

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

The story of the Word become flesh, the Incarnation of God, begins in this way. The angel Gabriel appeared to Mary with some astounding news. He greeted her and then, what is the first thing the angel needed to say to her? “Do not be afraid, Mary” (Lk. 1:30). It is the same with Joseph. Joseph had learned that Mary, the woman to whom he was engaged but not married, was pregnant. An angel came to him. The angel’s first words? “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid” (Mt. 1:20). And later, when the time for her to be delivered had come, once again the angels appeared, this time to shepherds tending their flocks outside Bethlehem. The angel’s first words were the same. “Do not be afraid” (Lk. 2:10)

The story of Jesus begins in exactly this way because Jesus is, and has always been, a dangerous person. The angel told Mary not to be afraid because what Mary was being asked to do was dangerous. For one thing, the most dangerous thing in a woman’s life in the time that Mary lived was childbirth. Mary was not being asked to do something antiseptic and safe. Mary was being asked to do something life-threatening. And she was asked to do something life-threatening not to make a family with her husband but in a way that had every possibility of making it impossible for her to have a husband at all. And assuming she survived childbirth, it would be difficult to imagine a more difficult thing in the ancient world than being an unmarried mother with no source of support. It is not all that easy a thing now. Mary knew the possible consequences of what God was asking her. Mary could well have chosen safety. The angel urged Mary to choose adventure instead. What the angels asked Joseph was not safe, either. Joseph was asked to do something that contradicted all the social norms of his day as well as the moral precepts of his religion. Joseph knew the consequences of what God was asking him. What Joseph was being asked to do was not safe. Joseph could well have chosen safety. The angel urged Joseph to choose adventure instead.

It is, of course, the same with the shepherds. The angels invited these common Judean peasants to leave their livelihood behind, which was dangerous enough. Shepherds keep watch over their flocks at night for a reason, after all. And they were then invited to go and find a child that was being proclaimed as king in a world in which King Herod was willing to have every male infant under two years old who might possibly be this new king slaughtered. The shepherds knew the risks. They could well have chosen safety. The angels urged the shepherds to choose adventure instead.

Somehow along the way, we tragically came to understand being a disciple of Jesus as being about our safety, our social safety in this life and our eternal safety in the life to come. We became obsessed with our own safety and we lost sight of the adventure we are offered in Jesus. In my opinion, the problem the Church faces now at the beginning of the 21st century is not that it has lost its moral bearings and not that its message is not clear and not that it is no longer relevant. It is that it is boring. It is that it is obsessed with its own safety. The task before us, more than anything else, is to reclaim the adventure of Mary and Joseph and the shepherds. As

long as the angels' words, "Do not be afraid," seem to us peculiar or quaint instead of real and relevant, we are missing the point. When those words, "Do not be afraid," speak to the reality of our own trepidation in following where Jesus has led, then and only then will we ever be close to understanding what Jesus meant when he said he was the way, the truth, and the life. Not before. Then and only then will we begin to understand what Jesus meant when he said, "For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it" (Mk. 8:35). Not before. Then and only then will we begin to understand the abundance of the life we are being offered. Not before.

It seems to me that our life in Christ depends on reclaiming the adventure of it. There is no way to do that except to abandon the safety of it. And we will know we have done that when the words of the angels, "Do not be afraid," strike us as relevant, hopeful, and encouraging rather than an out-of-place detail in a story we think of as simply the raw material for the annual Christmas pageant. We will know we have done that when being a disciple is not for cowards. I knew I was off track in writing this address and preparing for this convention when I found myself concentrating on how to be safe and praying that the convention we are now beginning would be boring. In each of my previous five conventions as your Bishop, I have not felt remotely safe at all. In each of those conventions, I have felt like my life and ministry were on the line. There was the year of the zero-based budget; the year of upheaval at St. Agnes' House and the Mission in the Mountains proposal; the year of the fair share giving plan and the Mission House proposal; the year of the General Convention fallout and St. John's, Versailles; and last year was the year of the Church of the Apostles.

