

Interview of the Revd Tory Baucum and Bishop Shannon Johnston

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The following transcript by the American Anglican Council is taken from the audio recording of an interview by Bill Marsh of the Revd Tory Baucum and Bishop Shannon Johnston at the "Faith in Conflict" Conference at Coventry Cathedral.

Moderator: We are, and we are wired up. We'll make a start. Just one or two people still coming in. Grab a seat. Make yourself comfortable. Just from time to time in life and in my experience, not that often in fact, I've met people and had conversations that have left a deep mark on me in terms of a sense of privilege at what I've heard, and a sense of inspiration at what I've heard. And I had that same experience in meeting the two gentlemen who are here with us. And it was for that reason, because of the importance of the story they have to tell, that they've kindly agreed to come quite a few thousand miles, and join us this evening.

I'll also need a moment to introduce myself. This is not - I know you know, interviews can take different styles in different places. I would think more Desert Island Discs than Jeremy Paxman. If you're looking for some kind of model, I understand in the States that the distinction would be think more Oprah than Bill O'Reilly.

Before I say anything else, let me ask these two gentlemen and incredibly welcome guests, thank you both, to introduce themselves, say who they are.

Tory Baucum: I'm Tory Baucum, and I have the privilege of being the Rector, the Senior Pastor at Truro Church in Fairfax, Virginia.

Moderator: Thank you.

Shannon Johnston: And I'm Shannon Johnston, and I'm the Episcopal Bishop of the Diocese of Virginia.

Moderator: Thank you. The story they have to tell is a story that takes place in a context inevitably, and it's a context that won't be familiar to many of us over here - or at least not particularly familiar to many of us. So, I wonder if I could ask you both to say a little bit about the background to this in terms of the particular dispute, conflict that's been going on within the Episcopal **Church** over sexuality issues to set the scene if you'd like for your own story.

Tory Baucum: I became the Rector of Truro Church in 2007, and already Truro was in a lawsuit with the Episcopal Diocese of Virginia for about eight months. That happened for a variety of reasons, but I would say there'd been a history of accumulated grievances between Truro and the Diocese and the national church for many years. Truro, just to give you a very brief sketch, was a leader in renewal. It really helped introduced the charismatic renewal to the Episcopal church in the '70s. A church with a great missionary program. For example, a forty-year relationship with the Diocese of Kigezi in Uganda. Bishop Festo Kivengere was our first partner and Bishop. I sometimes say that Truro is an American church with the soul of an East African church. We still have very deep ties with East Africa. It's shaped our ethos, our spirituality, our theology.

The tipping point in my view is in 2003 with the consecration of Gene Robinson. I was actually in London a week after the Primates had gathered together and issued a unanimous communiqué urging the Episcopal Church not to go ahead with the consecration of Gene Robinson.

Moderator: Sorry just to interrupt. For the benefit of those who aren't aware of Gene Robinson, give us the significance of that.

Tory Baucum: He was the Bishop of New Hampshire. He was elected. And he was a man living in a sexual relationship that was not marriage. He was in a gay relationship. So the Primates said this will split the - it will tear the Communion at its deepest level, the fabric of the Communion. And I think a lot of Anglicans around the world certainly in the Global South would say that was a schismatic act. And to have full disclosure, I share that belief. I think it was a schismatic act. So after that it was just a process of events that eventually led Truro to align itself with another part of the Anglican Communion.

So that's the setting for my arrival which raises lots of issues about my judgment I know, but anyway. That was the setting into which I came into Truro, the Anglican church.

Moderator: Thank you. Shannon.

Shannon Johnston: And I too inherited the situation. I was elected Bishop of Virginia in January of 2007, just after the lawsuits were filed. I was consecrated Bishop in May of 2007, and the lawsuits have been continuing these six years. So I do not know what it is like to be - I was first the coadjutor Bishop, which is the Bishop elected with the right of succession, and then I became the Diocesan Bishop in 2009. And we are just now at the end of the lawsuits. There's one more case out of fifteen that began. And we have been able to settle most of those, but we're down to an appeal at the Virginia Supreme Court with one more case. And I agree that the tipping point was the election and consecration of a gay man in a committed monogamous relationship. That became the real tipping point for the churches in Virginia that decided to withdraw from the Diocese and we've been working with that ever since.

Moderator: And you mention fifteen lawsuits. That's just in Virginia as I understand it.

