

Pastoral Letter and Statement by the Rector and Vestry of St. Peter's Episcopal Church

August 16, 2006

Dear St. Peter's Parish Family,

Grace and Peace from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

Within the life of St. Peter's Episcopal Church and School we have much for which to give thanks to God. Over 70 people participated in this summer's Alpha Course and several people gave their lives to Jesus for the first time. Our youth group has grown to be one of the largest in the Diocese. Our children and music programs are thriving. We continue to grow and add new members, and our church family finds much peace and joy as they worship together and serve others within our church, community and distant lands.

It would be wonderful to focus just on our parish life and mission alone. However, within the larger Episcopal Church and Anglican Communion family there are significant problems. The inadequate response by the Episcopal Church leadership to comply with the basic commitments necessary to maintain the bonds of Christian fellowship and unity threatens to create fragmentation and division within the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion. As the vestry and I have been monitoring the larger life of the Episcopal Church and Anglican Communion, we believe we have come to a place where we need to set a clear trajectory for St. Peter's Episcopal Church. It would be easy to be confounded in the uncertainty of the times. Not us! We must stay focused on the work of the gospel in our portion of the vineyard and proceed with confidence in the fulfillment of our mission. We have a responsibility to preserve this parish's vitality by navigating through these troubling times with faith and hope in Jesus Christ our Lord.

No one knows what the future may hold, what decisions and actions others will take, or what events may unfold. We as a parish, however, can be clear in our core values and threshold commitments. In the event that difficult choices have to be made our choices will be clear and consistent with our stated values and commitments. The attached document outlines St. Peter's core values and threshold commitments and clearly articulates our commitment to maintain our allegiance to the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church of Christ by remaining a constituent member of the Anglican Communion. As stated in our Constitution and Canons, our constituent membership in the Anglican Communion is an essential part of the trust relationship we have as Episcopalians. It is this basic trust relationship that is in jeopardy by the General Convention's recent actions, inactions and errors.

On a local level, our Bishop, John Howe stated in his July 2006 post-convention address:

"I told you, at our Convention last January, that we are dangerously close to division in the Anglican Communion, and I said, 'If division comes I will resist it with all of my energy. I hate the very thought of it. But if division is forced upon us, it is forced upon us.' My sense is that we are closer to it now than we were two weeks ago. I have said this to you twice previously, but

let me reiterate: if we must choose between being Episcopalian and being Anglican, I will choose Anglican.”

St. Peter’s Episcopal Church fully supports and applauds our Bishop and his faithful commitment to Jesus Christ and the Church. Should we find it necessary to make a choice, let it be known that, *“St. Peter’s Episcopal Church will choose Anglican, too!”*

The rector and vestry are calling for a special meeting of the St. Peter’s Parish on Sunday September 24th at 7:00 PM for discussion and confirmation of this letter and the attached statement. We will have a parish potluck dinner at 6:00 PM followed by this important meeting. I hope you will attend.

We all have a responsibility to act with conviction and purpose, as well as with prayer and patience. Please join us in patient and persistent prayer for this Church, your Clergy and Vestry. As an Episcopal Church family we are under discipline and need to mature in our knowledge and love of the Lord Jesus Christ. The writer of Hebrews reminds us that *“No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those trained by it. Therefore strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. Make level paths for your feet, so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed.”*

Thanking you in advance for your prayerful hearts and humble spirits.

We are faithfully yours in Him,

Charles Holt

14 August 2006 Statement of the Clergy and Vestry of St. Peter's Episcopal Church¹

We, the Clergy and Vestry and of St. Peter's Episcopal Church, joined by other members of our congregation, have watched with both personal and corporate spiritual concern the actions of the 75th General Convention of the Episcopal Church.² As a constituent member of the Anglican Communion according to the Constitution and Canons of ECUSA, this parish has reviewed the actions of the 75th General Convention of the Episcopal Church, and subsequent responses to it, in light of the Windsor Report's request.³ The Archbishop of Canterbury and the Primates of the Anglican Communion required that the Convention express regret for the consecration of the current Bishop of New Hampshire, and that a moratorium be placed both on the consecration of partnered homosexual persons and same sex blessings.

We believe that the actions of the 75th General Convention of the Episcopal Church may have jeopardized its own constitutional trust commitments to its own dioceses and parishes, to the Anglican Communion and to the See of Canterbury. Where there is now ambiguity on the part of the 75th General Convention's commitments, **let St. Peter's Episcopal Church now be unambiguous in its core values and threshold commitments.**

