

April 8, 2005

Dear Members of the St. Luke's on the Lake Family:

This letter represents the third communication with you concerning the ongoing crisis in the Episcopal Church (ECUSA). Although this letter will cause a reaction of both approval and disapproval, my intent is to be clear and forthright in these times of confusion and ambiguity, and to articulate hope for the future. A leader or shepherd must do this, however painful it might be for us who call St. Luke's on the Lake our spiritual home. Although these words are mine, your Vestry supports my position. For those who are relatively new to SLOL, my position is a continuation of an orthodox theology articulated by the first two rectors of this parish, Malcolm Riker and Roland Timberlake. It is important to remind everyone that the Parish Search Committee and I discussed these issues. Consequently, this letter represents a continuation rather than an adjustment to the theological direction of this parish. What follows is one more attempt to serve you by keeping you informed.

My first communication to you was dated September 2004, and appeared in *The View*. It consisted of some personal reflections on the one year anniversary of the 74th General Convention of the Episcopal Church. At that time, Gene Robinson, a practicing gay priest, was approved as a bishop by the General Convention. He was then consecrated and installed as the bishop of New Hampshire. A worldwide Anglican storm broke out, and sadly, we have the most severe crisis since the Reformation of the 16th century, out of which Anglicanism developed. In this first communication to you, I mentioned that the Primates, the Archbishops and Presiding Bishops of our thirty-eight worldwide provinces, met in emergency fashion. Their report, *The Windsor Report (TWR)*, was released on October 16, 2004.

My second communication to you was dated December 1, 2004, and appeared as a two-page letter. It consisted of some reflections on what the Windsor Report states and recommends. If you remember, TWR states that ECUSA clearly violated the teaching and practice of the Anglican Communion that prohibits the ordination of practicing homosexual persons or the blessing to same-sex union. Why is this so? Again, TWR stated that such acts are contrary to the scriptures and the teaching of the church. Clearly, ECUSA had violated the teachings of the Christian faith as received and held by the Anglican Communion. TWR recommended that ECUSA institute moratoria on the election and consecration of active homosexual clergy to the episcopate and blessings of same-sex unions. Also, in this December 1st letter, I complimented this parish as a mature congregation in the way it conducted a Town Hall Meeting on November 14th. (Incidentally, the Spring Town Hall Meeting will take place on Sunday, May 1, in the Fellowship Hall, from 3:00 to 4:30 PM.) In addition, I wrote that our own bishop, Don Wimberly, was providing real leadership, by leading "from the front." He wrote a return letter to

me, thanking us for praying for him and the Diocese. Finally, in my December 1st letter, I mentioned that three crucial events would take place in the first quarter of 2005. At this time, I wish to turn attention to the Primates Meeting in Ireland in February 2005, and the two ECUSA House of Bishops Meetings, in Salt Lake City in January 2005 and Camp Allen last month.

What Do the Events of the Last Few Months Mean?

The hastily called two day meeting in Salt Lake City was to discuss the Windsor Report. A definitive statement about TWR was not made. Instead a timid document, entitled “A Word to the Church” was offered. This document falls short of saying that ECUSA will adhere to the recommendations of TWR. Although the bishops did express regret for “the pain, the hurt, and the damage caused to our Anglican bonds of affection by certain actions of our church,” there was no repentance. It is repentance rather than regret that the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Primates are waiting to hear from ECUSA. Furthermore, the bishops in Salt Lake City failed to address the moratoria called for in TWR. One positive development is that some twenty-one bishops, including Bishop Wimberly, published a supplementary statement emphasizing that ECUSA must work with others in the Anglican Communion, and accept the discipline recommended by TWR. It is a simple fact that ECUSA is no longer able to resolve such divisive issues on its own.

