



Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

"I have set the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken." Psalm 16:8

Thursday evening Allison and I returned to Charleston. We were on vacation with family in California when the South Carolina Supreme Court issued the long awaited ruling. Obviously, it was not the favorable ruling we were seeking. Therefore, we returned home as soon as possible. Frankly, it is a grievous decision for us on so many levels. Perhaps you, as do I, have to fight despondency as I consider its many ramifications for us as a diocese, and especially for our congregations and clergy. For make no mistake—if this ruling stands how we carry out God's mission and the ministries he has given us will dramatically change. You may already have received from previous diocesan communications, the diocesan website or from local news, the gist of the court's conflicted 77-page opinion. Therefore, I will not rehearse it here. My purpose is more personal.

Today, thousands of Christians around the world are holding you, the congregations of the diocese, as well as our clergy and bishop in prayer. Even more specifically, yesterday Anglicans on this continent were lifting us in constant prayer. As you may know, we recently voted as a diocese to affiliate with the Anglican Church in North America, and this summer their Provincial Assembly joyfully received us as full members therein. What a comfort it is to know that our Archbishop, the Most Reverend Foley Beach, asked the bishops, clergy and laity of the ACNA to pray and fast yesterday on our behalf.

Many of those praying and fasting have in the past walked away from their church buildings, buildings they built and maintained, and in some cases, where their families worshiped for centuries. Some left by choice; others after years of litigation. I do not mention the latter, however, as if the legal issues in our case are fully resolved. They most certainly are not, though they are clearly challenging. Rather, I want you to know the sort of Christians who are praying for us; and while holding us in prayer, many are fasting. They have paid a price to follow their Lord. We are part of a provincial body of Anglican Christians and they are walking this hard road with us. Their fellowship at such a time is greatly comforting to me and I hope it is for you.

I also want to tell you what our next steps are. First, this Monday, August 7, the Standing Committee and I will meet with our lead legal counsel, Mr. Alan Runyan. I assure you that our legal team is looking at the various options before us. Second, this Wednesday I will meet with the deans of the various diocesan deaneries, and that afternoon, Mr. Runyan, Canon Lewis and I will meet with all the clergy of the diocese. Please keep us in your prayers. Many important decisions are before us and we want to be faithful to our Lord Jesus Christ and walk in step with the Holy Spirit.

Finally, I am honored to be your bishop, and, God willing, I will remain so as long as you and he will have me. I have been deeply encouraged by Psalm 16 where David, as psalmist, confesses that he has no good apart from God. The LORD is his chosen portion, his cup and his lot. Yet in verse 3, he also acknowledges that along with finding comfort in God in the midst of dreadful setbacks he also finds encouragement from the people he serves: "As for the saints in the land, they are the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight." Serendipitously, as if to illustrate this truth to me, when Allison and I arrived in the Charleston airport late Thursday afternoon walking to get our luggage we saw two familiar

faces— members of St. Michael's and the diocese—Dr. Alston Kitchens and her husband, Greg. They greeted us with smiles and hugs, and assurances of their prayers. They embodied many of you; the ones with whom we have cast our lot. Ten years ago, when I was going through a difficult consent process as your Bishop-Elect I wrote, "I have lashed myself to the mast of Christ and will ride out this storm wherever the ship of faith will take me." As you know, it brought me here.

Someone, clearly pleased with this judicial ruling, recently sent me an email sardonically asking when I was leaving town. I wrote back, "I'm not leaving town." I am lashed to Christ and lashed to you. We will see in the midst of this present storm where the ship of faith will take us. Ironically, I do not suspect that means leaving town, regardless of what else may change. This, dear friends, is what I know and want to remind you of—in favorable and unfavorable rulings from human courts, Christ is still Lord, he will come again to judge the living and the dead. His kingdom will have no end.

Yours in Christ,

Mark Joseph Lawrence
XIV Bishop of South Carolina

What happened? Where do we go from here?

A letter from Pastor Greg

In 2016 we endured a hurricane right as I arrived at Trinity Church to be your rector. We had to brace for a storm that blew over. Now, almost one year later, another storm is brewing and headed our way. The difference is that this storm has been spinning for a very long time.

In 1966 the Episcopal Church refused to discipline Bishop James Pike for denying the Trinity. It seems like a minor thing – but if we have no doctrine then we have no common language and we have no church. Eventually, we became two different churches. That, and a hundred more choices have poisoned the Anglican tree in the United States and bring us to where we are today.

