



In Our Many Voices

A Via Media USA Report

to The Episcopal Church

February 23, 2005

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary_____	2
Mission Statement of Via Media USA_____	4
Group Members of Via Media USA_____	4
In Their Own Words: Statements from Individual Allied Groups of Via Media USA_____	5
Albany Via Media_____	5
Concerned Episcopalians of the St. Lawrence Deanery (CESLD)_____	6
Episcopal Forum of South Carolina (EFSC)_____	7
Episcopal Voices of Central Florida (EVCF)_____	9
Fort Worth Via Media_____	11
Progressive Episcopalians of Pittsburgh (PEP)_____	13
Remain Episcopal (San Joaquin)_____	17
Southwest Florida Via Media Episcopalians_____	21
Springfield Via Media (SVM)_____	22
Tennessee Via Media_____	26
Via Media Dallas_____	27
Via Media Rio Grande_____	28
The Widening Circle (Rhode Island)_____	29

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In Our Many Voices

Feast of Polycarp, Bishop and Martyr

Executive Summary

Dr. Christopher Wilkins, Via Media USA Facilitator

“In Our Many Voices” is a Via Media USA report on our sense of the state of the Episcopal Church in the dioceses in which we are active, and on our particular ministries within them. Via Media USA is an alliance of independent groups that have joined in common cause to support the Episcopal Church and its traditional middle way—the *via media*. The *via media* perspective is a priceless gift from the Anglican tradition to an increasingly polarized world. We strive to be a voice for the ordinary Episcopalian who treasures the church as a sacramental and service community that rejoices in multiple understandings of God’s call to us.

We are currently gathered in thirteen groups in the following dioceses: Albany, Rhode Island, Pittsburgh, Springfield, Tennessee, South Carolina, Central Florida, Southwest Florida, Dallas, Fort Worth, Rio Grande, and San Joaquin. Some groups focus on education, others on making a difference in diocesan activities, still others on providing a forum for dialogue. Our allied groups are not all in dioceses that claim an affiliation with the Network of Anglican Communion Dioceses and Parishes (NACDAP), but they have emerged first where challenges to the *via media* have been most pronounced. All the groups are committed to strengthening the Episcopal Church and to preserving its unity.

Our members mirror the face of the Episcopal Church: we are laity and clergy; high-church Anglo-Catholic, Low Church and Broad Church, liberal and conservative. We are male and female; of a variety of races; married and single; young, old, and everything in-between. Our sexual identities and relationships reflect the range found in the Episcopal Church, and, we hope, God’s love to us. While not all of our members agreed with the decisions of General Convention in 2003, we all support the decision-making processes of our church.

We share three major goals.

1. To Provide Support for Each Other. Our first goal is to provide structures and communities of support for Episcopalians whose parishes or dioceses have left them on the margins, discounted and isolated from the rest of the Episcopal Church. Our mutual call is to continue to live out our faith as members of the Episcopal Church with a ministry that is both prophetic and healing for our parishes, our dioceses, and our church.

2. To Protect the Church. Our second goal is to address what made us so isolated in the first place. This involves identifying certain threats to our church’s unity, integrity, and mission, and encouraging others to do so as well. In the dioceses in which we are active, these threats come from those who are working to take the Episcopal Church apart from within and reorient it as a confessional evangelical institution. Others are intent on causing the destruction or replacement of the Episcopal Church if it does not “repent.” We believe that this is particularly true of the American Anglican Council and of some of the leaders of the NACDAP. Some of our dioceses have joined these groups; others are poised to do so; some have resisted. Together, they merit further study by the church in order to assess their parochial and diocesan dynamics and to find ways to address their particular challenges. When a moderate, inclusive Christian church community threatens or decides to veer from Anglicanism’s traditional broad, middle way, much is lost. The question before the church now is how that middle way can be restored.

As the attached reports from groups within in the Via Media USA alliance, collected under the title “In Their Own Words,” make clear, the leadership in many of our dioceses—especially those which have affiliated with the NACDAP—has not served the church well. Many of our diocesan leaders, knowingly or unknowingly, have acted in ways that:

- Engender unhealthy institutional dynamics throughout the church;
- Suppress dissent and discourage dialogue;
- Elicit fears of reprisal;
- Exacerbate isolation;
- Offer inadequate and limited theologies of the Bible and the church;
- Turn diversity into divisiveness and dissension;
- Diminish Episcopalians’ ability to trust and support each other in our lives in faith; and
- Denigrate the integrity, polity, and mission of the Episcopal Church.

If our experiences are any guide, leadership with these outcomes diminishes the church’s unity and Gospel witness, and it makes both lay and ordained Episcopal ministries less effective. We are particularly concerned about the lack of support for ministries that draw from the wide spectrum of current Episcopalians’ theological and ecclesial understandings. For reasons that others may be better able to explain, some of our leaders appear capable of successful leadership only of those whose vision is congruent to their own.

3. To Work for Reconciliation. Our third goal in this alliance is to work for reconciliation within the Episcopal Church, particularly in our own dioceses and parishes. We are mindful that the Anglican Communion, as well as our own House of Bishops, has called the Episcopal Church to find ways to care for its dissenting minorities, even as it calls on them to desist from destructive actions. We believe that reconciliation can be achieved in ways that not only avoid the threat of schism—which, we must emphasize, is quite real in our dioceses—but also enhance the integrity of the church and respect the consciences of individual believers.

We believe that the Episcopal Church needs to reach out to overcome the isolation in these dioceses. For our members and many other Episcopalians, the isolation feels like abandonment and is involuntary and painful. For others, the isolation is a deliberate act they have taken to shield themselves from contact with the rest of the church.

It is not in keeping with our evangelistic mission simply to let this movement further wall itself in a theological and ecclesial ghetto, whether inside or outside the Episcopal Church. Through the Windsor Report, the Lambeth Commission has called us as a church to account for the innovations that have become necessary for us in our living out the love of Christ in contemporary North America. Likewise, we must also call to accountability those whose vision for the church leads them not only to resist these innovations, but to isolate themselves from the rest of their church and, potentially, to leave it for good. No matter what else is true of us, we share a common Savior and a common call to witness to his love throughout the world in a united church.

An earlier version of this report was presented to the Executive Council of The Episcopal Church in February 2005.

Mission Statement of Via Media USA

Adopted March 27, 2004

Via Media USA, an alliance of associations of laity and clergy, is committed to promoting and protecting the faith, unity, and vitality of The Episcopal Church as the American expression of Anglican tradition.

Via Media USA:

- Strives to emulate Jesus Christ, respecting the dignity of every human being;
- Affirms the four principles of the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral: the Nicene Creed as a sufficient statement of belief, the Holy Scriptures as containing all things necessary to salvation, the Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Eucharist, and the Historic Episcopate;
- Acknowledges that Holy Scripture must be understood within the context of its origins and traditions of interpretation, as well as with the mediation of reason and the Holy Spirit;
- Nurtures greater understanding of Anglican tradition and Episcopal polity; and
- Celebrates its diverse understandings of matters outside the basic tenets of the faith as indicative of humanity's struggle to understand God's will for contemporary societies.

Via Media, the middle way, is not a compromise for the sake of peace, but a comprehension for the sake of truth.

Group Members of Via Media USA

1. Albany Via Media (www.albanyviamedia.org)
2. Concerned Episcopalians of the St. Lawrence Deanery (Albany) (www.cesld.org)
3. Episcopal Forum of South Carolina (www.episcopalforumofsc.org)
4. Episcopal Voices of Central Florida (www.episcopalvoicescf.org)
5. Fort Worth Via Media (www.fwviamedia.org)
6. Progressive Episcopalians of Pittsburgh (www.progressiveepiscopalians.org)
7. Remain Episcopal (San Joaquin) (www.remainepiscopal.org)
8. Southwest Florida Via Media Episcopalians (www.swflaviamedia.com)
9. Springfield Via Media (www.springfieldviamedia.org)
10. Tennessee Via Media (www.tnviamedia.org)
11. Via Media Dallas (www.viamedia-dallas.org)
12. Via Media Rio Grande (www.viamediariogrande.org)
13. The Widening Circle (Rhode Island)

To learn more about the groups that have prepared this report, or about Via Media USA and its ministry, please visit the individual groups on the web or contact Dr. Christopher Wilkins, Via Media USA Facilitator (ciwilkins@viamediausa.org).

