

The Anglican River
By
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Our church is facing a great crisis this year. In June there will be a meeting of the General Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church of the United States of America. This general convention is facing decisions that will cause disappointment and distress no matter what is decided. After this convention it is very possible that the Episcopal Church, our church, will no longer be part of the Anglican Communion.

I have created this teaching tool in order to explain as simply as I can why this might happen and provide us a framework for discussing our response to the decisions facing the National Convention. It is well known that the Greek word “crisis” translates “opportunity” in English. The crisis we are facing has presented us with an opportunity to more clearly articulate what it means to be an Anglican and why it matters. I hope you find this teaching useful.

One Very Important Thing

This is a very painful time in our church. It is especially painful for all who are in a same sex relationship or who are attracted to members of the same sex. We are all brothers and sisters in Christ, and it is vital that we remember this. Many of our Brothers and Sisters will be feeling an unwelcome spotlight on their pews as we are forced to discuss the issues before us.

At every level of the Anglican Communion, and at every step, it has been affirmed over and over that we are to welcome and love all who come into our community regardless of sexual orientation. In February of 2005, the Primates of the Anglican Communion put it this way:

We also wish to make it quite clear that in our discussion and assessment of the moral appropriateness of specific human behaviours, we continue unreservedly to be committed to the pastoral support and care of homosexual people. The victimisation or diminishment of human beings whose affections happen to be ordered towards people of the same sex is anathema to us. We assure homosexual people that they are children of God, loved and valued by him, and deserving of the best we can give of pastoral care and friendship.

Every time we renew our Baptismal Covenant we promise to “respect the dignity of every human being.” I invite you to enter into this conversation remembering that the ground at the foot of the cross is level. Jesus died for every one of us. None is worthier than another, and none is more deserving of grace. I pray that we will all have the grace to treat each other with love and respect as we discuss the questions before us.

When Simon Peter saw that Jesus was holy he fell on his knees and cried out “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!” (Luke 5:8). We are all companions in this earthly pilgrimage. I pray that we may all speak out of such a humble spirit, holding in remembrance our own need for God’s redeeming love.

I hope to make clear that this great crisis within our Anglican Communion is not primarily about sex. It is about the role of Scripture and the nature of our Anglican Communion. It is about a flood.

A River

Anglicanism is like a great river. Indeed it is one of the great rivers of the world. With over 77 million members in 164 countries, the Anglican Communion is international, vibrant, and rapidly growing. Our Episcopal Church makes up about 2.4 million members.

In a river, there are many streams of water. Some water moves slowly, some moves fast. Some is shallow and some runs deep. Sometimes the water falls and sometimes it even runs backwards. In a great river there is a lot going on, and within the Anglican Communion there is tremendous room for diversity.

Now what makes a river a river are its banks. As long as the water stays within the banks, it is part of the river. Sometimes Anglicanism is accused of having so much tolerance of diversity that we cannot stand for anything! This is not the case. The banks of any river have to be firm or else the river becomes a swamp. Some perceive our tolerance as weakness, but it is, in fact, a great strength.

In 2003 we had a flood. When the General Convention approved the ordination of the Rev. Gene Robinson, a man in a committed same sex relationship, as a bishop and approved the blessing of same sex relationships within the church, it flooded both banks of the Anglican River. The national and international response was immediate and passionate. Floods cause that kind of response.

Now the majority of the Anglican Communion has said to the Episcopal Church, come back into the river, because you can only be part of the river by staying with the banks.

What Banks?

What are those banks? What really unites us as Anglican Christians?

It’s not our music. Some of us like to worship with 18th century organ music. Some prefer traditional plainsong. Some of us love to worship God with contemporary music. And some of us couldn’t sing if the salvation of our souls depended on it. So it’s not our music.

