

Our Journey of Faith

St. Stephen's Anglican Church • Heathsville, VA

REVIEW

1. The congregation of St. Stephen's Anglican Church has a long tradition of faithful adherence to the Christian faith. We believe that the Bible is the word of God and that the only way to salvation is through Jesus Christ. (John 14:6, Acts 4:12). For generations, The Episcopal Church represented and preached these beliefs. In the 20th Century, however, The Episcopal Church of the United States (ECUSA) began a process of "modernization," or "progressiveness," gradually allowing Western culture to corrupt its proclamation of the Gospel. This process fostered a growing concern among members who were uncomfortable with the resulting compromise of Biblical principles. This uneasiness was present at St. Stephen's as the 21st Century began when it became evident that there was a widening gulf between what we believed and what the leadership of ECUSA was pronouncing. Our concerns reached a critical point in 2003 when at the General Convention of that year, ECUSA rejected a Resolution (B001) affirming the authority of Scripture and other basic elements of Christian faith, and subsequently approved the election as bishop of an unrepentant homosexual man living in a non-celibate relationship with his homosexual partner (C045). Our Rector, Jeffrey Cerar, was a delegate to that convention where he spoke and voted in opposition to these actions of the church.

2. This 2003 action by ECUSA precipitated three years of intense prayer and discussion in our congregation as we sought God's guidance for us as individuals and as a congregation. We were vocal in the forums of the Diocese of Virginia opposing the actions of ECUSA. Similar prayers and discussions were taking place in other congregations, not only in Virginia, but throughout the country and, indeed, the international Anglican Communion, as members everywhere began to realize that one could no longer proclaim the true gospel of Jesus Christ and support the actions and beliefs of ECUSA. Gradually, the concerned congregations, by now referred to as "orthodox," began to communicate among themselves, and with the support of numerous orthodox church leaders began to develop potentially alternative Anglican organizations for the growing probability of division within ECUSA. For St. Stephen's, these prayers and discussions culminated in an intense 40-day "discernment" process, followed by a congregational vote in December, 2006. There, a 75% majority of the congregation voted to remain Anglican and disassociate from ECUSA.

3. Thus, after years of discussions, debates, meetings, "listening," and prayers throughout the worldwide Anglican Communion about the actions of the Episcopal Church, or TEC, as it was called starting in late 2006, December of 2006 became the month of action for St. Stephen's (and other orthodox congregations in Virginia as well). We have now come under the ecclesiastical authority of the Convocation of Anglicans in North America (CANA), a missionary outreach of the Anglican Church of Nigeria. Along with 19 other Virginia congregations, some of which are under other Anglican Provinces, we pursue our mission and ministry as the "Anglican District of Virginia." (For additional information about CANA, please click on the link under Resources on our site).

4. We were not the first congregation to sever ties with TEC, and congregations all over the country have continued to separate from TEC. Because of the rapid pace of events, it would be helpful for all interested parties to understand a chronology of the more significant actions of the past 30 years. Therefore, following this article, we have posted a condensed chronology of the pertinent events that reflect the steady divergence of TEC from the traditional teachings of the Anglican Church, and we recommend it as a necessary supplement to this review. The events depicted in the chronology have resulted in concern among many members and parishes not only across America, but in the worldwide Anglican Communion as well. Sadly, the chronology also reveals that the national leadership of TEC and the Diocese of Virginia have adopted a litigious and adversarial approach toward dissenting congregations, renouncing the conciliatory approach first proposed by the Diocese earlier in 2006.

MYTH VS. FACT

There has been a great deal of publicity on a global basis about many of the actions listed in the chronology. We will focus here mainly on specific points related to St. Stephen's. But first, there are two major general clarifications necessary to insure proper perspective of the growing division within TEC.

Myth: The Episcopal Church (TEC) is the largest and most important Anglican organization.

Fact: There are 38 provinces in the worldwide Anglican Communion, of which TEC is one. The Church of England is the parent church and province, of which the Archbishop of Canterbury is the Primate. TEC may be the wealthiest of the

provinces, but it is far from the largest. Of the 77 million members of the Anglican Communion, 18-20 million are in the Province of Nigeria, which is on fire for the true faith and is growing at a prodigious rate. TEC claims a membership of 2.3 million, with average Sunday attendance of 880 thousand. (Independent sources estimate that TEC is losing members at the rate of 1000 per month.)

