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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

Shortly after Hurricane Katrina battered the Gulf Coast, PBS broadcast a feature on an Episcopal parish in Mississippi that had been devastated by the storm. I can't remember if the parish was in Gulfport or Pass Christian – the story was so moving that I forgot to take notes. What I do remember is this: on the Sunday following Katrina's onslaught, the priest and congregation gathered on a concrete slab that had once supported the church building. The priest, in full vestments, stood at a makeshift card-table altar; some of the congregation sat on lawn chairs, others were standing or sitting on the ground. "I want you to call to mind," the priest said, "what our wonderful church looked like, and what was most special to you: the beautiful stained glass windows, the pews where people sat for generations, the baptismal font where your children were baptized and the altar from which you were fed. All of that is gone forever. *But the church still stands.*" The church still stands – because the Body of Christ is a supernatural community with Jesus as its head and people as its members. Buildings come and go, but the church still stands.

I found myself reflecting on that scene three weeks ago, when about 300 people gathered in St. Andrew's, Valparaiso, to consecrate the new building. Here we were, offering to God a church building as stunning as the one in Mississippi that had been

destroyed by Katrina. Somehow the contrast overwhelmed me, and it seemed right to remember that nothing is permanent except the Body of Christ. No matter what, the church still stands. No matter what, Jesus will never let us go. No matter what, Jesus is Lord of the church. The fact that we belong to Jesus Christ is the single most important thing about us – and the single most important reality in the life of the Diocese of Northern Indiana. "Nothing . . . can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:39).

Today we celebrate the Feast of St. Simon and St. Jude; a day late, actually, but I trust that Simon and Jude won't mind. These are two of the more obscure apostles. We know only the tiniest bits about them. Simon – no relation to his more famous namesake, Simon Peter – is called "the Zealot" in the Gospel according to St. Mark, which may (or may not) indicate that he was a member of a radical anti-Roman political party. Jude – also no relation to his more famous namesake, Judas Iscariot – may (or may not) be the author of the New Testament epistle that bears that name. He's most famous as the patron saint of "lost causes," which may (or may not) be comforting today. Tradition says that Simon and Jude died as martyrs in Persia (modern day Iran). But that's about it. Perhaps the Prayer Book combines their feast into a single observance because we know so little about them. In any case, I'd like to turn to the New Testament lesson that the Prayer Book appoints for their feast. It tells us something about God's plan for the church – who we are, and what we're to become. Here's what St. Paul says:

You are no longer aliens in a foreign land, but fellow-citizens with God's people, members of God's household. You are built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the corner-stone. In him the whole building is bonded together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built with all the others into a spiritual dwelling for God (Eph. 2:19-22).

St. Paul is talking not simply about the church in general, but about the Diocese of Northern Indiana in particular. Who are we?

First, we're supernaturally connected to one another. In this passage, Paul is pointing to the fact that God has taken two very different groups of people – Christians from a Jewish background, and Christians from a Gentile background – and forged them into a single people. We need each other. No matter how different we are – and in our diocese, we've got an amazing variety of viewpoints on an amazing variety of issues – we belong to the Lord and therefore to one another.

Second, we are the recipients of a great gift: our spiritual ancestors faithfully passed on the Christian faith to us. The first Christians were deeply aware that the "apostles and prophets" had laid a foundation, and everything they did and said, everything they believed, was based on that standard. In the weeks following Bishop Sheridan's death, I've been thinking about the foundation that he laid. He was a pastor, a teacher, an encourager. Many of you can point to him as the Christian leader who led

you to Jesus, to the church, and to the sacraments. I'm wearing his pectoral cross today – and carrying his crozier – as a reminder that our forebears in the faith (not least Bishop Sheridan) introduced us to Jesus, laid a foundation, and now it's our turn to pass the Gospel to the next generation.

Third, Jesus is the cornerstone. He's the one who binds us together. Without Jesus, we have nothing to offer a needy and broken world. He is the content of our preaching, the goal of all our programming, the reason why we gather to celebrate the sacraments. I believe that the Holy Spirit is leading us to become a more radically Christ-centered diocese. (More about that later.)

Fourth, Jesus is growing his church. He's binding Christians together; calling people to himself; deepening our understanding of discipleship; creating a community where he is known, loved, worshipped, and obeyed. Our task is to cooperate with this great purpose. As you'll hear in a few minutes, growing the church is a particularly challenging task these days in the Diocese of Northern Indiana. But the New Testament makes it clear that we are in the business of helping the Christian community to grow – both in depth and in numbers.

