

Dear Markers – Below are my notes of the Forum Meeting last Saturday – greatly assisted by the suggestions of Bob Hansel & Lee Shaffer. These notes are followed by a report from the Episcopal News Service of the Presiding Bishop engaging in a conversation with laity on March 30 about another breakaway diocese in PA. I will send out another e-mail later today reporting on the vestry meeting in March.

Regards, Charlie Davis

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The Forum met at The Church of the Palms, United Methodist, in Oakatie on 3/28/09 to invite Dr. Walter Cabe of the Fort Worth Diocese to lead a discussion on:

“What Happens When the Leadership of an Episcopal Diocese Decides to Disassociate from the Episcopal Church?”

He was preceded by Mr. Lynn Pagliaro, President of the Episcopal Forum of SC [EFSC] Board, who gave a brief presentation on the purpose of EFSC as well as information about the recent diocesan Convention.

The program was-introduced by the Rev. Dr. Bob Hansel of St. Marks who coordinated the program, led us in prayer, and gave closing remarks.

Others attending from St. Marks included Allison Davidow & Jim Rowe, Anne & Roger Errington, Bonnie & John Gruetzmacher, Dale Hansel, Gail and Bill Hodsdon, Barbara & Bob Pinkerton, Lee & Scott Shaffer, Pat Updegraff, and Charlie, the Scribe. Many attended from All Saints Church, Hilton Head -- as did some members of other parishes in the diocese including St. Helena's.

In his presentation, Lynn Pagliaro made the important distinction that those dioceses that break away want to remain part of Anglicanism but not of the Episcopal Church, USA [TEC].

He said that Bishop Lawrence has decided that the Diocese of SC should stay in the TEC but envisaged a church that was more conservative than most other dioceses. Although the Bishop wants to start new churches, these would not include congregations such as St. Marks who subscribe to more progressive applications of tradition, scripture and reason.

According to Lynn, the Bishop believes that our diocese is more strongly connected to the dioceses in the Southern Cone rather than to TEC. Nonetheless, he says we will remain. He compares TEC to a sidecar to the bicycle of Anglicanism: when the sidecar provides mutual benefits – like pensions for the clergy or human resources – we will take advantage.

The Bishop is empathetic to the concerns of liberals – but not to the degree that we [St. Marks] can be recognized as a bona fide Episcopal community. The Bishop is striving for a Covenant to be adopted by Lambeth that presents a narrower interpretation of Christianity.

Bob Hansel, following, gave the distinction between the Bishop's vision and that of St. Mark's. We are welcoming and inclusive. He referenced the book, "House of Abraham: Lincoln and the Todds, A Family Divided by War" by Stephen Berry. Bob said the book talks of the president's family on both sides. The book looks at the Civil War as a family quarrel that stumbled into a war that could have been avoided if there had been a will on both sides to seek accommodation. This is what Bob is seeking because, when I asked later, whether seeking to affiliate with a different Episcopal diocese was a possibility so that we could achieve some sort of legitimacy within the Church, Bob said: "It would not be appropriate for a local faith community located in one Episcopal diocese to seek affiliation or recognition from another, adjacent diocese. Avenues toward such recognition both here in SC and elsewhere are--at least for the time being---closed to us. In my opinion, that should not prevent us from continuing to grow and expand as a church. Our legitimacy as followers of Christ is not an institutional matter. We already have, because of our baptism, a commissioning for ministry that provides all the legitimacy we need."

In setting up the program, Bob initially wanted to invite the Very Reverend Rick Cluett, the Presiding Bishop's emissary to both sides in ~~the~~ disputes over breakaway dioceses. But because Rick must keep his impartiality to be credible, he declined.

Walter Cabe, on the other hand, is eminently qualified because as a layman, he is both impervious to ecclesiastical backlash and, as the lay representative of his parish, he has lived through the experience of having his ~~own~~ Bishop lead his diocese out of ~~the~~ TEC.

Bob did not anticipate such an action in SC, but there is nothing like being prepared – which is why he invited Walter to address us.

