

## Speaking the Truth in Love...

-Ephesians 4:15

*A Report to the Congregation*

*Let your continual mercy, O Lord, cleanse and defend your Church; and, because it cannot continue in safety without your help, protect and govern it always by your goodness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

# Speaking the Truth in Love: *A Report to the Congregation*

## *Introduction*

The open recognition in both the House of Bishops and the House of Deputies at General Convention 2006 that “we are two minds within one body” has at long last produced an acknowledgement that there is a crisis in the Episcopal Church. Jesus said, *No...house divided against itself will stand* (Matthew: 12:25). We have already seen this being played out as seven dioceses have disassociated themselves from the Episcopal Church. (See *Addendum One attached*.) What this disassociation means or what it will mean in the future is not clear because there are so many issues yet to be resolved. Whatever it means or will mean, it cannot be denied that the Episcopal Church is in crisis.

On the surface it may appear that the thing which divides us is differences of opinions on human sexuality, specifically homosexuality. People often wonder why we cannot just stop debating about sex and focus on the mission of the church. The fact is human sexuality, as important as it is, is merely the presenting issue. The main issue and the thing that seriously divides us is our understanding of the final and ultimate authority of the Bible. There are those who think the Holy Spirit could be and in fact is leading the church into new doctrinal and moral insights. On the other hand, there are those who think the Holy Spirit will not lead the church into anything that is contrary to what is already written in Scripture.

Some people will think we are making matters worse by drawing attention to the crisis. We do not think so. We believe the Episcopal Church, the Diocese of Alabama and the Cathedral Church of the Advent may have some difficult and important decisions to make in the future. Therefore this report intends to explain fundamental facts on Anglican structure and polity, what Anglicans have traditionally believed about the Bible, and, because “what is past is prologue,” to explain the historical background of the crisis itself. From there we want to think about what kind of church we, seeking the will of God, want to be in the future.



### ***Fundamental facts on Anglican ecclesiastical structure:***

The Advent is one of 92 congregations within the Diocese of Alabama, and the largest. The Advent is also the Cathedral Church of the Diocese of Alabama which puts us in a unique situation. The Diocese of Alabama is one of over 100 dioceses in The Episcopal Church. The ecclesiastical leader of each diocese is the diocesan bishop.

The Episcopal Church is one of 38 “provinces” (national churches) that make up the Anglican Communion. (The Episcopal Church comprises less than 3% of the membership of the Anglican Communion.) Each province has a “head bishop” or Primate also called a Presiding Bishop or an Archbishop. The spiritual leader of the Communion is the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Primate of our mother church, the Church of England.

As its name suggests, “Anglicanism” is the expression of Christianity that derives historically from the Church of England. That church was theologically reformed by Protestantism, but she retained the structures and traditions of historic Christianity (Rome), including the traditional liturgy and “historic episcopate” - i.e., the unbroken line of bishops who were consecrated by bishops tracing their consecrations back to the time of the Apostles.

The spirit and heritage of the English Reformation is expressed in the Thirty-Nine Articles which can be found in the current Book of Common Prayer (page 867ff).

### ***The four “instruments” that maintain unity of the Anglican Communion:***

The four “instruments” that maintain unity of the Anglican Communion are (1) the Archbishop of Canterbury, (2) Lambeth: the decennial meetings of all the Anglican bishops, (3) the Anglican Consultative Council (members from all 38 provinces) who meet every 2 or 3 years and (4) the Primates: the meetings of the Presiding Bishops of each of the provinces.

### ***What Anglicans have traditionally believed about the Bible and about Human Sexuality:***

About the Bible:

There are three possible ways to view the Bible: 1. The Bible is “God’s word to man.” (This, of course, gives it absolute and final authority: The

Word of the Lord will stand forever [Isaiah 40:8]; The Scripture cannot be broken [Matthew 10:35]). 2. The Bible is “man’s word about God.” (This makes it interesting as an historical document about what man thinks about God, but it limits final authority because man is not perfect.) 3. The Bible is both “God’s word to man” and “man’s word about God.” (This throws the entire Bible into question and leaves it up to the “scholars” to tell us the difference.)

Anglicans have traditionally believed the Bible is “God’s word to man.” We “do have a distinctive historic tradition, a reformed commitment to the absolute priority of the Bible...” (Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury). Article VI of the Thirty-Nine Articles attests to this historic tradition. (See *Addendum Two attached*.) All deacons, priests and bishops are asked to “solemnly declare that (they) do believe the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, and to contain all things necessary to salvation” at the time of their ordination.

### ***About Human Sexuality:***

Anglicans traditionally have believed that the Bible is clear about what it teaches about human sexuality and about homosexuality in particular. The Anglican perspective was clearly stated at the last Lambeth conference, 1998, in Resolution 1.10:

This Conference... in view of the teaching of Scripture, upholds faithfulness in marriage between a man and a woman in lifelong union, and believes that abstinence is right for those who are not called to marriage... [and] reject[s] homosexual practice as incompatible with Scripture.