Shannon Johnston: That's just the Diocese of Virginia. The context of Virginia is that the Diocese of Virginia is the largest Diocese in the Episcopal Church that is part of the American church. The Episcopal church has sixteen countries in it. Haiti is our largest Diocese, but in the American part of the Episcopal Church, Virginia is the largest. And so it's iconic because it's also the oldest. We have Jamestown in sixteen seven. We have many of the Episcopal churches' oldest congregations and certainly Truro is one of those. So there are many iconic congregations in an iconic Diocese.

Moderator: So you both come into your roles as Bishop and as Rector of Truro church, which in case it wasn't clear is in Bishop Shannon's Diocese. You both inherit, as you put it, this issue, and you come in in the context of really a fight, a conflict that's going on right across different parts of the U.S. with a lot of litigation outside of Virginia as well. What happens then?

Shannon Johnston: Well, the battle was very protracted, still is. A lot of pain on all sides. A lot of friendships that had been lifelong literally were broken. Battles over legal custody of property. That sort of thing. And so there was a tremendous amount of personal life affected as well as ecclesial life. And that was probably as, in my role as chief Pastor as a Bishop, that occupied more of my time, the relational side than the legal side did. I was not very much involved in the legal side. But it was always the relationships that made the most difference to me, and that's where I put most of my focus pastorally and in my ministry as Bishop.

Moderator: Right. So if we follow the story forward then, you're both in-post. You've inherited litigation and really quite a significant far reaching conflict which goes right across the States. You knew each other then or not?

Shannon Johnston: No.

Moderator: You hadn't met.

Shannon Johnston: No.

Moderator: So how did you first meet?

Tory Baucum: We met almost two years ago now. It was approximately this time of the year in 2011. I'd been wanting to meet Shannon. Didn't quite know how to reach out to him, because as you can imagine, when you're in a lawsuit, you're essentially in war. But I'd asked my predecessor, John Howe, who's the Bishop of Central Florida if he could reach out to Shannon on my behalf to see if Shannon would welcome a meeting, and he did. So I went down to Richmond to meet with him with no real agenda other than to get to know him.

Moderator: So you didn't go particularly with an agenda to deal with the lawsuit?

Tory Baucum: No. I mean a lot of people think that was it. I'd say the lawsuit was the occasion. It wasn't the reason. The reason was you know, I'd been the Rector of Truro by that time for over three years. There were things I was seeing in the congregation that concerned me. Part of it was I think a reluctance to reach out to different groups in our community, and there would be theological rationalizations for some of this, like our public schools, for example. And as I dug beneath it, what I realized was there was fear. And I saw fear in different places, and then I realized you know, I couldn't just tell people to reach out to people and places they were afraid of. I had to lead by example.

And I think that was for me one of the reasons. You know, John tells us that perfect love casts out fear. I think the corollary is also true, perfect fear casts out love. And so I wanted to reach out to an adversary, and it was mostly for pastoral reasons, for the soul of our parish, for the kind of ministry I felt like God was calling us to do. And I did believe before being introduced to Coventry that reconciliation is very much at the heart of the Christian gospel, and mission. And so there was some of that motive as well.

Moderator: Thank you.

Shannon Johnston: And it's precisely because my interest was in the relationships as to how this was affecting people that I received Tory's call very, very happily. By temperament, I love to listen and I was intrigued by the call that came to me quite out of the blue in my experience. And I was delighted, and delighted that he would make time to come and sit down in the office so that we could begin to talk, not having the slightest idea of what we would talk about, or even why we would talk. But as the time came closer and closer for you to come to the offices, I felt that there was a leading of the spirit in this, and that is something that really caught me off guard. Because my sense would be - ordinarily would be to be defensive. But I did not, I felt surrounded by something that made this very - it felt very goodly from the beginning.

Moderator: And how was that first meeting? You had no agenda. You didn't know why you were doing it. You came representing if you'd like institutions that were in litigation.

Shannon Johnston: I think it probably started a little tentatively for me. A little tentatively. But by the time - we met for about what? Two hours?

Tory Baucum: Our second meeting was 2½ hours.

Shannon Johnston: Two and a half hours?

Tory Baucum: Not that I was counting, but. Yeah.

Shannon Johnston: And by the time we finished, from my point of view, my own experience it was rather tentative of - by the time we finished, it was in very deep prayer.

Tory Baucum: Yeah, that was my recollection. The first meeting was a little bit tense. Certainly not hostile, but a little bit tense. But by the end of the meeting, you know, we did pray and I remember Shannon said why don't we meet every month just to pray? So every

time I've taken a step in this relationship, and that's a typical example, Shannon has always met me and then some. So this is a joint story.

Moderator: Thank you. Okay, so you meet for the first couple of times. Do people know you're meeting or is this happening privately? That's what you call a leading question, by the way.