Walter said he is trying to help people in other dioceses who are deeply concerned about how to heal divisions. Thus, at Bob's invitation, he came to share information on the circumstances of the Diocese of Ft. Worth composed of North TX Episcopalians. Namely: what happens when a diocese leaves TEC and what is life like after the "train wreck." On March 15, 2008, the Rev. Courtland Moore, a retired priest, asked Walter to join him in setting up a joint lay/clergy team to fight the Bishop's effort to leave TEC.

Walter said his diocese was roughly comparable in size to ours, and 80 percent of laity and clergy voted to leave TEC and affiliate with the Southern Cone. Within the Anglican Church such a vote must go through two readings – in this case Nov. 2007, and Nov. 2008.

After the first reading, 60 laity of one parish wrote to the diocese se independently of their rector saying they did not wish to leave TEC – but "the train had already left the station."

The Rt. Rev. Jack Iker, Bishop of the Diocese of Ft. Worth, had prepared for the break: he had brought conservative priests into many of the diocese's parishes; he established

corporations to take control of Episcopal churches and other property; and he characterized those who refused to leave as a “fringe group” – as compared to the “steadfast Episcopalians” who had followed his lead out of TEC. To those who remained, he alleged that ~~the~~ TEC “doesn’t care about you.”

Walter and Courtland formed a Steering Committee of North Texas Episcopalians who were representative of diverse points of view and whose sole purpose was to reorganize the diocese after the Bishop led the break. They were aggressive in seeking help from the national church; they formed a non-profit corporation and set up their own website to pursue an aggressive pro-active communications strategy.

From the middle of March in 2008 to the middle of Feb. in 2009 they met every Saturday to share resources. The Bishop also tried to assert that for a parish/community to stay in TEC, there would have to be a vote of 66 percent of the congregation. This assertion was rejected by the Steering Committee as it is by TEC.

On Nov. 15, 2008, a year after the first reading, the diocese disassociated from TEC. Twenty thousand followed and still control [for the time being] the assets of the parishes as well as the buildings. The final disposition of these assets remains in dispute. It is estimated that 60 percent of those who left with the Bishop did so because of great attachment to the physical church buildings.

Within a week of Nov. 15, Bishop Iker was inhibited by the Presiding Bishop and within another week he was deposed. The process became more complex and acrimonious. Some rectors, who wanted to take their parishes with the bishop, were opposed by their vestries – and vice-versa. The Steering Committee spent a lot of time educating wardens and vestries and adopted a statement of mission and beliefs.

Within three months of the second reading for “secession,” the Presiding Bishop celebrated Eucharist in the diocese and, on Feb. 7, 2009, helped reorganize the diocese and elect a provisional bishop for those Episcopalians who had stayed in TEC. There are now six faithful communities in different regions of the diocese. Of the original 25,000 Episcopalians in the diocese, 5,000 stayed with TEC and 1,000 more have joined for a total of 6,000. Despite the controversy, the Steering Committee keeps Bishop Iker informed of the plans of the reorganized diocese.

In the question period Walter responded as follows:

Question.] What should Episcopalians in the Diocese of SC be doing in anticipation of the diocese leaving TEC [but still short of the two readings]?

Answer.] Work out your positions ahead of time. Bring in diverse viewpoints [although the Ft. Worth Steering Committee was not effective in bringing in rectors with diverse points of view]. Identify attitudes in various parishes. Recognize that you need broad representation to achieve credibility. Understand how to organize yourselves as a place for members of other vestries to go for answers – become known as educators. Help

vestries to stop whining. Build up communications.

Question.] What is the authority of a vestry?

Answer.] In a parish, authority varies parish by parish. Principally, a vestry has a fiduciary responsibility to represent the parish membership. The vestry calls the rector but he or she must be approved by the Bishop. Missions in a diocese are not allowed to have a vestry and the Bishop can appoint and fire members of the leadership and replace them at will.