Myth: The division within TEC is all about homosexuality.

Fact: The division is all about the sanctity of Scripture and the tenets of 2000 years of Christian beliefs. TEC has adopted the approach that the Bible is a “living document” and that new ways of thinking and worshipping simply weren’t foreseen 2000 years ago. The 2003 election as bishop of an unrepentant practicing homosexual man is just one symptom of the much larger problem.

As mentioned above, 2007 was an active year for the leadership and congregation of St. Stephen’s. As our rector said at the beginning of 2008, “This is an extraordinary time for us. What God is doing in our midst is overwhelming. The unity, energy, vitality and zeal for mission that we share are His gift. The love we have for one another and for our neighbor is His gift. The opportunity to risk everything for God is His gift. His grace is abundant. We are participating in a new reformation in the Body of Christ. We are a part of building new structures through the Anglican District of Virginia, CANA and the Common Cause Partnership. We have new relationships that raise our sights and expand our horizons for doing God’s work in the world.”

Information about our activities both internal and external has been plentiful, as we are passionate about keeping the congregation and others informed. Inevitably, however, some of the external information has been inaccurate and, in some cases, hurtful. We have chosen in the spirit of God’s love not to respond to or correct negative articles publicly. Yet when the history of this period is written, it should be accurate. To this end, we have prepared the following clarifications.

You may have heard...

In his Pastoral Address at Diocesan Council on January 26, 2007, Bishop Peter Lee of the Episcopal Diocese of Virginia said:

"We...must respond when people who no longer share our mission, seek to leave and take with them property that belongs to all of us and to our grandchildren in the faith. Our differences with the congregations that have departed the Diocese are not about property but about legacy. The church buildings of the Diocese of Virginia were given by generations past to be Episcopal Churches for generations to come and we are committed to protecting that legacy."

But we say...

When the church building in which we worship at St. Stephen's was consecrated in 1881, the purpose for which it was consecrated was stated as follows:

"...separating it henceforth from all unhallowed and common uses, and dedicating it to God's service for reading and preaching His holy word, for celebrating His holy sacraments, for offering to His glorious Majesty the sacrifices of prayer and praise, and for the performance of all other holy offices. And I humbly pray Almighty God to accept this house at our hands and to bless it with His constant presence by the Spirit through Jesus Christ, our Lord."

This building was given to God with the intention that we would worship Him there, and would read and preach His holy Word. That is the legacy to be preserved. When the holy Word of God is held in such low esteem that the leadership of the Church say it must change as we human beings change, or that we humans can rewrite the Bible because we wrote it in the first place, or that Jesus' words that there is no other way to the Father except through him are not the whole truth, then that legacy has been squandered. We who stand on the Word of God are protecting the legacy, not of the property, but of the house of God dedicated to His true worship. If there is a legacy, it is the historic, apostolic, Anglican expression of the Christian faith, which has been found by the worldwide Anglican Communion to be at odds with what the leadership of The Episcopal Church is saying and doing.

You may have heard...

That in December 2006 we formed a new church calling itself St. Stephen's Church (Anglican), and that the group that is now calling itself "St. Stephen's Episcopal Church" is the continuing congregation.

But we say...

The truth is that we are the continuing congregation. In a duly constituted meeting of the congregation, we voted by a 3-1 margin that this congregation was breaking its affiliation with The Episcopal Church, and joining CANA. The group that has since organized itself, elected a vestry after the congregational vote, assumed the name St. Stephen's, attempted to seize our funds, publicly disparaged our character and disavowed our leadership, and filed civil action against us, is not the continuing congregation.

CONCLUSION

The above information is provided only to address the important and public issue of the division that has occurred in TEC and to explain our motivation as a parish to remain faithful to the gospel as laid down in Scripture. However, the division issue is but an unfortunate distraction as we daily continue to emphasize our mission of knowing Jesus Christ and making Him known to others. If you have not yet done so, we encourage you to select the tab "About Us" on the Menu, upper left. There you will find the following profile of the faithful Christians who comprise the leadership and congregation of St. Stephen's Anglican Church.

