

# Questions on the Current Controversy Facing The Episcopal Church

The questions and answers below will help Episcopalians in the Diocese of Pittsburgh understand the issues bearing on the future of their diocese. This document may be freely reproduced if reprinted in its entirety. An index to the questions can be found on page 6.

## 1. *What is the current controversy?*

The Episcopal Church, traditionally, has found its unity in common worship, the Holy Scriptures as the revealed Word of God, the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion, and the ancient creeds of the Church. These define essential core beliefs. Over the years, there have been controversies about both belief and practice, but Episcopalians have continued to worship together. Those now in dissent within The Episcopal Church seek to elevate a number of specific positions to the status of core beliefs required of all Christians. Underlying these differences are disagreements about the proper ways to use and interpret scripture and to resolve the ancient tension within Christian thinking between love and law.

## 2. *Is this opposition new?*

Those unhappy with the decisions, in 1976, to ordain women as priests and, in 1979, to adopt a revision of the Book of Common Prayer organized throughout the 1980s and, in 1996, joined forces with evangelicals to form the American Anglican Council. They found common ground in opposing the church's dialogue on human sexuality. After the 2003 General Convention of The Episcopal Church, they protested the decision to consecrate Gene Robinson as Bishop of New Hampshire and the resolutions of General Convention related to human sexuality, and they appealed to leaders (primates) of the Anglican Communion for a judgment against The Episcopal Church. While representing a tiny minority within the church, their view is the dominant one in the Diocese of Pittsburgh. The dissenters claim to represent the majority view within the Anglican Communion.

## 3. *Why are matters coming to a head now?*

The efforts of the dissenting minority have not convinced The Episcopal Church to change the decisions of General Convention 2003. The election of Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori at General Convention 2006 confirmed that The Episcopal Church would continue to include a broad spectrum of theological thinking. Permitting such diversity of interpretation is unacceptable to the dissenters.

## 4. *Is our Presiding Bishop's theology truly Christian?*

The dissenting minority has raised questions about Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori's theology, which reflects the inclusive love of God (John 15:12) and God's absolute power to save. She has stated that Jesus Christ is "her way" and the "church's way" to salvation, but that it is not her job to "put God in a box" or to set rules about whom God may save. The Presiding Bishop calls us to consider what is required of a Christian community in response to God's love.

## 5. *What role has our diocese played?*

The Diocese of Pittsburgh has played a major role in the controversy. Many of the dissenting clergy have studied at Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry. Diocesan clergy helped found the American Anglican Council and have been articulate spokespersons for their cause. Following the 2003 General Convention, the diocese provided leadership to new organizations that emerged, especially the Anglican Communion Network (ACN). The special and annual diocesan conventions of 2003, 2004, and 2006 amended the diocesan constitution and passed resolutions that increasingly cut the diocese off from The Episcopal Church and denied the authority of General Convention and of church leaders.

## 6. *What choices do we face now?*

Diocesan leaders are offering three alternative courses of action: (1) continue on the periphery of The Episcopal Church, (2) separate as a group from The Episcopal Church, or (3) create a way for individual parishes to negotiate an exit from the church. Admitting that none of these options is perfect, the leadership has now focused on option 2 as the way forward. Congregations and individuals thus need to consider how they will respond to plans to implement it. A fourth option, fully participating in The Episcopal Church, has been dropped from consideration. None of the options under consideration takes into account the desires and feelings of those in the diocese who want to remain a part of The Episcopal Church.

## 7. *What is our diocesan leadership proposing as the next step?*

No clear proposal has been announced yet. The plan

that seems to be emerging is for much of the diocese to leave The Episcopal Church together and to join a confederation of churches outside The Episcopal Church having no immediate connection to the Anglican Communion. The confederation, referred to as the “Common Cause Partnership,” hopes to be recognized as a province by some leaders (primates) of Anglican Communion churches. The Diocese of Pittsburgh anticipates that approximately four other dioceses might join in this plan.

### **8. Who has the ultimate authority in The Episcopal Church?**

All authority in The Episcopal Church flows from General Convention, the triennial meeting of the elected deputies (clergy and lay) and bishops of the church. Only General Convention has the power to change the constitution or canons (church laws) of The Episcopal Church. All policy decisions of the church must be approved by both the House of Bishops and the House of Deputies. The Presiding Bishop chairs meetings of the House of Bishops; the House of Deputies has its own elected President. The Executive Council, an elected representative body including bishops, clergy, and laity, is charged with carrying out the decisions of General Convention between sessions.

