

# It's about communion! But communion with whom??

Over at Church of the Holy Communion in Charleston, South Carolina, [Fr. Dow Sanderson](#) speaks about his decision to remain in the Episcopal Church:

*I especially urge those of you who feel that you must leave your church home, in these difficult times, and seek another Anglican "safe haven". Like so many things in this broken and highly polarized world, some would frame this discussion as simply a choice between Biblical, Orthodox Truth on the one hand, and very progressive, liberals on the other. This simply is not true. In fact, the overwhelming majority of Anglo-Catholics in the United States remain a part of the Episcopal Church and have absolutely no intention of doing otherwise. These would include, of course, very famous places like St. Paul's in Washington, Church of the Advent in Boston, St. Thomas, Fifth Avenue in New York, St. John's in Savannah, to name just a few.*

*What is at stake here is Communion. Anglicanism, in all its expressions, has always claimed to be something more than just a church of the Reformation. Reformed, yes, but through our ties to the ancient See of Canterbury, we have depth of Tradition and continuity with the Apostolic Church that has always been highly valued.*

I certainly think that people of good conscience can remain in The Episcopal Church. At the same time, Fr. Sanderson begs a number of questions. Foremost, he states that the question is one of "communion." But this begs the question, "communion with whom?" The Catholic tradition is quite clear that communion is only possible with those who hold the Catholic faith. One of the better books on this subject is Werner

Elert's *Eucharist and Communion in the First Four Centuries* (Concordia Publishing House, 2003). St. Athanasius was not in communion with the heretic Arius. St. Cyril of Alexandria was not in communion with Nestorius. St. Augustine was not in communion with the Donatists. After the ecumenical councils of the early centuries, those who refused to subscribe to them were no longer in communion with the Catholic Church. For example, the Copts refused to recognize Chalcedon, and have been out of communion with the Orthodox churches to this day. Rome and Orthodoxy do not agree on the role of the pope, and so they have been out of communion since 1054. And, of course, Anglicans have been out of communion with Rome since Henry VIII.

The second question that Fr. Sanderson fails to address has to do with canon law and the role of the bishop in a diocese. As a priest in a diocese, what is one's obligation when one's bishop is deposed for "abandoning the communion" when he has not in fact done so? Bishop Mark Lawrence did not leave the Episcopal Church. He was kicked out. He was kicked out based on the misuse of a canon that was intended to be used for clergy that really had left the Episcopal Church and joined another denomination. But Bishop Mark was actually trying to keep the Diocese of South Carolina in TEC, not leave. In a case of double jeopardy, Bishop Lawrence was re-tried (without a trial or representation) on charges that had already been dismissed a year ago. Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori stated that she had accepted ["the renunciation of the ordained ministry in the Episcopal Church of Mark Lawrence,"](#) although TEC's canons state that such renunciation must be received in writing, and [Bishop Lawrence has denied that he made such a renunciation.](#)

So the Presiding Bishop's claim that Bishop Mark had "abandoned the communion," was, at the least, a very creative interpretation of TEC's canon law.. To be blunt, Bishop Mark did not abandon communion. TEC broke communion by deposing

him. It was only after TEC violated its own canon law by deposing Bishop Mark that South Carolina left TEC. Moreover, the Global South bishops (who represent the majority of bishops in the Anglican Communion) have [refused to recognize the deposition of Bishop Lawrence](#), and they continue to recognize Bishop Lawrence as the legitimate bishop of South Carolina: "We want to assure you that we recognize your Episcopal orders and your legitimate Episcopal oversight of the Diocese of South Carolina within the Anglican Communion." So the question of "communion" is not a straightforward one.

Given that Bishop Mark's deposition was contrary to TEC's own canons, it would seem that Bishop Mark still the legitimate bishop of the Diocese of South Carolina, and, as a priest in that diocese, Sanderson either acknowledges the legitimacy of TEC's deposition, or not. By placing himself under TEC's authority in South Carolina, Fr. Sanderson is making a choice. He is choosing to be in communion with TEC. But he is also choosing to refuse to be in communion with Bishop Lawrence, who, until TEC wrongfully deposed him, was Fr. Sanderson's bishop.

When I lived in Boston, I attended Church of the Advent, which Fr. Sanderson mentions, for a year or so. Fr. Sanderson finds it significant that the Church of the Advent remains in TEC. However, I know something of that story. During the time I lived in Boston, Advent survived a near schism when the unique governing board at Advent (a "corporation," not an elected vestry) attempted to leave TEC (not over doctrine) and take the building with them. But the majority of the congregation did not agree with the corporation, and the matter went to court. The congregation won. The corporation lost. But that set a legal precedent. The building belonged not to the corporation, but to the diocese. The current congregation at Advent has not left, and could not leave, because they would lose their building to the diocese.

When I attended Advent, the average Sunday attendance (ASA)

was around 400. [TEC's statistics page indicates that it is now around 250](#). So the Church of the Advent has not left TEC. But somewhere around a third of its Sunday attendees have. When I attended, Advent had two kinds of members, those who were serious Anglo-Catholics, and those who attended because they liked the beautiful music and liturgy. I cannot be certain, but I would imagine that the vast majority of those who no longer attend Advent on Sunday mornings were the serious Anglo-Catholics. Those ones who still keep coming are likely those who come for the music.

