

“Making the Case”

Explaining the rationale for proposed Resolution 1

*Friday Morning, November 2
Pasquerilla Convention Center
Johnstown, PA*

11 AM – Resolution 1

Presentation by
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Diocese of Pittsburgh
Resolution One

Resolution One has several parts. The first five define changes to the Diocesan Constitution, and the sixth defines a new Canon.

The first part amends the Diocesan Constitution to define that the Diocese of Pittsburgh is a constituent member of the Anglican Communion, in communion with the sea of Canterbury, upholding and propagating the historic Faith and Order as set forth in the Book of Common Prayer.

The second part states that the Diocese of Pittsburgh shall have membership in such province of the Anglican Communion as defined by diocesan Canon.

The third part describes the selection of “Deputies to Extra-Diocesan Conventions or Synods,” to be made at a diocesan convention.

The fourth part defines the boundaries of the Diocese of Pittsburgh, and opens up admission of parishes outside the boundaries into the diocese, provided that they meet all other requirements set forth in the Constitution and Canons of the Diocese of Pittsburgh for canonical admission.

The fifth part describes how a parish may come into union with the Diocese of Pittsburgh.

The sixth part is an additional Canon which describes “Provincial Membership within the Anglican Communion.” It currently states that the Diocese of Pittsburgh shall be a member of that Province of the Anglican Communion known as *The (Protestant) Episcopal Church in the United States of America*. This Canon would be revised later to define any change in Provincial Membership.

“Making the Case” – explaining the rationale for Resolution 1

*An address given to a pre-convention hearing prior to the
142nd Diocesan Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh meeting at Johnstown, PA,
by The Rev. Jonathan N. Millard, on November 2, 2007*

Opening Prayers

For the Church (#7 BCP p.816)

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.*

For the Mission of the Church (#8 BCP p.816)

Everliving God, whose will it is that all should come to you through your Son Jesus Christ: Inspire our witness to him, that all may know the power of his forgiveness and the hope of his resurrection; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

For a Church Convention (#12 BCP p.818)

Almighty and ever living God, source of all wisdom and understanding, be present with those who take counsel in this 142nd Convention, shortly to begin, for the renewal and mission of your church. Teach us in all things to seek first your honor and glory. Guide us to perceive what is right, and grant us both the courage to pursue it and the grace to accomplish it; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Introduction:

Welcome and thank you for making the effort to be here for this pre-convention meeting. I have been asked to “Make the Case” and explain the rationale for Resolution # 1 that will be coming before Convention this afternoon. As I expect you all know the effect of Resolution 1, if passed, will be to pave the way for the removal of the existing accession clause from our Constitution, to enable the Provincial Membership of the Diocese to be determined by Canon, and to make provision for Convention to receive into membership of the diocese parishes outside the existing geographical boundaries. Today’s Resolution is the first stage of a three-stage process. This is the first reading, which in and of itself will effect no actual changes. It will take a second reading at next year’s Annual Convention to effect these changes. Then, thirdly, the actual Province to which Pittsburgh will in the future belong will need to be named and approved by Convention.

In order to “make the case” for why I, and so many others, believe that these proposed changes are vital for us at this time, I will seek to present the current state of the crisis in the Anglican Church worldwide and The Episcopal Church (TEC) here in the States. I will also be addressing the various options that have been the center of diocesan wide discussions in the preceding months, and why I believe that the option before us today in Resolution 1, to make realignment possible, is the right course for us to take.

Section I – What is the Crisis?

The crisis is that The Episcopal Church, and the 77 million member worldwide Anglican Church, of which we are a part, is on the verge of breaking up. We cannot put our heads in the sand and act as if this will all just go away or have no bearing on us. Circumstances are such that change is coming upon us, and is now here, whether we want it or not. The schism or rift within the church has already started.

