

Bishops,

You are welcome to steal any ideas from this or to quote parts of it. I ask that you not reproduce it as a whole and circulate it as it was intended for our reflections at Camp Allen.

**Thank you,
Porter**

Porter Taylor
3/16/12

So first a poem, then an image and then the meditation.

The Contract: A word from the led William Ayot

And in the end we follow them -
not because we are paid,
not because we might see some advantage,
not because of the things they have accomplished
not even because of the dreams they dream
but simply because of who they are:
the man, the woman, the leader, the boss,
standing up there when the wave hits the rock,
passing out faith and confidence like life jackets,
knowing the currents, holding the doubts,
imagining the delights and terrors of every landfall;
captain, pirate, and parent by turns,
the bearer of our countless hopes and expectations.
We give them our trust. We give them our effort.
What we ask in return is that they stay true.

To be a pastor is to stay true---

 True to the love and grace of our Lord
True to our calling to walk with our people as they find themselves at the cross and seek
resurrection.

 And true to the vision our Lord has for his children—which means to give hope to
a world in despair.

Here's the image.

When my son Arthur turned 15 we decided he was becoming too parochial--

 too limited and too American

So I took him on a WALKABOUT---

we went to Paris for five days and India for two weeks

 Of course, we went to the Louvre---

We were in the Egyptian wing---

I was walking among the mummies---

 and I looked around and there was no Arthur.

I knew he had no Fancs
I knew he couldn't find our hotel.
and I had no idea where he was.
 I wanted to run through the museum shouting his name.
 I wanted to assert my American perogotive and reorganize everything.

Instead I went into the center of the room
 and I stood as tall as I could and I looked for him
People from all over world walked around me
 I knew I was surrounded by treasurers in other rooms
 I could be seing Fra Angelica or Rembrant or Ruebens
But I had to stand there staring at mummies.
About 45 minutes later Arthur came back
 "Hey Dad," he said "You missed all the cool stuff."

We are called as bishops to stand straight in a whirling world that is so often lost.
Or to use another image
In a dark world, we are to stand next to the paschal candle and sing the exsultet
 signaling that all those who have strayed are to come home.

Remember?

*"This night...restores innocence to the fallen, and joy to those who mourn.
It casts out pride and hatred, and brings peace and concord."*

As Pastors, we have to find the center and stand there.

 Or else we will simply be running around museums.

We are not therapists---

We are not social workers---

We are not fixers.

 We end up doing all of those things— "captain, pirate, and parent by turns"
But above all--we help people by staying true---

Yes, we oversee an organization---an institutional structure

 But at our core—we are living reminders of the wideness of God's mercy
 And we must remember that mercy—that HESED—that fierce love
 Or else the whole thing is lost.

I want to say that being a pastor—with a deep and wide heart---
in these times is swimming up stream—because of the times in which we live.

I. How is the Episcopate transforming?

Let's be honest---The Church is infected by our culture---

I don't want to dwell on these because I want to get to our calling,

But I want list the challenges we confront because they affect our ability to pastor.

1. Especially in America, our sense of identity has flattened; we equate people to convenient labels.

Our world says---Tell me who you vote for, or what News you watch
and I can tell you who you are.

2. we live in an age that distrust all authority and institutions

Our culture doesn't trust the government, the banks, the stock market, the courts, or the church---and therefore, there is distancing from leaders like us.

which makes our being pastors harder.

3. Our culture keeps a frantic pace/

When Jesus asks "Why do you run like the pagans?"—he is talking to us.

Pastoral care is time consuming and messy and doesn't have measurable results.

It is not an efficient use of our time---

And that's why people say, "I didn't want to bother you because you are so busy."

4. Our society is adverse to pain which is necessary part of healing.

Some time ago my therapist said---

You want to feel better, you just don't want to change.

And this is more pronounced in an age of anxiety—

Which makes honest interactions harder.

II. How does Bishop as Pastor inform your leadership?

Well. The pastoral role of being the bishop has in a very surprising way been

both the most rewarding and also the most trying part of my episcopacy.

Rewarding---because sometimes I think it's the only solid ground I experience.

Pain and loss and suffering and sorrow as well as joy and celebration are so real compared to so much of my work.

They ground me in the cross and redemptive love of our Lord.

But trying because dealing with the projections that come with a purple shirt limit these interactions severely.

In all modesty—as a parish priest I loved my congregation and they loved me.

And we had a level of honesty that was real.

I assumed that would translate to the diocese—

But it has been a mixed experience because as bishops, we have so many roles---

Sometimes people think of us as the police or the IRS instead the Shepherd.

I found out a priest's marriage was crumbling and when I asked her why she had not come to see me, she said, "I was afraid you'd discipline me."

But sometimes it has been humbling because I just showed up

and because I am the bishop I was invited into the inner rooms of people's lives.

