

# VERITAS

Official Newsletter of Fort Worth Via Media



Volume 1, Number 2

September 2005

## Appeal By Fort Worth Diocese Re Ordination of Women

### Statement on FW Diocese Website:

The Episcopal Diocese of Fort Worth has appealed to the Archbishop of Canterbury's Panel of Reference for assistance in our dispute with the Episcopal Church in the United States over the ordination of women to the priesthood and episcopate. The Bishop and Standing Committee of the Diocese made the appeal on July 11, 2005, in objection to the actions of the 1997 General Convention that made the ordination of women priests mandatory in every diocese, while the Anglican Communion seeks to maintain an "open process of reception" on this issue.

... Under the present canons, the Diocese of Fort Worth would not be able to proceed with the consecration of my successor (when that time comes) unless he agreed to the ordination of women as priests.

The Panel is asked to help find a way for the Diocese to remain a full member of the Anglican Communion, while maintaining the historic practice of the church catholic of a male priesthood.

*The Rt. Rev. Jack Leo Iker*  
Bishop of Fort Worth  
July 25, 2005

### Panel of Reference from the Anglican Communion Website:

The Primates of the Anglican Communion meeting in February 2005 recognized that certain parishes had been unwilling to accept the direct oversight of their diocesan bishops and that certain dioceses are in dispute with their provincial authorities. They recommended that a body be established to assist in the resolution of these difficulties.

On May 6<sup>th</sup>, the Archbishop of Canterbury directed the creation of an advisory and consultative body to be known as The Panel of Reference to whom he would appoint the members. The functions of the Panel are, at the request of the Archbishop, to enquire into, consider and report on situations where there is serious dispute concerning the adequacy of schemes of delegated or extended episcopal oversight or other extraordinary arrangements which may be needed to provide for ... dioceses in dispute with their provincial authorities. With the consent of the Archbishop, the Panel

The purpose of Fort Worth Via Media is to support, promote, and educate interested parties concerning the religious doctrines and historical role of The Episcopal Church in the United States of America (ECUSA), to advocate openness and acceptance of all persons in the life and governance of ECUSA, and to provide balanced and accurate information concerning potentially divisive issues facing The Episcopal Church in the United States of America.

may make recommendations to the Primates, dioceses and provincial and diocesan authorities concerned, and to report on their response.

In June 2005, the Archbishop announced the membership of the Panel including The Most Revd. Dr. Peter Carnley retiring Primate of the Anglican Church of Australia as Chairman and twelve other members including the only American, The Rt. Revd. Claude Payne, former Bishop of Texas.

### The Ordination of Women:

Women were seated for the first time as deputies to the General Convention, the legislative body of the Episcopal Church (USA), in 1970 overcoming more than fifty years of resistance by that all-male body. That convention also declared that deaconesses could be translated into deacons, opening the door to women as members of the clergy.

At the 1976 General Convention, the national canons were changed pertaining to the ordination to all three orders – bishop, priest and deacon – shall be "equally applicable to men and women." According to the website of the Episcopal Women's Caucus:

The canonical change mandated acceptance, and most dioceses understood that the use of the word shall rather than may in the 1976 canonical change meant precisely that ordination of women to priesthood and episcopate was the law of the Church. The dioceses of Fort Worth,

Quincy and San Joaquin, however, continue to resist despite heroic efforts by members of their dioceses and the General Convention itself.

Today, only three small dioceses, out of a total of 109 refuse ordination to the priest hood because of gender. In the past, the Fort Worth Diocese has acknowledged this mandate by making provisions with the Diocese of Dallas to provide training and Episcopal oversight to women called to the priesthood.

The 2001 Electronic Clerical Directory includes 3,481 women (20.34%) of the 17,118 listed. Louie Crew's website lists 5 active women diocesan bishops and 3 active suffragan bishops. He also mentions that at the 2003 General Convention, women constituted 52% of the lay deputies and 26% of the clergy deputies.

**FWVM Responds:**

August 18, 2005

The Most Rev. and Rt. Hon. Rowan Williams

Your Grace,  
Fort Worth Via Media, consisting of members of the Episcopal Church (USA), a constituent member of the Anglican Communion, and residing within the Diocese of Fort Worth, objects to the appeal to the Panel of Reference made by the Bishop and Standing Committee of our diocese.