It's not the way we worship either. Some of us like High Church worship with smells and bells; others don't like to see candles on the Altar. Some of us prefer rite 1, others prefer rite 2, and yet others prefer the 1928 Prayer Book. The Liturgical Renewal movement has so impacted liturgical churches that today it is very difficult to tell if you are in a Roman Catholic, Lutheran, or Episcopal Church. So it is not our style of worship that unites us as Anglican Christians.

Of course, our belief in Jesus Christ unites us as Christians, and it is important to remember that everyone involved in this year's General Convention are our brothers and sisters in Christ.

What makes us Anglican Christians is a desire and willingness to abide in the waters of Anglicanism. So what are the banks that keep us together in our glorious diversity?

Established during the Reformation

The banks of our great river were established during the English Reformation. They are easily described and really are the genius of Anglicanism. They address two important and fundamental questions that were critical to the reformers and remain critical to us today. "How do we order ourselves?" that is our peculiar understanding of authority and structure which describes our polity; and "How do we discern God's Will?" to which we answer "Scripture, Reason, and Tradition." So let's call one bank of our river "Polity" and other "Scripture, Reason, and Tradition".

The character or personality of any denomination becomes quite clear when examined through these two questions. The answer a denomination gives to them describes the uniqueness of the denomination. I suggest to you that it is this common approach to Christian living that makes Anglican Christians comfortable with each other even in the midst of disagreements. I think it also explains the worldwide passionate response to the decisions that the General Convention made in 2003. In 2003 we had a flood! The ECUSA went over both banks of the river. To most of the rest of the Anglican Communion it was experienced as a violation of the very character of Anglican Christianity.

In a little while I am going to describe each of these banks in significant detail and with the present crisis in mind, but first I would like to take a few minutes and describe one of the key motivators of the reformation.

Reformers like Change!

The English Reformers, like their European counterparts, desired change. They longed for it. In the face of a closed system that was not open to the possibility of the development of new dogma, the English reformers developed a new church that allows innovations to arise. Healthy Christian churches throughout history have sought to deepen their understanding of God's will and call on their lives. One fruit of this journey is the development of new doctrine and the improvement of old.

Queen Elizabeth desired that the new church encompass as many of her subjects as possible. The reformers desired a church that was open to development. The result was that in England the Reformation avoided creating highly defined faith statements as did some of their European counterparts; instead they created the 39 Articles, that among other things set out the parameters wherein innovation could authentically occur. In effect, the 39 Articles began describing the banks of our Anglican River.

The other bank of our River, “Polity”, was also shaped by the 39 Articles and also has to do with openness to theological development. Let us begin there.

Anglican Polity

Anglican polity is not so much a system of governance as it is a style of living together in fellowship and love. When we focus on rights we quickly lose sight of the life we have in common. We are a community that spans the world, not an international system of governance. We are a fellowship. Three important concepts form the foundation for our Anglican understanding of Polity. They are “shared authority”, “local autonomy”, and “voluntary submission”. We work well together when these three concepts remain in balance.

At the time of the English Reformation, the monarchy together with the clerical reformers rejected the hierarchical model of authority within the Roman Catholic Church. They rejected a top down style of governance that was unwilling to accept feedback or allow reformation of dogma to occur. Lay people were included in the governance of the church. This was clearly evident in the passage of the 39 Articles by Parliament. Over time, national and international structures developed that reflect this shared authority.

Along with the concept of shared authority went the understanding of a level of local autonomy. Once elected, consecrated and installed, an Anglican or Episcopal Bishop enjoys considerable freedom within his or her diocese. That is to say that no other bishop may tell a diocesan bishop what to do or not do within his or her diocese. Similarly diocesan bishops are limited in what they can tell rectors of parishes what they can and cannot do in their parishes.

Balancing this autonomy is the voluntary submission to the moral authority of the larger community. Essentially this is the practice of Christian love on an institutional level. Rectors respectfully attend to the advice of their bishops. Bishops and their diocese respectfully live within the doctrine and discipline of the national church. National Churches respectfully live within the doctrine and discipline of the wider Anglican Communion. Everyone stays within the banks of the river. So it is then that the Archbishop of Canterbury has very little formal authority, but a great deal of influence.