Other comments/advice from Walter:

- Remember “Episcopal” means being governed by a bishop.
  - There is a vestry resource guide on the web.
  - You can get tied up into “Alice in Wonderland” rules designed to get the intended outcome [such as the above attempt by the Bishop to require a 66 percent vote in a parish to prevent it from associating with him.] This jousting wears out ordinary people-and causes them to lose heart [probably what such jousting was designed to do].
  - A Standing Committee in the diocese is separate from but equal in authority to the Bishop.
  - Note there is an important legal distinction between being “reorganized,” vs. “reconstituted.” In situations such as these the church is “reorganized.”
  - On the issue of the ultimate disposition of assets and church property, one of Walter’s main points of counsel to us was: “Lawsuits over property take money and time for which TEC is well prepared to handle. Thus if you are caught up in the middle of a breakup, don’t let your spiritual life be diverted by these concerns.”
  - The Ft. Worth Steering Committee was helped by the reservoir of resources and experience of the San Joaquin diocese in CA,. Walter said: “As the San Joaquin diocese helped us in Ft. Worth, so we in Ft. Worth extend our help to you in whatever way you need.”
  - The message the Ft. Worth Steering Committee sends to all the Episcopalians in their diocese who have broken away or have lost heart: “Get ready to come home; we need you.”
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## **PENNSYLVANIA: Presiding Bishop engages in conversation with laity**

By Jerry Hames, March 30, 2009

[Episcopal News Service] For two hours on Sunday afternoon (March 30), Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori held a conversation with lay people in the [Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania](#) at [Philadelphia Cathedral](#), listening to their views and responding to their questions about the diocese, the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion.

She urged them not to become mired in the diocese's major problem -- the future of inhibited Pennsylvania Bishop Charles Bennison -- but to focus on new possibilities. Echoing her videotaped greeting to the Diocesan Convention last November, she encouraged them to be open to healing as individuals and collectively as a diocese. "Restoring relationships with one another is a significant part of your work right now," she said.

More than 250 people attended the lay forum and listened intently as the Presiding Bishop responded to about 30 questions directed her way. The questions were wide-ranging in scope and reflected broad interests, but at least a dozen were related to the serious financial challenges the diocese now faces and the lengthy legal procedures that have followed the inhibition of Bennison in 2007.

Since then, Bennison has been found guilty of two charges of conduct unbecoming a clergy member, and an ecclesiastical court has recommended he be deposed. In a separate hearing, the judges, composed of bishops, clergy and lay people elected by the General Convention, rejected his request to modify their sentence. Bennison has now appealed to a Court of Review composed of nine bishops. He continues to be paid by the diocese during this time.

Peter Wilmerding, chair of the Finance and Property Committee and a former controller of the diocese, said he was frustrated by delays by the Court of Review, apparently because of the bishops' conflicting schedules. He urged the Presiding Bishop to try to expedite the process, and she agreed to do what she could. "We've got to get a decision on the table so we can move ahead," Wilmerding said.

Several others questioned why the diocese is required to pay the bishop after an ecclesiastical trial found him guilty and why church canons have created such a lengthy, drawn-out judicial process.

"I understand your frustration at having to pay someone who is not functioning in this diocese," said Jefferts Schori, acknowledging that there is a strong case for revising church canons in order to expedite such matters and yet still be fair to the accused. "But let me challenge all of you," she said. "The situation in which you find yourself should not hold you hostage. If that is the only thing in your view, it will do that."

Other speakers asked for counsel and training from the national church's stewardship office and described the difficulty trying to balance the diocese's critical financial need with Christian stewardship responsibilities beyond diocesan borders. Lengthy statements preceded many questions, but one of the most poignant was asked in just seven words.

"What is your prayer for this diocese?" a woman asked.

"Get healthy; learn to love one another," Jefferts Schori replied, adding that those present must make attempts to lower the level of conflict in the diocese, and she urged them to adopt a discipline to help restore broken relationships. "Look for the blessing in the

person that drives you crazy."

Bishop Rodney Michel, former suffragan bishop of the Diocese of Long Island, was introduced at the forum as the new assisting bishop beginning April 1. He will serve up to three years, succeeding Bishop Allen Bartlett who returned from retirement to serve as assisting bishop during the past year.

Christopher Hart, a member of the Standing Committee, said it had been the Presiding Bishop's intent to make a diocesan visit since last fall when she was unable to attend the Diocesan Convention. On Sunday morning she preached at a service celebrating the 150th anniversary of Holy Trinity Church, Rittenhouse Square, and had meetings with the Standing Committee and members of the Youth Council prior to the lay forum. On Monday morning, the Presiding Bishop celebrated the Eucharist with diocesan clergy, followed by a clergy-only conversation about diocesan and church-wide issues and concerns.

*-- Jerry Hames is a former editor of Episcopal Life.*