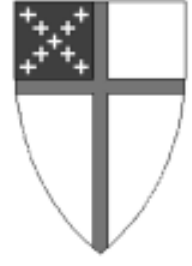




PEPtalk



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God's 'New Thing'

A Sermon by

The Rt. Rev. N.T. Wright

Bishop of Durham, England

Delivered at Ascension Episcopal Church

Passion Sunday, March 28, 2004

"Thus says the Lord. . . Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. The wild animals will honor me, the jackals and the ostriches; for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people, the people whom I formed for myself so that they might declare my praise." (Isaiah 43:16-21)

The words of the great prophet of the exile, whose oracles stand at the crown of the mighty books that we call Isaiah — they are words of hope and excitement, of ancient promises renewed and new possibilities emerging out of nothing. They are part of the fresh self-revelation of Israel's god, reminding the people in exile of who he was,

of what he'd done in the past, of what he could do and would do for them in the future. They're like a breath of spring just when you thought winter was set in for ever; like a shaft of sunlight breaking through a dark cloud; like a sudden call from a friend who you thought had gone for good.

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Bishops preach Easter rejuvenation

This issue of PEPtalk celebrates the Easter season's spirit of rejuvenation with the words of two bishops, N.T. (Tom) Wright and Arthur B. Williams, Jr., delivered in sermons on Passion Sunday, March 28, at Ascension and Calvary Episcopal Churches.

Bishop Wright, Bishop of Durham, England, and one of the church's premier theologians, was in Pittsburgh to lecture at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. The author of more than 30 books, he is former canon theologian of Westminster Abbey, and — by virtue of his bishopric — a member of the House of Lords. He is a member of the Eames Commission, appointed by

Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams to prescribe ways to preserve unity of the church in the face of disputes over sexuality now roiling the worldwide Anglican Communion.

Bishop Williams, retired Suffragan of Ohio, concluded his March 28 sermon with a report on the House of Bishops meeting at which the bishops addressed the challenge to church unity posed by the Network of Anglican Communion Dioceses and Parishes headed by Bishop Robert W. Duncan.

Bishop Williams' sermon begins on Page 5. Both sermons were transcribed by PEPtalk from tape recordings and have been edited slightly for length.

PEP allies form Via Media USA

PEP President Lionel Deimel and Vice Presidents Joan Gundersen and Christopher Wilkins joined leaders of 11 other groups in Atlanta March 25-27 to forge a nationwide organization dedicated to preserving unity within the Episcopal Church, USA. The following are some of their impressions of the meeting.

Lionel Deimel

PEP President

First, the bottom line. The meeting was a satisfying and harmonious one. We enjoyed getting to know a fine group of dedicated and inspiring people with whom we had previously communicated only by telephone and e-mail. We found that we had a great deal in common with people from South Carolina to San Diego, although those gathered were diverse and represented dioceses that are perhaps more different from one another than we might have imagined. All 12 groups are committed to the unity of the Episcopal Church and are convinced that we need to work together toward that goal.

We (1) agreed to form an umbrella group called Via Media USA, (2) adopted a mission statement for Via Media USA, (3) registered the Internet domain viamediausa.org (and related domains), and (4) held a press conference and sent out a press release about the meeting.

A steering committee will be formed with one member from each of the affiliate groups. Groups like PEP will retain their identities and will add a tag line to their names such as "A Via Media USA Affiliate." The steering com-

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Bishop Duncan pledges ‘generosity and charity’

Bishop Robert W. Duncan told Diocesan Council members at their monthly meeting March 30 that the Diocese will participate with “generosity and charity” to implement the pastoral oversight plan adopted by the

Episcopal House of Bishops March 23.

Basically reiterating the statement that he and Assistant Bishop Henry Scriven issued after the House of Bishops meeting, Bishop Duncan said the oversight plan “will require a lot of generosity on the part of bishops and a lot of trust on the part of clergy and laity.”

The bishops’ plan, developed during the four-day spring retreat of the House of Bishops in Navasota, Texas, would allow conservative parishes at odds with their bishops over the election of Bishop Gene Robinson in New Hampshire to seek pastoral oversight from conservative bishops in other dioceses.

Such a system had been demanded by the newly formed Network of Anglican Communion Dioceses and Parishes, led by Bishop Duncan. But the House of Bishops rejected a key part of the plan sought by the Network — the ability of a dissenting parish actually to separate from its diocese and become permanently attached to a bishop in another diocese.

