

Report on difficulties within The Episcopal Church of the US.

25 April 2012 Bishop Mark Lawrence (Bishop of South Carolina, of The Episcopal Church) and Bishop John Guernsey (Bishop of the Mid-Atlantic, of the Anglican Church in North America) speaking to the Guildford Diocesan Evangelical Fellowship.

Bishop Lawrence and Bishop Guernsey were in England to attend the conference of the Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans (FCA). They took an evening out to speak to a meeting of the Guildford Diocesan Evangelical Fellowship at Holy Trinity Claygate. Although I am not a member of either group I received a warm welcome.

Bishop Lawrence has remained within the Episcopal Church (TEC) in the US, whilst Bishop John Guernsey has separated from the Episcopal Church and joined the Anglican Church in North America (ACNA) which is a separate Anglican body formed by those who disagree with the liberal direction that the Episcopal Church has been taking.

Bishop Lawrence said that trends in the Episcopal Church in the US such as allowing those who have not been baptised to receive the Eucharist, and liberal views on sexual ethics was tearing the fabric of the Anglican Communion. The liberal direction by the Episcopal Church had also resulted in a radical decline in numbers.

In 2008 when he became Bishop of South Carolina he visited every parish in his first year, and he discovered the parishes fell into four different types:

- 1.) 10% of parishes were enthusiastically in favour of the liberal decisions of the Episcopal Church.
- 2.) 35% just wanted to do what they had always done and saw the job of the Bishop as being to keep all the problems of the national Church away from them.
- 3.) 35% opposed the liberal trends and feared that they might one day have to leave the Episcopal Church.
- 4.) 20% pressed him with 'are we leaving? and when?'. They were some of the strongest and most evangelistic parishes who felt that their mission was being compromised by what they considered to be the false gospel of the Episcopal Church. They did however want to remain as Anglicans and therefore wanted to separate from the Episcopal Church and then to be reconnected with another Anglican body.

When one of his parishes left the Episcopal Church and affiliated with the Anglican Church in North America (ACNA) he decided not to take the parish to court to claim their property. He took the view of 1 Corinthians 6 that it is better to lose your property than to shame the Church. He also saw ACNA as fellow brothers in Christ. However, when he did not take legal action, the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, Katharine Jefferts Schori, hired an attorney who presented himself as the counsel for the Episcopal Church in South Carolina. Bishop Lawrence said to the Presiding Bishop that she had no authority to intervene in this way and asked her to withdraw her attorney. The Presiding Bishop did not reply.

Bishop Lawrence said that his decision not to sue the parish who had left, meant that he was put under scrutiny by the Episcopal Church hierarchy and last year twelve allegations were brought against him, claiming that he had abandoned the communion of the Episcopal Church. A disciplinary board investigated and concluded that there was insufficient evidence against him.

Bishop John Guernsey of the Anglican Church in North America (ACNA) said that he had been a parish priest for 28 years, and had been an institutional loyalist to the Episcopal Church. For 15 years he had led the biblical orthodox group in the Episcopal Church's General Convention. He said that they had fought to keep the Episcopal Church biblical but "we lost". He said the tipping point was 2003 when the Episcopal Church confirmed the election of bishop elect Gene Robinson (a practising gay bishop), by which the Church was saying 'we know better than the Bible'. There had been hope that the Anglican Communion would discipline the Episcopal Church to bring it back, but he said that all that followed was the equivocations of The Windsor Report, the failed Panel of Reference, and never ending international meetings.

Consequently parish negotiated with their bishop to try and find an amicable model for their departure from the Episcopal Church. The result was that they had to give up ownership of their \$3.5 million church, and in return got ownership of a piece of land which had a \$2.7 million debt on it. It was a heavy cost, but the benefit was that litigation had been avoided. He had hoped that this would provide a precedent for other parishes in the diocese to leave without litigation, but the incoming Presiding Bishop, Katharine Jefferts Schori, said that there would be no more amicable settlements over property with parishes. The Presiding Bishop's justification for suing departing parishes for their property, was that it was necessary to secure the church buildings for future use of members of the Episcopal Church. However, Bishop Guernsey gave an example of a parish in New York state who were leaving the Episcopal Church and offered to buy their church building off the Episcopal Church. The Episcopal Church refused to sell it to them and instead sold it to a Muslim group, for less money than the parish had offered.

Bishop Guernsey drew attention to the report, *The Episcopal Church: Tearing the Fabric of Communion to Shreds (2012)* which detailed the 78 lawsuits that the Episcopal Church has brought against parishes.

The report is attached.

It is also available on the American Anglican Council website:

<http://www.americananglican.org/tec-tearing-the-fabric-2012-edition>

His parish had wanted to remain part of the Anglican Communion when they left the Episcopal Church and therefore they accepted the oversight of the Church of the Province of Uganda. (He said that the Episcopal Church tried to push them to be independent and said they would give the parish a better financial deal if they left Anglicanism altogether, but the parish refused to do so).

The Church of Uganda felt that there needed to be a Bishop to minister to their congregations in the US and consequently, Bishop Guernsey was consecrated by the Archbishop of Uganda to that role. He said that the disaffiliation with the Episcopal Church, whilst remaining within Anglicanism, gave his parish, and others that left, the freedom to proclaim the uncompromised gospel of Christ.

Bishop Guernsey said that in 2004 the main Church organisations that had separated themselves from the Episcopal Church (including: the Anglican Communion Network; Forward in Faith North America; the Reformed Episcopal Church; and the Anglican Mission in America) all came together to form the 'Common Cause Partnership'. The partnership included evangelicals, charismatic evangelicals and anglo-catholics, whose were able to come together because their unity in the biblical faith is greater than their differences. In 2009 the partnership became the Anglican Church in North America (ACNA). The Church of Uganda has recognised ACNA as the Anglican province and their Anglican partner in North America (rather than the

Episcopal Church). ACNA has expanded from 706 churches in 2009 to more than 1,000 churches in 2012, which were now formed into 22 dioceses. He said that their growth was due to the attractiveness of biblical Anglicanism.