- We at St. Stephen's Anglican Church are committed to the mission of the Christian Church: To know Jesus Christ and to make him known to others. We seek an on-going, progressive relationship with Jesus Christ, as the Creator intended.
- Worship is the most important thing we do at St. Stephen's.
- Children and youth are a delight and a priority to us at St. Stephen's. We cherish their presence in our worship.
- The people of our congregation are very much involved in our community.
- St. Stephen's members are actively involved in Christian missions.

We hope these highlights will encourage you to learn more about us and even pay us a visit. God Bless You!

CHRONOLOGY

1979

TEC adopted Resolution 1979-A053, which "re-affirm[ed] the traditional teaching of the Church on marriage, marital fidelity and sexual chastity as the standard of Christian sexual morality. Candidates for ordination are expected to conform to this standard. Therefore, we believe it is not appropriate for this Church to ordain a practicing homosexual, or any person who is engaged in heterosexual relations outside of marriage."

1998

At Lambeth Conference held every 10 years, Bishops of Anglican Communion (AC) adopt Resolution I.10 (by vote of 526-70), which, "in view of the teaching of Scripture, upholds faithfulness in marriage between a man and a woman in lifelong union, and believes that abstinence is right for those who are not called to marriage," reject[s] homosexual practice as incompatible with Scripture," and concludes that it "cannot advise the legitimising or blessing of same sex unions nor ordaining those involved in same gender unions."

JUNE 2003 *Note that ECUSA rejects Res. I.10, above.*

ECUSA General Convention approved election of Gene Robinson as Bishop of New Hampshire (Resolution 2003-C045) and passed Resolution 2003-C051, "Consider Blessing Committed, Same-Gender Relationships," which permitted local parishes to engage in public Rites of Blessing for same-sex unions; rejected Resolution 2003-B001 which would have affirmed authority of scripture.

OCTOBER 2003

Archbishop of Canterbury (ABC) Rowan Williams called emergency meeting of Anglican Communion (AC) Primates. Primates unanimously reaffirmed Lambeth Resolution I.10 "as having moral force and commanding the respect of the Communion" and warned that "[i]f [the] consecration [of the Bishop of New Hampshire] proceeds, we recognise that we have reached a crucial and critical point in the life of the Anglican Communion and we have had to conclude that the future of the Communion itself will be put in jeopardy. >In this case, the ministry of this one bishop will not be recognised by most of the Anglican world, and many provinces are likely to consider themselves to be out of Communion with the Episcopal Church (USA). This will tear the fabric of our Communion at

its deepest level, and may lead to further division on this and further issues as provinces have to decide in consequence whether they can remain in communion with provinces that choose not to break communion with the Episcopal Church (USA)." TEC's then-Presiding Bishop, Frank Griswold, joined the Primates' statement.

NOVEMBER 2003

TEC proceeded with consecration of Bishop Robinson, with Presiding Bishop Frank Griswold participating in the ceremony.

LATE 2003

ABC Williams called for Lambeth Commission on Communion to address division in AC.

JANUARY 20, 2004

Anglican Communion Network (ACN or Network) officially launched in response to crisis within TEC at organizing conference at Christ Church in Plano, TX. Bishop Robert Duncan of Pittsburgh is elected Moderator of the Network.

JANUARY 2004

The 209th Annual Council of the Episcopal Diocese of Virginia (EDVA) recognized that "profound differences have arisen over issues addressed at the 74th General Convention" of TEC and established a Reconciliation Commission to address them. The Reconciliation Commission comprised 13 members, including six presbyters (clergy) and seven laity, and met several times over the following year.

MAY 2004

The Global South Anglican Primates, comprising a majority of primates and representing more than 70 percent of the active membership of the AC, issued a statement explaining that TEC's decision to carry out the consecration was "a flagrant departure from the consensual and clearly communicated mind and will of the Anglican Communion" and that by this action TEC "has willfully torn 'the fabric of the communion at its deepest level', and as a consequence openly cut themselves adrift and broke[] the sacramental fellowship of the Communion."

OCTOBER 2004

The Lambeth Commission issued its Windsor Report, which explained that Robinson's consecration, the TEC resolution on same-sex blessings, and certain actions of the Anglican Church of Canada relating to a public Rite of blessing for same sex unions "have uncovered major divisions throughout the Anglican Communion." The report further explained that "[t]hose divisions have been obvious at several levels of Anglican life: between provinces, between dioceses and between individual Anglican clergy and laity," and that the divisions "threatened the life of a diverse worldwide Church." To promote reconciliation, the Windsor Report recommended that TEC "be invited to express its regret" for Robinson's consecration and the consequences that followed, and that "such an expression of regret would represent the desire of [TEC] to remain within the Communion." The Report called for moratoria on both same-sex blessings and ordination of gay clergy.