The bishops specified that while the dissenting parish might receive pastoral oversight from another bishop, such oversight would remain under direction of the diocesan bishop, who would invite the visitor and retain administrative jurisdiction over the parish.

“In our Episcopal Church polity, ‘oversight’ does not confer ‘jurisdiction,’ ” the bishops said pointedly.

“It was a difficult meeting,” Bishop Duncan said of the House of Bishops session. “The House is much divided. There was a good deal of denial of the situation in which we find ourselves.”

Bishop Duncan added that he had received a letter from Presiding Bishop Frank Griswold, thanking him for his statement after the bishops’ meeting.

PEP members attended the Diocesan Council meeting and passed out copies of the March issue of PEPtalk, including a copy to Bishop Duncan.

The Council also received a legal opinion from Diocesan Chancellor

Robert Devlin on issues raised by a letter from PEP members and other parishioners throughout the Diocese, challenging the Council’s vote at its February 3 meeting to enroll the Diocese in the Network.

The letter, titled “A Call for Unity” and signed by 149 parishioners from 20 parishes, asserted that Council had not properly discussed the matter and that the vote should be rescinded. The letter was submitted to Council at its meeting March 2, and new copies of the letter were distributed at the March 30 meeting with another 49 signers including some from three additional parishes: St. Michael’s in Ligonier, St. Peter’s in Butler, and St. Stephen’s in Sewickley.

Council President Battle Brown had deferred any action on the letter pending the chancellor’s opinion. Devlin told the Council that the only legal issue raised by the letter was the claim that the vote to join the Network was not taken in accord with the Diocesan canon prescribing Council procedures.

The letter noted that the canon’s requirement for “publication of advance agenda” was not satisfied by the agenda of the February 3 meeting, which was received by Council members only a few days before the meeting and carried no indication that the vote to join the Network would be taken.

Chancellor Devlin reported simply that the agenda for that meeting followed Council’s usual practice and therefore, “I don’t see that the canon was violated.” As a result of Devlin’s opinion, Council took no action on the “Call for Unity.”

In other Network-related matters, President Brown reported that the Council had received copies of resolutions from two parishes — Holy Cross in Homewood and Christ Church, North Hills — stating that they rejected membership in the Network and requested that none of their diocesan assessments be used to support the Network. Brown noted that no Diocesan funds are now going to the Network.

PEPtalk

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But like all the great promises in the Bible, they're never simply one-dimensional. . . . God's purposes run down into the dark recesses of human sorrow and exile. And in order even to hear them, let alone to appropriate and live by them, Israel is called to become someone different, to be changed and purified and transformed. . . .

And as the book moves on rapidly toward its great climax, a figure emerges from the shadows to carry this promise and purpose forward — a figure who is Israel, the light of the world, and yet who stands over against Israel and does for her what she can't do for herself; a figure who is obedient to God's call as Israel was meant to be and yet who suffers the fate of Israel's disobedience; a figure who takes on himself the desolation of exile and pain and misery and death in order to set Israel free. The Servant of the Lord, already introduced in the chapter before today's reading, comes more and more into focus until, ten chapters further on, we look in horror from afar and see him wounded for our trespasses and bruised for our iniquities. . . .

Now in looking at the larger picture in that reading we shouldn't miss some of the smaller details. The prophet looks back to the Exodus itself, the time when Yahweh carved a path through the Red Sea and overthrew the chariots and horses of the pursuing Egyptians. He led his people through the desert and supplied them with water where none appeared to exist.

Very well, says the prophet, that's what he will do again; it'll be like a new Exodus only more so. Don't think back to the former things; that's what God did in the times past. Look to the future; look to what he's going to do now. . . .

The sorts of new things God does are always about the renewal of creation itself — that's the sort of God he is. And that means the re-establishment of the projects of Genesis One and Two, the undoing of the plight of Genesis Three, the replanting of the Garden, the retaming and renaming of the wild animals, the re-establishment of the right relationship between God and humans and the created order, and within that, between male and female as joint bearers of his image.

New creation is to be a renewal of the original good creation. . . . It isn't about the scrapping of the original project and the invention of something quite different. Mere novelty is not the point. . . .