Since the election and consecration of Gene Robinson, a partnered, non-celibate homosexual man, as Bishop of New Hampshire in November 2003, as well as the approval, at diocesan level, of same-sex blessings, the Episcopal Church has been at the center of an international church crisis. This crisis, in the words of gathered leaders of the world’s Anglican churches, tears ‘the fabric of our communion at its deepest levels.’ (Primates Statement, October 16, 2003).

As things stand today, 22 of the Anglican Communion's 38 national churches, called Provinces, representing some 75% of the world's Anglicans, have declared broken or impaired communion with TEC.

Since 2001 some 250 parishes or portions of parishes and thousands of individuals have left the Episcopal Church. In all likelihood the break up will accelerate in the coming days, weeks or months – depending on how circumstances unfold. There are presently some 20 to 25 parishes in active litigation in the Episcopal Church across numerous dioceses. Just two days ago the Presiding Bishop wrote to Bishop Duncan warning him that if we go ahead with Resolution # 1 she will take swift action to begin disciplinary action against the bishop which could lead to his removal.

All of the above paints a very sad and serious picture for many reasons, but particularly because Christian unity is being destroyed. Two reasons, in particular, stand out as to why unity matters:

1. Our Lord Jesus himself prayed for the unity of the Church and taught us likewise to pray and work for the unity of the Church (John 17:21)
2. Unity is a powerful and positive witness to the world.

Alongside the Gospel pleas for unity, however, is the Gospel imperative for Truth. Indeed part of the work of the Holy Spirit is to lead us into all truth (John 16: 13). What happens then when unity and truth conflict with each other? Which is more important? I am reminded of the old adage, expressed in various ways and attributed to various authors: – “In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; and in all things, charity.”

Now I realize that this doesn't settle the matter before us – but it can help us ask some of the right questions. So what are we dealing with in the present controversy – is it an essential or a non-essential?

The crisis the church is facing certainly is concerned with sexual ethics and morality; but it also concerns church discipline and what it means to be in communion with other Christians. But the issues that divide our church go further than that. They concern the nature of God and basic beliefs about what the Gospel of Jesus Christ is all about. But *at the heart of the debate*, and above all else, the crisis is about the authority and supremacy of the Bible. This, unequivocally, is an essential matter.

All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16,17)

The central question before the church, therefore, is: Are we willing to receive this, embrace this, and order our common life together in submission to the Scriptures, or not?

Ten examples of how the essentials of the Christian Faith are being eroded, challenged, or contradicted by The Episcopal Church:

1. There is confusion concerning who God is:

Over the past 40 years there has been a drift away from orthodox ways of speaking about God. In some places in TEC instead of God being referred to as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, He is addressed only by *function* as creator, redeemer and sustainer, and not in *personal* ways. The problem with this approach is that it makes God more remote and the fact is God has revealed himself to us through the Scriptures not just by function, but in personal terms as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Another example is when the name LORD is replaced with “God.” So instead of the Liturgical greeting: “The Lord be with you” you may encounter in some parts of TEC “God be with you” or even “God is in you” with the response: “and also in you.” The word LORD apparently is perceived as too male, and too authoritarian. The earliest creedal statement was simply “Jesus is Lord.” And yes, it was meant to be authoritarian. I was very sad when I attended the Interfaith service at Calvary last week, to see precisely such a change had been made to the liturgy. When it came to share the Peace, the wording was not: “The peace of the Lord”, but rather “The Peace of God.”

2. There is a lack of clear teaching about the divinity of Christ:

In answer to a question referencing the divinity of Jesus, in an article published earlier this year, the Presiding Bishop, Katharine Jefferts Shori, said this: “If you begin to explore the literary context of the first century and the couple of hundred years on either side, the way that someone told a story about a great figure was to say ‘this one was born of the gods.’ That is what we’re saying. This carpenter from Nazareth or Bethlehem – and there are different stories about where he came from – shows us what a godly human being looks like, shows us God coming among us.”

