

Church of the Spirit

Kingstowne Community Church



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Dear

Ever had the wind knocked out of you? It's a scary thing, but you know it will only last a while and then you will start to breathe again. This week the wind has been knocked out of me as I watched the news from the national convention of the Episcopal Church. In case you have not been following the news, the Episcopal Church had been asked by the rest of the leaders of the worldwide Anglican Church to return to the long-standing, agreed-upon teachings concerning a number of issues. Instead, the recent convention ended with an announcement by the newly elected Presiding Bishop that we appear to be two churches under one roof. Large differences of opinion exist concerning:

- (1) Ordination and Church Leadership.** When a priest is ordained he or she is asked to be a wholesome example of Christ to their people. This year's convention had to deal with whether a man who has been divorced twice and married three times should serve as a bishop, and whether a man living in a sexual relationship outside of marriage should serve as a bishop. In both cases the convention said, "Yes."
- (2) Blessing of same-sex unions.** Should the church continue to allow some priests to privately perform same-sex weddings, should there be a moratorium to such practices, or should the church openly embrace same-sex unions? The convention chose to allow priests and bishops to continue holding private services.
- (3) The Authority of Scripture.** Does the Bible need to be rewritten/reinterpreted to bring it more in line with current cultural standards? Can we continue to say that the Bible contains all things necessary for salvation and is the ultimate rule of our faith? Does the Bible say one thing to one community and another to people elsewhere? The new Presiding Bishop has said the Bible needs to be updated to accommodate modern ways.
- (4) Interdependence.** Will the Episcopal Church continue to in the Anglican Communion, or will it "walk apart"?

The leaders of the Anglican Church (to which up until now both The Episcopal Church and Church of the Spirit have belonged) met for two years to respond to the actions taken at the 2003 Convention of the Episcopal Church. In its report, known as the Windsor Report, there were specific requirements placed on the American Church if it wanted to stay in communion with the rest of the 77 million Anglicans in the world. We were to use this year's Convention to repent for having contradicted the accepted teachings of the church (by consecrating a bishop who is living in a sexual relationship outside of marriage), and we were to establish a moratorium on future same-sex marriage services or the election of bishops who did not live within the standard of chastity as described in the Scriptures. The Episcopal Church overwhelmingly chose not to comply. In the coming six months, there will be gatherings of worldwide Anglican Church leaders to discuss where that leaves the Episcopal Church. The first response has already been made by the Archbishop of Canterbury. I am enclosing an excerpt of his letter of this week. The next worldwide meeting of all the Anglican bishops is set for the middle of 2008. Between now and then, a new understanding of what it means to be an Anglican will emerge. My best guess of what happens next is that each congregation in this country will be faced with choosing whether to continue in the Episcopal Church, or to stay in the Anglican Communion. There seems little hope that the two can continue together much longer. Evidently, the Archbishop agrees ...

How does this effect us? First, regardless of what is being taught in other places, we have always been very clear about what we teach here. Church of the Spirit teaches that the Biblical guidelines are clear that any sexual relationship outside of marriage is not what God intends. We know this may be a difficult standard to live up to, but that does not mean we lower the standard. It means that we need to welcome people who have a hard time with it. I was glad to see that what we have been teaching here corresponds exactly with what the Archbishop outlines as the clear



*A new church community of Christians and those seeking God
A member of the worldwide Anglican Communion*



teaching of our church. (Our church web site has a number of documents outlining our position on these issues – go to the button for past messages and look either at the "Past Messages" or under "Hot Topics.") I've been very careful about where the Bible speaks (and where it is silent). For instance, in the last year I have spoken directly about sexuality, abortion, creation, the sanctity of life, adultery and euthanasia. Being clear is part of who we are as a congregation. At the same time we have always kept our doors wide open to all people, including those who disagree or have doubts about the church's teachings. We can't back away from inviting everyone to come to church here. We know that all of us have fallen short of God's standards, so none of us gets to point fingers at anyone else. We all need God's love.

Second, we will have a series of messages in September that ask the question "Who are you?" We'll look at who we are as Christ Followers, who we are as members of a church, and who we are as part of a larger community. It's exactly this conversation the Archbishop has asked us to undertake. (You'll see, for instance, there are indeed good reasons for being part of a larger church family like the Anglican Communion.) These messages will kick off a parish-wide fall program called **DTR**, which stands for "**Defining the Relationship.**" Among the **DTR** programs we offer will be a series of workshops I will host on Wednesday evenings to look at the issues within the Anglican Church. We are working on a way for each member of the congregation to express his or her feelings should we be faced with a choice of continuing within the Episcopal Church or the Anglican Communion. Over the next months your Leadership Team will be looking at how this will affect our mission and ministry. In the mean time, please feel free to contact me personally at my private email address: RSchllnbrg1@msn.com. I am willing to respond to all of your concerns ... please do not hesitate to contact me, whether you agree with me or not.

Third, Steve Zidek, our Sr. Warden, and I have asked the Leadership Team to place a 90-day moratorium on our donations to the Diocese of Virginia. This will give us time to better understand what has happened, and see where it is taking us. We will continue to use your donations to support *Santa Maria*, the Latino Episcopal Church that is starting up in Arlington, and for local outreach efforts such as *Koinonia*. But we need to be clear about whether or not we wish to continue sending support to the Diocese based on its position in the upcoming international debate.

Personally, I was saddened by all that has happened, but **the Archbishop's leadership here gives me great hope** for our future! Please know this: my one motivation is to bring more people into a life-changing, life-saving relationship with Jesus. I gave up a lot when I came here to start a new church from scratch. I've poured my life into Church of the Spirit. I want to see it flourish and for more lives to be filled with God's grace. God offers us the promise of abundant joy and fullness of life. I am sad, though, when issues beyond our walls keep people from attending, or threaten the work we do here. **Controversies can keep us from the real mission of Church of the Spirit, which is to help one another find and follow Jesus, become fruitful disciples, and faithful witnesses.** I invite you to walk forward in faith with me, seeking a better understanding of what is happening and where God is leading us.

As you know, I view the Bible as God's word. Instead of trying to change the Bible, I am willing to let the Bible change me. I come to the Bible in humility, following an ancient path which says **faith should seek understanding**. When we start by trusting in God, we can end up trusting him to make things clearer for us as we read the Bible. I'm not always sure what others are reading, or how, or whether they are reading new things into the Bible. What I know is this: **over the last 20 years I have served faithfully in the catholic church, holding to the faith of the church that has been believed "in all places, in all times and by all people." That catholic faith is a *consensus fidelium*, a consensus of the faithful. It doesn't change with a vote at a convention.** It is a faith that holds us together regardless of the theological fads or the changing cultural contexts of each generation. It is the faith that alone can save us, for we cannot save ourselves. "*So to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church ... to all generations, forever and ever.*" [Eph 3:20-21]