The great advantage of this style of life together is that it encourages innovation in the face of local challenges, and in the best of cases promotes synergy in the midst of challenging circumstances. The great disadvantage is that it relies on what is called “the bonds of affection”, the voluntary willingness to submit in love to the larger community.

Anglicans throughout history have placed a high value on self governance, but self governance is not the same thing as autonomy. This issue of self governance vs. autonomy is not a new discussion item within the Anglican Communion. It regularly comes up as local parishes, diocese, and the national church face issues that concern the larger community. The Lambeth Conference in 1920 discussed this question and had this to say:

“The Churches represented in [the Communion] are indeed independent, but independent with the Christian freedom which recognises the restraints of truth and love. They are not free to deny the truth. They are not free to ignore the fellowship.”

We are, however, free to discuss our beliefs and reform them after sufficient prayer, discernment and discussion.

Another recent development of Anglican doctrine shows how the rest of the Anglican Communion might be consulted. Let me quote at length from the Windsor Report.

“The story of ordination of women to the priesthood and episcopate provides us with a recent example of mutual discernment and decision-making within the Anglican Communion.

“The background to the story was a period of debate and disagreement both before and after the ordination to the priesthood of Florence Li Tim-Oi in 1944. The story gathered pace in 1968, when the Diocese of Hong Kong & Macao brought the question of women's ordination to the priesthood to the Lambeth Conference. The Conference was not ready to respond because, as it stated in Resolution 34, “The Conference affirms its opinion that the theological arguments as at present presented for and against the ordination of women to the priesthood are inconclusive”. The Conference recommended that before any regional or national church or province made a final decision to ordain women to the priesthood they should consider carefully the advice of the Anglican Consultative Council.

“The Bishop of Hong Kong & Macao sought out the advice of the Anglican Consultative Council at its first meeting (in Limuru, Kenya) in 1970. After lengthy debate the Anglican Consultative Council advised the Bishop of Hong Kong & Macao that if, with the approval of his Synod, he were to proceed to the ordination of a woman his action would be acceptable to the Council, and that the Council would use its good offices to encourage all provinces of the Communion to continue in communion with that Diocese. The resolution passed (for: 24; against: 22).

“What needs to be noted is that Hong Kong did not understand itself to be so autonomous that it might proceed without bringing the matter to the Anglican Consultative Council as requested by the Lambeth Conference 1968. Furthermore, action was only taken with the co-operation of the Instruments of Unity

“The 1978 Lambeth Conference addressed a situation where Hong Kong, Canada, the United States and New Zealand had all ordained women to the priesthood and eight other provinces had accepted the ordination of women in principle. In response, the Conference passed Resolution 21: Women in the Priesthood, which in part stated, “The Conference also recognizes (3a) the autonomy of each of its member Churches, acknowledging the legal right of each Church to make its own decision about the appropriateness of admitting women to Holy Orders”. The Resolution also noted that such provincial action “has consequences of the utmost significance for the Anglican Communion as a whole”, and that “The Conference affirms its commitment to the preservation of unity within and between all member Churches of the Anglican Communion”. This resolution passed with 316 for, 37 against, and 17 abstentions.”

Today many people within the Anglican Communion still disagree with the ordination of Women, *and* agree that this development of doctrine is well within the river. The unity of the Anglican Communion does not require that we all agree on every matter of doctrine; but it does require that a majority of the communion does agree on the legitimacy of every new teaching.

Since the publication of the Windsor Report it has become clearer that there are four instruments of unity where the acceptability of new doctrines may be discerned. They are The Archbishop of Canterbury, The Lambeth Conference (the once every ten years gathering of Anglican Bishops from around the world), The Primates Meetings (the typically annual gathering of all the Primates or Presiding Bishops from around the world) and the Anglican Consultative Council (this group of laity, clergy, and bishops meets occasionally and not less than every three years). The Archbishop of Canterbury chairs and convenes all of the instruments of unity.

