The Rt. Rev. Shannon Rogers Duckworth
Address to the 188th Annual Convention
Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana
October 25, 2025

87,110. That's the number of miles on my 4Runner. It's an extraordinary figure for just three years of ministry. Good thing I know a car guy! 87,110 miles of incredible shared ministry…of visitations and travel….of doing the work both inside and outside of the diocese.

I've traveled from the river to the bayou, from cities to small towns, from large churches to small ones. I've spent time in our incredible Episcopal schools, such as St. Martin's and Episcopal, which host our conventions. I have seen vibrant ministry in our retirement communities, including the calling of a full-time chaplain at St. James Place. I've seen people continue to love, to serve, to worship, when the world around them is challenging and even threatening…even when they are uncertain about finances, or leadership, or age, or the next increase in insurance or utilities. Time and time again, you have shown me faith in its most resilient form. Yet, the truth remains that we are faced with real challenges that do not have easy answers or quick fixes.

Given the reality of these challenging times, I've been asking myself: What is the one thing we have as Christians in this time? What is the one thing that roots us, that calls us back when everything else feels uncertain? We love out loud.

This year marks the third in our convention themes, based on Faith, Hope, and Love. Each year, we have been asked to consider, "What are our voices in this moment?" How do our words and actions reflect God's call to us to be the voice for the voiceless, a home, a community of welcome, belonging, and service?

When I meet with the newest members of our churches, I hear the same story over and over:

I came because someone invited me.

I found a home when I thought it was impossible for me.
I stayed because I felt loved.

I read that “all are welcome” in the Episcopal church, and I believed that it actually meant me.

These words resonate deeply with me.

“All Are Welcome” is our standard, our non-negotiable. Every time that we pour the waters of baptism or proclaim the Baptismal Covenant, we are saying something radical. We are saying that God loved us first. That we are named as beloved. Not because of what we have done but because of who God is.

Over the last 5 months, I have hosted a podcast on the 5 questions of the Baptismal Covenant. I have invited friends and colleagues to explore each of these questions with me. I have bid us all to take a deeper dive into how the Episcopal Church will stand for the dignity of every human being, also acknowledging times in our history when we have fallen short of this mark. Yet, by really engaging the questions, we do all that we can to learn and grow “with God’s help.” Our Baptismal Covenant calls us to “seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbor as ourselves,” and to “strive for justice and peace among all people.”

Again, I challenge us to not only think about what that means, but to be called to prayerful action. We are faced with a rise in trends that, in the name of our shared faith, tempt us to draw stark lines between “us” and “them.” It is dangerous, threatening, and shuts down the promise of inclusion and welcome at the core of our beliefs. Our lives, our social media feeds, are filled with the noise of hate and division…of right and left…of democrat and republican. However, we must hold onto what Paul writes, “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28).

This isn’t preaching politics. It’s proclaiming the Gospel. And, doing this doesn’t make us any less patriotic. I have flown an American flag outside of my house for all of my adult life. I am the daughter, sister, and wife of

veterans. The Baptismal Covenant is about holding fast to the very core of our theology and our beliefs as Episcopalians and as Americans. Our focus is to be fixed on the living God who reigns in love and justice. This is how we maintain our Christian witness.

When our faith is fused with nationalism that seeks not to bind together, but to separate and corrupt, we risk turning the cross into a banner of exclusion rather than a symbol of love and redemption. As is currently playing out in the wider Anglican Communion over the selection of the first female Archbishop of Canterbury, it is because of the bonds, not outside of them, that we share in the Risen Christ and step into and through the conflict. There is always, in Jesus, the hope of unity.

When we say that we love out loud, we do so, not just in quiet prayers or private devotion, but in public witness. We do this when we feed the hungry, defend the vulnerable, and tell the truth even when it is difficult. Jesus said, “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). This love is not sentimental. It is courageous. It is a bridge, not a wall. It stands against hatred, fear, and the misuse of God’s name for earthly power instead of love.

When I became bishop, people often asked, “What’s your vision for the diocese?” And for a long time, I focused on that question. But over these past few years, I’ve realized something even more important:

It’s not just my vision that matters.
It’s our collective voice.
What do we have to say about who Jesus is to us?
How do we love well?
What would our neighbors say about us if they didn’t know us? If our congregations were no longer a part of our communities?

Theologian Andrew Root has written extensively about what it means to be the Church in what he calls a secular age, at a time when many no longer expect God to act.

He reminds us that the renewal of the Church will not come just from new programs or perfect strategies, but from a renewed awareness of God’s living presence.

I have experienced what that presence means over and over again, all across this diocese. I have seen increases in attendance as well as confirmations. Your budgets have grown, and giving has increased.

Therefore, I would like to take a moment to reflect on what we have accomplished together with the resources you have entrusted to us.

Turn in your booklets to page 26. There you will see the last 16 years of budgets. I want you to look carefully at this chart. Since 2011, we have only passed 3 balanced budgets. Now, if you look over to the right of that number to the actual year-end figure, you will see that, most years, we did an extraordinary job managing expenses. Most years, we ended up in the black or significantly reduced the deficit.

We have not seen a balanced budget since 2020, and as bishop, that was one of my primary goals. Your generosity, your faith, your sacrificial gifts, and our attention to financial stability have made that happen.

It has also meant that we have had to make hard decisions. In January, we closed the Chapel of the Holy Comforter at the University of New Orleans. No bishop ever wants to close congregations. It is painful and a deep loss. In just a few weeks, we will close on the sale of that property to another Christian congregation. And, as we have done so faithfully with both the resources of Frances Joseph Gaudet and the Grace Fund, it will be used, not to turn on the lights, but for mission and ministry in the diocese.