Shannon Johnston: Yeah. There were people on my staff who knew that we were meeting because it was happening in my office, but the meetings themselves were very private, and we considered that space to be very safe.

Moderator: Yes.

Shannon Johnston: I certainly did.

Tory Baucum: Initially just my wardens, my executive committee, kind of the inner circle of the vestry. The vestry knew that I was going to, but I didn't really update them with any details until a few months into the meetings. So we kept it pretty close to protect it. You know.

Moderator: Yeah. That's a kind of - well, it's not a kind of, it is very much a reaching out across a divide. I'm wondering whether there were people in vestry and in your office and so on who were a bit more equivocal about the wisdom of doing that.

Tory Baucum: Well, not the vestry. Truro is really remarkable you know, in this respect. It isn't afraid to take a stand if they think it's a real matter of truth and justice. Not just on this issue, but a host of issues. We've tangled with the city council about a homeless congregation that we shelter. So that's very much in the heart. But also it deepened the soul of this parish as a desire for peace, and peacemaking. I'll give you an example.

After I'd been at Truro for two years, the chapel at Virginia Theological Seminary, which is the seminary of the Diocese of Virginia, it burnt down, and we'd had a special vestry meeting on Friday of the day that it burnt down, and we knew about it. We had another meeting on Tuesday about something else, and within three days our vestry prayed and decided to give a significant sum of money to rebuild the chapel. And it was the quickest decision I've ever seen the vestry make. You know, this is our former Diocese.

It's got that kind of what some people would think of as a paradox. I'm not sure it is a paradox. I think it's just very much the spirit of Christ. It's a very forgiving place. Very forgiving parish.

I'll just tell you this other anecdote which will give you an insight into the soul of the parish. When the second ruling - we won the first round of court rulings. The second round of court rulings we lost. And we called a special prayer meeting and within twenty-four hours we had about 500 of our members gather to pray. After the prayer meeting a reporter who I didn't know was there came up to one of my colleagues and she said, I don't believe this. And my colleague said, well what? What don't you believe? And she said, there's no anger here. In fact, she said there's a sweet spirit here. I don't understand this. And I think that is something God has protected at Truro.

So though not everybody knew, not many people knew, I think when they knew they weren't entirely surprised, because I'd been there for four or five years. They kind of knew what I was about. And it was consistent with I think their deepest core.

Shannon Johnston: And my Chief of Staff who was also a practicing attorney when he became Chief of Staff was quite nervous about what the meetings would mean. What the Bishop might say. If I'd wandered into legal territory that I was on less sure footing. There were some significant misgivings about these, especially being behind closed doors, and no reports coming out of what the meetings were. So there was a lot of the fear of the unknown.

But I think as the meetings went on and everything remained upright, they began to give it a little more space. And I know now because he told me a bit later from those earlier meetings, that he began to see some change in me in my relationship to my ministry as Bishop. That he sort of connected the dots as a time of when I started to meet with Tory that I began to embrace more of a sense of confidence about my role and my vision. And I did not know that myself was happening and as I reflected on that and worked with it with my Spiritual Director, I think that's true.

Moderator: It's a meeting as it were across the divide. Sounds like it was in quite a significant way, enhancing both of you in your faith and your humanity, and your soul. Would that be fair?

Shannon Johnston: It is for me. I grew. I've started to grow as a Bishop, and I'm growing day by day with this wonderful friendship. And am becoming a better Bishop because of him.

Tory Baucum: Yes. You don't walk this path without it changing you. It changes you. And you'll have to ask my parishioner sitting on the front row whether it's changed me for the better or not. I don't know. But I know I'm different.

Moderator: Thank you. We've talked about the first couple of meetings. I'm wondering. You've talked a little bit about how you've changed over the course of it. I'm wondering what else developed as these meetings went on. You said they became a regular event monthly I think you said. So how did that progress, and what was changing about it at the time?

Tory Baucum: Well I mean I think what the Lord was doing other than being present in our meetings, so there was always three there, was we were rebuilding trust. You know, trust had been destroyed through this process, and we were rebuilding trust. And of course, the pathway to trust is transparency. One of our rules was that what was said there in essence would stay there. That we would not paper over our differences, nor would we exaggerate them. We really worked hard at that. We really I think tried to speak truthfully to one another about very difficult, painful things. But at the same time we didn't get into this kind of exaggerated rhetoric, like we're in two different religions, and stuff like that.

So I think we both felt it was important for us to be disciplined, to be honest. I mean, this has caused great disruption in a church that we both love, and so - and we had no intention of this ever going public. But we were just I think doing this for each other for our own soul's sake, for the sake of our communities that we were called to pastor. At least that was my view.