In 2003, the National General Convention chose to act in defiance of the Anglican Communion. The bonds of affection were sundered by ignoring the Anglican Communion and deciding to enact a new doctrine . It was well understood in 2003 that the great majority of the Anglican Communion was opposed to the blessing of same sex unions and opposed to the consecration of a non celibate gay priest as a bishop. Indeed, the Lambeth Conference made this very clear in 1998 with the passage of resolution 1.10 that says in part “This Conference ...cannot advise the legitimising or blessing of same sex unions nor ordaining those involved in same gender unions;”

In 2003 ECUSA enacted a new doctrine that the rest of the Anglican Communion was opposed to.

One bank was flooded.

Let's consider now the other bank of our river "Scripture, Reason, and Tradition".

Scripture, Reason, and Tradition.

How do we discern God's will for us? How can we be confident that any action is pleasing to the Lord? These are questions that everyone who seeks to be a faithful Christian must answer. They are the questions that lay at the heart of the Reformation.

The reformers rejected the then current church's teaching that the Pope was the final arbiter of God's will on earth. Instead they turned to scripture and argued that the Bible was the sole authoritative voice declaring God's will for His people. English reformers took a more nuanced approach. While upholding the centrality of scripture, they held that Jesus Christ is the ultimate authority and taught that Scripture was the best witness to our Lord's teaching and God's will. They also believed that the early church, particularly of the first few centuries bore witness to Jesus' person and ministry.

The English reformers upheld the importance of reason in reading scripture. They understood how easy it is to bend scripture to our own ends, through either a simplistic literalism or a convenient interpretation. When I say reason what I mean is the honest and courageous use of our best intellect to penetrate the deepest meaning and purpose of scripture. Reason in the slogan "Scripture, Reason, and Tradition" does not refer to the use of argument outside of the biblical witness as in "what I think is reasonable". Scripture is still foundational. Reason ensures that we will read and interpret it as well as we possibly can. Tradition then refers to the witness of all who have gone before us and particularly early Christians.

This approach to Scripture finds expression in the 39 Articles. Whatever we think about the 39 Articles we must acknowledge that they accurately represent the basic thinking of the English Reformation. Today some view the 39 articles as an historic relic, a set of statements that represents the reformation church but which we have outgrown in this modern age. Others, like me, look at the passage of the 39 Articles as the intentional setting of Anglicanism's DNA. The 39 articles contain the distilled wisdom and teaching of the Reformers. Their legacy is found in the 77 million Anglicans found around the world today.

The 39 Articles were passed by the British Parliament in 1571. In some instances the Articles establish clear doctrine. Consider Article 4:

IV. Of the Resurrection of Christ

Christ did truly rise again from death, and took again his body, with flesh, bones, and all things appertaining to the perfection of

Man's nature; wherewith he ascended into Heaven, and there sitteth, until he return to judge all Men at the last day.

Some revisionist Episcopalians who do not believe in Jesus' physical resurrection are well served by relegating the Articles to a place of historic curiosity.

Some of the Articles establish clear doctrine while others establish boundaries on what may be taught. Three of these articles are of special interest to us at this time as they deal with the place of scripture.

Article 6 reads:

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.

Article 20 reads:

XX. Of the Authority of the Church

The Church hath power to decree Rites or Ceremonies, and authority- in Controversies of Faith: And yet it is not lawful for the Church to ordain any thing that is contrary to God's Word written, neither may it so expound one place of Scripture, that it be repugnant to another. Wherefore, although the Church be a witness and a keeper of Holy Writ, as it ought not to decree any thing against the same, so besides the same ought it not to enforce any thing to be believed for necessity of Salvation.