JANUARY 2005

The Diocese's Reconciliation Commission issued a report stating that GC 2003 "caused severe division in our Diocese." The report "lament[ed] the perilous position in which the Episcopal Church finds itself in relation to the rest of the Anglican Communion as a result of General Convention 2003," and noted that the Commission's members "wrestled with how we might come to a civil and gracious response to the bitter divisions in parts of our diocese that have arisen in response to these decisions of the 74th General Convention. "The report described the conflict within the Diocese as a "level 5 conflict" in which "[t]he outcome can only be defined in terms of win, lose, or compromise. "The Reconciliation Commission's report further acknowledged that "differences over the interpretation of Scripture are at the core of our conflict" and that these differences "threaten to divide not only our diocese, but also the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion itself." The report concluded: "[W]e cannot avoid the difficult question: 'Can we continue to live together?' We understand from some of those among us that the answer may ultimately be 'No,' and that in this case there must be provision for an amicable divorce."

SEPTEMBER 20, 2005

John Yates and roughly 25 Rectors and Vicars (including our Rector) met with EDVA Bishop Peter James Lee at Good Shepherd Church in Burke to discuss division.

LATE 2005

EDVA Bishop Lee appoints "Special Committee" comprised of three Lee appointees (EDVA Chancellor Russ Palmore, Rev. Andrew Marrow, and Standing Committee member Rev. Carolyn Parkinson) and three John Yates appointees (John Yates, Hugo Blankingship, and Tom Yates) and charges it with "helping congregations continuing in conflict over the decisions of the 2003 General Convention get on with their mission in as close a union as possible with the diocese."

JANUARY 2006

Special Committee begins meeting on a monthly basis.

JUNE 13-21, 2006

TEC General Convention

JUNE 2006

Church of Nigeria Æ Anglican Communion announces that first CANA missionary bishop will be Martyn Minns

AUGUST 20, 2006

The Church of Nigeria Æ Anglican Communion formally consecrates the Rt. Rev. Martyn Minns as CANA's first missionary bishop

SEPTEMBER 2006

40 Days of Discernment begins at seven Virginia churches.

The Global South Primates issue a statement that "the time has now come to take initial steps toward the formation of what will be recognized as a separate ecclesiastical structure of the Anglican Communion in the USA."

SEPTEMBER 28, 2006

Special Committee issues its unanimous Report and "Protocol for Departing Congregation" to EDVA Bishop Peter James Lee. Report acknowledges "the division which may cause some to 'walk apart.'" Bishop Lee describes report to Special Committee as "the right way forward."

OCTOBER 8, 2006

CANA Board votes to amend Articles of Incorporation to change name from "Convocation for Anglican Nigerians in America" to "Convocation of Anglicans in North America."

NOVEMBER 9, 2006

EDVA Bishop Lee presents Special Committee Report and Protocol to joint meeting of EDVA Standing Committee and Executive Board, which vote near unanimously (1 "nay") to "receive" them. Diocese and All Saints' Church in Dale City announce settlement of property-related issues.

NOVEMBER 15, 2006

Diocese issues press release asserting that "there is no approved protocol" for separating from the Diocese and stating that the Diocese Standing Committee and Executive Board "voted to receive the report but it is inaccurate to say it was endorsed or approved."

NOVEMBER 17, 2006

(The diocese begins to refute the conciliatory approach) Diocese Standing Committee meets; Diocese issues press release stating that "the Standing Committee further considered the report of the Special Committee appointed by Bishop Lee in late 2005" and "[t]hough the Standing Committee today did not approve or endorse the report, the Standing Committee views the report as a potentially useful way forward for those congregations in a period of deliberate discernment over their future relationship with the Episcopal Church" and "one of several possible approaches to achieving a mutually acceptable agreement." Diocese posts Special Committee report on its website.