Shannon Johnston: I think my sense, too, is our prayers grew in scope and in depth. And there's no question that we began - or I began to feel that something was opening up. That our conversations were taking us into places that we would not have guessed we would go if you'd ask me, you know, how would this conversation evolve.

We began to talk about - we talked about very ordinary things as well as the extraordinary, and the contention, and the pain. But we talked about very personal things and things. Family and vocation, and theologies that influence scholars that we liked to follow. Poetry. So things opened up more and then that began to set the stage for the next step. And my image for this is that it's always been we take a step into something unknown just because we're called to take that step. We have no idea why, or I don't know why that step is to be taken, but I trust it. And trust to me has been the great virtue. Trusting God's presence in it, among us, between us. Trusting you. And being able to take that step and see where that step leads us so what do we see new. We're in a different place, so we see something new. And then that new thing that we see calls us to take another step. And we just take that step because we're supposed to. And we've never really had - still don't - have an agenda. Or much knowledge about where this is leading.

Moderator: The blogosphere, it is what it is, but it's pretty active, and I know it's been pretty active on issues like this. Frankly, irrespective of your own journey and your own friendship, I

mean can you say a little bit about the impact that those who disagree with what you're doing has had?

Tory Baucum: Yeah. I think I've gotten more attention than Shannon has on the blogs so I probably should speak first. You know, some of that is painful when you feel like it's unfair, but on the other hand, this is what I know. Is a lot of the people that write have been wounded in all of this. They have their own fears. They're not illegitimate fears. They have been betrayed. I think some of them are saying oh my gosh, please don't let Tory betray us. So some of that is going on. And you know, I do empathize with that, because I've had those experiences myself.

A lot of those people, in fact, my most severe critics I've never met. They've never met me. They don't know me. And I didn't become the Rector of Truro to fight the Episcopal Church. I think some people were hoping that might be the case, but that's not why I went. I went to pastor and lead Truro through this crisis. I felt like that's what God was calling me to do. I don't preach against the Episcopal Church. You know, I differentiate. We have differentiated at a great cost. But I still love the Episcopal Church. I've grown to love Shannon. I do consider him a friend. I do consider him to be a brother. But a brother who I think has taken a wrong turn. It's not the same thing as ceasing to be a Christian.

So you know, I think some people on the blogs want me to say the thing that I said at the beginning about schism and not say the thing about being a brother. I think they're both true. And I have to be honest with my position. And it's because you know, he does worship the same resurrected Christ that I worship, and believes the same Nicene faith that I believe that there's a lot of common ground that I can work with. You know, it's not like these things are nothing. They are something.

So I think those kinds of nuances, those kinds of conversations don't happen generally on the blog. And what I'm hoping for is that by persevering over time, if this is godly, and if this is right, the Lord will vindicate it. And that's what I'm hoping for.

Moderator: And I'll come to you with a similar question in a moment, but I just wanted to pick up on something that you said just now, Tory. That you regard Shannon as a brother, and one who's taken a wrong turn. And I'm fascinated by, and I suspect we all are, by your capacity to hold those two together at the same time. Because so much of the language and the rhetoric of conflict is about one of those being mutually exclusive with the other and I'd love to hear from you both actually about that aspect of it.

Tory Baucum: Well, I think that's where a lot of us need to grow in our discipleship. One of the persons - two people keep me company in this journey. One is Augustine. I've been reading through some of his letters especially with the Donatists and the Pelagians. I know there was a Donatist Bishop by the name of Maximinus who was a Nubian Bishop, and in his letters Augustine implores him not to re-baptize Catholic Christians. This will tear the body of Christ. But also through those letters he refers to him as a brother. My dear brother. Numerous times. One letter I counted six times he appeals to him as a brother. So one can be in error, even in serious error, and still be a brother.

Another one of my heroes, I call him the Patron Saint of Divided Churches, Saint Francis de Sales, who was you know, the Bishop of Geneva during the Reformation. Now this won't bless all of my reformed brothers and sisters out there, but when he first went there, he did not convert the Calvinists back to the Catholic church. But that was because he was very polemical. He engaged in name calling with Saint Thomas Aquinas which they had no care for. But then the Lord convicted him, that this is not the way to engage his battle. So he decided to assault Geneva with love. And he made it a rule that he would not ordain a priest unless he was convinced that they actually loved Protestants.

He no longer cited Aquinas. He would only cite the authorities they both agreed with, which was the bible and the Fathers. And there's something in that spirit that I think is right. I call it relational orthodoxy. You know, I'm completely committed to doctrinal orthodoxy. I totally

believe in it. But I'm equally committed to relational orthodoxy. I think it really does matter how we talk to one another when we're in conflict. I think it really does matter how we view our opponent, our theological opponent. And even if you don't think they're a brother, they're still made in the image of God and sometimes that isn't on display in our rhetoric.

