

Address by The Very Reverend Dr. Philip C. Linder  
December 13, 2009 – Advent III

Dear people of Trinity,

Since this past August after being nominated for bishop of our diocese, Ellen and I have struggled with discerning where God was calling us at this point of ten years into my ministry as Dean of Trinity Cathedral, and twenty-four years as a priest of The Episcopal Church. We sought to be faithful in our attentive listening and the discipline of prayer to discover God's will through his Son, Jesus Christ. The question that emerged as the ultimate litmus test was and still remains, "Where can we be most effective in changing lives for Jesus Christ, and serving all of God's people and the Church? As you know, this difficult journey of discernment led us full circle back to Trinity Cathedral, where I believed that God desired for me to continue to serve as your priest and dean, and Ellen as parish nurse and my wife.

As a result, I formally withdrew my name from consideration. Only once a very long time ago have I desired to be a bishop, as I find the politics of such elections repugnant to Jesus Christ and the holiness of the Church. Within days of this withdrawal though, a number of clergy convinced me to be petitioned back into the process and be a nominee. And as difficult as that was to hear and consider again for all of you and especially my staff, Ellen and I knew in our hearts that unless we saw this election process through to its completion we would always live with the knowledge that we may have said no to God. I knew that I would not have any peace in the knowledge, believing that I may have to face my Lord some day and explain that no to Him.

On December 12<sup>th</sup> the clergy and lay delegates on the third ballot elected another to be the 8th Bishop of the Diocese of Upper South Carolina, The Reverend Andrew Waldo of Minnesota. I truly look forward to offering him my full support as Dean and welcoming him into the life of our cathedral and diocese. In yesterday's election the diocese chose a different kind of leadership and vision than that which I possess and offered up to them, and I want you to hear that Ellen and I, although naturally disappointed on a number of

levels, have enormous peace in our hearts. Well, actually we are thrilled and overjoyed to be remaining with all of you whom we love so much! I love serving and leading all of you as priest and dean of Trinity Cathedral. And I cherish my staff.

We are at a critical moment in the history of our beloved Trinity. During our time together in ministry we have been blessed with significant growth in membership, mission, and ministries. Together in 2001 we dreamed of this Trinity Center for Mission and Ministry, a place for Christian formation classes, youth ministry, and basketball; these doors opened in 2006. We did not know that God's plan would be first for us to worship here in Averyt Hall, while we went about the great task of restoring our cathedral, discovered to be in imminent danger of structural collapse. Within the scope of both of these projects the generosity of Trinity members and benefactors have pledged more than 13 million dollars to the glory of God. Now with more than sixty percent of the work completed, we are already stunned by the beauty of our cathedral under historic restoration. And through the great generosity of Harriet and Neel Keenan, The Keenan Chapel has now been beautifully restored in loving memory of Walter Keenan.

Today the staff, vestry, and laity of Trinity are worshiping, working, and serving Christ at a level that I have never before witnessed in all my years. The new *Strategic Plan, for Trinity*, outlining the vision, goals, and objectives for our church for the next five to ten years, is presently a working document serving as a compass to direct and hold us accountable as we seek to address those areas where we can raise the bar and do better, and in new ways fulfill God's will for Christ's mission and ministry. This plan addresses every key aspect of our church's ministry including: pastoral care, local and international outreach, preaching, Christian education, children and youth, facilities, and staffing. And undergirding all is our corporate dynamic worship—the center of our life in Jesus Christ, now a model for liturgy and music throughout the Episcopal Church and Anglican world.

I am also so grateful to my incredible staff! I am so thankful to the lay ministries of Trinity. The work alone put into making December 12th a perfect one in service of the larger Church was so evident—they did us proud. We are also blessed with the outstanding leadership of Kirby Shealy, Senior Warden, and Mary Belser, Junior Warden and every single member of the Vestry, Trinity Foundation, and our lay diocesan deputies.

I am truly excited about this next period of our life together, especially as we prepare to re-enter our beloved Trinity Cathedral sometime in 2010, and then in 2012 celebrate our bicentennial. As I have taught many times, the “No’s” in life point to the deeper “Yes’s”—Trinity Cathedral is my deeper Yes. Together we have accomplished much through God’s grace, and together we will take this cathedral and community of faith to a level of worship, faith, and ministry in Jesus’ Name unimagined. Hear me loud and clear—well, actually hear Ellen loud and clear: “We are never doing that bishop thing again, and you will have us at Trinity for a very long time!”

When I was a child my mother taught me these words from one of her favorite poets, Robert Frost. She carried them on a little slip of paper in her wallet until the day that she died. I now carry them in my wallet: “The woods are lovely dark and deep. But I have promises to keep. And miles to go before I sleep. And miles to go before I sleep.” I believe together, we have many miles to go.