



40 DAYS OF DISCERNMENT™

a congregational program for choosing a way forward

www.40DaysofDiscernment.org

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Editorial note: As the 40 Days of Discernment™ program proceeds, additional relevant materials may become available and will be provided online at www.40DaysofDiscernment.org.



*The logo is a cross and crown made up of 40 diamonds.
(Designed by Alliant Studios)*

Table of Contents

Guide to This Guidebook	4
Can't We All Just Get Along?—John Yates	5
Things to Keep in Mind—Jim Oakes	8
Discernment Through Prayer & Fasting—E. Kathleen Christopher & Sue Hardman	9

THE 40 DAYS

Week 1: Understanding the Crisis

◆ Timeline of Significant Events in the Episcopal Crisis	15
◆ What Does It Mean To Be an Episcopalian?	18
Small Group Discussion Guide for Week 1	21
Inductive Bible Study: 1 Corinthians chapters 1–2	22

Week 2: The Importance of Being Anglican

◆ Anglican Distinctives	31
◆ A New Anglican Reformation	35
Small Group Discussion Guide for Week 2	37
Inductive Bible Study: 1 Corinthians chapters 3–4	37

Week 3: An Intractable Conflict?

◆ Humbling Considerations	44
◆ What About Our Property?	48
Small Group Discussion Guide for Week 3	51
Inductive Bible Study: 1 Corinthians chapters 5–6	51

Week 4: Truth & Unity

◆ Listen to the Spirit	58
◆ Unity Within the Framework of Truth	60
Small Group Discussion Guide for Week 4	64
Inductive Bible Study: 1 Corinthians chapters 7–9	64

Week 5: Grieving, Healing, and Change

◆ Grief: Losing What We Love	71
◆ Change & Adaptation	76
Small Group Discussion Guide for Week 5	77
Inductive Bible Study: 1 Corinthians chapters 10–13	78

Week 6: Choosing Our Future

◆ How Then Shall We Live?	85
Small Group Discussion Guide for Week 6	89
Inductive Bible Study: 1 Corinthians chapters 14–16	89

Guide to This Guidebook

The current crisis in The Episcopal Church (TEC, formerly referred to as the Episcopal Church USA or ECUSA) demands a response. Parishes and missions need a prayerful and reasoned way for choosing a way forward. The 40 Days of Discernment™ program and this guidebook are an attempt to help congregations do just that.

This guidebook provides guidance on prayer and fasting, weekly readings on topical subjects, questions for small group discussion, and a devotional with inductive Bible study questions on 1 Corinthians. The guidebook, though, is but one part of the overall discernment process.

As with any church program, each parish and mission must shape 40 Days of Discernment™ to fit its local needs and context. The 40 Days of Discernment™ is intended to include the following components:

- ◆ solemn assemblies at the beginning and end of 40 Days
- ◆ prayer meetings
- ◆ fasting, perhaps weekly on designated days
- ◆ individuals working through the guidebook
- ◆ small group discussions
- ◆ newsletter articles
- ◆ possible vestry resolution on what course of action the parish ought to take
- ◆ congregational meeting and any necessary vote on any vestry resolution

The nature and timing of any vestry resolution and congregational meeting may vary greatly from congregation to congregation. For some, a resolution may be an affirmation of the congregation's desire to remain in its current diocese; for others there may be a proposal that the congregation apply to affiliate with a particular part of the Anglican Communion. For some, the timing of such actions may be done within the 40 days, and for others it may be scheduled after the 40 days.

More information and resources are available at the official website for this program: www.40DaysofDiscernment.org.

Can't We All Just Get Along?

In the last year I have been approached from time to time by a few parishioners concerned that our vestry at The Falls Church might be giving serious thought to our disaffiliating from The Episcopal Church (TEC). "Can it be so bad, John, that this is necessary? The last thing the church needs is more division. Let's stay in and continue to work from within, for renewal and reform as you, John, have always taught us."

The question deserves a thoughtful answer. Understand, we are not at this time taking action to disaffiliate from TEC; but is it a possibility one day? It is certainly possible. None of us knows what will happen in the future, and our vestry at The Falls Church has made no definite plans. We are, however, considering carefully all contingencies that we can imagine and attempting to be prepared with various strategies. We are in regular discussion both with our bishop, the Rt. Rev. Peter Lee, as well as with leaders of a coalition of 25 or so other Virginia congregations that share our deep concerns.

Our denomination has undergone a major, steady transformation over the last half century, a transformation that has become evident to all due to a series of major decisions over the last ten years or so regarding sexual ethics, though the changes that resulted in this revisionist thinking are rooted in deeper doctrinal shifts that have evolved more gradually.

There are many key issues over which Episcopalians are divided. They are extremely serious issues and all of these issues are rooted in doctrine, even though we now live in a day when the culture is quite suspicious of doctrinal matters. And this division is reflected in many ways, including the parting of many congregations from the denomination. The now-famous quote of our bishop about choosing heresy over schism is evidence of a widely held view in TEC. Our denominational leaders are less and less certain about the ancient truths. When you deprive the church of its ancient orthodox underpinnings, you eventually pull the whole church down. It is happening before our eyes.

TEC has come to practice grievous revisions to key doctrines. The doctrine of man (i.e., humanity) in TEC extols man, not God, as the measure of all things. The doctrine of revelation has become a "pick and choose" approach to the Bible whereby we accept what we think accords with modern wisdom, and reject what doesn't. The

doctrine of salvation now sees Jesus as a way to God—the reason evangelism is so rare within Episcopalianism is that most Episcopalians don't really believe it's necessary for people to commit their lives to Christ, as long as they do the best they can. The doctrine of the church (i.e., ecclesiology) has been replaced by a preoccupation with running the church by General Convention's revisions of canon law.

Another area of concern is the doctrine of regeneration. While TEC has weakened doctrinally, it has at the same time elevated liturgy and rites. Listen to just about any current Episcopal leader speak about holy baptism and the Eucharist as the decisive actions of the church. Infant baptism is viewed as the key rite of entry into the church, while Eucharist is the sustaining rite, and these are the two essentials “in which we now find our unity.” While there is truth in this, the early church placed great emphasis on repentance, informed faith, and moral discipline in accordance with the Commandments and essential Christian doctrine. There is no doctrine of regeneration in the Episcopal Church now, other than a fuzzy notion that the “new birth” occurs in infant baptism. This places great emphasis on rite and very little on repentance, transformation, and discipleship. The New Testament teaches that regeneration occurs when the Holy Spirit enables a person to come to active, personal faith in Jesus Christ, along with genuine repentance for sin.

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in the Episcopal
Church now*

These and many other factors have been eating away at Episcopalianism for a long time and many church members have recognized that we are irreconcilably divided and have exited TEC. The current crisis over same-sex relationships has caught people's attention, however, and brought about even greater division, not because this one ethical issue is so important, but rather because it has

become the leading illustration of what happens when a church breaks loose from its biblical and orthodox foundations. It is interesting that the youngest members of the Anglican Church (the Global South Anglicans) have seen this fact the most clearly and spoken out the most boldly against the heresies of the North (us).

For years I have believed that renewal of the Episcopal Church was not only possible but worth working towards. That is the way we viewed our role within TEC. The Falls Church has hoped to be a lighthouse of renewal and a model of orthodox Anglican faith. Certainly renewal is always possible with God, but all the signs I see now lead me to believe that TEC is inevitably headed away from historic biblical faith. TEC is

now basically a radically liberal, Unitarian-like church with tinges of ceremonial high-church flavor, and it is pathetically shrinking numerically week by week. Yes, there are still exceptions to this, but the exceptions are rarer and rarer.

The major question is: Can orthodox, biblically committed congregations continue to remain affiliated with TEC, or has the time come to seek alternative affiliation with some other branch of Anglicanism?

Our own bishop allows us to be who Christ has called us to be, and tells us that the rest of the diocese and denomination needs us. We are under no pressure to embrace or teach or give financial support to practices or people or programs that in good conscience we feel we cannot support. Still, many, many dioceses are not so generous and open as Virginia. Many of us simply do not feel at home in TEC anymore.

I dream of an Anglican Church in North America that is truly biblically centered, mission-focused, evangelistically on fire, doctrinally sound, and led by wise, passionate, godly leaders—a church that will offer confused 21st century postmoderns a real faith, a life-changing encounter with Jesus Christ, and community in which the healing, powerful, and sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit is being celebrated in worship and fellowship day by day.

This guidebook is offered as an aid for those who are seeking to discern how God is leading in response to these issues. It has been written by many different people from several Virginia congregations who intend to devote forty days to prayerful discernment. May God indeed enable us to discern what actions are most pleasing to him. May he guide and direct us all.

—*the Rev. John Yates*
Rector of The Falls Church, Falls Church, Virginia

Things to Keep in mind

Over the past couple of years, an informal but growing group of wardens and clergy from around the Episcopal Diocese of Virginia have been meeting periodically to talk about how our congregations could find a way forward in light of divisive actions taken by The Episcopal Church in recent years.

One of the things we have discussed is the need for a deliberate time of prayerful discernment. It is my great pleasure to introduce you to the guidebook for the discernment process that has grown out of this group. We will all undertake this process together as we seek to determine God's will for our future within the Anglican Communion.

As I think about the path that has led us to this undertaking, I am struck by the magnitude of our effort. Indeed, it is tempting to be overwhelmed by this decision we are making: to hear God's will for us as faithful followers of Christ in his church. But recognizing that God has frequently achieved his goals with flawed people, we can trust in his grace and mercy as we embark on this project together.

As we proceed, it seems to me that we need to keep three key ideas in mind. First, we cannot proceed out of anger. Rather, we need to understand that, although we may profoundly disagree with the direction The Episcopal Church has taken, a decision made in anger is not likely to be a wise one. We need to pray for a humble spirit as we listen to God's Word.

Second, we need to be mindful of our own sins. Scripture reminds us that none of us is blameless, and we need to resist the temptation to cast stones at the sins of others while our own go unrecognized.

Third, we need to be truly open to God's call. While many—perhaps most—of us come into this process with an opinion, we cannot merely define discernment as “waiting until everyone else agrees with me.” We can be certain that God has something greater in store for us than we can even imagine—and we need to make sure that we hear him when he speaks to us!

None of these admonitions should make us fearful. Indeed, they should give us confidence as we proceed. It comforts me to know that we are not alone in this endeavor—in fact, churches representing over 20% of the Diocese of Virginia are considering participating in this effort together. We are not alone! We invite you to take this journey with us.

—*Jim Oakes*
The Virginia Wardens Group

Discernment Through Prayer and Fasting

We are entering into a period of 40 days to seek the will of God. The Lord delights in the desire of his people to know and to do his will. Time and time again in the Scriptures, we see how the people of Israel prospered when they followed God's will . . . and how low they sank when they chose to go their own way.

Proverbs 3:5–6 promises, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will direct your paths.” In order to make sure that this discernment process is really about listening to God's direction for our congregation, and not to ourselves, we need to put into practice the wisdom of this proverb by turning to God with all our being; not leaning on our own human understanding; acknowledging God in all we do; listening to God's direction and being willing to follow God's path for our lives. We may enter into this period of discernment, confident in the knowledge that if we humble ourselves and truly seek to do God's will above all else, he will lovingly direct our paths.

Key to our discernment process will be prayer and fasting. Both of these can be challenging, but God rewards the use of such disciplines as he turns them into means of his grace. Below are some guidelines that may be adapted for use by congregations, small groups, and individuals.

Prayer and discernment

by the Rev. E. Kathleen Christopher, HealingWay Ministries

One of our most common errors in situations is to assume that we know the right answer even before praying about it. That is the plain message of the story about Joshua and the Gibeonite deception. Verse 14 of Joshua chapter 9 notes that “The men of Israel . . . did not inquire of the LORD.” An assumption about the Gibeonites led to later troubles for the Israelites. No matter how clear a situation and choice may seem, we need to hold it up to the Lord, and be willing to

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let go of our own preconceived notions. Without prayer, we are no better off than non-Christians who lean on their own understanding. Walking into deception is not difficult. The Enemy whispers into our ear, “You can see clearly which is the correct path here . . . no need to bother the Lord with this one.”

The Enemy whispers into our ear, “You can see clearly which is the correct path here . . . no need to bother the Lord with this one.”

We do not have to beg the Lord to speak to us or to hear us. God is our loving Father who has already spoken through the Word, who continues to guide us by the Spirit, and who eagerly listens for the voices of his children. We are to approach the Lord knowing that nothing would give him greater pleasure than to fulfill the prayers of his children, voiced in accord with his will (Luke 11:1–13).

◆ *Preparing to pray*

No matter how wronged each side in the Episcopal crisis may feel, none of us are sinless. Perhaps the greatest temptation for all of us is to behave like the self-righteous Pharisee in the temple who proudly prayed, “Thank you, Lord, that I am not like them” (Lk 18:9–14). The Lord prefers the company of a hundred abject sinners who know their true state than a thousand self-defined “holy ones” who do not.

So, the most important element in preparing to pray is to confess our sins and to forgive others who have sinned against us (cf. general confession in BCP p.360; Great Litany, BCP p.148). Scripture tells us that unconfessed sin and lack of forgiveness hinders prayers (Matthew 6:14–15; 1 Peter 3:7).

◆ *Prayer is conversation*

Praying is conversation. Conversation is talking and listening. When the conversation is with our Lord and Creator, it is best to begin by listening! Silence allows us to listen to the voice of God. Let the Lord reveal not only sins to be confessed, but also his perspective on a given topic or situation through his Word and Spirit.

Have Bibles available to follow the Holy Spirit’s prompting to look at a particular passage or verse. One of the most powerful and effective ways to pray is by praying Scripture. The Psalter is especially appropriate as the psalms are the original prayerbook of God’s people.

As with any conversation, no individual should dominate the discussion. Also, do not expect everyone to offer a spoken prayer on each topic or even during each meeting. If you are not comfortable praying out loud in front of others, please still participate—those also pray who offer their silent assent to the prayers voiced by others.

The apostle Paul admonishes the community of faith, “everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way” (1Corinthians 14:40). Be sensitive to the ebb and flow of the group. A facilitator may help shepherd prayer meetings by indicating possible focal points for intercession and petition, and by starting and ending the meeting on time out of respect for people’s schedules (people may linger of course as they are able).

After confessing, listening, and talking to God, close the prayer meeting by allowing another spell of quiet time in order to hear God’s response to any requests. Consider making notes about and sharing insights and prayer directives received for the coming week.

Any guidance that proceeds from prayer needs to be confirmed firstly by Scripture, and secondly by tradition, experience, and reason. Within those parameters, allow the Lord to give different instructions to different people. There is to be no judgment or criticism if congregations or individuals discern different paths, as long as a path conforms to the whole witness of Scripture.

♦ *Guidelines for prayer meetings*

It is recommended that a regular weekly schedule of prayer meetings be established during the 40 Days of Discernment; such prayer meetings would be in addition to weekend worship and 40 Days of Discernment small groups. A facilitator may graciously shepherd the group through an outline such as this:

- ♦ Prepare and confess
- ♦ Worship the Lord, as simply or elaborately as appropriate
- ♦ Listen to the Lord
- ♦ Talk to the Lord, focusing on different topics or concerns
- ♦ Hear the Lord’s response to your requests, recording and sharing the Lord’s direction for the coming days
- ♦ Leave in peace

Fasting and Discernment

by the Rev. Sue Hardman, HealingWay Ministries

The biblical norm is that you can pray without fasting, but you cannot fast without praying. Jesus said to his disciples, “when you fast . . .” (Matthew 6:17). *When not if.* Jesus expected that his disciples would fast. He expected that they would deny their cravings and reliance on earthly sustenance, and depend on God for their nourishment.

In the Bible, fasting is usually referred to as deliberately abstaining from food. In the tradition of the church, fasting may take the form of any type of self-denial of unnecessary foods, entertainment, or other forms of self-indulgence. Andrew Murray says, “Fasting helps to express, to deepen and to confirm the resolution that we are ready to sacrifice anything, to sacrifice ourselves, to attain what we seek for the Kingdom of God.”

In order to move closer to God we must give up our own desires and seek the will of God. Pride keeps us from letting go of what we think is good and right. Fasting disciplines the body while God humbles the soul. The humbled soul is one that recognizes its sinful self and repents and turns to the Lord.

When the king of Nineveh heard Jonah’s prophetic warning, he issued a proclamation to fast and repent

When the king of Nineveh heard Jonah’s prophetic warning, he issued a proclamation to fast and repent: “Do not let any man or beast, herd or flock, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink . . . Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways” (Jonah 3:7–8). God’s response: “When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened” (3:10).

When God sees people truly humbling themselves, seeking God’s mercy, and conforming themselves to God’s will, then God may have compassion on them and forego righteous punishment.

Fasting is not meant to force the hand of God; in no way does fasting manipulate God. Rather, as Isaiah chapter 58 makes clear, fasting or self-humiliation in and of itself is meaningless without also pursuing God’s will.

◆ *Guidelines for fasting from food*

- ◆ If you have any medical issues (e.g., diabetes, pregnancy, fatigue, etc.), consult your physician before embarking on a fast of any length.
- ◆ Do not enter any long-term fast without first consulting a physician.
- ◆ Start slow. Fast from one meal, spending the meal time in prayer. Then, if so moved, extend to a longer period without food.
- ◆ Drink plenty of water.
- ◆ Before starting a fast, answer these questions: Is the Lord calling me to fast at this time? What are the objectives of the fast? Is this fast for the Lord and his glory?
- ◆ When beginning or coming off an extended fast, consult your physician.

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God.*

◆ *Aids for deciding whether and how long to fast*

- ◆ Ask God to lead you.
- ◆ Pray with others.
- ◆ Read Scripture.
- ◆ Invite a friend to be your prayer partner in your fast.
- ◆ Commit to a length of time.
- ◆ Journal about what is happening to you, both physically and spiritually; also write down what the Lord is saying to you or your larger group.

◆ *Examples of biblical fasts*

- ◆ 1 night (Daniel 6:18)
- ◆ 1 day (1 Samuel 7:6; 2 Sam 1:12, 3:35; Judges 20:26)
- ◆ 3 days & nights (Esther 4:16; Acts 9:17–19)
- ◆ 7 days (1 Sam 31:13; 2 Sam 12:16–23)
- ◆ 14 days (Acts 27:33–34)
- ◆ 21 days (Daniel 10:3–13)
- ◆ 40 days (Exodus 24:18, 34:28; 1 Kings 19:8; Matthew 4:2/Mark 1:3/Luke 4:2)

Gracious Father, we pray for thy holy Catholic Church. Fill it with all truth, in all truth with all peace. Where it is corrupt, purify it; where it is in error, direct it; where in any thing it is amiss, reform it. Where it is right, strengthen it; where it is in want, provide for it; where it is divided, reunite it; for the sake of Jesus Christ thy Son our Savior. Amen.

