

Address by the Rt. Rev. Leo Frade
 Bishop of Southeast Florida
 at the 37th Diocesan Convention

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 St. Benedict's, Plantation

Two weeks ago I was at our National Cathedral in Washington DC for the Investiture of the 26th Presiding Bishop, The Most Reverend Katharine Jefferts-Schori. This was the third time that I have participated as a bishop in the Investiture of a Presiding Bishop. I was there for Ed Browning, Frank Griswold and now Katharine Jefferts-Schori. I can assure you that this ceremony was a glorious and historical moment in the life of our Church. It was also the investiture where I have seen the most bishops attend.

As the long line of bishops formed in their colorful Rochets and Chimeres on their way to the Cathedral it dawned on me that I had recently become the Senior Bishop with Jurisdiction in the House of Bishops. I must point out, so you won't think that I am bragging, that this is not a coveted position at all because the only value that it carries with it is that people get to point out that you have become quite ancient in bishop years. I know that there are other bishops that are older than I, but like dogs we bishops count our years differently, and I became the Senior Bishop with Jurisdiction when Bishop Bill Swing retired as Bishop of California. He is Bishop number 732 and I am Bishop number 780 in the Succession of American Bishops since Samuel Seabury. By now The Episcopal Church has consecrated more than a thousand bishops since Seabury and around 250 after me.

I don't know if it is because of my new recently acquired senior status or due to the fact that I am actually getting old that I have been recently meditating on my ministry. I have been pondering during the past months looking back at my ministry throughout the years as a lay person, a deacon, a priest and a bishop.

Has it all been worthwhile, all the effort and work throughout the many years of my life?

Have I done what was required from me as a Christian?

As your bishop I wonder: Are you and I doing what God wants us to do as a Diocese?

What about our mission? Are we on the right track?

Should we concentrate more on evangelism or should we focus more on social work to alleviate the suffering of our world?

Throughout time I have always tried to do my utmost to be faithful to the Christ that I serve. I have been committed to do my best and to obey Christ's commandments for me and his Church.

How can I be sure that what we are doing is what God wants us to do?

Well, throughout the years I have always tested my life and my work based on Christ's teachings from the Scriptures.

When I read God's Word I have found two major teachings of Christ that have guided me throughout the years to model my life and my ministry.

One of those teachings is the Great Commission of our Lord to his disciples found in the 28th Chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew:

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.” (MT. 28:19-20)

The second teaching from Christ that keeps guiding my life, my work and my decisions in the Church can be found in the 12th Chapter of Mark verses 28 to 31. Our Lord is asked: “Which commandment is the first of all?” Jesus answered: “The first is, ‘Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this. ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”

For the past 6 Diocesan Conventions I have year after year shared with you our efforts to fulfill the commandment that Jesus gave us to “Go into all the world to proclaim the Gospel.” I can assure you that the Diocese of SE Florida is obeying our Lord and is becoming a true missionary diocese.

Our efforts continue to expand our missionary work and plant new churches the same way that those who preceded us did, fulfilling the Great Commission. We are here because someone brought us here, and our task is to continue bringing others to Christ.

Today Meadow Park in Parkland continues growing and is now accompanied by another church plant, the Church @ the Grove located in Loxahatchee, North Palm Beach Deanery.

Also a new vibrant Spanish congregation at Trinity Cathedral, formed under the direction of Bp. Ottley and the Rev. Cruz Zenaida Cardona, has flourished to the point that serious consideration is being given to establish it as a new organized mission. Their last confirmation was an impressive class of 37. It is my great hope that we will be able to carry on with this church plant.

The work of the Nehemiah project continues empowering and strengthening the work of 29 congregations of our Diocese. For those congregations that participate in the Nehemiah project I don’t need to tell them the rich gift that it has become. Let me add that the Nehemiah 2003 class is 11% above the Diocesan average in Pledge and the Average Worship Attendance is 5% above the Diocesan Average. It is also a source of pride that congregations around the country are beginning to call us in order to use Nehemiah as a model for growth.

These are just some of the many efforts that are taking place in our Diocese to expand and strengthen God’s kingdom.

We are also making a concerted effort to bring to our diocese the best clergy available of our church. We are concentrating on people committed to share the Gospel and to reach the unchurched in our midst. The Archdeacon for Deployment has just shared with you some of that effort.

I want to thank both Archdeacons for their hard work that they do in this diocese.

In the same way our Commission on the Ministry continues its task to select the very best among our ranks to be the future clergy of our diocese. It is not an easy task and they spend many hours in that selection process. We all should be thankful to them for their hard work.