At best that is ambiguous or confusing, and at worst it is false teaching. Jesus was much more than someone who “shows us what a godly human being looks like.” And the Church does not say that he was “born of the gods.” The biblical witness and the faith of the church is that Jesus is the Son of God: fully God and fully man. The Word became flesh (John 1). We proclaim this truth weekly in the Nicene Creed.

3. There is a lack of clear teaching about Salvation and Sin:

Questioned about selfishness and fallenness, the Presiding Bishop said this: “The human journey is about encouraging our own selves to move up into higher consciousness, into being able to be present in a violent situation without responding with violence ... “ and in the same interview she went on to say: “The question is always how can we get beyond our own narrow self-interest and see that our salvation lies in attending to the needs of other people.”

This is not the Gospel story of sin and redemption. The Scriptures teach that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (Rom. 3:23). The Scriptures teach that salvation is not through our works, or our efforts to move up to a higher consciousness, or even through attending to the needs of others. Our salvation lies in Jesus, “who while we were still sinners, died for us.” (Rom. 5:8); and all who believe in the LORD and call upon his name will be saved. (Rom. 10:13)

4. There is a drift towards universalism:

The Presiding Bishop says of Jesus: “we who practice the Christian tradition understand him 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” (Time Magazine: July 17,2006). Jesus said: I am the way the truth and the life no one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6).

When, some years ago, I first heard Bishop Duncan speak of us living in a time of Reformation of the Church throughout the world, I confess I wondered if that was a little grandiose. I now believe, without a doubt, that he was right. This was illustrated for me, once again, just last week. I was deeply saddened to hear Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu deny the particularity of the Christian Faith, mocking the idea that Jesus could possibly be the only way to God, and declaring that all religions are worshipping the same God, just by different names. The archbishop is a great man who has done wonderful work for reconciliation and peace. I salute him for all the good he has done, but I am sad and troubled that he would be so dismissive of the supreme work of love and salvation that our Lord Jesus Christ did for us on the cross.

5. There is a loss of confidence in the Gospel as Good News for all:

The official teaching of the Anglican Church on the issue of human sexuality is that which has been set out by the Lambeth Conference in 1998 (Resolution 1:10). But here’s the key point concerning the Gospel that I want to make:

[The Conference] “recognises that there are among us persons who experience themselves as having a homosexual orientation. Many of these are members of the Church and are seeking the pastoral care, moral direction of the Church, and *God’s transforming power for the living of their lives and the ordering of relationships.*” [emphasis added]. It is that confidence in the transforming power of God that the actions of TEC now challenge. So instead of welcoming and loving all into the church so that they might experience transformation, TEC simply welcomes and affirms people just as they are – denying them the healing and hope and transforming power of God.

6. There is erroneous teaching and practice regarding human sexuality

Over the past couple of decades there has been a serious rejection of the clear teaching of the Bible and the Church on human sexuality and marriage. The clear teaching of Scripture and tradition and of the one, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic church is that sex is for marriage. The only sexually intimate relationships that are good and holy according to Scripture and tradition are those between a man and a woman, within an intended life long, faithful covenant of marriage. That means that pre-marital sex, extra-marital sex, gay sex, *any* sex outside of marriage is *all* contrary to God's will. This is the clear teaching of the Bible and of Jesus.

7. There is a seemingly 'social justice only' view of the mission of the church

I have struggled to find any clear statements from the Presiding Bishop about the basics of the faith. From her inaugural sermon through to all kinds of talks and sermons and interviews that I've seen or heard extracts from she seems to be concerned primarily with a political and social gospel. She seems to be concerned principally about the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals. There is much to be commended about these goals and much to challenge us – but they are by no means the same thing as the message of salvation for those who are perishing. (John 3: 16). If the Millennium Goals are our gospel message it falls seriously short of the message of proclaiming "Christ and him crucified." (1 Corinthians 2:1-5).

8. There is contempt for the Authority of the Bible

Bishop Bennison has said: "The church wrote the Bible, and the church can rewrite the Bible." No, that is a serious error.

