



What does the future look like in The Episcopal Church for the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh?

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ACROSS THE AISLE**

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Our task is monumental. We have allowed ourselves to be in conflict over theological issues and we will have to learn to work together in spite of our differences. Even if we do everything right, the immediate future will be painful and difficult. If the Diocesan Convention votes to sever its ties to the Episcopal Church, those voting to realign will be jumping out into the abyss and in some sense so will we. We will have to reorganize a diocesan structure that we have all taken for granted. We will have to find a way of relating to the Episcopal Church that is acceptable to all of us. We will have to find a way of healing the damage caused by a breach of this magnitude and relating in a faithful way with our friends and neighbors who have decided to walk apart from us.

BUT WE CAN DO IT! In the early meetings of AtA the conversation was tentative at best and truculent at worst. Everyone worried that somehow they would be pushed into agreeing with something that compromised their principles. What we discovered was that our affection for each other and our willingness to listen and work for cooperative goals overcame our pain and suspicion. We were able to achieve more than we dreamed of at that first meeting. We thought maybe we would learn to talk to each other. We weren't sure we could ever reach consensus. We have been able to work together with generosity and faith, and we have reached consensus on some issues. We are working on others. Our work together needs to be a model for the continuing diocese.

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Remember, consensus means to give consent; it does not necessarily mean to agree. I can give consent to actions that I am not enthusiastic about, but which do not call my principles into question. I can consent to actions which will forward the life of the diocese.

We will have to develop creative compromise as an agenda item. We are not all going to suddenly agree. What we are going to do is listen and hear what others are saying and try to find a way to make it work. We don't presently have consensus on property issues and where we stand in relation to the national organization of TEC. Actually it is inappropriate to have such developed policies before the 143rd Diocesan Convention has voted. Who we are and what we become depends very much on the decisions made on October 4th. We are preparing to be the continuing Diocese of Pittsburgh in the Episcopal Church because we need to have a structure ready to assume responsibility not because we want to compete with or pressure our present Diocesan structures.

In most administrative ways our reorganized diocesan structures will be the same as they always have been. We will have a Standing Committee, a Board of Trustees, a Diocesan Council. We will have districts and deputies and a convention. We will struggle over how to spend our money. How to support parishes in need. How to develop new programs and support those programs we have that are successful. How to develop diocesan activities that encourage community and mission. To the greatest extent possible we will be organized on the basis of the Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church and the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh.

“By their fruits ye shall know them.” We will exert real effort to grow in fellowship and mission. This Diocese has a number of missions of which we can be very proud. SOME of them are: the Youth Ministry at St. Stephen's Wilksburg under the direction of Mr. Tony Jackson with the support of the Rev. Diane Shepard and now the Rev. Nancy Chalfant-Walker; the Shepherd's Heart Fellowship, the Rev. Michael Wurschmidt, founder and rector; the Shepherd Wellness Center, the Rev. Lynn Chester Edwards, founder and board member; Calvary Camp, which owes a lot to many people over the years but presently we honor the Rev. Leslie Reimer's contribution; and one

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very close to my heart the Chaplaincy at Canterbury Place, the Rev. Gaea Thompson, Chaplain. Some of these will realign and some will remain with TEC. We are proud of ALL of them and more, but we will find ways to increase their number and reach out to those in need.

We want to be known by our fruits: our ability to heal ourselves and others during and after this breach; our commitment to supporting established ministries and finding new ones; our commitment to preaching the Gospel and following Jesus. Those are the goals we want to reach and that is what we will try to achieve. Pray for the church.

We cannot change the past. We would be foolish to repeat it. Going forward with courage to change the dynamic of contention to one of hope and cooperation, love and fellowship has to be our acknowledged goal. Cutting each other a little slack should be our watchword. We share the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We share his mission to the poor and oppressed of this world. We trust in His ability to transform our lives and we share the mission of spreading the Gospel of Love and Hope in the world. We WILL go on together emphasizing our agreements without losing our principles and finding a way to express our unique contribution to our Christian community, our secular community and even, perhaps even especially, to those who have decided to sever their corporate relationship to us.

In order to accomplish this task we will have to commit ourselves not only to our triune God but to each other. We will not emphasize our paranoid fears of what might happen but will emphasize our Christian faith in what will happen. We must have faith in God and in each other. We will not always agree but we will trust each other. We will accomplish nothing if we do not lead from love, hope, and faith. If we lead from fear we are doomed before we start. Therefore we will obey the great commandment to LOVE GOD AND OUR NEIGHBOR. We will have faith: "In thee O God, have I put my trust, Let me never be confounded."