Frankly it was just beginning to feel safe to come to convention again. Things are, after all, going reasonably well in the Diocese of Lexington. We have an extraordinary staff that works well and hard for the people of this Diocese. We are settled into Mission House and programs there are expanding. We have a new director of St. Agnes' House and a renewed sense of our ministry of hospitality to cancer patients and their families. We have a thriving ministry with Reading Camp, which expanded again this past year, and we have hired a director. We have a budget in the black with important new mission initiatives in college ministry and work with Hispanics. We have accomplished much of what we set out six years ago to accomplish in becoming a missionary community. We are showing some encouraging signs of healing the divisions of our last General Convention. It was time, I thought, perhaps to play it safe a bit. Why upset the apple cart? The words of the angels, "Do not be afraid," were seeming comfortably quaint, peculiar, and irrelevant to me. Fortunately, I realized that I was even boring myself. I repent of any desire to play it safe because what is the fun of that?

In fact, the year since our last convention has seemed anything but safe and I have more than once heard the angels saying, "Do not be afraid."

A large part of my year has been occupied with the property formerly occupied by the Church of the Apostles when there were voices all around me, and more

importantly inside me, telling me to play it safe. There were voices telling me we could not afford to keep it, that the buildings were in too great a state of disrepair to be practical, and that the maintenance and utility costs would be too high for it to ever be safe. I was urged not to hold services there because it would make it harder for us to sell it to the former members of Apostles and that would not be safe. I was told that there were too many obstacles to doing ministry there for it to be safe. There were voices threatening to sue us if we did not give up our rights to it, and that did not feel safe at all. None of it felt safe.

And then Hurricane Katrina came and opened our eyes again to the adventure of being missionaries, and the words of the angel, "Do not be afraid," suddenly seemed relevant and real. First we marshaled our resources to prepare the facility to house hurricane evacuees. I asked our local congregations to send volunteers to clean the buildings up. I was told it was not safe to be optimistic. Over 200 showed up, and not one of them was bored. We took risks. We spent money on renovations and we spent it on faith not knowing for sure how those renovations would eventually be funded. We did not play it safe. And we were not bored—not me or the diocesan staff or the Executive Council or the people of the Diocese who responded and helped. The truth is that adventure is a lot more fun than playing it safe.

As it turns out, our guests from New Orleans never did materialize. But what happened in the effort to prepare for them was that our eyes as a community were opened to the needs of our own poor. As a result, we have been preparing the property to be transitional housing, part of a program in which we will partner with others to help people go from homelessness to self-sufficiency. A clinic is also part of the mission plan. The property, which became known as All Saints Village during the time we were preparing for hurricane evacuees, will now be known in its more permanent form as Martha's Place. The Rev. Bonnie Jones will be the director of Martha's Place, and there is no one more ideally suited for this ministry than she. "Do not be afraid" will be neither quaint nor peculiar counsel as we continue to develop our mission at Martha's Place.

Earlier today we welcomed a new congregation as an organized mission of the Diocese of Lexington to be known as St. Martha's. Bonnie is also its vicar and it has taken on Martha's Place as part of its ministry. There were 89 at its first service last Sunday. It will be meeting for now at the Trent Boulevard property, although frankly my hope is that it will eventually move to the Hamburg Plaza area. The adventure of our other new congregation called All Saints, which is composed of young people, continues as well. They will share the space on Trent Boulevard with St. Martha's. For now, the Trent Boulevard property, which was not safe to keep, is incubating two new congregations with different senses of their missions. Eventually one, and probably both, congregations will move. Both remain important initiatives. Both are non-traditional approaches and both deserve our continued concern and support.