So those things have shaped me, have influenced me. They continue to encourage me to engage this kind of relationship the way that I am. So those sometimes I feel a little bit lonely in the United States. I don't feel lonely in terms of the great cloud of witnesses.

Moderator: And Shannon?

Shannon Johnston: Well, I think what I would have to say is that I hold this same tension about agreeing and disagreeing. That I disagree in some very fundamental things that people care passionately about, and I disagree with the way our position in the Episcopal **Church** has been characterized. But at the same time, as I told my Diocese in what we call a council, but I think it's called a synod here, when the whole Diocese meets, I told them that agreement is overrated. And hearing Dr. Sam Wells today, it resonated with me very strongly. Agreement is overrated.

And I think what I'm trying to do is stay in there so to speak, and be a part of reclaiming what I think is a unique charism, the best charism of Anglicanism is a both-and quality. It's something that we can see back to the Elizabethan settlement, and it's something that we've seen in carrying forward Catholic and Protestant strands in our life as national churches, and then as provincial churches, and then as the worldwide Communion.

So I'm committed to being able to say that while we do not paper over our differences, they don't make the difference to break the relationship and to break what we might be able to have grow.

Moderator: Thank you both, particularly for that aspect of it. It leads me in a way inevitably to the question of unity, because there is always a lot of discussion about unity, and what it means and what it doesn't mean. And you may have noticed, we have our own fair share of fights over here as well. And I'm wondering what - how your thinking about unity has either changed or developed or been enhanced in some way through this process. What does it mean for you to be in unity with other Christians?

Shannon Johnston: Well, I can answer that best by giving you an example from another discipline, which is music. I was a music major in my college years, and I'm an ardent enthusiast of classical music. And Leonard Bernstein is one of my favorite conductors, and Glenn Gould is one of my favorite pianists, and it was I think in 1962 that they gave a concert of a piano concerto. Brahms' first piano concerto, and it became so famous or infamous a performance because before the performance happened, Leonard Bernstein went out on the stage and disavowed the interpretation they were about to hear. He said he so fundamentally disagreed with Mr. Gould's conception of the concerto, but nevertheless he thought that it was important. And both of them wrote about that. Glenn Gould - well, Bernstein said that he decided to conduct this because of the utter integrity of the pianist, and the sincerity of the conception. And Glenn Gould wrote about it saying that the maestro wanted to conduct it because of his commitment to something that needed to be said.

I'm not suggesting a conductor soloist kind of relationship here, but they were partners in making music happen when they both fundamentally disagreed with each other's view of the score. And that performance still says things that you cannot hear in any other performance of that concerto. So I say we go about making the music that the gospel makes, even when we find that there are points of disagreement.

Moderator: I know I think from discussions that whilst you paint frankly an incredibly inspiring picture, it's not been without cost to you both, and I wonder if you'd be prepared to say a little bit about the price that you feel you've had to pay, chosen to pay, because of the journey you've decided to take together.

Tory Baucum: Well yeah, it's hard to speak about that because so many of our sisters and brothers around the world and in the global church have truly suffered for the faith. So it puts our suffering in perspective. I mean, it has been a crucible. It's been the most intense seven years of my life. It's had effects on our family. And if you were to ask me has it been worth it, I would say right now, no. It hasn't been worth it. But I'm living in hope. I'm living in hope that the story is not over, and that the Lord will redeem the pain. And I have a deep confidence and Elizabeth, my dear wife shares this confidence that God has called us, and that part of that call is to do what we're doing now. So we're looking to see what God is going to do with it.

I'll use another musical analogy. I'm from Kansas City. Grew up around jazz, and in jazz we say there's no such thing as a bad note. Only bad resolutions. So I'm hanging in there for a really good resolution.

Moderator: Thank you.

Shannon Johnston: Because there's been a lot of bad notes in my view, but we're not done yet. We want to see this thing resolved.

Moderator: Thank you.

Shannon Johnston: And I really want to say one of the real gifts for me in this relationship as we've come to know each other and when I came to know Elizabeth, to see the incredible - well, role of leadership in spirituality with how the conversations unfold for the two of us. Some of her comments have had a great deal of influence on what we talk about, and how we talk about it.

Moderator: Which brings us actually perhaps inadvertently to the question of leadership. Because I'm very conscious that you've gone - you've made this journey not only in your capacities as brothers in Christ, but also in your capacities as leaders. And I wonder what particular challenges that you feel there are to being leaders in the context of a conflict.