9. There is failure by Bishops to defend the faith

The role of a bishop in the words of the 1662 ordinal is: "to banish and drive away from the church all erroneous and strange doctrine contrary to the Word of God." – Here in the States, the very opposite is true. Rather than drive away false teaching many of the bishops of TEC embrace it, celebrate it and declare to be good and holy that which God declares to wrong. To ordain an openly gay, non-celibate man – when the rest of the world urged TEC not to do this – is not only contrary to Scripture but is also an arrogant display of American intransigence.

10. There is a lack of respect for truth or unity

There seems to be a cavalier spirit among many in TEC that disregards the mandate for unity with the one holy, catholic and apostolic church. Claims are made by 'progressives' that they are putting truth ahead of unity. However the 'truth' they claim is that it's a matter of social justice and Christian virtue to bless same sex unions and permit practicing gay and lesbian people to hold any office within the church. This is, of course, is contrary to the truth as revealed in Holy Scripture. And the only unity they secure is among a tiny minority of the church worldwide.

Headline events over the last 4 years that have brought us to this moment of crisis:

1. November 2003: Gene Robinson consecrated bishop of New Hampshire.

The fabric of the Anglican Communion was torn. The Roman Catholic Church suspended scheduled talks with the Anglican Church. The Russian Orthodox Church broke relations with ECUSA. This fracture is not some localized denominational squabble – rather it goes to the core of what it means to be a part of the one holy, catholic and apostolic Church.

2. October 2004: Lambeth Commission released the Windsor Report which among other things:

- a. Reaffirmed Lambeth 1: 10 and the authority of scripture as central to Anglican common life;
- b. Called for repentance;

- c. Called for a moratorium on public rites of same sex blessings;
- d. Called for a moratorium on the election and consent of any candidate to the episcopate living in same sex union. (Since then California has short-listed an openly gay, non-celibate partnered man and Chicago currently has short-listed a non-celibate partnered lesbian woman.)
- e. Called for the establishing of a common Anglican Covenant which would make explicit the loyalty and bonds of affection which govern the relationships between the churches of the Communion.

3. February 2007: Primates Meeting at Dar es Salaam. The Primates:

- a. Declared that TEC had not been clear;
- b. Declared that they are not yet in a position to recognise that The Episcopal Church has mended its broken relationships.
- c. Agreed to establish a Pastoral Council and a Pastoral Scheme to provide for those (including Pittsburgh) who had requested alternative Primatial oversight;
- d. Requested, that the House of Bishops of TEC make an unequivocal common covenant that the bishops will not authorize any Rite of Blessing for same-sex unions in their dioceses and confirm that a candidate for Episcopal orders living in a same-sex union shall not receive the necessary consent unless some new consensus on these matters emerges across the Communion.
- e. Requested that the answer of the House of Bishops be conveyed to the Primates by the Presiding Bishop by 30th September 2007 and that if the reassurances requested of the House of Bishops cannot in good conscience be given, the relationship between The Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion as a whole remains damaged at best, and this has consequences for the full participation of the Church in the life of the Communion.

4. March 2007: House of Bishops met and issued a statement rejecting the requests of the Primates.

They said of the Primates Pastoral Scheme:

- a. That it would be “injurious to TEC”;
- b. That “it violates our founding principles as The Episcopal Church following our own liberation from colonialism and the beginning of a life independent of the Church of England”;
- c. That “most of all it is spiritually unsound.”

In my view this is a breathtakingly arrogant response by TEC. Indeed when I first read this I thought it had to be a spoof – surely the House of Bishops would never say such things. I was wrong: they could and they did.

5. September 20-25.2007: House of Bishops Met in New Orleans.

There are many opinions out there as to what the official response of the HOB really amounted to – but the consensus of most seems to be that the clear and unequivocal acceptance of the requests of the Primates failed to be given. We still await the response of the Primates.