The COM has completed its task and has processed the more than 72 names that were on its list. We have already lifted the moratorium for candidates for the diaconate and are now finally ready to begin considering new candidates for the priesthood beginning in January of 2007.

The Bishop's Spring Conference has been a success and has prepared and expanded our knowledge in evangelism. Next February 15 & 16 we will be presenting The Magnetic Church, which promises to be another winner.

Our Cursillo Movement is reenergizing and more and more Cursillistas are joining the ranks. Our ECW, DOK, Mother's Union, Brotherhood of St. Andrew's, Discovery Weekends, Faith Alive and other organizations also are healthy, growing and empowering the mission of our diocese. These are indeed wonderful tools to grow the church.

Go into all the world and preach the Gospel.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind and all your strength.

I asked myself if we had done this. The answer is a definite yes. But it doesn't end there.

As Rite I Holy Eucharist says in our Prayer Book: "And the second is like unto it: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."

Have we done that? Are we truly committed to fulfill the second part of the Great Commandment as the Diocese of Southeast Florida?

I believe that we can also say yes, a resounding yes. Recently I asked the congregations of the diocese to share with me all of the social and outreach work taking place in their congregations.

I am happy to share with you today that we can rejoice in the growth of our diocese. Membership up 2% over previous year. Average Sunday Attendance also up 2% over previous year and Plate and Pledge up 3% over the previous year. Yes, we can rejoice in our growth—our commitment to bring others to Christ--but we also can rejoice in our commitment to love our neighbor as ourselves.

According to our calculations based on the report that was sent from the congregations, Human Needs Commission, and the Episcopal Foundation we are currently providing throughout our diocese close to half a million meals a year to the homeless and families in need.

I presume that you, God and the angels rejoice in these two accomplishments, and you can be assured that I certainly do.

And that is just a fraction of the work that we do. Thousands and thousands of dollars are spent yearly by our congregations and diocese to help others.

Hundred of volunteer hours make this possible in places like St. Mary's Kitchen in Stuart; Trinity Cathedral's Feed my Sheep in Miami; Christ Church, Coconut Grove's, Crisis Food Pantry; St. Nicholas, Pompano Beach's, commitment to St. Laurence Chapel's ministry to the homeless; St. Matthew's, Miami's, Food Pantry; feeding programs at St. Christopher's-by-the-Sea, Key Biscayne; St. Matthew's, Delray Beach, with its Head Start and Senior Ministry; Good Shepherd, Tequesta's, meals for people in west Jupiter and aid to the Indiantown migrant community; the many community ministries of St. Gregory's, Boca Raton, and its commitment to the church in Haiti; the feeding of

countless numbers of homeless people at St. George's, Riviera Beach, under the direction of Canon Hap Lewis, with the cooperation of the churches in the Palm Beaches, like St. Mark's, Bethesda-by-the-Sea, Holy Trinity and others; St. Mary Magdalene's Fish Food Pantry and their commitment to Alcoholic Anonymous and Alanon and other self-help groups. This kind of work, of course, is also taking place in many others among our congregations.

The ministry of our churches in the Keys is also outstanding, with meals, help to children's shelters, food pantries and other community agencies provided by St. James, Islamorada, St. Columba, Marathon, St. Francis, Big Pine Key and both St. Peter's and St. Paul's in Key West.

At the other extreme, in the northern end of our diocese, All Saints', Jensen Beach, provides help through the Children's Center and is beginning work with the migrants of the area.

Holy Comforter, Miami, has a program to feed the homeless, a childcare center and a senior housing facility. Holy Cross, Miami, is also helping the undocumented and feeding the hungry, and hosts a childcare center for children of working parents. Todos los Santos, Miami, also provides childcare. St. Paul and the Martyrs of Haiti, Miami, provides food and clothing to its needy neighbors in Little Haiti.

St. Margaret's in Miami Lakes, sponsors the My Backyard after school program for middle school students, and Holy Family, Miami Gardens, also provides a variety of ministries to the needy of its area.

St. Bernard's, North Miami Beach, offers ministry to the poor and needy, and St. Andrew's, Lake Worth, has an ongoing commitment to the poor and those rejected by society.

Holy Redeemer, Lake Worth, feeds countless numbers of its neighbors and also works with a large migrant community, caring for their needs.

St. Philip's, Coral Gables, helps the hungry through the Crisis Food Bank and provides dinners at the Homeless Assistance Center. St. Stephen's, Coconut Grove, has also been involved for over two decades the Homeless Assistance Center, as have members of many other North and South Dade congregations.