All of this sets the stage for this year's Convention Address. Fr. Lloyd Johnson, rector of St. Alban's, Fort Wayne, taught me a helpful way to look back at our life together, as well as to look ahead. At a vestry meeting at St. Alban's one year, he talked about the "ughs" and the "wows" – the areas of ministry where we are experiencing some

degree of stress, tension, concern, and the areas where we can recognize the Lord's hand at work and celebrate successes, small ones and large ones. I'm going to use Fr. Lloyd's breakdown as a kind of filter to look at the life of the diocese, and will end the address with a three-fold Gospel challenge to every parish. At each step of the way, I encourage you to keep St. Paul's words in mind: We are supernaturally connected to one another. We are the recipients of a great gift. Jesus is the cornerstone. Jesus is growing his church.

Ugh

It's not been an easy year. In my 2004 address, I named two painful realities: our attendance figures are at best flat, and many parishes experience a high level of financial stress. These realities have, if anything, worsened in the past year.

Let's start with attendance. We now have received complete average Sunday attendance figures for every parish for 2004. (You'll find a copy of this information in your packet.) They tell us that from 2002 to 2004, attendance in the diocese on a typical Sunday declined about ten percent – from 3,000 to 2,700. You may remember that in 2001 I articulated a diocesan BHAG (Big Hoosier Audacious Goal), that we seek to double average Sunday attendance by the year 2010. Obviously we're heading in the wrong direction. Only a couple of parishes showed any increase at all. As you will see in the figures, in some congregations the decline is sharp, in others slight; but the overall picture is discouraging. What's behind it? In a few instances, I can point to local issues

– congregational conflict, primarily; but on the whole our parishes are happy and healthy. Relationships are good; clergy are faithfully presenting the Gospel; people are seeking to grow as disciples of Jesus Christ. Is there some connection between our attendance decline and the controversy generated by decisions of the 2003 General Convention? That may be part of it, though certainly not all. Anecdotally I hear of parishioners who've left the Episcopal Church, not because they're dissatisfied with the diocese, but because they are can no longer be a part of our church. I suspect (though I can't document this) that the greater issue is the "graying" of our diocese. Our parishes are predominantly, though not exclusively, made up of older members. We are not attracting young families. That, in turn, leads to inevitable decline.

Finances also continue to be a source of stress. In last year's address, I mentioned that a number of our parishes with full-time clergy are finding it more and more difficult to maintain those positions. Giving may be up, but expenses (insurance and utilities chief among them) are rising even faster. In 2005, one more parish was forced to move from full-time to part-time status in its clergy leadership, and another is poised to do so at the beginning of 2006. While there's an opportunity here – we find ourselves thinking creatively about ministry and about mobilizing the Body of Christ in new and exciting ways – the pattern is nonetheless discouraging.

In addition, a growing number of parishes are approaching Diocesan Council with assessment reduction requests. These requests totaled $40,000 in 2004, $86,000 in 2005, and already for 2006 Council has approved $70,000 in reductions, with more perhaps to

come. In most cases, the requests represent financial survival, and Council has been quite compassionate in granting them. We've reached a point, however, where the diocesan budget cannot handle the strain without significant adjustments. For the past two years, Fr. Patrick Ormos has made a motion at the time that the budget is approved that shortfalls will be made up by reduction in our pledge to the national church. (I hope that he, or someone else, will do so again!) But even that solution has its limits; it is important, I believe, that we at least tithe to the wider church.

Already we are making difficult decisions. We're looking carefully at office expenses, for example, and will be making some changes in practice in 2006. But office expenses can only make up for a small percentage of the deficit. Inevitably we will look at staff as well. The youth missioner position will come to an end next summer, and the ministries he supervised will be contracted out in a more cost-effective way. In addition, and this is very painful, we may not be able to maintain a full-time canon to the ordinary. Canon David Seger will retire at some point between the 2006 Diocesan Convention and the close of the year. I've said to Diocesan Council that a possible, though very imperfect, solution may be to employ a part-time canon, perhaps a retired priest or a lay person.

