

Anglican Diocese of Arizona

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An Open Letter to the Bishops, Clergy and People of the Continuing Church

While a clergyman in ECUSA during the heat of the struggles of 1976-77, I regularly attended a monthly gathering of clergy within the diocese of Los Angeles called the Society of Anglican Clergy, or SAC as we called it. Most of the priests who attended were affectionately known as "Spikes" - high churchmen whose parishes were bastions of Anglo-Catholicism and whose liturgies included the smells, bells and accoutrements of the historic Faith as visibly as the theology preached was clear and concise.

There was also another expression of churchmanship within SAC. Those were the clerics to whom the moniker "low-churchmen" applied, or perhaps even "broad Churchmen" or "Latitudinarians" would have been correct. They loved Morning Prayer on a weekly basis for the Sunday liturgy, and yes, Holy Communion on Sundays at least once a month or so, too. And most assuredly, we loved one another, worked together, and shared the same consternation regarding what was happening within our beloved Episcopal Church.

Sadly, I think that we have lost that oneness which we so cherished in those earlier years. Even within the Continuing Church movement, we are now seemingly in our own "camps," coming out only when necessity dictates communication with the other "tribes."

Certainly we all consider ourselves to be Christ's soldiers and servants, but somehow or another, we're still mostly separated, fragmented. We may call ourselves "Anglicans" or "Episcopalians" or "Anglo-Catholics" or "High" or "Low" Churchmen, but... are we "one in Christ?" That is - and has been throughout the years - the question.

Let's examine our shared history.

A group of faithful Episcopalians gathered in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1977 and agreed upon the [Affirmation of St. Louis](#), a document which expressed commitment to the historic and biblical Faith of the Church. The next year - on January 28, 1978 - the Rt. Rev. Albert Chambers and two other bishops consecrated four ECUSA priests - Frs. Waterson, Mote, Doren and Morse. And to this day we celebrate and thank God for that event with the Feast of the Preservation of the American Episcopate, and we rejoice that the consecrations made it possible for Episcopalians to continue practicing the Catholic and Apostolic faith of the Church, as it has been handed down through the centuries.

As we celebrate that event, it is also good to both re-examine and meditate upon our journey. The Continuing Church is now more than thirty years old. We've come a long way; however, we've still a long journey ahead of us, and there's something important for us to consider now, after so many years of "wandering in the desert."

It happened a long time ago. When we packed our bags and left ECUSA, we did so with the Faith "*once delivered unto the saints*," bringing it with us intact and not tinkered with. However, when we unpacked those bags and began our parishes - sometimes this examination occurred years later - we found that we had brought some other things with us, also: some "dirty laundry" that we didn't intend to include. Those were the sins of our fathers, the likes of pride, envy and the rest of the "dwarf-making" deadlies that are so prevalent not only in the land which we had left, but throughout this fallen world.

In short, our humanity and fallen nature came with us, along with our Faith and ideals. And because we ignored the dirty laundry's presence in our new-found busy-nesses, and therefore didn't set them aside as quickly as we ought to have done, after all of these years we are still fragmented into various camps. And perhaps it would be better to identify the camps or jurisdictions as "power bases" - or, as another clergyman aptly described them, "*pyramids of personal privilege.*"

So, we have made mistakes. Some small and some longer lasting and very inhibiting. For whatever reason (and the "reason" depends upon who's telling the story) the four bishops who were consecrated in 1978 failed to come together. Instead, they went their own ways, and the decisions and designs which were forthcoming have continued to plague us and the Church in our own day and age. One such example was the creation of dioceses which were not geographical, but theological in nature.

I suppose that at first glance, it may not seem to be all that important, as it's good to declare commitment and love through names the likes of the diocese of the "Blessed Sacrament" or "Christ the King" or "Holy Cross." However, I have come to realize the limited nature inherent within such designations.

Should the names of our dioceses be theological declarations, or should they define a geographical area? I would choose the latter, and would suggest that, when and where it is possible, our dioceses should be geographical, and therefore easily identifiable, such as ours in Arizona. We have put aside the "Diocese of the Blessed Sacrament" and replaced it with the "Anglican Diocese of Arizona." Short, succinct and specific: we are Anglican, we are a diocese, and we are "in" Arizona.