Let's not forget the four Broward congregations--St. John's, St. James-in-the-Hills and St. Andrew's in Hollywood and St. Anne's, Hallandale--that have a very strong commitment to helping the homeless of that area through the growing ministries of the South Broward Jubilee Center.

Has your congregation been left out? Don't feel bad--I am just mentioning those congregations that responded to my request for reports of social outreach ministries in our congregations. I know that there are many, many more.

Our diocese has not forsaken the important task of fighting racism, prejudice and classist attitudes in the very diverse world that we live in here in Southeast Florida, where it would be very easy to fall into these sins. The continuing work of the anti-racism commission needs to be commended.

I want also to thank the Assistant Bishop James Ottley for all the effort he gives not only for the growth of our ethnic churches but also for his commitment for Social Justice in our region and the world.

I also want to commend him and Fr. Frank Corbishley for their achievement in helping to obtain just wages and the right to organize for the janitors at the University of Miami.

I am also happy to mention an exciting ministry of St. Agnes, Miami, that was highlighted by the *Miami Herald* and also in the most recent issue of *The Net*. This congregation under the leadership of Canon Richard Barry responded to the need for affordable housing in Miami by providing 80 two-story three-and-four-bedroom, single-family homes. It became a miracle, providing housing affordable to those working families that are unable to find a place to live.

Resurrection, Miami; Incarnation, Miami, Transfiguration, Miami, also carry on a strong ministry of helping children, the poor and the destitute.

I also want to highlight the work that the Diocesan Commission on Human Needs under the leadership of the Rev. Winston Wright is doing providing financial help to many different projects throughout the diocese that otherwise would not be able to carry out their work.

The North Palm Beach Deanery sponsors an active ministry to seniors at many nursing and assisted living facilities. The Rev. Jack Tucker initiated this ministry which is now carried forth by the Rev. Donna Hall.

St. Luke, Port Salerno's, work with the needy in that area and the Church of the Advent's support of Karios prison ministry is also outstanding.

I now want to make an important announcement: the creation of Episcopal Charities under the direction of Charlie Ring as President, Bonnie Weaver as Chair and Ellen St. John as Program and Grant Director. The SE Florida Episcopal Foundation is being transformed now as Episcopal Charities. This change in name and format will allow us to expand our ability to help others in need. Tomorrow further details of this wonderful transformation will be presented to this Convention.

Fulfilling that part of the Great Commandment: "And your neighbor as yourself" is and will continue being integral part of the DNA of this diocese.

I need to mention another aspect of our efforts to reach out to others in need. Our ministry is not only local but also national and international.

A yearly mission to Navajoland takes place from St. Mark's, Ft. Lauderdale, and St. Mary Magdalene, Coral Springs. And several of our congregations, like St. Thomas, Coral Gables, St. Nicholas, Pompano Beach, St. Mark's, Palm Beach Gardens, and Bethesda-by-the-Sea, Palm Beach, have been involved in the reconstruction of New Orleans and Mississippi after Katrina.

Year after year missionary teams go to minister in Jamaica, Nicaragua, Dominican Republic, Africa, and Honduras and they are an integral part of the ministry of several congregations in our diocese.

I want to thank especially all of those who have helped Our Little Roses Home for Abandoned, Abused and Orphaned Girls in Honduras. As you well know Diana my wife started this ministry to girls in need 18 years ago when I was a missionary in Honduras. I am happy to inform you that through your help we have already graduated 2 girls from the university; one more is graduating this year and we still have 14 girls studying in the university and more than 20 in High School and many others in elementary school. Your efforts have helped to transform many lives. Thank you, thank you.

Earlier this year I also was able to visit the Episcopal Diocese of Cuba at the request of their bishop. As you well know the situation under the Communist government has taken a toll but the Church has been able to resurrect even stronger than before.

Archdeacon Hobbs, Fr. Martin Zlatic, Fr. Eric Kahl, Fr. Roger Tobin all from this diocese can vouch for this miracle of faith taking place right now a few miles south of us. They witnessed first hand the plight of the Christians of Cuba and their need for companionship and aid.

The Church in Cuba is asking us for assistance and I pray that you will respond to care those very near to us.

During our last visit to our Companion Diocese of Nassau and the Bahamas and the Turk and Caicos we discussed the possibility in joining efforts to be able to help the Cuban church considering that they don't have the same restrictions that American citizens have. I pray that we will be able to join our strength to be a Christ to them.