The actual appeal from the Episcopal Diocese of Fort Worth to the Archbishop of Canterbury's Panel of Reference concludes with the following sentence: "As a diocese committed to the 'open process of reception' as articulated by the Eames Commission, we now appeal to you and the primates for some means by which we can remain full members of the Anglican Communion."

The sentence has two problems:

The first has to do with the extent of the diocesan concern with the "open process of reception". To be committed to the process one cannot have a policy of exemption from the process. How is it possible for women priests to be received when women priests are disallowed?

If one is committed to the process of reception that must mean that one agrees that duly ordained women must be allowed to perform valid sacerdotal functions somewhere in the communion-that such actions are not intrinsically detrimental to the functioning of the body. The question therefore becomes territorial. Why should they be allowed to function in some areas but not others?

The second problem has to do with the concern of the diocese to remain a full member of the Anglican Communion. While at times the diocese acts like an autonomous national church by making independent

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 ★ **Fort Worth Via Media** ★  
 ★ P.O. Box 101212 ★  
 ★ Fort Worth, Texas 76185 ★  
 ★ website at <http://fwviamedia.org>. ★  
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concordats with schismatic bodies not recognized by the national Episcopal Church, and passing diocesan canons that conflict with canons of the national Episcopal Church, the fact remains that the Anglican Communion is a communion of autonomous national churches not dioceses. The Episcopal Diocese of Fort Worth exists as an entity within ECUSA.

The document goes on to say, "Since then the Diocese of Fort Worth has been told by the Presiding Bishop and others in authority that, should it again elect a bishop opposed to women in the presbyterate and episcopate, the bishop elect would not receive the necessary consents to be consecrated." This may have been perceived as a threat but in reality, it is an expected outcome since a bishop elect has to be approved by a majority of bishops and standing committees of ECUSA and considering the disposition in the church, it would be very unlikely that a person opposed to the ordination of women would receive a majority. In a letter to Bishop Iker, the Presiding Bishop indicated that it was his opinion that a bishop elect who personally disapproved of women priests could receive necessary consents provided he would permit ordination of women in his diocese.

The document makes much about whether the original intent of the General Convention of 1976 was to make the process voluntary rather than mandatory. This is irrelevant. What is relevant is adherence to the present canons. The present canon states: "The provisions of the Canons of this Title for the admission of Postulants and Candidates, and for the ordination to the three Orders, Bishops, Priests, and Deacons, shall be equally applicable to men and women."

The actual canon is both mandatory and voluntary. Permission cannot be denied anywhere to ordination based on gender but no parish is required to call a fe

male priest. This seems to be the mind of the church as presently constituted.

Episcopalians have had positive experiences with female clergy for 30 years. The population of the USA is very fluid. Surely a household, comfortable with the ministrations of an ECUSA female priest, upon moving into a new diocese, should be able to choose a parish somewhere in a large metropolitan area that has functioning female clergy.

While the diocesan Bishop and his Standing Committee may oppose the ordination of women, that opposition is not held by all communicants within the diocese. Reserving the right to state additional reasons, Fort Worth Via Media prays that the Archbishop of Canterbury will take no action on this appeal by the Diocese of Fort Worth as, in our opinion, the Panel of Reference should not concern itself with this issue.

Yours in Christ,  
George J. Komechak, President



## The Prez Sez:

"The Episcopal Church Welcomes You". Really? Is that true in the Diocese of Fort Worth? Does the Anglican Communion Network welcome you? Does it depend on who you are?

In reflecting on the presentation by the national Episcopal Church (ECUSA) to the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC) in Nottingham, England, this past June and the immediate attack upon ECUSA in general and homosexuality in particular by the American Anglican Council, also known as the Anglican Communion Network (ACN), the above questions come to mind.