***In Their Own Words:
Statements from Individual Allied Groups of Via Media USA***

Albany Via Media
“A Place to Kneel”

Who are we? Albany Via Media is an organization of clergy and lay Episcopalians in the Diocese of Albany. We are loyal to the doctrine, discipline, and worship of Christ in the Episcopal Church USA, and to our Primate, the Presiding Bishop. We recognize the General Convention of the Episcopal Church USA as the highest authority in the church. We founded our organization when Bishop Herzog, then a board member of the American Anglican Council (AAC), and Bishop Bena, a member and leader in the AAC, disagreed with decisions of the General Convention and spoke of realignment and impaired communion with the Episcopal Church USA. Since any realignment or impaired communion with other dioceses of the Episcopal Church affects our lives and our ministries, binds our consciences, and violates the ordination vows of our clergy, Albany Via Media, a not-for-profit corporation in the State of New York, was created to keep the Diocese of Albany in communion with the Episcopal Church USA.

What do we offer? Albany Via Media offers a place for Episcopalians to be faithful to Christ as prayerful members of the Episcopal Church USA. We give thanks for the Episcopal Church as the American embodiment of Anglicanism—a comprehensive and diverse family. We understand that all of us bring unique gifts to the ministry of the church and all have a place at Christ’s table. No one can claim greater honor or truth over another. Albany Via Media offers a place for faithful and prayerful Episcopalians within the diocese to live out our Lord’s Great Commandment in love, diversity, and compassion.

What do we seek? Albany Via Media seeks to revive our Anglican diversity in the Diocese of Albany. Knowing that prayer shapes believing, we understand that we are strongest when we kneel (or stand) together in prayer. Albany Via Media seeks to model and teach a charitable faith. We welcome differences, ambiguities, and paradox, knowing that prayerful consideration of various points of view, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, can yield new insights, deeper understanding, and a lively Christian faith.

What do we believe? We believe that “The Holy Scriptures containeth all things necessary to salvation” (Article 6, *Articles of Religion*). We believe that the so-called “literal” interpretation of Holy Scripture is theologically and intellectually dishonest. We find biblical fundamentalism to be dangerously idolatrous. Nurtured by Scripture, tradition, and reason, we open ourselves to God’s truth as a diverse community through prayer, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. As Episcopalians, we are sustained and empowered by Holy Scripture, the sacraments, the creeds, common prayer, and servant ministry. We understand the New Testament model of the Body of Christ to be a very local, universal, diverse, and inclusive church, with a variety of gifts for ministry.

In Summary, Albany Via Media is a grassroots organization of clergy and lay people who love the rich diversity of the Episcopal Church. We are deeply committed to the life of common prayer and the prayer book faith we have received. We are Episcopalians striving for a middle way of diversity and tolerance in the Diocese of Albany.

We pray that we can trust the words of the Bishop of Albany, who has said that the Network of Anglican Communion Dioceses and Parishes will be “a way to keep ‘orthodox’ Episcopalians in the Church,” rather than a structure to help them to break away.

Concerned Episcopalians of St. Lawrence Deanery (CESLD)

CESLD is a lay organization in northern New York located between the St. Lawrence River and the Adirondack Mountains. Our deanery is the in most remote area of the Diocese of Albany, and there is a ninety-minute drive to the nearest parish not affiliated with the Network of Anglican Communion Dioceses and Parishes. These factors add to our feeling of isolation. We consider ourselves a sister organization of Albany Via Media. Although independent, we look to Albany Via Media for pastoral guidance within our diocese.

Members of CESLD are trying to be defenders of the Episcopal Church both in the deanery and in the diocese. Our deanery has no priest or deacon who voted to reject the Diocese of Albany's entry into the Network.

Among our concerns is the isolation of our moderate laity, as the clergy deployment under Bishop Herzog has become increasingly adversarial toward the Episcopal Church.

We consider education of both adults and children to be a primary mission for CESLD. We value our identity and Anglican heritage, and we are working to instill these values throughout our local church community. We have plans to continue with adult and youth education in various forms.

Any help from the Episcopal Church in supporting our ministry would be greatly appreciated. The church might supply speakers or workshops, educational materials and resources, or ideas and insights to help instill the Episcopal ethos among our laity.

Episcopal Forum of South Carolina (EFSC)

Who We Are

We are Episcopalians in the Diocese of South Carolina:

- United in our desire to remain within the Episcopal Church in the United States of America (ECUSA) and the Anglican Communion.
- Who uphold the faith as revealed in *Scripture, tradition, and reason*.
- Who support efforts to preserve unity within ECUSA.
- Who will oppose any movements for schism within ECUSA.
- Christians bound in love for one another, committed to worshipping together and building up God's kingdom.
- Holding widespread opinions about human sexuality and how the church should respond to these issues today.
- Who believe that the Holy Spirit is working in the deliberations of ECUSA and its General Convention.
- Who are concerned that issues of sexuality are being allowed to polarize the church, diverting attention from our mission to seek union with God following Jesus Christ in love and service.

What We Have Done

We have:

- Held Forums throughout the Diocese of South Carolina. These are meetings where people can gather and, in a safe place, discuss issues and concerns within our church. Typically, the Forums are attended by 15-50 people. A sampling of comments from the Forums is available on our Web site at <http://www.episcopalforumofsc.org>.
- Sponsored the conference "Episcopalians Seeking Unity in Diversity." The attendance was approximately 200, and the program included the following speakers:
 - "Episcopal/Anglican Church History"
The Rev. Dr. Donald Armentrout, *Professor of Ecclesiastical History, University of the South*
 - "The AAC, ACI, and Network Perspectives"
The Rev. Canon Dr. Kendall Harmon, *Canon Theologian, Diocese of South Carolina*
 - "Diocesan Considerations"
The Very Rev. William McKeachie, *Dean of the Cathedral of St. Luke and St. Paul, Charleston*
 - "Episcopal Church USA Leadership Perspective"
The Very Rev. Sam Candler, *Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip, Atlanta*
- Had a presence and provided a table with information regarding ECUSA and the Network of Anglican Communion Dioceses and Parishes at our diocesan convention.
- Had representation at four meetings with our bishops, in an attempt to continue dialogue and establish mutual respect and interaction.
- Arranged for reduced-cost subscriptions to *Episcopal Life* for those interested.

- Maintained a Web site and sent regular e-mail messages to membership.
- Provided information on the Web site, including news reports and recommended reading.
- Provided representatives from EFSC board of directors to a diocesan reconciliation committee.

Future Plans

Our future plans include:

- Additional Forums in the diocese.
- Another conference in the spring. We are seeking a dynamic speaker, someone of the stature of Archbishop Desmond Tutu, to interest the *center*, which is still alive in the diocese but very apathetic. We want to emphasize the mission of our church, not division within it.

Episcopal Voices of Central Florida (EVCF) ***“Knowing Unity in a Changing World”***

Under the episcopate of the Rt. Rev. John W. Howe, along with a group of discontented clergy, the Diocese of Central Florida has slowly but deliberately moved into a contentious, fragile relationship with the Episcopal Church over human sexuality issues. Up until August 2003, laity were either oblivious to what was really happening or simply ignored it. After General Convention 2003, Bishop Howe called for a special convention the following month, September. A small group of clergy mobilized to oppose divisive resolutions but, in the end, it was unsuccessful. With the regular diocesan convention looming in January 2004, these clergy decided to include some very concerned and agitated laity. By December 2003, a grassroots group called Episcopal Voices emerged—a group of laity and clergy with diverse opinions about the General Convention’s actions, but solidly committed to remain Episcopalians. Because of fear and risk factors, Episcopal Voices became lay-driven. Episcopal Voices communicate with each other primarily by e-mail or telephone, with the expectation that news and information will be shared with others.

Members of our Steering Committee proposed several resolutions and nominees (none elected) for the January 2004 convention and quickly gathered over 700 signatures on a petition of commitment to remain constituent members of the Episcopal Church. However, the Network of Anglican Communion Dioceses and Parishes formed in Plano, Texas, just four days prior to our convention. Our Bishop was there instead of at St. Luke’s Cathedral, where he was to have officiated at Evening Prayer for Unity, sponsored by Episcopal Voices. During a convention forum and later in Bishop Howe’s address, the Network was described as just another organization like the Prayer Book Society! The only reference we Voices had was the Network’s charter, which included the signature of our bishop, so little was known about the intent and purposes of it. But, given past “performances” in our diocese and elsewhere, we could guess. Episcopal Voices supported Bishop Howe when he recommended that the convention wait until further details were known. Nevertheless, the convention roared ahead to approve joining the Network by a nearly three-to-one margin, becoming the first diocese to affiliate. A positive development, however, was negotiating the withdrawal of several resolutions that would have resulted in further divisiveness, including broken communion with not only the Presiding Bishop, but other bishops as well. As an aside but in truth, we Voices felt utterly abandoned by the leadership of the Episcopal Church during this time and subsequent to it.

