

Press Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
1 PM EDT, October 13, 2003

PITTSBURGH EPISCOPALIANS SEND LETTER TO PRIMATES DEPLORING BISHOP'S ACTIONS

On behalf of its members throughout the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh, Progressive Episcopalians of Pittsburgh (PEP), anticipating the Anglican Primates' meeting in London on October 14–15, has sent the Primates the letter below. This letter draws attention to the ways that Pittsburgh Bishop Robert Duncan's efforts to oppose the actions of the 74th General Convention of the Episcopal Church have hurt local parishes. Bishop Duncan has been a prime spokesman for the American Anglican Council, which represents the small, ultra-conservative faction that is threatening the Church with schism. Conservatives have become dominant in Pittsburgh in the last twenty years. PEP's letter deplores the intolerance, divisiveness, and scriptural literalism that this faction displays, as well as its detrimental effects on all Episcopalians, particularly those in Pittsburgh.

Founded in 2003 to provide a moderate voice and a unifying force for Episcopalians in Pittsburgh, PEP seeks to strengthen both the unity and the diversity of the Episcopal Church. Drawing strength from the fact that Episcopalians, like many Christians, are not of one mind on issues of human sexuality, we stand as members of the Anglican Communion united in our manner of worship, our breadth of spiritual insight on matters of doctrine, and our tolerance and charity on matters of ethics and other issues that come before the church.

— ——— TEXT OF LETTER FOLLOWS — — —

Dear Most Reverend Primates and Bishops:

Bishop Robert Duncan of the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh has brought to you his complaints about recent actions of the Episcopal Church, USA. We, as confirmed communicant members of the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh, wish you to know our concerns before you begin deliberations. The Diocese

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of Pittsburgh is in crisis, but not because of the actions of the 74th General Convention of the Episcopal Church. The crisis is one that Bishop Duncan has created by promoting schism; misrepresenting the actions of the General Convention and the nature of the Episcopal Church and Anglican Communion; and failing to attend to the needs of his whole flock. Over 750 members of the diocese have signed a petition for unity of the Episcopal Church. Concerned members of the diocese, both conservative and liberal, gathered the signatures despite having less than three weeks to circulate the petition and being barred by some parish priests from making it available to their parishioners. At least a quarter to a third of Pittsburgh Episcopalians disagree with Bishop Duncan, and we ask you to remember this in all that you do or say regarding these matters.

In three extraordinary hearings, we listened to the Bishop read a “Teaching” that stated

“My analysis of our present situation is that we have arrived at a moment within the Episcopal Church where there are actually two churches and two gospels. One church offers its fundamental good news in the values of conversion and discipleship. The other church offers its fundamental good news in the values of inclusion and liberation. Neither church is pure. Both claim allegiance to Jesus Christ.”

If there are now two churches, it is because Bishop Duncan and those who think as he does have made it such. We, however, embrace one faith and one church, believing that the church needs both discipleship and inclusion, conversion and liberation. What are we to make of this statement? It appears that Bishop Duncan wishes to make the Episcopal Church an exclusive church that is not liberating, a place open only to those who believe just as he does. Certainly he has abandoned us.

Bishop Duncan and a handful of other bishops first declared the Episcopal Church, USA, “apostate” and then “schismatic” because of two actions of the 74th General Convention. The first action was the decision to confirm as Bishop of New Hampshire a man who had earned the love and respect of Episcopalians in that diocese through his many years of Christian service as a priest. In confirming the choice of the Diocese of New Hampshire, the majority of bishops followed a long-standing tradition giving great weight to local pastoral needs, a tradition you also have honored.

The second action was the passage of General Convention Resolution C051, which (1) affirmed the convention’s and the Church’s support for the core beliefs of the Anglican Communion as expressed in the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral; (2) reaffirmed the statement that homosexuals are children of God and should be offered the love and pastoral care of the church; (3) acknowledged that differences of opinion exist among Church members regarding monogamous, non-celibate, same-sex relationships; (4) reiterated the 73rd

General Convention's statement that such relationships should be marked by fidelity, respect, and mutual love; (5) allowed local units to experiment with liturgies blessing same-sex unions without committing the whole church to blessing such unions; (6) committed the Church to further study; and (7) reaffirmed the Church's commitment to communion across a diversity of opinion.

Thus General Convention's actions reaffirmed an historical Anglican statement of faith, reiterated two sections of the 1998 Lambeth resolutions (affirming homosexuals as children of God, and committing to further study of the issues), joined in the statement acknowledging a lack of agreement on homosexuality that appeared in your May 2003 Pastoral Letter, adopted the traditional Anglican positions of allowing regional experimentation and diversity, and demonstrated traditional Anglican values of diversity *within* the Church and the wider Communion.

Therefore, the true issue is not what the Episcopal Church, USA, did last summer, but whether the Anglican Communion will continue to honor its traditions of national independence, or will allow a minority pressure group to foster division. It would be a tragedy for the Communion to allow division when it has been working so hard to reunite Christ's Church. The Holy Spirit's work was evident in the creation of a communion that expresses a common core faith through independent national churches adapted to local custom and conditions. It is a system designed to be inclusive, liberating, and able to interpret Christ's teachings in ways uniquely suited to further the work of conversion and discipleship around the world.

Bishop Duncan and his supporters, however, have attempted to redefine the common core faith of the church. Historical documents from the 1886 Chicago and 1888 Lambeth meetings specify that the Nicene Creed is a sufficient statement of faith, but Bishop Duncan is now adding a list of beliefs based on a particular biblical interpretation, and he is insisting that all "true" Anglicans must believe as he does. Anglican teaching affirms that scripture contains all things necessary for salvation, but that scripture must be read in the light of tradition and reason, and with guidance from the Holy Spirit. Scripture is open to multiple readings. It is a living Word, not an immutable one. We believe it is Bishop Duncan who is going beyond the bounds of Anglican tradition by denying diversity of interpretation.

Finally, Bishop Duncan has tried not only to nullify the recent decisions of General Convention, but also to pursue a course designed to overturn the canons of the diocese and the Episcopal Church, USA, with respect to church property. Despite many warnings, he led this diocese in special convention to pass a resolution on church property that contravenes both the canons of the diocese and of the Episcopal Church. Those canons specify that the diocese holds all property in trust for the Episcopal Church, USA. He presented

this resolution as a mechanism to allow parishes leaving the diocese to take their property with them. It sends a clear message that we are not wanted in *his* diocese.

In Bishop Duncan's "Teaching," he claims that the "orthodox" have been battered by the decisions of the Episcopal Church. In reality, his actions have battered us. The resolutions assume that those of us unwilling to accept his version of the faith will withdraw. He is trying to push us out of a church (and a Communion) that we love, in part, for its very willingness to allow differences in understanding of matters outside of the Creeds, Sacraments, and historical episcopate. As you consider responses to actions of the 74th General Convention, we request that you also consider a response to Bishop Duncan's actions in forgetting his ordination vow to care for his whole flock; breaking his vow to "conform to the doctrine, discipline, and worship of the [Protestant] Episcopal Church [in the United States of America]"; attempting to deny the Episcopal Church its legal property; and inciting unrest in dioceses beyond his own.

Yours in Christ,

(Progressive Episcopalians of Pittsburgh)

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