—*A Prayer for the Church, BCP p.816*

On the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers. Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high. Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only for a day for a man to humble himself? . . . Is that what you call a fast?

—Isaiah 58:3–5

Week 1: Understanding the Crisis

*Vice is a monster of so frightful mien,
As to be hated needs but to be seen;
Yet seen too oft, familiar with her face,
We first endure, then pity, then embrace.*
—Alexander Pope, *Essay on Man*, II.v

Timeline of Significant Events in the Episcopal Crisis

“Beginning in the early 1870s, a theology deeply skeptical about many of Christianity’s central claims began to influence the leadership of the Episcopal Church, and then spread throughout it. By the late 1960s it had come to dominate the Church entirely.” So observes Dr. Les Fairfield. The following timeline highlights some of the significant events in the Episcopal crisis (for further details, see www.40DaysofDiscernment.org for resources).

1966–1967

Bishop James Pike charged, but never tried, with heresy for denying the doctrine of the Trinity

1976

General Convention commenced dialogue on sexuality and ordination of homosexual candidates (resolutions A068 and B101)

1977

Bishop Paul Moore (New York) ordained an openly homosexual ordinand

1979

Several bishops refused to abide by General Convention’s reaffirmation of traditional Christian ethics on sexuality and marriage (resolution A053)

1985

General Convention resolved to “dispel myths and prejudices” against homosexuality (resolution D082)

1987 & 1989

Heresy charges against Bishop John Spong (Newark) dismissed by panel of peer bishops

1988

General Convention continued dialogue regarding sexuality (resolution D102)

1989–1991

Bishops Spong and Walter Righter (Newark) and the Diocese of Washington, D.C., ordained non-celibate homosexual ordinands

1991

- ◆ General Convention rejected a resolution calling clergy to abstain from sex outside of marriage
- ◆ Over 75% of dioceses began a three-year dialogue about sexuality

1993

Bishop Richard Grein (New York) led Sunday Eucharist liturgy that praised pagan deities Ra and Ausar at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine

1994

- ◆ General Convention began considering rites blessing same-sex unions (resolution D049)
- ◆ 90 bishops and 144 deputies signed “Koinonia Statement” defining homosexuality as morally neutral

1996

- ◆ Heresy charges against Bishop Righter dismissed due to “no clear doctrine” prohibiting ordination of “persons living in committed same gender sexual relationships”
- ◆ Integrity counted over 100 ordinations of openly homosexual candidates to date

1997

Virginia Theological Seminary began revision of policies to admit actively homosexual seminarians and to provide shared housing for non-celibate unmarried faculty and students

1998

Lambeth Conference of global Anglican bishops reaffirmed “the primary authority of the Scriptures” (resolution III.1; cf. III.5) and reaffirmed “homosexual practice as incompatible with Scripture” (resolution I.10 by vote of 526 to 70)

2000

General Convention acknowledged relationships other than marriage and disagreement on church's teaching (resolution D039)

2001

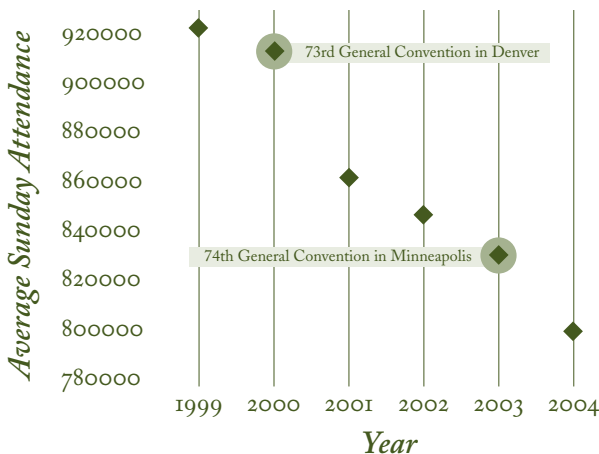
Anglican Primates acknowledged estrangement in Communion due to changes in theology and practice regarding sexuality and called provinces to avoid actions that may damage the Communion's "credibility of mission"

2002

Anglican Consultative Council (ACC) urged dioceses and bishops to refrain from unilateral actions that would strain the Communion

2003

- ◆ Primates negated authorization of rites for blessings of same-sex unions
- ◆ Bishop Michael Ingham (New Westminster, Canada) issued rite for blessings of same-sex unions
- ◆ General Convention rejected affirming the authority of Scripture (resolution B001); confirmed the episcopal election of a priest openly living in a same-sex relationship; and recognized blessings of same-sex unions as "within bounds of our common life" (resolution C051)
- ◆ Primates' emergency meeting declared that General Convention's decisions "will tear the fabric of our Communion at its deepest level"; reaffirmed 1998 Lambeth Conference resolutions
- ◆ Presiding Bishop Griswold consecrated a priest openly living in a same-sex relationship as bishop



2004

- ◆ Bishop Otis Charles (Utah, retired) “married” his homosexual partner
- ◆ Bishop J. Jon Bruno (Los Angeles) performed blessing of same-sex union
- ◆ Bishop John Chane (Washington, D.C.) performed blessing of same-sex union
- ◆ ECUSA promoted pagan Druid eucharistic liturgy on its website
- ◆ Lambeth Commission released the Windsor Report which reaffirmed traditional Christian morality

2005

- ◆ Primates’ Meeting endorsed Windsor Report; called ECUSA to withdraw its representatives from the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC) until Lambeth 2008; requested ECUSA’s explanation for recent actions
- ◆ ACC endorsed Primates’ call for ECUSA withdrawal; ECUSA presented *To Set Our Hope On Christ* as its official response to Windsor Report

2006

- ◆ General Convention rejected Windsor Report’s “moratorium” on consecrations of those who are “living in a same gender union”; and instead called for restraint “by not consenting” to any candidate “whose manner of life presents a challenge to the wider church”; did not address a moratorium on same-sex blessings
- ◆ Archbishop of Canterbury Williams acknowledged “deep division” in the Communion
- ◆ 7 orthodox dioceses that uphold the teaching of the Anglican Communion and reject the actions of General Convention petitioned the Archbishop of Canterbury for “alternative primatial oversight”

What Does It Mean To Be an Episcopalian?

“What does it mean to be an Episcopalian, and should I be one?” This question goes to the very heart of the 40 Days of Discernment. How would you answer this question? How others in The Episcopal Church (TEC) answer it varies greatly depending on whom you ask. And therein, essentially, is the crisis that has led to this booklet. There are two distinct and competing visions for what it means to be an Episcopalian, and for that matter, what it means to be part of Christ’s church.

On the one hand, the Anglican bishops during the Reformation, and the founders of the Episcopal Church, defined the church as “a congregation of faithful men in which the pure Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments be duly ministered according to Christ’s ordinance.” The “pure Word” was the Holy Scripture, of which the church was to be “a witness and a keeper”—not an author. Those Scriptures contained “all things necessary to salvation,” and their salvation message was simple

and exclusive: We are all “inclined to evil” and deserve “God’s wrath and damnation.” But God has graciously offered to rescue us, by sending his one and only Son to take on human nature as Jesus, to live a sinless life, and “by sacrifice of himself once made” through his death and resurrection to “take away the sins of the world.” We accept this gift of God by turning from evil, repenting of sin, and placing our “true and lively faith” in Christ. It is “only” by “the Name of Jesus Christ” that a person may be saved. (Articles of Religion 2, 6, 9–12, 15, 18–20, *Book of Common Prayer* pp.868–71.)

On the other hand, the Presiding Bishop-elect of TEC recently said to Time magazine, “We who practice the Christian tradition understand [Jesus] as our vehicle to the divine. But for us to assume that God could not act in other ways is, I think, to put God in an awfully small box.” Several years ago, the Bishop of Newark called for a new reformation in Christianity, saying, “The view of the cross as the sacrifice for the sins of the world is a barbarian idea based on primitive concepts of God and must be dismissed.” In an Easter Sunday sermon, the Bishop of Washington, D.C., described Christ’s resurrection as “at best, conjectural” and not of significance. At its 2006 General Convention, TEC declined to approve a resolution endorsing John 14—that Jesus is “the way and the truth and the life” and that “no one comes to the Father except through” him. In 2005, at the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC) meeting, TEC’s presentation explaining its actions at the 2003 General Convention discounted the writings of Paul opposing homosexual practice, because he was “a first century Jewish male steeped in the tradition that includes Leviticus.” And in 1998, the Bishop of Pennsylvania, when asked how TEC could bless homosexual marriages when the Bible clearly forbids it, answered, “Because we wrote the Bible and we can rewrite it. We have rewritten the Bible many times.”

What do these two visions have in common? If the answer is little or nothing, can and should persons who see Christianity so differently consider themselves fellow believers, or should they admit that they are irreconcilably divided and walk apart? This question is not theoretical or academic. We must confront daily, and painfully, what our churches should be teaching to their congregants each Sunday and what parents should be teaching to their children.

Questions of doctrine are not the whole picture. In a fallen world, we will never find an unblemished church. The church faced heresy as soon as it was founded, as your study of 1 Corinthians will reveal. We should be humble and cautious toward the church in this world: And, while Jesus’ parables in Matthew 13 are about the kingdom, not the church; his warning about God’s judgment at the end times, should give the church pause as it seeks to discipline people in the present age: “while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. Let them both grow together until the harvest” (v.29–30).

Yet the Bible is filled with passages denouncing and urging action against false teaching and immoral living within the church. In the book of Revelation, in letters to the early churches of Pergamum and Thyatira, the Son of Man recognized that the faithful and the heretical coexisted, and while praising the faithful for their faithfulness he chastised the churches for tolerating false teachers (Rev 2).

The Anglican reformers wrestled with the same problem: They saw that all parts of God's church "have erred" in all areas including "their living" and "matters of Faith" (Art. 19, *BCP* p.871). They also knew that the Bible calls Christians to unity: "one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all" (Ephesians 4). And yet those bishops, after prayer, study, and debate, found it necessary to separate from the Roman Catholic Church of their day. As Bishop John Jewel put it soon after the English Reformation, "Of a truth, unity and concord doth best become religion: yet unity [is not] the sure and certain mark whereby to know the Church of God. For there was the greatest consent that might be amongst them that worshipped the golden calf."

How does one know when unity has been broken? How does one determine how to respond to division within the church? The purpose of this booklet is to help you think through these questions and prayerfully seek answers in the current crisis. Several of the readings address these questions in some detail. Here, perhaps, we can at least say this: We need to determine the extent to which any doctrinal or ethical failure compromises or threatens our faithfulness to God or our witness to the world, as well as the likelihood that such failures and their results can be corrected.

Bishop Jewel, a former Catholic vicar, defended the English Reformation by admitting,

It is doubtless an odious matter for one to leave the fellowship... We have now done to depart from that Church, whose errors were proved and made manifest to the world, which Church also had already evidently departed from God's word... We truly have renounced that Church, wherein we could neither have the Word of God sincerely taught, nor the sacraments rightly administered, nor the Name of God duly called upon.

Not only does recognizing a break in fellowship involve difficult decisions, but it also stirs up a host of emotions, not the least of which can be grief over broken relationships. There also may be fear: Will a change be for the better? The ancient kingdom of Israel, which separated from Judah with seemingly good cause, provides a cautionary tale.

Finally, we as individuals, congregations, and dioceses face the question of maintaining unity not only within TEC, but also within the worldwide Anglican Communion. One might say that TEC through its actions already has broken unity, so

the real question is not whether, but how unity will break: Shall we let go of our unity with TEC for the sake of maintaining our unity with the Anglican Communion, or vice versa?

This crisis is different from every other crisis TEC has faced, whether the departure of evangelicals in the late 1800s or the departure of Anglo-Catholics in the 1970s. Many consider the issues to be more fundamental, and now the Anglican Communion is watching and acting. The 1998 Lambeth Conference of all

the real question is not whether, but how unity will break

Anglican bishops responded to the ordination of a practicing homosexual within TEC by “rejecting homosexual practice as incompatible with Scripture” (resolution I.10). When TEC in 2003 consented to the election of a non-celibate homosexual priest as bishop, the leading Archbishops of the Communion (the “Primates”) warned TEC against “tear[ing] the fabric of our Communion at its deepest level” by consecrating him. TEC’s Presiding Bishop then presided over the consecration. The Archbishop of Canterbury responded by commissioning *The Windsor Report*, which has, with the Primates’ endorsement, become the benchmark for continued unity within the Communion. This report recognized that “the overwhelming response from other Christians both inside and outside the Anglican family has been to regard [TEC’s actions] as departures from genuine, apostolic Christian faith.” Many believe that TEC failed to respond adequately and chose to walk apart at its 2006 General Convention. Thus, many “Windsor bishops” within TEC have asked the Archbishop of Canterbury for alternative oversight in order to remain within the Communion.

The Anglican Communion is straining to uphold its understanding of Scripture and doctrine and to hold the Communion together in unity. If TEC has walked apart and the two visions of our church are irreconcilable—the questions that motivate us to set aside these 40 days of discernment—then, like Joshua several millennia ago, we must choose now whom we will serve.

Small Group Discussion Guide for Week 1

Topical questions

- Is there a crisis in the Episcopal Church?
- If there is a crisis, what is it really about?

1 Corinthians questions

CHAPTER I

- Has TEC reflected “human wisdom” rather than God’s wisdom? Has our church?

CHAPTER 2

b. What are some maturing lessons that God may want us to learn and embrace?

Inductive Bible Study: 1 Corinthians chapters 1–2
♦ Week 1, day 1

PRAY: Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen

READ: 1 Corinthians 1:1–9

MEDITATE:

To those sanctified in Christ Jesus... (v.2)

What a church! Paul paints quite a picture of the church in Corinth in the opening verses of this letter. Just read a few of the descriptions: a sanctified church (v. 2), a gifted church (v. 7), a wise church (v. 5), a church blessed with God's faithful care (v. 8).

Corinth comes across as the perfect church...until we read verse 10. From that point until the very end of the book, Paul lists and corrects the doctrinal and behavioral errors of the Corinthian church, addressing every kind of fault from factions (1:10) to immoral behavior (5:1). The Corinthians were even denying the resurrection (ch. 15)!

What's going on? Why does the apostle describe the church in such glowing terms in the opening verses and then correct such glaring shortcomings throughout the rest of the book? Is the church at Corinth a church of saints or a church of sinners? The answer to this last question is an unambiguous *both*!

The church in Corinth, like the church throughout history and like the church today, was a mixed bag, full of potential and full of problems. Full of problems: a sober reminder that the church is made up of sinful men and women like you and me. Full of potential: a joyful, confidence-building reminder that the church is God's church, the bride of Christ, to which God has pledged his faithful care (v. 8).

As we enter this forty-day period of discernment, we find ourselves in well-known territory. We are in a church full of problems, problems that are as varied and as serious as those Paul met in Corinth. But this is also a church full of potential because God has promised himself to his church.

Questions and Application:

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What should our posture and our attitude be as we enter these forty days?

PRAY: Almighty God, you alone can bring into order the unruly wills and affections of sinners: Grant your people grace to love what you command and desire what you promise; that, among the swift and varied changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

◆ *Week 1, day 2*

PRAY: Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

READ: 1 Corinthians 1:10–17

MEDITATE:

A cult of personality... “I follow Paul!” “I follow Apollos!” “I follow Peter!” The church at Corinth was divided along the personalities of the early leaders of the church. It is safe to assume that the early leaders opposed these divisions, but the people continued to proclaim their loyalties.

Paul addresses the problem of these needless divisions by focusing on the necessity to follow Christ, asking a series of three questions in verse 13: 1) Is Christ divided? 2) Was Paul crucified for you? 3) Were you baptized into the name of Paul? In other words, Paul addresses the problem of division by stressing the common denominators that bind all members of the church together: 1) the unity and sufficiency of Christ (Is Christ divided?), 2) the cross of Christ (Was Paul crucified for you?), and 3) the lordship of Christ (Were you baptized into Paul’s name?) A similar emphasis is found in our own Baptismal Examination: “Do you turn to Jesus Christ as your Savior?” “Will you follow him as your Lord?”

Paul’s appeal to the church in Corinth is for unity: unity under the cross of Christ and unity under the lordship of Christ. At the close of these forty days of discernment we will ask some very important questions about our unity with The Episcopal Church and the larger Anglican Communion, so it is appropriate that we

consider Paul's admonition to the Corinthians for unity. It is equally important to consider the basis and the foundation from which unity must grow: the cross of Christ and the lordship of Christ.

Questions and Application:

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What counsel do you think Paul would provide as we consider our unity with The Episcopal Church and the larger Anglican Communion?
4. Are there any needless divisions that have separated you from a brother or sister in Christ? Might you return to the source of your unity, the cross of Christ and the lordship of Christ, and make peace with that person?

PRAY: Grant, Almighty God, that all who confess your name may be united in your truth, live together in your love, and reveal your glory in the world. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

◆ Week 1, day 3

PRAY: Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

READ: 1 Corinthians 1:18–25

MEDITATE:

For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe (v. 21).

What a wonderful verse to explore!

For in the wisdom of God the world did not know God through wisdom... It was God's preordained, wise plan to hide himself from the wisdom of humankind. God is not at the top of a mental ladder that can be reached only by the wise and the sophisticated. The gospel message is not something we "figure out."

As members of a Roman colony on the Grecian peninsula, the Corinthians valued logical thought. We can imagine them in their tunics celebrating fine arguments and lofty reason as they speculated their way toward an understanding of the divine. Paul's words must have been a rude awakening! The virtue they prized the most, wisdom, was the very virtue that God frustrated as a way to find him!

God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached... God's good news isn't

a puzzle to be solved; it is a message with specific content, summarized in Paul's second letter to the Corinthians: "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us" (2 Cor 5:21).

...to save those who believe. God's good news is a message to be believed. It isn't reserved only for those who are smart, wise, or even particularly good!

These verses serve as a reminder that our life with Christ does not depend upon our wisdom (or any other virtue, for that matter!) but upon the grace of faith in what God has done for us in Christ.

Questions and Application:

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. How does it apply?

PRAY: Almighty God, who for our redemption gave your only-begotten Son to the death of the cross, and by his glorious resurrection delivered us from the power of our enemy: Grant us so to die daily to sin, that we may evermore live with him in the joy of his resurrection; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

◆ Week 1, day 4

PRAY: Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

READ: 1 Corinthians 1:26–31

MEDITATE:

Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth (v. 26).