Dealing with the anger of a few people and the lengths to which they will go in the violation of their responsibilities to this community has been a part of the year that

has felt unsafe to me and in which the words of the angels, “Do not be afraid,” seemed relevant and real and personal. In October of this year, I discovered that the former Vestry of the Church of the Nativity had attempted to remove its church property from The Episcopal Church and the Diocese of Lexington by creating two corporations not subject to the authority of The Episcopal Church in order to hide the transfer of the title to church property. It was a violation not only of our canons but of express trust documents. The transfer was made without my knowledge or the knowledge of anyone else associated with the Diocese, or for that matter, without the knowledge of the congregation. It seems the former Vestry feared that they would not have been able to keep that property should they decide to separate from The Episcopal Church and the Diocese. And they were quite right. They would not have been. I can tell you that exposing this deception and breach of trust and facing the vicious verbal abuse that followed it was one of those times that did not feel so safe to me in the past year. But protecting the assets of The Episcopal Church, and in particular protecting the assets of the Church of the Nativity for the Episcopalians of Maysville is my job, and I have every intention of being faithful to my job. It has its moments of challenge, but challenge, after all, is just another word for adventure. What made that adventure spiritually valuable is that it was shared with the loyal Episcopalians of that parish who faced a difficult time and did very difficult things in the face of adversity and risk. After the co-chairs of the annual Christmas bazaar resigned, they organized to have the bazaar anyway. The people of Nativity organized an outreach project to collect winter cloths for the poor under the leadership of their deacon, the Rev. Mary Kilbourn Huey. When most of the former Vestry resigned, they elected a new Vestry and re-organized. Last week they successfully completed the call of a new Rector. They are represented at this convention today. They have inspired me to hear the angels say, “Do not be afraid,” and know what it means because they have chosen adventure rather than safety. Jesus once gave this advice to a leader of the Pharisees who had invited him to eat with him on the Sabbath. “When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. But when you give a banquet invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous” (Lk. 14:12-14). Our goal as the Church is not to invite enough people to help us pay the bills. It is to invite those who will bless us—the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. What Jesus said is that those are the people we need to know in order to know him. Those are the people we need to love in order to love him. That is why they bless us. The people Jesus urges us to invite may not meet our criteria for being people we should know. They may not meet our criteria for people we would allow to be members of our country club or would allow in our homes. They may not be clean enough for us or normal enough for us or well enough for us or wealthy enough for us or socially acceptable enough for us or family oriented enough for us or white enough for us or straight enough for us. They may not even meet our standards to get a green card. That is the fearful part. This is why it is an adventure. Let us get specific. We have a need to welcome Hispanic people in this part of the world. Not because they will help us pay the bills

now or maybe even ever, but because they will help us know and love Jesus. We began working on this need seriously last year and we have begun to make some progress. We began by making small grants to our three congregations that have Spanish-speaking clergy—Good Shepherd, Lexington; St. Mary's, Middlesboro; and Our Saviour, Madison County. This year I am happy to say we need to add a fourth congregation, the Church of the Nativity in Maysville, whose new Rector speaks Spanish. Beginning this year, I will require all new postulants in this Diocese to be proficient in Spanish. The Diocesan staff and I will begin Spanish lessons this spring. You are invited to speak Spanish too. We have got to get serious about this. The proposed budget also proposes that we further our financial commitment to this incarnational work by funding a part-time Hispanic missionary, not to do Hispanic Ministry for us. It will be this person's job to encourage Hispanic ministry in all of our congregations because there are few, if any, of them that do not have a need to develop such ministry. The focus will be on Lexington and Northern Kentucky as well as small towns and rural areas where the needs of the Hispanic community are typically unseen and unmet.

We will be seeking to further our adventure in ministry with single adults, an area in which our Diocese has always been a leader. The safer course of action might be to turn to models that have worked for us in the past. The more challenging course would be to work to create new models for a different circumstance and time and for the use of different gifts and different resources. The safer course of action and certainly the easier one, might be to take the course of the mega-churches of Lexington and close our doors on Christmas Day because that is a day for families. The more challenging course would be to open our doors and our hearts and invite people without families to be part of our family. We will be able to choose the more challenging in this Diocese because we are blessed with gifted and dedicated lay leadership in the persons of C.C. Johnson and Bill Clark, who are the co-chairs of the Singles Ministry Commission and Kay Collier McLaughlin who has led Solo Flight for a long time. It is important that we be paying attention to the needs of single adults if for no other reason than how many of them there are. It is also important because single adults upset our preconceptions of the way we falsely like to believe the world is. They confront our mythology of family with the reality of family. That may frighten us just a little. That is why we need them all the more. Among those we need to be intentional about welcoming without expectation of repayment are college students. We will continue our partnership with the Lutheran Church for the University of Kentucky and Lexington Community College. We have a thriving Canterbury Club at Berea College. We have a growing and encouraging group at Eastern Kentucky University thanks to Matt Hartney. We have more informal work going on in several places including at Morehead State through St. Alban's and at Prestonsburg Community College through St. James.