The presentation by ECUSA to the ACC included distribution of a 130 page booklet titled, "To Set Our Hope in Christ". It is an excellent document which summarizes the struggles of the Episcopal Church and Anglican Communion to come to grips on the issue of homosexuality over the years and which explains the background leading up to the acceptance of Gene Robinson to be bishop of New Hampshire. Apparent throughout the booklet is the fact that there continues to be disagreement on the issue. It also notes from various convention resolutions and reports, "No one theory of cause can explain all cases of homosexuality.", "...we are conscious that within the Church itself there are those whose pattern of sexual expression is at variance with the received Christian moral tradition, but whose lives in other respects demonstrate the marks of genuine Christian character...", that we need to continue dialogue to come to greater understanding,

"...diverse opinion needs to be respected. But we do not believe these should be Church-dividing issues...". These ideas are concurrent with the ideas and goals of the Via Media organizations across the country.

The day following ECUSA's presentation, two resolutions were passed by the ACC (see accompanying article). One of them was to continue the "listening process". That same day, the Anglican Communion Network came out with their statement blasting ECUSA, making it obvious that they had no intention to listen. They made it clear that they want to make it a Church-dividing issue and they are leading the charge to do so.

Here in the Diocese of Fort Worth, it turns out that the diocesan leadership is in full agreement with the ACN. However, paradoxically, our diocese is in "impaired communion" with those ACN members who accept the ordination of women. It means that our diocese is apparently in a state of impaired communion with just about everyone, except maybe Archbishop Peter Akinola. (See another accompanying article about the situation in Nigeria.) But since they tolerate bigamy, we may be in impaired communion with them also.

Here in Fort Worth the attitude of our leadership seems to be that homosexuals are pitied for their dreadfully sinful state, but since they are children of God, they must be ministered to. How welcoming is that? Here in Fort Worth the attitude of our leadership is that women are not qualified, because of their gender, to be priests or bishops. How welcoming is that?

In many places in the Episcopal Church there is dialogue, listening and understanding. Unfortunately, the many calls for dialogue and listening that have been advocated by General Convention resolutions through the years have been rejected in Fort Worth.

Something is wrong here folks! In our Fort Worth diocese certain people are not really welcome. If your sexual orientation is not heterosexual, you're a second class citizen and this diocese does not welcome you. If you are a woman who feels called to ministry, forget it. Go somewhere else-even if that means leaving an established life, leaving your friends and beginning somewhere else. There is no turn-off like knowing you're not welcome.

I think it is necessary that the Episcopal Church and Anglican Communion be known as a Church that serves the just cause; where we do love God with our whole heart, mind and soul and where we do love our neighbors as ourselves. When I joined the Episcopal Church forty-four years ago, I felt that the Episcopal Church, more than any other, did what was right and just. If we don't continue this tradition, we will have lost the Gospel message and we will become irrele-

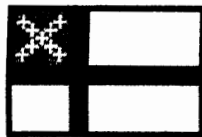
vant in the eyes of the rest of the world. "Look at those fools tearing each other apart, fighting over property, spending their money on law suits". It's time to do away with the bigotry that pervades our diocese. It's time to let our bishop and clergy know that what's going on here in Fort Worth is not just. Get involved and make a difference. Get your parishioners involved. Spread the word. We need to do this for our souls and the souls of our neighbors! That's what's important!

George Komechak, President



### Contributions to FWVM Deductible

Fort Worth Via Media was certified as a non-profit corporation on June 1st in accordance with the Texas Non-Profit Corporation Act. In August, Fort Worth Via Media received a determination by the Internal Revenue Service to be tax exempt under section 501 (c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code. Your deductible contribution is gratefully accepted by mailing a check payable to Fort Worth Via Media at P.O. Box 101212, Fort Worth, TX 76185.



### FWVM Challenges Bishop's Statement

July 29, 2005

Dear Bishop Iker,

In your web site Bishop's page letter of July 13, 2005, you wrote: "If the Episcopal Church decides to walk away from the Anglican Communion, this Diocese will not depart with them."

We do not challenge our Bishop lightly and wish we could ignore this divisive statement.

The only ones who seem to believe that the Episcopal Church will walk away from the Anglican Communion are members of the American Anglican Council and the Network of Anglican Communion Dioceses and Parishes. We in Fort Worth Via Media, in alliance with Via Media USA, believe the Episcopal Church will continue to uphold the principals and commandments of Christ and will choose to embrace rather than reject the rest of the members of the worldwide Anglican Communion.