### **9. What is the Anglican Communion?**

The Anglican Communion is a fellowship of 38 autonomous national/regional churches (“provinces”) and dioceses that are in communion with the Archbishop of Canterbury. They express the Catholic and Apostolic faith through the Book of Common Prayer as authorized by each church. The Communion is bound together not by a central legislative authority, but by mutual loyalty and common counsel. The Anglican Communion calls the chief bishop of each province its “primate,” although the actual title and duties of primates vary greatly. Organization of a formal fellowship of churches calling itself the Anglican Communion began in 1867. The Episcopal Church has been involved in the Communion since its beginning.

### **10. What are the “Instruments of Communion”?**

This is a recent term for the four chief institutions through which members of the Anglican Communion consult and coordinate their work. The four are: the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lambeth Conference of bishops (which first met in 1867 and generally meets every 10 years), the Anglican Consultative Council (which first met in 1971 and is the only “instrument” to have bylaws approved by every Communion province and representation from clergy, laity, and bishops), and the Primates’ Meeting (which began in 1978 as a meeting for “leisurely thought,

prayer, and deep consultation” among the primates). None of the “instruments” has any legislative authority. Some groups have recently made proposals to transform these “instruments” (especially the Primates’ Meeting) into agencies with the power to intervene in and discipline individual provinces.

### **11. How did the Anglican Communion get involved?**

The dissenters within The Episcopal Church have sought allies among the Anglican primates of developing nations to win international support against The Episcopal Church. They have submitted a series of petitions to which various Communion bodies and special commissions have responded. The most recent plea was a request to the Archbishop of Canterbury for a foreign primate to oversee certain dioceses and to exercise the duties of the Presiding Bishop for them. The dissenters have also encouraged their international allies to ignore provincial boundaries and to intervene in Episcopal dioceses.

### **12. What does the Presiding Bishop do?**

The Presiding Bishop convenes and presides at meetings of the House of Bishops and the Executive Council, acts as chief consecrator of new bishops, and has constitutionally prescribed roles in overseeing the election and disciplining of bishops. The Presiding Bishop, designated as a spokesperson for the church and as primate, represents the church in gatherings of the Anglican Communion primates. The Presiding Bishop is required to visit every diocese during his or her term of office but has no actual power over dioceses or other bishops. The office has a number of administrative duties and is the closest thing to a CEO that the church has.

### **13. What is “Alternative Primatial Oversight”?**

Six dioceses, including Pittsburgh, have asked the Archbishop of Canterbury to place them under the oversight of a foreign primate. In the combined petition submitted to the Archbishop of Canterbury in 2006, the dioceses listed all of the constitutionally and canonically defined roles of the Presiding Bishop as needing to be transferred to another primate. This request presents constitutional problems. The Presiding Bishop does not exercise “oversight” of dioceses and has no constitutional power to delegate his or her duties to others.

### **14. What are the communiqués people are talking about?**

Since the primates became involved in the controversy within The Episcopal Church, they have issued statements or communiqués at the conclusion of their

meetings, explaining their understanding of the current issues and offering recommendations for actions to ease tensions within the Communion. The most recent of these communiqués are from Dromantine, Ireland, in 2005, and in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, in 2007.

### **15. What is the Anglican Communion Network?**

The Network of Anglican Communion Dioceses and Parishes (now referred to as the Anglican Communion Network) is a federation of dissenting Episcopalians. The ACN adopted its structural charter in early 2004. Its goal was to replace The Episcopal Church in the Anglican Communion or to gain admission to the Communion as an independent province. Bishop Duncan serves as the ACN “moderator.” Ten dioceses (Albany, Central Florida, Dallas, Fort Worth, Pittsburgh, Quincy, Rio Grande, San Joaquin, South Carolina, and Springfield) eventually affiliated with the ACN. Parishes in non-ACN dioceses who wish to affiliate become members of one of several ACN convocations led by a “dean.” The ACN has acted as a shadow church, creating a relief agency for its own use (rather than employing Episcopal Relief and Development), its own pension program, and founding new missions unaffiliated with any Episcopal diocese. Settlement of the Calvary Church lawsuit confirmed the right of any parish in this diocese formally to refuse membership in the ACN.