Today it is common for TEC Episcopal priests to deny not only the Trinity but the Resurrection and even the idea of sin. Essentially, they believe we're all "good at heart" – which is a beautiful thought, but doesn't make much sense or provide any hope for Humanity's never ending stumbles, falls, and inability to get things right.

Now, 51 years later, the differences are so strong that TEC (the national church body) wants to take the Diocese' and Trinity's property away from us. Mind you, they've never spent a dime on this land, don't hold the deed, and have no fiduciary liability – but they claim they own this very land. And, to everyone's surprise, in an unprecedented 5 opinion ruling, the court ruled partially in TEC's favor.

So, what's at stake? When Trinity decided, years ago, to leave The Episcopal Church along with 32 of our sister churches our properties were threatened. Now, the threat of being removed from our buildings is an actual possibility. Barring a reversal of the court's decision, we will be forced to move buildings.

But that doesn't mean Trinity will cease to exist. We are a family. We believe that Jesus really lived, that he really died for our sins, and that by the power of the Resurrection that He can save even us! And we don't need a building to proclaim that good (and real) news.

Here are the next steps:

1. Our legal team will do the necessary steps to file for a rehearing and if necessary file with the US Supreme Court for relief. They will keep us up to date on how close this storm comes to Trinity.
2. A team of Vestry members and others will work with Danny MacDonald, our senior warden, to oversee contingency plans for any changes that may need to be made.
3. Programs of the church will continue as planned – the Church enjoys a building but the church is more than just a building.
4. We will send out information, regularly, via E-News and Facebook to help keep everyone up to date. If you are not on the email weekly, please send an email to ***communications@trinitymyrtlebeach.org***

When our family came to Trinity, we knew we were called to be here. Even though this threatens me, personally, and our family's housing, we know that Trinity is our family. In such a short time, we've come to love all of you and plan to be here for a very fruitful time of ministry. None of these challenges change this. After all, if Paul can have a Bible Study chained between two guards and the church in Philippi can meet in a house – surely we are not too prideful to be willing to move a few miles to a new location.

Finally, with that in mind, let me say that this issue is not one that I am glib about. This, in my mind, is a deeply pastoral and deeply gospel driven issue.

It is pastoral because of the life that has been lived here. Trinity members' families have worshipped here, baptized children here, walked daughters down aisles here, and even buried loved ones in this place. It is sacred ground. God has met each one of us here and shown His love to us in these sacred spaces. This is Holy Ground.

It is a Gospel issue because it is about Jesus and how to live as His people. You will hear many voices say that we are in this jam because we don't accept homosexuals. Nothing could be further from the truth. I have always had homosexual people in my congregations and I suspect the same is true to this day. The question we all must wrestle with, is how to live in light of the Gospel. If Jesus is Lord of all – then he is Lord of me too. In every area of my life, I must live in reflection of His calling and demands, including celibacy and covenant relationships. Please pray that no one in this congregation feels ostracized for struggling to live out a faithful Christian life in their soul, mind and body.

As we move forward, please be quick to listen and quick to ask questions. I will do my best to answer them or find answers as quickly as possible for you.

And, most of all, pray!

Blessings in Jesus,

Greg+
August 5, 2017

What Does It Mean To Be an Episcopalian? (adapted from 40 Days of Discernment)

“What does it mean to be an Episcopalian, and should I be one?” This question goes to the very heart of these matters. How would you answer this question? How others in The Episcopal Church (TEC) answer it varies greatly depending on whom you ask. And therein, essentially, is the crisis. There are two distinct and competing visions for what it means to be an Episcopalian, and for that matter, what it means to be part of Christ’s church.

On the one hand, the Anglican bishops during the Reformation, and the founders of the Episcopal Church, defined the church as “a congregation of faithful men in which the pure Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments be duly ministered according to Christ’s ordinance.” The “pure Word” was the Holy Scripture, of which the church was to be “a witness and a keeper”—not an author. Those Scriptures contained “all things necessary to salvation,” and their salvation message was simple and exclusive: We are all “inclined to evil” and deserve “God’s wrath and damnation.” But God has graciously offered to rescue us, by sending his one and only Son to take on human nature as Jesus, to live a sinless life, and “by sacrifice of himself once made” through his death and resurrection to “take away the sins of the world.” We accept this gift of God by turning from evil, repenting of sin, and placing our “true and lively faith” in Christ. It is “only” by “the Name of Jesus Christ” that a person may be saved. (Articles of Religion 2, 6, 9–12, 15, 18–20, Book of Common Prayer pp.868–71.)