Presumably, every parish in the diocese is a Network parish. Only twenty-four active clergy opposed joining the Network. Two of 86 vestries resolved to decline “membership.” In spite of the numbers, we believe that there are *still small* Episcopal Voices in every congregation. Given the difficulty in reaching them, we were gratified that our first open meeting last spring attracted nearly 100 people from all over the diocese. Of note (and for the sake of brevity):

- Individual members of Episcopal Voices were successful in preventing their vestries from joining the American Anglican Council (AAC) and/or diverting funds from Episcopal Relief and Development.
- Moderate priests were not re-appointed to important boards and committees.
- Clergy are polarized. Each “side” essentially communicates “underground.”
- In addition to the treasurer, one moderate Voice remains on the 2005 Diocesan Board; none remains on the Standing Committee.
- One of the two parishes that “disassociated” from the Network has been threatened with aided-parish status. Plans for that parish to establish an off-campus worship site are now

threatened by plans for a so-called “parallel” church in the same geographic area to be established by the diocese through its Congregational Development Commission.

- A gay man in a partnered relationship was elected to his parish vestry. At a subsequent vestry meeting, the rector declared the election invalid due to “a violation of canons.”
- Many moderate laypeople are church dropouts and are in exile. “Friendly” churches are few and far between.
- Two of the largest parishes in the diocese are now Anglican Mission in America (AMiA) parishes.
- At least five priests were granted Letters Dimissory to dioceses in the Province of Rwanda. All maintain residency in the geographic area of our diocese and serve on the staff of AMiA parishes.
- In 2004, only 19% of diocesan funds appropriated for “National and World Mission” was designated for the Episcopal Church. Through October 2004, nearly \$144,000 was appropriated among the Diocese of Honduras, missionary societies under the umbrella of the AAC, the Network of Anglican Communion Dioceses and Parishes, and the Province of Uganda. Three thousand dollars was put into escrow in 2004 to pay the cost for six chosen delegates (not elected at-large) to attend the Network’s 2005 Annual Meeting. The 2005 budget is described as “flat,” due to the defection of the two largest churches.
- Parishes must *choose* to support the Episcopal Church; alternative giving is the norm.
- A three-year \$2.5 million capital funds campaign to plant new churches and fund the diocesan conference center’s expansion and youth camp fell over a million dollars short of its stated goal.
- Average Sunday attendance in the diocese declined over the past five years (including those years prior to General Convention 2003), while the population growth in central Florida is the highest in the United States.
- All of the deputies elected to General Convention 2006 are aligned with organizations that seek to be recognized by the Anglican Communion as The Episcopal Church. One clergy deputy is a member of the Network steering committee while another is the dean of the local chapter of the American Anglican Council. Hence, those who *are* Episcopalians are completely left out of the process of helping to determine the mission and ministry of the Episcopal Church. Elected alternates, however, represent a broader spectrum.
- Space is given to us in the diocesan newspaper, but, basically, the *Episcopalian* is pro-Network. To date, however, there has been no mention of the Network’s Anglican Relief and Development Fund. Full-page advertisements appear for the ERD.
- Our relationship with Bishop Howe is cordial and responsive. We invited him to meet with us on three different occasions for conversation. He accepted, but he later advised us of scheduling conflicts.
- While “we” and “they” continue to gather around the Eucharistic table, there is otherwise no meaningful or constructive dialogue or conversation.

Meanwhile, the disappointments, frustrations, shock, and anger of the past months appear to have subsided into a position of “wait and see.” We have studied and discussed the Windsor Report and answered the Presiding Bishop’s request for a response. In the meantime, we Episcopal Voices (or disenfranchised Episcopalians), while most assuredly marginalized in our diocese, pray without ceasing and remain ever hopeful that, in spite of our differences of opinion or lines drawn in the sand, we can continue to walk together.

Fort Worth Via Media

There are many stories within the Episcopal Diocese of Fort Worth that will never be shared for various reasons. Some people do not feel the need to share; others have experienced the swift arm of retribution that follows “insubordination”; and still others are fearful that sharing might create similar effects upon themselves and their own parishes. But most of the people in this diocese do not realize the significance of their stories because they do not realize that what they experience in this diocese is not the Episcopal Church USA. This diocese follows only the rules with which our leadership agrees. Otherwise, we declare ourselves to be victimized by the hierarchy of the “revisionist” liberal national church. It is important never to forget that this diocese was formed with the decision to keep women priests out.

We do have a few examples that show a broad spectrum of abuse and fear.

After General Convention in 2003, the Rev. Deuel Smith, Rector at St. Michael’s, was so angry with the voting that, one Sunday, he threw the Episcopal flag on the floor, stomped on it, and declared that the church was no longer an Episcopal church. He then invited the congregation to step on the flag as they came to the altar for communion. As far as we can tell, this priest has never been reprimanded by the bishop for this act of disrespect, and he is still the rector of his church.

During this same time period, the Rev. Scott Wooten, rector of the Episcopal Church of the Holy Spirit, said his church had been vandalized and set afire as a hate crime against an “orthodox” church. At first, he described the writing on a wall as “God & Jesus loves Homosexuals.” Later, he had to admit that the only legible words were “God” and “Jesus.” Bishop Iker stated in print that this was a hate crime. The real truth came out later that the acts were done by two teenagers who were bored and wanted something to do. Neither Rev. Wooten nor Bishop Iker bothered to tell the rest of the world that they had been wrong.

One story can be taken from this past year’s annual diocesan convention: A resolution was entered that everyone could have accepted unanimously. It was an absolute wonder, and we were all flabbergasted at its ability to heal. It read, “The Episcopal Diocese of Fort Worth, meeting in convention the 6th day of November 2004, urges the House of Bishops of the Episcopal Church (USA) to accept and implement the recommendations of the Windsor Report.” Then a motion was made that a clause be added: “through repentance of their actions against God and His Church.” This, in turn, made the resolution one-sided and took from the original all hope of its being a peaceful undisputed resolution.

The end result was a fracturing resolution that was approved on the final of two votes. From the back of the room, the verbal response at the call for the vote sounded very even, the nays as loud as the yeas. The bishop did not feel that he could make the call clearly; therefore he asked for a second, standing, vote. As the call came for those opposed to the new resolution to stand, only a few were willing to expose their position. Such is the life in this diocese. One is willing to oppose as long as one does not have to be identifiable.

Some members within the diocese of Fort Worth are creating a study guide to use in helping others to read and understand the Windsor Report. We take seriously the request of the Eames Commission, the Presiding Bishop, and even our own Bishop to read and study this document.

One parish was called to request the use of a room for the study group and we were told NOT to make the request public so that splinter groups (such as Via Media and Integrity) would not expect the same privilege.

Some of the priests in the diocese have let us know that if they give ANY support to groups who do not agree with Bishop Iker, they will be out of a job. The Bishop has even gone so far as to call priests traitors for voting against a resolution the Bishop wanted passed. Paranoia runs rampant in this diocese. This is just another example.

And finally, one in our group tells her own story.

“My partner and I were parishioners in good standing at Christ the King parish on the west side of Fort Worth. I was editor of the newsletter, chair of the Social Ministries Commission, volunteer in the Food and Clothes Bank, member of Altar Guild, and lector. My partner was a past vestry member, past Junior Warden, volunteer at the Food and Clothes Bank, a member of Altar Guild and a lay reader.

“The parish was a large part of our life. On numerous occasions, I had private conversations with the parish priest. On many of those occasions, we spoke to the issue of homosexuality. He told me several times that he truly felt that homosexuality had to be an issue of genetics rather than choice because, otherwise, it would not run in so many families. He said that my partnership was based upon the same tenets as one of Holy Matrimony. He knew what we meant to each other and knew that our lives were entwined. He also told me (even though I did not initiate the idea) to never ask him to bless the relationship because the bishop would never approve.