In these verses Paul introduces one of the dominant themes of this letter: the power of God in the gospel shines brightest in humility. Here he reminds the Corinthians of their humble origins. Later, he will comment on his own humble preaching (2:1).

Consider this question with me: Why does God have a habit of using the humble? Why does God choose the things that are low and despised in the world (v. 28)?

Why do children, the most humble and needy, find their way to Jesus' arms while the proud, rich, and independent walk away in frustration (Mathew 19:13–22)?

Perhaps it is because the humble have no connection to their importance or independence and are therefore naturally inclined to trust. Children are forced to trust. They possess nothing independently: no money, food, clothing, or shelter. Nothing. They literally must trust to survive. Perhaps this is the quality that our Lord saw and loved in children. Perhaps this is the quality that he desires to see in us: trust.

It appears that the church in Corinth began in a place of humble trust in the gospel of Jesus Christ. As the church grew in importance, as the church grew in resources, it seems that the church forgot its heritage of dependence.

Questions and Application:

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. Have you built up any illusions of independence?
4. Do we need to return to a heritage of trust?

PRAY: Most Holy Father, may our knowledge of you shine ever more clearly within us, that we may perceive the breadth of your blessings, the extent of your promises, the height of your majesty, and the depth of your judgment. May your kingdom rule in us now, through grace, and bring us at last to your kingdom of light where we shall see you as you are. In Jesus' name. Amen.

◆ Week 1, day 5

PRAY: Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

READ: 1 Corinthians 2:1–5

MEDITATE:

But we preach Christ crucified...

What did the apostles preach? What picture of Christ did they paint with their words? Did they paint the picture of a young teacher gathering crowds, sharing words of hope and comfort? Did they paint the picture of Jesus' healing hand offered to the broken and the sick? Or even of the Christ child, lying in the manger? All of these images, all of these pictures are absolutely accurate. Jesus taught. He welcomed little children, he healed the sick, and he was born helpless and was

placed in a manger. But the focus of Paul's preaching was not on the manger, but on the cross: "For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (2:2).

The cross: it is the end point of the gospels. It is the subject of apostolic preaching. It is the center point of the Eucharist (a perpetual memory of his precious death and sacrifice, until he comes again). It is the focus of our gaze during Sunday worship. For me, the cross is a constant reminder of two very important truths: The first, and unpleasant, truth is that my distance from God, my weakness and sin, are so great that someone had to die for me. But the second truth, the good news, is that someone did die in my place: Jesus Christ, God's only son. And I am glad that the apostle resolved to know nothing except Jesus Christ and him crucified (v. 2), because I need the constant reminder of my great need and his great love.

Questions and Application:

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What are you reminded of when you look at the cross?
4. What "image" or "picture" of Christ is being painted by TEC? Does that picture align with the picture painted by the apostles?

PRAY: Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God, we pray you to set your passion, cross, and death between your judgment and our souls, now and in the hour of our death. Give mercy and grace to the living; pardon and rest to the faithful dead; to your holy Church peace and concord; and to us sinners everlasting life and glory; for with the Father and the Holy Spirit you live and reign, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

◆ Week 1, day 6

PRAY: Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

READ: 1 Corinthians 2:6–10b

MEDITATE:

No, we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden... (v. 7)

What is Paul's secret? What is the hidden wisdom? These words must have tantalized the Corinthian congregation. The Corinthians were wrestling with the allure

of a nascent Gnosticism. Although Gnostic religions would take many shapes and forms in the coming decades and centuries, one of their central tenets was that secret knowledge of God could be attained only by a select few (*gnosis* is the Greek word for *wisdom*).

Paul does away with any concept of a secret and selective wisdom by declaring God's secret from the rooftop: Jesus Christ and him crucified. That's it! That's the big secret. Jesus Christ and him crucified: This is God's hidden wisdom (v. 7). Jesus Christ and him crucified: This is God's preordained plan for our glory (v. 7). Jesus Christ and him crucified. Nothing more. Nothing less. That is it. That is all! I imagine that this was a bit of a letdown for the Corinthians. I imagine they wanted something new, something exciting, a new secret word of insight about God. But Paul, as he always does, draws the Corinthians back to the Christ and his cross.

Consider an example from marriage: a husband and wife do not grow in their marriage by creating new and exciting marriage vows every few months, but rather by returning to the same basic, wonderful, inexhaustible vows exchanged at the altar. The Christian life does not grow by exploring new and variant ways of being a Christian, but rather by returning to the basic, wonderful, inexhaustible truth of Jesus Christ and him crucified.

Questions and Application:

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. Are there any ways in which we have drifted from the basic truth: Jesus Christ and him crucified?
4. Does someone you know need to know the "secret" of Jesus Christ and him crucified?

PRAY: Merciful God, creator of all the peoples of the earth and lover of souls: have compassion on all who do not know you as you are revealed in your Son Jesus Christ; let your Gospel be preached with grace and power to those who have not heard it; turn the hearts of those who resist it; and bring home to your fold those who have gone astray; that there may be one flock under one shepherd, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

◆ Week 1, day 7

PRAY: Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

READ: 1 Corinthians 2:10b–16

MEDITATE:

But we have the mind of Christ (v. 16).

Read this passage again and take special note of the pronouns: 12: we have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. 13: This is what we speak... 16: But we have the mind of Christ.

These are important pronouns. The *we* of these verses refer to the apostolic community: Peter, Paul, and the other writers of the New Testament. And in verse 16 the *we* makes a preposterous, wonderful boast: we have the mind of Christ.

In our society, which rightly values majority rule and vote, it can be tempting to include ourselves in that royal *we*, allowing you and me the same authority as the apostolic community. Perhaps this presumption is behind the unfortunate statement by a bishop in the Episcopal Church: “The church wrote the Bible, therefore we [the modern church] can change it.”

The scriptures are not open for change. We do not have the privilege or the responsibility of rewriting God’s word. In our creeds we state that we believe in an apostolic church, not because we have the same rights and authority of the apostles but rather because we inherit what the apostles taught, apply what the apostles taught to our day and age, and guard what the apostles taught so that it may be passed down to those yet to come.

Questions and Application:

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. Are there any ways that your faith, your life, your family, and your church need to be informed by and conformed to what the apostles taught?

PRAY: Almighty God, you sent your Son Jesus Christ to reconcile the world to yourself: We praise and bless you for those whom you have sent in the power of your Spirit to preach the Gospel to all nations. We thank you that in all parts of the earth a community of love has been gathered together by their prayers and labors, and that in every place your servants call upon your name. Father, keep us faithful to the unchangeable truth of your Word, Jesus Christ our Lord; for the kingdom and the power and the glory are yours forever. Amen.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Week 2: The Importance of Being Anglican

Anglicanism is a part of the Body of Christ—the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church through which God works in the world to bring his salvation to the ends of the earth. Neither Anglicanism nor the Episcopal Church comes first—they are only particular expressions of the faith, consequences of historical contingencies. The faith once delivered to the saints comes first.

—Paul Julianne, member of Virginia Commission on Reconciliation

Anglican Distinctives

“Show us some truth in the Bible that we are not teaching, and we will teach it; show us something we are teaching that is denied in the Bible, and we will stop teaching it.” This was the oft-quoted summary that renowned missionary bishop Stephen Neill claimed distilled the essence of Anglican theology. It has no special feature of its own. It is simply the Christianity of the Bible, pure and simple, as it has been received through the history of the English people. What is distinctively Christian should describe Anglicanism.

The English Reformation of the sixteenth century is seen by some as a massive disturbance in the unfolding story of English church and national life. The church—its doctrines, liturgy, legal standing, and international relationships—experienced profound change. But the title has stuck: this was a reformation, one that many were persuaded was necessary because of a significant drift from gospel truth.

What is distinctively Christian should describe Anglicanism.

Much has been made of the political aspects of this story, together with the matrimonial issues facing Henry VIII. These should not obscure the realization that England, in common with much of Europe, was experiencing a revival in religion. Continental leaders like Luther, Zwingli, and later, Calvin, all made their mark on the English church.

The direction, though not without its critics, was clear: The authority of the Roman church was cast off. A liturgy in the common tongue was promoted. A teaching rooted in apostolic doctrine through the Bible was upheld. A preaching ministry or priesthood learned in the Scriptures was provided. And all of this was done with the intent of enabling the people of the nation of England to find a personal faith and live together in accord with the gospel.

Thomas Cranmer and his colleagues had a vision for a nation united in common worship and corporate allegiance to Christ, achieved through a new emphasis on the ministry of the Word. In contrast to some more radical expressions of reformation seen elsewhere, the English or Anglican Reformation generally resisted extremes. Cranmer and others worked hard to establish a generous principle of reform: “If something in church practice is not forbidden in Scripture, we are free to retain it.” This proved a more helpful approach in national life than the more severe: “we will permit in church life only what is enjoined in Scripture.”

By the time of Elizabeth I, a Protestant expression of faith was enshrined in the (eventually) 39 Articles of Religion, The Prayer Book, and The Ordinal (regulations for ordination). The reformation retained the succession of the historic ministry of bishops, priests, and deacons; and taught an approach to church life based clearly on the authority of the Bible and such traditional practices that the Scriptures do not deny, bound up for mutual benefit with the life of the nation. It is this Elizabethan settlement that has guided our progress over the years. Succeeding centuries have witnessed the impact of the English Civil War and the Restoration (17th), the Evangelical Revival and growth of the Missionary Societies (18th), and the rise of the Oxford movement and Anglo-Catholicism (19th).

*the Anglican
Communion itself is
the latest development*

The most recent feature has been the emergence of the international Anglican partnership, as missionary churches have matured and taken their place on the world stage alongside the older colonial churches. In a real sense, the Anglican Communion itself is the latest development. Implicit in the world-

wide growth of churches related to the Church of England, the Anglican family has had international institutions only since 1868, when the first Lambeth Conference of bishops was held—the Anglican Consultative Council and the Meeting of Primates date only from late in the 20th Century. The Anglican Communion as a self-conscious body is recent realization, but one emerging from a clear tradition of commitment and life, owning several corporate distinctives. It is to these we now turn.

◆ *Biblical*

Our first distinctive, then, is that we are a proudly biblical church. The authority of the Scriptures is as clearly established in Anglicanism's foundational documents as in any church; and even today, it is these foundational documents to which the Archbishop of Canterbury assents when he assumes his office. They guide us in the ways we are to interpret Scripture. Our liturgy is biblical. We clearly expect to read through the Scriptures and hear the Bible taught and explained. At ordination, our ministers are symbolically presented with copies of the Scriptures as a sign that they are to read, obey, preach, and to enable lay people to read and obey, the Bible. Our history shows that when we are closest to the Scriptures, both the church and national life prosper. When questions of importance arise, our foundational understanding is that the considered teaching of the Bible shall be decisive.

◆ *Liturgical*

We acknowledge that we are a distinctively liturgical church. Dom Gregory Dix described Cranmer's order for Holy Communion as an admirable attempt to frame the Eucharist around the doctrine of justification by faith. Though he was not meaning that as a compliment, this order has nourished and instructed generations for the gospel. We acknowledge our sins as "provoking most justly thy wrath and indignation against us." The cross of Jesus Christ is presented as "the full perfect and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world." We receive the sacrament with the words, "The Body of our Lord Jesus Christ that was given for you, preserve your Body and soul unto everlasting life. Take and eat this in remembrance that Christ died for you, and feed on him in your heart by faith with thanksgiving." The best practice gives worshippers a balance of Word and Sacrament, both proclaiming the gospel. Today, even when many have moved to revised services that sometimes incorporate questionable elements, it is difficult to extinguish the gospel message. Yet more people experience the church around the world through Morning and Evening Prayer, which also take their origin in Cranmer's reworking of existing texts. These services have presented the ancient principles of worship, Scripture and prayer, in a way that has formed countless lives through generations. Also, the lectionary readings and collects bring us to the Bible and prayer in a theologically profound manner, and enable a personal encounter for spiritual strengthening.

◆ *Pastoral*

The third distinctive is that we are a practically pastoral church. Services of baptism, marriage, and burial provide a biblical framework for pastoral interaction at key points in individuals' lives. The Anglican church expects (even demands) a community life to work successfully: the parish system in England with the provision for a local resident leader, the corporate assumption for worship, the rise of vestries and synodical government involving the responsibilities of lay people in various

ways—all speak of a community life that is primarily pastoral and relational. The contemporary growth in the healing ministry, together with the rise of the cell church or small group ministry approach to church life, emphasizes the corporate connections for the faith, possible and expected at the local level. Though we have not often called our ministers pastors, that is what they are.

◆ *Lay-focused*

This leads naturally to the fourth distinctive, that we are a laity focused church. This may seem not to be the case when in some parts of the church we expend great energy over-emphasizing the ordained ministry, but the truth is that the lay members are the primary members of the church. It was the reformation vision of Bible translator William Tyndale that every plough boy would be able to read the Scriptures for himself; it was the implicit intention for lay leadership and authorized lay ministries (like lay reader and lay preacher) to develop and benefit the local church; and it has been this Anglican vision that has promoted education all around the world as a means to achieving this end. Today it can be argued that the church is growing fastest where lay leaders are in charge of congregational expansion, and the ordained ministry serves them, rather than the other way around.

*the church is
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◆ *Contextual*

The fifth distinctive needs to be stated carefully: our roots as an established church (not a state church, please note) in England mean that we have always sought a partnership between the work of the church and the progress of the life of the nation. Anglicans have been good chaplains, seeking to promote the gospel on the public stage in ways that have been mutually beneficial. We have sought to promote education as noted above, and have also shown a Christian interest in the medical and healing professions, in law and government, and in the world of commerce. This

has not always been possible in some nations, and as the West becomes increasingly secular, these links will of necessity become links of prophetic critique rather than support. But where these arrangements are possible, they have enabled a witness to the society in which they have been set, and have enabled the society avenues of corporate religious expression at times of national or local need.

♦ *Missional*

Finally, we are a church seeking to participate in God's mission, that is, in what God is doing in the world. It has been said that the nearest we come to the acknowledgement of mission in the works of Cranmer are the Good Friday prayers for the conversion of non-Christians. By the time of the Evangelical Revival in the eighteenth century, Anglicans were taking their share in international mission, and have been influential in missional strategy and thinking ever since. We are an international community increasingly influenced by the churches of missionary expansion over the churches of colonial settlement. Anglican churches are aware of their responsibilities both inside their borders and outside, and of the growing awareness of the multidimensional aspects of the meaning of mission.

The Church with these marks has been a powerful contributor to the work of the gospel worldwide. This is distinctive Anglicanism, and it is not without distinction.

A New Anglican Reformation

At the Anglican Communion Network's "Hope and a Future" conference in 2005, Rick Warren called for a "new Anglican Reformation." What will such a reformation look like? The 16th century reformers had the ambition to restore and rebuild the apostolic church root and branch. When things get as chaotic as they are now, it gives the opportunity to revisit issues which are overlooked or finessed in ordinary times. What can American Anglicans do to recapture our original vision? What more would the Lord have us do to recover our lamp stand?

♦ *Spiritual Disciplines*

While the Episcopal renewal movement of the 1970s had moments of Holy Spirit power, it lacked the steady influence of the Spirit in prayer, fasting, and through personal and disciplined study of Scripture. Evangelicals (e.g., Dallas Willard, Richard Foster, Eugene Peterson, and Rick Warren) have given the church contemporary resources for the spiritual disciplines. If we combine these with the rich heritage of Prayer Book worship, Anglicans may once again offer the wider church and the world a renewed "Canterbury Trail" of thoughtful biblical meditation, majestic corporate worship, and sacrificial prayer and fasting.

♦ *Evangelism and Congregational Development*

Let's face it: American Anglicans have been poor at evangelism and church planting, leaving that hard work to other churches. By contrast, our African Anglican colleagues have an apostolic gift. We should humbly learn from them. At the same time, Episcopalians bring organizational gifts to the area of congregational leadership and development in a way that would benefit some African churches. By sharing gifts in this way there can be an equal exchange (2 Corinthians 8:14).

◆ *Marriage and Family Life*

The Episcopal Church changed the divorce canon in 1973, as a pastoral concession to a few “hard cases.” These few turned into an avalanche of divorce-on-demand at all ranks of the church. Clearly we need to go back and rethink the church’s marriage discipline, for laity and for clergy. In addition, we shall need to tap into positive resources, like Marriage Savers, which can help build up and preserve the life of our families. Once again, we may ask of our African friends how to capture something of that solidarity of the extended family which characterizes their traditional and Christian culture.

◆ *Mission and Money*

Certain parishes and mission agencies have promoted the growth of mission consciousness in recent decades. That said, the Episcopal Church as a whole, liberal and conservative, has had a miserable track record in taking the Great Commission as a mandate rather than an option. The Anglican Communion Network and Anglican Mission in America have set a 50% standard of giving towards missions. Giving time, talent, and treasure will be a real challenge when congregations find they may have to start over again. Good and generous stewardship demands a balance in frugally meeting the needs of the local parish, domestic ministry needs, and cross-cultural mission partnerships.

◆ *International partnership*

Faithful congregations must free themselves of every shred of racial insensitivity, which has no place in the church of Christ. Some Episcopalians also suffer from a condescending prejudice against non-western or non-northern regions where Anglicanism is thriving. This sentiment is often expressed in terms of “Africa is a basket case.” One Episcopalian has said that helping Africa was like pouring water down a rabbit-hole. That is a serious misconception. True, there are good and bad ways to help. Above all, we need bold investment and accountable partnerships. Creative partnerships for economic development have already been established by organizations, such as Five Talents. American Anglicans have an opportunity to partner with Anglicans in other provinces to advance a godly reformation of those societies.

◆ *Education*

Education is one of the highly felt needs of the majority of the world today. Dr. Stephen Noll speaks of “education as mission”; as our Lord said, “go make disciples . . . teaching them.” We are involved today in a “worldview war,” as Francis Schaeffer, Charles Colson, and others have observed. If Christians don’t educate people, someone will; someone without a Christian worldview will fill the need by

teaching students from a non-Christian perspective. We need to wake up to the need to train spiritually mature Christians who can defend and extend the faith once delivered to the saints.

There are many other ways that the Spirit may work in the new Anglican Reformation. Let us look forward to participating in building up the Body of Christ in this new era.

Small Group Discussion Guide for Week 2

Topical questions

- a. What is distinct about being Anglican?
- b. Where do we see the Holy Spirit moving in powerful ways today?
- c. How do we want to participate in the new Anglican reformation?

1 Corinthians questions

CHAPTER 3

- a. How should our foundation in Jesus Christ shape our congregation and shape our future?