Article 6 tells us that Holy Scripture contains all that is necessary for Salvation, and Article 20 tells us that we may not teach anything that is contrary to scripture. These two articles set limits on our use of Holy Scripture. Article 34 expresses the freedom to pursue diversity within these limits. In part we read:

XXXIV. Of the Traditions of the Church

It is not necessary that Traditions and Ceremonies be in all places one, and utterly like; for at all times they have been divers, and may be changed according to the diversities of countries, times, and men's manners, so that nothing be ordained against God's Word...

Even' particular or national Church hath authority to ordain, change, and abolish, ceremonies or rites of the Church

ordained only by man's authority, so that all things be done to edifying.

We have liberty in the way we choose to worship, provided we do not worship in a way that is contrary to Holy Scripture.

How do Anglicans discern God's will? We prayerfully apply our best intellectual efforts to the study of Holy Scripture and listening to the wisdom of all who have gone before us. So that is why we call the second bank of our river "Scripture, Reason, and Tradition".

In 2003 this bank of the river was flooded when the General Convention approved the blessing of same sex unions before reaching a consensus on the basis of "Scripture, Reason, and Tradition". The lack of this basis was well known by the membership of the 2003 General Convention. The House of Bishops issued a report entitled "Report of the Theology Committee of the House of Bishops of the Episcopal Church" on March 18th 2003. In part this report said:

[6.5] Liturgy provides cohesion for the Anglican Communion, and it is through our liturgies that we define what we most deeply believe as Christians. Because at this time we are nowhere near consensus in the Church regarding the blessing of homosexual relationships, we cannot recommend authorizing the development of new rites for such blessings.

Our liturgies express our beliefs. Worship expresses our theology in prayer, praise, and sacrament. In 2003 our General Convention approved new worship knowing that we were "nowhere near consensus" regarding the biblical or theological grounds for these services within the Anglican Communion or even within the Episcopal Church.

The consecration of The Rev. Gene Robinson as a bishop was similarly problematic. Within Anglicanism, a bishop is more than the chief pastor of a diocese. A bishop is a sign of the unity of a diocese within itself and a sign of the unity of the diocese to the larger church. Anglican bishops are symbols of our Anglican Communion. Let me read again from the Windsor Report:

127. The Communion has also made its collective position clear on the issue of ordaining those who are involved in same gender unions; (Lambeth Conference 1998, resolution 1.10) and this has been reiterated by the primates through their endorsement of the 1998 Lambeth Conference resolution.(16 October 2003) By electing and confirming such a candidate in the face of the concerns expressed by the wider Communion, the Episcopal Church (USA) has caused deep offence to many faithful Anglican

Christians both in its own church and in other parts of the Communion.

Recap

Let's recap. The Anglican Communion is like a great river. Like all rivers, it has two banks. One bank describes the way we discern God's will, and the other describes our peculiar understanding of authority and structure. The General Convention of 2003 (GC2003) chose to forsake interdependence and act independently of the rest of the communion. We had a flood.

These independent actions shocked many Episcopalians. It was shocking in its departure from an historic willingness to seek first the unity of the church and live within the wisdom of the wider communion. This spirit is expressed in our Prayer Book in many places. In the preface written in 1789 we see the strong desire to remain in unity with the Church in England as we read "...this Church is far from intending to depart from the Church of England in any essential point of doctrine, discipline, or worship; or further than local circumstances require." (page 11) In 1886 the House of Bishops adopted the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral. Although the quadrilateral was not adopted by the General Convention of 1888, it is of such significance and stature that it is included in our Prayer Book as one of the Historical Documents of the Church. (Page 876-877) The Quadrilateral expresses the desire of the church to seek the unity of the church. Let me read to you paragraphs 1 and 3:

1. Our earnest desire that the Saviour's prayer, "That we all may be one," may, in its deepest and truest sense, be speedily fulfilled;
3. That in all things of human ordering or human choice, relating to modes of worship and discipline, or to traditional customs, this Church is ready in the spirit of love and humility to forgo all preferences of her own;

In 2003 The General Convention made decisions that went against the expressed mind of the Anglican Communion and in doing so acted independently of the wider communion and independently of our own customs and historic attitudes. In acting independently we caused harm to the unity of the church. General Convention in 2006 must now decide whether The Episcopal Church will remain in the Anglican Communion. Will we remain in the river or become a creek?