Nevertheless, your statement seems to be incompatible with Article 1, Section 3 of the Constitution of the Episcopal Church which stipulates: "No person shall be ordained and consecrated Bishop....unless...the person shall subscribe and make the following declaration: '...I do solemnly engage to conform to the Doctrine, Discipline, and Worship of the Episcopal

Church."

Seeking replacement of does not represent conforming to the discipline of the Episcopal Church. There are limits as to how far one can bend the rules of any organization while maintaining the benefits of status, position, and office granted by that organization. Regardless of what you personally do, this Diocese is a part of and will remain in the Episcopal Church.

The Episcopal Church is governed by the tri-annual General Convention, which consists of the House of Bishops and the House of Deputies. A vote requires a majority in each house. In the House of Deputies, a majority of the clergy or of the laity in a diocese can cancel an affirmative vote. This complicated voting scheme makes passing anything difficult unless it is overwhelmingly supported. You are a member of the House of Bishops and play a very strong hand in electing all of the Deputies from Fort Worth. Yet you are unwilling to accept the resolutions of that Convention.

We pray for our Church, for our unity and our witness. We pray for our leaders, that they will comply with the majority of the Episcopal Church, which is and has always been in tension. Should a majority in the Anglican Communion decide to eventually expel the Episcopal Church and refuse to share in the Eucharist, it will be a very sad day for us, but we will remain in the Episcopal Church. We hope that you will not depart, but remain with us. Regardless of what you personally do, the Diocese of Fort Worth is a part of and will remain in the Episcopal Church.

Yours in Christ,

George J. Komechak, President

On behalf of Fort Worth Via Media



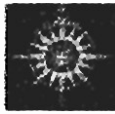
### VIA MEDIA ANNUAL MEETING

"Going Forward, Bearing Hope" is the theme of the very first Annual Meeting of Via Media USA to be held in Dallas September 29 thru Oct 1. The gathering will begin on Thursday night at 7:00 with a meet and greet social hour and reports and stories from each allied group. Then beginning at 8:30 Friday morning we will have a day and a half of workshops and educational seminars of such topics as Building Effective Press Relations, Your Choice in Electing a Bishop, Legal Questions and Understanding Church Canons, and Organizing Activities for Local Groups. Some others will include talks on Richard Hooker, Anglicans in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and a Primer of Episcopal Church History. We will also have plenty of time for visiting and getting to know others from different dioceses, who share our own concerns about the future of

our church. And we will share our love for Christ in worship and breaking of bread together. By the time we leave at 2:00 on Saturday afternoon, we will be fired up to carry on the work of the broad middle way of the Episcopal Church.

The meeting will be held at Best Western Dallas North; 13333 N. Stemmons Frwy; Dallas, TX 75234. Advanced registration is \$55 and must be made by September 21<sup>st</sup>. The registration form is available on the website: <http://viamediausa.org>.

Via Media USA is an alliance of Albany Via Media, Concerned Episcopalians of St. Lawrence Deanery, Episcopal Forum of South Carolina, Episcopal Voices of Central Florida, Fort Worth Via Media, Progressive Episcopalians of Pittsburgh, Remain Episcopal – San Joaquin, Southwest Florida Via Media Episcopalians, Springfield Via Media, Tennessee Via Media, Via Media Dallas, and Via Media Rio Grande.



### ACC Meeting

Source: Episcopal News Service

On June 21<sup>st</sup> the Episcopal Church made their presentation to the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC) meeting in Nottingham, England including the 130 page booklet "To Set Our Hope in Christ." From the Preamble of that booklet by the Presiding Bishop:

The Episcopal Church in the United States welcomes the request made in paragraph 135 of the Windsor Report: "We particularly request a contribution from the Episcopal Church (USA) which explains, from within the sources of authority that we as Anglicans have received in scripture, the apostolic tradition and reasoned reflection, how a person living in a same gender union may be considered eligible to lead the flock of Christ." The Episcopal Church has been seeking to answer this question for nearly 40 years and at the same time has been addressing a more fundamental question, namely: how can the holiness and

**You** are cordially invited to join Fort Worth Via Media by coming to our monthly meetings, participating in the Yahoo Discussion Group (email Barbi Click at [goatsbeardherbfarm@cowtown.net](mailto:goatsbeardherbfarm@cowtown.net)) or just by praying with us for one holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. Please email our President, George Komechak at [skydancr@flash.net](mailto:skydancr@flash.net) with questions, comments, or additions/deletions to our mailing list.