But we live of course in a society and indeed in a measure in a church in which mere novelty has for a long time been the single most important thing — the new car, the new computer, the new gadget, the new fashion, the new chic behavior — the quest for novelty, which shows itself in everything from cooking to clothes, from military equipment to sexual behavior, can be seen as the distortion of the right and God-given longing for God's new creation. What we ought to be in the business of, what today's readings call us to with fresh energy, is understanding that restless hunt for

novelty as what it is, and of modeling and proclaiming the truth of which it is the parody — the life-giving promise of genuine new creation, of which the false models on offer today are the lifeless and indeed deadly imitations.

"Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. . . . Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. . . . But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples, said, "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" (John 12: 1-5)

In eleven days time we shall be keeping Maundy Thursday, and some of us will enact once more that mysterious foot-washing which John describes in the next chapter, when Jesus washes the feet of the disciples and wipes them with the towel which he is wearing. But John has given us a kind of signpost to that event in today's reading, with Mary anointing Jesus' own feet and wiping them with her hair.

The story is full of tension; you can feel it crackling in the air, as Martha does her usual thing working hard in the kitchen and serving the meal, and Mary does her usual thing only more so, expressing her total devotion to Jesus in an outrageous and flamboyant and extravagant fashion. And as always, whenever someone is worshipping Jesus with everything they've got, there is someone standing in the background muttering that they don't like this kind of thing, that there's no such thing as a free pot of ointment, that surely we've got better things to do than this emotional nonsense.

And in the middle of it all, there is Lazarus, who would have been cold in his tomb if Jesus hadn't wakened him up a few days before. He is there as a living and breathing sign of hope — is it any wonder his sister Mary wanted to worship Jesus with everything she's got? — but a sign of hope purchased at a huge cost, which was to be paid by Jesus himself in just a few days' time. . . .

"Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. . . . For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ. . . . forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Jesus Christ." (Philippians 3:7-8, 13-14)

The new thing that God is doing is the new creation that bursts out of the tomb on Easter morning, the first day of the week, the beginning of God's new world. And we in this Passiontide are summoned like Mary to bring the love and adoration of our hearts and lives, perhaps even with gifts that will cost us dear and that could have been used for other purposes, and to watch, and to follow, and to love and to learn and to live. And as we ponder this journey, following Jesus from now, Passion Sunday, on through Palm Sunday, on through Holy Week and to Good Friday itself, keeping this Passover time, this Exodus time, this time of rescue and

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new creation, I have some reflections growing out of those readings, reflections on where we are in the Western Church today and on the new things God is doing in our midst, and the danger of false trails as we try to find and follow them.

Paul speaks of the gains he had had as a devout Jew, and of coming to regard them as loss for the sake of the Messiah. Like Isaiah telling Israel not to consider the former things but to look for the new things, Paul says that he is forgetting what lies behind and straining forward for what lies ahead, pressing on toward the goal, for God's upward call in the Messiah, Jesus.

We in the church are extremely good at looking backwards; indeed, we are in one way of course right to do so. We are rooted in God's action in Christ, set out for us in Scripture, itself rooted in the story of Israel. We've got to keep true to those roots. But so often in the church, we tell stories to ourselves about the much more recent past, stories which become, as we say, our tradition, our way of doing things, which aren't actually part of the great sweep of Christian history, but simply the little habits and patterns of life we learned in our Sunday School, our seminary, our little subgroup, whatever it is. And often we label ourselves and one another in relation to these things, forgetting that labels tend to look backward at the very moment when God wants us to look forward. . . . So often the worship and witness of the church is hindered by people who don't realize that their grumbles at somebody else's way of worshipping or praying or whatever is modeled exactly on the grumbles of Judas as he looks at Mary.

But there is a larger and more urgent call to look forward. At this point the church in Europe and certainly in Britain is in quite a different position from the church in America, but I think we both have similar lessons to learn.

In Britain we have grown accustomed, not least through the war of attrition waged on us by our national media, to think of Christianity as being on its last legs. The average person in the street in Britain today assumes. . . that Christianity is disproved, that it's out of date, that it's old hat, that it's bad for your health, it's historically discredited, it's scientifically obscurant, and actually it's dangerous to society because it creates crusades and holocausts, and so on. And alas, the church is often prepared to go along for the ride, and simply plans to shrink budgets and clergy numbers, to manage decline as we call it. It can be very depressing.