Now, my definition of a meditation is random reflections---so here are mine:

1. I need to start with me.

I care about being a pastor because I have known God's grace when I was up against a wall---and I have been up against many.

I am not a Christian because of anything I can do,

but because of what Christ has done for me.

All the good things in my life have been sheer gifts from God.

It's by grace that I got sober---

it's by grace that my wife and I adopted two children—

it's by grace I have become reconciled with important people in my life---

—everything is by grace.

On my good days that's what keeps me true—

and opens my heart the size of a mustard seed.

2. Here's good news.

Our pastoral role is often symbolic—which means it's easier than we think.

We show up and our people know that there's backup.

We show up and our people feel comforted because their Mamma or Pappa is there.

The second year of my episcopacy one of our parishes was dealing with a financial scandal involving the former rector.

The priest called me and asked me to come and talk to the Vestry.

Should I bring our financial officer?, I asked.

No—she said. just you.

Should I come early and go over the records?

No—we start at 6:30 just come then.

Well—I said. What do you want me to do?

LONG PAUSE.

Just tell them it will all be okay, and they'll believe you because you're the bishop.

So often our job is to put aside our important schedule and egos and show up

and have faith that God can work through us if we will get out of the way.

3. I have to accept the fact that my relationships in the diocese are one way.

I am to pastor the clergy and laity and not have them pastor me

Because as their bishop, it's never equal.

I have had to find other places to be my emotional compost---

I have to deal with my own stuff somewhere else

and that is especially true of my feelings about the clergy.

It's not my job to make them like me or complement me or even agree with me.

It's not my job to make them like what I like,

Or within reason (that means the rubrics) do church the way I want them to—

It's **my** job to hold their stories in a holy stance—and point them to the Savior

It's my job to speak Christ's words of comfort

It's my job to stand by the Paschal Candle and sing the exsultet.

4. Part of our pastoral calling is to bless or curse and we do so with our attention.

I went to a parish for a visitation and preached what I thought was a great sermon.

I was certain people would talk about what a great preacher I was.

But the rector called me and said that her congregation was upset

because I didn't specifically recognize their Foodbank in the sermon.

Or sometimes priests ask me for lunch---

And they just talk about—well, nothing.

I want to know what their agenda is---but then I realize it's about connection.

It's about being blessed.

5. Here's the hard one---Pastoral care is open house.

“You did not choose me, I chose you.”

There are days when I KNOW the Church would be much better off if Jesus would leave the choosing to us.

It has been so difficult to accept that I am the pastor to all the flock.

The ones who misbehave—

The ones who bad mouth me

The ones who sabotage everything the diocese is trying to do.
The Whiners, the slackers, the prima donas
As well as the hard workers, the deep souls, the gentle spirits—
BUT---We pastor them as we model the behavior we expect from them—
And we pastor them because sometimes we are the slackers and the prima donas
And we pastor them because they are the face of Jesus.

And if we are to see Jesus—that's where he will be.

6. I worry about our Church and I worry about me.

I worry that I am becoming too bureaucratic—or too focused on results or my agenda.

My wife says I use my bishop's voice for a few hours when I get home---

As if I believe I have a staff that lives at our house.

"I don't work for you" she says.

Pastoral care reminds us of the fragility of life.

Remember you are dust.

Remember all of this is dust

Remember what matters and what doesn't.

Remember and open your heart.

My first year as a bishop my daughter went on a summer trip to the Caribbean

We used frequent flyer miles to get her there.

So to get home she flew from Miami to Newark and Newark to Asheville

Except that when she got to Newark—the flight was cancelled.

She was 16—it was 8:00 Sunday night and she's stuck in the Newark airport.

I was talking to her on the phone—trying to tell her how to fix this—

But I didn't know how to fix it.

So I said the only logical thing—"Talk to your mother"

While they talked, I tried to think of who I knew in New Jersey.

And the answer was---no one.

And then I remembered—there's a bishop in Newark—

I confess, I didn't remember his name.

I looked him up in the bishop's list---Jack Croneberger.

So I called him--- "Jack, this is your best friend, Porter Taylor"

Long pause. "Oh hi Porter"

I explained about Marie and then said—

"if you could just get a priest or deacon to go to the airport
and take her to a motel and get her settled—I'd be grateful for life."

Longer pause.

"Porter. Tell her that a fat white guy in a white Volvo will be there in 20 minutes."

Amazing Grace how sweet the sound---

I think of Jack Croneberger—

and he makes me want to be a good pastor too.

His example reminds me of who we are as Church—

and of our calling to care for souls—even when it's Sunday night

and you have burdens of your own.

7. Here's the clincher.

The Good Shepherd of all our souls is working on all of us.

Sometimes our daughter is stuck somewhere and we have to ask for help
And sometimes someone calls us to ask for our help.
Even though it's Sunday night—we are tired and have burdens too
We go.

We call this the Church
We call this our ministry.
We call this staying true.