ORDINATION SERMON FOR LUCY AMERMAN
January 5, 2004 – St. Peter's Arlington, VA – Dr. Patrick R. Close

Greetings from New Jersey to the Bishop, people of St. Peter's, family and friends. My name is Pat Close. I am the Rector of Grace Church in Haddonfield. It's a joy to be here with Lucy and you for this wonderful celebration. I am familiar with this area. Twenty years ago I was ordained to the deaconate by Bishop Lee at St. Dunstan's in McLean. A year later I was ordained to the priesthood at St. Timothy's in Herndon. So you see, I know who you people are! We let Lucy get away … but beware … we'll try to get her back!

What a joy it is to be here tonight. It represents another part of Lucy's journey in her faith journey. It is a special night. It's twelfth night! This is the last night of the Christmas season. You do know that Christmas is a season, don't you? Christmas is not just a day … even though our culture thinks it is. Maybe if we can learn to keep Christmas for a season, we can learn to keep it in our hearts all year long.

Ordination on this night feels so appropriate. It is a gift and this is the season of gift giving. In Christmas, we celebrate the gift of God's son, Jesus. The gifts of Jesus and ordination go hand in hand. They become signs of the many gifts that God continues to give us all year long. And who doesn't like a gift?

This is also Twelfth Night, the night before the Feast of the Epiphany. Shakespeare wrote about twelfth night. It is a time for celebration. There are many French and English customs that grew up around twelfth night. One of them is a King's cake, a wonderful surprise that peaks our curiosity. On this night we look forward to the visit of the three wise men, the three kings seeking the newborn king. What do they bring Jesus? They bring gifts! The story of gift giving keeps on going.

There was a song composed in the 16th century that is popular even today about this season. Maybe you know it. It's called "The Twelve Days of Christmas." It was written by religious people during the intense religious wars that ravaged England at this time. It was used by people of faith to convey the teachings of the Christian faith to the children. Hidden in this seemingly simple song were the basics of a catechism. The first line of the song goes; "On the first day of Christmas, my true love gave to me …" "True love" was a way of saying God. The "me" in the song represented every baptized Christian. Each of the "days" denoted an important aspect of the Christian faith. The children could learn and sing this song in public. Most people would only take it for a child's song or pub song. It was much more. It was a gift.

The "Twelve Days of Christmas" is a song for Lucy's ordination. Tonight we celebrate many gifts. We celebrate the gift of God's grace, the gift of ordination, and the gift of relationships. These gifts have the power to transform our lives. Tonight will change your life Lucy. It will change the lives of those you serve. At the center of it all … the song, this night, and your ordination … is our Lord Jesus Christ. So let's sing the song and see what it has to say to you Lucy, and to us.

On the first day of Christmas, my true love gave to me, a partridge in a pear tree. **This first gift speaks about Jesus. We are to remember that he comes first in our life. Lucy, remember to keep your eyes on Jesus Christ. One of the things to remember about partridges is that they are a protective bird. If the nestlings are threatened by a predator, the partridge will feign injury to draw off the threat. Jesus used a similar imagery of himself when he spoke of how he wanted to take Jerusalem (the faithful) under his wings like a hen does its chicks (Luke 13:34). Remember Lucy to care for those entrusted to you. We are called to shelter those in our care. Remember also that it is Jesus Christ who protects us. We are under the shadow of his wings.**

On the second day of Christmas, my true love gave to me, two turtle doves. **The two doves represent the Old and New Testaments. This gift reminds us of the importance of the Bible. Our Holy Scriptures are the story of God's love and self-revelation. Lucy, be grounded in the story of God. Remember how I encouraged you to take all the bible courses you could in seminary? The Bible is the working manual for all clergy. These are the words to guide us in our priesthood. Lucy, be a person of the great story and help others to come to know it.**

On the third day of Christmas, my true love gave to me, three French hens. **The three French hens stand for the three theological virtues. We find them in St. Paul's great hymn to love in the Letter to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 13:13). The three great gifts are faith, hope and love. Lucy, place these virtues at the center of your life. Teach others the importance of these gifts. Be a person of faith in God and our Lord Jesus Christ. They will never fail you. Be a person of hope. Live into the hope that God holds us constantly to us. Be a person of love. Remember that this is the greatest gift and the greatest commandment of Jesus … to love!**

On the fourth day of Christmas, my true love gave to me, four calling birds. **The four calling birds remind us of the four Gospels: Matthew; Mark; Luke; and John. At our baptisms we are encouraged to proclaim to Good News of God in Jesus Christ in word and deed. Lucy, be a preacher, teacher, a celebrant and administer the sacraments. Look at the gift of these writings. Tell and live the story that is written on their pages. Remember that it is your story, and it is our story!**

On the fifth day of Christmas, my true love gave to me, five gold coins. **The five coins stand for the first five books of the Bible. They are known as the Torah, the Law. The Law reminds us of the history of humanity's sinful failures and of God's response … grace! We are reminded that all we have sinned. All of us have fallen short of the glory of God, says St. Paul. Lucy, understand that you will fail in your priesthood. You will disappoint others and they will fail and disappoint you. It's human nature. But remember that we are not to live with regrets or the desire to get even. God's way in response to our sin is to grant us forgiveness. Lucy, learn to forgive. It is a new start for you and the other. Forgiveness is the way that deals with us. It is the way we are called to deal with others.**