Before The Flood

Bad weather typically precedes a flood. The flood of GC2003 is no exception. Understanding the conditions that gave rise to this situation allows us to evaluate the possibility of positive change within the Episcopal Church.

In the early 20th century virtually every American denomination, including our own, engaged in social outreach and soul outreach. During the World Wars a divergence

began to appear which accelerated in the 1950's and 1960's. What we now call the Evangelical Churches let go of social outreach and the Mainline Churches let go of soul outreach. They set about to introduce people to a relationship with God in Jesus Christ and we set about building food banks, hospitals, shelters, and soup kitchens.

In the 1950's it was easy to believe that Evangelism (soul outreach) should be a low priority. Most of the communities in which we had churches had populations that seemed thoroughly churched. It was a grand time. So in love we organized ourselves for ministry away from our congregations. We built up a large National Church structure and asked our Presiding Bishop to be a full time Presiding Bishop (prior to this the Presiding Bishop had remained bishop of his diocese). Ironically, or perhaps precipitously, we did this at the very time that membership began to decline.

We accomplished many wonderful and life giving things over the years. People's lives were touched and genuine help given. We can be proud of this. At the same time a sense of unease began to grow (as our membership declined), accelerated into the 1980's and manifested in the Lambeth Conference of 1988 which declared the 1990's "the Decade of Evangelism". I expect that every diocese in North America introduced some sort of program of Evangelism during the 1990's.

At the same time as our understanding of the church's mission was becoming primarily focused on Social Outreach to the detriment of Soul Outreach, a crisis of confidence regarding the authority of scripture was occurring. In the early part of the twentieth century it became popular to "demythologize" scripture. Proponents of this position argued that Jesus didn't really do any miracles and didn't physically rise from the dead. These stories are metaphors that carry great truth for us but that do not need to be taken at face value. In the late 20th century this school of thought achieved a high degree of press in the writing of the "Jesus Seminar".

Within the Episcopal Church today there is a wide range of positions held by Clergy regarding the person of Jesus Christ. Some, like me, believe the gospels are accurate historical records. Others believe the gospels to be highly edited documents primarily designed to serve a missionary movement that no longer reflected Jesus' core teachings. At the extreme end of this position is a view of Jesus as a wandering Rabbi who happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time and got killed by the Romans.

The crisis of confidence in the authority of scripture and the corresponding emphasis on social outreach that accelerated in the 1950's and 1960's (and still informs the basic understanding of mission within the Episcopal Church today) provides the back drop for GC2003. Simply put, the perceived issue of social justice outweighed the authority of scripture at GC2003.

The bad weather that led to this flood began to be noticed in the 1960's when Bp Pike made the front cover of Time magazine for denying the divinity of Jesus Christ and the Trinity, as well as other portions of our creeds. While the House of Bishops denounced

these statements as “offensive and irresponsible”, they did not bring him up on charges of heresy as they might have.

The decisions of GC2003 reflect the logical development of a trend away from the authority of scripture and to the centrality of social justice that began in the mid 20th century. We are very clearly now at a tipping point between the two. This June GC2006 will have to choose.

After The Flood

It is impossible to know what will happen in June at the General Convention. We do know that the continued membership of The Episcopal Church in the Anglican Communion is very much at stake. The events since GC2003 have made this very clear. Let's take a brief look at some of these critical events.