Now I know that in America things are quite different, with huge churches, and money available for all kinds of Christian projects the rest of the world can only dream of. But you face other problems, not least the problems of a theology and spirituality that looks not for a new creation of

an Isaianic sort, not for a redemption won by the costly passion of the Word made flesh, but for a validation of novelty, a spirituality which is mere therapy, a Christ without a cross, a god without a passion, the American dream — dare I say it? — dressed up in its Sunday best, and not wanting to see any signs of death and resurrection, of expensive ointment poured out in sheer love and devotion speaking of God's radical new creation, a new world in which this great country could do so much if only it stopped trying to run the world in its own interest and instead decided to regard whatever gains it had as loss for the sake of the Messiah.

We've had to struggle with that lesson, and I hope around the world that we'll all be able to do it. And as I look at the church faced with our problems and your problems, I have found stirring in my heart the hope, and even the belief, that

God is going to do a new thing. It won't necessarily be what we want. It won't necessarily look like the church we grew up in; it won't correspond to my blueprints or your blueprints; it won't be comfortable and it won't be cozy, but it will be God's new creation, God's fresh Exodus, God's Passover project come bang up to date for this new

century and this post-post-modern world. . . .

I want to urge you today, as I urge my own people back home, to forget what lies behind and to strain forward for what lies ahead. Of course there will be people who will offer parodies of God's new creation. Of course there will be grumblers standing on the sidelines to disapprove. We should expect. . . that if God is indeed doing a new thing, there will be powerful distractions and temptations getting in the way, trying to blow us off course.

I dare say that the present crisis in the Anglican Communion may be a sign that the dark forces opposed to the Gospel of Jesus are doing their best to distract us and to nullify the powerful witness that could make this Twenty-First Century a whole new time of Christian flourishing and consequent human flourishing. It would be deeply tragic if, with the new century before us, and challenges for the Gospel in the social and political and cultural as well as spiritual spheres, we were to collapse into a church of Judases instead of a church of Marys.

Let us then resolve, this Passiontide, to follow our Lord wherever he goes, to walk with him through the sea and the wilderness, to feast on the strange food and drink he gives us for the journey, to forget what lies behind and to strain forward for what lies ahead, and to become in his name and for his sake, the people whom he has formed for himself so that they may declare his praise.

"So behold, says the Lord, I am about to do a new thing. I will make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert."

Let us, this Passiontide, follow that way, and drink from that river. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

"I want to urge you today. . . to forget what lies behind and to strain forward for what lies ahead. . . ."

'Living Stones' build God's 'New Thing'

A Sermon by
The Rt. Rev. Arthur B. Williams, Jr.
Bishop Suffragan of Ohio, retired
Delivered at Calvary Episcopal Church
Passion Sunday, March 28, 2004

"What then does this text mean: 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone'?" (Luke 20: 17)

Next Sunday is Palm Sunday. Holy Week begins and we celebrate the triumphal entry of Jesus into the City of Jerusalem. But today's Gospel jumps ahead of that event and gives us a preview of what happened in Jerusalem to Jesus. Every day, Luke says, Jesus was teaching in the temple. One day when he was telling the people gathered the Good News, he told his listeners the parable of the vineyard.

I'm not going to retell the story, but listen to what Jesus says is the point of his narrative. He dips into a book that every one of his hearers was familiar with, because they were all good Jews. He reaches back into the Book of Psalms and says at the conclusion of his parable, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone." (Psalm 118:22).

These dozen words with their reference to rejection of a stone and its subsequent elevation to the chief cornerstone are the oldest Old Testament passage that earliest Christianity applied to the death and resurrection of Christ. It is, as I said, written in the Psalms. Matthew (21:42), Mark (12:10) and Luke (20:17) all place those words on Jesus' lips. Later when Peter was arrested he addressed those who held him captive and said, "(Jesus) is the stone that was rejected by you builders; he has become the cornerstone (Acts 4:11). And in another place, twenty or thirty years later, in writing from Rome to a new church, he said, "God has chosen a new cornerstone for the temple," and again, "the stone which the builders rejected has become the very head of the corner." (1Peter 2:6-7)

So what do we make of this verse, used no less than six times throughout Scripture? My friends, this verse is the basic passage for the "No-Yes" interpretation of the death and resurrection of Jesus. These words usher us into Holy Week and give us a preview of the events of that week culminating in Good Friday. The death of Jesus is humanity's "No" to Jesus — "No" to all he said, "No" to all he taught, "No" to all that he did during his earthly life. And the resurrection is God's vindication of Jesus — God's "Yes" to all that he said, all that he taught, all that he did during his earthly ministry, including his death on the cross.