On the sixth day of Christmas, my true love gave to me, six geese a-laying. **The six geese speak to us about the six days of creation. We are reminded that God is Creator. We are called to be co-creators with God. Lucy, look for the ways to be creative and a life-giving force in your priesthood. Look for the creative in your life, your ministry, your parish and in the Diocese. Remember that our God is not a god about death and dying. Our God is about life and living. Live Lucy! Help others to live through your priesthood.**

On the seventh day of Christmas, my true love gave to me, seven swans a-swimming. **The swans point us towards the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. Those gifts are: prophecy; ministry; teaching; exhortation; giving; leading; and compassion (Romans 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 12:8-11). Each of us has been given gifts to further the Kingdom of God. Lucy, recognize and use your gifts. Help others to discover and use their gifts. You might try asking yourselves and others three questions: What do you like to do? What do you do best? What will you do for God? These questions might help you to discover the gifts. Don't worry about having all seven of the gifts. Not even bishops have all of them! Realize what your gifts are. Build upon your strengths. Invite others with the other gifts to come together. Build up the Church with your gifts and the gifts of others.**

On the eighth day of Christmas, my true love gave to me, eight maids a-milking. **The eight maids represent the eight Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-10). Jesus said: blessed are the poor in spirit; the mourners; the meek; those seeking righteousness; the merciful; the pure in heart; the peacemakers; and the persecuted. Lucy, let Jesus' words shape your ministry. The priesthood is not about power, control, prestige or status. We are called to seek out and serve those who Jesus reached out to in his earthly life. Our priesthood is laid our before us in the Bible. Remember to follow Christ's example and serve.**

On the ninth day of Christmas, my true love gave to me, nine ladies dancing. **Ah! The gift of dance! The dance here is the nine fruits of the Holy Spirit. These are: love; joy; peace; patience; kindness; generosity; faithfulness; gentleness; and self-control (Galatians 5:22). Lucy, learn to dance … and dance with God! Dance with Jesus! Remember to cultivate these fruits in your priesthood. They will serve you best. Some of these gifts will come as a challenge. Patience has always been a struggle for me! Just seek to make this gifts part of the dance of your ministry.**

On the tenth day of Christmas, my true love gave to me, ten lord's a-leaping. **The gift here is the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17). It was a reminder of the importance of moral codes and rules of conduct in our life. Lucy, you may start here, but remembers that even Jesus summarized the Ten Commandments. He must have been an Episcopalian … because he shortened to just three: love God; love others; and love yourself. There is a balance here that I would encourage you to seek in your priesthood. Don't commit the frequent mistake most common to clergy … we forget to pay attention to self-care. You can't be an effective priest if you don't show others how to lovingly care for yourself as well as for others.**

***On the eleventh day of Christmas, my true love gave to me, eleven pipers piping*. The gift here are the eleven faithful disciples (Luke 6:14-16). They were: Simon Peter; Andrew; James; John; Philip; Bartholomew; Matthew; Thomas; James bar Alphaeus; Simon the Zealot; and Judas bar James. They are a re reminder that ministry is shaped in community and fellowship. Lucy, you are in good company. Remember that you are never alone. Seek out the companionship of colleagues. Resist the temptation to be the "lone ranger." Even Jesus sent out the disciples two by two. We are not meant to do ministry alone.**

On the twelfth day of Christmas, my true love gave to me, twelve drummers drumming.
The last gift mentioned in the song speaks to the twelve points of the Apostle's Creed. It is a statement of faith. We are people of creeds. Lucy, be a priest who speaks about the Christian faith. Use the tradition, but interpret it for today. Speak up for the Church. Acquaint others with what we believe. Help people to develop their faith. The creeds remind us of the gift of faith that comes down to us over the centuries.

Lucy, the "Twelve Days of Christmas" is a song for Christmas and a song for you. Learn to sing a new song as you live into your priesthood. Lucy, please stand. Lucy, my friend, my sister-in-Christ, my colleague ... You are called by God to the ministry of the priesthood. You have been raised up by the Church to serve as one of its priests. Live into this new vocation with a song in your heart and mind. Know that God is ever with you. Know that Jesus Christ leads you. Be a person of prayer, sacraments, faith and love. Be a priest with a song in your heart. Lucy, help others to sing and most important … love them!

Would the congregation of St. Peter's, Lucy's family and friends, and visitors please stand. To you I would say … be the Church. Let the song of God's love live in your lives. Support Lucy in her ministry as a priest. Let her be a priest … not something else. Make sure she will have the support that she will need to be a priest … and love her!

Would Bishop David please stand. Let the song be part of your life. Give Lucy the support and resources she will need to be a priest. Help her to bring the song of God's love into the lives of all that she ministers to as a priest. Thank you.

And remember … remember a song … remember that this is Twelfth night … remember a gift … and celebrate! On the first day of Christmas, my true love gave to me …