One Sunday morning, a mother went in to wake her son and tell him it was time to get ready for church, to which he replied, "I'm not going."

"Why not?" she asked.

"I'll give you two good reasons," he said. "One, they don't like me, and two, I don't like them."

His mother replied, "I'll give YOU two good reasons why you SHOULD go to church. One, you're 54 years old, and two, you're the Rector!"

faithfulness to which God calls us all be made manifest in human intimacy?

Though we have not reached a common mind we have come to a place in our discussion such that the clergy and people of a diocese have been able, after prayer and much discernment, to call a man living in a same sex relationship to be their bishop. As well, a majority of the representatives of the wider church—bishops, clergy and lay persons—have felt guided by the Holy Spirit, again in light of prayer and discernment, to consent to the election and consecration.

On June 22<sup>nd</sup>, the ACC unanimously affirmed the "listening process" requested for the Anglican Communion since 1998 and endorsed the Primates' February request that the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Church of Canada "voluntarily withdraw their members" from the ACC until the 2008 Lambeth Conference. The vote on the second resolution was 30 in favor, 28 against, with 4 abstentions, according to the Anglican Communion Office, and came after a two-hour session closed to observers, guests and media.

Commenting after the vote, Presiding Bishop Frank Griswold said: "The vote, which was contingent on the absence of the six votes of the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Church of Canada reveals a divide within the membership of the ACC. I very much hope that the listening process now mandated by the ACC will be one step in healing this divide. I also hope that the report submitted by the Episcopal Church to the members of the ACC, "To Set Our Hope on Christ," will be a useful contribution to that process. The work and mission of the Anglican Communion is carried out largely through international commissions and networks in which the Episcopal Church continues as a fully active and committed participant. It is through these means and our numerous other relationships focused on mission to our hurting world that we will, with God's grace, find our way forward."



## The Nigerian Connection

Peter Akinola is the Archbishop, Metropolitan and Primate of the Church of Nigeria, Anglican Communion. He was a strong influence to the Anglican Consultative Council in requiring the voluntary withdrawal of the Episcopal Church (USA) and the Anglican Church of Canada because of their respective positions regarding homosexuals. Recently, he has been urging similar action for the Church of England, because of its stand in connection with a new law called the Civil Partnerships Act. He is quoted as saying: "I believe that the temporary suspension of the Church of England is the right course of action to take. The church will be subjected to the same procedures and discipline that America and Canada faced" (see [virtueonline.com](http://virtueonline.com) posted July 30, 2005).

The following is from a press release dated June 14, 2005 from Progressive Episcopalians of Pittsburgh, our fellow Via Media USA affiliate:

Progressive Episcopalians of Pittsburgh (PEP) has obtained a draft constitution for an organization called the "Anglican Global Initiative" (AGI), apparently intended to be a shadow, alternative, or parallel Anglican Communion for so-called orthodox Anglicans. The document, which has circulated among leaders of the Episcopal Church, USA, and the Anglican Church of Canada since the Primates Meeting of last February, was discussed at a January Nairobi meeting of "Global South" primates led by Nigerian Archbishop Peter Akinola. The constitution, which seems not to have been formally agreed to by meeting participants, names Akinola and Archbishop Drexel Gomez, of the West Indies, as interim co-presidents. Akinola and Gomez have been two of the most vocal critics of the Episcopal Church and of the Anglican Church of Canada for their treatment of homosexuality.