So what's my point? My point is not to criticize Fr. Sanderson for his decision to remain in the Episcopal Church. For those of us who are committed to orthodox Anglicanism, and have struggled with the Episcopal Church crisis over the last decade or more, where we end up is never simple. People can stay, and they can leave, and both decisions can be made in good conscience.

At the same time, Communion is important. But communion is also a choice, and a necessary choice that we all must make. To choose to be in communion with some is by necessity to choose not to be in communion with others. If one stays in the Episcopal Church, one has not chosen "communion" over non-communion. One has chosen communion with some (such as Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori) over others (such as Bishop Mark Lawrence). Unfortunately, it is impossible to choose both, and I would suggest that it is the Episcopal Church that has forced that decision on the orthodox, not the reverse.

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# New Article on The Hermeneutics of Same-Sex Practice



It is only within the last generation that affluent Western Christians have suggested that same-sex sexual activity might be morally permissible. The unanimous consensus of the previous Christian tradition (Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant and Anglican) has been that homosexual activity is immoral, condemned by both Scripture and Church tradition. The vast majority of critical biblical scholars continue to recognize that the plain-sense reading of the biblical texts prohibits homosexual activity, and that Scripture endorses only one permissible model for sexual activity: exclusive life-long commitment within heterosexual marriage.

Given the historic Anglican commitment to the primacy and sufficiency of Scripture, it would seem difficult to make a case from an Anglican perspective for the approval of same-sex activity, for the blessing of same-sex relationships, or for the ordaining of practicing homosexual clergy. Those who attempt to make such a case necessarily have to address the question of biblical authority. How one attempts to reconcile the endorsing of same-sex practices with the authority of Scripture will depend, first, on whether one recognizes that Scripture prohibits same-sex activity, and, second, how one responds to Scripture's teaching.

*The above is the beginning of a new rather lengthy article I've just written entitled ["The Hermeneutics of Same-Sex Practice: A Summary and Evaluation."](#) It can be found in the Pages section to the left. I cannot imagine it will win me many friends.*

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## How NOT to Attract Young People

Over at [StandFirm](#), they linked to this article from the Episcopal Diocese of Arizona about ["How to Get More Young People in Church."](#) This is the liberal TEC diocese that I found so attractive that for the six months I lived in Arizona about five years ago, I worshiped in a Lutheran church. (But, of course, I'm not a young person.) Anyway, the article prompted me to think about how one might go about *not* attracting young people, and it occurred to me that where I teach has figured that one out just about right.

How NOT to attract young people:

1. Build a seminary in a rundown former steel town outside Pittsburgh. This will discourage the hip and trendy.
2. Design a curriculum that is centered around biblical theology and creedal orthodoxy. This will discourage the progressive and relevant.
3. Require every faculty member and incoming seminarian to sign a doctrinal statement affirming the essentials of creedal orthodoxy. Make sure the statement is detailed enough that it is impossible to fudge. This will discourage the open-minded.

4. Require every incoming seminarian to learn the basics of biblical Hebrew and Greek their very first semester. This will discourage those who hate hard work.

5. Besides requiring courses that teach the Bible in English, require every seminarian to take at least one advanced exegesis course on either an Old Testament or New Testament book in the original Hebrew or Greek. This will discourage those who have more important things to do with their time.

6. Require that all students take courses in the basics of systematic theology and church history where they actually read people like Athanasius, Augustine, Luther, Calvin, and Barth rather than just reading about them. This will discourage those who would not rather read "dead white men."

7. Require that all students take a course in Anglican theology where they actually have to read people like Thomas Cranmer, John Jewel, Richard Hooker, the Caroline Divines, Joseph Butler, John and Charles Wesley, Charles Simeon, the Oxford Movement, and modern Anglicans, rather than just reading about them. More "dead white men."

8. Require that students take mandatory courses in missions and evangelism, and that every student take a mandatory mission trip outside the United States. (One is right now spending her Thanksgiving holiday not eating turkey, but in Turkey.) This will discourage everyone.

9. Require that students attend chapel (Morning or Evening Prayer) on those days that they are on campus, and attend Eucharist at the weekly campus service. This will discourage the easily bored.

10. Require that students lead Morning and Evening Prayer and preach in chapel. This will discourage those who would rather sleep in.

11. Require that students attend weekly advisee groups where

students meet with and pray with fellow students and faculty. This will discourage those who would prefer to avoid all that intimacy—like yours truly.

12. Require that students contribute mandatory work hours doing things like helping out in the kitchen. This will discourage those who already have enough work to do.

13. Require that students take a course in Mentored Ministry where they learn how to pastor by working under the supervision of a local priest or pastor. This will discourage those who already know what the church needs.

14. Require that every few years the entire seminary (faculty and students) attend a major mission conference where people are encouraged to think about becoming overseas missionaries, and some end up doing so. This will discourage those who have no desire to go to dirty poor far away places where people don't speak American English.

