



## **What is the right thing to do?**

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*Given At A Hopeful Future For The Episcopal Diocese Of Pittsburgh: An Alternative Solution  
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1. In the presentation that the Diocesan Leadership Team has taken to many parishes in our diocese, there are three questions which frame the question of realignment.
2. Is Jesus who he says he is? Are the Scriptures reliable? Are there moral absolutes?
3. In the diocesan presentation by the leadership team, if one is able to answer “yes” to these questions then, in light of the current controversies within the Anglican Communion and the Episcopal Church, the listener is led to one solution, which is presented as Realignment.
4. I was able to answer each of these three questions with a resounding “Yes!” But then the logic of the diocesan leadership’s team completely escaped me because I could not see how to get from affirming these answers to the conclusion that realignment is the only path forward.
5. Like many, I am deeply troubled with many of the directions charted by our national church leadership. I am confused by statements by high officials, which seem to contradict basic creedal teachings we all learned in our catechism. I am distressed at the lack of charity and humility toward an accountability to the whole Body of Christ by the leaders on both sides.
6. Yet, I have not been able to follow the reasoning, seemingly embraced by so many in our diocese, that the only solution to these concerns is realignment.
7. And so for me, in seeking to be faithful to God, the overriding concern in all this is, “What is the right thing to do?”
8. In an article about realignment I wrote last spring, I expressed “doubt as to whether such a strategy is faithful for a catholic and biblical Christian,” I pointed to, “an authentic concern about those left behind, a wariness about any group claiming purity, the lack of any organic unity among those who have already left, and a real concern about the effect of such a strategy on my own congregation and the distractions from mission the fall-out would produce.”
9. The first and most important reason for my reservations about the re-alignment proposal is that I believe that it is neither a catholic Christian nor a biblical thing to do. Within this point, I’d like to draw attention to four aspects:
  - a. Despite all the spin about it being called a “re-alignment” instead of a split, it is a separation; it is a split from the Episcopal Church (in fact, that is the whole point). There is no way that it will be seen in any other way here in the United States. All the non-Christians will see is, those Christians talk a lot about love but they sure have a hard time getting along even with themselves. Whether this is right or wrong, this still is what the witness to our own culture will be. In addition to this is the dangerous spiritual baggage the realigned group will take into their

new diocese. Inevitably, they will carry with them the value that when Christians have a serious disagreement then division is an acceptable solution.

- b. There are plenty of other conservative bishops in TEC who have not come on board with those who are advocating re-alignment. In fact, there are probably only three, maybe four, dioceses where re-alignment is being seriously considered. And yet, if realignment is really a Word from the Lord, then the discernment of even the larger orthodox and faithful remnant within TEC does not seem to be recognizing it—as Scripture says it should.
  - c. In my parish we spent the weeks of Lent looking at ALL the biblical passages that deal with false teachers and with divisions. Without exception, the biblical command is not to cause division in the church. We are to avoid false teachers, but those who cause division as well as those who are false prophets the Scripture says God will judge. Right now in TEC, the actual doctrine of our Church is articulated in the Book of Common Prayer, which is thoroughly orthodox. Remember that Jesus' final high priestly prayer was for us to be one even as he and the Father are one. (John 17)
  - d. Finally, I have an understanding of the Church as the Body of Christ, of which he is the head (this is from Paul). As a consequence, I do not believe that a single diocese has the competence in the Holy Spirit by itself or the authority to separate itself. As part of the Body, we are accountable to the larger church. I really believe this is a decision that, if it must be made, then it must be made at a larger and higher level. For this very reason, I oppose both the realignment as well as the consecration of the bishop of New Hampshire. Neither action seems to be congruent for a church that claims to be catholic and apostolic.
10. Second, I know firsthand that there are still plenty of faithful Christian people in the Episcopal Church; people who will never leave. I worked in another diocese for eight years before I came to Pittsburgh and I know the vast majority of them were faithful Christian people. It seems strange to me that faithful orthodox Church leaders would leave behind these folks. Indeed, one writer has argued that the surest way to determine that the people in the pews of the Episcopal Church will not hear the gospel is for all the orthodox leaders to leave.
11. Third, I have had many conversations about this issue with many people in our diocese. Many, understandably, are concerned about purity and holiness and faithfulness (this is not, of course, a bad thing). They want to be part of a Church that is purely devoted to Christ Jesus (and they see TEC as hopelessly compromised). The problem is that some of them are drawing the lines closer and closer together. And when the lines get drawn too close then sometimes you end up with all Law and very little Grace. The older I get, the more I see that sin is truly the human condition and that we all need God's grace because none of us measures up to the glory of God. I have become a little wary of some of the rhetoric I hear from those who seem to believe that a re-aligned church can be pure. I have never been a member of a perfect church in all the years of my life as a Christian—and I don't expect to be this side of Judgment Day.
12. Fourth, I would probably be a lot more excited about the re-alignment if I believed it was an action of the Holy Spirit. What I see, however, is that so many of those who have already left have found it nearly impossible to get together themselves. Right now in the US, there are Nigerian churches, Rwandan churches, Ugandan churches, Bolivian churches, Kenyan churches, Southern Cone churches, Reformed Episcopal Churches, plus many others (a veritable alphabet soup of Anglican splinters). They have released a statement that says they are working to come together but then, when they go back home, they issue all kinds of exceptions and retractions. Is it possible that an authentic action of the Holy Spirit could be fragmenting the Episcopal Church into all these different shards? That does not seem to be congruent with what the Bible says the Holy Spirit does. If all those who left came together

in a real way, which they should have done long ago, then it would be a miracle of the Holy Spirit that would be hard to ignore. But it is not happening.

13. Finally, after 2003, with the actions of TEC, our parish went through a pretty hard time. There were divisions between us that had not been so pronounced before. There were people on both sides of the arguments who left. It had the effect of de-railing a lot of our ministry and mission, which I perceived to be an attack of the Enemy. After being caught in this distraction for almost two years, we began to recover our awareness of mission, even in the midst of the turmoil. We recovered our sense of hospitality even to those in a minority opinion. What I see, in this current debate, are the seeds to return us to that distraction, only this time I fear it will be worse. There very likely will be lawsuits, which will probably will come after re-alignment, but almost more troubling than that is my concern that our common mission and ministry, which in our parish has enjoyed across the board eager support and participation, will once again be tore asunder by distraction and division.
  
14. What is the right thing to do? This is an essential question for every faithful Christian to ask. I have not been able to see, despite all the problems in TEC, that re-alignment is a right and faithful response.