I should add the following as a footnote, however. A couple of weeks ago, at our annual clergy retreat, I told the assembled priests and deacons that we may not be able to budget for a full-time canon to the ordinary after 2006. The clergy almost unanimously rebelled. Many pointed out that the current staff configuration allows the bishop the

freedom to travel. In fact, my mileage log tells me that I'm out of the office and somewhere else in the diocese about 50% of all work days. If the canon position is reduced, some clergy noted (and correctly), I will in essence have to take over many of his duties. And so my ability to travel around the diocese will be severely limited. This is no small matter. My own vision of the episcopate is that it is literally apostolic (the word means "one who is sent"), not tied to a desk in South Bend. I believe that my availability has provided a positive dynamic in the life of the diocese, and the radical revision of our staff will affect our quality of life in a negative way. In light of the conversation with our clergy, I'll be asking Diocesan Council early in 2006 to think as creatively as they can about our staffing and to see if there is a way to continue the canon to the ordinary position as a full-time ministry. With Canon Seger's retirement at the end of the year, we will have to make a decision about the position sometime in the first part of 2006.

On one level, the ongoing controversy in the wake of the 2003 General Convention could come under the "ugh" category. Dealing with its aftermath is a major part of my life and ministry, and I know that many parishes continue to struggle with the difficult and complex issues concerning human sexuality. Last July I attended a three-day meeting in Los Angeles of 19 bishops – conservatives, liberals, and centrists – to talk about our life together and how we can maintain unity in the midst of such striking theological diversity. It was a difficult and fruitful time, and in many ways that same diversity is mirrored in our own diocese. I hear a good deal of anxiety as we draw nearer to next summer's General Convention in Columbus, Ohio. Inevitably General

Convention will be asked to respond to the Windsor Report (more about that later from a diocesan perspective), and there may well be other controversial matters on Convention's agenda. At the same time, our diocese has handled these issues in a wonderfully positive way; our unity is strong; and so I'm inclined to talk about them under the heading of "wow". But it I would be inappropriately minimizing the matter if I said that Northern Indiana is somehow "in the clear". There may be tough days ahead, and our commitment to one another – one of our core values – will surely be tested in the fire of churchwide controversy.

Wow

It's no accident that I conclude with the "wows" rather than the "ughs". Jesus is doing great things in our diocese, and I don't want you to conclude from our areas of stress and tension that I am at all discouraged. Far from it! Week after week, as I visit our parishes, I hear stories of transformation. We have a missionary heritage, beginning with the ministry of Bishop Jackson Kemper in the 1840s; our spiritual DNA is rooted in a gospel that changes lives and draws people into a living relationship with the Risen Lord. Never forget that!

Vocations to the ordained ministry, both the priesthood and the diaconate, continue to grow. At the moment we have thirteen postulants and candidates, six of them under the age of thirty. Several others are in discernment, two of them under thirty as well. We're restoring a balance between ordinands who come to the priesthood or the

diaconate later in life – and ordinands who expect to give their whole working lives to the ministry. You may be wondering, in a diocese as small as ours, how we will place all of these new clergy, especially those preparing for full-time ministry. The fact is, we won't. With only about fifteen full-time positions in the entire diocese, openings are rare. But nationwide the Episcopal Church is experiencing a clergy shortage, and many of those prepared for ordination through the Diocese of Northern Indiana will find themselves serving elsewhere. In 2005, for example, we ordained four people – two of whom now serve within the diocese and two beyond (one in California, in fact, and the other in Illinois). Northern Indiana is giving a gift to the whole church by producing deeply committed and superbly trained priests and deacons.

The diocese celebrated another enormously successful camp season this summer. The children's camp – directed by Kim and Tim Gray – was the largest in decades: 120 campers and a staff of 60. I can't begin to describe the joy and enthusiasm that camp generates. As I told campers, staff, and parents at the closing service, diocesan summer camp is the best and most important ministry that the diocese does. We touch young people at a time when they are most eager. Friendships made at camp are often carried into adulthood, and for many young people camp represents a life-changing encounter with Jesus, an encounter that they will carry with them for the rest of their lives. I should add that we have now expanded our camp program to include high school students. In late June, youth missioner Jason Beschinski, assisted by Julie Handshumacher (now a postulant for holy orders and a student at Sewanee), led our second annual high school camp, with about twenty young people attending. This camp "ratchets up" the level of

teaching and challenges young people to become active and enthusiastic disciples of Jesus Christ. A number of young people who've attended our high school camp are considering the possibility of ordained ministry; and so the camping program in the Diocese of Northern Indiana has the potential of providing leaders for the church well into the future.