But I would like to see us be more adventurous. Perhaps our highest priority must be to reach out to African-Americans at Kentucky State. Now that is going to push our boundaries, a little. We cannot ignore Georgetown, Centre, Transylvania, and Asbury. We are going to have to be highly creative at Northern Kentucky University,

but we can be and we must be. The proposed budget for 2006 includes funding for a part-time college chaplain. We should probably stop thinking “chaplain” and start thinking “missioner” because it is very much our intention that our college work be much broader than taking care of our own. Taking care of our own is important, but by itself it is too safe. My dream is that our college ministry will be about reaching out to those as yet unknown to us, especially young people who are having a hard time with the faith they’ve been brought up with in light of what they’re learning in class. What I have in mind is a college missionary who will challenge young peoples’ hearts to expand by meeting, working with, and being converted by the poor. We in this Diocese have lots of opportunities available—Reading Camp, the Youth Outreach Center at Barnes Mountain, the Transitional Housing Ministry at Martha’s Place, Moveable Feast, the soup kitchen at Calvary, Ashland, the refuge ministry at St. Andrew’s, Lexington, the after school program at St. Andrew’s, Fort Thomas, Church Under the Bridge at Mission House, and Pyramid Ministries at Christ Church Cathedral just to name just a few. What I envision is a college ministry that builds relationships between college students and the people we serve because it is in such relationships that lives are changed and people meet the incarnate Lord Jesus.

This is important spiritually. It is important because loving God and loving our neighbor are two sides of the very same coin. “Those who say, ‘I love God,’ and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen.” (1 Jn. 4:20) There is far too little adventure in loving God without loving all of God’s people—all of them, not some of God’s people, all of God’s people.

“[Jesus] called the crowd with his disciples and said to them, ‘If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it’” (Mk. 8:34-37). It is a strange saying on the best of days. It is, quite frankly, madness. Indeed, in a world obsessed with its own safety, as ours is, it is Jesus himself who is madness. Following Jesus is never safe. It was never intended to be safe. That is why he so frequently had to repeat to his disciples what the angels had said to Mary and Joseph and the shepherds, just as he said to Peter when he called him, “Do not be afraid” (Lk 5:6).

We hear a lot these days about how the Church might not survive its current crisis or whatever crisis is next. I would describe our current reality more as a challenge than a crisis. But whatever it is, I am confident that The Episcopal Church and the Diocese of Lexington will be here for hundreds of years to come. But I am also confident that I do not measure the Church’s faithfulness by the Church’s worldly success. What I know is that life, but not survival, is a value of the Gospel. Our spiritual well-being is not measured in terms of our safety. It is measured in terms of our adventure. My Bible somehow omitted that chapter about how worldly success and godly faithfulness are the same thing. I must have gotten a misprint, but my Bible says that the faithful church will lose its life on behalf of the world it serves.