October 16, 2003 Emergency Meeting of Primates of Anglican Communion produces a unanimous statement that the consecration of Gene Robinson as Bishop would “tear the fabric of the Communion at its deepest level.” The Rt. Rev. Griswold, our presiding Bishop signs. The Archbishop of Canterbury commissions the Windsor Report

November 2, 2003 Consecration of Gene Robinson as Bishop. Bp. Griswold presides. Many Anglican Primates express sense of sorrow and betrayal that Bp. Griswold signed a unanimous statement in October and act against it in November.

October 18, 2004 Windsor Report Released. This is an incredibly important document that will affect the development of the Anglican Communion for years to come. It sets out some principles of what it means to be a Communion and makes recommendations for dealing with the immediate issues and for the development of a more formal understanding of membership in the Communion.

In this report the Episcopal Church is called on to not consecrate any Bp who is in a same sex relationship until such time as a consensus within the rest of the Communion exists. It also calls for the cessation of the blessings of same sex unions until such time as a consensus within the rest of the Communion exists. It also calls on the Episcopal Church to express its regret for breaching the “constraints of the bonds of affection”, and states that such an expression of regret would be understood as a statement of desire on the part of ECUSA to remain in the Anglican Communion.

February 2005, Primates meet at Dromantine, Northern Ireland. Their principle work was to respond to the Windsor Report. Among other things they said

14. Within the ambit of the issues discussed in the Windsor Report and in order to recognise the integrity of all parties, we request that the Episcopal Church (USA) and the Anglican Church of Canada voluntarily withdraw their members from the Anglican Consultative Council for the period leading up to the next Lambeth Conference. During that same period we request that both churches respond through their relevant constitutional

bodies to the questions specifically addressed to them in the Windsor Report as they consider their place within the Anglican Communion.

They further called on The Anglican Consultative Council (ACC) to meet in June 2005 so that representatives of ECUSA and the Anglican Church of Canada “may have an opportunity to set out the thinking behind the recent actions of their Provinces...”

At first glance a “voluntary withdrawal” does not seem a serious sanction. In fact the constitution and bylaws of the ACC do not currently provide for the removal of a member. Any removal at this time has to be voluntary. In response to the present crisis, the ACC is now considering changes to itself to allow for the removal of members.

March 15, 2005. The Episcopal House of Bishops meets and enacts a moratorium on all Episcopal Consecrations. Not only will no one in a same sex relationship be consecrated a bishop, no bishop will be consecrated until after the 2006 General Convention has the opportunity to respond to the Windsor Report and subsequent developments.

The House of Bishops also issues a statement wherein they say

We express our own deep regret for the pain that others have experienced with respect to our actions at the General Convention of 2003 and we offer our sincerest apology and repentance for having breached our bonds of affection by any failure to consult adequately with our Anglican partners before taking those actions.

This expression of regret is widely criticized as falling short of the regret called for in the Windsor Report. The House of Bishops were of the mind that only the General Convention could adequately respond to the Windsor Report, that they as a House of Bishops did not have the authority.

June 22, 2005 Anglican Consultative Council listens to representatives from Episcopal Church and then votes to affirm the position advocated by the Primates asking for the voluntary withdrawal from membership in the Anglican Consultative Council, one of the four instruments of unity in the Anglican Communion. The vote passes narrowly with 30 in favor, 28 opposed, and 4 abstaining.

June 23, 2005 the ACC passed a motion changing its membership to include all of the Anglican Primates as ex-officio members. This change reflects the growing significance of the ACC in light of the Windsor report.

March 15, 2006 Episcopal House of Bishops is addressed by Bp. Michael Langrish of Exeter. Bp. Langrish was representing the Archbishop of Canterbury at the meeting of the Episcopal House of Bishops. Among his many comments, two stand out

“someone here, in the context of great warmth and friendship, said to me: I do regret I caused you pain; but I cannot regret that I voted for something that brought so much hope and joy.’ My response was ‘I

don't want you to do either'.