The stage was set for the Primates Meeting in Ireland. What we know from this meeting is the Primates Communique, published on February 24th. (I have asked Mary Miner from the office to place copies of this Communique in the narthex. Please read and re-read with your own eyes and ears!) There is no doubt that the Communique is a clear “victory” for the orthodox side. First, ECUSA and the Anglican Church of Canada (ACOC) were barred from the Anglican Consultative Council until the Lambeth Conference of 2008. Second, a “panel of reference” has been appointed by the Archbishop of Canterbury to provide relief for those orthodox parishes and dioceses as needed. (It should be noted that at SLOL, we serve gladly the Diocese of Texas and Bishop Wimberly. We do not have to look elsewhere for support.) Third, moratoria were called for on same-sex blessings and any further consecrations of active homosexual clergy to the episcopate. It is my belief that the Primates have made it clear that the course set up by ECUSA and ACOC have pulled them away from the rest of the Communion. And, thankfully, the conditions for ECUSA and ACOC to remain as full members are equally clear. ECUSA and ACOC will have to repent and conform their teaching and practice to the historical biblical faith, as it was “once delivered to the saints.” The hope given to us by the Primates is that the broken relationships can be restored. Conversely, if we fail to do so, the separation will become formal. The question is whether or not ECUSA and ACOC will be wise enough, humble enough, and biblical enough to reach the same conclusion.

The third meeting, the gathering of the House of Bishops at Camp Allen, delivered to us a “Covenant Statement.” For the first time, the House of Bishops did not ignore the implications of TWR and the Communique. Although it may not have fit into their current agenda for the Episcopal Church, the House of Bishops did acknowledge the crisis as an “extraordinary time.” There will be, effective immediately and lasting until the next General Convention, a moratoria on all Episcopal elections. This means that there will be no elections of any bishops for the next

fifteen months. The House of Bishops will postpone their decisions concerning the crisis until the summer of 2006, when the 75th General Convention meets in Columbus, Ohio. This strikes me as a delaying tactic, as well as a failure of the bishops to lead the church through the crisis. Although many of us do not expect a reversal or a turning back from the current path, I pledge to do my small part, as one of the elected deputies from the Diocese of Texas, to return ECUSA to the Anglican fold.

What Does All This Mean for Us at SLOL?

Finally, we come to a decision each one of us needs to consider: where are we to go? As I wrote to you last September, "I ask each of you who call SLOL your spiritual home to consider the following: Are you being fed with spiritual nourishment here? Are you hearing the Word of God proclaimed? Are you being challenged to give more of yourself to God? Are you finding the living God in your prayers, in your worship, in your service, in your family and in yourself? Each one of you has found God in this special place called SLOL. If that were not true, I suspect that you would have moved on or out by now." My point is I think we should stay in ECUSA for as long as we possibly can. We have an important contribution to make. We are a church that believes itself called "to be a community in Christ and to be Christ to the world." Of course, there may be a time, when for whatever reasons, we may feel "pushed out." Then, we have to go. The Primates have now given us, I believe, further incentive to remain. Personally, I feel that I am an Episcopalian in good standing. And the Primates have backed me. In fact, I believe the Primates need witnessing churches like SLOL. If I, you or this parish leaves, there will be one less "contribution" to make.

On Maundy Thursday night, a few weeks ago, we read from the second chapter of Paul's Letter to the Philippians. Christ "emptied himself, taking the form of a servant and not counting equality with God a thing to be grasped." This view of God and the life represented by St. Paul describes the gift of grace for all of us. I hope and pray that ECUSA will yearn to become a church of grace. Here, grace for ECUSA means ready to become a servant, to make the concession that repentance is the act of grace most needed. Also, and more to the point of our current standing, grace might mean the willingness to be martyred. To be sure, this is not the same as the Christians who suffer in Darfur, or northern Nigeria, or Kyrgyzstan. Yet, a willingness to be ready to be martyred is to say, honestly, that we have to be prepared to give it all away. I don't wish to do this, and most of you do not either. Nevertheless, grace means exactly that: a preparedness to offer ourselves to a God who governs all things. If we can believe this, then we will surely find ourselves in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Faithfully,

Michael Wyckoff
Rector