CHAPTER 4

- b. What would our congregation's founders do if they were in our shoes?

Inductive Bible Study: 1 Corinthians chapters 3–4

◆ *Week 2, day 1*

PRAY: Lord Jesus, help me not to look to human leaders when I should be focused on you and your truth embodied in the gospel. Thank you that you are the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6). In knowing you is spiritual maturity.

READ: 1 Corinthians 3:1–5

MEDITATE:

Paul was upset with the Corinthians. He expected them to be ready for solid spiritual food, but instead they were only ready for spiritual milk. If a child is feeding only on milk when he or she should be eating solids, we know something is wrong. By the grace of God, the Corinthians had had enriching and profound experiences of the gifts of the Holy Spirit (1:4–7). Paul longed for them to be mature followers of the Lord Jesus, to be mature spiritual men and women. Yet they were worldly. They were still spiritual infants. They were pridefully claiming to follow different spiritual leaders in order to take sides and boast. They were “acting like mere men” rather than the redeemed and transformed followers of the Lord Jesus.

Paul is clear. The Corinthians should not be dividing themselves up by allegiance to human leaders, regardless of how God had used these leaders in their lives. Rather, as Paul makes clear in other letters, the teaching of the true nature of gospel is the crucial aspect of faith that must be fought for (Gal 1–3). The human leaders of the church are simply servants of Christ.

Questions and Application:

1. What are some of the characteristics of a worldly Christian?
2. What are the characteristics of spiritually mature Christians?
3. What is the source of all jealousy?
4. Why is quarreling a fruit of the flesh?
5. How should you regard the person who led you to faith in Christ?

PRAY: Lord Jesus, show us with clarity the way to move from spiritual infancy to spiritual maturity through the cross on which you died for us, that we may be true and valuable servants.

◆ *Week 2, day 2*

PRAY: Lord Jesus, show me my place in your work that I may faithfully serve you.

READ: 1 Corinthians 3:5–9

MEDITATE:

Paul was faced with Christians who were boasting about their spiritual lives. He calls them from spiritual immaturity to be servants. Paul is a servant of Jesus Christ. That is the highest accolade anyone could give. Different servants have different God-given tasks and ministries. Some have the task of sowing, planting the seeds. Others are to water the plants. Note what Paul considers the most important aspect of all of this: God is the one who gives the growth. Note, too, that every servant and every ministering person is working for one common purpose. That one purpose is the work of Christ, the building up of the kingdom of God in truth, grace, and holiness. A servant needs to listen closely and carefully to his master. As humble servants of our Lord, we will be able to know and fulfill the work of the kingdom of our Lord that he has assigned us.

Questions and Application:

1. As servants of Christ, what are we to be focused on in order to stay humble?
2. What has the Lord shown you about where and how he wants you to serve in the glorious and difficult work of Christ on earth?

PRAY: Lord Jesus, help me to grow in humility as a servant so that I may by your grace and Holy Spirit find my wonderful place in your kingdom work.

◆ Week 2, day 3

PRAY: Lord Jesus, help me to grow in grace so that by the grace you have given me your work may be accomplished in the lives of the people around me.

READ: 1 Corinthians 3:10–17

MEDITATE:

What Paul does, he does by the grace of God in Jesus Christ. Paul has been working. Paul uses the metaphor of the construction of a building. He has, by the Holy Spirit's direction and empowerment, brought them a foundation, Jesus Christ himself. He was, and now others are, at work in Corinth building upon what he has done in bringing the gospel to that important city.

But there is a problem with how the discipling and building up of the Corinthian church is proceeding. People are building on top of what Paul has done with questionable materials—with teaching and instruction that will be shown to be simply human. Human constructs will not last. There will be a time of testing by fire and they will perish—only what is true to the gospel will endure. The spiritual immaturity of the Corinthian Christians appears to be a result of misunderstandings of true Christian discipleship.

Paul calls the Corinthians back to a right understanding of who they are. Together (“you” is plural) the Corinthians are God’s holy temple, set apart for God alone. And it is the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, who lives in them. They must be very careful to understand what God has done in and with them through Christ and the Holy Spirit. The Corinthian Christians have had a powerful experience, but they are in danger of losing what Christ has begun in them.

Questions and Application:

1. What does Paul mean when he says that God’s Spirit dwells in the Corinthian believers?
2. How is the holiness of God’s temple at stake?
3. How is God’s sacred temple in danger?
4. When the fire of “the Day” (v. 13) comes, what will be burned up?
What will last?

PRAY: Thank you, Lord, for the grace you have given me to serve you. May the work I do by your command stand in the day of fire and testing. Teach me about the indwelling of your Holy Spirit. Teach me about your holiness.

◆ *Week 2, day 4*

PRAY: Lord Jesus, you are the Lord of the church. Let us not trust in our own wisdom but, in humility, daily trust in your gracious truth and your wisdom as you build your church.

READ: 1 Corinthians 3:18–22

MEDITATE:

Have you ever deceived yourself because you thought you were something you were not? How does that happen? Peter thought he knew himself. He boasted he would not deny Jesus. But he did. “Pride goes before a fall.”

Paul zeroes in on the boasting of the Corinthians. They have been claiming that they are wise. “Greeks look for wisdom” (1:22). Paul knew the Greek culture and mindset. But were they wise according to the world’s ways, “by the standards of this age” (v. 18) or wise as God gives the ability to make right choices? The Corinthians are enamored of their own wisdom and intelligence, how bright they are, how knowledgeable, how wise. They are proud of their wisdom as they boast in their champion teachers. They have lost sight of the truth. Paul, Apollos, and Cephas are simply servants.

Who do you belong to? The apostles all belong to their master, Jesus. Are you ready to serve him and him alone, in the humility of the cross?

Questions and Application:

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. Are there ways in which our congregation or TEC has become enamored of its own “wisdom” as it interacts with academic and cultural currents of thought and behavior?
4. What is it that Paul tells us we have in Christ? What does this mean?

PRAY: Lord Jesus, protect your church from arrogant and prideful disregard for the teaching and ethical standards of your holy Word. Keep me submitted and obedient to the truth and standards of your Word.

◆ *Week 2, day 5*

PRAY: Lord Jesus, you came into this sinful, evil-dominated, and broken world as a servant in order to give your life as a ransom for many. O Lord, set us free from sin and evil that we may take our place as servants of Christ who are entrusted with the mysteries of God.

READ: 1 Corinthians 4:1–5

MEDITATE:

In the face of the boasting and pride of the Corinthians, Paul makes clear how his ministry is to be understood. The contrast is clear. Paul and those who are with him are servants of Christ. God has entrusted to them the mysteries (or the secret things of God), the profound and one-time-hidden truth of the gospel. Given this trust, he must be a faithful and trustworthy steward.

Paul was called to preach Jesus Christ and him crucified. In Jesus was the power and wisdom of God for the Jew and Greek alike. Jesus is the wisdom of God, our righteousness, holiness, and redemption. Jesus' death and resurrection were the supreme acts of God in redeeming and rescuing his creatures. The Corinthians should be boasting in Jesus as Lord, not in men.

Paul wants the Christians in Corinth to know that their judgment of him is of no significance. Paul does not even judge himself. The Lord is Paul's judge and, when the Lord comes, everything will be brought into the light; his life will be open before God. Things hidden in darkness, even the motives of men's hearts, will be brought into the light and seen for what they are. As we pray, "Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known and from you no secrets are hidden, cleanse the thoughts of our heart by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit."

Paul must strive to be faithful to the gospel. He must preach so that men, women, and children may be converted and come into a living relationship with the Lord. When the Day of Judgment comes, each of us will receive praise from God on the basis of what was done in accordance with God's will as revealed in God's holy Word.

Questions and Application:

1. What are we taking pride in?
2. What do we have which has not been given to us by God? In other words, is there anything to take pride in or anything to boast in apart from our Lord Jesus Christ?

PRAY: Lord Jesus, expose the darkness in the church wherever it is found. Expose every duplicity, every half-truth, everything that is not of you and your Word. Move us into your light that we may be purified and cleansed from every sin and delivered from evil.

◆ *Week 2, day 6*

PRAY: Lord Jesus, help us to remain faithful in the face of trials, struggles, and persecution from within the church and from without. Help us to remember when we are rejected and called names unfairly and unjustly that we walk the way you yourself walked, the way of the cross. Thank you that the resurrection is your promise.

READ: 1 Corinthians 4:8–13

MEDITATE:

Paul challenges the boasters with his very own sacrifices for the sake of the gospel. Paul uses irony to try to reach the Corinthians. He contrasts what the Corinthians have, what they think they have, with his own life as a servant of Jesus Christ. The Corinthians have everything they want. They are rich, kings, wise, strong, and honored. All this Paul writes tongue in cheek. Paul and those who are apostles are like men condemned to die in the Roman arena. As a follower of Jesus, Paul is cursed and yet he blesses, persecuted and yet he endures it, slandered and yet he answers kindly. How much has Christ called us to endure for the sake of the gospel? One of the hardest things is to be persecuted by those you love, by those in the church.

Questions and Application:

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. Do you know of anyone who has been persecuted for the gospel?
4. Was Paul's suffering in vain?

PRAY: Lord Jesus, please work in the hearts of all those who persecute us. Give us your grace that our response may be love, as Christ loved those who nailed him to the cross.

◆ *Week 2, day 7*

PRAY: Heavenly Father, we are needy children. Teach us how to walk humbly with you. Be glorified in us, your church.

READ: 1 Corinthians 4:14–21

MEDITATE:

Paul tempered his hard-edged irony by recalling how the Corinthian believers came to faith in the first place. Paul was not just one of many guides or guardians or teachers who had guided the new Christians. They only had one father in the gospel—and that was Paul. There is tenderness here in Paul's appeal.

There is also sensitivity when he talks about Timothy, his “son” whom he loves, who will clarify Paul’s teaching. Paul wants to know the power of the church, not its boasting words. Spiritual power from God is the evident mark of the kingdom.

Where is the spiritual power in TEC? Has the church changed its beliefs, or merely its tone? Are the changes outward, or changes of heart?

Questions and Application:

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. Does the way TEC lives as a denomination reflect what it teaches?
4. Does our congregation's life reflect what we teach?
5. Does my life reflect what I believe?
6. Have we become arrogant in any way?

PRAY: Lord Jesus, when you looked out over Jerusalem you wept. Help us to weep as we look out over the lost in our generation.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins or other markings on the paper.

Week 3: An Intractable Conflict?

Whatever weakens your reason, impairs the tenderness of your conscience, obscures your sense of God, or takes off your relish of spiritual things; in short, whatever increases the strength and authority of your body over your mind, that thing is sin to you.

—Susanna Wesley

Humbling Considerations

◆ *The context of Anglicanism*

The root cause of the Episcopal Church's current crisis is the conflict between fundamentally different understandings of essential Christian doctrine and ethics. The practical consequence is that The Episcopal Church (TEC) has become, in effect, at least two churches that embrace radically different understandings of the Bible and Christian gospel with inherently conflicting views on how to live as an authentic disciple of Jesus Christ.

Before we can even begin to discern whether we as a congregation can remain within TEC as it is now constituted and governed, we need to understand the context of TEC and Anglicanism within the greater Story told by Scripture. This is a large and encompassing Story, extending from the beginning until the end of time. This Story tells us who we are as human beings, and how we are to live in a manner pleasing to God. We cannot lightly disregard its authority.

One way of summarizing the Story told by Scripture is: God is seeking a people among whom he chooses to dwell in order to bless the whole world. At the center of the Story is the Cross of Christ, who was slain for our redemption, that we may place our trust in him, thereby being reconciled to God and receive the gift of God's own life, his eternal life, which begins as we start to know Jesus. This theme of God's saving the world by indwelling his people is beautifully and succinctly summarized in the prayer Jesus prayed for his disciples (and us!) on the night before his crucifixion (see John 17:1-26).

God is a Trinity of Persons who made us so we can share his life as the community of his people. He wants the whole world to be drawn into the life he offers. He does this by dwelling with his people, transforming us into the likeness (image) of Christ. The goal of the Christian life is to become Christ-like. Like him, we are to be about the Father's business. That business is redemption and transformation, drawing the world into his new creation.

God works, not through our pride, but through our weakness: “But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me” (2 Corinthians 12:9). Scripture is unflinchingly realistic about the weak human condition. There were no perfect disciples or perfect churches in the New Testament. The apostle Paul says of himself that he struggles against weaknesses to temptation in order to live the sanctified life (Romans 7:7–25). The Corinthian church was riddled with rivalries and immorality. No church is immune; it is no surprise when sin and division rear their ugly heads.

Yet God can work miracles of transformation to bring us out of our enslavement to sin if we will allow his new creation to break in. We continually need to repent and put our lives under the authority of the scriptural Story, at the center of which is Jesus—the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but through him (John 14:6).

The above is but an outline of the grand and comprehensive Story of the world and humanity told by Scripture and the traditional doctrines of the church. This Story provides the context within which we must discern our response to the

crisis in TEC. The only legitimate reason to seek to affiliate with an alternative Anglican province is if we clearly discern that God is calling us to do so, for the sake of the witness and mission of the church. We must do what God says. This is what we must discern prayerfully together as a congregation with love for one another and for those with whom we differ. Any other course would be sinful and based on human pride.

There were no perfect disciples or perfect churches in the New Testament.

♦ *Two churches, two gospels*

The Episcopal Church’s response to the practice of homosexuality is merely a presenting issue; a symptom of far deeper divisions. These divisions cut down to foundational understandings about Jesus Christ, the Bible, the gospel, and what it means to be the church and a Christian. Nonetheless, how the church deals with the issues of sexuality bears significantly on the church and—unless resolved—threatens to undermine the mission of the church.

At the heart of the conflict over sexuality, bound up with how the church reads Scripture, is a question: Is homosexual behavior a part of the old, the sinful ways of humanity, or is it not? Is it a state from which God’s grace can transform a person, or barring that, give the ability to live as he or she is, according to God’s standards

and holiness? Or is it something that we should now see as consistent with his new creation, something holy, which images in a holy way the love of God for humanity and should be commended to anyone as a pattern of holy living? If the former, then the church must uphold its long-standing teaching, while seeking in the most compassionate, respectful, and pastoral way possible to reach out to and proclaim God's love, forgiveness, and transforming power to those who for whatever reason find themselves living outside the boundaries of God's standards. If the latter, then the church must courageously and prophetically speak for this new understanding of God's truth, and lead the world into the acceptance thereof.

There is an inevitable conflict between these two understandings. Each side, if it is true to its own convictions, has a claim to make against the other. That is why the issues are tearing the fabric of the church apart and severely hindering work in common mission. That is why the two sides of this dispute cannot just agree to differ and be about business as usual.

*What gospel are we
converting people to?*

What is at stake is the very integrity of the good news of the gospel that is being proclaimed! What gospel are we converting people to? Whichever side one is on, can one in integrity and good conscience be a part of convert-

ing people to a gospel that is perceived as being false and destructive, that does not promote human flourishing by living according to the holiness of God? The tragic dimension of this conflict is that the mission of the church to the world is hindered and many people will be deeply hurt whichever direction the church takes.

These are real issues of great importance to people, and it is most important that we see the truth of God's will for us in these matters. As human beings we all have mixed motives, and rationalizing and political posturing is surely a recognizable human trait. In spite of that tendency, it is important to recognize that there are people on both sides of these sexuality issues who sincerely are trying to seek the truth and be faithful to the highest in the Christian tradition.

Yet evil has a pernicious way of masquerading as goodness and light that is bright enough to blind any of us: Conservatives should not be excused for their failures in manifesting the compassion of Christ to all people, nor for their failure to live up to God's standards—surely heterosexual sin is as much a sin as homosexual sin. We do not throw sinners out of the church—else our churches would all be empty. The church should be full of sinners! We must welcome all who are drawn to Christ into our churches, and glory in the fact that we are forgiven sinners who have the opportunity to grow in Christ.

Jesus admonished sinners to stop sinning (cf. John 5:14, 8:11). Yet, the church is full of repeat offenders—a casual reading of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7) is sufficient to convince us of that. In judging others, we should not so much seek to uphold our own opinions—since our ways are not necessarily God’s ways and “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of the Lord” (Rom 3:23). But, we should seek to point all towards the ways of God: the love of the Father, the mercy of the Son, the power of the Spirit.

One inescapable aspect of this conflict is determining what we teach our children. What do we put into our Sunday school curriculum? Do we teach that homosexual conduct is a good and holy aspect of living that God blesses? Or do we teach the traditional understanding that human sexual relations are to be confined to marriage between a man and a woman? Do we teach that we are unable to figure this out—that the Scriptures do not guide us on this—so the church can only offer options for individual preference? Will the church have any credibility at all if it is unable to resolve such a crucial aspect of human living and morality? What of the family that worships in one diocese and then moves to another—will the children learn one thing in one diocese and completely the opposite in the other (the same could even be said of parishes in the same diocese)?

Perhaps it is the intuitive awareness of the intractability of a compromise solution that argues most strongly for separation. Is it possible to frame a teaching that would be acceptable to both sides? And to God? Is it possible to find a solution that is consistent with both the grace and mercy of God on the one hand and his holiness and rejection of sin on the other?

It is an unfortunate human trait that our ideological commitments often prevent us from seeing important dimensions of reality. Many people in the pews must surely be distressed by these seemingly interminable battles. The church’s mission to proclaim the gospel is profoundly compromised by these fights. The unity that Jesus desires for his disciples is deeply wounded, and the world is tragically pushed away from knowledge of the God’s forgiving and transforming love for all people. This is the greatest sin of our unhappy divisions, and we each bear great responsibility for its continuation.

Will the church have any credibility at all if it is unable to resolve such a crucial aspect of human living

◆ *Some practicalities*

It is extremely hard for people to live indefinitely with the tension that these disputes cause. We should be willing to admit that the opposing views are intrinsically irreconcilable and ultimately cannot coexist in a church that lives up to its call to be holy as God is holy. Yet division has a tragic dimension, and will be painful to many. But we can choose to be respectful, not spiteful, and seek to maximize cooperation across lines of division, to the extent possible.

So much depends on how we think about the world. Our basic worldviews shape our lives and govern our actions. We need to become saturated in a scriptural worldview. For example: “Your word is a lamp unto my feet” (Ps 119:105). “Be transformed by the renewing of your minds” (Rom 12:2). Like Jesus, we should always seek to know the Father’s will and do it, whatever the cost—yet always in humility, not in judgment, in awareness of our own sinfulness before a holy God, and seeking to be witnesses to Jesus as the unique way, the truth, and the life, pointing always to the cross of Christ as the only answer to all of our dilemmas.

What About Our Property?