Shannon Johnston: Yeah, I got one heck of a hate letter the other day from someone who was just dismayed that I could have a close relationship with a Rector of a church that pulled out of the Diocese and was part of legal action, and all of that. I've gotten people who've been confused by it, and find that maybe they sense a less than steady hand on the wheel. That I should be clearer and more resolute about how the Diocese is going to be or not going to be in a relationship with this breakaway movement as they put it.

But I must say that for me as Bishop, I've received a much more affirmation than criticism. My pastoral address in which I said that agreement was overrated, and I told the story about Tory and me, I got more positive response to that address, and I've had more good mail and phone calls than any other thing that I've said or done in my six years as Bishop. So it's not been expensive for me emotionally or spiritually. It has been very rewarding. And many people have found that - or I have found that many people have been able to come sort of out of the shadows to say thank you because something about the way in which we've been going through this divide has not felt right.

They would say I knew I felt the church was right defending the property, but the way in which it was unfolding just didn't work for me, and something like the relationship between Tory and myself makes them come to a better space with that. And I think that's really something.

Moderator: Thank you. We've got an opportunity as well for questions from the floor. I don't want to hog this opportunity - well, I do actually, but I'm not going to hog this opportunity. And I think we've got a roving mic somewhere as well. And I've asked these two gentlemen if they'd be kind enough, which they will to take questions from the floor. Does anybody want to

ask anything in particular to either or both of Tory and Shannon? Yes. Forgive me. I can't see or know names.

Audience: I was very grateful for your testimony. I imagine that like a lot of people here, it was a great encouragement. I guess one of my fears is that you both seem to be very kind, and generous, and nice people, and I just wonder how it might be possible to repeat the kind of interaction that you've had among people who are possibly a bit less nice.

Moderator: You can choose who wishes to answer that first. I'm not going to select.

Tory Baucum: We were asked some similar questions a week ago with another group we were with. I think the thing we have to remind ourselves of, and also remind other people is that I do think our friendship - and we do have a friendship - it's characterized like all friendships, by respect and affection. You know, Augustine taught me that friendship is always a gift of the Holy Spirit. And the quality of that friendship is not always a common mind, but it is always a common heart. And so it's hard to say can this be replicated, you know, in other parts of the communion, other parts of the world where there's level five conflict.

But I think what can be replicated is this desire not to live in fear of the person that you're in conflict with. And making a decision that they, too, are a son or daughter of God. However much we might think they're deceived or misled, that that - whatever their theological positions are, those are defining realities. They're not the definitive reality. The definitive reality is that they are made in the image of God, and they're endlessly pursued by Jesus Christ. And if you start there and you reach out from that place, no telling what can happen.

I've tried to do this with other people before and haven't been successful. And so I know without Shannon and his openness, his vulnerability, this would not have happened. So I'm under no illusions that this can be just trotted out, that we can do this. But I do think there are some basic principles that people like you know, Bill, and Stephen, and others can help us learn about things that we're not doing that we should be doing.

We heard a great one this afternoon from Sam Wells. I mean, understanding that you know, living into this conflict is part of our obedience as disciples. The way we engage it. Living into the mystery of Christ. Instead of seeing it as a problem that we just have to get around so we can get on and do the real gospel thing.

So those things can be learned and those things can be replicated, and then the Lord will use those I believe. But that's the best I can do right now. I don't know how nice we are, though. I think that's --

Moderator: Well, we'll defer to the front row for an answer to that in a moment.

Shannon Johnston: I can hear in the question a sense of how much of what we share is based on our individual temperaments. And I can say that the substance of what we do may have been allowed for to some degree by our temperaments. But in fact, there is a methodology, and Tory just said it, that mediators like Bill can bring that out - but the methodology can be adapted I think to any sort of temperament, which would be understanding that - as Sam well said today, reconciliation is the gospel. A commitment to each other. A real authenticity to be who you are. Not to try to be nice just because you ought to be nice, or because you're trying to get out with as little conflict as possible, but to bring a real authenticity of who you are. And if the other person feels that authenticity there, then they're more likely to trust you and feel like maybe they can share some of that vulnerability. And maybe it breaks down some of the walls that we've put up around each other.

Moderator: Thank you. David, you had a question. There's a mic on its way.

Audience: Thank you. I know this sounds very naïve, but you've used the word litigation. I just can't get my head around what litigation in the church is actually about. I mean, would you mind just explaining what the sort of actions are that the church has been involved in?

Shannon Johnston: What was the word?

Moderator: Litigation. The question was could you explain a little bit about what the litigation was about.