15. Regularly admit students from overseas so that students daily interact with other students from places like Uganda, Nigeria, the Sudan, Egypt, Indonesia, and Brazil. This will discourage those who think that life begins and ends at the border.

16. Hire a Dean/President who has pictures of Luther, Calvin, and Barth on his office wall. This will discourage Anglo-Catholics.

17. Hire other faculty who have icons on their walls. This will discourage Evangelicals.

18. Hire at least one faculty member who decorates his office with African art that he has picked up on his regular teaching trips to Africa. This will discourage those who are afraid he might suggest they take a trip to Africa.

19. Make sure that the local bishop (who serves on the Board)



is deposed from his ministry by the Presiding Bishop of TEC, and he then goes on to become the Archbishop of a new Anglican church. This is guaranteed to offend a lot of people.

20. Have other board members who are Communion Partner bishops, including one whose diocese is currently being threatened by TEC, and have other board members and regular guests who are bishops or Primate in those parts of the Anglican communion that "just don't get it." This is guaranteed to offend even more people.

21. Encourage students to take courses in Church Planting because it is quite unlikely that they will be hired as clergy in most dioceses in the Episcopal Church, and the Dioceses of new Anglican movements like the ACNA have not been established long enough to actually have existing churches in the places they will likely be pastors. This will drive away those who want a certain future.

22. Be amazed when the largest incoming class in recent history overwhelms the campus in fall 2010, and the majority are under 30 years old.

Perhaps I should add one last point about HOW TO attract young people to your church. Use contemporary worship with a praise band! Young people just love churches where aging boomers play electric guitars and sing music with insipid lyrics that sound something like Karen Carpenter might have written if she had a crush on Jesus instead of her imaginary boyfriend.

Young people hate hymns. They hate chant. They hate incense and solemn liturgy.

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# It's My Fault that Leander Harding is not a Bishop

We all have hobbies. My friend and colleague Leander Harding seems to like to run in episcopal elections. I don't know how many times he has run, but he likely holds some kind of a record, and he has never won. Actually, he does not seem to run, so much as people keep nominating him. In the last few months, he was nominated in both the Episcopal Diocese of the Rio Grande (New Mexico) and the Episcopal Diocese of Springfield (Illinois). In both cases, the clergy and laity chose candidates who were (speaking strictly objectively) both pastorally and academically less qualified than Leander to be a bishop. I speculate as to why this is the case, but have been convinced that the problem is that he is too orthodox, and too smart. The elected bishop in Rio Grande (formerly an orthodox Episcopal diocese) is a revisionist, and I expect this means the end of orthodoxy in that diocese, as orthodox parishes will either leave for the ACNA or will die.

Over at [Virtueonline](#), David Virtue noticed this anomaly, and posted a piece on his blog asking about why it is that in the Episcopal election at Springfield, not only Leander, but other far more qualified candidates, like Robert Munday, Dean of Nashotah House, were passed by. The very first comment to appear was by the Rev. Tom Woodward of Santa Fe, NM, a retired Liberal Protestant priest who lives in the Diocese of Rio Grande. Tom and I had met before online. Tom wrote to respond to Virtue's column about Springfield, but in passing offered some interesting information about why Leander Harding was not elected in Rio Grande.

*I hope I can assure you that M\_\_\_\_. and D\_\_\_\_. will receive consents across the board. Both are solidly conservative on matters theological and both have a history of respectful dialogue with leaders from all segments of the Episcopal*

Church.

*It is clear that the candidates you prefer would not receive consents from any but the most right wing of dioceses. Harding is now licensed by ACNA and told the Diocese of the Rio Grande that he has no intentions of revoking it or of separating himself from Wm. Witt and others on the Trinity faculty who have been unrelenting in their disparaging of the Episcopal Church. Dean Munday and Fr. Cox have been less than enthusiastic about their relationship to the doctrine, worship and governance of the Episcopal Church. And so on.*

*It appears that Springfield is committed to its future and vocation within the Episcopal Church – and that it has selected three nominees who share that commitment – disagreeing with some of the direction of TEC, not disparaging but addressing those with whom they disagree with respect and in love.*

**I responded:**

*I am both surprised and pleased that Tom Woodward of Santa Fe has singled me out as being “unrelenting” in my criticism (not disparaging) of TEC, as well as someone from whom Leander Harding should disassociate himself.*

*At the same time, I am simply amused that Woodward would describe Harding’s and presumably my own views as “most right wing.” I have long advocated that the political terminology of “right wing” and “left wing” is entirely inappropriate in what are primarily theological disagreements. I have taught Christian Ethics in the Diocese of Rio Grande’s extension program, and Woodward can ask the students who took my course just how “right wing” I am.*

*The key issue is theological, and in past debates with Woodward, this has become clear. Specifically, it has to do with Christology and the atonement: are the person and work*

*of Christ constitutive of a salvation that can be found nowhere else, or are they illustrative of a salvation that can be found elsewhere, and even perhaps everywhere? Put more bluntly, can we affirm that Jesus saves and that Jesus alone saves? KJS's repeated affirmations that Jesus is "a way" and not "the way" of salvation makes clear where SHE stands, as has Woodward in past discussions.*