### **16. What is the Common Cause Partnership?**

The Common Cause Partnership is a group of churches and organizations brought together by the ACN. It includes churches outside the Anglican Communion that split from The Episcopal Church, often many years ago, as well as more recent entities created through the intervention of foreign bishops. Bishops from these groups will meet in September 2007 to discuss creating more formal ties, in the hope of gaining status as a new church within the Communion.

### **17. What is a province?**

This term has two unrelated meanings. The Anglican Communion calls the national or regional churches that are Communion members “provinces.” Within The Episcopal Church, “province” designates one of the nine regional groupings of dioceses first defined by church canons nearly a century ago. Provinces hold an annual synod, work on issues of ministry and mission, have representation on the Executive Council and other bodies, and play a role in the appeals process of church trials of clergy.

### **18. Did the Diocese of Pittsburgh withdraw from its Episcopal Church province?**

The 2006, diocesan convention passed a resolution “withdrawing” consent to be included in Province III of The Episcopal Church. Despite this resolution, church canons continue to list Pittsburgh as a diocese of Province III, and only action of General Convention can remove Pittsburgh from this list. Diocesan leaders have cited Missouri as an example of another diocese that withdrew from its province. However, Missouri did not withdraw, but merely stopped participating in its assigned province. What Missouri wanted to do was to transfer to a neighboring province. It did so once General Convention added a transfer procedure to the canons.

### **19. Has The Episcopal Church changed its doctrine or beliefs?**

No. The Episcopal Church has not changed its doctrine or beliefs. No statement of faith or belief has been altered by General Conventions in 2003 or 2006. In fact, as part of Resolution C052, General Convention 2003 affirmed “our life together as a community of faith is grounded in the saving work of Jesus Christ and expressed in the principles of the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral: Holy Scripture, the historic Creeds of the Church, the two dominical sacraments, and the historic episcopate.”

### **20. Has The Episcopal Church authorized a liturgy for blessing same-sex unions?**

No. After more than a quarter-century of discussion, study, and listening, the church did change its canons to bar exclusion from any ministry based on sexual orientation. In 2000, General Convention approved a resolution (D039) acknowledging divisions on this topic and affirming that all relationships in or out of marriage should be marked by “monogamy, mutual affection and respect, careful, honest communication, and ... holy love.” The church has discussed liturgies to bless same-sex unions, but it has not authorized the use of such a liturgy. Acknowledging disagreements, General Convention 2003 declared that those who wished to explore local liturgies could do so. Some bishops have permitted blessings under this local option, but the church, as a whole, has not yet spoken.

### **21. Isn't this all about consecrating a gay bishop?**

No. The divisions over theology, sexuality, and the proper approach to scripture existed before Bishop Robinson was elected. Bishop Duncan has declared that the issue is not about sexuality. All sides of the

discussion about sexuality have scriptural bases for their positions, but they interpret the scriptures differently.

## **22. What is the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral?**

The Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral is a statement first proposed and endorsed by the House of Bishops of The Episcopal Church in 1886 and adopted with minor changes in 1888 by the Lambeth Conference of bishops. It contains four elements: Holy Scripture, the historic creeds of the Church, the two gospel sacraments (baptism and communion), and the historic episcopate. The text can be found in the “Historic Documents” section of the 1979 Book of Common Prayer (pp. 876–7). The Quadrilateral provides the closest thing we have to a statement of the core faith of those churches that are part of the Anglican Communion.

## **23. What is the “Global South”?**

The “Global South” is a grouping of Anglican provinces, primarily in the developing countries of Africa, Asia, and South America. At its peak, as many as 15 of the 38 provinces were members of this group. The “Global South” has supported the claims and demands of dissenters in The Episcopal Church. The core membership of the group is found in the provinces of Nigeria, Uganda, Rwanda, Kenya, Southeast Asia, Southern Cone (southern South America), and the West Indies.

## **24. Did The Episcopal Church violate its own constitution by its actions in 2003?**

No. The claim has been made that actions in 2003 were unconstitutional because they were contrary to the Preamble of the constitution of The Episcopal Church. This preamble was proposed in 1964 and adopted in 1967 as part of a discussion about the name of the church. It includes a description of The Episcopal Church as a “constituent member” of the “fellowship” called the Anglican Communion. It does not subjugate the church to the Communion or obligate it to remain a member. The primates and the Windsor Report have both acknowledged that The Episcopal Church acted in accordance with the church’s own constitution and canons.