So the question for us today is perhaps not so much, what do we make of this passage about the rejected stone becoming the chief cornerstone? The question for us is, what does the passage make of us? If Jesus Christ is in actuality the Rock of our destiny, what has that to do with you and

with me? I mentioned Peter's letter earlier. There he also tells us, because Jesus Christ is the very cornerstone, we are a chosen race; we are living stones, chosen and precious in God's sight.

I came to Pittsburgh this weekend almost directly from the most recent meeting of the House of Bishops. In retrospect I believe that we struggled with what it means to be living stones, what it means to build up the Church in our role as bishops. I believe that we were successful in moving further down the road in our special ministry of reconciling differences among the members of our Episcopal Church.

We had four tasks before us, daunting in some ways. One, how to prevent what I call an internal schism in our church — all that talk about a church within a church. Second, how to respond to the leaders of our worldwide Anglican Communion who have asked us in the Episcopal Church to make provision for those who dissent from the decision of the General Convention last summer, regarding the affirmation of Bishop Robinson of New Hampshire. Three, how to deal with the retired bishops who set aside canon law and came into my diocese, the Diocese of Ohio, two weeks ago, without permission of the Bishop of Ohio, to confirm persons from five conservative congregations. And four, how to get on with our planned agenda of reconciliation in the world community.

In our six days together in the context of worship and Bible study, we did indeed attend to these four challenges. As you know, there has been a threat from those who don't agree with the decision regarding Bishop Robinson to form a church within a church. They have organized themselves and some have said they will not allow their own diocesan bishops to come to their parishes to confirm and to administer the sacraments. Some want to circumvent the bishop of their diocese and thereby invite in another bishop without reference to or conversation with their own diocesan bishop.

So in a plan we are calling "Caring for All the Churches," a provision is now made for the bishop of any diocese to consult with a dissenting parish, and if he or she finds that there is a serious difference in views in the area of human sexuality, the diocesan bishop — not the parish — may arrange for another bishop to come in and provide pastoral oversight for that parish, including Confirmation and the administration of the other sacraments. The parish thus remains under the jurisdiction of the diocesan bishop, and the pastoral care is delegated. This plan also includes an appeal process.

As you would expect, it didn't take long for our finished plan to get on the net. And it didn't take long for some conservative voices to say that this plan is "dead on arrival." They want certain diocesan bishops instead to surrender their jurisdiction. This abdication of jurisdiction, my friends, would be contrary to our canon law and would still move our church

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toward a church within a church. Your own bishop, Bishop Duncan, has responded in writing on the Diocesan website that he will do what he can to enable the success of the House of Bishops' plan within the wider church and promises a pastoral letter to this diocese within the next few weeks.

Our plan will soon be received by the special Lambeth Commission which the Archbishop of Canterbury has established to maintain unity within our worldwide Anglican Communion on the subject of human sexuality. The former bishop of Bethlehem (Pennsylvania) is a member of the Lambeth Commission and was with us at our meeting. He reported that he believes the bishops accomplished what the Primates — the chief bishops of the Anglican Communion — have asked us to do.

We then moved on to our third task, what to do about those bishops who set aside one of the most ancient canons of the church Catholic — a bishop does not enter another bishop's diocese to preach or administer the sacraments without the permission of the bishop of that diocese. In this regard the House of Bishops after much debate decided to be generous and to invite reconciliation instead of proceeding in a legal way. Unanimously the House agreed that any future move, such as what happened in Ohio, would result in presentment for trial. The five bishops who broke the canons are being asked to be in conversation with the Presiding Bishop and his Council of Advice. I believe that this action surprised the five bishops. (Perhaps they were hoping to be martyrs for their cause.) Their joint reply to our action was to issue a statement in which they "censured" themselves and then proceeded to respond as if the House of Bishops had done the legal censuring.

Then the House of Bishops went on with our primary agenda and heard about the challenges and opportunities for global mission, especially in the Sudan, Central America, Melanesia and Liberia, from the Archbishops of those Provinces who were present with us.