*Politics? I am neither "left wing" nor "right wing" by the standards of today's culture wars, but a Barthian Thomist. The current situation in TEC is exactly parallel to the issue that Barth and the Confessing Church faced in Nazi Germany and addressed in the Barmen Declaration. Is Jesus Lord or is Caesar Lord? Both right wing and left wing have their Caesars.*

*Anyway who has read my blog should know where I stand on these things. Although he probably does not realize it, Woodward has slandered both myself and Leander Harding, but I will accept his statement as a compliment.*

Unfortunately, Virtue deleted the rest of Woodward's comments, but we continued to interact for some time, with Woodward continuing his criticism of Trinity and its faculty as extreme, and outside the mainstream of Anglicanism, criticizing its Board, its doctrinal statement, and also its name change – from Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry to Trinity School for Ministry.

The deleted comments were not perhaps so interesting, but Woodward's initial comment is, because of what it says about the mindset of the liberal establishment in The Episcopal Church, but also about how they view their task in the Episcopal Church.

First, it is annoying that the revisionists continues to view the disagreement as a primarily political rather than theological one. According to Woodward, Leander Harding could

not receive consents, except in the “most right wing of dioceses.” I have complained for years that viewing the current disagreement in terms of the political categories of “left wing” and “right wing” is useless because the disagreement is not about politics, but about theology, that such categories are constantly shifting, and they do not say anything meaningful about the person to which they are applied, except insofar as they indicate a dislike for the person.

More significantly, Woodward’s comment illustrates that “Neuhaus’s Law” now operates in The Episcopal Church. (Neuhaus’s Law is an axiom of the late Richard John Neuhaus that “Where orthodoxy is optional, orthodoxy will become prohibited.”)

But if Woodward’s statement is accurate, TEC has now gone beyond Neuhaus’s Law. For orthodox believers in the Episcopal Church, it is now no longer enough to remain a member of The Episcopal Church, and to promise not to leave, and to work with the opposition—all of which I am certain Leander promised the Diocese of Rio Grande. Rather, it is now the case that one cannot disagree with the liberal leadership of The Episcopal Church or “disparage” TEC. (And to “disparage” The Episcopal Church simply means to criticize the liberal leadership or to disagree with its theology or policies.) Moreover, one must also disassociate from those (like myself) who have publicly criticized that leadership and from orthodox Anglican seminaries like TSM. And, finally, one must have nothing to do with those who have left TEC, and may not provide them with support or ministry in any way. As Woodward makes clear, one of the chief complaints about Leander was that he had provided pastoral support in ACNA parishes in the Diocese of Pittsburgh.

Finally, it shows that, having accomplished their initial goal of having their views made the official theology of The Episcopal Church, the revisionist leadership is now willing to

take the next step of silencing the opposition. It is now no longer enough for orthodox Episcopalians to promise to remain in TEC, and to support it financially. They must not verbally express disagreement with its new theology or policy.

There seems to be a kind of mutual cluelessness about authoritarians—whether of the “left-wing” or the “right-wing.” They cannot abide criticism, and cannot perceive that their very intolerance is a major cause of that which they so dislike.

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## **Should We Blame The Seminaries?**

From a comment I put on StandFirm, which was later picked up by Anglican Mainstream:

In the late 1960's the focus of Anglican theology shifted dramatically – and so did the seminaries:

Liberal Protestantism (in the sense represented by Diocese of New Westminster, Canada, Bishop Michael Ingham) did not exist at all until Friedrich Schleiermacher, and did not exist in Anglicanism until the late nineteenth/early twentieth century.

Historic Broad Church Anglicanism was not Liberal Protestantism. (F.D. Maurice and William Temple, for example, believed every article of the creed.) Additionally, until the last twenty years or so, liberalism was never considered at the center of Anglican identity, but was tolerated as a kind of protest movement in the church with the understanding that Reformed catholic orthodoxy was the heart of Anglican identity. Anglican authority was defined by the sufficiency of

Scripture, the creeds and the theological content of the (1662) BCP , as well as the 39 Articles, all understood fairly literally.

I have seen little evidence that "historic Broad Church Anglicanism" still exists. What used to be called "Broad Church" seems to have morphed into Liberal Protestantism. Perhaps it still exists in the C of E some place.

Wherever I have found acceptance of same sex-unions, I have also found theological compromise on other issues as well. In TEC these days, the dominant theology seems to be either blatant Liberal Protestantism or an "Affirming Catholicism" that is really "Unitarian Dress-up," a love of "smells and bells" with minimal commitment to Catholic Theology.

Certainly the seminaries are largely responsible. If one reads the theological literature of the last century, one notices a sudden change in Anglican theology that took place beginning in the 1960s. In the first half of the century, the dominant Anglican theologians were people like William Temple, Michael Ramsey, Oliver Quick, Eric Mascall, Austin Farrer. Biblically, the scholars were people like E. C. Hoskyns, C. H. Dodd (an English Congregationalist), and C. F. D. Moule. The most widely read Anglican authors were probably C. S. Lewis, Dorothy Sayers, and Evelyn Underhill.

