaglin do the work of a much larger staff and have risen to the challenge of a new bishop's ideas about communication. When given the opportunity to hire an employee to replace their secretary they developed a job description and made a strategic hire; bringing on board Luke Blount as a writer, and leader in social networking and media arts.

As your ambassador I am helping us make connections across the Episcopal Church and the global communion. One such connection is with the diocese of Haiti. Through the House of Bishops I met Bishop Zache Duracin, the bishop of the largest Diocese in the Episcopal Church, the Diocese of Haiti. He and I were at table together for my first year and a half in the house. While in England for the Compass Rose meeting I was able to spend some time with him and to hear of the miraculous work they are doing in Haiti. The Diocese has given through the Episcopal Foundation of Texas \$10,000. During 2010 alone people and congregations sent more than \$44,000. Leaders have over the last two years given dollars, time, and talent. Together I believe we can say that the people of our diocese have given over \$100,000 dollars directly and indirectly to the rebuild effort. But we are not done yet.

There is more work. We must help them rebuild the national cathedral there which is of great historic, artistic, cultural, and communal importance. Moreover, we must help them to rebuild their country. This is a ministry we must do in partnership with them. Bishop Duracin has asked for more funding and we will make another gift this year. However, we are going to work with the Episcopal Church's campaign. You will be hearing more about this as I have appointed my Archdeacon Russ Oechsel to head this up.

Last year the Council asked that the Executive Board look at extending the Council by one day. The Executive Board has reported in volume one of the journal that they did not believe this was a good idea. However, I have worked with Camp Allen and a few leaders in the diocese and it has been decided that JoAnne and I will host the first annual Episcopal Diocese of Texas Family Reunion and Blue Grass Festival at Camp Allen on the weekend of May 11, 2012. We hope this will be an opportunity for us to make connections within the wider family of the diocese; connections and relationships outside the work of mission and ministry and business. Please mark your calendars and plan to join us.

Conclusion

Before I conclude I wish to say that I have been gifted two incredible suffragan bishops, bishop High and Bishop Harrison. I would ask you to please show what I know is your deep and heartfelt gratitude for their service and ministry.

I am not foolish enough to lead this diocese without your wisdom and partnership.

I also am so very grateful for your diocesan staff. Will the staff in the room please rise. They labor vigorously on your behalf. It is upon their shoulders I stand more often than not. It is upon their tireless efforts that I depend. Most of all of course is my assistant Stephanie Taylor. You know, JoAnne knows, we all know I could not do it without her partnership and support.

And, there is JoAnne. I am grateful for being able to walk this ministry with you. I am grateful for your continuous support of the diocese by your support of me. I am grateful for your honesty and your love. As everyone knows who knows you...I married far above my station...thank God.

The truth is that it is us; we the people called the Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Texas do this work.

We have a mission.

We have values that define how we see the world: ministry and mission that is transformational, exceptional stewardship, excellence in mission

Every congregation and every institution is continuously engaging in the work of formation, leadership, and connection for the sole purpose of realizing potential given our missionary context.

We are on the precipice of a new age of mission.

I would not want to take my steps into the wilderness before us without you, the people of the diocese, who I am proud and honored to call friends and humbled to serve as bishop.

My hope is that at the last day we will have dared, with entrepreneurial spirits, to see the glory of God and the challenge before us as an opportunity for service and mission and not a stumbling block to be feared.

And, that as President Thomas Jefferson said of Meriwether Lewis:

...That it may be said of us that we were of great courage and undaunted.

...That we were not be diverted from our task nor God's direction.

...And that there was no hesitation but fidelity in our cause and in our mission.

May we with steadfast faith and fervent prayer ask for God's grace and power to enliven our wills for the work that is before us. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
[Amen]

Endnote:

The basics of our faith mentioned above are:

- our communion in the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church, worshipping the one true God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit;
- the catholic and apostolic faith uniquely revealed in the Holy Scriptures and set forth in the catholic creeds;
- the belief that the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments contain all things necessary for salvation and as being the rule and ultimate standard of faith;
- that the Apostles' Creed, as the baptismal symbol; and the Nicene Creed, as the sufficient statement of the Christian faith;
- that the two sacraments ordained by Christ himself – Baptism and the Supper of the Lord – ministered with the unfailing use of Christ's words of institution, and of the elements ordained by him;
- that the historic episcopate, locally adapted in the methods of its administration to the varying needs of the nations and peoples called of God into the unity of his Church;
- that the shared patterns of our common prayer and liturgy form, sustain and nourish our worship of God and our faith and life together...