



January 12, 2010

Dear Christ Church members,

Over the past several years, the actions of The Episcopal Church (TEC) have challenged what we at Christ Church have held to be central beliefs. This has caused the vestry to spend tremendous time and energy discerning how we should respond. It has also caused, we are sure, no small amount of anxiety, confusion, consternation, frustration, anger and concern in our community. Some members have told us that we are moving too fast and others that we are not moving fast enough. Some simply do not know what we have been doing, or have been misinformed. We wanted to take this opportunity, as several of us prepare to rotate off the vestry, to share with you where we stand relative to TEC.

According to church history professor Les Fairfield, “Beginning in the early 1870s, a theology deeply skeptical about many of Christianity’s central claims began to influence the leadership of the Episcopal Church, and then spread throughout it. By the late 1960s it had come to dominate the Church entirely.” In the past decade, this movement away from orthodoxy has accelerated. Since the General Convention of 2003 there have been a series of actions by the Convention and by the Presiding Bishop that have caused us great concern.

TEC has embraced a new gospel. TEC has refused to affirm Scripture as the foundation of authority in our church. It has failed to conform to the Anglican Communion’s standard, and biblical teaching that prohibits sexual activity outside of Holy Matrimony, and specifically that TEC refrain from same-sex blessings and the ordination of partnered homosexuals. The Presiding Bishop has called into question the uniqueness of salvation through Jesus. TEC has endorsed abortion as an essential part of America’s health care reform plan. The actions of three successive General Conventions have offered little hope that there will be a change of this direction at any time in the future.

Through significant prayer and measured deliberation, the Vestry of Christ Church has responded strongly, consistently and unanimously to these attacks on our core beliefs:

- After the 2003 General Convention, the vestry voted to withhold those funds that would have gone to the national church, to disassociate from the actions of the 2003 General Convention and to become an affiliated member of the American Anglican Council.
- In July 2006, the vestry wrote a letter to Bishop Lillibridge stating without equivocation that we would leave The Episcopal Church as soon as a way out was provided. It also voted to become an affiliated member of the Anglican Communion Network.
- In October 2008, after a nine-month discernment process considering the future of Christ Church, the vestry voted to “disassociate from TEC’s false teachings without disconnecting from the Anglican Communion and the Diocese of West Texas.”
- In February of 2009, at Diocesan Council our vestry proposed a resolution affirming that we are apostolically connected to the Anglican Communion through our diocese, not through TEC. It

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further disassociated us from the actions of the General Convention that impair our relationship with the broader Anglican Communion. The resolution was tabled. Christ Church Vestry then amended the resolution and adopted it as our own statement. Subsequently at its Diocesan Council, the Diocese of Western Louisiana adopted our statement almost verbatim.

During all of these deliberations we have met with Bishops Lillibridge and Reed—formally and informally - on numerous occasions. We have sought their counsel and kept them regularly informed on our process and our decisions. This past summer we invited Bishops Lillibridge and Reed to address our congregation regarding the actions of the 2009 GC. We followed this with a letter expressing our concerns and requesting that they publicly support our position. We are not of one mind on the degree to which we should engage and support the diocese. While all of us support our bishop's actions for orthodoxy in his national and international forums and in his leadership of our diocese, some of us are uneasy that, in his communication on the divisive issues, he bases his stands more on process than on biblical warrant.

Over more than four years of seriously considering the condition of TEC and our relationship with TEC, successive vestries have through words and actions affirmed our historic faith in Jesus Christ, and rejected the erroneous teachings that are being promulgated by many in TEC. It has been our goal to assure the faithful members of our congregation while sending a clear signal to TEC leadership of our discontent with the direction of TEC. We remain completely committed to Christ Church's mission "to proclaim, embody, and extend Christ's reign in the world by the power of the Holy Spirit to the glory of the Father." We have not waived from this, but have become increasingly concerned that it is threatened by TEC.

Our dilemma is not, nor has it ever been, where we stand relative to matters of faith. Nor has there been any disagreement about our desire to keep our congregation together. Rather, given the movement of TEC away from our beliefs, our dilemma is how and where to appropriately lead the church. On this, the vestry has not found unanimity. There are those of us who believe that there is no future in TEC and others who would like to work for change from within. Some of us are willing to give up our existing buildings if necessary and others would not leave under any circumstance. There are no easy answers, and we have sought to walk the razor-thin line of not compromising on the essentials of our faith while maintaining the unity of the body. And we have sought to do both with genuine love.

The future leadership of Christ Church will undoubtedly continue wrestling with these difficult issues. This vestry and those in the past few years have endeavored to maintain the ground that was won by countless others who came before us. We have kept our feet firmly planted on the foundation of Jesus Christ as revealed through Holy Scripture. We sense, however, that the land around us is eroding away and that we will find ourselves in an ever more precarious situation. Whether we can continue to stand where we are, or whether we must move in some other direction, remains to be seen. Our prayer is that we can remain one worshipping body.

This vestry has chosen to place unity in what we believe over our various opinions on how to proceed and to continue together as one body in fulfilling our mission. We pray for the future of Christ Church and for all those who will lead us in the days ahead. We continue to thank God for the rich blessing of the family that He has given us here and for the privilege of being able to serve Him and each of you as members of the Vestry.

Respectfully,

The Vestry of Christ Church 2009 – 2010

Passed unanimously at Special Vestry Meeting, January 12, 2010.