“All the positive aspects changed after ‘A Place to Stand.’ He found *his* place to stand, and it was in direct opposition to the place he had claimed to stand previously. He came back from there ‘a changed man,’ declaring in his sermons that there were those among us who knew we sinned but that we were to be forgiven because who among us was without sin? He went on to talk about the sins of ‘those among us’ as the sins of denial—that we would not declare our sins and ask for forgiveness.

“After that sermon, things were never quite the same. A couple of weeks later, I was told by several of those who were present at a vestry meeting that he had accused me of having listed Christ the King as a ‘gay-friendly’ parish on an Internet site. When asked what site, he said he didn’t know, but that he had been told that I had done it. This I did not do and would not have done simply because he had always said that he did not want to become a ‘gay’ parish. Although I wondered what exactly he wanted to be known as, I respected his position within the diocese. Our position there at the little parish that had meant so very much to us became untenable. It became a source of sadness and hurt and too easily could have become a fragmenting issue within the parish itself. So we moved.

“There is much pain in this diocese. We also know that there are many here who prefer to bury their heads in the sand. Mostly, we know that it is important that others outside of this diocese know that there are many of us who truly are Episcopal Christians intent upon remaining that very thing.”

Progressive Episcopalians of Pittsburgh (PEP)

Progressive Episcopalians of Pittsburgh (PEP) is an association of Episcopal laity and clergy dedicated to maintaining the health and unity of the Episcopal Church, including the Diocese of Pittsburgh, as a theologically diverse expression of Anglicanism in America. We are a varied group, whose members come from parishes across the diocese, who hold diverse views on many subjects, and who seek to provide each other with fellowship, support, and enhanced opportunities for outreach and other ministries.

Our newsletter, *PEPTalk*, and our internet chat list, PEPchat, have become respected sources of information and support within the diocese and beyond. All of us wish to remain part of the Episcopal Church (ECUSA). We have come together in PEP, and joined the other groups in the Via Media USA alliance, to preserve and protect the church to which we have been called and which we cherish.

We are very concerned about what the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh is doing, and the direction it is taking. Statements made and actions taken by this diocese, and particularly by its bishop, the Rt. Rev. Robert W. Duncan, are well-known throughout the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion. The things done here that are most troubling call for careful scrutiny and, we believe, for an appropriate, substantive response from the church to an ongoing threat to its unity and integrity.

Here is a sampling of actions that have raised these concerns. Diocesan leadership, including Bishop Duncan, has:

1. Amended the diocesan constitution with a provision that gives the diocese the right to nullify any canon or action of the Episcopal Church that the diocese deems to be contrary to the “historic Faith and Order of the one holy catholic and apostolic church” or to be in conflict with the diocesan constitution.¹
2. In convention, declined to express commitments: (a) to abide by the constitution and canons of the Episcopal Church, (b) to continue ordaining women to the priesthood, and (c) to witness against violence done around the world to sexual minorities.²
3. Eliminated support for the missions and ministries of the Episcopal Church, directing national giving instead to organizations deemed “orthodox.” In one instance, Diocesan Council approved one parish’s decision to redirect part of its funds from the Episcopal Church to the Anglican Mission in America.
4. Joined the diocese to the Network of Anglican Communion Dioceses and Parishes (NACDAP)³ without consideration of, or provision for, parishes that do not wish to be part of it, and without allowing discussion of the proposal at the Diocesan Council meeting that approved the affiliation.
5. Approved a resolution in 2002—one that the bishop acknowledged was divisive, but that he stated was necessary for the diocese—declaring that the diocese was prepared not only

¹ The amendment was adopted on second reading in November 2004. Similar provisions have also been added to the constitutions of the dioceses of Fort Worth and San Joaquin.

² Diocesan leaders did so by refusing to allow votes on resolutions, properly submitted by parishioners, that expressed these commitments.

³ NACDAP leaders sometimes refer to this as the “Anglican Communion Network,” although it is not officially sponsored or authorized by the Anglican Communion, as the name suggests.

- to oppose, but also to defy, actions of General Convention 2003 that it deemed contrary to the faith and order of the church.
6. Attempted to strip the Episcopal Church of real and other assets dedicated to its ministries by abrogating the church's trust interest in each parish and mission.⁴
 7. Under the guise of unity and reconciliation, and while invoking biblical injunctions against Christians suing one another in court, threatened with expulsion from the diocese the two parishes currently suing the Pittsburgh bishops and other diocesan leaders over these leaders' unwillingness to protect Episcopal Church property and to abide by church canons.⁵
 8. Participated in founding and funding the Anglican Relief and Development Fund, a competitor to Episcopal Relief and Development (ERD), and removed from the diocesan budget all funding and support for ERD.
 9. Created a climate in which parishes and clergy, particularly women clergy, who are considered not to be supportive of the bishop find it difficult to obtain the kinds of pastoral and episcopal support they need.
 10. Addressed human sexuality, particularly homosexuality, from a limited conservative-evangelical perspective, if at all. This includes the bishop's support for a process at Happening events that "outs" homosexual teenagers and advocates "conversion therapy" for them.⁶
 11. Welcomed into the diocese clergy members of Forward in Faith, who do not support ordaining women or who show open disdain for ordained women's ministry.
 12. Maintained active leadership within the American Anglican Council and the NACDAP, both of which advocate replacing the Episcopal Church as a member of the Anglican Communion. This has included Bishop Duncan's requesting recognition in international Communion events as the equal of the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, his

⁴ In 2003, the Board of Trustees adopted a resolution to this effect—a resolution that is contrary to Episcopal Church canons, particularly the Dennis Canon. A special convention later that year also adopted the resolution. The resolution has been challenged by two parishes—Calvary Church and St. Stephen's, Wilkesburg—in a lawsuit against Bishop Duncan, *et al.*, asserting the Episcopal Church's trust interest, against the diocesan contention that assets belong to parishes and missions themselves and presumably could be taken with them if they left the Episcopal Church. After this suit was filed, the Board of Trustees and Diocesan Council rescinded the actions, in conflict with the expressed wishes of the convention. The diocese's attempt to repudiate the resolution was rejected by the plaintiff parishes, which have insisted on a court decision on the matter, pursuant to which the suit remains active.

⁵ This threat, designed specifically to force the parishes to drop their suit, more resembles an attempt at extortion than it does an act of reconciliation. It was carried out at the 2004 diocesan convention, when Bishop Duncan invoked a diocesan canon (XV.6) that allows a special or regular diocesan convention to remove parishes from the diocese so long as notification was made at the previous annual convention. It should be noted that this action took place in the context of the diocese's attempts to seize the assessment funds that Calvary Church has put into escrow under agreement by the parties and the court, pending resolution of the suit.

⁶ Mindful that sexual ethics, particularly concerning homosexuality, is an area of ongoing controversy throughout the Christian family, we nevertheless consider Pittsburgh's actions towards homosexuality to be particularly troublesome. Not only is the diocese openly hostile to such groups as Integrity and Claiming the Blessing, but it also encourages so-called conversion therapy, a form of treatment for "persons with homosexual tendencies" that is discounted by the medical and psychological communities and is only practiced in conservative-evangelical institutions. Furthermore, when asked what parishioners who are opposed to homosexuality should do if their parishes are not sufficiently opposed to the Episcopal Church's actions regarding homosexuality, the recommendations given are either to "stay and fight" or to "leave" for a more orthodox parish. A dynamic in which parishioners would be encouraged to listen carefully to the experiences of homosexual persons so as to strengthen the church and provide better pastoral understanding and care within it, which both the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion have recommended, is not only not recommended or taken under diocesan auspices; it is actively opposed.

- negotiating ecumenical agreements directly with other denominations, and his repeatedly asking to be recognized as the leader of the “real” Anglican Communion church in North America.
13. Interfered with such effective and well-recognized Episcopal Church organizations as Episcopal Church Women (ECW), encouraging members to found or join competing non-ECUSA organizations more amenable to the bishop’s theological and ecclesiological positions.⁷
 14. Declared that none of Bishop Robinson’s co-consecrators may perform episcopal or priestly functions in this diocese, while permitting a bishop and priests from outside ECUSA and the Anglican Communion (*i.e.*, members of the Reformed Episcopal Church) to do so.
 15. Intervened in several dioceses in the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Church of Canada on behalf of “beleaguered orthodox congregations.”
 16. Transferred such clergy as the Rev. David Moyer to non-ECUSA jurisdictions, thereby facilitating violations of diocesan and provincial boundaries by non-ECUSA bishops.
 17. Subverted the candidacy process described in the canons by circumventing the role of candidates’ home dioceses in approving them for orders, and by preventing the Pittsburgh Commission on Ministry from performing its duty of screening all local candidates.⁸
 18. Worked to instill an understanding that, whereas the Episcopal Church may be diocesan in polity, it is and should be merely congregational in practice. This has caused the diocese to dismantle or abandon ministries that parishes alone cannot perform.⁹
 19. Has blocked information about the larger Episcopal Church from reaching this diocese by only allowing groups with a “partnership” relationship to the diocese to display information at diocesan events. This has meant, for example, that groups such as the Episcopal Women’s History Project or Church Historical Society were not allowed to place newsletters or brochures on an information table during diocesan convention.