”It's something different from regret that is at stake here. As you probably know, in our response to the Windsor Report the English House of Bishops sought to strengthen the language of repentance, which we believed to be more appropriate than regret. Now as we have seen so often this week language can so easily be misunderstood and divide. So let me be clear, we were not seeing repentance in punitive or scapegoating terms; rather as something much more clinical and precise -- that seeing of an action or behaviour in a new light, the light of new circumstances under God, understanding it afresh and changing behaviour accordingly, not out of fear but out of love.”

And

“it does seem to me, as I listen to those other parts of the Communion that I know best, that any further consecration of those in a same sex relationship; any authorisation of any person to undertake same sex blessings; any stated intention not to seriously engage with The Windsor Report -- will be read very widely as a declaration not to stay with the Communion”

May 6th, 2006 The Diocese of California met to elect a new Bishop. Three of the seven candidates are in committed same sex relationships. The Rt. Rev. Mark Andrus, a heterosexual married suffragan bishop was elected. This was widely received as a positive development as it allows the National Convention to respond to the Windsor Report without the added complication the election of a bishop in a same sex relationship represented.

June 13- 21, 2006 General Convention Meets in Columbus Ohio. The main item of business of this General Convention is our continued membership in the Anglican Communion. Also at stake is the unity of the Episcopal Church as parishes and dioceses across the country weigh their commitments to Anglicanism. A wide split in the church following the National Convention is a real possibility if the Convention does not voluntarily submit to the moral authority of the Anglican Communion. The Windsor Report calls for a significant expression of regret, the cessation of public blessings of same sex relationships, and that no other persons in same sex relationships be consecrated a bishop. Anything short of this may not be sufficient. The motions currently being proposed likely fall short of what is needed. They will hopefully be amended and strengthened during the convention.

Three Possible Responses for St. Edward's

There are many possible responses to the current crisis that the church is facing. I would like to describe three.

First, we can choose to do nothing. We can let the General Convention decide whatever they will decide and seek to happily live together into the future. This option is only realistic if the General Convention fully embraces the Windsor Report in June. Following the 2003 General Convention we experienced tremendous turmoil within our parish. We lost several households who felt they could no longer be associated with the Episcopal Church. Many more remained undecided for over a year.

St. Edward's has always been a biblically orthodox church. Many of our members are passionate both about remaining Anglican and remaining centered upon the authority of scripture. This does not describe everyone at St. Edwards. We are a diverse group. I suspect many members of St. Edward's think of themselves principally as members of St. Edward's rather than Episcopalian or Anglican. Some, a few in my estimation, embrace the direction of the General Convention as a positive development and are unconcerned about remaining in the Anglican Communion.

Doing nothing is a risky proposition at best, and a betrayal of who we are at worst. I think a more proactive decision is called for.

Second, at the other end of the spectrum of options, is leaving the Episcopal Church entirely. We could join with those parishes that have already chosen to disassociate with the General Convention. This is a very serious step and would need careful discussion and preparation. While I respect the decisions of those congregations that have taken this step, I find myself wondering if this is the responsible course for us to take before knowing the outcome of June's General Convention and the ensuing response of the Anglican Communion.

The Third option I see is to take a proactive public position that expresses our commitment to remaining within the Anglican Communion without leaving the Episcopal Church. Two organizations already exist that we could join. The first is called the Anglican Communion Network (ACN). It is an organization of parishes and diocese that are committed to remaining part of the Anglican Communion. The second is an advocacy group of Episcopalians that are committed to remaining within and reforming the Episcopal Church: American Anglican Council (AAC). Their goal is "to uphold Biblical orthodoxy in the Episcopal Church and in Anglicanism in North America and worldwide". Joining one or both of these organizations in May of this year would send a clear message to our Diocese and to our delegates to the General Convention.

Over the past several months I have met some clergy who are members of both the ACN and the AAC and am very comfortable with them. .

We have always been a biblically orthodox church. Joining the ACN and possibly the AAC would signal our commitment to remaining Anglican, and hopefully remaining Episcopalian. I say hopefully as no one knows what will happen in June and following.