Beginning in the 1960s, we have Bishop John A. T. Robinson's *Honest to God* (warmed over "Tillich"), Norman Pittinger's process theology, Bishop Pike, and the standard Systematic Theology text is John Macquarrie's *Principles of Christian Theology*. (Macquarrie's chief influences were Heidegger and Bultmann.) Donald M. Baillie's immensely popular *Christology, God was in Christ: An Essay on Incarnation and Atonement* (1948) is twentieth century Nestorianism, although Baillie seems to have thought he was defending orthodoxy. Joseph Fletcher, author of *Situation Ethics*, taught Christian ethics at EDS. The dominant biblical scholars in this period were

people like Dennis Nineham, John Knox (not the Reformation figure, but a Presbyterian NT scholar), W. H. Lampe (advocate of "Spirit-Christology"), and, of course, J.A.T. Robinson, all of whom were adoptionists of various sorts. The notorious volume *The Myth of God Incarnate* appeared in the late 1970s. The most widely read Episcopal author during the late twentieth century was likely Bishop Spong.

My colleague, Leander Harding, has been writing a book on the ordained ministry, and did some research at Sewanee on the literature that had been written by Episcopalians over the last century. In the early twentieth century, the primary content of the writing was theological. The main biblical text discussed was the Letter to the Hebrews. The writers discussed issues like the relation between Word and Sacraments, eucharistic sacrifice, etc. After mid-twentieth century, there was a shift to the therapeutic. Episcopal writers on the priesthood now talked about ministry in terms of counseling, management, parish leadership. The previous theological and biblical content simply disappeared.

So there is a sense in which [those self-proclaimed "Episcopal Majority" clergy] who express shock at the questioning of their orthodoxy is not surprising. If they were educated in TEC seminaries sometime during the 1960s or early 1970s, they likely would not have been exposed to historic Anglicanism, but rather to a liberal Protestantism that was new to Anglicanism, but had blossomed almost overnight, a kind of theological kudzu. I would imagine that most of the current bishops in TEC would have been indoctrinated in the new theology during their seminary days.

It is also interesting that many Anglican/Episcopal theologians who started out fairly orthodox shifted ground later on. J.A. T. Robinson was initially fairly orthodox, writing some good books on biblical theology in the 1950s. James Pike wrote a moderately orthodox systematic theology volume in the original Church Teaching Series. Australian



bishop Peter Carnley wrote some good material on the historical reliability of the gospels early in his career, but in the 1980s wrote a book on the Resurrection that was, to say the least, squishy. Richard Norris wrote some good material on Christology in the early 1980s, as well as a pretty good volume on Systematic Theology for the 1970s Church Teaching series. Toward the end of his life he endorsed same-sex blessings.

So certainly the seminaries deserve much of the credit (or rather blame) for the dominant Liberal Protestantism that is rampant in TEC these days. Just as an aside, the vast majority of these Anglican/Episcopal Liberal Protestants who created this theology were straight white men, and they had already given away the goods before either the Prayer Book was revised or the ordination of women had been approved.

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## **My Letter to Bishop Smith: Drew and Me, Part 1**

I do not pretend to have a gift of prophecy. In fact, I often get things quite wrong. However, the response of the House of Bishops today to the Tanzania Communique immediately brought back to me the words I wrote to Bishop Andrew Smith almost four years ago now, which now seem amazingly prescient. Of course, I could not have known when I wrote this letter that only two years later Bishop Smith and an entourage would invade our parish of St. John's, Bristol, change the locks on our building, hack into the confidential files on the parish computer, impose a priest-in-charge who was a leading officer in Affirming Catholicism and who would then fire those of us who were the legally elected vestry, and, finally, that Smith

would depose our rector, the Rev. Dr. Mark Hansen from the priesthood of the Episcopal Church. And I certainly could not have foreseen that I would be one of several dozen who would sign a presentment against our bishop that would be completely ignored, while Bishop Smith, still under charges, would be assigned as a judge in the trial of Bishop Cox for crossing diocesan boundaries. The ironies of my letter are rich, it seems.

Pay special attention to what I wrote about the oath of obedience. In the last several years it has become quite clear how TEC interprets that oath. And note what the HOB said today about the "sufficiency of Scripture."

September 7, 2003

The Right Reverend Andrew D. Smith, Bishop  
The Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut  
1335 Asylum Avenue  
Hartford, CT 06105-2295

Dear Bishop Smith:

It is with deep regret that I write to inform you that I am withdrawing my request to be considered for ordination to the priesthood in the Episcopal diocese of Connecticut.

I want to thank you for the courtesy extended to me on my visit to Diocesan House on June 10, and for your willingness to allow me to continue with the discernment process.

Unfortunately, in light of the recent events of this summer's General Convention, I can not in good conscience continue with the ordination process, at least not in the diocese of Connecticut.

Please let me explain why I believe this to be so.