⁷ As an example: Bishop Duncan insisted, in autumn 2004, that ECW invite Ugandan Archbishop Orombi to speak at the Fall UTO (United Thank Offering) Ingathering, even though the archbishop has refused to accept any further National UTO grants “until the women of the Church repent.” ECW had to cancel its plans on the date and with a speaker of its choice. As another example: for over a hundred years, the women of this diocese have supported United Thank Offering by dropping coins in their UTO “Blue Boxes” daily to show their gratitude to God for his many blessings. Twice each year, the women bring the accumulated funds from their boxes to a diocesan UTO Ingathering. Bishop Duncan has now directed the women to limit their Ingatherings to one each year and said that, from now on, it will be called the “Women’s Ingathering.” The women will be given a choice of directing their offering to either UTO or Anglican Relief and Development. There was no discussion or debate about this decision; it was presented as a “done deal.”

⁸ In such cases, the diocesan Commission on Ministry has been pressured to approve the candidates without examination or review. Although such clergy often report having been considered “too orthodox” for their dioceses, indications are that other concerns for ministerial and pastoral effectiveness obtain. Approving such persons for ordained ministry in the way that it is done in Pittsburgh has several negative effects, not the least of which is making such clergy extraordinarily dependent on Bishop Duncan for their ministries, and, hence, intensely and personally loyal to him. It should be noted that the diocese rarely recommends or allows candidates for ordination to attend Episcopal seminaries other than Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry or Nashotah House.

⁹ One PEP member identified the root of this problem as follows: “My own concern in this diocese is the silence, the inability to address concretely the concerns of social justice. It is close to impossible to address advocacy in the areas of domestic hunger, poverty, housing and economic inequity, the plight of immigrants, Millennial goals, the situations in Darfur and Somalia, and micro-lending in a diocese so opposed to the organizations that are leading the way to answering and advocating in these areas of concern.”

This is a sampling of actions taken in this diocese by, or with the encouragement of, its diocesan, that we find destructive to the church's unity and ministry. The climate they create is one of isolation and division, where charity, trust, and goodwill are lacking. It is a climate that has taken many years to create, and which has all but defined the experience of the Episcopal Church for far too many people, particularly our young people. In short, the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh has, for a great many years, been lacking the kind of leadership that is needed for those of us in this diocese to thrive in our ministries and to mature in Christian faith.

It is, furthermore, difficult for people in this diocese to find ways to bring reconciliation or to strengthen unity. Too often, factions have formed within parishes, and indeed across the diocese, leaving relationships among Pittsburgh's Episcopalians quite damaged. In many cases, parishioners wishing to remain Episcopalians find they must leave parishes they have attended for decades and drive great distances to find a parish in which they are not simply called "revisionists." Some clergy sympathetic to Bishop Duncan refuse to allow parishioners to have open forums to discuss the issues facing their diocese and the Episcopal Church. They also act in other ways to keep parishioners uninformed, such as not notifying them when their parish is hosting a pre-convention hearing. Other clergy who may be less sympathetic to the bishop nonetheless worry that any attention to these issues will only make things in their parishes worse. Furthermore, such clergy tend to dread meeting with their bishop at all.

Some of Pittsburgh's diocesan leaders have publicly acknowledged the tensions inherent in leading both a diocese within the Episcopal Church and a reform movement opposed to that church. They note that, although both tasks are important to them, the latter is the more urgent.¹⁰ Claiming to care as best they can for those who disagree, our leaders are nonetheless clear that they will follow what they see as the wishes of the diocesan and the worldwide Christian and Anglican majority.

This, we believe, is the context in which the actions described above have taken place. It is also why actions of this sort are likely to continue unless appropriate and concerted responses to them, on several levels, are made by the Episcopal Church.

Most diocesan leaders are quite thankful for the path Pittsburgh has taken—those who are not rarely stay long in leadership—and particularly for the presence of Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry and for the various missionary societies that are now based here. These leaders understand that they are creating a different church and using Episcopal Church assets to do so, although they have tried to conceal the evidence for this. These people are confident that their work is of God, and that the work of the Episcopal Church, increasingly, is not. They are certain that they have grasped the future of the Anglican Communion, and that their ministries, not those of most Episcopalians, are the ones that are going to thrive in the coming years, both in North America and beyond.

¹⁰ In several recent presentations, Bishop Duncan has described his call on this matter as having come directly from God, which puts those who might question his vision in opposition not merely to one man, but, indeed, to *God*. This speaks to another part of the dynamic of leadership that we find to be quite destructive. As one PEP member explained, "What I find most frustrating in this diocese is that, in any meeting of people from different churches, conservatives invariably find a way of injecting the bishop into the conversation. Someone will pray for our "godly" bishop, for example, and all his marvelous works. It has created a cult of personality that I find sickening."

Remain Episcopal (San Joaquin)

Background

In August 2003, the Rt. Rev. John-David Schofield, Bishop of the Diocese of San Joaquin, called an emergency meeting of the diocese to report on the actions of 2003 General Convention. The bishop began the meeting by describing the actions of convention, specifically the vote in favor of consecration of Gene Robinson. At that point, the bishop pronounced *Ichabod*¹¹ on the Presiding Bishop and all who had voted in favor of the consecration, thereby declaring that the Holy Spirit had abandoned them. This condemnation has pervaded the diocese. One priest asked whether we would need to keep the word “Episcopal” in our name. Bishop Schofield replied that, for legal and financial reasons, we need to keep the name for now.

The negative tone was set at this meeting, after which discussion at many parishes began to display the same negative attitude toward the Episcopal Church (ECUSA). A rector at one of the largest parishes was asked where he stood on the issue of our diocese remaining faithful to ECUSA; his response: “I’m not going to make an a** out of myself.” Upon further questioning, he replied that there was no need to discuss the issue. By fall 2003, the word “Episcopal” no longer appeared on the cover of the parish bulletins. In the next months, this priest began openly to harass members in good standing who questioned or disagreed with the increasingly apparent anti-Episcopal-Church mood of the diocese.

To address the lack of open dialogue permitted in many parishes and to minister to those who wanted to remain faithful to the Episcopal Church, a group of concerned parishioners began to gather in homes. Simultaneously, a group of four priests and three laypeople began meeting to develop strategies to ensure that the Diocese of San Joaquin remained part of the Episcopal Church. We called ourselves “Remain Episcopal.”

State of the Diocese of San Joaquin

Diocesan affiliation with the American Anglican Council (AAC)

- Bishop Schofield, a charter member and on the Board of the AAC, participates in all major AAC functions.
- A member of the Class of 2004 Standing Committee of the Diocese of San Joaquin is also on the board of the Network of Anglican Communion Dioceses and Parishes.
- The 2004-2005 budget has line items supporting the AAC.
- Bishop Schofield was quoted in the *Madera Tribune* as follows: “The Network hopes to one day be recognized as the lead Episcopal agency in the country.” This statement has not been retracted or corrected. Clergy throughout the diocese frequently state *as fact* that this diocese intends to leave the Episcopal Church.
- Total funds allocated directly from the Diocese of San Joaquin for specified African ministries are nearly \$100,000 for the past two years. Only a minimum payment of \$15,000 was sent this year to the Episcopal Church to preserve voting rights at the next General Convention.

Changes in diocesan constitution

- At the October 2004 diocesan convention, the following amendment to the constitution was proposed and overwhelmingly passed: “The Diocese of San Joaquin accedes to

¹¹ *vide* 1 Samuel 4:21a, “She named the child Ichabod, meaning, ‘The glory has departed from Israel...’”

and/or incorporates the terms and provisions of the Constitution of the Episcopal Church in the United States of America to the terms and provisions of the Diocesan constitution to the extent that such terms and provisions, and any amendment thereto, adopted by the authority of the General Convention, are not inconsistent with the terms and provisions of the Constitution and Canons of the Diocese of San Joaquin, as amended from time to time, and ratified by an Diocesan Convention duly called and held.”