On the other hand, the Presiding Bishop-elect of TEC recently said to Time magazine, “We who practice the Christian tradition understand [Jesus] as our vehicle to the divine. But for us to assume that God could not act in other ways is, I think, to put God in an awfully small box.” Several years ago, the Bishop of Newark called for a new reformation in Christianity, saying, “The view of the cross as the sacrifice for the sins of the world is a barbarian idea based on primitive concepts of God and must be dismissed.” In an Easter Sunday sermon, the Bishop of Washington, D.C., described Christ’s resurrection as “at best, conjectural” and not of significance. At its 2006 General Convention, TEC declined to approve a resolution endorsing John 14—that Jesus is “the way and the truth and the life” and that “no one comes to the Father except through” him. In 2005, at the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC) meeting, TEC’s presentation explaining its actions at the 2003 General Convention discounted the writings of Paul opposing homosexual practice, because he was “a first century Jewish male steeped in the tradition that includes Leviticus.” And in 1998, the Bishop of Pennsylvania, when asked how TEC could bless homosexual marriages when the Bible clearly forbids it, answered, “Because we wrote the Bible and we can rewrite it. We have rewritten the Bible many times.”

What do these two visions have in common? If the answer is little or nothing, can and should persons who see Christianity so differently consider themselves fellow believers, or should they admit that they are irreconcilably divided and walk apart? This question is not theoretical or academic. We must confront daily, and painfully, what our churches should be teaching to their congregants each Sunday and what parents should be teaching to their children.

Questions of doctrine are not the whole picture. In a fallen world, we will never find an unblemished church. The church faced heresy as soon as it was founded, as your study of 1 Corinthians will reveal. We should be humble and cautious toward the church in this world: And, while Jesus’ parables in Matthew 13 are about the kingdom, not the church; his warning about God’s judgment at the end times, should give the church pause as it seeks to discipline people in the present age: “while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. Let them both grow together until the harvest” (v.29–30).

Yet the Bible is filled with passages denouncing and urging action against false teaching and immoral living within the church. In the book of Revelation, in letters to the early churches of Pergamum and Thyatira, the Son of Man recognized that the faithful and the heretical coexisted, and while praising the faithful for their faithfulness he chastised the churches for tolerating false teachers (Rev 2).

The Anglican reformers wrestled with the same problem: They saw that all parts of God's church "have erred" in all areas including "their living" and "matters of Faith" (Art. 19, BCP p.871). They also knew that the Bible calls Christians to unity: "one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all" (Ephesians 4). And yet those bishops, after prayer, study, and debate, found it necessary to separate from the Roman Catholic Church of their day. As Bishop John Jewel put it soon after the English Reformation, "Of a truth, unity and concord doth best become religion: yet unity [is not] the sure and certain mark whereby to know the Church of God. For there was the greatest consent that might be amongst them that worshipped the golden calf."

How does one know when unity has been broken? How does one determine how to respond to division within the church? The purpose of this article is to help you think through these questions and prayerfully seek answers in the current crisis.

We can at least say this: We need to determine the extent to which any doctrinal or ethical failure compromises or threatens our faithfulness to God or our witness to the world, as well as the likelihood that such failures and their results can be corrected.

Bishop Jewel, a former Catholic vicar, defended the English Reformation admitting,

It is doubtless an odious matter for one to leave the fellowship...We have now done to depart from that Church, whose errors were proved and made manifest to the world, which Church also had already evidently departed from God's word...We truly have renounced that Church, wherein we could neither have the Word of God sincerely taught, nor the sacraments rightly administered, nor the Name of God duly called upon.

Not only does recognizing a break in fellowship involve difficult decisions, but it also stirs up a host of emotions, not the least of which can be grief over broken relationships. There also may be fear: Will a change be for the better? The ancient kingdom of Israel, which separated from Judah with seemingly good cause, provides a cautionary tale.

Finally, we as individuals, congregations, and dioceses face the question of maintaining unity not only within TEC, but also within the worldwide Anglican Communion. One might say that TEC through its actions already has broken unity, so the real question is not whether, but how unity will break: Shall we let go of our unity with TEC for the sake of maintaining our unity with the Anglican Communion, or vice versa?