God is doing exciting things in the Hispanic congregation in Plymouth. As I've mentioned before, Northern Indiana is experiencing an enormous influx of Spanish-speaking people, and one of the cities most deeply impacted is Plymouth in Marshall County. Some years ago, St. Thomas' became host for social service ministry to Hispanics called Corazon y Manos (Heart and Hands). Eventually some of those served by the ministry asked Fr. John Schramm about the possibility of a Eucharist in Spanish. Fr. John embarked on the challenging task of learning a new language, and in the spring of 2003 la Iglesia de Santo Tomas was born. Attendance has been up and down during the past 2 ½ years, but recently the Spanish Eucharist has grown to as many as fifty or sixty persons in church on a Sunday. Your bishop has been challenged as well: on a couple of occasions I've dragged out my high school Spanish and received new members en espanol. My prayer is that what we're learning at Santo Tomas will become a model for the rest of the diocese, as we discover how to welcome a new wave of immigrants into our midst.

As I mentioned earlier, St. Andrew's, Valparaiso, built a new church this year. It's an exciting story indeed! For years, the parish has been "land locked" in a beautiful

but unexpandable facility. If the church was to grow, St. Andrew's needed a new building. Over the past couple of years, God did a miracle. The parish received a gift of land in the northern part of Valparaiso. They sold the old building to a retirement community, raised additional money, and built a wonderful new facility in a growing part of the city – a building designed, I should add, to be a place of welcome as well as a center for worship. One more reference to the sermon I preached at the consecration of the new church: I challenged the parish on behalf of the diocese to see itself as a *missionary outpost*. This beautiful new building, I said, isn't an end in itself; it's a place where you will meet Jesus – and go. The diocese has high expectations of the people of St. Andrew's church; and so, I believe, does Jesus. We are asking our brothers and sisters in Valparaiso to model for us what a community in mission looks like. And we can all have miraculous expectations that our Lord will work through them (and through us!) to reach people in our communities who have no living relationship with Jesus or his church.

Speaking of mission, the Lord opened another door as well – through the tragedy that's overwhelmed the Gulf Coast. In the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, I sent an e-mail a few weeks ago to all of our clergy asking them about ways that their congregations have responded. So far, about 1/3 of the parishes have reported in. What I've heard is heartening indeed. One parish has "adopted" a middle school in Louisiana. Many others have sent significant monetary gifts, either to Episcopal Relief and Development, or to the dioceses of Mississippi, Louisiana, or Western Louisiana. Young people at Howe Military School collected $826 for disaster relief. Two parishes report

that they are making facilities available for emergency housing for evacuees. A number of people from our diocese (including my wife, Sylvia) have traveled to the devastated region to offer assistance and expertise. A biblical principle – as old as the story of Joseph in the Book of Genesis – says that God can bring good out of evil. Certainly in this case, the tragedy that's overwhelmed the Gulf Coast has released the floodgates of compassion from members of our diocese. In fact, on my own responsibility I signed us up for a program sponsored by the Suffragan Bishop for Chaplaincies, George Packard. It's called "We Will Stand with You," and it will match our diocese with people in need in the effected area. Eventually we will be assigned to a parish or a church institution, and will be invited to assist in its rebuilding – raising money and providing other means of encouragement and support. Stay tuned for more information! I trust that this will release missional energy and generosity from the people of the Diocese of Northern Indiana.

During the past year we've undertaken two ministry initiatives that were only in the planning and dreaming stage at the time of last year's Convention. First, you may remember that I talked in rather grim detail about our diocesan financial stress and its effect on our ability to fund ministry. In that connection, I said that I would be appointing a "blue ribbon task force" to look at the diocese, survey its needs, and make recommendations. By early 2005 the group had come together – named the Whatever It Takes Task Force, after our third core value. A little later, Fr. Martin Yabroff of St. James' Cathedral and Dale Guckenberger of St. Andrew's, Michigan City, will offer a preliminary report of the task force's work. I'll simply say here that Whatever It Takes

has moved in some surprising directions. Initially I expected the group to come up with organizational solutions on how we could more efficiently use our resources for ministry. While the task force has indeed done some "outside the box" thinking along these lines, their primary thrust has moved in a different direction: to encourage the diocese to embark even more enthusiastically on mission. In the end, they have come to believe, the answer to declining attendance and financial strain is not simply a better structure. Rather, the answer involves hearts focused on Jesus Christ and hands made available to him. I am deeply grateful for their work and encouraged by their creative engagement in this process.

Second, you may also remember last year that I talked about a reconciliation initiative in which our diocese had been invited to participate. In a church as polarized as ours, reconciliation doesn't just happen. We have to *decide* to be in relationship. And so four dioceses – Los Angeles, Western Massachusetts, Ohio, and Northern Indiana – jointly sponsored a four-day reconciliation conference in Holyoke, Massachusetts, last April. A team of nine from Northern Indiana attended, and this month's clergy retreat – led by Canon Brian Cox of the Diocese of Los Angeles – focused on the same theme. You'll be hearing a report from Nola Wegman of St. Andrew's, Valparaiso, and Fr. Jim Warnock of Gethsemane, Marion, about the conference and the ongoing work of reconciliation in our diocese. I'll simply add at this point that we are seeking to set the stage for a positive engagement with one another following next summer's General Convention – whatever happens in Columbus.