Archbishop Mouneer Anis, Primate of Jerusalem and the Middle East, said this to the House of Bishops:

“My friends, you may believe you have discovered a very different truth from that of the majority in the Anglican Communion. It is not just about sexuality, but about your views of Christ, the Gospel, and the authority of the Bible. Please forgive me when I relay that some say you are a different church, others even think that you are a different religion.”

“For the first time in centuries, the fabric of our Communion is tom. Our energies have been drained and our resources are lost and it is difficult for both of us to continue like this.”

“My friends, if you really believe that the truth revealed to you is different from that shown to the rest of the Communion, then you need to uphold that claim with boldness even at the risk of losing unity. If you think it is right and necessary to ordain and consecrate practicing homosexuals and that you should bless same sex partnerships or even marriages, you should be true to what you believe is right and accept the consequences.”

“Today I appeal to you to respond with great clarity to the requests that were made in Dar es Salaam.”

“If you don’t commit yourself to the Dar es Salaam recommendations would you be willing to walk apart at least for a period during which we continue our discussions and dialogue until we reach a common understanding, especially about the essentials of our faith? Forgive me when I say that for many of us in the Communion, we feel that you have already walked apart at least theologically from the standard teaching of the Communion.”

“I know that you value personal freedom and independence. The whole world learns this from you. You need to demonstrate this by securing freedom for the American orthodox Anglicans who do not share your theological direction. Show your spirit of inclusiveness when you deal with them. I am afraid to say that without this more and more interventions from other provinces are going to happen. No one wants this.”

(The above paragraphs are extracts from the Archbishop’s address and not the full text)

Section II – Options before us:

There are two basic options:

- Continue to be a part of The Episcopal Church; or
- Realign with a different part of the Anglican Church

There are a number of ways that each of the above could be done and I’m going to speak about 2 options for each.

First: The options to stay...

1 (a). Embrace TEC

One way to stay is to embrace TEC. There are those who believe this to be the only right course of action. They might say: “You should never leave or realign or do any such thing. We are Episcopalians – we always have been and we always will be. We are an independent, self governing, National Church. We have acted within our rights. It’s not for a minority within the Episcopal Church or a majority from without to tell us what to do. And we will certainly not have any foreign powers interfering.”

Those who feel this way may, fully and unashamedly, desire to embrace the new teachings of TEC and wholeheartedly support the direction the church is heading in. If that’s what folks feel – then, as archbishop Anis effectively said on Friday, ‘Do it and accept the consequences.’

Indeed Resolution # 2 before Diocesan Convention today gives us the opportunity to do precisely that. We can restore Article 1, Section 1 of the Diocesan Constitution and Canons – which would put back the unqualified accession clause, modified in 2004. In essence that resolution would have us fully endorsing and recognizing, without any qualification, the full authority of The Episcopal Church.

Let me be very clear about where I stand in relation to this first option to stay put and embrace and endorse TEC, without qualification:

1. I cannot and will not do this. I firmly believe that the Episcopal Church has embraced, and is continuing to embrace, a different gospel to the Gospel of the New Testament and of our Lord Jesus Christ.

2. I don't believe that such a course to stay put, fully supporting TEC, in any way reflects the will of most of the congregations of this diocese.
3. Such a course of action, would I believe – sooner or later, pave the way for a lasting breaking of the bonds of fellowship and communion between TEC and the worldwide Anglican Communion and most of the rest of the one, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. If TEC continues on its present course it will become an increasingly irrelevant, ineffective, backwater of the church. Or to be even blunter, it will, in my opinion, continue its slide into oblivion, as it becomes ever more a heretical and dying sect. Already TEC is Moribund. This church is terminally ill. The statistics paint a sad and pathetic story: The numbers of churches that are growing is declining while the numbers of churches that are shrinking continues to rise. The Episcopal Church is dying.
4. Nevertheless, notwithstanding my own firm and clear views on this, I also want to acknowledge that this option to reaffirm our unqualified accession to TEC may, for some, be driven by honest, sincere, genuinely held beliefs that the Holy Spirit is leading TEC into new truths and that the new teaching is prophetic. Furthermore some believe that the full inclusion of practicing homosexual people at every level of the church, including as bishops, priests and deacons, is a matter of social justice and that, regardless of the costs and consequences, this is the course that must be pursued.