In today's lesson, Isaiah writes: ("Thus says the Lord,") Behold, I am doing a new thing." (Isaiah 43:19). Many of us in the House of Bishops weren't ready for the new thing that God would do with us living stones when we gathered last week outside of Houston, Texas. But in the end we discovered that indeed God had done a new thing for God's church.

So in closing, my friends, on this Fifth Sunday in Lent, my question for you is: If Jesus is indeed the chief cornerstone in God's great plan for salvation, and if God is always doing a new thing, what does it mean that we are God's living stones? What new thing might he be doing with you as you prepare for this coming Holy Week? What does it mean for you to live those words which we all sang a few minutes ago — that God's love is "so amazing, so divine, that it demands my soul, my life, my all"?

Amen.

Presiding Bishop Griswold Salutes Via Media delegates

The following letter from Bishop Frank T. Griswold, presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church, USA, greeted leaders of PEP and other groups when they met in Atlanta.

Dear Friends,

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ as you gather this week in Atlanta and you seek to make common cause in the service of God's mission, which is "to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ."

These are challenging days for our church, and yet they contain within themselves an invitation to be the many-membered body of the risen Christ in a deeper and fuller way.

Rooted and grounded in common prayer, our divergent points of view find their place of meeting and reconciliation in word and sacrament and a life shared in the service of the Gospel. The diverse center is the overwhelming reality of our church and its voice is urgently needed, both within the church and in our fractured and polarizing world.

May God bless you all,

Yours in Christ,

Frank T. Griswold

Presiding Bishop and Primate

Mission Statement of Via Media USA

Via Media USA, an alliance of associations of laity and clergy, is committed to promoting and protecting the faith, unity, and vitality of the 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.

PEP allies form Via Media USA

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mittee will be responsible for taking the next steps toward making Via Media a reality. A preliminary Web site is at <http://viamediausa.org>.

We began our work by describing our various groups and what they have done. This was instructive; some groups have pursued activities very different from our own, but each group has developed at least one successful strategy useful in its local context.

When we arrived, a very encouraging letter from the Presiding Bishop awaited us, which was certainly a positive development. Another delightful surprise was that people took up a collection without our knowledge and gave PEP and Albany Via Media \$150 each, in appreciation for all their work done for the meeting.

The closing Eucharist was wonderful. We celebrated Charles Henry Brent, a tireless worker for church unity who is celebrated on March 27 on our calendar. We sang my hymn "Authorities," and Bishop of Atlanta J. Neil Alexander celebrated and gave an inspiring sermon that included a brief report from the House of Bishops meeting.

Bishop Alexander said that the Episcopal Church is healthy and thriving, but that bishops lament the decision by some (including Bishop Duncan) to leave empty seats at the table — seats available to them.

Joan, Christopher, and I appreciate PEP's enabling us to spend the better part of three days in prayer, conversation, and fellowship with Episcopalians in at-risk dioceses across the country. Not only have we strengthened our witness by uniting more conspicuously in our struggle, but we have benefited from the models of action and cooperation that we learned about in Atlanta.

Donations in support of Via Media USA's work may be sent to: The Episcopal Forum of South Carolina (EFSC), c/o Barbara Mann, P.O. Box 1772, Mt. Pleasant, SC 29465.

Groups tell stories of suffering and success

Christopher Wilkins

PEP Vice President, Operations

One thing that surprised many of us was how good it felt to be among friends and fellow Christians. The things that for so long have set our teeth on edge in our home parishes and dioceses were simply not there. This left all the more energy available to concentrate on the things that draw us together as children of God. Groups shared stories of suffering, as well as of successes. Each group has succeeded at one thing, at least, and there was much to learn.

Some groups have held effective forums in churches and other places around their dioceses at which Episcopalians can talk about the issues that unite us, as well as those that divide, and work on our common ministries. Some have succeeded in shepherding loyal Episcopalians into diocesan leadership. Many have developed respectful relations with local media. Some have developed structures that will enable effective action in response to several contingencies.

What they share is a common origin: diocesan over-reactions to the 2003 General Convention, which culminated years of abuse of authority and intelli-

gence in each diocese in question.

It is said — and I agree — that abuse does little good. However, the abuse that Episcopalians represented in Atlanta have long faced from bishops, priests, and other ministers in their conservative and evangelical dioceses has had one good result. It has led people who are passionately in love with God and God's work — and deeply committed to the church — to decide not to take it anymore, and not to walk away.