One thing that ECUSA did well was in designating geographical areas for dioceses - such as the Diocese of Fort Worth, or San Joaquin, or - egads! - Los(t) Angeles. And perhaps that particular diocese - my "former" home - gives us the needed example for another issue we face. The Los Angeles lesson is simply put: most assuredly a contributing part of the reason that the LA diocese decomposed at such a rapid rate was it's "largeness." Can a Bishop be the chief pastor to congregations he hardly ever spends time in? Is "largeness" a synonym for "holiness?" If LA is any indication, the answer is an emphatic No.

In our Continuing Church endeavor, we have oftentimes perpetuated the Los Angeles dilemma, geographically speaking - Dioceses of the West, East, Southern States, Southwestern States, etcetera, etcetera, ad nauseam! Big IS better!(!?)

Is it a good idea for the apostolic ministry - Bishops, specifically - to fly from one coast to the other or from one state to another, in order to fulfill the apostolic duties and ministry? Is it even necessary to do so? And yet, when we examine what has occurred during the years since 1976, we see dioceses, jurisdictions, and yes, kingdoms - call them whatever you want - stretch from "*sea to shining sea!*" Not at all necessary, but indulged in, in spite of it all. And the world watched as **WE** were the ones with the "Flying Bishops!"

I serve as an example of this faulty approach. During my time as Bishop in the APCK I flew so often from Arizona to Seattle to Montana to California to Texas to North and South Carolina to Washington DC and to Alabama (et al!!!!) that I upgraded to First Class for free each and every time I flew! Fine for my body? That's a point of debate, but, oh! so deadly for the soul - mine **and** those poor folk whom the "figurehead bishop" visited every so often. It was never the same fellow, you know - just a faceless apostolic presence with his pointed hat who would float in, lay hands on someone, preach and then fly off as if to heaven (or Neverland?) after the Sunday liturgy was complete and the food feast consumed.

So, what's the answer?

I say this in the spirit of Christian encouragement, and I address not only my fellow bishops and other ministers, but each and every one of us within the Continuing Church movement: let us begin the process of reuniting the Continuing Church. Let's reapportion it into geographical and workable

areas, and make it our goal - **in OUR lifetime!** - to unite under an agreed upon "title" or moniker. Enough with the "alphabet soup syndrome" so prevalent within the Continuing Church movement!!!!

Although there are a few older bishops ministering within the Continuing Church movement than I, I dare say that none have had the time to ponder our predicament more than I have. And I also dare to say, that the need for *any* bishop to venture into another state for a visitation, or even to start a church in the "hither and yon" is, at best, the exception and **NOT** the norm.

We - bishops - need to stay in our own small area/vineyard, and get back to our own people and become the Bishop God wants us to be, spending time with our people so that they come to love us and we, them. Ours is not to cultivate fleeting relationships, but rather is the beginning of the embracing of the Eternal. And that happens one person at a time. In other words, we must become the "Father in God" we are called to be, not the "father" who sees his children every other month or year, or whenever the "agreed upon statement" says we can or should!

This is not a new "call" that I trumpet; rather, I have seen a few of my fellow bishops propose the same things that I have said in this letter, and I pray for success for them and for us all and for the strengthening of dear Mother Church. But it is now time for us to come together with a common resolve, and get on with the building up of God's Holy Church. We've fiddled around long enough, it's time **TO DO** what we are, and always have been, called to do.

Our beginnings were grand. Today can be, too!

Recall the idealism, youthful vigor and the tenacity of the Saint Louis conference. One priest preached at the conference, *"I call upon you to exercise your apostolic commission - save yourselves, your children, your families, your friends and fellows. Leave this modern Egypt - the fleshpots of the Minneapolis Church - whose bishops act like Pharaohs, building pyramids of personal power and privilege. Leave this kingdom of death, this House of Pharaoh, and march with us into the desert."*

Those words are as true today as when they were first proclaimed. We need no pyramids. The privilege to serve God and His people is enough for us all. I know that most of our bishops - if encouraged, prayed for, and supported - **can** and **will be** the servants Jesus calls them to be. And when we actually commit to and do our ministry, God will be glorified beyond measure!

Will you help your bishops to lead by example, showing the faithful and those who watch us from afar how to live in unity and godly love, instead of acting like *"Pharaohs, building pyramids of personal power and privilege?"*

Enough of those things! We **CAN** exist without such temporal trappings, indulgences. I can attest to that, personally. Necessity dictated that to me, and Necessity - Sweet Clement Jesus - declares it to us all. It's time! Our true and eternal life and ministry flows from the side of Christ, and is first a life of suffering, and then one of glory.

Teach us so, Dear Lord Jesus!

+ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

+ *David McMannes*