DECEMBER 1, 2006

At request of EDVA Chancellor Russ Palmore, TFC Chancellor Hugo Blankingship and Tom Yates meet with Palmore, Brad Davenport, and TEC Chancellor David Booth Beers. Bishop Lee sends letter to all rectors and vestries of congregations in discernment, threatening "potential personal liability" for individual vestry members for decision to separate from TEC and the Diocese. Letter describes Protocol as "a useful way forward," but states that the Standing Committee, Executive Board, and TEC have not approved it.

DECEMBER 4, 2006

Articles of Incorporation of Anglican District of Virginia, An Association of Churches, filed with Virginia SCC.

DECEMBER 5, 2006

Virginia SCC issues Certificate of Incorporation for Anglican District of Virginia, An Association of Churches.

Bishop Lee writes to members of congregations participating in 40 days of discernment and voting process and urges them to "reject the tempting calls for division." Congregations conduct votes; attorneys reach agreement on informal standstill agreement that permits voting

DECEMBER 10-17, 2006

Congregations to file petitions under Va. Code § 57-9 reporting their votes (and allowing Diocese/ TEC to intervene), but stays all other litigation and any adverse ecclesiastical actions by TEC/Diocese against clergy or vestries of voting congregations.

DECEMBER 15, 2006

Organizing Meeting of initial governing board (Synod Council) of Anglican District of Virginia, An Association of Churches conducted.

DECEMBER 17, 2006

Nine Virginia congregations, including St. Stephen's, Heathsville, announce that they have voted to disassociate from TEC and affiliate with the Anglican District of Virginia, an association of churches under CANA; two other congregations announce disassociation from TEC and affiliation with Church of Uganda (AC).

DECEMBER 18, 2006

Six congregations (TFC, Truro, COA, St. Margaret's, St. Paul's, St. Stephen's) file "Report" of their congregational vote pursuant to Virginia Code § 57-9 in respective county circuit courts. EDVA Bishop Lee, Standing Committee, and Executive Board meet in Richmond and respond to congregational announcements. Among other things, Lee (1) announces formation of "Property Commission" to negotiate with departing congregations and "charge[s] [it] with addressing matters of real and personal property on behalf of the Diocese"; (2)

announces that a "Standstill Agreement" has been reached with disaffiliating congregations. Informal standstill agreement commences for 30 days of negotiation, with possibility for two 30-day renewal periods. Press release acknowledges that 15 congregations that have separated or may separate "represent just over 7% of the churches in the Diocese," "11% of baptized membership and 18% of the diocesan average Sunday attendance."

JANUARY 8, 2007

EDVA Standing Committee and Executive Board meet in Fredericksburg. Part of meeting is session with TEC Chancellor David Booth Beers. Steffen Johnson sends letter to EDVA Property Committee responding to initial requests for information and proceeding with negotiations. TEC legal counsel Goodwin & Proctor contacts Winston & Strawn to request consent to intervention in 57-9 Division Petition proceedings.

JANUARY 9, 2007

(Note that the diocese initiates the litigation, not the dissenting parishes.) Diocese announces decision to cancel standstill agreement and pursue litigation. Court grants Diocese intervention (and filing of answer) in Truro's 57-9 proceeding (unopposed, pursuant to standstill agreement).

JANUARY 17, 2007

Standstill Agreement expires.

JANUARY 18, 2007

Diocese Standing Committee concludes that 11 congregations' clergy have abandoned communion of TEC and will be inhibited, declares property of voting congregations "abandoned," and authorizes litigation.

JANUARY 19, 2007

Diocese files motion to intervene in Oatlands division proceedings under Va. Code § 57-9.

JANUARY 22, 2007

Bishop Lee and Standing Committee inhibit 27 clergy (21 formerly canonically resident in Diocese, and 6 resident in other Dioceses but functioning in VA).

JANUARY 29, 2007

Court grants TEC intervention (and filing of answer) in TEC's § 57-9 proceedings (unopposed, pursuant to standstill agreement).

JANUARY 31, 2007

Diocese files suit against all 11 CANA/ADV congregations across 5 counties, including three that did not file 57-9 petitions (COW, Christ the Redeemer Church, and Potomac Falls TEC intervenes and files answer to various congregations' § 57-9 petitions.

FEBRUARY 9, 2007

TEC files lawsuit against departing congregations, Rectors, Vestries, and Trustees. Lawsuit includes more than 200 defendants, including 88 "Doe" and "Roe" defendants. TEC and EDVA file separate Application to Consolidate all pending lawsuits.