Our carefully-managed, long-term investments, along with your assessments, mean…

That when **12 of you** are in transition, our office is there — coordinating, leading, praying with you through the search process.

When **25 individuals** are discerning ordination — that's right, twenty-five! — We walk with them, supporting them at one of our seminaries or the Iona program, nurturing new leaders for the Church.

When **4 congregations** receive Grace Funds to support full-time clergy, or **17 priests and deacons** begin new calls, we're providing training and mentorship.

It means that when you call the diocesan office for guidance on property, insurance, parish support, or pastoral care, someone is there to help.

It means that we can host youth gatherings and relaunch participation in Happening for the first time in years.

When $160,000 is given to the most vulnerable through direct grants from Episcopal Relief and Development.

When the Gaudet Committee distributes $200,000 in grants to schools and organizations supporting Black youth.

It means we can offer *Love Out Loud* Lay Leadership Summits and microgrants to congregations doing remarkable work.

It means that we can share accurate, accessible information through a redesigned website and newsletter.

It means that when crises arise — and they do — we are only a phone call or a visit away. When we are committed to following all of our Safe Church guidelines, as well as holding to the disciplinary accountability of our clergy and lay people.

It means that when your church joins Pride marches, visits the incarcerated, trains new deacons, holds bilingual Eucharists, teaches English as a Second Language, or explores ways to heal the environment, the Diocese of Louisiana stands with you.

It's a $1.25M grant to offer The Little Box of Good News to you and your families.

Because this isn't just about dollars and deficits. It's about discipleship. It's about how we *love out loud* — whether we're in Bayou duLarge or Baton Rouge, in St. Luke's or St. Philip's.

It's when I participate in the work of the wider church and work alongside Presiding Bishop Rowe on the planning of House of Bishops meetings. This is the life-giving love of Jesus Christ made visible through the Episcopal Church.

Baptism reminds us: God didn't act once, long ago. God is acting still.

That's what it means to make visible the quiet, steady love of God that is already present.

The early church in the Book of Acts knew this truth well. They didn't have buildings or budgets or institutional plans. They had the Spirit given by God through the witness of Jesus Christ. They had each other. And they had the promise that God would be faithful. The apostles turned the world upside down not through power or certainty, but through acts of love…breaking bread, healing, forgiving, proclaiming hope.

When Peter and John healed the beggar at the temple gate, they didn't give him gold or silver. They gave him what they had…the living Christ.

That is what we, too, are called to give.

We are also facing real headwinds.

Rising property and liability insurance threaten the stability of many parishes. Over the past 18 months, our staff and insurance committee have worked tirelessly with both private carriers and Church Insurance to explore solutions. We'll be presenting those findings to the Executive Board soon, and you'll hear from us as this phase concludes.

The Solomon Episcopal Conference Center also faces challenges familiar to camps and retreat centers nationwide: aging infrastructure and rising costs. But we are meeting those challenges head-on — clarifying our mission, developing new clientele, and charting a sustainable future under strong, faithful leadership. We will also be renovating the director's house to become Virginia's House, a long-hoped for place for lodging and retreat of our youth. Thank you to Ms. Virginia Weidmann for your extraordinarily generous gift.

But, there is more. And today I am thrilled to share this news with you.

As you know, our diocese is participating in the Episcopal Church Foundation's *Diocesan Vitality Initiative* — focusing on insurance, sustainable finances, and communication. The next step is to explore a

diocesan-wide endowment campaign to strengthen our parishes and ministries for generations to come.

Over the next few months, we'll be asking questions, listening deeply, and identifying ways we can grow together. We'll invite clergy and lay leaders from every corner of our diocese to share their wisdom. Please — if asked — lend us 45 minutes of your time. Help shape the vision for our future.

When those conversations are complete, I'll share a report outlining what we've learned — the needs, opportunities, and possibilities that lie before us. This is a new day for the Diocese of Louisiana. Together, we are expanding our mission, deepening our sustainability, and strengthening our shared witness. Together we will be the church of the future.

During one of my recent visitations, I met this little guy. He is an every-Sunday-church-goer. He was amazing. After the service, he came right up to me. "Bishop, I have a question. Why didn't you carry your staff for the entire service? I thought that was the purpose of it. The bishop MUST carry her staff." I told him that during the service, I needed my hands a lot, so I mainly just carry it in and out. He looked at me with a furrow in his brow and said, "If you do that, how will you grab the sheep if they get lost?"

I loved this for several reasons. This is clearly a child who has found comfort in his church. And, he has clearly been attending his Godly Play classes. But, much more than that, he sees a connection between himself and the role of the bishop. His comments were both humbling and challenging to me. We have to challenge ourselves to make sure that our churches are welcoming to children like him. He is our future.

I have a sacred responsibility to you as your bishop. This role is heart work. I commit myself to you and to what we have to do together. There is so much joy. And, there is hard work to do. I have and will continue to make hard decisions. I am quite sure I have made mistakes, and we have also seen so much growth and joy. I also want you to know that I love doing this with you.

I want to end by saying thank you. Thank you for this incredible privilege to be your bishop. Thank you for your warm welcome each and every week and for the love that you share. I have such admiration for each of you,

and you bring me such deep joy. Thank you to my amazing staff. You are brave and talented and gritty and fiercely loyal. I am grateful for the love of my husband, my sons, my family, and friends who keep me grounded.

We have so many good days of ministry ahead of us. And, we must get out of the message of love…to love out loud!