

An Update on the Episcopal Church

And the Episcopal Diocese of Fort Worth

In a Lenten Series a year or two ago, issues concerning the local and national Church were presented in an attempt to keep you informed of the issues affecting the relationship between the two. [As events have unfolded, it is clear that certain developments call us to deepen and strengthen our common bonds as a parish family.](#) Therefore, this is to invite you to an opportunity being planned for the evening of Wednesday, December 5, for our parish family to consider and discuss these momentous matters in more detail. [In preparation for these discussions, I invite you to write down questions and concerns you have concerning these matters and place them in the Rose and Cross container on the glass case in the Narthex. This will give me some time to prepare more thorough responses than are possible in a normal Q&A session.](#)

The Diocese of Fort Worth is moving forward to “take the first step needed to dissociate itself from the General Convention of The Episcopal Church and to begin the process of affiliating with another Province of the worldwide Anglican Communion”. [The passage of five amendments to our diocese’s Constitution and Canons at our diocesan convention on November 16 and 17 would accomplish this first step. One thing to keep in mind is that nothing is going to change overnight. The Committee on Constitution and Canons reminds us that, “Since constitutional changes do not go into effect until they are approved by two successive diocesan conventions, the second, ratifying vote would come at the annual meeting in 2008.”](#)

Why would the Diocese of Fort Worth seek to separate from the Episcopal Church? One answer may be found in the Diocese’s appeal to the Archbishop of Canterbury [“for some means by which we can remain full members of the Anglican Communion.”](#) This appeal was made July 11, 2005 [“in objection to the actions of the 1997 General Convention that made the ordination of women priests *mandatory* in every diocese”,](#) and is motivated by the fact that [“the Diocese of Fort Worth has been told by the Presiding Bishop and others in authority that, should it again elect a bishop opposed to women in the presbyterate and episcopate, the bishop elect would not receive the necessary consents to be consecrated.”](#) Another answer may be found in the 2003 consecration as bishop of a gay man in a lifelong committed relationship with another man. This has caused distress, not only in this diocese, but also in the worldwide Anglican Communion.

The Episcopal Church responds to these objections with a reminder that they were accomplished by duly established means (General Convention) acting through duly established procedures (The Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church), and that its member dioceses and parishes are bound to abide by the actions of General Convention, both majority and minority. The Episcopal Church also does not recognize the Diocese of Fort Worth’s proposed amendment changes as legitimate, [since they are in opposition to the Constitution and Canons of the Diocese’s originating organization. In other words, the child can’t make rules contrary to the desires of the parent, and even if the child goes so far as to write the rules down and “make them official”, they still carry no weight.](#)

Concerns expressed by the Anglican Communion come down to this: (1) Are the people being consecrated as bishops by The Episcopal Church able to be accepted as bishops in any province in the world? (2) Are those who feel alienated by actions of the Episcopal Church being offered acceptable means by which their need for pastoral oversight is addressed? The Executive Council’s response was that it “recognizes that the requests made by the Primates, directed to the House of Bishops and the Presiding Bishop, raise important and unresolved questions about the polity (how we do things) of the Episcopal Church and its ecclesiology (how we put the church together).” While the Executive council recognized the requests made by the primates, they also found portions that they “felt bound to reject because they were perceived as inappropriate interventions into the polity of The Episcopal Church and contrary to its Canons and

Constitution.” Why? Because the requests by the primates did not address themselves to the General Convention as the decision-making body that would consider these requests and either put them into action or not.

To some, the actions of General Convention are the ongoing revelation by the Holy Spirit of who we are called to be in Christ. To others, the same actions signal a complete departure from what the Scriptures outline for Christian community life.

So, where does that leave us? Do we go with those seeking a theologically orthodox archbishop? Do we stay with The Episcopal Church as it continues on its present course? What happens to the property and buildings in which we worship and work? As theologically and culturally diverse as St. Christopher’s is, how do we walk together as a family, no matter what?

In consultation with your Vestry, I’ve set the following as our schedule for Wednesday, December 5.

6:15 PM	Holy Eucharist & Unction
7:00 PM	Soup & Sandwich Supper
7:30 PM	Informational session led by Fr. Bill
7:45 PM	Discussion, Questions, Feedback
8:30 PM	Close with Evening Devotion (Compline)

As we anticipate our upcoming conversations, one thing in all of this is absolutely crystal clear...we must pray as we’ve never prayed before, not for our outcomes, but for His Who died for us that we may live.

Yours in Him,

Fr. Bill+