- **We believe** that the interpretation of the adequacy of the Windsor related actions and resolutions of the 75th General Convention must occur in the context of the understanding and response of the Anglican Communion as a whole, with a commitment to seeking communion consensus. No province can rightly reserve to itself the exclusive interpretation of the meaning of its actions.
- **We believe** that the clear implication of the Archbishop of Canterbury's two statements — "Challenge and Hope for the Anglican Communion" (June 27, 2006)⁴ and his July 7 address to the Church of England Synod⁵ — is that the 2006 General Convention has inadequately addressed the Windsor Report's recommendations and requests, threatening to further strain, and perhaps dissolve, the bonds of affection among the provinces of the Anglican Communion. The maintenance of our Province's constitutional framework of constituent membership in the Anglican Communion and Communion with the See of Canterbury requires humble submission to that interdependence and accountability for the preservation of our sacred trust and constitutional integrity as a province.
- **We believe** that the goal of the Episcopal Church, the Diocese of Central Florida and the parish of St. Peter's Episcopal Church must be one of humility and submission to the consensus and response of the Anglican Communion instruments of unity. The Windsor Report calls for greater interdependence and accountability among the several provinces of the Anglican Communion.
- **We believe** that we can look to the instruments of unity, specifically the February 2007 Primates meeting and the 2008 Lambeth Gathering of Bishops, for the provision of communion consensus and clear accountability of this Province with recommendations as to how our parish and diocese may maintain its constituent member status within the Anglican Communion.
- **We believe** that the election of the new Presiding Bishop at the General Convention is cause for great concern because:
 - She gave consent to the consecration of the Bishop of New Hampshire in 2003 in direct defiance of the express teaching of the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Primates of the Communion, and the Lambeth Bishops;

¹ We are indebted to the good work of the vestry of Grace and St. Stephen's Episcopal Church of Colorado Springs, CO for the lion's share of the wording of this statement paper. This work is greatly informed by the Anglican Communion Institute <http://www.anglicancommunioninstitute.org> that is presently involved at the highest level of the Communion in confronting the real dangers that threaten our church.

² General Convention actions: See http://www.episcopalchurch.org/53785_ENG_HTM.htm

³ Windsor Report: See: <http://www.aco.org/windsor2004/downloads/index.cfm>.

⁴ "Challenge and Hope for the Anglican Communion" by Rowan Williams: See http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/sermons_speeches/060627%20Archbishop%20-%20challenge%20and%20hope%20reflection.htm

⁵ Rowan Williams July 7th, 2006 General Synod of the Church of England: See <http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/releases/060707.htm>

- She has personally authorized the blessing of sexual relationships outside the bonds of marriage;
- She holds that Christianity evolves to the degree that contemporary opinions need not be accountable to the received doctrine, discipline and worship of the traditional Church;
- She rejects that Jesus is the *only* way to the Father.
- She has also stated that resolution B033, which calls for restraint in consenting to the consecration of bishops whose manner of life may be problematic for the rest of the Communion, is simply a policy that can be reversed or revised very soon.
- **We believe** the decision of the Bishop, Standing Committee and Diocesan Board of the Diocese of Central Florida to request Alternative Primatial Oversight from the Archbishop of Canterbury was necessary and completely appropriate.⁶

Further, let it be known that:

- **We are committed** to the Apostles' teaching and fellowship, the breaking of bread and the prayers.
- **We are committed** to praying for our Bishop, the Archbishop of Canterbury and the current leadership of the Episcopal Church, including the new Presiding Bishop.
- **We are committed** to Lambeth Resolution 1.10 of 1998 as the agreed teaching of the Anglican Communion on human sexuality.⁷
- **We are committed** to the recommendations of the Windsor Report as the means to restoring our common life in communion.
- **We are committed** to the vision of an Anglican Covenant set forth by the Archbishop of Canterbury in "Challenge and Hope for the Anglican Communion".

To support the Catholic and Evangelical witness of dioceses and congregations in ECUSA, the Archbishop of Canterbury has proposed a two tier relationship to the larger Communion in which dioceses and congregations such as our own could be assigned constituent status within the Anglican Communion by clear commitment to Communion life and discipline.

We do hereby declare the intention of the Vestry of St. Peter's Episcopal Church to remain "a constituent member of the Anglican Communion, a Fellowship within the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, of those duly constituted Dioceses, Provinces, and regional Churches in communion with the See of Canterbury, upholding and propagating the historic Faith and Order as set forth in the Book of Common Prayer."⁸

We will develop and maintain affiliations within structures recognized by the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Primates of the Communion, and Bishops within our own church for the purpose of a public commitment to those threshold elements of Communion Teaching, Conciliar decision making, and Covenant that uphold the Doctrine, Discipline and Worship of Jesus Christ as received from the Apostles by the Anglican Communion.

So long as it remains within our power and with God's help, we pledge to hold ourselves and the leadership of the Episcopal Church accountable to allegiance to Jesus Christ the Lord, the Word of God revealed in the Old and New Testaments, and the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church of Christ.

By unanimous resolve this 14th day of August, 2006 the Clergy and Vestry of St. Peter's Episcopal Church in Lake Mary, Florida.

⁶ See <http://www.cfdiocese.org/news/news06/gc2006/altover.htm>

⁷ See: <http://www.lambethconference.org/resolutions/1998/1998-1-10.cfm>

⁸ From the preface of the Constitution and Canons of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America.