Why some leaders chose to abuse their authority over the last 20 years is still a mystery to us. What is not a mystery is that those abuses are as contrary to Christ's spirit in our church as are biblical literalism and theological fundamentalism — and those who commit them are likewise in need of repentance and reconciliation.

If we in the Via Media movement act in Christ's spirit of fierce charity that has inspired us already, we will be able not only to avert schism in the Episcopal Church; we can also revive mainstream Christianity as a force drawing people closer to the mind and the heart of God in a world filled with beauty and insight, as well as grief and pain.

Delegates treated to Southern Hospitality

Joan Gundersen

PEP Vice President, Policy and Planning

It was a wonderful experience, and it should be noted that Andrew Grimmke, his parents Will and Jenny Grimmke, and Paul Cosby and his wife Emily were our local arrangements crew and they outdid themselves to make us feel welcome. The Grimmkes not only had signs and nametags waiting for everyone, but provided continental breakfast each morning and a wonderful dinner on Friday night at their home (that meant they arranged transportation for us all).

Paul Cosby took on all the liturgical arrangements. We said Compline the first night, morning prayer each

morning, used the prayers for noonday and evening, and had a final Eucharist. Each time there were different officiants and readers, so it was quite a task to arrange. The Church (All Saints' Episcopal) was also very helpful, and the whole staff came to the final Eucharist.

Lionel, Christopher, Nancy Key (of Remain Episcopal – San Joaquin) and I were driven to the airport by a woman who read about the meeting in the paper and came to the closing Eucharist to offer her help transporting people to the airport. She just wanted to do something to help the cause. Southern hospitality? YOU BET!!!

St. Andrew's affirms allegiance to Episcopal Church, USA

St. Andrew's Episcopal Church in Highland Park has added its name to those of parishes adopting resolutions affirming intention to remain within the Episcopal Church USA and rejecting affiliation with the Network of Anglican Communion Dioceses and Parishes.

The St. Andrew's resolution, approved by the parish's vestry on March 21, reaffirms the parish's original charter, enacted in 1837 "for the purpose of worshipping Almighty God according to the faith and discipline of the Episcopal Church of the United States of America within the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh." It asserts that the church "will continue to solely affiliate within the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh under the Constitution and Canon laws of the

Episcopal Church of the United States of America."

In a supplementary background statement, the vestry noted that the Diocesan Council has voted to affiliate the diocese with the Network. "Therefore, to avoid any conflict between the governance of the Episcopal Church of the United States and the Network, the Vestry of St. Andrew's reaffirms the Parish's original Charter and singular affiliation with the Episcopal Church of the United States."

Other churches that have resolved to stay within ECUSA include Christ Church, North Hills; Christ Church, Indiana; Holy Cross, Homewood; St. Stephen's, Wilksburg; St. Brendan's, Franklin Park; Church of the Redeemer, Squirrel Hill, and St. Thomas, Canonsburg.

Via Media USA affiliates

Progressive Episcopalians of Pittsburgh (PEP) is one of 12 groups nationwide that came together in Atlanta to form Via Media USA. The others are:

Southwest Florida Via Media Episcopalians; Episcopal Voices of Central Florida; San Diego E-Way; Episcopal Forum of South Carolina; Forth Worth Via Media; The Gathering (Dallas); Concerned Episcopalians of the St. Lawrence Deanery (Albany); Springfield Via Media (Illinois); Remain Episcopal (San Joaquin, Calif.); Via Media Rio Grande (New Mexico); Albany (N.Y.) Via Media.

Help circulate *PEPtalk*

Don't just read *PEPtalk*, the newsletter of Progressive Episcopalians of Pittsburgh. Contribute to it — send us letters, articles and ideas. Most important, distribute *PEPtalk* in your church. For copies, call Charles Robideau, editor, at 724-776-1684, or email crobideau@stargate.net. *PEPtalk* is also on the PEP website: <http://progressiveepiscopalians.org>

Interested in learning more about PEP?

Please fill out and mail this form and we will send you information and an application for membership.

Name _____

Address _____

Parish _____

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Please mail to:

PEP Membership, 634 Tenth Street, Oakmont, PA 15139-1143

or send an Email request to: bovinesue@aol.com

PEPtalk

Progressive Episcopalians of Pittsburgh
4530 William Penn Highway, #109
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Inside:

PEP allies form
Via Media USA

Bishop Duncan pledges
'generosity and charity'