When we met, we discussed the possibility that the Anglican Communion might split as a result of actions taken by General

Convention, and I had stated my concerns that the issues dividing Episcopalians needed to be considered theologically rather than simply on political or personal grounds. The 1998 Lambeth Conference, the Anglican primates, the two most recent Archbishops of Canterbury, and two theological commissions (one formed by Archbishop Carey and one formed specifically to advise General Convention) have stressed repeatedly that it is inappropriate either to bless same sex relationships or to ordain those involved in same sex relations because there is not enough theological consensus in the Anglican Communion to do so.

Despite these warnings, General Convention voted to confirm the ordination of Gene Robinson as a bishop, and to sanction local option to bless same sex relations, but it did so on political and personal grounds rather than first having decided on theological grounds whether same sex relations are actually permissible. Indeed, the Convention admitted that the Episcopal Church had not yet reached theological agreement on this issue, as evidenced by its own theological study commission, and so the Convention made the decisions it made without theological warrant.

Regardless of its lack of theological foundation, General Convention has *de facto* changed the "doctrine, discipline, and worship" of the Episcopal Church by this action. This change of doctrine now makes it impossible for me to participate in the service for the "Ordination of a Priest" in an honest manner, and with a clear conscience. At one point or another, I would have to lie.

The candidate for ordination is asked to affirm three things: (1) To "solemnly declare" to "believe the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament to be the Word of God, and to contain all things necessary to salvation." (2) To "be loyal to the doctrine, discipline, and worship of the Episcopal Church." (3) To "obey your bishop and other ministers who may have authority over you and your work."

Despite the concerted efforts of scholars like William Countryman and John Boswell to argue that Scripture does not prohibit committed long-term same sex relations, but rather prohibits *different kinds* of same sex relations, the scholarly consensus has not changed that the plain sense reading of Scripture prohibits *all* sexual relationships outside of monogamous heterosexual marriage. (See the attached.) Given the radical innovation in Church teaching that General Convention approved, there would need to be an overwhelming corresponding change in the consensus of biblical scholarship before proceeding to endorse same sex relationships, but the opposite has occurred instead. Biblical scholarship has roundly rejected rather than endorsed the revised interpretation as an accurate reading of Scripture.

Accordingly, the doctrinal change made at General Convention places the candidate for ordination in an impossible dilemma. If he or she affirms that the Holy Scriptures are the Word of God and contain all things necessary for salvation, then the candidate cannot in good conscience swear to be loyal to the doctrine, discipline, and worship of the Episcopal Church, since the Episcopal Church's new doctrine about sexuality conflicts with the plain teaching of Scripture. If the candidate honestly swears to be loyal to the doctrine, discipline, and worship of the Episcopal Church, then the candidate cannot honestly swear to believe what he or she is required to believe about the Scriptures.

Finally, a new dilemma arises when the candidate is asked to swear obedience to the bishop. A bishop represents not simply his or her own authority in a geographical diocese, but the entire catholic Church in continuity with the faith delivered once and for all, and maintained through historical succession from the apostles. But now that the official teaching of the Episcopal Church is no longer in agreement with the catholic doctrine of the Church about sexuality, or with the affirmed teaching of the Anglican Communion, the question arises as to

whom or what the candidate is now swearing obedience. Is the candidate swearing obedience to the bishop merely as an individual? What then becomes of the affirmation that the bishop is representative of the tradition and authority of the entire catholic Church as a member of the universal episcopate? Is the candidate swearing obedience to the bishop as a representative of the Episcopal church as a denomination, and to its new teaching on sexuality, to the exclusion of the consensus of the rest of the Anglican Communion and worldwide Christendom? Then the candidate would be swearing obedience to the bishop as representative of a national Protestant sect, and not as part of the catholic Body of Christ, and would in effect be renouncing membership in the Anglican Communion. Is the candidate swearing obedience to the bishop as a representative of the Body of Christ as manifested in the worldwide Anglican Communion? But the vast majority of the bishops of the Anglican Communion are at odds with the Episcopal Church's new teaching on sexuality, and the candidate would have to decide between loyalty to the bishops of the Anglican Communion, and loyalty to the local bishop.

At this point, I am reminded of the biblical admonition to "Let your 'Yes' be 'Yes' and your 'No' be 'No' (James 5:12; cf. Mt. 5:37.) I believe that the promises made at ordination are solemn vows, and are not to be undertaken lightly. They are not to be made with duplicity, reservations, or while crossing one's fingers behind one's back. Rather, being ordained is a time for straight speaking, and complete honesty before God, the Church, and one's bishop. Because I could not in honesty simultaneously affirm that the Bible is the Word of God, and swear to uphold the new doctrine of the Episcopal Church on sexuality, I cannot in good conscience consent to be ordained in the diocese of Connecticut. At the same time, I would prefer not to have to choose between loyalty to my bishop and the Episcopal Church, and loyalty to the Anglican Communion, but if forced to do so, I would have to be loyal to the worldwide Anglican Communion, not to a national

denomination or a local diocese.