Though I believe such an approach is profoundly misguided, and that those who hold to it are wrong, we must nevertheless ensure that in all our dealings with people who hold these views that we are gracious, kind and loving. Our job is not to judge or condemn. Our job is not to seek their harm or to sue them.

We should leave it up to God. We are not going to sort out, once and for all, the issues that divide us overnight – it could take 10, 20, 50 years. But, in the meantime, we need, somehow, to find ways to bless one another, even as we walk apart. We need to apply the “Gamaliel principle.” (Acts 5:27-40). In that case Peter and the Apostles were arrested and told by the ruling council to stop preaching about Jesus. But Peter's response was basically: “we must obey God rather than men ... [we're not going to stop]. The council was furious and wanted to kill them – but one of them, a Pharisee called Gamaliel, said: [Be careful what you do to these men...] “let them alone, for if this understanding is of men it will fail; but if it is of God you will not be able to overthrow them.” Remarkably, they took his advice and let Peter and the others go free.

I believe this is what each side should say to the other side in the present debate.

1(b). Stay as a 'Faithful Remnant'

Another way to stay in TEC is for folks to stay as a 'faithful remnant.' Those who might choose to follow this course would continue to preach and live out the Gospel unswervingly. They would stay faithful while continuing to challenge TEC from within and calling people to repentance and faith. They would model righteous living.

This is an honorable position. It is a way of providing pastoral care, teaching and challenge to those who will remain even after most orthodox believers have realigned. For one or two parishes – if an orthodox rector left-he or she would be leaving 'the sheep' to an uncertain future, and behaving as a 'hired hand.' (John 10:1-13). Certainly I would want to bless and pray for, work alongside and support all those who, in conscience, choose this option.

However, I do not believe that this is a wise course of action for the vast majority of the parishes of our diocese for three reasons:

1. It is not safe... once the existing rector or the bishop is no longer here – some parishes may very well not be able to appoint a new rector of their own choosing. You cannot call a rector without the approval of the bishop. Yes, praise God, Mark Lawrence, has received the necessary consents to be the next bishop of South Carolina – but I think we would be foolish to assume that that means that the hurdles to future orthodox nominations are now gone. On the contrary the attitude and actions we see coming from the Presiding Bishop's office is submit or be sued and/or deposed.

2. If not now, when? The issues before the church are plain and clear. We are divided by serious and substantial theological and ecclesiastical differences (as I have just set out). There is attrition all around us. Numerous parishes are being sued, thousands of parishioners have already left the Episcopal Church. This ship is going down – it is time to realign.
3. I believe this is a time for the people and parishes of the Diocese to stand firmly alongside our bishop. He is being directly opposed by the Presiding Bishop, who is threatening to have him deposed. I believe we are called to rise to the challenges of realignment that are now before us.

Second: The options to realign...

2 (a). Realign as individual Parishes

One way for realignment to happen is for individual parishes to realign themselves within the Anglican Communion. This has been happening all over the country – though not yet in Pittsburgh. This could be achieved by an individual parish seeking to end their relationship with the Diocese of Pittsburgh and the Episcopal Church. Parishes could rescind their own accession clauses and seek to negotiate some sort of exit with the bishop. Bishop Duncan has already indicated his willingness to enter into discussions with any parish about how there could be an amicable parting of the ways – whether on the progressive or the conserving side of the debate. And indeed, the Calvary lawsuit settlement provided a mechanism for parishes who might wish to leave.