◆ *Introduction*

The heart and soul of our congregations are the people, not the bricks and mortar of our buildings. At the same time, however, God has created us not only with minds and spirits, but also with bodies and physical needs. One of those needs is a place to gather to worship God corporately, to grow deeper in our relationship with Jesus Christ and in community with each other, and to be equipped by the Holy Spirit for the work of ministry and outreach (see Ephesians 4). Thus, while our buildings and other resources do not define us as people, God gives us such resources for a purpose. And we are called to be good stewards, using those resources to serve the needs of others and to advance the purposes of his kingdom (see Luke 16).

As Episcopal congregations and vestries discern whether The Episcopal Church (TEC) has walked apart from the global Anglican Communion, and whether to affiliate with another part of the Communion, some have inquired whether this would have any effect on our church property and other assets. A full discussion of that question is beyond the scope of a document such as this. As good stewards of our resources, however, it would not be prudent (or realistic) to say that issues concerning our property merit no consideration. We hope that the following will help you understand the basic issues.

◆ *Legal considerations*

There is no prescribed or agreed-upon procedure for a congregation to disaffiliate from its diocese or TEC. One possibility, however, is that a congregation would engage in discussions with the diocese concerning its decision to affiliate with another branch of Anglicanism and would reach agreement on a means of settling any differences with the diocese and amicably parting ways. The Presiding Bishop of TEC has indicated that legal disputes over the ownership of parish property are internal diocesan matters, and that TEC's canons would permit a diocesan bishop to reach an amicable settlement with a congregation that wanted to leave TEC and retain its property.

In the Diocese of Virginia, the Rt. Rev. Peter Lee has appointed a committee that has been meeting privately over the past several months with a view toward, among other things, reaching agreement on the general principles that would guide a Christ-like and amicable separation of congregations from the diocese and TEC, should that become necessary. If we ultimately determined that we must come under other Anglican oversight, it would be our hope and prayer that we could do so in a manner that was fair and mutually agreeable to the congregation and the diocese.

In other dioceses, amicable property settlements have involved the departing church paying an amount of money to the diocese in settlement of the diocese's claim against the church property. Of course, a departing church may resent the suggestion that it should pay anything to the diocese; may feel that the demand is extortionate; and may have difficulty with the idea of giving money to a body with which it is not in full fellowship. But litigation can be extremely expensive, and these congregations have not been willing to accept the risk of losing such litigation (and with it their property). Moreover, regardless of who is in the right, lawsuits between congregations and the denomination could potentially harm the witness of the Christian church to the world. Those latter considerations favor amicable settlement.

*The heart and soul
of our congregations
are the people, not the
bricks and mortar of
our buildings.*

If, however, the approach of negotiated settlement should fail and other legal action were unavoidable, we would have to be prepared to take steps to confirm our ownership of our property under civil law.

Although the Virginia courts have repeatedly explained that Virginia law does not recognize religious denominations' claims to hold an implied trust in local church property, dioceses in other states have argued that TEC's "Dennis Canon" or similar diocesan canons give them a trust-based interest in local congregational property. Thus, we may be forced to litigate that issue.

We would, however, have a number of legal arguments at our disposal to protect our property. For example, in addition to the limitations that Virginia law places on implied trusts, Virginia law also provides a mechanism for a congregation, in the event of a "division" within a religious denomination, to determine by congregational vote the "branch" of the divided church to which it will thereafter belong (Va. Code § 57-9). This law further provides that the church property will follow their decision. Although the Windsor Report acknowledges division within the Anglican Communion, and the Virginia diocese's own Reconciliation Committee acknowledges that this division is of the deepest and most serious nature, it is possible that the diocese would contest this action, resulting in costly litigation.

◆ *Concluding thoughts*

As with any matter that is litigated, no one can guarantee in advance what the outcome would be. We are prepared to litigate these issues, however, if that should prove necessary. And if a congregation's discernment includes the possibility of affiliating with another branch of Anglicanism, we recommend that the congregation immediately begin the process of identifying legal counsel who may best serve its needs.

This is not to say that we would expect to institute litigation against TEC or the diocese. We believe that we have been, and will continue to be, faithful in following the various biblical teachings (including Matthew 18) in an attempt to resolve these issues amicably. Moreover, if the diocese or TEC were to "go to law" by initiating a lawsuit against us (1 Cor 6:1), we would defend our congregation's property.

In any of these circumstances, however, we would seek to act in a Christ-like manner—to act in love, to be vigilant in guarding against self-interest and improper motives, and to honor God above the vindication of our interests.

Many of us are stewards of facilities that have been maintained over the years by Christian believers who intended and expected that they would be used to preach the gospel and to build people up in the Christian faith. We have a duty to keep the trust of those believers, to perpetuate that gospel message for those who will hear it in the future, and, above all, to be faithful to God in our stewardship of the resources that he has committed to our care. The leadership of our congregation has given much thought concerning how to resolve these matters in a biblical manner.

We encourage you to ask them about the issue, if you have questions.

As you enter the 40 Days of Discernment™, let us assure you that we will continue to seek to resolve any property-related issues with the diocese amicably, and without resort to litigation. We would urge you not to let property be a determining factor in your vestry's or congregation's discernment process. Decisions concerning the future direction of our congregations should not turn on whether there is a guaranteed outcome concerning the ownership of church property, but on the Lord's leading. Property is a resource that should facilitate God's vision for your congregation, not hinder it.

Small Group Discussion Guide for Week 3

Topical questions

1. Are there things that we need to do with more humility?
2. What should our congregation do if the diocese were to initiate litigation to lay claim to our property and assets, or attempt to inhibit our clergy?

1 Corinthians questions

CHAPTER 5

- a. Discuss the relevance of chapter 5 to the Episcopal crisis.
- b. Has our congregation effectively disciplined members and called people to repentance?

CHAPTER 6

- c. Discuss the relevance of 6:9–20 to our crisis.

Inductive Bible Study: 1 Corinthians chapters 5–6

♦ *Week 3, day 1*

PRAY: Father, as I listen for your direction today, please show me your will that I may make it my own. Let my thoughts be your thoughts.

READ: 1 Corinthians 5:1–5

MEDITATE:

I have thought at length, as many of you have, about why God has chosen our denomination, our little band of Christ-followers, to be pioneers for theological reform in North America. My best answer: In his wisdom, the Lord is offering us an opportunity to refresh our culture with the pure message of the gospel, namely that the creator of the universe offers himself to mankind through a repentant, faith-guided life in Christ. We are his tools, privileged tools, ordained for royal use in an eternal

fellowship with their maker. “Brothers, children of Abraham, and you God-fearing Gentiles, it is to us that this message of salvation has been sent” (Acts 13:26).

Paul could not have permitted the Corinthians to overlook the immorality of 5:1 because he longed for this man to see his error and to return to the Lord. His instruction, that they “hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed,” is completed in pastoral love: so that “his spirit [may be] saved on the day of the Lord” (v. 5).

Questions and Application:

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. Paul already had the individual’s return in sight when he encouraged breaking off fellowship with him. Do we have a similar perspective?
2. In a few years, when we look back on this time, will we be able to say with confidence that our response was appropriate in order to call each other to repentance?

PRAY: Make us zealous, O Lord, to administer your love and your justice in the Church; setting aside all our fears and all our preferences. Our lives are yours. Use us as you will.

◆ *Week 3, day 2*

PRAY: Father, as I listen for your direction today, please show me your will that I may make it my own. Let my thoughts be your thoughts.

READ: 1 Corinthians 5:6–8

MEDITATE:

When the Church encounters a threat to the gospel and to its proclamation, she is called to a righteous response and to vigilance over the state of her heart. If the gospel and its faithful community are to remain pure, unconformed to the “pattern of this world” (Rom 12:2), both the message and its means of delivery must remain Christ-centered. Our calling must be to live in such a way that people see God, not us; hear his message, not ours; and are loved as he would love them.

It was both the method and the content of Christ’s message that brought me to faith—eternal truth offered to me in the hands of the chief servant. I believe that Jesus could have ministered in many ways, but he chose his methods with our salvation in mind. Take courage today to proclaim the pure gospel message to the world, never losing sight of Christ’s humility.

Questions and Application:

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. If we boast while acting on what we are sure is true, we can have a destructive influence on each other and on our corporate ability to deliver the message of Christ with the means of Christ. How can we ensure that our corporate response to the crisis in the Church is Christ-like—appropriate while fully submissive to the heart of Jesus?

PRAY: As my lips speak your truth, Lord, empower me to offer it with it the hands of your son.

◆ Week 3, day 3

PRAY: Father, as I listen for your direction today, please show me your will that I may make it my own. Let my thoughts be your thoughts.

READ: 1 Corinthians 5:9–11

MEDITATE:

The world must be able to distinguish between lives dedicated to Christ, bonded together in fellowship to fulfill God's purposes on the earth, and lives dedicated to themselves and to the satisfaction of their appetites. An incontrovertible crisis exists when the world looks at the church and can no longer tell the difference between the way it (the world) lives and the way the church lives. Our calling as followers of Christ is to ensure that the church lives and breathes in the kingdom of God rather than in the kingdom of Satan. The church must not be an exemplary reflection of the best things of this world; rather, she must be an earthly manifestation of the kingdom of God, literally heaven on earth.

When Paul implores the Corinthians not to associate with immoral people who profess to follow Christ, he is leading them in the principle that the church is to be immersed in the world while not being incorporated by it. We must worship the person of Christ while committing ourselves also to the life of Christ; one cannot be held without the other and remain godly.

Questions and Application:

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. We, like Adam as the centurion of the garden in Genesis 2:15, are not simply to take care of the lives God places before us; we are to protect and preserve them as watchmen. How can our corporate response to the crisis in the church protect and preserve the lives of those within while accurately representing the kingdom of God to the world?

PRAY: Father, let me love your people as you do so that I might live to preserve and protect them as you would.

◆ *Week 3, day 4*

PRAY: Father, as I listen for your direction today, please show me your will that I may make it my own. Let my thoughts be your thoughts.

READ: 1 Corinthians 5:12–13

MEDITATE:

Anthony Thiselton, in his commentary on 1 Corinthians, makes a profound statement about the special character of the church and its call to remain godly in both composition and mission. He writes, “The church as a whole has a responsibility to formulate its own house rules for the preservation of its unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity as expressing a distinctively Christian (or Christ-like) corporate identity which retains cohesion for its witness, nurture, and mission to the world.” What does this mean for us? It means that should we decide together that it is spiritually appropriate to break fellowship with someone, we ought to be doing it for the following reasons: 1) If we do not, we compromise our unity and ability to live as a community set apart for God’s work. 2) If we do not, we find ourselves in opposition to the teaching of the apostles, whose lives and ministry call us to live together in a specific way that they learned by living with and serving the Lord Jesus. 3) If we do not, the character of our fellowship will have changed so drastically that we no longer naturally do what God calls us to do. 4) If we do not, we affirm this person’s action as acceptable in God’s eyes, thereby cultivating in him or her a lifestyle that is fundamentally contrary to God’s will; in this way we lead both this person and all witnesses away from the Lord instead of to him.

Questions and Application:

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. Given Thiselton’s comment on the church’s identity, how can we ensure that our corporate response to the crisis in the church preserves this identity: holy, catholic, and apostolic?

PRAY: Father, show us what you see and allow us to weigh carefully the costs of action or inaction.

◆ *Week 3, day 5*

PRAY: Father, as I listen for your direction today, please show me your will that I may make it my own. Let my thoughts be your thoughts.

READ: 1 Corinthians 6:1–8 (also recommended: Matthew 18)

MEDITATE:

We must believe from these verses that the body of Christ has been empowered and gifted to appropriately negotiate the *disputes* (NIV), *cases* (NASB), and *grievances* (ESV) of 1 Corinthians 6:1. If we are intended to reign with Christ, Paul wants us to know that we are qualified to resolve grievances that exist between brothers and sisters within the church (v. 6, 8). Although Paul certainly had in mind the politically and socially motivated Roman courts of his day, we must not ignore his inherent motivation: to do everything possible to achieve resolution face to face while preventing secular influences from determining the outcomes of family matters within the church. Not only do we commit ourselves to an outside authority when we engage in a public battle in the courts, we run the risk of solidifying the accusation that we have been *defeated* (NIV, ESV, and NASB).

We must have faith that if God wants us to retain our property, he will enable this to happen. Our job is to discern whether or not any contending for that property is consistent with the scriptures and allows us a godly avenue that both advocates for our civil rights and portrays the face of Jesus to a lost world. When this is all over, we must be able to proclaim the gospel with the credibility of Christ on the cross, with a clear conscience that we have acted in truth and humility rather than self-interest.

Questions and Application:

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. How can we guard against our decisions regarding property being guided by a sense of entitlement, as opposed to a sense of responsibility as stewards of Christ's resources?

PRAY: Father, reveal to me the state of my heart. Do I embody the life of Christ in every act I make and word I speak? Let our choices reflect the perfect character of your son. Thy will be done.

◆ Week 3, day 6

PRAY: Father, as I listen for your direction today, please show me your will that I may make it my own. Let my thoughts be your thoughts.

READ: 1 Corinthians 6:9–11

MEDITATE:

Here, Paul reminds the Corinthians that although they now enjoy the benefit of

God's grace on them (6:11), they were not always so privileged. Those listed here can all be grouped together in this way: men and women whose lifestyles are saturated by habitual, ungodly behavior. Paul is asking the people of Corinth to look at their own hearts while they make assessments regarding the depravity of those outside the church. This is the second reminder from Paul to the Corinthians, in chapter 6, of their humanity (v. 8).

Questions and Application:

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean? Read verse 11. What is your testimony? What difference has Christ made in your life?

PRAY: Father, when we come into contact with people whose lives are permeated by sin and selfishness, help us to examine ourselves first, and allow us to remember the chains that you cut from our own ankles so that we might reach out to them and call them to you.

◆ *Week 3, day 7*

PRAY: Father, as I listen for your direction today, please show me your will that I may make it my own. Let my thoughts be your thoughts.

READ: 1 Corinthians 6:12–20

MEDITATE:

Sexual acts have both physical and spiritual consequences. Consequences can be beneficial or destructive. Within the bonds of a godly marriage, physical intimacy has the potential to bring the husband and the wife together spiritually, the benefits of the body girding up the heart. The unified household enjoys all the blessings of God's ultimate metaphor for the relationship of Christ and the church, while the divided household struggles to find a shred of common ground between the two parties. So it is with our relationship with the Lord. The way we treat our bodies has a direct effect on our relationship with the Lord. Sexual immorality in the life of the believer places him or her in direct conflict with the believer's call to holiness.

Questions and Application:

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. How do the principles of interconnectedness of body and spirit apply to the crisis in the church?
4. What do you think are the long-term consequences of sexual immorality within the church in terms of our ability to honor God with our bodies?
5. Speaking corporately, can the church honor or bring dishonor to God with her body (i.e., with her members)?

PRAY: Father, remind us daily that although certain behaviors may seem innocent on the surface, their spiritual consequences can be greater than we could imagine. Help us to know when we are doing harm to you with our bodies.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Week 4: Truth & Unity

Those who urge the church to change the norm of its teaching on this matter must know that they are promoting schism. If a church were to let itself be pushed to the point where it ceased to treat homosexual activity as a departure from the biblical norm, and recognized homosexual unions as a personal partnership of love equivalent to marriage, such a church would stand no longer on biblical ground but against the unequivocal witness of Scripture. A church that took this step would cease to be the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church.

—Wolfhart Pannenberg,

“Revelation and Homosexual Experience”

Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

—I John 4:1

Listen to the Spirit

We need to ask for today, “What is the Spirit saying to the churches?”—especially for the “enduring” Anglican churches, as Bishop Robert Duncan of the Anglican Communion Network (ACN) has called them.

The question at hand of course comes from Letters to the Seven Churches in the Book of Revelation (chapters 2–3). One is increasingly convinced that the later books of the New Testament (i.e., the Pastoral and Catholic Epistles, including the Apocalypse) are scriptures directed to our branch of the church today. These letters are addressed to a

church which has experienced evangelism and renewal and even persecution but which is now facing challenges from within.

◆ *First Epistle of John*

Take, for instance, the First Epistle of John: John warns his flock, “Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1). One thinks of this every time one hears a leader claiming that the Spirit has endorsed this or that agenda. John gives a simple Christological test of false prophecy: Does the prophet confess that the Son of God has come in the flesh? In the 1st century, the false prophets denied that Jesus was really human. In our context today in the 21st century, the false prophets are uncomfortable with God supernaturally intervening in human history, and so they overemphasize Jesus’ humanity and seek to deny or at least minimize his divinity. When they do this, they end up promoting a false Jesus.

John says of the false prophets, “they did not really belong to us” (1 John 2:18–19). This passage reminds one of the claim which the ACN is making that it represents the “enduring” church, while it is the revisionist wing which has chosen to “walk apart.”

◆ *Epistle of Jude*

The good news about Jesus was not a myth or fairy tale of the 1st century; it is an eternal message for all people in all places at all times, and the church has been entrusted to deliver this good news. In the little Epistle of Jude we find the phrase, “to contend for the faith once (hapax) entrusted to the saints” (Jude verse 3). The word hapax means “once for all,” the same word used to define Jesus’ atoning death, once for all time and for all people (Romans 6:10). Jude warns against those who “have secretly slipped in among you” (Jude verse 4) and want to distort this eternal message. In TEC, many are endorsing false teaching openly—even in votes of the General Convention.

◆ *Revelation*

The Apocalypse to John reflects an historical moment when heresy had taken root in the church in Asia Minor but had not come to full blossom. All of the churches continue to be recognized as such; but the Spirit does warn that if a church fails to repent, the Lord will come and remove its lamp stand (Revelation 2:5). The seven churches of Revelation represent quite a spectrum: those which are patiently enduring persecution and poverty (Smyrna, Philadelphia), those which are orthodox but complacent (Ephesus, Sardis, Laodicea), and those which are tolerating false prophets (Pergamum, Thyatira).

TEC today most resembles the latter two churches of Pergamum and Thyatira—perhaps at an even more developed stage. It is not clear that Balaam and Jezebel had actually attained high office in their churches, but they were definitely exercising strong influence on the flock. The Spirit’s word to these churches is “repent” and “hold on to the truth until I come.” The challenge of these 40 days of discernment is to find out what this word means for our day and our particular church polity.

◆ *Avoiding self-deception*

Thirty-five years ago, some sensed that the Spirit was leading them to renew the mainline churches, in our case TEC, from within. There was hope that individual parishes, like Truro and Falls Church, and clusters of congregations (e.g., Region 7 of the Diocese of Virginia) could be beacons to the rest of the domination. The founders at Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry, hoped that the younger clergy of TEC could be formed by strong biblical teaching, evangelical doctrine, and openness to the working of the Spirit of God to be the next generation of church leaders.

