

July 25, 2009

via e-mail

Dear Vestry Members,

As you can imagine, and are probably aware, many folks are weighing in with their thoughts and opinions about The Episcopal Church following the 76th General Convention. Leaders of our own diocese, even individual parishes surrounding All Saints, have offered their "response" to the actions of the GC. Bishop Lawrence has been critical of the actions surrounding human sexuality issues at GC through correspondence to clergy and the Diocesan webpage and via a televised interview on Anglican TV. Kendall Harmon, the Canon Theologian of the diocese, thought it prudent to throw gasoline onto the post convention response with outrageous and inflammatory language that is bound to raise the temperature of folks in this diocese. The parishes of St. Luke's HHI, Church of the Cross, Bluffton; and St. Helena's, Beaufort, have given their negative response on the diocesan website (and now I learn through a parishioner calling the office this morning that their position was issued in a full page ad in the Packet, Saturday's edition). The Bishop is meeting with the Standing Committee of the Diocese and the Deans, presumably to develop a strategy for this diocese forward (the Bishop has said as much during the TV interview).

As Rector I choose not to enter into the fray with my own opinions or speak on behalf of the parish I serve. Our parish, members, vestry and clergy leadership have been very clear about who we are and our position as a member of the Episcopal Church. I think it would be counterproductive to make any statements now. I don't feel I have to defend the actions of GC. In fact their actions are in keeping with where the Episcopal Church has moved in the recent past. As a denomination, as a Church representing Christ in the world, we are perhaps clearer than ever before about sexuality as it relates to ministry, ordination, the Episcopate, and men and women in the pews of our churches whose sexual orientation is homosexual. If anything the church was very accurate about where we (the Episcopal Church) see ourselves theologically on these important issues.

I happen to agree with the position our Church has taken; I'm still mulling over, deeply and privately, my own understanding of "union" and "marriage" and what it means to "bless a union." But that is beside the point. What is important is that we continue to be inclusive, open and accepting of all who wish to share in the life of this parish, and that our temperament, our outward and visible signs, our language, spoken and written, our central theology of Christ, be one of welcome and inclusivity.

As I remind myself, let me remind you, that we are a living member of the Episcopal Church, and our Church is not anywhere close to perfect or infallible. I remind myself, and you, that this parish and the Episcopal Church may be sincerely wrong about many issues, and about the hot issues facing the Church today. The Church and this parish can only move and respond to the will of God through the gift of the Holy Spirit. Are we sadly mistaken? Is the Holy Spirit missing or ignored? I can only comment that I move humbly with a sense that God speaks through me, and you, and the imperfect Episcopal Church through the convergence of the biblical story continuing to unfold and inform, through our minds that are a blessing from God, and through our hearts that speak inaudibly of our God urging us to be about HIS love in a broken and torn world.

As messy as it is, as this protracted conflict continues in our Church – and, I might add, this diocese – we run the danger of losing our overall priority and focus: the healing love of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our mission to share Christ who, in his life, was Christ to all. As messy as this is, the Episcopal Church has set a clearer course for our future. As I publicly stated in the summer of 2003, I applaud the Episcopal Church for its clarity and decisiveness about issues many would rather sweep under the rug or ignore and act as if they do not exist.

With your advice, I wish to share this message with any member of the parish, if they so desire. I have said nothing here that I would not say in conversation or with the Bishop and leaders of the diocese.

Sincerely in Christ,

Richard Carroll Lindsey, Rector