Shannon Johnston: Control over the property of the physical church plant and campus. Who owned the property? Once they seceded from the Diocese did they retain the property or not, was the litigation. And that's still at stake in this one last case. But the rulings have come and the settlements have come that the Diocese has now - is in control of all of the property that has been in dispute.

Moderator: And it's fair to say broadly speaking that's been the same issue across the U.S. wherever these things have been contested.

Shannon Johnston: Yes. Um-hmm. Very broadly it's been that way, with one or two exceptions.

Moderator: Okay. Thank you. Any other questions? Yes. Lady in the front row here. We'll come to you first and then there's a gentleman at the back.

Audience: It's really wonderful to hear what you had to say, and you clearly have been changed by the experience. Can you see that change kind of cascaded down to the people that you work with? Are they more willing to interact with each other?

Tory Baucum: Oh, yes. I think we're seeing it at Truro. Right now we, like so many congregations here in the U.K., we run the alpha course and we do it six times a year so we're very committed to doing it, and doing it well. And we have more seekers on our course than we've ever had in the history of the parish doing this course, and I think it is very much related to the peacemaking that we've done with the Diocese. And we're more engaged in our local community, building bridges in like, for example, the public school. We have a growing, and strong, and positive presence. And I think these are all byproducts of this kind of approach, this kind of attitude towards those that we don't quite put the world together the same way, but we build bridges to them.

Shannon Johnston: Yes. Members of my staff as relationships grow and become more public, have grown to embrace this as something that is really making a difference, and my Chief of Staff is one of the best examples of that. Where he was in relation - and being an attorney, he was involved in a lot of the legal side of it, but he was also involved with a member of Tory's staff in talking through how we can negotiate our way through things, and they formed quite a strong bond, and grew in great respect with each other. And then my administrative assistant has become very - I would say very confident about what is happening when she was sort of wondering what was going on on the other side of the door. She's now very pleased about whatever it is, it's a good thing. She says that God is blessing it.

Moderator: Thank you.

Shannon Johnston: So I guess the people we're working with are making it - it's making a difference.

Moderator: Thank you. And yeah, so the gentleman I think right at the back, and then I can see a hand in the middle as well. I can't see much back there because it's too dark, but do the best I can.

Audience: I've got the microphone anyway. Thank you. I wondered if you could just follow-up the first question which involved people who were nice and not-so-nice, but within the context as I understood it, that both were approaching the issues from a Christian point of view.

I'm currently involved in a situation where in a Christian environment, somebody professes faith, and the other professes none, and I'm struggling to get in. Can you help?

Shannon Johnston: I'm sorry about the question. It was hard for me to hear from some of the reverberation.

Moderator: Do you want to just give us a slight synthesis of the question?

Audience: Two people within a Christian environment, although one is a Christian, the other professes no faith at all. They're at loggerheads. And such skills as I've got, I'm struggling because one party professes no faith. Can you help?

Moderator: Put another way I think perhaps the question is does it make any difference to the kind of journey you've tried to take if in the questioner's situation he was trying to help two people come into that sort of - make that sort of journey, when one professes a Christian faith and the other doesn't.

Tory Baucum: Well I certainly think our common faith has been a wonderful resource, **indispensable**. But I don't think - I think people without a faith can still be led by God. You know, be led by Christ. The Holy Spirit can still be called upon if only one person believes. So I wouldn't give up hope. But I'm still suffering jetlag, and I don't think I can be more helpful to you than that at this point. I'll just be honest.

Moderator: Shannon, do you want to plead jetlag, or answer this one?

Shannon Johnston: No. I think that if you're in a situation where a person of faith and a person who lacks that faith or even that same degree of faith, you've got to connect at the level of common humanity. Meet them where they are. That's incarnational. That's what God did for us is to come to where we are and be who we are. So I think being able to meet another person at the best they can do is what I would certainly try to do.

Moderator: Thank you. We've probably got time for one more, but I think I see two hands, so let's see two more. I can only point because I can't see anything in the dark, but you've stood up anyway so you must recognize it's you I'm pointing at.

Audience: Thank you. You've clearly not let the particular conflict that you are engaged in enter your souls, and it's been a wonderful testimony this evening. But I think my question is, earlier in the history of Truro there was an agreement between Truro and the Diocese that was overturned eventually, but there was an agreement. Would you say that the position that you've got to could be called reconciliation? And how would you see what you're doing might have some impact on the legal situation in which you find yourselves? And can it affect any change?

Shannon Johnston: Well, I would answer, I would say there never was a legal agreement between the Diocese and Truro. There was a report that was submitted and was never approved. It was received, but they did not act on it because the standing committee which had to sign off on property did not agree with the report that recommended the agreement that you're referring to. So that's just one caveat.