This crisis is different from every other crisis TEC has faced, whether the departure of evangelicals in the late 1800s or the departure of Anglo-Catholics in the 1970s. Many consider the issues to be more fundamental, and now the Anglican Communion is watching and acting. The 1998 Lambeth Conference of all Anglican bishops responded to the ordination of a practicing homosexual within TEC by "rejecting homosexual practice as incompatible with Scripture" (resolution I.10). When TEC in 2003 consented to the election of a non-celibate homosexual priest as bishop, the leading Archbishops of the Communion (the "Primates") warned TEC against "tear[ing] the fabric of our Communion at its deepest level" by consecrating him. TEC's Presiding Bishop then presided over the consecration. The Archbishop of Canterbury responded by commissioning The Windsor Report, which has, with the Primates' endorsement, become the benchmark for continued unity within the Communion. This report recognized that "the overwhelming response from other Christians both inside and outside the Anglican family has been to regard [TEC's actions] as departures from genuine, apostolic Christian faith." Many believe that TEC failed to respond adequately and chose to walk apart at its 2006 General Convention. Thus, many "Windsor bishops" within TEC have asked the Archbishop of Canterbury for alternative oversight in order to remain within the Communion.

The Anglican Communion is straining to uphold its understanding of Scripture and doctrine and to hold the Communion together in unity. If TEC has walked apart and the two visions of our church are irreconcilable—the questions that motivate us to set aside these 40 days of discernment—then, like Joshua several millennia ago, we must choose now whom we will serve.

Understanding the Crisis – A Timeline

*Vice is a monster of so frightful mien,
As to be hated needs but to be seen;
Yet seen too oft, familiar with her face,
We first endure, then pity, then embrace.*

—Alexander Pope, Essay on Man, II.v

Timeline of Significant Events in the Episcopal Crisis

“Beginning in the early 1870s, a theology deeply skeptical about many of Christianity’s central claims began to influence the leadership of the Episcopal Church, and then spread throughout it. By the late 1960s it had come to dominate the Church entirely.” So observes Dr. Les Fairfield.

The following timeline highlights some of the significant events in the Episcopal crisis

1966-1967

Bishop James Pike charged, but never tried, with heresy for denying the doctrine of the Trinity

1976

General Convention commenced dialogue on sexuality and ordination of homosexual candidates (resolutions A068 and B101)

1977

Bishop Paul Moore (New York) ordained an openly homosexual ordinand

1979

Several bishops refused to abide by General Convention’s reaffirmation of traditional Christian ethics on sexuality and marriage (resolution A053)

1985

General Convention resolved to “dispel myths and prejudices” against homosexuality (resolution D082)16

1987 & 1989

Heresy charges against Bishop John Spong (Newark) dismissed by panel of peer bishops

1988 General Convention continued dialogue regarding sexuality (resolution D102)

1989–1991 Bishops Spong and Walter Righter (Newark) and the Diocese of Washington, D.C., ordained non-celibate homosexual ordinands

1991 General Convention rejected a resolution calling clergy to abstain from sex outside of marriage
Over 75% of dioceses began a three-year dialogue about sexuality

1993 Bishop Richard Grein (New York) led Sunday Eucharist liturgy that praised pagan deities Ra and Ausar at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine

1994 General Convention began considering rites blessing same-sex unions (resolution D049) 90 bishops and 144 deputies signed "Koinonia Statement" defining homosexuality as morally neutral

1996 Heresy charges against Bishop Righter dismissed due to "no clear doctrine" prohibiting ordination of "persons living in committed same gender sexual relationships" Integrity counted over 100 ordinations of openly homosexual candidates to date

1997 Virginia Theological Seminary began revision of policies to admit actively homosexual seminarians and to provide shared housing for non-celibate unmarried faculty and students

1998 Lambeth Conference of global Anglican bishops reaffirmed "the primary authority of the Scriptures" (resolution III.1; cf. III.5) and reaffirmed "homosexual practice as incompatible with Scripture" (resolution I.10 by vote of 526 to 70) 17

2000 General Convention acknowledged relationships other than marriage and disagreement on church's teaching (resolution D039)

2001 Anglican Primates acknowledged estrangement in Communion due to changes in theology and practice regarding sexuality and called provinces to avoid actions that may damage the Communion's "credibility of mission"

2002 Anglican Consultative Council (ACC) urged dioceses and bishops to refrain from unilateral actions that would strain the Communion