I want to be clear that this is my own decision. I am speaking only for myself, and not for St. John's Episcopal Church, Bristol, or my rector, the Rev. Dr. Mark Hansen. I am not claiming to be morally superior to the bishops and deputies at General Convention who have changed the doctrine of the Episcopal Church. I am a sinner, justified (I pray) by grace through faith in Jesus Christ and his atoning death and resurrection, with skeletons in my own closet. I *am* affirming that General Convention has acted improperly, without theological warrant, and without consideration of its place in the broader Anglican communion that claims to be a body of catholic Christianity. I have not made this decision lightly, nor out of simple animosity or disappointment that "my side lost" at General Convention. As I made clear in our conversation on June 10, and in the discernment materials I submitted to the diocese, I believe that I have a genuine vocation to ordained ministry, a call that has relentlessly pursued me since childhood. I am giving up this call with great reluctance, at least for now, and at least in the Episcopal diocese of Connecticut. I am grieved.

I would ask that you would remember me in your prayers, as I will remember you in mine. It is my hope that when the Anglican primates meet this fall, they will be able to find a way for the Anglican Communion to remain united, and to be faithful to the Scriptures, and to catholic tradition. I would hope that we would both pray for the future of the Anglican Communion, and that it will remain faithful to God's will as revealed in the Scriptures, and be preserved in catholic unity, but if it cannot remain united, that it would at least remain faithful.

With All Due Respect,

William G. Witt, Ph.D.

## Representative Contemporary Biblical Scholarship on Same Sex Relations

Note that the scholars cited below do not necessarily agree with the Bible's teaching. Some reject it, or suggest it be modified. Nor are they universally "conservative" in their theological stances. They represent the contemporary consensus of scholarship (both liberal and conservative, from a variety of confessional traditions) about *what the Bible actually teaches* on same sex relations. They make it clear that the exegetical interpretations of scholars like William Countryman and John Boswell are eccentric.

### *Roman Catholic*

"I believe the general outlines of biblical teaching on sex are fairly clear. . . . [T]he *general* parameters of a "biblical" sexual morality are not in great dispute (setting gender aside for the moment). Sex, in both the Hebrew and the early Christian scriptures, is assumed to belong in heterosexual marriage, which is faithful and procreative. . . . [T]here is scarcely any doubt that premarital sex, adultery, divorce, prostitution, and homosexuality are not included in the ideal." Lisa Sowle Cahill, "Sexual Ethics: A Feminist Biblical Perspective," *Interpretation* (Jan 95) 49(1): 6.

### *Jewish*

"The Bible's extreme aversion to homosexuality is part of [the] concern not to let sexual activity destroy the categories of orderly existence. . . . Homosexual activity, as known in the ancient world, exists outside the pair-bond structure, which is the social locus of permissible sexuality. Furthermore, it blurs the distinction between male and female, and this cannot be tolerated in the biblical system. Anything that smacks of homosexual blurring is similarly prohibited, such as cross-dressing. . . . Forbidden sexuality, like adultery, incest, homosexuality, and bestiality . . . becomes

a national concern. Such sexual behavior is a threat to social order, as is murder, and again, like murder, it is said to pollute the land and thereby endanger the very survival of Israel. Leviticus 18 relates that the pre-Israel inhabitants of the land indulged in the incestuous relations listed there, in bestiality, homosexuality, and molech-worship, and that-as a result-the land became defiled and vomited out its inhabitants. . . . Israel's right of occupation is contingent upon its care not to do these things, for murder, illicit sex and idolatry will pollute the land, and a polluted land will not sustain them." Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake of the Goddesses: Women, Culture and the Biblical Transformation of Pagan Myth* (Ballantine Books, 1992), 195-196.

### *Presbyterian*

"The holiness of God's people is integrally tied to the sanctity of the institution of marriage, which was assumed by the Old Testament to be both divinely ordained and normative. . . . Homosexuality was universally condemned and dismissed as abhorrent." Brevard Childs, *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context* (Fortress, 1985), 79.

### *Methodist*

"Paul was against homosexuality, both active and inactive, both male and female. This marks him as Jewish. . . . Jews, looking at the Gentile world, saw it as full of *porneia*, sexual sin of all sorts, and homosexuality was a prime case. They condemned it, lock, stock, and barrel. This is emphasized in the Bible . . . and repeated in subsequent Jewish literature. . . . So when we turn to Paul, we are not surprised that he condemns all homosexual activity, nor that he specifies both the active and the passive partners. . . . Some scholars propose that the words are uncertain as to meaning and thus that perhaps Paul did not really condemn homosexuality. The words, however, are quite clear. . . . Paul condemns both male and female homosexuality in blanket terms



and without making any distinction.” E. B. Sanders, *Paul* (Oxford, 1991), 110, 112-113.