This vision was partially fulfilled by the growth of many strong congregations, a few strong dioceses, and some new mission societies. However, the vision failed to stop the decline in the institutional Episcopal Church. It failed to overcome the century-long drift toward theological liberalism and the deep-seated power structures. Those who have headed this movement must confess their own sins and failures as well; among them: weak leadership, inordinate love of worldly trappings, and spiritual self-indulgence.

What the Spirit says to the churches may change, depending on how the people of God respond. In his early prophetic ministry, Jeremiah called the people to repent and reform the institutional structures (Jeremiah 7:3). At the end of his life, he called them to exile and warned against any nostalgic notions of going home (29:28). So it is with the Anglican movement in North America today. Whether or not we correctly heard the Spirit in the 1970s, we can hardly put old patches on yesterday’s wineskins. Sociologically and spiritually, it will not do simply to put up “The Enduring Episcopal Church Welcomes You” signs and expect renewal.

Unity Within the Framework of Truth

Not every doctrinal disagreement within the Christian church justifies division. Anglicanism has the virtue of a healthy breadth not present in some denominations. We insist on “mere Christianity”—Scripture as it has always been understood, and the creeds as they have always been professed—without being dogmatic on issues that the Scripture and creeds leave open for reasonable disagreement. Anglicanism’s founding Thirty-Nine Articles reflect this approach: “whatsoever is not read [in the Scriptures], nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required” (Article VI, BCP p.868).

A healthy doctrinal breadth in nonessentials, however, must not be confused with indifference to God's Word, which "is God-breathed and . . . useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16). The Articles state that "it is not lawful for the Church to ordain anything that is contrary to God's Word written" (Art. XX, BCP p.871). Indeed, a church that tolerates and even blesses what the Bible forbids cannot long expect to maintain its identity as the church of Jesus Christ.

*healthy doctrinal
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♦ *The importance of truth*

Transcendent truth lies at the heart of Christianity. The God of Israel is the "God of truth" (Isaiah 65:16); Jesus is "the truth" (John 14:6); the Holy Spirit is "the Spirit of truth" (John 14:17); God's "word is truth" (John 17:17). Real truth—truth that accurately reflects life's realities, joys, and hardships—is ultimately found in a relationship with the living God.

The despairing notion that truth is unknowable, that we live in ambiguity about important doctrine, or that we can affirm only what is "true for us"—is not, at bottom, Christian. Such notions are tantamount to saying that we cannot know God. But Jesus taught that we can, and that to know God is to know truth: "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32).

God therefore insists on his truth not because he wants to oppress us, but because he loves us and wants to free us from sin. Sometimes it takes time to realize that his ways are best. As "Christ's ambassadors," we are charged to invite others to experience God's truth by confessing their sin, trusting in Christ, and being "reconciled to God" (1 Cor 5:20-21). God's truth frees us from the power of sin so we can spend both eternity and our present life in his presence. What good news!

Of course, the fact that we have come to Christ does not mean that we no longer need to examine ourselves for sinful attitudes and behaviors. As Paul stated: "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). But God promises that "righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ" (Rom 3:22). And he desires to sanctify us—to change our lifelong sinful habits. Jesus asked the Father to "Sanctify [us] by the truth" (John 17:17). Paul prayed a similar prayer for

the early church: “May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thessalonians 5:23). Thus, when we continue in sin without repentance, we rebel against God.

♦ *The importance of unity*

Unity, too, is bound up in our relationship with God and our concern for nonbelievers. On the night before his crucifixion, Jesus prayed, “I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (John 17:20–21).

The Lord thus cares deeply for unity in his body, and breaking fellowship with other believers without justification is wrong (e.g., 1 Cor 1:10; 3:3–5; 12:25). The church is a body in which everyone has something essential to contribute (1 Cor 12:12–27; Ephesians 4).

When part of the church abandons essential truths, however, it becomes impossible for the whole church both to vindicate truth and maintain unity—one of these duties must be compromised.

♦ *How much un-truth to tolerate*

In the current Episcopal crisis, one often hears: “The things that unite us are more important than the things that divide us.” In a similar vein, the Rt. Rev. Peter James Lee, bishop of the Diocese of Virginia, has said, “If you must make a choice between heresy and schism, always choose heresy.” The church, however, is called to avoid both heresy and schism.

One rarely hears a rigorous explanation of the things that unite TEC. In fact, TEC is “united” not by a shared understanding of God or our need for redemption, but by shared history, rituals, and institutional structures. People can be members of TEC—even bishops—and deny the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Thus, TEC contains both those who believe the historic Christian creeds and those who deny them, and we must ask: Are these nonessentials on which we can disagree?

Some argue that the obvious priority of love in Christianity requires maintaining unity at all costs. But this approach misunderstands unity and love while ignoring the commands of Scripture about truth and error. The same Jesus who prayed “that all of them may be one,” also told us to break fellowship with unrepentant sinners who call him Lord (Matthew 18:17). The same apostle who challenged the early

Christians to “agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought,” also charged them to break off fellowship with those in the church who persisted in immoral behavior (1 Cor 5).

In short, the Bible is clear that false teaching and unrepentant sin may not be accommodated by God’s people—just as it is clear that those who do repent must be welcomed back into fellowship (2 Cor 2:5-11). But unless the church adheres to God’s standards, any mercy that it offers will be counterfeit. We cannot rally around the motto, “one Lord, one faith, one baptism” (Eph 4:5), unless we are together committed to faith in Jesus Christ as Lord, to relating to him on his terms, not ours.

We cannot rally around the motto, “one Lord, one faith, one baptism,” unless we are together committed to faith in Jesus Christ as Lord

At bottom, it is departing from God’s Word, not insisting on following it, that causes division within the church. Thus, when the church corrects those who insist on continuing in sin, it is promoting not schism but sound discipline. Of course, any lack of unity in the church ultimately traces to sin—to rebellion against Christ. And all of us must ask whether our own sin is causing division within his body.

♦ “United in your truth”

The church cannot have unity just for the sake of unity. An authentic marriage of unity and truth is suggested in the Prayers of the People: “Grant, Almighty God, that all who confess your Name may be united in your truth, live together in your love, and reveal your glory in the world” (BCP, p.388).

The church cannot have unity just for the sake of unity.

Let this be our prayer.

Small Group Discussion Guide for Week 4

Topical questions

1. What do you hear the Holy Spirit saying to our congregation?
2. How do you understand the relationship between truth and unity in the Episcopal crisis?

1 Corinthians questions

CHAPTER 7:

- a. How can our congregation support single people and married couples?

CHAPTER 8:

- b. Is TEC or our congregation hindering evangelism?

CHAPTER 9:

- c. 9:1–18 How should a congregation support its bishop and other spiritual leaders?
- d. 9:19–23 How can we have a contextualized ministry for those who struggle with sexual sin in a way that is welcoming of people but not affirming of sin?
- e. 9:24–27 Will remaining in TEC help us be disciplined and to run with purpose?

Inductive Bible Study: 1 Corinthians chapters 7–9

♦ *Week 4, day 1*

PRAY: Lord, as I begin this week with you, show me what it means to put Christ above all else in my life.

READ: 1 Corinthians 7:1–16

MEDITATE:

In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul begins to answer questions sent to him by the church at Corinth. The first topics he addresses are sex and marriage. Corinth was not unlike our modern culture—it was a cosmopolitan city, and certain elements of the society were highly erotic and sexually permissive. The temple of Aphrodite had 1,000 “sacred prostitutes,” and the Greek verb “to Corinthianize” meant “to practice sexual immorality.” For some in Corinth, vows and fidelity meant little, and certain members of the new church would have been unaware of the high regard that should be given to marital faithfulness.

Paul says that Christians should be neither sexually indulgent outside of marriage nor ascetic within marriage. One of the reasons God created marriage was for husbands and wives to find sexual fulfillment. Paul reinforces the point that marriage is a lifelong union, and specifically mentions that someone who has become a Christian should do all he or she can to preserve this union if the spouse is not also a believer.

Paul also says that singleness is good if a person uses it to devote him or herself to serving Christ. He writes more about this later in the chapter. While he wishes that everyone could have the same focus on serving Christ that he does as an unmarried man, he doesn't command singleness but recognizes that both marriage and singleness are gifts and callings to honor God (v. 7).

Questions and Application:

What does this passage say?

What does this passage mean?

Ask God to show us whether our culture is blinding us from recognizing any sin.

How can you serve Christ today as a married or single person?

What can you do to uphold God's design for marriage in our church and culture?

PRAY: Lord, please show me how I can serve you today and uphold your standards for marriage and sexual purity.

◆ *Week 4, day 2*

PRAY: Thank you, Lord, that your will and purpose for my life are best.

READ: 1 Corinthians 7:17–24

MEDITATE:

God is sovereign, and your life is part of his divine plan and purpose. Like Rick Warren says in *The Purpose-Driven Life*, "It's not about you," but about discovering God's purpose for your life and how you can live for him.

People in the Corinthian church came from different backgrounds. Paul was aware of their differing circumstances when he was inspired to say, "Each one should retain the place in life that the Lord assigned to him and to which God has called him" (v. 17). This can be a sensitive subject, and it is important to point out that Paul was not enforcing subjugation of those who were slaves, since he said that if they were able gain their freedom, they should (v. 21).

More important than your station in life is the fact that Christ died for you. "You were bought at a price" (v. 23), which is the life and blood of the Son of God himself. That's why your first priority must be to serve the Lord, who gave himself for you in the place where he has put you. God has you there for a reason.

It's very difficult to be in The Episcopal Church these days, but be assured that God has you here for his purposes. Like Queen Esther, God has called us for "such a time as this" (Esther 4:14). That doesn't mean we sit passively and do nothing; we are called to follow Christ. But rather than complain to God about your circum-

stances, look at it as an opportunity to be part of his plan and the exciting things he has ahead for us.

Questions and Application:

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. How do you feel about being part of The Episcopal Church?
4. Why do you think God has you in this church at this time?
5. What challenges do you face in being faithful to Christ?

PRAY: Heavenly Father, by your Holy Spirit help me to be faithful in the place you have called me and ready to follow you wherever you lead.

◆ *Week 4, day 3*

PRAY: Lord God, help me to see where I can make an impact for you today.

READ: 1 Corinthians 7:25–40

MEDITATE:

Paul picks up the discussion about marriage he began earlier in the chapter, going into more detail about the advantages he sees in being single.

For Paul, the main advantage of being single, when it is a gift from God (v. 7), is that it offers the chance to give undivided attention and service to Christ. Single people do not have the family responsibilities that married people do, and can devote themselves more fully to ministry.

Whether his readers are married or single, Paul reminds them that the time is short (v. 29–31). In family, neighborhood, marketplace, or ministry, our lives and churches should be characterized by fully devoted service to the Lord.

Questions and Application:

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. How is the situation in Episcopal Church helping or hindering you in being a fully devoted follower of Christ?
4. How can you devote yourself to serving Christ today?

PRAY: Lord, I commit myself to you and to sharing the gospel at every opportunity. Please empower me by your Holy Spirit to live for you.

◆ *Week 4, day 4*

PRAY: Thank you, Lord, for the freedom I have in Christ.

READ: 1 Corinthians 8:1–13

MEDITATE:

Knowing Jesus brings great freedom in our lives. But our freedom as Christians also has to take into account love for fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, considering how to build them up in their faith.

The Corinthians faced a situation common in the pagan Roman Empire. Meat left over from animals that had been sacrificed to false gods was available for sale. Should Christians who have renounced worshipping pagan gods eat this meat? Would they somehow be participating in the worship and rituals they had renounced?

Paul says first that idols are nothing, and food sacrificed to idols is not spiritually contaminated. However, he reminds his readers that some Christians will still associate eating this meat with worshipping a pagan god or goddess, and that consuming it with a clear conscience will be difficult or impossible. Even though Paul says that objectively there is no problem eating this meat, he tells the church members not to do anything that will hurt someone else's faith. He says that he would be willing to forego meat entirely if it hurt another Christian's faith (v. 13). It is a sin against your brothers to hurt their consciences and, even worse, it is a sin against Christ.

Questions and Application:

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. Are we using our freedom in Christ in any selfish ways? Are there any habits or behaviors that we need to change for the sake of others?

PRAY: Lord, please show me anything I'm saying or doing that is hurting a fellow Christian's faith, and help me change my behavior so I can be an encouragement.

◆ *Week 4, day 5*

PRAY: Lord Jesus, thank you that you laid down your rights and emptied yourself for my salvation.

READ: 1 Corinthians 9:1–18

MEDITATE:

If anyone should have the rights, privileges, and respect due an apostle, it should be Paul. (cf. 2 Cor 11:16–29). The Corinthians should be willing to support Paul because he is a legitimate minister of the gospel who served among them. Although Paul has the rights of any other apostle, he says he will not insist on them if doing so will hinder the gospel. Because of his love for Christ and for the Corinthians, he served them without asking for compensation.

Paul is not saying that being a follower of Christ means you have no rights whatsoever. But he is saying that Christians should be willing to decline to assert their rights for the higher value of spreading the gospel.

Questions and Application:

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What is your reaction to laying down your rights for the sake of Christ and the gospel?
4. Is God speaking to you about something in particular that he wants you to relinquish?

PRAY: Lord, show me where clinging to my rights prevents me from living and sharing the good news of your love and grace.

♦ *Week 4, day 6*

PRAY: Dear Father, thank you that your Son gave his life so that I could be forgiven and reconciled to you.

READ: 1 Corinthians 9:19–23

MEDITATE:

Following his discussion about his right to financial support, Paul tells of other ways he has voluntarily curtailed his freedom so as to bring more people to Christ, “Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible” (9:19). Paul is so dedicated to Jesus and the mission of telling other people about him that although he can do what he wants, he will do what is necessary to win people to Christ. He will not compromise the truth of the gospel or his integrity, but wherever possible Paul will identify with the people he is trying to reach.

Paul's following the Mosaic law (Numbers 6:2–12) as recorded in Acts 21:17–29, is an example of his principle of becoming “all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some” (1 Cor 9:22).

Questions and Application:

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. Whom is God calling you to evangelize?
4. Is there a way to contextualize your evangelistic message or are there any cross-cultural actions you can take so that this person/group may better understand the good news about Jesus?
5. Is there anything about TEC or our congregation that hinders evangelism?

PRAY: Lord, help me connect with others who need to hear the gospel and give me the grace to deny myself for the sake of ministry in your name.

◆ *Week 4, day 7*

PRAY: Lord Jesus, help me run my race today.

READ: 1 Corinthians 9:24–27

MEDITATE:

Paul concludes this chapter on Christian rights and freedom with a sports illustration. Athletic games were very popular in Paul's time, and his readers would identify with his images of the runner and boxer. Athletes are focused on one thing: winning the prize. To achieve that goal, they follow a training program that requires discipline and sacrifice.

Anyone who wants to excel as an athlete, dancer, scholar, musician, or in any other field knows that discipline and sacrifice are part of the package. You have to be willing to devote your time and energy to your chosen endeavor and give up anything that would divert you from your goal. When the prize is valuable enough to you, you are willing to make the necessary sacrifices to win it.

Paul was willing to sacrifice his privileges, comfort, security, and safety to follow Christ. He was devoted to “spiritual conditioning” (v. 26–27) to serve the Lord, fight against sin, and tell others about the love of God in Christ.

Questions and Application:

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. Are there disciplines that God is calling you to practice?

Week 5: Grieving, Healing, and Change

For a long period of my life I believed that the church was in denial . . . Then I came to the stunning realization that it's not the church that's been in denial, it's me that's been in denial.

—the Rev. David Roseberry, Christ Church Plano,
as reported by Jesse Hyde, *Dallas Observer*, 27 July 2006

Grief: Losing What We Love

Many of us may have no sense of grieving over the current Episcopal crisis. Yet, many others of us are grieving over the church.

♦ *What is grief?*

The loss of anything significant results in grief. Grieving occurs when something is lost and readjustment is necessitated. Grief is a normal response which may include anxiety, fear, uncertainty, loss of equilibrium, and a feeling of not only something not being right but of something feeling terribly wrong. Something that was near and dear and close to us, something that was counted on is gone.

One grief specialist described the difference between mourning and grieving: mourning is external expression; grieving is internal feeling and processing. Mourning includes crying out to God in desperation, anger and exasperation; grieving is the aching and pain connected to the loss.

Grief can affect us physically, emotionally, cognitively, socially, and spiritually. Physically, grieving tires the person. Emotionally, there is shock, sadness, emptiness, and anger. Cognitively, there is disbelief, internal debate, and eventually some resolution. Socially, there is conflict with some, closer unity with others, and withdrawal for a season. Spiritually, there is bewilderment over how God can allow this, frustration with others who disagree or will not take a stand one way or another or soon enough, and a reexamination of what really matters in Christian faith and practice.

Grieving can be a normal process or it can become pathological. Normal grief often involves intense sorrow, pain, stress, anger, depression, and corresponding physical symptoms along with changes in personal relationships over a long period of time. There is often denial, restlessness, disorganization, inefficiency, irritability,

and apparent obsession with talking about the issue. When a person dies there is often recurring loneliness and depression, but when an institution dies this may appear more as apathy and hopelessness. The depths of these are experienced differently by different personalities, but healthy grieving eventually leads to a restoration of physical, mental, and relational well-being.

Pathological grief may include prolonged denial that something is lost, hyperactivity that seems frantic and fruitless, anger that is destructive and condemnatory, and impulsivity that may result in foolish words or actions that have severe consequences that were not anticipated.

One of the dangers in the present Episcopal controversy is a self-righteous indignation that makes a person feel entitled to lash out at those who differ, to attribute bad motives to those who hold a different opinion within their own congregation, diocese, or the denomination. Vigilance is needed in self-examination to avoid premature reaction and further damage as well as to forge constructive direction to move beyond the grief.

♦ *Grieving takes time*

Grieving takes time—even years. In an American culture that values efficiency and pragmatism, people often minimize the reality of grief, feel embarrassed by its symptoms, and fail to acknowledge its inevitable process through time.