This resolution passed by a vote of 526 to 70.

Of course, Anglicans believe in the absolute commandment for love and inclusion. Christians are called to *speak the truth in love* (Ephesians 4:15). In light of the teaching of Scripture we believe that the task of the church is to reach out in love and compassion to the practicing homosexual without condoning the behavior. We also know there is no sin more consistently condemned by Jesus than the sin of self-righteousness. The Bible teaches us there is no distinction (Romans 3:22), we are all sinners in need of God’s grace and mercy which he has provided through the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ.



## *The Crisis*

It's been a long time coming, but many believe the Episcopal Church as a whole has largely shifted from viewing the Bible as "God's word to man" to viewing it as a combination of both "God's word to man" and "man's word about God." It is not difficult to see how this understanding of Scripture can lead to a revisionist perspective on doctrine that has been founded on the authority of God's word in the Bible.

Perhaps the most dramatic manifestation of this in recent years has been the highly publicized works of John Spong, retired Bishop of Newark, whose writings have rejected most of the core doctrines of the Christian faith. Under his influence, the Assistant Bishop Righter, also of the Diocese of Newark, ordained a practicing homosexual. There was strong reaction against this ordination within the Anglican Communion, and that's what prompted the aforementioned 1998 Lambeth Resolution 1.10.

In 2003, the Diocese of New Hampshire elected as its bishop V. Gene Robinson, a practicing homosexual. The question whether to approve his consecration as a bishop came before the Episcopal Church at its General Convention in 2003. Against the admonishment of the Anglican Communion (see above, "the instruments of Anglican Unity"), and against 2,000 years of Christian teaching, the Episcopal Church, by a decisive majority, defied Lambeth Resolution 1.10 and approved Robinson's consecration. It should be noted here that Henry Parsley, Bishop of Alabama, voted against approving the consecration.

It might prove helpful to contrast all this with the controversy that surrounded women's ordination. The height of this controversy in the Episcopal Church was in the 1970s. At the 1976 General Convention the ordination of women was authorized. In response, the 1978 Lambeth Conference did resolve that those churches that did ordain women and those that did not had an equal place within the Anglican spectrum.

The Anglican Communion's declaration on homosexuality, however, was entirely different. After the 2003 General Convention, the Primates issued a statement asking the Episcopal Church not to proceed because this act would "tear the fabric of our Communion at its deepest level." The Episcopal Church disregarded the warning.

In response to the consecration of Gene Robinson, the Archbishop of Canterbury appointed a commission that issued the Windsor Report

in October 2004. Among other things, the report called on the Episcopal Church to "effect a moratorium on the election and consent to the consecration of any candidate to the episcopate who is living in a same gender union", to "express regret that the proper constraints of the bonds of affection were breached in the events surrounding the election and (the) consecration" and to give a theological explanation of its position "from within the sources of authority that we as Anglicans have received in scripture, the apostolic tradition and reasoned reflection."

In February 2005 the Primates issued their Dromantine Communiqué that endorsed the Windsor Report and asked the Episcopal Church to respond.

The Episcopal Church General Convention this past June was therefore the occasion on which it was to respond to the Windsor Report and the Primate's Communiqué. (*Resolutions passed at General Convention that pertain to the Windsor Report are attached as Addendum Three.*)

There are some, like Bishop Parsley, who believe these resolutions have "voiced our unequivocal commitment to the Anglican Communion." Other church leaders believe the Episcopal Church's response has not gone far enough.

There's one thing for certain. It will be the Anglican Communion alone that will determine if the Episcopal Church has met the demands of the Windsor Report. According to the Archbishop, the Primates of the Anglican Communion will meet early next year to consider the matter. In the interim, a group appointed by the Joint Standing Committee of the Anglican Consultative Council and the Primates will be assisting Dr. Williams in considering the resolutions of the Episcopal Church's General Convention in response to the questions posed by the Windsor Report.

In the meanwhile more than a few bishops in the Episcopal Church have made it clear they will move forward with blessings for same sex relationships. Others, at least seven, have openly dissented from the action of General Convention in Resolution B033. (*See Addendum Four attached.*) Also the election of Katherine Jefferts Schori as the Presiding Bishop seems likely to exacerbate the strain with the Primates and the rest of the Communion inasmuch as she has, since her election, publicly reiterated her support of Gene Robinson's consecration and for same-sex blessings.



### *What's going to happen now and in the future?*

No one knows for certain what the future holds. But God has revealed himself in Holy Scripture to be a sovereign God. He is not waiting around to find out how all of this is going to turn out. He knows. Jesus called the church into being. He is willing and able to lead us into the paths of righteousness. We need to listen to him when he said, *Do not be anxious about tomorrow*. In fact, *Do not fear* is the most common commandment in the Bible.