- This action was overwhelmingly approved on its first vote, and, if approved in October 2005, it will become part of our diocesan constitution. This is following the pattern set by the Diocese of Pittsburgh, which, in 2004, ratified, on the second vote, such a change to its constitution.

“No woman will serve as priest in this diocese under my watch”

- The above statement was made by Bishop Schofield as he met with the congregation of St. Dunstan, Modesto, California, in 2004.
- Bishop Schofield refuses to allow women ordained in other dioceses to serve as priests in this diocese. These priests in good standing may serve only as deacons.
- While Bishop Schofield was initially willing to allow women in the diaconate to pursue ordination in other dioceses, he now also requires that they physically move from this diocese. However, male priests who do not physically reside in this diocese are allowed canonical residence in this diocese.

Refusal of the diocese to study the issue of human sexuality

- The Episcopal Church has repeatedly asked dioceses to engage in prayerful study of the issues surrounding human sexuality. The Windsor Report issued a similar recommendation. When a resolution asking for this study (homosexuality and the authority of scripture) was before the October 2004 convention, it was soundly defeated. In the words of one delegate, it would not be necessary because we already know God’s will. It should be noted that the bishop has, indeed, held one clergy roundtable allowing discussion on any topic, and by request of clergy, has scheduled another.
- The bishop has established a program to “heal” homosexuality.
- The bishop and many clergy continue to teach and preach that homosexuality is a sin, and all who practice this “lifestyle” are condemned. Following a lecture on this subject by the bishop at a recent meeting at St. Paul’s, Visalia, the parish priest asked a member of Remain Episcopal whether he believed that a straight man with a mistress should be a Sunday school teacher or a member of the vestry, implying that all homosexuals are sinners, and therefore that none can serve in such capacities in the Episcopal Church.

Refusal to allow open discussion regarding issues of remaining faithful to ECUSA

- Open discussion about the participation of this diocese in the AAC/Network of Anglican Communion Dioceses and Parishes is prohibited at local forums.
- When Remain Episcopal sponsored such forums, with speakers on both sides of the issues, the bishop refused to allow notice to be posted in the diocesan newsletter.
- Letters to the Editor of the diocesan newsletter were discontinued after letters critical of the diocesan position on the Episcopal Church were published.

Reprisals against clergy and laity who question the AAC/Network position

- One priest closely allied to the bishop, instructed the senior warden to inform a Remain Episcopal member who also served on the church vestry that her motives for serving on

vestry were suspect and that she had betrayed their trust. The priest informed her that her opinions were heresy and her views biblically incorrect. When this person wrote a letter affirming her desire to remain in the Episcopal Church, she was singled out as a troublemaker.

- The same priest approached Remain Episcopal, saying he wished to develop trust. At the next vestry meeting he read the names of all Remain Episcopal members in attendance, demeaning them one-by-one.
- The priest at one of the largest parishes refused to speak privately with Remain Episcopal clergy for purposes of discussing issues of unity and schism.
- A clergy member who previously held many positions in the diocese (chair of examining chaplains, examining chaplain, instructor at the diocesan-linked seminary, and occasional preacher at diocesan events) was stripped of these positions because of his support for the unity of the Episcopal Church.
- Remain Episcopal clergy are commonly accused of being disloyal to the bishop and said not to be Christian.

Parish Closures

- Bishop Schofield and the diocesan Standing Committee are in the process of selling the property of a parish that has been closed, and they are threatening to close and sell the property of two other struggling congregations. Statements were made from the floor of convention about using these funds to develop a legal “war chest.” Such an understanding is often repeated throughout the diocese.
- Bishop Schofield has also served written notice to the members of Trinity, Madera, built in the late 1800’s by family of current members, that he will close and sell the church by February 27, 2005, unless revenues are raised.
- Church membership (and consequently, church revenue) has steadily declined due to the current vicar, but when church laity appealed to the bishop for a change in pastoral leadership, he summarily declined to consider the request. As of February 2005, unless the parish produces a quota of revenue, the bishop has promised to close the church and sell the property for apartments, bulldozing the old historic building with its beautiful stained glass windows. With different pastoral leadership, laity strongly believe, the church membership and revenues could thrive. The concern of Remain Episcopal is that the motivation could be to liquidate diocesan assets in order to raise funds for future legal battles with the Episcopal Church.
- During the October 2003 convention, Bishop Schofield publicly offered that any parish not in agreement with his viewpoints could move to another diocese, thus threatening traditional geographic boundaries.

Remain Episcopal’s Response

- Remain Episcopal held its first meetings in fall 2003 with a Steering Committee as its governing body. Currently, three regional groups have been organized.
- Remain Episcopal attended a meeting in March 2004 of similar groups throughout the Episcopal Church. Remain Episcopal is now an allied member of Via Media USA.
- Approximately 150-200 laity and clergy members have attended a meeting or event of Remain Episcopal since its beginning in fall 2003.
- Remain Episcopal established a Web site in fall 2003, with updated information and spiritual reflections (Soul Food).

- During summer 2004, Remain Episcopal sponsored three educational forums. These moderated forums featured one speaker presenting the AAC position and one speaker presenting the Remain Episcopal position. A question-and-answer period followed. A total of approximately 125 people attended these forums.
- In January 2005, Remain Episcopal held a planning session to develop officially its vision, purpose, mission, goals, and objectives. Over fifty people (both clergy and laity) from throughout the diocese attended the daylong session. The following statements were drafted:
 - **Vision:** The Diocese of San Joaquin becomes and remains an active and fully integrated member of the Episcopal Church.
 - **Gospel Purpose:** To explore, embrace, live, and proclaim God's extravagant love, as expressed through Jesus Christ.
 - **Mission:** To educate, motivate, and enable clergy and laity in the diocese of San Joaquin to be faithful to the Episcopal Church of the United States of America as a vital, diverse, and faithful part of the Anglican Communion.
 - **Goals for 2005:**
 - Goal 1:* To provide education through communication with the laity and clergy within the Diocese of San Joaquin.
 - Goal 2:* To provide outreach and support to encourage/inspire/motivate clergy and laity in the Diocese of San Joaquin to remain in the Episcopal Church of the USA.
 - Goal 3:* To maintain the legal status as Episcopalians in parishes faithful to the Episcopal Church of the USA within the Diocese of San Joaquin.
 - Goal 4:* Create an effective structure and adequate resources to fulfill the mission of Remain Episcopal.

Southwest Florida Via Media Episcopalians

Southwest Florida Via Media Episcopalians is an association of clergy and laity that unites theologically diverse persons around mutually shared convictions. As centrist Episcopalians, we seek:

- To remain within the Episcopal Church as the American expression of the Anglican Faith.
- To pray continuously for each other, regardless of theological position.
- To act upon our baptismal vows by striving for justice and full inclusivity of all people within church and society.
- To provide safe spaces where people of widespread opinions and theologies can share what is in their hearts.
- To move beyond threats of schism, holding firm to the image of “one body in Christ.”

Firmly rooted in the love of God, discipleship of Christ, witness of Scripture, and loyalty to the doctrine, discipline, worship, and Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church, we welcome fresh manifestations of the Holy Spirit within our common life and mission.

Southwest Florida Via Media Episcopalians sponsored an open forum before the last diocesan convention and, in January 2005, sponsored a well-received, open Going-Forward event for lay leaders and clergy, with speakers and workshops at the diocesan cathedral.

We watch with prayerful interest the preparations for the election of a Bishop Coadjutor in December 2005 to succeed Diocesan Bishop John Lipscomb by the end of this decade.

Springfield Via Media (SVM)

Report on the State of the Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Springfield

Summary

Introduction

The Episcopal Diocese of Springfield has become increasingly confrontational and divided as Bishop Peter Beckwith has refused any pretext of pastoral engagement and dialogue, but rather has chosen to systematically identify and marginalize (or eliminate) anyone who deigns to have a different perspective on theology or leadership.

The diocese is not liberal, but neither is it archconservative. There are many (even perhaps a majority) who believe that General Convention 2003 erred in its decisions regarding Bishop Robinson and the blessing of same sex unions, but they are not prepared to leave their beloved (if errant) church, but rather prefer to continue the dialogue in faith. Thus, the issues in the diocese are more about Bishop Beckwith's dictatorial leadership style and the ultra-conservative theology he is determined to impose on everyone—like it or not.

