

Pastoral Letter to
The Episcopal Diocese of Fort Worth
To be read at Sunday services

23 January 2011

To the saints of the Church in the Episcopal Diocese of Fort Worth: grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I write to you today regarding the ruling handed down on Friday January 21st by Judge Chupp. I am sure all of you are by now aware that the ruling was made in favor of The Episcopal Church and its Episcopal Diocese of Fort Worth. If you have not read the ruling for yourself, I encourage you to do so. It is very brief and in two parts: one is a ruling for our motion for Summary Judgment and the other is the ruling for The Episcopal Church's motion for Summary Judgment.

The Order calls for the Southern Cone diocesan leaders to surrender diocesan property and assets and render an accounting within sixty (60) days and requires that they not hold themselves out as the leaders of the Episcopal Diocese of Fort Worth. That is the simple part.

The much more complex part concerns our response to the Order and how we will live our commitment to Jesus Christ as His Body the Church. Certainly we can take heart that our position has been validated by the court, but this process has been painful for both sides and there is no room for triumphalism. My hope is that we will together reach out in love to our sisters and brothers who have been separated from us. Let us set such a tone that a healing process can begin that will enable some to eventually return to The Episcopal Church, and for most to remain in place in their church homes when we are able to reclaim possession of the buildings.

As I said at our diocesan convention, no one will be turned out of their church home. That will not happen. To the contrary, we offer them a prodigious welcome.

Our diocese has been preparing for months for the days ahead. St. Paul's condemnation of factionalism in today's Epistle reading from I Corinthians is right on target. (Isn't God's sense of timing wonderful!) This decision simply means we will speed up our work toward reconciliation and healing between the factions. Our task is to redouble our efforts at working toward that time of reconciliation and renewal through prayer, including prayer for those who may now be in despair over the decision.

I ask you to be gentle with those who may have hurt you in the past. I encourage you to reconnect with any with whom you can begin the reestablishment of relationship. Invite them to come and meet and hear Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori on Tuesday, February 15th at Southcliff Baptist Church, 4100 Southwest Loop 820, Fort Worth, 76109. The evening begins at 6:00pm with a book signing, followed by a 7pm presentation, meditation, and conversation with the presiding bishop. My hope is that we might have a thousand people, both our own members and members of the Southern Cone, to enter into this dialogue.

Again I express my thanks to you for your love and welcome of me as together we have grown in the mission and ministry of Christ Jesus over the past 15 months. Our Chancellor Kathleen Wells reminded us on the opening night of Diocesan Convention in November 2010, "Keep calm and carry on." I also want to remind you of the words of our Treasurer, Bob Hicks, "We are going to live out of abundance and not scarcity." Our abundance is primarily God's love for us which we must give away and the presence of the Holy Spirit which calls us to use our abundant gifts to draw those around us to Christ.

Pray diligently, give generously of God's love in you, and welcome absolutely everyone in Jesus' name.

Wallis Ohl
Provisional Bishop
The Episcopal Diocese of Fort Worth