We live at a peculiar time when the Church is concentrating a great deal of energy and effort on saving its life and not on giving it away. Our life will not be renewed, I believe, until we stop asking what is best for the church and start asking what is best for the world we serve, until we stop asking what is safe for the Church and start asking what we are called to do, until we stop asking what is in it for us and start asking what is in it for others, until we stop asking what we have to gain and start asking what we have to give, until we stop asking how to preserve our resources and start asking how to put them to work, until we stop asking what is easier for us and start asking what the world needs. As our Lord Jesus Christ gave his life for that world and found it again, so will we. That is the Gospel. We have gone far too long playing it safe. We have gone far too long in asking what is best for ourselves first and what is best for the world second. God willing, those days are coming to an end. Now is the time to remember the words of our Lord Jesus, who said, "Those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it." There is nothing even remotely safe about the Gospel. The Gospel is that we find our lives precisely by losing them. As your Bishop, I am specifically asking you here and now whether you believe that or not. I am asking you if you are willing to face danger in the service of the Gospel, risk in the love of Jesus, the loss of our lives for the sake of gaining them. The proposals I am about to lay out are not safe or easy or comfortable. I believe, though, that they will lead us into life and frankly I don't much care whether we succeed or fail as the world sees such things. Abandoning safety for adventure is what has gotten us this far and this is what will see us home. First, I am proposing that we enter a partnership with the Order of the Holy Cross, an American monastic order with a monastery in Grahamstown, South Africa to take Reading Camp international. I know it seems daunting. There are many obstacles to overcome. There are many pressing needs right here without going 8,648 miles to find them. But in Christ there is no "their" children in Africa and "our" children in Eastern Kentucky. There are only God's children. We will, no doubt, have to work harder to find the financial resources necessary to do both Reading Camp here and there, but that is where the adventure will be for us. If we had let the reality of the challenges stop us, we would not be doing Reading Camp in the first place.

Second, I am proposing that we duplicate what we have done with Reading Camp by creating a camp for children whose parents are in prison. Once again, the obstacles are not small, but the danger to worry about is that our thinking may be. We cannot see the problems we face as obstacles to stop us but as challenges to be overcome. The only question about the adequacy of our resources pertains to the resources inside of us, and in our internal resources as a people, I have great faith. The only real danger is in playing it safe. Third, I am proposing that we reevaluate the Cathedral Domain in a way that concentrates on giving camp experiences to those who could not afford them. In this regard I mean several things. One of those is that each summer we have unfilled capacity at all of our camps. Last year we had 445 campers. Our established camps could have accommodated many more than that. Why didn't we give away spots away to children who could not have attended camp any other way? Those extra campers would have had a summer camp

experience they would never otherwise have had. They would have been nurtured in the Christian Faith. Our children would have had a rich experience of the diversity of God's creation they would not otherwise have had. And we? We would have been blessed by inviting without expectation of repayment. It is just another way we can give ourselves away. The more we do, the more life we will find. In addition to the unused spaces at our established camps, the Cathedral Domain is actually capable of even greater capacity. There are opportunities, I believe, of running parallel camp sessions and meeting even more needs. As part of this proposal, I will begin a self-study of both our camping and our youth ministry programs and I have asked professionals from outside our Diocese to help us by bringing some fresh eyes to these ministries. Fourth, I am proposing yet an additional new congregation, this one in Northern Kentucky. Now 10 years into our second century, it is time we act on our intentions from the Second Century Campaign. One of the objects of that campaign was a new congregation in Northern Kentucky. We have some material assets from that campaign, and we will be getting others from the closing of St. Stephen's in Latonia. By putting those together we will have enough to get started. My proposal is to form a steering committee comprised of representatives of our existing Northern Kentucky congregations to make plans, purchase property in this fast-growing part of our Diocese, and move toward inaugurating this new ministry. Fifth, I am proposing that we aggressively offer credible Bible study throughout our part of Kentucky by using Education for Ministry program as a tool. It is time to reclaim the Bible from fundamentalism. As I reflect on the aftermath of our last General Convention, I am convinced that one of the things that went seriously wrong was that people did not know much about the Bible and so got used by others who sold them a bill of goods for their own purposes. I am also convinced that there is a hunger both within our Church and outside it for an intellectually credible way to study the Bible, not for purposes of thumping but for purposes of loving. Education for Ministry, a theological education by extension program of the School of Theology at Sewanee offers such a resource. In fact, I firmly believe it is one of the finest resources The Episcopal Church has to offer. It is time we employed it. What I am proposing is a group of lay EFM mentors to take serious and academically sound religious study beyond the boundaries of our churches out into the communities we serve. The more people know about the Bible, the more they will know it has a lot more to do with economics than sex. The more people know about the Bible, the more threatening to the structures that prop up poverty, illiteracy, oppression, racism, and injustice. The more people know about the Bible, the better for God's world. It is a big undertaking. It is a little fearful. It is a life giving experience of to giving our resources away, to give ourselves away for the benefit of the world we serve. Faith has a lot more to do with adventure than safety of any kind, even our eternal safety. It baffles me that a reading of the Gospel could see the coming reign of God in terms of safety or security instead of as being about adventure. The Gospel is about encountering God in the flesh, and encountering God, as we have repeatedly seen, is a fearsome thing. God puts shock and awe to shame, but not as the world might expect. God puts shock and awe to shame in, of all things, the cross, and beyond the cross, in the resurrection. "When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the

doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you. When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained'" (Jn. 20:19-23). On the day of the resurrection, the ministry that Jesus entrusted to his disciples was the ministry of reconciliation. To lock others out is the human response to fear. It is safe. Reconciliation is God's more creative response. It is perhaps the most unsafe work of all. The reconciled life offered in Christ is not about eliminating our differences. It is about overcoming our differences.

Reconciliation is not remotely easy work. The problem with human relationships is that the only way to avoid the conflict in them, the only way to avoid the hostility in them, the only way to avoid the need for reconciliation in them is not to have them. There was no problem in the garden, after all, as long as there was just one human there. It was the addition of the second when things started to go wrong. At first it was lies, deceit, and blaming. Within just one generation it was murder. The truth is that it is easier if we are just separated from one another by whatever it takes, and locked doors work fine.

We in The Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion and even here locally in the Diocese of Lexington now face a moment of potential separation, of slamming the doors and locking them shut. We indeed have our conflicts. We have had precious little peace in our church these last three years, and perhaps longer than that. Will we keep the peace by separating from one another? If we do, we will have avoided conflict but at the cost of opposing the reconciling work of Christ on the cross. Will we resolve our hostility the easy way, by closing the doors and locking them tight? It is tempting for some to walk out the door. That is the easy way out, and we have those who have done that. It is just as tempting to say good riddance and don't let the door hit you on the way out. It is tempting indeed, and like many things that are tempting, and almost all things that are easy, it is not faithful.

Agreement and reconciliation are not the same thing. I do not think we are likely to achieve agreement in the short term, and to tell you the truth, I don't really care much if we do. I am hopeful, though, that we might achieve reconciliation. Reconciliation is about turning to face each other. It is not really even about repentance. The paradigm is the Parable of the Prodigal Son. What was necessary for the embrace of the father and the son was that they turned to face each other. Repentance was not required. In truth, the father had never stopped facing the son. He was looking down the road for him even on the day of the son's return. But also in truth, the father did not seek the son's repentance, only his embrace. All the son had to do was turn to face the father and the father ran to embrace him. It was the embrace, and not the repentance, that accomplished the reconciliation.

Reconciliation is a hard thing. It will require respecting each other in the face of

our honest differences over the issues that surround homosexuality. Reconciliation does not require agreement. In fact, reconciliation has no requirements at all because the love of Christians has no requirements at all. It is possible to separate, one from the other. It is possible to force submission, one to the other. Both work quite well for avoiding conflict. Neither, however, is remotely the same as reconciliation between one another.

Since the General Convention of 2003, there has been a lot of work of reconciliation being carried out in this Diocese. It has not at all always felt safe. It is indeed possible to be in disagreement and be reconciled. There is living proof of it in this Diocese, and I point with great joy to the role that Calvary Church, Ashland; Christ Church, Harlan; and St. Andrew's Church, Ft. Thomas play in this Diocese. The Rectors of Calvary and St. Andrew's are both members of our Executive Council. A lay member of Christ Church is on the Standing Committee. A lay member of St. Andrew's is on the Executive Council. Both Christ Church and St. Andrew's are deeply committed to Reading Camp. All of these congregations have important voices in the life of the Diocese. And, for that matter, most members of all our churches are important voices for reconciliation, whatever they may believe about the sexuality issue.