Laypeople—and some clergy—have been totally disenfranchised, and increasingly a 'congregational' mindset is emerging. People who do not actively agree and support Bishop Beckwith have been eliminated from any position in diocesan governance. This consolidation of absolute power is troubling in its own right, but even more important will be its role in the near-future election of a new bishop. A semblance of a balance of power (and thus the voice of the laity and clergy) must be restored if the election process is to have any integrity and not simply further alienate and divide the diocese.

Role of Springfield Via Media

There are two main roles for Springfield Via Media: (1) communication and (2) providing a source of hope and unity for the laity and support and strength for the clergy.

Our biggest immediate challenge is one of communication. Given the demise of freedom of the press and expression within the diocese, SVM must fill the void with a broader, more balanced perspective on the full range of local, national, and international issues. A significant part of this effort is to communicate what is actually going on in the diocese and throughout the Anglican Communion—those events and developments that Bishop Beckwith would prefer not be known, or at least to be viewed only through his prejudiced prism. There is much secrecy in the diocese, and the diocesan newsletter does not report on anything that might reflect a perspective in the least at variance with Bishop Beckwith. Hence, silence about the unilateral and premature closing of a nascent mission effort, the replacement of the editor of the diocesan newspaper (the *Springfield Current*), the change in the synod budget only three weeks after synod, the bullying of a clergy person into retirement, and the harassment of dying priests' families.

Another significant role is to try to be a "glue" that holds at least the laity together as a meaningful voice within the diocese, especially at synod (convention), and to gain strength as we approach an opportunity to select a new bishop when Bishop Beckwith retires. Given the despair and sense of defeat that exists within the diocese, this is no easy objective. The difficulty is exacerbated by the widespread belief that 815 does not care about this small, financially insignificant diocese, and thus we feel like we are being left to "dangle in the wind."

Bill of Particulars

In the view of Springfield Via Media, the Diocese of Springfield is profoundly dysfunctional, riddled with intrigue, manipulation, secrecy, mistrust, fear, and a growing anger:

Some diocesan funds are managed without professionally accepted standards of accountability.

- The bishop approved debt of about \$860,000 encumbering a mission congregation, primarily for the development of a small childcare center. About \$378,000 in bank loans, secured by the diocese, were executed without first getting the approval of the Bishop's Committee or the Standing Committee, as canonically required. These bank loans included apparently false statements of corporate authority; no approval was granted by the Bishop's Committee, and no authority was granted by official action of the Standing Committee. More than \$450,000 of the \$860,000 is in the form of direct diocesan loans.
- There is nearly impenetrable secrecy about diocesan audits and all financial transaction details. Neither the Finance Department nor Diocesan Council has the canonical authority to examine audit details.
- Official finance reports to Synod and Council provide little detailed information about expenditure of diocesan reserve funds or funds for clergy sabbaticals and continuing education. There is also, of course, canonically protected secrecy about the use of the Bishop's Discretionary Fund, supported by parish offerings and more than \$50,000 annually from one trust alone.
- At least one veteran priest, who had developed a very thoughtful plan for a productive six-week sabbatical, was told that he did not qualify for diocesan support from the very fund established to support sabbaticals.

The clergy, other than those in the Network of Anglican Communion Dioceses and Parishes, are thoroughly demoralized.

- Mission clergy have been summoned one-by-one to the bishop's office either to pledge their loyalty to his position or to endure verbal abuse, then and ongoing.
- Selected mission clergy have been removed and replaced with the bishop's sympathizers.
- Women priests have been subjected to frequent bullying. One was suspended from all priestly functions for no specified reason except "failure to support the bishop's ministry." Only one woman priest remains in the diocese.
- A dying priest and his wife were pressed to leave the rectory where they lived. Promptly after the priest's death, the wife was evicted.
- The bishop was intransigent in his objections to the expressed wishes of a second dying priest, an honorary canon at the cathedral, about his funeral and its officiants and participants. Only after the cathedral leadership intervened did the bishop back off.
- The bishop and his sympathizers used voting by orders at synod (see below) to defeat as "theologically corrupt" a measure that would have acknowledged the division in the diocese and sought professional mediation. The measure acknowledged a "growing tension" that "has affected clergy morale, ministry in local congregations and the overall effectiveness of our common mission"
- Several parish rectors have withdrawn from diocesan ministries rather than risk their physical, mental, and spiritual health.

The bishop has used diocesan structures to eliminate those who disagree with him and has consolidated power behind the Network position.

- He has summarily dismissed volunteer chairs and members of diocesan departments and replaced them with his sympathizers. Chairs are members of Diocesan Council.
- He has used the Diocesan Council, which is about one-third elected and two-thirds bishop-appointed, to override the expressed will of the Diocesan Synod. In 2003, for instance, the synod approved paying the full amount of our national church commitment, but, three weeks later, the bishop convened a special session of the council that, packed with his sympathizers, voted to permit congregations to withhold their monies from the national church. While this special meeting was properly called, the voting was irregular under *Robert's Rules* because the meeting notice did not include any agenda.
- He again bypassed the synod and put before Diocesan Council a measure to align the diocese with the Network. His appointees voted in favor, effectively marginalizing the synod's elected membership and eliminating any representative voice of clergy and laypeople.
- By dismissing mission clergy and replacing them with his sympathizers, he has tipped the balance in the clergy.
- By applying a diocesan canon prejudicially, he eliminated many retired clergy from the synod, including a number who were still actively involved in ministry as supply priests. At the same time, he summoned his sympathizers among retired clergy to take seat and vote at synod, including some who came from distant locations and had not been involved in ministry for years.
- By 2004, with his new majority among the clergy, he controlled the synod by means of voting by orders: that is, members of his block would demand a vote by orders on *any* measure they opposed, guaranteeing that it would fail.
- The bishop's paid archdeacon, a Canon 9 priest and a Network sympathizer, serves as president of the Standing Committee, a dual position fraught with potential for conflict of interest.

The laity who are aware of and engaged in diocesan affairs feel completely disenfranchised.

- With the effective use of voting by orders to block all measures he opposed, a dozen or more lay-sponsored proposals were defeated *without even permitting a vote of lay delegates*—the chancellor ruled that once the clergy had voted against the measures, there was no reason to take the lay vote.
- One duly elected delegate was summarily denied certification, on the argument that she had moved to the church that elected her in order to become a delegate and oppose the bishop. In fact, as the wife of a retired mission priest formerly serving five congregations, she had attended that church regularly for nine years.
- The bishop has said publicly that laypeople are incapable of understanding the theology of the current controversy. His words were: "Laypeople ... don't know any better."

Communication, other than within Network circles and the bishop's threatening contacts with "dissenting" clergy, has ground to a halt.

- The bishop summarily replaced the editor of the *Springfield Current*, the diocesan paper, who had tried to publish a range of perspectives on various issues. Her dismissal followed months of verbal abuse at his hands.

- The *Current* carried the 2004 Christmas messages of the bishop and the Archbishop of Canterbury, but not that of the Presiding Bishop.
- The *Current* only publishes items reflecting the bishop's views and his prejudices. Completely neutral and inoffensive items (*e.g.*, a piece about a stained glass window crafted by a laywoman who happens to oppose the Network) are not published. Network news often dominates its pages.
- The bishop has threatened clergy with punitive action if they reveal the nature of his threats and decrees. Needless to say, this behavior has a chilling effect on communication and public dissemination of information.
- As a result, many laypeople are unaware of the disintegration of the diocese.

The bishop has damaged, perhaps irreparably in some places, the mission of the church.

- He summarily closed a promising new mission plant in a part of the diocese where there is explosive new residential and commercial development. Neither he nor any member of his office ever visited this new plant, where about 60 people were involved in various programs (worship, study, teen movie night). He closed down the church despite the anguished pleas of its members, leaving them appalled and angry and unlikely ever to attend another Episcopal church, at least not one in this diocese. Meanwhile, vast new housing developments continue to rise in this community, which is clearly the prime growth area *in the entire diocese*.
- Over the years of his episcopate, programs of the diocese have withered as larger and larger percentages of the budget go to insurance—and to the bishop's office. He has said publicly that we are “too small” to be a program diocese, despite incontrovertible evidence to the contrary in previous episcopates.

Laypeople and clergy who support the national church feel ignored and abandoned by it.