2003

- Primates negated authorization of rites for blessings of same-sex unions
- Bishop Michael Ingham (New Westminster, Canada) issued rite for blessings of same-sex unions
- General Convention rejected affirming the authority of Scripture (resolution B001); confirmed the episcopal election of a priest openly living in a same-sex relationship; and recognized blessings of same-sex unions as "within bounds of our common life" (resolution C051)
- Primates' emergency meeting declared that General Convention's decisions "will tear the fabric of our Communion at its deepest level"; reaffirmed 1998 Lambeth Conference resolutions
- Presiding Bishop Griswold consecrated a priest openly living in a same-sex relationship as bishop
- Attendance at Episcopal Churches drops from 920,000 in 1999 to 790,000 in 2004

2004

- Bishop Otis Charles (Utah, retired) "married" his homosexual partner Bishop
- J. Jon Bruno (Los Angeles) performed blessing of same-sex union
- Bishop John Chane (Washington, D.C.) performed blessing of same-sex union
- ECUSA promoted pagan Druid eucharistic liturgy on its website
- Lambeth Commission released the Windsor Report which reaffirmed traditional Christian morality
- 2005 Primates' Meeting endorsed Windsor Report; called ECUSA to withdraw its representatives from the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC) until Lambeth 2008; requested ECUSA's explanation for recent actions
- ACC endorsed Primates' call for ECUSA withdrawal; ECUSA presented To Set Our Hope On Christ as its official response to Windsor Report

2006

- General Convention rejected Windsor Report's "moratorium" on consecrations of those who are "living in a same gender union"; and instead called for restraint "by not consenting" to any candidate "whose manner of life presents a challenge to the wider church"; did not address a moratorium on same-sex blessings
- Archbishop of Canterbury Williams acknowledged "deep division" in the Communion

- 7 orthodox dioceses that uphold the teaching of the Anglican Communion and reject the actions of General Convention petitioned the Archbishop of Canterbury for “alternative primatial oversight”
- Bishop Lawrence elected 14th Bishop of South Carolina

2007

Consent process (for Lawrence election from House of Bishop) ruled null and void on a technicality
Bishop Lawrence asked to stand again in election for Bishop of South Carolina

2008

Bishop J.D. Schofield (Diocese of San Joaquin) deposed for abandoning the Church
Bishop Robert Duncan (Diocese of Pittsburgh) deposed for abandoning the Church

July 2009 – General Convention: Two Resolutions pass: Generous Pastoral Response contrary to Book of Common Prayer (BCP) and Constitution and Canons. Work on rites for Same-Sex Marriage/Blessings, (Title IV revisions and Mandated National Church Health Care Program)

2010 – Attorney representing the Episcopal Church begins investigating the actions of parishes and the Diocese who modified their corporate documents to remove all references to TEC.

The Episcopal Forum of SC submitted charges of abandonment against Bp. Lawrence.

2012 – Lawrence meets with the Diocese of South Carolina Standing Committee. They unanimously agree to allow him to seek to negotiate with the Presiding Bishop for a peaceful way forward.

September 18, 2012 – Disciplinary Board for Bishops meets and certifies abandonment on three charges, two of which were previously dismissed on November 22, 2011. Bishop Lawrence, the Standing Committee and the Diocese are not told.

October 15, 2012 – The Presiding Bishop informs Bishop Lawrence of the action of the Disciplinary Board decision on Sept. 18 to certify abandonment of communion.

October 17, 2012 – Diocese announces that it automatically disassociated when The Episcopal Church took action against the Bishop.
- Diocesan Convention affirms Disaffiliation.

December 5, 2012 – Presiding Bishop claims that Bishop Lawrence has renounced his ministry.

December 10, 2012 – New TEC Steering Committee announces Convention; continues to mislead people by using Diocesan Seal, name, etc. The Constitution and Canons of TEC and the Diocese do not allow this.

January 4, 2013 – The Diocese of South Carolina the trustees and congregations representing the vast majority of its baptized members files a lawsuit against The Episcopal Church to protect the Diocese’s real and personal property and that of its parishes.

June 3, 2013 – TEC Holds hostage Pensions of More than 80 disassociated staff members; refuses to allow them to move their retirement savings.

February, 2015 - Judge Goodstein Rules Diocese of South Carolina and Parishes Keep Diocesan Property. TEC and TECSC appealed Judge Goodstein's ruling to the State Supreme Court.

August 2, 2017 – In unprecedented 5 opinion ruling, SC Supreme Court rules that most of the Diocese properties belong to TEC, upending settled law. Diocese appeals.