Part of the evidence of that is the fair share giving program. The first year of that system's implementation was the first year after General Convention. We have a system that allows congregations to appeal assessments, and to meet the challenges of our last General Convention, we allowed congregations to appeal both on financial need and to redirect their assessments because of conscience. We did not want individuals who were in conscientious objection to the actions of the 2003 General Convention to have to choose not to support their congregations in order to be heard in their dissent. It did not feel safe, but it has accomplished its goal. In 2004, there were 12 appeals totaling \$185,000, of which six were redirections on the basis of conscience in the amount of \$113,000. In 2005, there were 11 appeals totaling \$124,000, of which three were conscience redirections in the amount of \$65,000. In both 2004 and 2005, all assessments, including all redirections, were paid in full. This is extremely good news. But the news gets even better. For 2006 there were only four appeals totaling \$33,000. There were no redirections. We are healing. As unsafe as it may have been, the adventure of reconciliation is being lived out.

One thing I deeply believe in the core of my being is that I will not, I will not, I will not ever give up on any relationship. I can no more give up on others than God, to my utter surprise, can give up on me. Still, there are some who have closed the door to us. One thing I have learned, as painful a lesson as it has sometimes been, is that it is impossible to be reconciled with someone who does not want to be reconciled. That is something we have no choice but to entrust to God. We must trust in God's ultimate will for reconciliation because we cannot be held hostage to the choices of others to separate from us, here in the Diocese of Lexington, in The Episcopal Church, or in the Anglican Communion. We must move on with the mission God has

given us to do. And that is to live our lives in the service of the world God has given us.

There is one other thing in my life that seems a little unsafe to me at the moment, which I want to share that with you. I share it in the confidence that it is often in what is unsafe that God is most present and available and calling all of us to grow in faith.

Earlier this month the Nominating Committee for the Presiding Bishop announced a slate of four Bishops to become the 26th Presiding Bishop. All four bishops nominated are good people, solid bishops, and cherished friends. The election will occur at the General Convention this summer in Columbus, Ohio. This week I received a letter saying that several of my colleagues have nominated me by petition as an additional candidate. I have not sought this nomination, and indeed, I have others plans that excite me greatly, both with you in mission and to use my upcoming sabbatical to study canon law in Wales. I do not know if I have a call to be Presiding Bishop, and I am not even asking myself that. What I am asking myself is if I am called to let the Church decide if I have gifts that might be useful to it at this particular moment. At the same time, serving as the Presiding Bishop at this particular time in the Church's history would be the adventure of a lifetime, and it has over and over been in what is challenging and difficult and risky and unsafe and adventurous that I have most experienced God's care for me and God's efforts to shape me into a faithful follower of Jesus. I would be the biggest hypocrite in the world if I constantly called you as the people of this Diocese into challenge and adventure and were not willing to be called to that myself.

I do not know where this will lead. In response to my colleagues' request I have begun a process of discernment with my family and with my spiritual director. There is much to think about. I have already spent a considerable amount of time praying my way through this, and I am, quite frankly, not yet finished. Whatever I may decide God is calling me to do, I know for sure that it is not to leave the Diocese of Lexington. The only question in my spirit right now is whether it is to serve you in a different way and to love you from a different place. I expect to reach a decision as to whether or not I will allow myself to be considered in the next two weeks. All I can do now is ask for your prayers. I would value your counsel. I promise that I will inform you as soon as I have made a decision.

You all are an unbelievable gift from God for me. You are an adventure. Some of you are more of an adventure than others. The future is something, of course, that we cannot know. What we can choose, though, is never to opt for taking the easy way or the safe way but to choose the adventure every time. "The angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people.'" Good news. Great joy. For all the people. Do not be afraid.

The Rt. Rev. Stacy F. Sauls