## **25. What is the “accession clause” in our diocesan constitution?**

General Convention approves the creation of new dioceses. The constitution of The Episcopal Church requires that the constitution of a new diocese include “an unqualified accession to the Constitution and Canons” of The Episcopal Church. The original state conventions whose representatives wrote the

1789 constitution for the church also acceded to the constitution as part of the approval process. Once a diocese has acceded, it no longer has the power to withdraw that accession or to modify it because it becomes a subordinate unit to the general church. In 2004, the Diocese of Pittsburgh’s convention finished approving a constitutional amendment adding qualifications to the accession clause in the Pittsburgh constitution. In June 2007, the Executive Council of The Episcopal Church passed a resolution calling such changes “null and void.”

## **26. What is the Windsor Report?**

The Windsor Report was written by a special commission appointed in 2003 by the Archbishop of Canterbury at the request of the primates. The report—proposed as part of an ongoing conversation about dealing with conflict within the Communion—was issued in October 2004. It condemned the crossing of diocesan lines by bishops and asked The Episcopal Church and the Anglican Church of Canada to express regret for actions that had “strained the fabric” of the Anglican Communion. It asked the churches to refrain from further consecrations of bishops in same-sex relationships and from authorizing rites for the blessing of same-sex unions.

## **27. What does it mean to be “Windsor compliant”?**

The dissenting minority in The Episcopal Church turned certain parts of the Windsor Report into a checklist of requirements for being “Windsor compliant.” This checklist ignored parts of the report, however, such as the requirement for an end to violating the boundaries of The Episcopal Church. A group of bishops (“Windsor bishops”), including some who are not members of the ACN, met twice in 2006 and issued statements supporting the Windsor Report as the best way forward. The group has continued to meet occasionally, although its membership changes with each meeting.

## **28. Has The Episcopal Church ignored the Windsor Report?**

General Convention 2006 passed a series of resolutions responding to the Windsor Report, including A159—Commitment to Interdependence in the Anglican Communion, A160—Expression of Regret (for straining the bonds of affection and not giving sufficient importance to the impact of our actions), A165—Commitment to Windsor and Listening Processes, A166—Anglican Covenant Development Process, and B033 (calling on diocesan standing committees and bishops “to exercise restraint by not consenting to the consecration of any candidate to the episcopate whose manner of life presents a challenge to the wider church ...”). A special committee appointed by the Archbishop of Canterbury reported to the pri-

mates in Dar es Salaam in 2007 that The Episcopal Church had complied with the Windsor Report and Dromantine communiqué, although the committee wanted clarification on the blessing of same-sex unions. Archbishop Eames, of Ireland, who chaired the commission that drafted the Windsor Report, has also stated that The Episcopal Church has fully met the recommendations in that report.

### **29. Has The Episcopal Church been suspended from the Anglican Communion?**

No. The Episcopal Church and the Anglican Church of Canada graciously agreed not to participate as voting members in the 2005 meeting of the Anglican Consultative Council as a means of showing their sensitivity to the concerns raised by other members of the Communion, and honoring a request by the primates in their Dromantine communiqué. The ACC, by the narrowest of margins, approved that voluntary withdrawal, which ends in 2008. The Episcopal Church participates in numerous committees and networks of the Anglican Communion, and our Presiding Bishop continues to participate in meetings of the primates. All of the current diocesan bishops of The Episcopal Church, except for Bishop Robinson, have been invited to Lambeth 2008. None of those consecrated by other provinces to serve as bishops inside the bounds of The Episcopal Church received invitations.

### **30. Why did Calvary Church sue the diocese?**

It didn't. Calvary Church was the lead plaintiff in a lawsuit filed in the fall of 2003 against individual leaders of the diocese. Those who filed suit were concerned that measures passed at the special convention in September 2003 and proposed for the November 2003 convention put at risk the property owned by all of us collectively as Episcopalians. The leaders of the diocese succeeded in having the diocese added as a defendant, so that they could have access to diocesan funds to oppose the lawsuit. The parties to this suit reached a signed settlement in October 2005, but, following the vote at the diocesan convention in 2006 to withdraw from Province III, Calvary returned to court, claiming that the diocese was violating the terms of the settlement.