It could be true, as we have been told repeatedly, that there is nothing national officials can do canonically, but surely there are things they could do pastorally.

- A priest who has been repeatedly bullied and menaced by the bishop called national church headquarters seeking advice and support and was told, curtly, to stop whining.
- Another, who was removed from her mission assignment and forbidden to perform any priestly functions, was advised, without a glimmer of sympathy or emotional support, to “move out of the diocese.”
- A request for advice from yet another priest was brusquely dismissed.
- Justifiably or not, laypeople suspect that 815 is unhelpful because we are a small, insignificant diocese with little money. One laywoman put it this way: “It feels to me like 815 considers us to be an annoying wart on its bum.”
- A bunker mentality is growing among the bishop's opponents, who find themselves appalled and angry at him and equally frustrated and angry with national church officials, who seem not to care about the destructive effects of the bishop's behavior on the church's mission and ministry.

Is there anybody out there?

Tennessee Via Media

The Diocese of Tennessee held its diocesan convention the last weekend in January 2005. A resolution to affiliate with the Network of Anglican Communion Dioceses and Parishes was very narrowly defeated. From our point of view, such an affiliation is just a matter of time. This diocese is *de facto*, if not *de jure*, affiliated with the Network. The bishop, the Rt. Rev. Bert Herlong, has worked hard at starting up mission churches and then loading those churches with “evangelical” clergy, frequently graduates of Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry in Pittsburgh. He is building up the clergy numbers to favor his very narrow interpretation of the Gospel.

We have found the work here of attempting to organize very frustrating. In our experience, Bishop Herlong is a domineering, autocratic presence, and liberal clergy here seem intimidated by him. Progressive rectors seem to shrink into the safety and security of their own parishes.

The Episcopal Church leadership needs to understand that as parishes are organized and affiliated with the Network, it leaves behind a “diaspora” of Episcopalians, moderate to liberal, without a church home. We are losing a group of Episcopalians—those who leave not because they disagree or agree with the Robinson consecration, but because they are sick and tired of the Network politics in the church. Episcopalians are even moving on to other denominations, crossing diocesan boundaries to go to safer churches, or not going to church at all. As one member said, “The three local parishes are all Network parishes. If we want to go to one that is not, we need to drive to one at least an hour away.”

This is a pastoral problem that is screaming to be addressed, but also one, in our experience, that the Episcopal Church leadership has so far chosen to ignore. One of our members has even attempted to appeal to the national offices of the Episcopal Church for relief from this mess. We felt they just ignored what we are saying.

Via Media Dallas

In October of this year, the Diocese of Dallas voted to join the Network of Anglican Communion Dioceses and Parishes. The implementing resolution reserved to the bishop the right to terminate membership in the Network immediately should he determine, with the advice and consent of the Standing Committee, that the Network has violated any provision of the Episcopal Church's constitution and canons. Membership on the Standing Committee now is heavily stacked with pro-Network people, some even more ardent supporters of it than the present bishop.

A motion to cast secret ballots was defeated, and some of the clergy of the diocese inferred from the bishop's comments that to vote against joining the Network was a personal vote against him. We are distressed that simply opposing a proposal by the bishop can be seen by some as personally opposing the bishop himself. That is not our position as we understand that people of integrity differ as to the proper course of action at this time. For whatever reason, only a handful of parishes have "opted out" of the Network though others may be considering doing so. Much will depend upon the outcome of the Primates' meeting in February. Normally, the bishop's address at convention is published, but the one on the Network has not been made public.

A resolution was presented at diocesan convention that resolved (in part):

- a) *to affirm that sexuality is a gift from God and any treatment of those who are confused about or are unhappy with their sexuality should not be coercive or manipulative and,*
- b) *that medical treatment, psychological therapy and pastoral counseling should not compromise our baptismal covenant to respect the dignity of every human being, should not be coercive or manipulative, and should conform to the standards of the respective professions.*

The resolution was tabled for study. It is difficult to imagine, in the face of overwhelming medical and psychological knowledge, that further study would be effective or productive.

The bishop was quoted in *The Dallas Morning News* as saying in Kampala, "Many people oppose the gay culture even in America. That's why we have come to ask Christians here to oppose it." As of this date, the bishop has not publicly refuted this statement. In light of the Archbishop of Canterbury's request that all persons desist from making homophobic remarks, this Kampala statement presents a dilemma.

On numerous occasions, we have asked the bishop if he will allow non-Network priests to come into the diocese or if he would allow a non-Network bishop to provide episcopal oversight to non-Network parishes, but we have been unable to get a direct answer.

At its most recent meeting, the Executive Council of the diocese approved the Finance Committee's recommendation to send \$14,700 to Ekklesia to assist in funding transportation for bishops going to the Primates meeting. These funds were to come from undesignated funds from the Mission and Outreach line item. Our information is that these funds are to be used for Global South Primates who do not accept funds from the Episcopal Church.

Via Media Dallas is in a "holding pattern" until Bishop Stanton and other Network bishops respond to any action that the Primates may take at their February meeting. We are continuing to update our Web site (<http://www.viamedia-dallas.org>) and send notices by way of our listserve, so that our members, many of whom are dispirited following the loss of the vote at convention, may continue to be strengthened through the knowledge that there are many others in like situations who are continuing their pursuit of unity in the Episcopal Church. It is without question among the Via Media Episcopalians that the diocese is severely divided, because the bishop has denied the existence of any middle way on these issues. The result of this adamant stance is that no discussion is possible and Via Media Dallas's frustration is heightened.

Via Media Rio Grande (VMRG)

Via Media Rio Grande represents a substantial minority of the members of the Episcopal Diocese of the Rio Grande. The mission of Via Media Rio Grande is to pray and work towards a healthy, balanced, and reconciling Episcopal Diocese of the Rio Grande. Our goals are:

1. To continue in full communion with and under the canonical authority of the Episcopal Church in the United States of America.
2. To advocate respectful consideration of the variety of views in our diocese as we make decisions affecting our life together.

A third goal, to promote a fair and open process leading to the election of our next bishop, was initially included in the list above.

The organization was formed in November 2003 after Bishop Kelshaw announced his retirement at the diocesan convocation in October. The first action of the Steering Committee was to request a meeting with the Standing Committee, with the intention of requesting that the election process not go forward at that time, but, rather, that we have an interim bishop who would lead us in a process of reconciliation. This request was denied. Following this denial, as has been widely publicized, VMRG sent a letter to all standing committees and bishops with jurisdiction asking them to withhold consent for the election process, in order to allow time for healing and reconciliation. Consents for the election were obtained and the Standing Committee appointed a discernment committee with twelve of its thirteen members coming from conservative parishes.

Via Media Rio Grande scheduled public meetings in January 2004. Despite differences of opinion about issues dividing the church, participants found consensus around other concerns about diocesan life as experienced over the last decade:

- The atmosphere of polarization, exclusion, and fear within our diocese;
- The denial by diocesan leadership to recognize the diversity within our diocese; and
- The need for a safe environment where different views can be presented and listened to with respect.

Throughout the summer and fall, VMRG continued to encourage dialogue through meetings held across the diocese and to disseminate information to keep members of the diocese informed about the election process. Following the announcement of the discernment committee's slate of candidates, a group of clergy and laity representing divergent viewpoints nominated two additional candidates by petition. One of these petition candidates, the Rev. Canon Jeffrey Steenson, was elected in October 2004.

Via Media Rio Grande will continue its efforts to provide support for Episcopalians in our diocese who support the Episcopal Church and resist affiliation with the Network of Anglican Communion Dioceses and Parishes, to promote open and respectful dialogue, and to work with our new bishop in his attempts to effect reconciliation and healing.

The Widening Circle (Rhode Island)

Mission Statement

Adopted July 19, 2004

The purpose of the Widening Circle, Jesus Christ being the center, is to witness to the diversity and comprehensiveness of the Episcopal Church. We embrace the reality that historically our church has lived in the tension of the continuity with the past while responding to new theological, political and cultural insights. Theologically and historically, we rely on Christ's incarnation and therefore:

- We accept the limitations of human knowledge.
- We are compelled to advocate for inclusiveness and choice.
- We are open to newer and deeper understanding of God's continuous revelation.
- We strive for justice and peace among all people; and
- We pledge to respect the dignity of every human being as vowed in our Baptismal Covenant.

In the tradition of Richard Hooker, the seminal theologian for Anglicans, we affirm that Holy Scripture must be interpreted in the light of human understanding and experience.