Perhaps the best-known outline of the process are the five stages observed by Elizabeth Kübler-Ross (*On Death and Dying*, 1969):

1. Denial (this isn't happening to me!)
2. Anger (why is this happening to me?)
3. Bargaining (I promise I'll be a better person if . . .)
4. Depression (I don't care anymore)
5. Acceptance (I'm ready for whatever comes)

In *Bereavement: Studies of Grief in Adult Life*, C. M. Parkes describes grief in four phases:

1. Numbness with denial, distress, and anger
2. Yearning for that which is lost
3. Disorganization with despair
4. Reorganization

Parkes's framing may be especially helpful for understanding institutional loss. In the numbness phase there is denial as well as shock as reality unfolds. In yearning

there is the urge to recover what has been or is being lost. In disorganization and despair, there is acceptance of the permanence and pervasiveness of the loss. And in reorganization of behavior a path and a plan for moving on is executed.

In institutional loss, much time is often required to plan and to build a new structure even though many want to run ahead of what may be feasible or timely. There is a struggle to have something new to trust in while salvaging as much as is possible from what was known and trusted. These phases are not necessarily sequential but more often are recurring with overlaps and setbacks.

◆ *How Johnny learns to grieve*

In *The Grief Recovery Handbook* authors John James and Frank Cherry trace the story of a boy named Johnny. When five-year old Johnny's dog dies, Johnny comes unglued. He bursts out crying because his best companion is gone. So Johnny's dad consoles him by promising, "Don't feel bad Johnny; we'll get you a new dog right away." In that one sentence, his dad offers steps one and two in society's program for grief management: (1) bury your feelings, and (2) replace your losses. Once you have a new dog, you won't even feel the pain of the loss. Several years later Johnny falls in love for the first time—only his love is not requited and the girl breaks his heart. Now mom comes to the rescue with, "Don't worry son, there are other fish in the sea." Translation: "don't worry" means "bury the pain" and "there are other fish" means "replace the loss". Johnny has steps one and two down cold.

One day while in school, Johnny receives the news that his maternal grandfather has died. Johnny is crushed and buries his head on his desk. His teacher can't deal with the outward show of grief, so he sends Johnny to the principal's office to wait for his dad. His dad picks him up and drives him home. As they walk in the front door, Johnny sees his mother weeping in the living room. He wants to go to her, but his dad says, "Not now, Johnny; mom needs to be alone." So Johnny goes to his room and shuts the door and learns the third step in society's program for grief management: (3) grieve your losses alone.

Over time, Johnny tries to overcome his feelings with academic achievements, athletics, extra-curricular activities, and a host of busy-ness to take his mind off his pain. But it just won't go away. His father notices that Johnny has become a little moody and distant and preoccupied, so he asks what's the matter. Johnny says he just can't get his mind off his grandfather and how much he misses him. Then dad gently introduces him to the fourth step in society's program for grief management: (4) "Johnny, give it time . . . time will heal the pain."

Of course, time doesn't heal the pain. Johnny continues to think about his grandfather and the fact that he never had the chance to say goodbye to him. The regret

Johnny feels is overwhelming, so he says to himself, “What can I do about it now? I guess I’ll just live with regret for the rest of my life.” That becomes the fifth piece in his working philosophy toward grief management: (5) plan to live with regret; there’s absolutely nothing you can do about it.

Johnny mulls this over and does a little relational math. He reasons, “Whenever I allow myself to get close to someone or something, it exposes me to the possibility of deep pain. Therefore, to make sure I don’t have to experience the anguish of this pain again, I’m going to keep an arm’s length from any close relationships that may expose me to this kind of pain.” Johnny has learned the sixth and final step: (6) wall up and never trust again. Don’t get too close to anyone or anything lest you get burned in the end.

So here are the world’s steps of grief management:

1. Bury your feelings
2. Replace your losses
3. Isolate yourself
4. Wait for time to heal
5. Regret
6. Distrust vulnerability

Does that sound familiar? It’s the program society has been offering for years.

◆ *Healthy grieving*

Do you know what God has to say about this program? It doesn’t work! If we try to follow society’s program in grieving any sense of loss we may have in the midst of the TEC crisis, we stand to become victims of the toxicity of our own unprocessed pain.

The Letter of First Thessalonians admonishes the church: “We do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope” (1 Thessalonians 4:13). When we come to the issue of possible anger or grief over the current crisis, this verse suggests that there’s more than one way to grieve. The verse also suggests that the Christian approach to grieving is a hope-filled approach, and that maybe others’ approach isn’t quite so hopeful.

Bill Hybels has outlined a helpful Christian approach to grief management that contrasts with the world’s method:

1. Feel your feelings—"Jesus wept" (John 11:35)
2. Review your loss—"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6-7)
3. Share your pain in Christian fellowship—"If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!" (Ecclesiastes 4:10)
4. Pray for the Holy Spirit to heal—"I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever" (John 14:16)
5. Reconcile—"as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone" (Romans 12:18)
6. Trust God with your future—"He is the One who goes before you. He will be with you, he will not leave you nor forsake you; do not fear nor be dismayed" (Deuteronomy 31:8)

◆ *What can we do?*

The Bible is realistic about grieving. There is a time to be born and a time to die (Ecclesiastes 3:2). There are valleys of the shadow of death (Psalm 23). The coming Messiah is described as a man of sorrows and familiar with grief (Isaiah 53:3). Blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted (Matthew 5:4).

God's grace is sufficient to supply every need. The Holy Spirit is given as the Comforter who meets us at our point of need including the season of grief, but God's plan is for believers to comfort one another with this same comfort, encouragement and support.

What practical things can we do to help ourselves or others to grieve healthily?

- ◆ Create margin in your schedule so that you have time to listen to God and are available for God to use you.
- ◆ Pray for the leaders of the church.
- ◆ Pray for all, that our words and actions would honor Christ.
- ◆ Seek God's peace (shalom) with others, which demands the framework of justice and righteousness.
- ◆ Speak the truth in love.
- ◆ Acknowledge anger, but do not sin and give the devil an opportunity to hurt Christians, the church, or the cause of the gospel (see Ephesians 4:25-27).
- ◆ Take care of yourself during these especially stressful days—eat healthily, get appropriate rest, and exercise.
- ◆ Be there for one another to listen, comfort, and encourage.

Change & Adaptation

Life is full of change. Regardless of whether we're grieving or not, the Episcopal crisis has presented our congregation with a number of changes that we cannot avoid (e.g., polarization, declining membership in TEC, redirecting resources towards dealing with the crisis, etc.). And just as grief can be dealt with in healthy or unhealthy ways, change can bring the best and the worst out of people.

Spencer Johnson's brief but powerful book, *Who Moved My Cheese*, captures a simple truth: the very things that we take for granted can cause us the most angst when changed. Researchers in secular industries, such as Gene Hall and Shirley Hord (*Implementing Change: Patterns, Principles and Potholes*), have encouraged leaders to fine tune their abilities to anticipate and to adapt to change as soon as possible.

For the church, Jesus Christ provides us with the solid rock foundation to which we can anchor our lives. And the Scriptures provide the reference point to which the church must turn in order to align change in our lives with the purposes of the Lord.

Our resistance to and fear of change grows exponentially when we fail to participate in the process. Change is a process, not a product. As such, when we are confronted with change, we may experience a wide range of emotions and reactions. Some of us may feel exhilaration. Others may feel loss and sadness, even anger and grief. Others may not feel anything at first, or even later may wonder what all the fuss was about. Some may resent change that happens outside of their control. Perhaps we did not plan to change but now find ourselves reacting to changes as they happen.

Another principle of change is that *plans* and *practice* are two distinct phases that require both patience and time. Plans must sometimes be adjusted as they are actually put into practice. We constantly assess what's working and what's not. Plans and practice don't always go at the speed that we would like. For some, change cannot come fast enough. Others need time to absorb, reflect on and study all of the whats, hows, whys, and what ifs.

We best respond to change when we are engaged in a *horizontal* rather than *top-down* process. It is the people of an institution, not the institution itself, that change. This is a key reason why small group ministry is so valuable in a church setting. Through small groups, individuals have time to process and participate in the changes by corporate prayer and discernment.

The small group is also the perfect place for Christians to support one another during times of crisis. Each member of a group is going to deal with change at their own pace. Some people are venturesome *innovators* who lead the way in promoting change as soon as it emerges. Meanwhile, others are cautious *laggards* who need more assurance before embracing change. The majority of people are at different stages between these two extremes. Our fellowship needs to be a safe place which allows each person to honestly express where they're at in dealing with change.

Finally, let us continually remind ourselves of the love of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. It is through him and with him that we gird ourselves with the spiritual foundation essential to the 40 Days of Discernment. It is his Word that guides us, his teachings that inform us, and his care that energizes and gives us hope in the midst of any change.

Small Group Discussion Guide for Week 5

Topical questions

1. Am I grieving over anything?
2. If I've been grieving, where am I in healing?
3. How am I dealing with the changes in TEC over the past several years?

1 Corinthians questions

CHAPTER 10

- a. What struggles and temptations can we anticipate in the months ahead?
- b. How can our congregation guard itself against both ungratefulness for God's provision and cynicism in the face of challenges?

CHAPTER 11

- c. 11:3–16 Like the issue of men's and women's attire in worship, what are some culturally specific issues on which congregations can differ from location to location and which should not divide the body of Christ?
- d. 11:17–34 Reflect on things that need to be examined in your own life.

CHAPTER 12

- e. What special role can our congregation play in the body of Christ?

CHAPTER 13

- f. How does our congregation manifest love?

Inductive Bible Study: 1 Corinthians chapters 10–13

◆ *Week 5, day 1*

PRAY: Almighty and eternal God, draw my heart to you, guide my mind, fill my imagination, and direct my will, so that I may be completely yours, utterly dedicated to you. Use me, I pray, as you choose, and always to your glory and the welfare of your people, through Jesus Christ my Savior and Lord. Amen.

READ: 1 Corinthians 10:1–11:1

MEDITATE:

In August of 2001, a Kansas City pharmacist was charged with diluting the cancer treatment drugs Gemzar and Taxol in order to make a larger profit. This man held life-saving power in his hands, and for the sake of personal gain diluted it to the point at which it could not help people. As Christians, there are four ways we can be guilty of a similar crime on the spiritual plane:

1. Be ignorant of history. To illustrate the folly of trusting in the ceremonies of religion to protect a Christian from temptation, in verses 1–11 Paul reaches back to the history of Israel for an illustration. The evil we face is a master of disguise and often changes the names of things to confuse us. What God calls sexual sin is often labeled as sexual “liberation” today. Will we learn from history or will we be ignorant of it?
2. Rationalize our behavior. Sure, what other people are doing is plainly sinful, but my own shortcoming is understandable or acceptable. By listing specific sins, Paul is warning his readers that they could just as easily step on the same landmines.
3. Mix Christianity with other religions. Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6).
4. Look out for number one. There is in all authentic Christianity a healthy tension between individual freedom and corporate or community responsibility. Keeping a good balance between the two is not easy.

Questions and Application:

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What struggles and temptations can we anticipate in the months ahead?
4. How can our congregation guard itself against both ungratefulness for God’s provision and cynicism in the face of challenges?

PRAY: Almighty God, by the Passover of your son you have brought us out of sin unto righteousness and out of death into life. Grant to me and to all who are sealed by your Spirit the will and the power to proclaim you to all the world through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

♦ *Week 5, day 2*

PRAY: repeat prayer from day 1

READ: 1 Corinthians 11:2–16

MEDITATE:

This passage is probably one of the most complex, controversial, and opaque of any text of comparable length in the New Testament. Even a brief review of the history of interpretation of these verses should inspire a considerable degree of tentativeness on the part of anyone who would write a meditation on the same! Still, there are several points about which we can remain relatively confident.

Most interpreters agree that one timeless principle that may be deduced from this passage is that Christians should not try to blur distinctions between the sexes. Christianity recognizes that God created men and women as sexual beings, with sexual differences. Grooming or dressing in ways that make it impossible to recognize a person's gender or, worse still, changing our sexual appearance through transvestite behavior does not bring glory to Christ. Also, in any culture, believers must strenuously avoid whatever forms of dress or grooming potentially communicate to the non-Christian world sexual misconduct or idolatrous worship.

Beyond this, the consensus among interpreters begins to break down. But there is a wide berth in which we can continue to study the relevant texts together in love and in light of the Scriptures as a whole, trusting that none of us has yet received complete illumination!

Questions and Application:

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What are some culturally specific issues on which congregations can differ from location to location and which should not divide the Body of Christ?

PRAY: repeat prayer from day 1

♦ *Week 5, day 3*

PRAY: Almighty and eternal God, draw my heart to you, guide my mind, fill my imagination, and direct my will, so that I may be completely yours, utterly dedicated to you. Use me, I pray, as you choose, and always to your glory and the welfare of your people, through Jesus Christ my Savior and Lord. Amen.

READ: 1 Corinthians 11:17–34

MEDITATE:

The Lord's Supper, designed precisely to foster Christian unity, not only divided the Corinthians but has divided believers ever since. One of the ironies of the modern ecumenical movement is that many denominations or branches of the church have been willing to abandon fundamental doctrines of the faith (the deity of Christ, belief in the biblical miracles, the trustworthiness of Scripture, the nature of sexuality, and so on) and thereby achieve a measure of "unity" around liberal theological perspectives, while raising loud argument and division over issues that stem from purely human traditions. Certain aspects of our eucharistic practice, as beloved as they are, can be some of those issues. At the same time, we often overlook or ignore eucharistic issues that are clearly set forth in this passage of First Corinthians. The World Council of Churches has offered this helpful statement (*Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, pp.10–17):

The Eucharist celebration demands reconciliation and sharing among all those regarded as brothers and sisters in the one family of God and is a constant challenge in the search for appropriate relationships in social, economic, and political life. All kinds of injustice, racism, separation, and lack of freedom are radically challenged when we share the body and blood of Christ . . . As participants in the Eucharist, therefore, we prove inconsistent if we are not actively participating in this ongoing restoration of the world's situation and the human condition . . . and above all, the obstinacy of unjustifiable divisions within the body of Christ.

Questions and Application:

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. Reflect on things that need to be examined in your own life.

PRAY: O God, whose blessed son made himself known to his disciples in the breaking of bread: open the eyes of my faith, that I may behold him, in all his redeeming work, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

◆ *Week 5, day 4*

PRAY: repeat prayer from day 1

READ: 1 Corinthians 12:1–11

MEDITATE:

Think of a glorious symphony. There is great variety in the instruments played and the skills required of the players, but all those instruments and all those different musicians create a musical unity as they give a concert.

Often in the church we have a tendency to seek unity in conformity. Rather than encouraging each person's uniqueness we often discourage it. In many churches this quest for uniformity is not limited to loyalty to the rector and staff and participation in regular worship. There is an effort to get all the members to think alike on all issues. While there is a certain short-term efficiency in an authoritarian approach to leadership, in the long run it is self-defeating because it does not recognize the giftedness of each member of the church. The kind of unity God seeks comes from the exercising of those gifts.

Perhaps some of the “gifts of the Spirit” don't surface until a need appears and we come to God in desperation and we pray about what to do. That's where we are right now, brothers and sisters! As we embrace this time of discernment, we will discover that God in his love and wisdom has placed the necessary gifts within the church for dealing with both our problems and our opportunities! I am convinced that the church is merely touching the hem of the garment of God, mainly because there are still so many gifts undiscovered and so many gifted Christians whose gifts are not being used.

Questions and Application:

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What is your SHAPE (Spiritual Gifts, Heartbeat passion, Abilities, Personality, Experience)?

PRAY: Almighty and everlasting God, who in the paschal mystery established the new covenant of reconciliation, grant that all who have been reborn into the fellowship of Christ's body may show forth in their lives what they profess by their faith, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

◆ *Week 5, day 5*

PRAY: repeat prayer from day 1

READ: 1 Corinthians 12:12–31a

MEDITATE:

The Apostle Paul is not yet finished with the discussion of the gifts of the Spirit, and he now builds on what he has already said as he addresses the problem of divisions in the church and makes a case for unity. The continuing need for the church with all its diversity is to find a basis for oneness.

In verses 12 and 13 he lays down the only lasting basis for unity: “For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body” (v. 13). The only basis for being a member of the church was the profession “Jesus is Lord.” Paul reminds his readers—and us—that true “unity” is built upon one thing: the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the unchanging truth of his holy and unalterable word! Unity within the church of Jesus is founded squarely on the truth of Jesus, and the transformation he brings—there and nowhere else!

Questions and Application:

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What special role do you think our congregation can play in the body of Christ?

PRAY: Grant, Almighty God, that all who confess your name may be united in your truth, live together in your love, and reveal your glory in the world.

◆ *Week 5, day 6*

PRAY: repeat prayer from day 1

READ: 1 Corinthians 12:31b–13:7

MEDITATE:

At the conclusion of his chapter on the gifts of the Spirit, after admonishing his readers to “desire the best gifts,” Paul then promises to show them the way that is superior to all others—love. The love of which he speaks was not an abstract virtue. Rather, it was a love that had been defined by God’s action in sending Jesus Christ into the world. It was a love that reached out to those who did not deserve it, a love that put the interests of others first, a love that forgave people and started over with them. It means that caring, forgiving, redeeming love which is the essence of God’s nature.

In every religious controversy it is love that leaves first. This was certainly true in Corinth, where they were fighting over the gift of tongues. How much more when the controversy concerns the basic and profoundly important issues of God's intent for human sexuality!

Lest we become sloppy in our application of love to current issues, we would do well to remember that the all-supremely-loving Jesus Christ could clear the temple in righteous indignation (Mark 11:15–18), and unleash a torrential rebuke of the hypocrisy of the religious leaders of his day (Matthew 23).

Lewis Smedes outlines this approach in his study of this chapter in his *Love Within Limits*. Among other insights, he notes that God has limits to his patience, and so must we. Neither does patience include the toleration of evil. “Kindness” is both intelligent and tough, “without wisdom and honesty,” it “easily becomes mere pity, bound to hurt more people than it helps.”

Questions and Application:

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. How does our congregation manifest love?

PRAY: Gracious Father, we pray for your holy catholic church. Fill it with all truth, in all truth with all peace. Where in my own life there is corruption, purify me; where I am in error, direct me; where in anything I have wandered astray, draw me to your side. Grant that I might reflect the perfect love of your son, who died that I might live. Amen.

♦ Week 5, day 7

PRAY: repeat prayer from day 1

READ: 1 Corinthians 13:8–13

MEDITATE: When I officiate at a wedding and read the words, “Love never fails” (v. 8), I am painfully aware that human affection can fail! And it does—often and disastrously. Yet love as God defines it, never fails.

Love without an objective grounding in the truth of the living God of the universe runs rampant. St. John's affirmation that “God is love” (1 John 4:16) has been inverted in the popular slogan “Where there is love there is God.” And while the

Week 6: Choosing Our Future

One canon reduced to writing by God himself, two testaments, three creeds, four general councils, five centuries, and the series of Fathers in that period—the centuries, that is, before Constantine, and two after—determine the boundary of our faith.
—Lancelot Andrewes

How then shall we live?