FEBRUARY 19, 2007

At conclusion of Annual Meeting in Dar-Es-Salaam, Tanzania, Anglican Primates issue unanimous Communique addressing TEC situation. Communique calls for, among other things, TEC House of Bishops unequivocally to declare moratoria called for by Windsor Report and requests halt to litigation.

FEBRUARY 20, 2007

Court grants TEC intervention in Truro's 57-9 proceedings (unopposed, pursuant to standstill agreement).

FEBRUARY 22, 2007

CANA/ADV counsel writes counsel for TEC and EDVA requesting suspension of all pending litigation in accordance with Primates' urging.

FEBRUARY 26, 2007

TEC and Diocese separately respond and decline to agree to stay, citing need to address "all other issues" in Communique in "context"

APRIL 10, 2007

Panel appointed by the Supreme Court of Virginia grants the Application for an Order of Transfer and consolidation in Fairfax County.

APRIL 25, 2007

Court enters order appointing Judge Randy I. Bellows to preside in consolidated case in Fairfax County.

NOVEMBER 19-21, 2007

Evidentiary Hearing on the § 57-9 Petitions.

JANUARY 2008

Commonwealth of Virginia Attorney General files brief and motion to intervene, arguing that Par. 57-9 is constitutional as applied by CANA congregations.

APRIL 3, 2008

Judge Bellows decides that Virginia Statute 57-9 does apply to the dissenting Virginia congregations.

JUNE 27, 2008

Judge Bellows decides that Virginia Statute 57-9 is constitutional as applied in the case before him.

AUGUST 19, 2008

Judge Bellows rules that the application of Virginia Statute 57-9 does not violate the Contracts Clause of the Virginia Constitution.

DECEMBER 19, 2008

Judge Bellows rules the St. Stephens 1874 deed does not contain an enforceable restriction as to the use of the property; the deed is subject to the Virginia Statute 57-9(A). Thus, Judge Bellows rejected the argument of ECUSA and the Diocese that the property could not be assigned to an entity other than an Episcopal Church.

JANUARY 8, 2009

Judge Bellows entered a final order approving the petitions and reports filed by St. Stephens pursuant to Va. Code 57-9. The order is conclusive as to the title to and control of the property. It provides the trustees named in the deed hold title solely for the benefit of the CANA congregation of St. Stephens. The order provides the property consisting of cash, money and securities in various identified accounts existing as of the date of the 57-9 vote is also the property of the CANA congregation of St. Stephens.

FEBRUARY 3, 2009

The Episcopal Diocese of Virginia filed a notice of appeal.

OCTOBER 15, 2009

The Supreme Court of Virginia agrees to accept the appeal of The Episcopal Diocese of Virginia regarding the ruling of the Circuit Court.

FEBRUARY 1, 2010

ADV/CANA file brief with the Supreme Court of Virginia related to the appeal by TEC and the Episcopal Diocese of Virginia of the Circuit Court's (Judge Bellows) decision that the Division Statute does apply to the property case.

FEBRUARY 28, 2010

TEC/DVA file their appellate briefs with the Virginia Supreme Court.

APRIL 13, 2010

Oral hearing for both parties before the Supreme Court of Virginia. The hearing is open to the public.

JUNE 10, 2010

The Supreme Court of Virginia issues ruling overturning the Circuit Court's (Judge Bellows) decision. The ruling stated that the Division Statute does not apply and remanded the case to the Circuit Court for litigation of the property ownership issues themselves.

JULY 10, 2010

CANA/ADV Congregations file a motion to the Supreme Court of Virginia requesting a rehearing based on errors of fact in the June 10, 2010 Supreme Court of Virginia decision.

SEPTEMBER 24, 2010

The Supreme Court of Virginia denies CANA/ADV request for rehearing without further comment.

DECEMBER 17, 2010

Judge Bellows issues several rulings related to the conduct of the litigation. One important ruling is that the CANA/ADV request for a jury trial was denied. A bench trial will be held. The trial is estimated to take 26 days and is scheduled for the period April 25-June 14, 2011. The possibility of post-trial hearings and oral arguments may extend the process into late 2011 or early 2012 before a final decision is rendered. After that, further appeals are expected.