“The few biblical texts that *do* address the topic of homosexual behavior . . . are unambiguously and unremittingly negative in their judgment. . . Paul’s use of the term [*arsenokoitai*] presupposes and reaffirms the holiness code’s condemnation of homosexual acts. This is not a controversial point in Paul’s argument. . . . Paul simply assumes that his readers will share his conviction that those who indulge in homosexual activity are ‘wrongdoers’ . . . Paul’s choice of homosexuality as an illustration of human depravity is not merely random: it serves his rhetorical purposes by providing a vivid image of humanity’s primal rejection of the sovereignty of God the Creator. . . . Though only a few biblical texts speak of homoerotic activity, all that do mention it express unqualified disapproval. Thus, on this issue, there is no synthetic problem for New Testament ethics. In this respect, the issue of homosexuality differs significantly from such matters as slavery or the subordination of women, concerning which the Bible contains internal tensions and counterposed witnesses. The biblical witness against homosexual practices is univocal.” Richard Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (HarperCollins, 1996), 381, 382-383, 385, 389.

### *Anglican*

“For all the issues that divided the church in the past . . . tolerance or blessing of homosexual acts was never one of them. Apparently scripture’s plain sense was simply too plain when it came to homosexual behavior. The history of interpretation, Jewish and Christian, bears witness to the ‘plainness’ of scripture on this matter.” Christopher Seitz, “Sexuality and Scripture’s Plain Sense,” *Word Without End: The Old Testament as Abiding Theological Witness* (Eerdmans, 1998), 324-325.

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# Is the Episcopal Church Heretical?

A gentleman associated with a an Episcopal Church advocacy group calling itself The Episcopal Majority recently chided me for using the word "heresy" to refer to recent stances taken by TEC.

"What you, from your peculiar point of view, term as heresy is just that—your peculiar judgment."

The accusation that orthodox Anglicanism is nothing more than "private judgment" is one of my particular irritations. It is often used by followers of John Henry Newman, but seems now to have been adopted by the revisionists. Here was my reply.

Well, no. It's not. Say, for example, that a Presiding Bishop of TEC were to claim that Jesus was only one way of salvation among others, and claimed that to say that no one came to the Father except through Jesus would "put God in a small box." That would constitute a heresy that has been repudiated repeatedly throughout church history and is condemned in the 39 Articles (xviii). Or suppose that said Presiding Bishop gave a Christmas sermon in which he or she first seemed to be affirming the doctrine of the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ, but then went on to speak of incarnation in a manner that made it clear that incarnation was simply a way of speaking of God's general presence in creation, and that what was true of Jesus was equally true of other people as well, including, in his or her own words, Santa Claus. That would, of course, be a repudiation of the Nicene Creed. Or suppose that such a Presiding Bishop were to say in a recent interview that he or she did not believe that Jesus was terribly

concerned about the afterlife. That would either indicate that she was not familiar with the gospels, or believed that they were entirely untrustworthy. That would, of course, be contrary to the Anglican affirmation of the "sufficiency of Scripture." Or suppose such a General Convention were to approve as bishop a man whose lifestyle were explicitly condemned in Scripture, on the grounds that Scripture says we are supposed to love one another. That would be to violate the statement in the 39 Articles that the Church "cannot ordain anything contrary to God's Word written" and that it may not interpret Scripture so as to make one part repugnant to another (xx). Or suppose that such a church tried to justify its actions by pointing out that Christians eat shellfish. That would be to violate the historic principle of biblical interpretation that distinguishes between moral, ritual, civil, and ecclesiastical law, and would be to pit the OT against the NT (vii). Or suppose that such a church tried to impose ordained female clergy on a diocese. That would place the church in violation of the article that nothing that cannot be read in Scripture or proved from it may be required as an article of faith (vi). Or suppose that prominent members (including bishops of said church) made statements or wrote best selling books suggesting that if the bones of Jesus were found in a grave somewhere in Palestine, this would make no difference to Christian faith. That would violate article iv, which states that Jesus rose bodily from the grave, including his flesh, bones, and everything pertaining to the perfection of human nature.

Of course, no Presiding Bishop would ever actually say such things, nor would a General Convention approve such things. To take such actions would place such a church so far beyond the bounds of historic Christianity that it could no longer be called a church, but merely a heretical sect, something like Mormonism or the Jehovah's Witnesses or Christian Science. But to recognize that such actions or beliefs would be heretical would not be engaging in mere private judgment, merely

affirming what Scripture clearly teaches, and what Christians have always affirmed and have repeated numerous times in Creeds and Confessions.

But, of course, we're talking about hypotheticals. As I said, no even remotely Christian church would ever do or affirm such things or elect as its chief officers those who did. And, as you've pointed out, the Episcopal Majority was formed merely to preserve the church's historic heritage and tradition. So no one in Episcopal Majority would endorse or approve such actions or beliefs either.

But if they did, hypothetically speaking, I think we could call that heresy.

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## **My Suggested Slogan for the Episcopal Church's New Evangelism Campaign**

**For those asking questions . . .**

**The Episcopal Church has no  
answers!**

This in response to Presiding Bishop KJS's recent interview in which she explained why she thought TEC might be attractive to young people:

*[M]any of those young people are asking spiritual questions.*

*“Why am I here? What am I supposed to be about as a human being? How am I supposed to live in relationship with other people?” Those are questions that the Episcopal Church is well poised and well experienced in helping people to find answers. Not provide answers, but help people wrestle with the questions. . . . [W]e don’t come with a prescribed set of answers. We really do encourage people to wrestle with the question.*