Nigeria has the largest population of any country in Africa with 140 million people. Life expectancy is 46/47 years with infant mortality at almost 10%. This statistic includes the results of famine from drought, massacres from tribal and religious conflicts, and the large (5.4% of the population) incident of HIV (AIDS). An estimated 68% of the population is liter-

ate (age 15 or over, who can read and write), which breaks down at 75.7% male and 60.6% female. It is a male dominated society where wife beatings predominate (one out of three women have suffered violence from men—NY Times, 8/11/05). The Church tolerates polygamy, although it does not condone it.

Nigeria has a petroleum based economy whose revenues have been squandered through mismanagement and corruption. Known in the United States for its role in identity theft and internet fraud perpetrated on Americans, Nigeria is a transit point for heroin and cocaine, a major money-laundering center, and has massive corruption and criminal activity. (World Facts Book of the Central Intelligence Agency, updated as of 7/28/05)

Approximately 50% of the population of Nigeria is Muslim, 40% is Christian and 10% are indigenous religions. The Church of Nigeria, Anglican Communion, has an estimated membership of nineteen million (membership of the Episcopal Church in the USA is around two million). This alone makes them a very influential voice in the 70 million member Anglican Communion.

In September 2003, Archbishop Njongongulu Ndungane of Cape Town indicated that African, and other clergymen constituting the Global South Primates, expressing opposition to gay ordination were "arrogant, intolerant and hypocritical". Ndungane also charged that Africans did not have a full appreciation of their sexuality, and accused those who opposed the appointment of gays of hypocrisy, saying they had the wrong priorities. He said instead of putting much emphasis on human sexuality in the church, leaders should prioritise hunger, HIV/Aids, the oppressive sharia law in Nigeria, peace and hunger.

The Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church blamed the lobbying efforts of six Network/AAC members on the African bishops to thwart the reconciliation efforts of the Episcopal Church (USA) at the Primate's meeting in February. Addressing the quotes from Archbishop Peter Akinola in the article written for the Sunday Times, the Reverend Richard Kirker, General Secretary of the Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement (LGCM) said the following on August 2, 2005: "Archbishop Peter Akinola of Nigeria and his collaborators will never formally and publicly move against the Church of England; their new American paymasters led by bishop Duncan of Pittsburgh, USA will not allow it." (Duncan is head of The Network of Anglican Communion Dioceses and Parishes in which the Diocese of Fort Worth is a founding member).



The Episcopal Church welcomes you.



## Annual Convention of the Diocese of Fort Worth

"Building Up the Body of Christ" is the theme of the 23rd Annual Convention of the Diocese of Fort Worth, which will be hosted by the Southern Deanery and All Saint's Episcopal School, Normandale Campus, Fort Worth on November 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>. The opening Eucharist will be on Friday, November 18, 2005, at All Saints' Episcopal School Chapel, 9700 Saints Circle, Fort Worth, TX 76108, beginning at 5:30 p.m. Registration will take place in the School Gymnasium on Saturday, Nov. 19, from 7:30 a.m. until 8:45 A.M. The Convention will convene at 9 A.M. in the Gymnasium. After lunch, the Convention will continue until all business has been transacted. The Bishop will give his Annual Address at the beginning of the business session on Saturday morning.



## NUMBERS

The number of communicants in the diocese of Fort Worth grew from 14,479 in 1993 to 14,938 in 2003 or by 3%. In the ten years ending 2000, the population of Tarrant County grew from 1,170,000 to 1,446,000 or 23.6%. During comparable periods, the number of communicants in the diocese of Dallas grew 29.6% to 34,327 (from 26,479) while the population of Dallas County grew to 2,219,000 or 19.8%.

From 1993 to 2003, the number of communicants in the Episcopal Church (ECUSA) grew from 1,619,000 to 1,920,000 or 18.5%. The other two dioceses in which women are not ordained to the priesthood are San Joaquin and Quincy. The number of communicants in the diocese of San Joaquin grew 13.3% to 8,348 while the number of communicants in the diocese of Quincy actually declined to 2,388 from 3,130 in 1993.

These statistics are imperfect. Both the diocese of Dallas and Fort Worth extend beyond their county boundaries and the inclusion of the three dioceses, which do not ordain women, is not suggested as a reason for the lack of growth. However the statistics are interesting and the readers may wish to draw their own conclusions.

