

The Bishop's Message
September 2009

What Now?

My guess is that a good many Episcopalians in the Diocese of Springfield have had an interest in and followed to some extent the activity and action taken at the 76th General Convention of The Episcopal Church held last July in Anaheim, California. Perhaps at least as many of you have been following what the “Spin-doctors” have been saying about it ever since.

From a broad perspective, the highest leadership of The Episcopal Church, that being the Presiding Bishop and the President of the House of Deputies, is saying, “Nothing has changed!” I suppose that could be an attempt to placate the Archbishop of Canterbury and the broad majority of the Anglican Communion.

You perhaps are aware that Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, had said in his address to us in Anaheim that he was fearful The Episcopal Church would act in a way which would push the Anglican Communion further away than we have already. Indeed, that, in my opinion, has happened. Resolution D025 effectively negated Resolution B033 passed at the 75th General Convention held in Columbus, Ohio, which put a moratorium on non-celibate homosexuals becoming bishops. Additionally, C056 orders the collecting of rites for the blessing of homosexual relationships for consideration at the 77th General Convention to become official rites of The Episcopal Church.

In a real way, the leadership of our Church is correct. Nothing has changed. In many quarters of The Episcopal Church, ordination of non-celibate homosexuals has continued unabated for years as has the blessing of same sex relationships. The 76th General Convention may appropriately be viewed as setting in concrete the flawed and misguided innovations and immoral direction of our Church. As I said on the floor of the House of Bishops during one of our executive sessions, we have failed to connect the dots or do the math. What The Episcopal Church set in motion in 2003 has been a disaster. What people want most from the Church is a relationship with God through which our shortcomings can be authentically rectified, not superficially justified. By every measure including the Gamaliel test, the secularization of the Church does not work and unless we change the future is grim, indeed.

What we hear preached by those at “815” (the address of The Episcopal Church national office in New York City) is the central importance of the Millennium Goals rather than eternal salvation in Christ Jesus through repentance, forgiveness and sanctification. To some the uniqueness of Christ appears to be an embarrassment, His Lordship in all things questioned and the authority of Holy

Scripture rejected. They appear ignorant to what it means to be “relevant” preferring to be “relative.”

Sadly, it is all too clear. The Episcopal has become blinded to its primary mission. The priority and focus is on property litigation at the expense of evangelistic outreach. Of course, if there isn't a true Gospel to be shared, born of having met the resurrected Christ, evangelistic motivation is stunted at the outset.

The problem for the Episcopal Church is this: Even if there is success in the courtroom, all that will be gained is some assets that can only temporarily postpone the inevitable demise of our once grand Church. There will be no Episcopal congregations to fill the buildings. The people will have left in pursuit of the faith once delivered to the saints. All that will be left is empty walls and lost souls.

Perhaps C. S. Lewis summed the situation up best when he said, “I willingly believe that the damned are, in one sense, successful rebels to the end; that the doors of hell are locked on the inside.”

If these words of C.S. Lewis are correct, and I believe they are, we should be encouraged to recommit to the mission and ministry of the Gospel. Certainly that has not changed! It is today what it always has been. You and I are simply called to be faithful, but not to what we may think or to our secularly crafted principles and values. We are called to be faithful to the principles and values divinely given to the whole Body of Christ, the Church catholic, through God's revelation. Any intention and willingness to do that must be grounded in the Holy Spirit, Holy Scripture, the Sacraments and fellowship with the saints.

From an historical perspective, we know there has never been an age when the Church was not in crisis. Why should we expect to be delivered from the required responsibility of all Christians to be a formidable witness in our time? What the Church needs now is exactly what it has needed in every age – men and women who are spiritual warriors in their willingness to stand and witness to the truth no matter what the cost.

We can be assured the authentic Gospel of Christ will win out. The question is: Where do we stand – with Christ or with the world?

The Right Reverend Peter Hess Beckwith
Tenth Bishop of Springfield