Let me say three things about the above strategy:

1. It could come to this. Parishes do have a separate legal identity in and of themselves. Any parish could try to leave the Diocese of Pittsburgh and The Episcopal Church on their own and, as a parish, be received into another diocese under another Province.
2. This strategy may have varying degrees of merit from one parish to another. Some parishes, have very strong claims to the legitimate title of their property that would very likely stand up to any challenge should such a challenge be made, others are much more directly tied to the Diocese or National Church. But, if all else fails, any parish can always fall back on this position and go it alone if they have to.
3. I believe that this ought not to be a first course for any parish in Pittsburgh. Rather, let us stand together shoulder to shoulder with our fellow faithful believers and our bishops here at this time.

2 (b). Realign as a Diocese

The option that is coming before the diocese, by resolution to Convention today, is one that provides for the possibility of realigning the Diocese as a whole with another Province of the Communion. Under such a scheme, if carried out, we would stay together as the Diocese of Pittsburgh, (except for those who would choose to leave and go back to TEC) – but we would no longer be a part of TEC. We would belong to another Province – we don't yet know where. In all likelihood this would be a temporary and transitional arrangement. My hope and expectation is that in the fullness of time there will be a new orthodox Anglican Province here in America. But this could take some years in the making.

There are four comments I want to make about this strategy:

1. I believe that this is the next right step for us to take. This is probably the way to secure the largest possible majority for the best possible outcome. That outcome being the continued faithful ministry and mission of the greatest number of parishes in this diocese.
2. It is becoming daily more important for us to get beyond the distractions and uncertainties of being a part of The Episcopal Church. By realigning to a faithful, missional, Province we can move ahead focused on the vital mission that God has called each parish to where they are located, to Pittsburgh, and to the world.

3. This strategy does not entail individual parishes ‘doing’ anything. The actions to effect this change would be those of Diocesan Convention.
4. Finally on this, there is still a lot of water to go over the dam – a lot could happen between the first vote, later today, and the second vote, whenever that should be, next year. Notwithstanding the position taken by the Presiding Bishop in her letter to Bishop Duncan this week – the fact remains that it would be in everyone’s best interests to try and negotiate a settlement of these matters. Not to do so would be a real tragedy.

A word about Legal Issues:

1. First, some are saying that the proposals in Resolution 1 are a **legal impossibility**, and exceed the power of the diocese to enact. We also know that the Executive council of TEC, at its meeting on June 14, 2007, has declared the Constitutional changes that were made at Pittsburgh’s 2004 convention null and void. It is interesting to me that it took the executive council almost 3 years to decide that. But, in any event, all I want to say about the legal impossibility of this is “we’ll have to see.” We did act in 2004 and are again seeking to act today according to the provisions of our Constitution and Canons, which provide a mechanism for their amendment. I think it is fair to say that the constitution and canons never envisioned the situation we now face. At the time of the making and adhering to the Accession Clause, it would have been unthinkable that the National Church would behave the way it now behaves.

I would also add this. Just a couple of weeks ago the Archbishop of Canterbury, in a letter to Bishop John Howe, wrote this: “Any diocese compliant with Windsor remains clearly in communion with Canterbury and the mainstream of the Communion, whatever may be the longer-term result for others in The Episcopal Church. The organ of union with the wider Church is the Bishop and the diocese rather than the Provincial structure as such.” I believe that we are absolutely staying within the mainstream of the Communion by acting as a diocese with our bishop.

2. Second, I can give you **no definitive answer** about the legal status of parish or diocesan property – because it is just not clear. The law varies from State to State – there are some 20 to 25 cases ongoing at this time and more contemplated.
3. There has been much said concerning the **Denis Canon**. This is a canon of TEC, adopted in 1979 which basically says that all real and personal property held by or for the benefit of any Parish is held in trust for the national church and the diocese in which the parish is located.

However this has never been tested all the way to the Supreme Court. Different States have interpreted this in different ways. Once again different parishes will have different situations as to the strength or otherwise of their claim to title of their property.