Out of a sense of prudent stewardship, your vestry has likely been exploring various scenarios for the future of your congregation. One potential scenario is the possibility that the congregation may desire to explore Anglican affiliation alternative to The Episcopal Church (TEC). Over the past few years, somewhere in the ballpark of 100 congregations have left TEC and come under alternative oversight.

At the end of this discernment process your vestry may call for a congregational meeting and a vote on whether the congregation will remain affiliated with TEC or will respond to the division within TEC and the broader Anglican Communion by affiliating with another part of the Anglican Communion. Such a vote would invite you to make your own individual decision and cast your ballot in light of our communal nature and the leading of the Holy Spirit as emphasized in the 40 Days of Discernment.

It will help if you are clear with yourself about what motivates you in your involvement in a faith community, about your desires, and about what sacrifices you are able to live with depending on which scenario is played out.

It is important to be realistic about the future. Whether there is a decision to affiliate with TEC or with another branch of the Anglican Communion, there will always be conflict in God's church. There will always be hard choices to make. No matter what decisions are made at the conclusion of this discernment process, there will be new ramifications and opportunities. This final topical reading is about "counting the costs" of choosing our future (see Luke 14:28–33).

◆ *A thought experiment*

This guidebook has sought to articulate the issues parishes and missions face in deciding whether to remain affiliated with TEC after the end of the 40 Days of Discernment. In making that decision it is important to consider some of the implications of the alternatives we face. What is the vision God has for our church? What would we have to do and what sacrifices would we have to make to follow each of these alternatives in both the short term and over time? How do we remain faithful to our commitments? What are the goals we have for the outcome of these 40 days?

The following analysis provides a starting point for congregational and small group discussions of possible scenarios. These scenarios are (1) conformity, (2) staying to resist, and (3) affiliate with another branch of Anglicanism. We encourage participants in the discernment process to carefully and prayerfully consider for themselves what they think the effect of each alternative would be.

◆ *1. Conform to the TEC status-quo*

Avoid further conflict with the American Episcopal church by standing down. Embrace compromise for the sake of unity. Promote the view that what unites us is more important than what divides us. Do nothing that may cause significant conflict. Stop insisting that the Bible is primary authority for what we hold to be true. Allow truth to be defined by prevailing opinion and current culture. Repent of any former stance and pay contributions to our diocese. Embrace the moral and theological leadership of our duly elected national and diocesan leaders. Do not object to inhibitions and depositions of conservative clergy. By remaining silent, lend our support to TEC in any disputes with Global South Anglicans. Allow the diocese to control selection of our rector or vicar, and where our seminarians should be trained for ministry. Use Sunday school curriculum endorsed by TEC leaders so that our children are raised up to support the ethos of TEC. Risk losing members who prefer option 2 or 3.

◆ *2. Stay and resist TEC*

Remain in TEC even if we determine that TEC has “walked apart.” Stand firm in our commitments to Christian orthodoxy in the Anglican tradition. Decline to compromise or walk apart. Decline to use the prospect of walking apart from TEC as leverage to reform TEC. Refuse offers from Anglican primates to join any new, orthodox branch of the Anglican Communion in America. Persuade clergy and congregations who have previously left TEC to return to the fray. Bear witness to the truth in love. Appeal to the TEC majority to respect the voice of a dissenting minority and to allow orthodox churches to continue their ministries unhindered. Continue to press for full conformity to *The Windsor Report* at future General Conventions. Mount campaigns to nominate and elect theologically orthodox bishops in all dioceses. Work to attract newcomers to orthodox congregations by a

public relations campaign that offsets the public perception of the larger Episcopal Church. Institute a decades-long program to educate promising orthodox students in the hopes that they gain tenure in key professorships at Episcopal colleges and seminaries. Found a publishing house for orthodox Episcopalians. Support orthodox Anglican leaders and provinces. Endure hostile threats by national or diocesan leaders regarding clergy appointments, aspirant training, ownership of property, etc. Grieve over the continuing loss of members who can no longer in good conscience remain in a congregation that is in TEC, or who prefer option 1.

◆ *3. Affiliate with another branch of Anglicanism*

Conclude that it is no longer feasible (theologically or otherwise) to remain affiliated with TEC. Recognize the division in TEC and proceed as amicably as possible. Seek alignment with an alternative Anglican body. Budget to support the Anglican body which would provide oversight. Should the diocese file suit against us, defend rights in court as may be necessary. Rededicate resources previously preoccupied with disputes with TEC to evangelical outreach. Acknowledge Global South provinces who have made significant sacrifices in recent years to provide safe harbor for the orthodox in TEC. Continue to pray for repentance by TEC and eventual reconciliation. Be a part of the adventure and challenge of building up an orthodox Anglican presence in the USA. Lose members who prefer option 1 or 2.

This last scenario is an umbrella covering several specific options, each of which carries different implications and costs. Some of these alternatives which the vestry may have considered include the emerging programs being developed by the Anglican Communion Network, Uganda, Southern Cone (including Bolivia), Convocation for Anglicans in North America, Anglican Mission in America, Reformed Episcopal Church, Anglican Province of America, and Traditional Anglican Communion. The present situation is fluid and new options may emerge. Consult with your vestry for further details.

Dozens of congregations have already come under the episcopal oversight of an orthodox province elsewhere in the Anglican Communion, such as Southern Cone or Uganda. This alternative may involve, among other things, some cultural adjustments, perhaps increased international travel, and partnership with a province particularly focused on evangelism.

The Convocation for Anglicans in North America (CANA) is another option. This is an initiative of the Anglican Church of Nigeria which offers a domestic episcopate, an emerging ecclesial structure for the American context, and full membership in a province of the Anglican Communion. This alternative may involve, among other things, some cultural adjustments, and partnership with a province particularly focused on evangelism.

The Anglican Communion Network (ACN) has emphasized its commitment to finding means of caring for, and keeping within the Anglican Communion, orthodox TEC parishes. The ACN also is working on a “Common Cause” initiative, which seeks to reunite orthodox Anglican offshoots in North America. Aligning individually with one of the forty or so groups that have previously disaffiliated from TEC may mean not having the full recognition of many Anglican provinces and the Archbishop of Canterbury. Furthermore, aligning with one of these groups would require accepting the perspective on the defining issues that led to its formation (e.g., rejection of the 1979 *BCP*).

Other options could be entertained too, including leaving Anglicanism. Congregations could consider applying to become affiliated with the Orthodox Church or the Catholic Church. Some may also consider joining another Protestant denomination or becoming a postdenominational independent church. These affiliations would require a denominational change which likely demand huge adjustments in polity and practices.

By God’s grace, we trust that none of our members will have become so disenchanted by the Episcopal crisis and division that they will leave Christ and his universal church altogether.

*there will always
be conflict in God’s
church*

◆ *Concluding Remarks*

As we consider momentous decisions in the life of our faith community, we need to remind ourselves of whose we are. Our Lord has made many promises to us that will encourage us and give us strength.

God has a plan for us, a plan not to harm us but to prosper us, a plan to give us a

hope and a future (Jeremiah 29:11). He has promised never to leave us or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5; Matthew 28:20). He has promised that the gates of hell will never prevail against his church (Matthew 16:18). He has promised that those who stand firm to the end will be saved (Matthew 24:13).

In light of these promises, you can be bold, courageous, and hopeful, putting yourself in God’s hands. “The Lord will do what seems good to him” (2 Samuel 10:12). You can be a risk taker—and there is certainly risk in any option—for if you follow God’s will, he will not leave you unprotected. You can rejoice and not be anxious about anything, but in everything, in prayer and thanksgiving, present your requests to the Lord. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:4–9).

Small Group Discussion Guide for Week 6

Topical questions

1. What are the pros/cons of remaining affiliated with TEC?
2. In an ideal scenario, twelve months from now, what will our relationship look like with (a) our current diocese, (b) other orthodox congregations in our region, and (c) the Anglican Communion?
3. If our congregation decides to remain affiliated with TEC, what will I do?
4. If our congregation decides to seek alignment with a different part of the Anglican Communion, what will I do?

1 Corinthians questions

CHAPTER 14

- a. How can we help others understand the good news of Jesus the Messiah and the revealed truths of God's Word?

CHAPTER 15

- b. Discuss the implications and consequences of the resurrection for our congregational life.

CHAPTER 16

- c. With whom is God calling us to be affiliated?

Inductive Bible Study: 1 Corinthians chapters 14–16

◆ *Week 6, day 1*

PRAY: We thank you, Lord God, for providing your church with your Holy Spirit to guide us, strengthen us, and grow us up into the image of Jesus, your son.

READ: 1 Corinthians 14:1–25

MEDITATE:

Paul now turns his attention to another conflict dividing the church in Corinth: the use of spiritual gifts, including tongues and prophecy. As often happens, God's holy gifts, meant for the church's benefit and his glory, had instead become a matter of controversy and a source of division. Paul lays out group guidelines for using the gifts of the Holy Spirit in a way that honors God and fulfills God's purposes.

Questions and Application:

1. What appears to have been the problem in the Corinthian church regarding the use of spiritual gifts?
2. What does Paul say about the purpose of God's spiritual gifts to the church (specifically tongues and prophecy)?
3. What sinful human tendencies were apparently being manifested?
4. What do you think is meant by the term "prophecy" as used by the early church? Is it relevant to today's church?
5. Does the situation at Corinth relate, in your mind, to the present situation in TEC and/or your own congregation? If so, how does this passage illuminate the present?
6. How do you think the Lord would have you apply what you have read and learned here today?

PRAY: Lord, grant that this day, and in all the days to come, I may be an instrument in your hand, blessing others as you have blessed me, and building up your church in the strength of your Holy Spirit.

◆ *Week 6, day 2*

PRAY: Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker... (Psalm 95:6)

READ: 1 Corinthians 14:26–33

MEDITATE:

When we gather for worship, our primary purpose is to worship and praise our Almighty God. Through worship, we come into his presence; heaven and earth are joined. Paul describes the appearance of communal worship under the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit. The liturgy is open to allow anyone who feels so moved to share their Holy Spirit-given gift of worship or edification. Paul also instructs how those gifts are to be expressed: in an orderly manner and with self-control, "For God is not a God of disorder but of peace" (v. 33).

Within the Anglican Communion, there is a wide range of liturgical models. Even within the Anglican Communion Network, there are traditionalists, Charismatics, Evangelicals, and Anglo-Catholics. Many of the historical schisms within the Episcopal Church have been sparked by liturgical battles. At this time in history, many of those who had separated in the past are being drawn together again by a common purpose.

Questions and Application:

1. What does this passage say?
2. Have you ever been in a church service that displayed the more controversial gifts of the Holy Spirit? If so, what was your reaction?
3. Should our mode of worship (e.g., charismatic, Anglo-Catholic, low church, etc.) divide our church?

PRAY: Thank you, Lord God, for inviting us to share in your holiness through the practice of worship. Help us to take our attention off of ourselves and place it where it belongs—on you.

◆ *Week 6, day 3*

PRAY: God Our Creator, thank you for creating us, male and female, in your own image. Help us to grow into the men and women you envisioned at our creation.

READ: 1 Corinthians 14:34–39

MEDITATE:

In reading Paul's letter to the Corinthians, we encounter this perplexing passage, declaring that "women should be silent in the churches." This statement is puzzling because it appears to conflict with other passages by Paul in which he describes, in an approving manner, women having an active role in worship and ministry. Some scholars propose that this paragraph was a later editorial insertion. Others have suggested that, as in other parts of 1 Corinthians, a specific issue from the Corinthians' original letter to Paul is being addressed, and in doing so Paul quotes from their letter. If this is the case, verses 34–35 would be properly in quotation marks, with verse 36 as Paul's response. A third possibility is that Paul was here addressing a very specific situation in Corinth, namely a group of women promoting a heresy, and that he was giving instructions for them, and them alone, to remain silent.

Questions and Application:

1. Baffling or not, this passage remains a part of God's holy Word. How do we address the issue of apparent contradictions within Scripture?
2. How can we use the whole Scripture to illuminate specific scripture passages?
3. How do we discern whether a directive is simply a cultural remnant or if it remains binding for all God's people at all places in all times?
4. Within the Anglican Communion Network, how can we address differences of opinion regarding God's intended role for women in the church and still remain a united body of Christ?

PRAY: Lord Jesus, you gave women an honor and respect never before seen in the history of mankind. Show us how to partner together in the ministry of your Kingdom.

◆ *Week 6, day 4*

PRAY: Heavenly Father, you have sent us the Holy Spirit to lead us into all truth. Lead us now into right discernment of your Word and make your truth effectual in our lives

READ: 1 Corinthians 15:1–19

MEDITATE:

Throughout his letter to the Corinthians, Paul addresses various matters of dispute. Now he turns his attention to the most critical of these: the resurrection. Some at Corinth were saying that there was no resurrection of the dead. Paul speaks of the resurrection as primary to the faith “received”: not only his personal faith, but the faith of all the true church. The resurrection both fulfills and verifies scripture. Paul reminds his readers that Christ's resurrection is not merely a rumored event, but a widely witnessed occurrence, for the resurrected Jesus had appeared to literally hundreds of people, many of whom were still alive (and so available to confirm or refute the story). The bottom line? “If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain” (v.14). Yet, today, a vast number of churchgoers, including clergy at all levels, do not believe in the literal, bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. In their opinion, a spiritual resurrection or a metaphorical resurrection is perfectly congruent with the Christian faith.

Questions and Application:

1. What do you believe about the physical resurrection of Jesus?
2. Why do you think Paul says that “if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins” (v.17)?
3. In your mind, does the notion of salvation require a literal resurrection? Why or why not?

PRAY: Lord Jesus, you rose from the dead that we might have eternal life. Grant us the certainty of that promise in this life and in the life to come.

♦ *Week 6, day 5*

PRAY: Heavenly Father, we belong to you. We have been bought and paid for by the blood of your son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Sanctify us that on that final day we may stand before you in purity and holiness.

READ: 1 Corinthians 15:20–49

MEDITATE:

Paul calls Jesus the “firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (v. 20). At harvest time, the Israelites would offer to God the first ripened produce of the crop (Lev. 23:10). This sacrifice was a recognition that as the remainder of the crop ripened and subsequently was harvested, all belonged to the Lord. Likewise, Jesus is the “firstfruits” of the resurrection of the dead; we are the remainder of the crop. As Jesus belonged to God, so do we. The resurrection of Christ causes the believer to be raised spiritually in this life (Romans 6:4; Ephesians 2:6) and guarantees that we will be raised bodily in the next.

Questions and Application:

1. In the Apostles’ Creed, we proclaim that we believe in the “resurrection of the body.” What would it mean to interpret this in a symbolic sense? How about in a literal sense? Does it matter?
2. What are the implications and the applications of believing in our own physical resurrection from the dead?
3. In emphasizing the significance of the belief in a bodily resurrection, Paul asks (v. 30), “And as for us, why do we endanger ourselves every hour?” The implied answer is, “Because I am preaching the resurrection of Jesus and of all believers.” Why was the literal resurrection a dangerous message to preach? Is it still dangerous today?

PRAY: Lord Jesus, it was not enough for you to redeem our souls; you have also redeemed our bodies. Remind us each day that our bodies are holy to you and consecrated to your use.

♦ *Week 6, day 6*

PRAY: Lord Jesus, you call us to work for your kingdom while on earth. Help me to know that my labor is never in vain.

READ: 1 Corinthians 15:50–58

MEDITATE:

In a way that is consistent with the rest of Scripture, Paul presents the kingdom of God not as a “virtual reality” but as a rock-solid one. The kingdom is imperishable, and so we also must be of an imperishable form to live in it. It is substantial, not merely ethereal, so we will not be disembodied spirits floating around in this kingdom. We will be supernaturally embodied, as was the resurrected Christ. In the face of false teaching and various temptations, Paul encourages the Corinthians to persevere in a faith grounded in the hope of the resurrection. His readers are to be immovable in faith and proclamation while “abound[ing] in every good work” (2 Cor 9:8).

Today, universalism (the belief that, ultimately, everyone is going to heaven) is by far the predominant belief regarding life after death, both in churches and on the streets. Another common belief is that we are “spiritual beings having a physical adventure” awaiting a return to our place of origin (heaven) and to our “true” nature (i.e., purely spiritual). Therefore, what happens to our physical bodies and what we do with our physical bodies while on earth is of no eternal consequence.

Questions and Application:

1. How do my beliefs about the coming kingdom and the afterlife affect how I live and proclaim the gospel?
2. How does the prevailing view of universalism compare to the theology found here in Paul’s writings? Does it matter what any individual believes on this point?
3. What is the “work of the Lord” (v. 58) that Paul refers to, and am I doing it now?

PRAY: Lord, help me to be steadfast in the proclaiming and the living of your gospel.

◆ *Week 6, day 7*

PRAY: Grant, O Lord, that we may be faithful and active members of the body of Christ.

READ: 1 Corinthians 16

MEDITATE:

Paul urges the Christians at Corinth to provide generously for the needs of the suffering church in Judea. Paul’s purpose in taking up the collection was not only for the monetary relief of the Jewish Christians, but also for the purpose of drawing together two disparate parts of the church that didn’t always get along: the Messianic Jews and the ingrafted Gentiles. Paul’s entire letter to the Corinthians addresses the matter of divisions within the church. Here the letter ends on the same note, but in a different framework. Paul has made it clear that not everyone

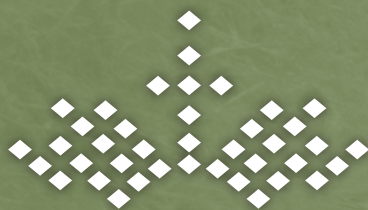
who claims membership in the family has a right to that fellowship: he has even prescribed separation from those who are unwilling to stop engaging in certain immoral conduct or in false worship (1 Cor 5:11). However, in this case the division is a legitimate difference of opinion within the body of Christ, and should not be allowed to stand in the way of unity of Spirit and mutual caring.

Questions and Application:

1. In our forty days of discernment, we have been addressing the issue of differences within the established church and the godly way to deal with them. Are some differences deal-breakers while others are not? If so, how do we discern one from the other?
2. How much difference of opinion is acceptable in such areas as liturgy, worship, religious orders, church teaching, and theology?
3. What are the essentials? How are they determined?
4. When are we to set aside our differences and work together for our common mission, as did the Jewish and Gentile churches? If the differences are so critical that they preclude ministering and worshipping together, how then are we to respond?

PRAY: Come Holy Spirit, illuminate and guide your church.

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