### **31. Doesn't our parish own its land and buildings?**

Not really. The Episcopal Church has long held the position that all property is held in trust for the whole church by the diocese, and that a parish has the right to use and the obligation to maintain that property. When a parish closes, parishioners do not sell the property and share the earnings from the sale among

themselves. Instead, the diocese assumes ownership. At the time of consecration of a church building, the vestry places it under the care of the diocese and church. Court cases supporting The Episcopal Church's position date back to the nineteenth century. Pennsylvania Courts have consistently supported this interpretation of ownership, most recently in a December 29, 2005, opinion by the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania. In 1979, The Episcopal Church added an explicit statement to its canons (the "Dennis Canon") specifying that all property is held in trust for The Episcopal Church by the diocese.

### **32. Why was the Dennis Canon enacted?**

A court opinion in Georgia suggested that hierarchical churches should state explicitly their claims to the property of member units, rather than rely on a theory of implied trusteeship. The Episcopal Church acted promptly to add such a statement to its canon law. This canon has been upheld in numerous lawsuits from the 1980s, when some groups tried to retain property while withdrawing from The Episcopal Church because of the adoption of the 1979 Book of Common Prayer and approval of women's ordination.

### **33. What happens to the diocese if our bishop is no longer here?**

The Standing Committee serves as the ecclesiastical authority in the absence of a bishop. The Episcopal Church canons provide for a process by which an interim bishop can be appointed in consultation with the Standing Committee. That bishop would then work with remaining leaders to ensure that the diocese has full and functioning bodies, according to its canons.

### **34. Has an entire diocese ever left The Episcopal Church?**

The Episcopal Church has never recognized a unilateral secession by a diocese. In 1861, nine dioceses organized as the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Confederate States of America. This secession was never recognized. The dioceses continued to be included in the roll call at the General Conventions of 1862 and 1865. In 1865, two bishops from the CSA were welcomed back into the House of Bishops, and others returned in 1868. General Convention did not, however, recognize the actions of the Confederate group in forming a new diocese and consecrating a bishop for it. This refusal asserted the position that the only legal governing body of the church was General Convention. There are international dioceses that have left The Episcopal Church to become separate provinces. These departures were accomplished by action of the General Convention.

### **35. What happens to a parish that leaves The Episcopal Church?**

Parishes or congregations cannot leave. Individuals are free to leave. If they wish to form a new congregation in some other jurisdiction, that is their right. The Episcopal Church will assert its legal right to endowments, buildings, and other property (such as vestments, communion silver, prayer books, and hymnals), so that they may be used by any faithful remnant of that parish, or by a new congregation gathered in that location. Members of the vestry of a parish contemplating such a decision should be aware that vestry members are bound to “faithfully perform the duties of that office in accordance with the Constitution and Canons of this Church” (Canon I.17.8) and are personally liable under Pennsylvania law for property that they might remove from the continuing parish.

### **36. Will those leaving The Episcopal Church still recognize women priests?**

Bishop Duncan accepts women’s ordination to the priesthood, but he stated, in October 2006, that it could take a century for the Communion to learn whether this is truly God’s will or not. The Anglican Communion Network has “agreed to disagree” on this point. However, the supporters of women’s ordination are a distinct minority in the larger Common Cause Partnership that is providing the core of a potential new province, in the ACN dioceses actively considering withdrawal from The Episcopal Church, and in the core “Global South” provinces.

### **37. Will things change for parishes that remain in The Episcopal Church?**

The Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh will continue to be part of The Episcopal Church, but the diocese will experience loss. Both parishes and the diocese will be smaller if some people choose to leave. In a few cases, congregations may need to call a new minister, but every parish remaining will continue to worship in its own building, using the Book of Common Prayer. The parish will remain a member of The Episcopal Church and, through it, will continue to be part of the Anglican Communion. The Episcopal Church will continue to hold the Nicene and Apostles Creeds as its basic statements of faith, assert that scripture contains all things necessary for salvation, and celebrate the two gospel sacraments. The Episcopal Church and all its parishes will continue to include a broad spectrum of interpretation and practice, from conservative to liberal, evangelical to Anglo-Catholic.

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