4. **We must obey the law** – if any buildings or other property are ruled not to belong to a parish then that parish must hand over the keys and walk out. However, I believe that it is a matter of Christian Stewardship that parishes not do that unless it is clear that they should – either because there is a clear and final ruling by the courts or because the whole process becomes so corrupting and distracting from the work of the Gospel, that they come to the view that they should walk away regardless.
5. **A word of reassurance:** You won’t show up at your parish church on Sunday morning after our vote today and find “Do not cross this line” yellow tape encircling the church building. This will take time to resolve - maybe years.
6. Finally, on the legal front, we could of course still come to **an agreed settlement**. Indeed this is something that I and others are hoping for, praying for and working towards.

Section III – The Way Ahead:

I want to conclude by saying this. At the end of the day the issues before us are not about canons and conventions, laws and lawsuits – they are about the centrality of the cross of Christ, which is foolishness to the Greeks and a stumbling block to the Jews. The issues are about what do we mean when we use the word God. Do we mean the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and the God and Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ or do we mean some generic, other god? The issues before us are rooted in the authority of God’s Word as revealed in Holy Scripture. We are not arguing about sex, or over the minutiae of laws, but the timeless truths of the Gospel of Jesus Christ which is life and hope and salvation to those who are perishing.

Because of this we cannot just agree to differ and carry on as if nothing has changed. There are profound and irreconcilable theological and ecclesiological differences between us. I believe those who hold to the traditional teachings of the Bible, and the one holy catholic and apostolic church in this diocese need to make a stand today. We should stand with our bishop and with the overwhelming majority of millions of Anglican Christians around the world. Enough is enough. We will not be bullied, or sued, or ‘dialogued’ into submission. We will make our stand and what will follow will follow.

For five years I practiced law in the UK. I was in court over a thousand times. Much of my work was in the area of family law and much of that concerned divorcing couples arguing over property and children. I learnt some very important lessons in those years.

First, a divorce decree is just a piece of paper that confirms what has already happened – namely the irretrievable breakdown of a marriage; I think our realignment will simply ratify that which is already happening.

Second the parties in a divorce almost always are able to agree better terms as to the distribution of assets or custody of children than the courts can order. But you can be sure of this – if the parties cannot agree – the courts will rule. But how they will rule no one in this room can tell us. The law is a very blunt instrument in these matters. We should do all we can to settle this matter – even in the corridors of the courts – indeed our Lord commands us to do precisely that.

And thirdly, when parents fight and there are children it is the children who *always* and *inevitably* get hurt. And who are the children in our situation? They are God’s children – regardless of age – who belong in our parishes. They are also the people who are not part of our parishes – but who so desperately need to know and experience the healing love and transformation that comes from God through Jesus.

If we act today according to our consciences, and if resolution 1 is passed with a significant majority, as I believe it will be, then we may find ourselves at the mercy of those who oppose us. If they choose to depose the bishop or sue any of us, let that be on their consciences. But my conscience is clear in seeking to enable this diocese and the people of Church of the Ascension, whom I serve, to be free to be a part of a Biblically Orthodox, Missional, Province of the Anglican Communion. I will not walk away from the people and the property that have been entrusted to my care. I will not cease in proclaiming the Good News of God’s saving love to those as yet outside the church.

But let me say this to those who are minded to sue us or would be supportive of such action. What does winning – that is to say taking the property – look like? I’ll tell you what it looks like. It looks like 50 or more of the parishes of this great diocese closing forever.

There is a better way. There is a more excellent way. There is the way of love that does not resort to the law, but rather acts with humility, and grace, and compassion, which allows each side to walk apart. That kind of charity is the kind of charity that our broken and hurting world needs to see in us. I pray that all of us may have the wisdom and the grace to love justice, show mercy and walk humbly before our God. Our actions in the coming weeks and months will speak much louder than our words this day. May God have mercy on us and may we be found faithful to Him and to his Word. Amen.