

# The Episcopal Diocese of Dallas

The Rt. Rev. James M. Stanton, Bishop

July 22, 2009

A Letter to the Clergy

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ in the Diocese of Dallas,

I write to you in response to the actions of the recent General Convention of The Episcopal Church meeting in Anaheim, California. Some in the diocese will be pleased with much that happened, while others will view with alarm some of the resolutions passed.

I feel compelled to speak a word to the Diocese of Dallas concerning three actions in particular. The first two gathered the most press attention and later comment. Members of our Diocese as well as Anglicans throughout the Communion are particularly concerned about these actions, which took the form of resolutions.

The Communion at large has been looking for a clear word from The Episcopal Church as to whether we will continue to honor the moratoria on developing rites for the blessing of same sex unions and consenting to the election to the episcopate of a person living in a same sex relationship. These moratoria were first suggested in the [Windsor Report](#) of October 2004 and were occasioned by the consecration of a bishop in The Episcopal Church living in a non-celibate same-sex relationship. A pledge, known as [B033](#), to “exercise restraint” in giving further consents to such persons was adopted by the Convention of 2006. And while the 2006 Convention did not declare a moratorium on blessing rites for same-sex unions, it nevertheless turned away several resolutions calling for development of such rites. The Primates of the Anglican Communion took note of these actions with gratitude at their meeting in 2007 ([Dar es Salaam](#)), but requested greater clarity. That clarity would come in 2009.

It is clear from the resolutions passed, as well as from the floor debate in both Houses, that it is the intention of the leadership of The Episcopal Church that the moratoria requested by the Communion are no longer binding. Although a number of commentators, among them bishops, have maintained that the moratoria themselves were not specifically addressed, it is clear that both the House of Deputies and the House of Bishops view their previous pledge as cancelled. It was the stated desire of both Bishops and Deputies that this General Convention speak clearly to the Communion concerning “the reality of where this church is.”

[Resolution D025](#) reads (in part): “That the 76th General Convention affirm that God has called and may call [gay and lesbian persons in lifelong committed relationships], to any ordained ministry in The Episcopal Church” and further declares that it is competent to deal with these calls in its own

“discernment processes acting in accordance with the Constitution and Canons of The Episcopal Church.”

[Resolution C056](#) reads (in part): “That the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music, in consultation with the House of Bishops, collect and develop theological and liturgical resources, and report to the 77th General Convention”.

While it is true that neither of these resolutions deal explicitly with repudiations of either previous actions of the Convention or of specific requests made of our Church, it is also quite true that their intent is plain. The 2006 resolution had called for restraint on giving consent to the consecration of any bishop “whose manner of life presents a challenge to the wider church.” That concern is now completely absent in D025, and the only criteria in making such decisions are entirely internal. As for C056, the operative word is “develop.” The plain sense here is to “create,” “produce,” or “promote.”

C056 also resolves that bishops “may provide generous pastoral response” to meet the needs of same-sex couples, and this, before providing any theological support for the rites themselves. This appears to give a “green light” to local, unilateral action, and is already being so interpreted by a number of bishops.

Taken together, this is *de facto* a repudiation of the repeated requests directed to us by the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Primates of the Communion, and the Anglican Consultative Council. It is also, I would argue, a repudiation of a previous actions of our own General Convention, in 1991, which mandated a “pan-Anglican” and ecumenical consultation on these matters, because “these potentially divisive issues which should not be resolved by the Episcopal Church on its own.” ([1991-B020](#))

Although these resolutions deal specifically with matters concerning same-sex relationships and persons living within them, I want to remind you of the words of the Archbishop of Canterbury in his paper following our 2006 General Convention (“[The Challenge and Hope of Being an Anglican Today](#)”):

“And, to make clear something that can get very much obscured in the rhetoric about 'inclusion', this is not and should never be a question about the contribution of gay and lesbian people as such to the Church of God and its ministry, about the dignity and value of gay and lesbian people. Instead it is a question, agonisingly difficult for many, as to what kinds of behaviour a Church that seeks to be loyal to the Bible can bless, and what kinds of behaviour it must warn against - and so it is a question about how we make decisions corporately with other Christians, looking together for the mind of Christ as we share the study of the Scriptures.”

There are many gay and lesbian members of our congregations. Some long for the day when the Church will recognize and bless their relationships. Others among them do not. Add to these a number of people who are considering whether they can even remain in The Episcopal Church any longer. Ministry in these circumstances can be agonizing indeed. The churches of the Diocese of Dallas will, I trust, continue to be a place where all are welcome. We all kneel on level ground before the cross of Christ.

But the larger question is what it means for “the Church” to make these decisions: is it right or good, or even possible, for a congregation, a diocese, or even a province of the Universal Church to make its own way and claim to give “the Church’s blessing” – or God’s? Discerning the mind of Christ surely must mean doing this together. The Christian faith is something we receive, not legislate. Our own *Book of Common Prayer* recognizes that “the bond and covenant of marriage was established by God in creation, and our Lord Jesus Christ adorned this manner of life by his presence and first miracle at a wedding in Cana of Galilee. And Holy Scripture commends it to be honored by all people.” (BCP, p. 423)

In the meantime, we need to be clear about where “we are” as a Diocese:

- The Diocese of Dallas will continue to hold up and proclaim the apostles’ teaching that is the ground of Christian fellowship, and the foundational promise of our Baptismal vows.
- We will continue to stand with the larger Church in affirming the primacy of Scripture, the sanctity of marriage and the call to holiness of life.
- We will not consent to the election of a bishop living in a same-sex relationship, and we will not allow the blessings of same-sex relationships in this diocese.
- We will continue to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ, engage in mission at home and abroad, plant new congregations and make disciples of our Lord.

These commitments are in keeping with the historic teaching of the Holy Scriptures as held by the vast majority of the Anglican Communion, and, for that matter, the Church throughout the centuries.

I mentioned earlier a third significant resolution passed by the General Convention. [Resolution D020](#) “invites” the dioceses and congregations of the Episcopal Church to study the proposed Anglican Covenant and “to consider the Anglican Covenant proposed draft as a document to inform their understanding of and commitment to our common life in the Anglican Communion.” I commend this study to our churches and I intend to give a prominent place at our Diocesan Convention in October to such a consideration.

Bishop Lambert and I will be conferring with the Standing Committee and the Clergy of this Diocese on these matters. In the meantime, please know that we will continue to stand with the larger Communion and the historic Church in upholding the apostolic faith and fellowship.

It is imperative that we as a Diocese commit ourselves to one another and work together for the building up of God’s kingdom. At no time in the life of this Church has it been so critical for the community to stand together to carry the message of the Good News of Christ to a broken world. We cannot live in isolation from one another but must find ways to work with and support one another in our common mission and ministry. Now is not the time to “run for cover” but to step out in the name of Jesus Christ and continue to worship, work and witness for the glory of God.

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