The church statistics were obtained from Louie Crew's website [andromedaRutgers.edu](http://andromedaRutgers.edu).



## Religion and Politics

Episcopal News Service—July 01, 2005,

Editors note: Condensed from an article by John C. Danforth an Episcopal priest, a former United States Ambassador to the United Nations and, for 18 years, a Republican Senator from Missouri. His Op-Ed article "Onward, Moderate Christian Soldiers" appeared in the June 17, 2005 edition of the New York Times.

It would be an oversimplification to say that America's culture wars are now between people of faith and non-believers. People of faith are not of one mind, whether on specific issues like stem cell research and government intervention in the case of Terri Schiavo, or the more general issue of how religion relates to politics. In recent years, conservative Christians have presented themselves as representing the one authentic Christian perspective on politics. With due respect for our conservative friends, equally devout Christians come to very different conclusions.

It is important for those of us who are sometimes called moderates to make the case that we, too, have strongly held Christian convictions, that we speak from the depths of our beliefs, and that our approach to politics is at least as faithful as that of those who are more conservative. Our difference concerns the extent to which government should, or even can, translate religious beliefs into the laws of the state.

People of faith have the right, and perhaps the obligation, to bring their values to bear in politics. Many conservative Christians approach politics with a certainty that they know God's truth, and that they can advance the kingdom of God through governmental action. So they have developed a political agenda that they believe advances God's kingdom, one that includes efforts to "put God back" into the public square and to pass a constitutional amendment intended to protect marriage from the perceived threat of homosexuality.

Moderate Christians are less certain about when and how our beliefs can be translated into statutory form, not because of a lack of faith in God but because of a healthy acknowledgement of the limitations of human beings. Like conservative Christians, we attend church, read the Bible and say our prayers. But for us, the only absolute standard of behavior is the When,

we see an opportunity to save our neighbors' lives through stem cell research, we believe that it is our duty to pursue that research, and to oppose legislation that would impede us from doing so. We think that efforts to haul references of God into the public square, into schools and courthouses, are far more apt to divide Americans than to advance faith.

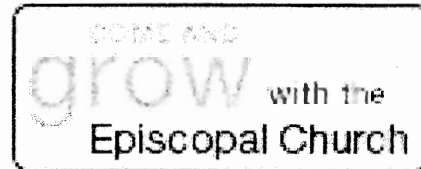
Following a Lord who reached out in compassion to all human beings, we oppose amending the Constitution in a way that would humiliate homosexuals. For us, living the Love Commandment may be at odds with efforts to encapsulate Christianity in a political agenda. We strongly support the separation of church and state, both because that principle is essential to holding together a diverse country, and because the policies of the state always fall short of the demands of faith. Aware that even our most passionate ventures into politics are efforts to carry the treasure of religion in the earthen vessel of government, we proceed in a spirit of humility lacking in our conservative colleagues.

In the decade since I left the Senate, American politics has been characterized by two phenomena: the increased activism of the Christian right, especially in the Republican Party, and the collapse of bipartisan collegiality. I do not think it is a stretch to suggest a relationship between the two. To assert that I am on God's side and you are not, that I know God's will and you do not, and that I will use the power of government to advance my understanding of

God's kingdom is certain to produce hostility.

By contrast, moderate Christians see ourselves, literally, as moderators. Far from claiming to possess God's truth, we claim only to be imperfect seekers of the truth. We reject the notion that religion should present a series of wedge issues useful at election time for energizing a political base. We believe it is God's work to practice humility, to wear tolerance on our sleeves, to reach out to those with whom we disagree, and to overcome the meanness we see in today's politics.

For us, religion should be inclusive, and it should seek to bridge the differences that separate people. We do not exclude from worship those whose opinions differ from ours. Following a Lord who sat at the table with tax collectors and sinners, we welcome to the Lord's table all who would come. Following a Lord who cited love of God and love of neighbor as encompassing all the commandments, we reject a political agenda that displaces that love. Christians who hold these convictions ought to add their clear voice of moderation to the debate on religion in politics.



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 Official Newsletter of Fort Worth Via Media  
 P.O. Box 101212  
 Fort Worth, Texas 76185