



**What if you are a minority in a parish  
committed to a different direction?**

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I've been asked to say a few words about folks who might think of themselves as "minorities" within their parishes. I hope these would be encouraging words, and that whichever way forward these members of our wider community choose to follow, that there will be a sense of blessing and meaningful life and ministry and hope. Things are complex, and there are conflicting concerns, and we will I trust seek to care for one another with a spirit of affection, respect, and care—and with a great deal of patience.

At the present moment we have congregations of our diocese that are, with their clergy and lay leadership, largely in agreement with the direction forward of "realignment," and we have similarly congregations largely in agreement with the direction forward of continuity within the Episcopal Church. We also have congregations without consensus, which are divided, perhaps a some small majority leaning in one direction or the other, but with a very substantial minority leaning in the other direction. And of course there are divisions in other ways as well, in extended families, among close friends, within the same congregation. A very difficult time, no question.

I'm focusing first here, at this Across the Aisle meeting, on folks who sense that they are "in the minority" in their present congregations, because while they wish to remain within the Episcopal Church, their parishes seem to be going in the direction of realignment. However, I think that on the other side of this divide, among the parishes that will choose to remain within the Episcopal Church, there are "minorities" who would

be themselves supportive of the realignment, and would wish to be a part of that. Many of the practical and pastoral issues arise, and I think the same kinds of awareness and care will be important across the board.

In all this, I would talk about three possible ways forward for those in the minority in their parishes.

First, I will simply repeat an experience I had one Sunday evening a number of months ago when I was participating in a panel discussion on the issues of realignment in a congregation which is quite clearly in large majority of membership and leadership wishing to support and participate in the realignment. At the refreshment time following a panel discussion, a middle-aged man came up to me and said, "I agree with you, and I wish our parish would remain in the Episcopal Church. If it were up to me, I might even leave this congregation and find another. But this is my wife's church, with many members of her extended family, and she and they are enthusiastically supporting the bishop. So I'll be staying here with my family."

So first: for many of those who feel that they are in a minority in their parishes, the way forward will be in any case to remain in those congregations anyway, despite disagreement. What I want to say is just a personal note, which is that I think that can be one response of integrity and grace. I hope that as our two entities emerge following this October, "realigned" congregations and "Episcopal Church" congregations, that there will continue to be at least some sense of Anglican breadth on both sides of the divide. That kind of diversity will be a blessing, I believe, for us all, and in the long run I would hope it would be a force to lead us toward reconciliation, which I hope is a prayer we're saying on our knees every night before bed.

Secondly, now, for "minorities," this just a very practical comment, many folks will decide simply that this is a time to step out, and to move into another congregation. In the city and near suburbs we've seen quite a bit of this already, a kind of "shuffling" of families between nearby congregations, and I think this is a real and good option for many. There are pastoral challenges in this, because those who move in this kind of context come often with a sense of pretty deep hurt, and often a sense of hurt is left

among those left behind—and so we need to think about issues of generosity and spaciousness as we in our congregations both send and receive in this time of dislocation.

I do want to say, especially to those in leadership in congregations which may be facing the loss of members at this point, that the focus of stabilizing congregations and of finding resources to keep things going will be the highest priority of the leadership of our diocese over these next months. I've heard friends say, "we may lose a half a dozen families, and if we do we will probably not be able to pay our gas bill this winter, or to continue to support our rector in ministry." I think the message is at this point: don't lose heart. We will have resources, and will do our best to mitigate the hurt that all this dislocation will cause.

And third, in some places, perhaps many places, and again, on both sides of the river, individuals and families will seek to maintain a sense of continuing congregational identity. Forming alternative congregational units, perhaps beginning with a couple of families meeting together in someone's home, or perhaps even larger groups that would initially gather in a larger common space. Scale and organizational energies will vary.

What I want to say in any case for folks who would follow this way forward, that it is very strongly the commitment of those of us who have been planning for the next phase of our diocesan life and reorganization, that if these groups form, as I know there will be a number, they will be strongly supported with pastoral care, a continuing sacramental life, and with a sharing of community resources, including financial support. We will find a way to preserve continuities of worship, and to be sure that baptisms, marriages, confirmations, burials, and all the day-to-day needs of community life and care, will be supported. You won't be left alone. And we also—as we have done the initial planning, with work on preparing for a reorganizing convention of our diocese probably later this fall, to be sure that there will be ways for every congregation desiring to participate in the continuing Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh to have representation and a voice and place at the table. We're going to need everybody, in the months and years ahead, and we don't want anybody to be left out. There is a committee, being led by Dr. Joan Gundersen, looking carefully at our diocesan bylaws and canons related to representation at Convention, and it will be the case that those who have separated from

realigning congregations because of their desire to continue in the Episcopal Church, if they have not joined another parish, will be given the opportunity to organize and to find ways of appropriate credentialing of deputies to a reorganizing diocesan convention later this year. Again to say, we don't want anybody to be left out of this process, and we will be working to make sure appropriate representation is possible—following as carefully as we can the rules already in place in our diocesan canons.