I also want to highlight another ministry that is quite far away from us--all the way to Africa, on an island east of Kenya called Madagascar. I will be traveling to Antananarivo, that nation's capital, to be part of the consecration on December 10 of one of our priests, the Rev. Todd McGregor, as the area bishop of Tulear, one of the poorest areas of that very poor country.

Todd and his wife Patsy, who was ordained a priest in September, are heroes of the faith in the African nations where their ministry has taken them—Madagascar, Kenya and Sudan. Let me read an email from Todd concerning his recent visit to Sudan:

"I'm in Sudan, my flight was cancelled yesterday. My work in Sudan went very well. I trained about 30 evangelists for 3 days, preached in the Cathedral in Maridy and led a retreat for 25 deacons for 3 days who were ordained priests last Sunday. The Sudanese are in good spirits these days, even if the roads are horrendous like Madagascar in the rural areas.

I was in areas which have been quite insecure recently. You could see the presence of the Lord's Resistance Army but I must say that the Lord was gracious to us and our ministry. The stories I have learned from the Sudanese are incredible. Some being taken captive, others are being shot at, others tortured, others being bombed and yet still surviving. As I travel on Sunday, all I saw was camps of the SPLA and land mine danger signs. I am afraid that I did not see tourists in Southern Sudan. But the church is moving along with good spirit, building temporary mud schools for the children, dispensaries and etc.

I look forward to returning. Love, Todd."

Our diocese should be proud of Todd and Patsy's ministry in Africa. I am appealing to your generosity during the Eucharist at this Convention. I am going to ask for you to be extra generous. I would like to take a considerable love offering with me to the consecration to help Todd begin his new work of ministering to the spiritual and material needs of God's people in Tulear, Madagascar.

I also want to call the attention of this Diocesan Convention to the beginning of our diocesan response to the commitment made by the Episcopal Church at General Convention in June to the Millennium Development Goals. We have included in our budget a line item for that purpose.

For those of you who are not yet familiar with what is being called the MDGs, let me tell you that they are an eight-pronged declaration that has at its core the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger in the world by the year 2015

The eight goals are:

1. - Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger.
2. - Achieve universal primary education.
3. - Promote gender equality and empower women.
4. - Reduce child mortality.
5. - Improve maternal health.
6. - Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases.
7. - Ensure environmental sustainability.
8. - Develop a global partnership for development.

I am informing this Convention that we will be reaching out directly to address the challenge of the MDG's with the help of Episcopal Charities. Every year we will disburse the money to a worthy project or projects around the world that fulfill the Millennium Development Goals.

I am also asking every congregation to respond to the MDG's by beginning to establish a fund that will eventually set aside 0.7% of the parish budget for this purpose.

Let me end by saying to the clergy of this diocese, my colleagues in the ministry in Southeast Florida, how much I appreciate their support and also their commitment to both the Great Commission and the Great Commandment. You and the laity of your congregations have made all of this work possible.

It is my hope that all the vestries get to really appreciate how lucky they are with clergy as committed as ours. I really mean this and want to make sure to keep these faithful sisters and brothers in Christ working together with me in this diocese.

I would like to bring to your attention a serious concern I have regarding the present compensation package of our clergy. We need to become aware that we are in a part of the country where it is becoming more and more expensive to live, and we are falling behind in compensating our clergy in a manner that reflects this reality. Each congregation needs to take a good look at the financial package provided to its clergy. We can not continue to live with a 1960's mentality. When our present clergy reach retirement age, all our congregations need to be able to compete in securing the best qualified clergy for our diocese—and that means offering compensation that makes it affordable for a priest to move to our diocese.

I am hearing more often than I care to about the inability of our clergy to face the high expenses of this area. I also can identify with this reality as a person who lives in Miami next to our Cathedral.

Our Lord tells us to love our neighbor as ourselves and that means that we must take care of our own also.

And now before I end I want share with you that we have what I call a healthy diocese. With God's help, lots of prayer and lots of work we have been able to stay together, work together and respect each other's opinion. I have always said that regardless of the conflicts taking place beyond our diocesan borders I am committed to make this diocese a cordial place where there will be room for all.

As far as I am concerned I will open my doors to all persuasions and will respect all persons and groups. That is my commitment.

Well, I have spoken longer than I expected but we have a lot of good work here. Diana and I want to express our gratitude to you for all your love and care for us during these past six and a half years since I became your bishop.

Oh, one more thing. We start our pilgrimage to the Holy Land next January 16. We still have some spaces available if any of you want to go with us on this 14-day pilgrimage. Talk to me or to Diana for further details.

That's all folks.

May God bless and keep everyone of you.