

The Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh of The Episcopal Church



May 11, 2011

To the Clergy of the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh

Over the past several months, many of us have been distressed by the inaccurate reports and misleading information circulating regarding relations between the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh and those who have affiliated with the Anglican Church in North America. Often our own parishioners have come to us with questions as to what are the real facts.

For this reason, the following question and answer sheet has been prepared to be distributed as widely as possible. In addition, it will be posted on our web site and shared with those who are no longer active in our diocese.

Please know that a team of diocesan leaders meets weekly to sort out the issues regarding property and other legal matters. As the appeal process in the secular courts, which continues to be mounted by the Anglican Church in North America, enters its final stages, we must address the property issues before us. But it remains our intention to do so in as amicable and fair manner as is possible. Although no congregation has been asked to vacate the property, some congregations affiliated with the Anglican Church in North America are now choosing to do so of their own volition. To that end, we have appointed Dr. Joan Gundersen as Administrator for Properties to oversee these situations so that insurance, utilities, maintenance and provision for outside groups using them will be kept up when they are returned to us. Also I am in the process of assembling a committee to meet under the direction of Canon Jay Geisler to develop a plan for how we may develop new congregations in those areas in which we no longer have an active parish.

Finally, and most importantly, it is imperative that the word get out as widely as possible that Anglican Church in North American clergy, laity and whole congregations can always opt to return to the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh with no repercussions. We have already received a number of inquiries from individuals seeking to return. We are in no way seeking to destroy or damage those who wish to remain in the new church now affiliated with Archbishop Duncan, nor will we speak ill of those congregations or any members thereof. We will do all we can to respond to those requests with charity and as much support as we can offer. Should you receive such requests, please forward them on to the diocesan office.

We hope this communication will be helpful to you when questioned about the real story of where we are in our relations with our former parishioners now affiliated with the Anglican Church in North America.

Faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kenneth L. Price, Jr." with a stylized flourish at the end.

Kenneth L. Price, Jr.
Bishop

enc.

Questions and Answers about the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh and the Realignment

What happened to all of the parishes that are no longer active in the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh?

Since the 2008 Diocesan Convention, 42 parishes have stopped participating in the Episcopal Diocese because the leaders maintain their parishes and the diocese had withdrawn from the Episcopal Church and realigned with the Anglican Province of the Southern Cone (based in South America) and more recently, the new Anglican Church in North America (ACNA). We don't see things the same way. We say that people can leave the Episcopal Church, but not parishes or a diocese. To respect the views of those who disagree with us without prejudice to either point of view, we'll use the terms "realigned congregation" and "realigned diocese" to describe the present situation.

Is the Episcopal Church continuing to sue the realigned diocese?

No, it is the other way around and has been for over a year. The Stipulation signed by Bishop Duncan and diocesan leaders in 2005 came into play with the realignment vote and, after Judge James' ruling regarding its application in 2009, it has been the realigned diocese which has been suing to appeal, rehear and overturn this ruling.

Does the Episcopal Diocese want to kick realigned congregations out of their buildings?

There is no reason for realigned congregations to abandon their buildings without talking with us and the Episcopal Diocese has not asked any parish to vacate the property. Indeed, the Episcopal Diocese has invited realigned congregations to enter into negotiations in order to come to a settlement regarding these properties.

Why does the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh have an interest in these properties at all, especially since these people left the Episcopal Church?

Each of the realigned congregations occupies and uses properties and assets that were given faithfully by Episcopalians for the ministry of the Episcopal Church, sometimes over generations. It is not fair for the assets of one denomination to be taken by a group of people and then used to set up a competing denomination. (The ACNA purports to replace the Episcopal Church as the American branch of the Anglican Communion.) The leaders of the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh are stewards of the assets of the Diocese, not owners, acting as trustees for the generations of faithful Episcopalians in Southwest Pennsylvania. We cannot simply give away that property to others.

What is the "Dennis" Canon?

The "Dennis" Canon is a canon of the Episcopal Church (I.7.4) passed by General Convention in 1979 (to which Pittsburgh sent its deputies) stating that all parish property and assets are held in trust by the dioceses of the Episcopal Church solely for the benefit of those dioceses and the Episcopal Church. This means that the parish property can only be used for that purpose. The Dennis Canon has been upheld by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court in its 2005 decision involving the Diocese of Pennsylvania and the Parish of St. James the Less. The canon built on an understanding that had always existed in the Church. Not only were parishes required to accede to the Episcopal Church Constitution and Canons, but many parishes, when founded, included articles in their charters and bylaws disqualifying leaders who advocated non-conformity to the Episcopal Church.

Why shouldn't an Episcopal congregation be able to leave the Episcopal Church and keep its building?

The importance of unity in the Body of Christ, despite disagreements that Christians may have with one another, is emphatically communicated in the New Testament. Division of a church is not a biblical solution for disagreements. If those currently using a building had full power to determine its use, there would be then no limits on what the church building could be used for. Besides upholding the intentions of past donors, the Dennis Canon provides strict sanctions against those who would divide a church and use its historic assets for a different denomination. Conversely, the canon provides a strong incentive to seek unity, even in the face of disagreement. By making it clear which of two rival groups gets to keep the church property (in which a congregation may have worshiped for generations), church rules such as the Dennis Canon and the traditions that preceded it hopefully minimize the chance of a painful split (or at least provide an objective rule for resolving it) and also protect the ability of a remnant faithful to worship within the Episcopal Church.

Are the only two possible models of a settlement the examples of St. Philip's Church, Moon, and the Somerset Anglican Fellowship?

No. Each congregation has a different situation and so there may be many possible settlements. That is why it is important that each realigned congregation enter into negotiations with the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh.

In the case of congregations that negotiate a financial settlement with the Diocese of Pittsburgh, how will the Episcopal Diocese use any monies received?

In all likelihood, the Diocese will use the money to extend its ministry by creating new church plants, encouraging groups of Episcopalians who are rebuilding congregations, and supporting existing parishes.

Can any of the congregations come back? And if they can, what repercussions will there be for them?

Any realigned congregation will be welcomed back. There would be no repercussions whatsoever.

What about realigned clergy who want to return?

Since Bishop Price released the realigned clergy (in recognition that they were no longer doing ministry within the Episcopal Church), they can be restored simply by reaffirming the oath of conformity they signed at their ordination. In fact, it has already happened in this diocese.

If I want to be part of the Episcopal Church, what can I do?

You can contact the Rev. Canon Scott Quinn at 412-921-4103 or email him at squinn@episcopalpgh.org to talk about your options. You can follow developments concerning the Episcopal Diocese and learn about the mission and ministries of its many vibrant parishes by visiting our web site, www.episcopalpgh.org. You can also sign up for our weekly e-mail newsletter, "Grace Happens."

How do I sign up for "Grace Happens"?

It's as simple as entering an e-mail address in the sign-up form on the home page of the Episcopal Diocese web site, www.episcopalpgh.org. Every newsletter you receive contains a link for forwarding that copy to anyone else you chose. Feel free to print the newsletter as a way of sharing it with others.