But I think the main point of the question that I hear is what change can we bring about through what we're doing? And as I said, we're not - I'm not very clear exactly about where this is taking us, but I do know that I like the fact that more voices other than the attorneys are speaking.

I've got laypersons weighing in on this. I've got clergy weighing in on this. Congregations. Vestries. It's not just say oh, we've got to wait until the court says something. It's bigger than that now. It's better than that. And if that's a result of something that we've done, then I praise God for it.

Moderator: Do you want to add to that?

Tory Baucum: Well, I think - I agree with Shannon's summary of the legal facts. That's my understanding as well. Yeah. You know, they won so they're in a very different place than we are. I think what some people think, because I've read it on the blogs, that we've reached out because you know, we wanted to get the best deal we could get, and that's really not true. And we actually have a place that has been offered to us to worship by the Roman Catholic Diocese.

But I think Truro has a sense that God is in this, and we want to see what the Lord wants to do, and we want to give the Lord time. Shannon said something that is very meaningful to me. He says, Tory, I'm not trying to be generous. I want to cleanse the wound that has been inflicted by this fight. And I think that is reciprocated. I mean, I too want to heal the wound that you know, we've inflicted, because we've wounded each other. And so I think that's the season we're in. And where it leads to, I don't know. I'm content not to know at this point.

Audience: Thank you.

Tory Baucum: In three months though, that may change, you know.

Moderator: One final question. There was a hand up somewhere at the back. Yes.

Audience: As you dialogue do either of you find your perspective on the actual issue that divides you changing? And do you think there might ever be a time either of you where you feel actually could be it's me that's wrong about this, not him?

Shannon Johnston: That's a very profound question for me because I was asked it in another context. I have been forced to go into myself deeper about my leadership as Bishop, about my faith, my belief in what the Episcopal Church is doing. But I think what I have come down to is this, and it plays off of what Tory just said. I know that God is involved in this, and so I trust that. And I just happen to believe that God through the Holy Spirit has all of this going on at the same time. So I do not - I may disagree, but I do not say well, this is wrong. I don't like the word wrong. I just disagree. But I do believe that the Holy Spirit has all of this going on at the same time for us, and is asking us to do something with that reality.

Tory Baucum: Yeah. Let me come at it a little bit differently, because this is the question I sometimes get asked from friends, you know. Don't you think Shannon should repent? And you know, the short answer is yes. I don't think he's the only one that needs to repent, but I do. But to me the more interesting question is, is how does one repent? You know, Paul says quite clearly it's the kindness of God that leads to repentance, not the wrath of man.

And I know that, you know, I have a different view on this than Shannon does. I was an Episcopal priest for over twenty years. Most of my ministry was in left-of-center Dioceses. I've dealt with this subject for a long time. I've landed in a different place. Certainly I have to remain open. The Lord knows my tribe of evangelical Christians have been wrong about a lot of things. I mean, I admit that in Mississippi where he came from, it was the Episcopal church that stood up for African-Americans in the Civil Rights movement, not evangelical Protestants by in large. They didn't. So we've been wrong on these different issues.

I actually don't see this particular issue through a Civil Rights lens. I see it through another lens. But the history, the history that I know, the history I've experienced, and my own history of being wrong about many things, certainly causes me to be humble. And you know, with somebody like Shannon, I am open. I want to learn. I want to hear how he's come to this place.

So I think that's the best I can do. But it's not just about me. It's not just about two individuals. It's about Pastors of a church, and how we disagree and how we make decisions when we have differences. And so that's another kind of conversation, and I think that's a

little bit different than two individuals who happen to have a theological or ethical disagreement.

And I'm very concerned that we're stewards of this opportunity so that we can help heal the church. You know, because the church is always going to have disagreements. It always has had disagreements, significant disagreements, but I do not think we've handled this disagreement well at all, and we've made it much more destructive than it needed to be. That is my more immediate concern right now. I have other concerns, but that's my immediate one.

Moderator: We're I'm afraid out of time. For myself, I can't begin to thank you enough, and I suspect strongly that I'm speaking on behalf of everybody. For your willingness to come over here particularly. For your willingness to talk as frankly and openly as you have. And in a way, above all, for what you've modeled to us and to the wider church about a willingness to take a journey into the unknown, and trust God for the journey, and somehow the capacity to hold both differences and commitment to each other at the same time. It's deeply inspiring. And we want not only to thank you, but also to honor you for the journey you're making. Perhaps on behalf of all of us, let's say thank you.

[End of Audio]