That doesn't mean we are the "frozen chosen." The Cathedral Church of the Advent is committed to listening to the voice of the Good Shepherd. At a Vestry Meeting, August 17, 2006, the Clergy, Wardens, Vestry and Senior Wardens Emeriti unanimously agreed that we believe God is calling us to seek a relationship with the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Primates of the Communion in a way that is not impaired. We believe this will call for an unequivocal commitment to the Windsor Report and acceptance of all of its recommendations in respect to the crisis we are in.

We further agree that we want to work with and through our standing committee and diocesan bishop who, in a teaching that he provided to the Diocesan Convention in February 2005, has expressed his belief that "we must uphold the received teaching of the church, as articulated by the Lambeth 1998 report." We are thankful for his words and want to encourage him to remain steadfast in this teaching and determined that the Diocese of Alabama remain a full, unimpaired constituent member of the Anglican Communion, being in Fellowship within the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church in communion with the See of Canterbury, and upholding and propagating the Historic Faith and Order.

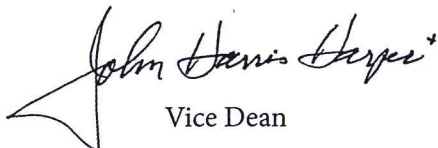
The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, be with us all evermore. Amen.

Respectfully submitted,

The Clergy and the Wardens on behalf of the  
Vestry of the Cathedral Church of the Advent



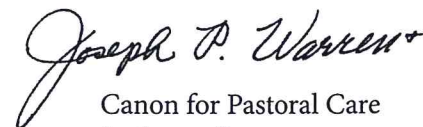
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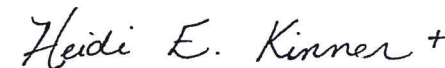
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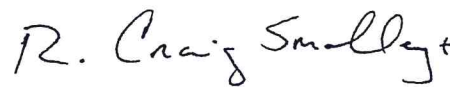
Canon for Pastoral Care  
& Counseling



Junior Warden



Canon Missioner



Canon for Christian Education

### *Dean's Conclusion*

I feel a need to close on a pastoral note and repeat some things I've said before but simply cannot overemphasize.

Whatever path the Lord leads us down, the Cathedral Church of the Advent will continue to preach and teach the gospel of Jesus Christ. Additionally, the Cathedral Church of the Advent stands under the commandment of love and welcomes everyone. The gospel is radically inclusive. Jesus said, *Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out* (John 6:37). Jesus never rejected anyone; but he didn't condone their way of life. He never touched a soul he didn't change.

No person should feel rejected at the Cathedral Church of the Advent. We have members of the Advent who are gay. Any kind of homophobia will not be tolerated by any person on this staff. No person is better than the other. Just before Holy Communion we all pray, *We are not worthy enough to gather up the crumbs under thy table*. We pray that together, as one body.

At the core, this crisis is not about human sexuality. At the most important and crucial level this crisis is theological, it's about the authority of the Bible, it's about what it means to be an Apostolic Church.

We are committed to preserving the Advent's theological integrity for future generations. We will not be a part of revision to traditional Christian teaching; we will *contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints* (Jude 3).

I believe in and through this crisis, we will emerge a better and stronger church. Painful though it may be, Jesus tells us his Father prunes us that we may bear more fruit (John 15:2). I ask that you pray daily for God's guidance and continued blessings on our church, remembering always his words: *Have no fear*.

## Addendum One

Central Florida, Dallas, Fort Worth, Pittsburgh  
San Joaquin, South Carolina, Springfield

## **Addendum Two**

### **VI. Of the Sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures for Salvation.**

Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation. In the name of the Holy Scripture we do understand those canonical Books of the Old and New Testament, of whose authority was never any doubt in the Church.

## **Addendum Three**

### **Resolutions of General Convention 2006:**

A160

Resolved, That the 75th General Convention of The Episcopal Church, mindful of “the repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation enjoined on us by Christ” (Windsor Report, paragraph 134), express its regret for straining the bonds of affection in the events surrounding the General Convention of 2003 and the consequences which followed; offer its sincerest apology to those within our Anglican Communion who are offended by our failure to accord sufficient importance to the impact of our actions on our church and other parts of the Communion; and ask forgiveness as we seek to live into deeper levels of communion one with another.

B033

Resolved, That the 75th General Convention receive and embrace The Windsor Report’s invitation to engage in a process of healing and reconciliation; and be it further

Resolved, That this Convention therefore call upon Standing Committees and bishops with jurisdiction to exercise restraint by not consenting to the consecration of any candidate to the episcopate whose manner of life presents a challenge to the wider church and will lead to further strains on communion.

## **Addendum Four**

Chicago, Newark, Northern Michigan, Rochester,  
Vermont, Washington, Wyoming





*Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.*  
-John 6:37