In fact, my final “wow” has to do with the way that our diocese is dealing with the church’s struggle over human sexuality. As you know, in October 2004 a commission appointed by the Archbishop of Canterbury issued a document now known as the Windsor Report. (That’s because the commission held most of its meetings at Windsor Castle.) Last spring, we held a “clergy day” simply to work through the report’s contents – what it teaches about the church, and what it asks the Episcopal Church to do in order to restore its relationship with the rest of the Anglican Communion. As a follow-up, three clergy – Frs. Patrick Ormos, Brian Grantz, and Jim Lodwick – have organized a series of three “Windsor Days” for clergy, deputies to General Convention, and members of our reconciliation team. These “Windsor Days” deal with issues raised by the Report: hermeneutics (a technical term for how we read and interpret the Bible), ecclesiology (another technical term, referring to the theology of the church), and relationships (we will spend time listening to the stories of gay and lesbian members of our diocese, as well as to persons who oppose actions of the 2003 General Convention; in so doing, we hope to model respectful conversation among Christians and provide a framework for the ministry of reconciliation). At the same time, our diocesan Standing Committee has endorsed the Windsor Report and its recommendations, and has communicated that endorsement to Presiding Bishop Frank Griswold and to the Archbishop of Canterbury. I wholeheartedly add my support to this action, and do believe that the Windsor Report provides a gracious and grace-filled way for Anglican Christians to remain in loving communion with one another and for us to do our part in restoring the bonds of affection that have characterized the Anglican Communion.

In all of this, I want to add a word about my commitment to *you*. When I became Bishop of Northern Indiana five and a half years ago, I realized that God intends the episcopate to be a ministry that binds people together. I am the bishop of absolutely everyone: young and old, black and white, gay and straight, conservative and liberal. I have often quoted Rabbi Ed Friedman, who said, "Be clear about your convictions and stay connected." Both sides of that equation are essential. You need to know where I stand; and you need to know, equally, that I am committed to every one of you. We are not a diocese by accident. This morning's Eucharist is a divine appointment. Jesus feeds *all* of us from his table; and Jesus' prayer for unity – that we may be one as he and the Father are one (John 17:21) – has never been more pertinent.

A concluding word about three Gospel challenges

Most of you can probably recite our diocesan core values:

- A passion for the Gospel of Jesus Christ
- A heart for the lost
- A willingness to do whatever it takes
- A commitment to one another

These core values define who we are. For more than five years, we have been internalizing them, discovering what it means to love Jesus, care for the lost, open ourselves to new ways of doing ministry, and open ourselves to one another. The

Whatever It Takes Task Force has also been pondering the core values, and asking: How can we give them "legs"? How can we apply them in concrete ways to the ministry of every parish in the diocese? As we talked about these questions, we came to recognize that Jesus is challenging us to incarnate these core values in three ways. I will call them *Gospel Challenges.* In the coming years, you'll be hearing about these challenges as a kind of structure in which we can live out the core values. Here they are:

- *Knowing Jesus*: Jesus invites every man, woman, and child in the Diocese of Northern Indiana into a personal relationship with him – and invites every parish to create programs for our own ongoing conversion and spiritual growth.
- *Sharing Jesus*: Jesus invites us to cooperate in the great work of the Great Commission – by intentionally engaging in the ministries of invitation and welcome
- *Serving Jesus*: Jesus invites us to cooperate in the great work of the Great Commandment – by surveying the community in which our parishes are located, discovering the community's needs, and responding to those needs in sacrificial ways

I believe that our Lord has "a hope and a future" (Jeremiah 29:11) for us; that the great days of the Diocese of Northern Indiana are yet to come; that the genius of the Anglican expression of the Christian faith – at once Catholic and evangelical – will break

forth in new and creative ways; and that Jesus calls us to walk with him in paths yet unknown.

Let us pray.

Come, Holy Spirit

and renew in us the fire of your love.

Fill us with holy expectancy

as we gather in the name of Jesus.

Give us a passion for the Gospel,

a heart for the lost,

a willingness to do whatever it takes,

and a commitment to one another.

Strengthen us

to Know Jesus

to Share Jesus

to Serve Jesus.

Enflame us, embolden us, empower us

as disciples who make disciples

for Jesus' sake.