

*Statement by Dave Schofield on Homosexuality and the Episcopal Church*

[Note: Dave **Schofield**, Episcopal Bishop of San Joaquin, CA, wrote in his column in the September issue of the Church's "San Joaquin Star" on the controversial issue of homosexuality in the Church. Part of his statement was published in the October 2003 Newsletter. Here is the full text.]

Dear People of God,

I write to you as your Chief Pastor at the conclusion of the 74<sup>th</sup> General Convention of the Episcopal Church. No doubt you already are aware through the public media of some of the alarming decisions made at Convention that depart from the Church's traditional teaching on sexual morality and marriage. This has been a most trying time for your convention deputies and for me as we sought to uphold Biblical authority on two matters in particular.

First, you need to know that our deputation voted against the approval given by the General Convention for the consecration of a man who is a practicing homosexual to become a bishop of this Church in New Hampshire. And second, we also voted against the resolution that now allows the blessing of same sex unions in the Episcopal Church. No liturgy for such a service was created or proposed. Therefore, I have already sent a pastoral directive to all of the clergy of this diocese reminding them of the Prayer Book rubric which requires the bishop's permission for any service not already provided in the Book of Common Prayer or the Book of Occasional Services. No service purporting to be a blessing of same-sex unions shall be allowed in this diocese by this bishop. To disobey such a pastoral directive brings with it serious consequences for any clergy.

We are deeply saddened that the Convention endorsed these two schismatic acts, for they alienate the Episcopal Church from the worldwide Anglican Communion and repudiate the clear teaching of Holy Scripture. By these two decisions, the Episcopal Church, which we love and treasure, has violated its own constitution which commits us as a Church to "upholding and propagating the historic Faith and Order" of the one, holy, catholic and Apostolic Church.

As faithful Episcopalians we grieve with other Christians who are shocked and offended by these decisions. Many of our own dioceses have already begun to communicate to me that they feel the Church has abandoned them

in rejecting the teaching of the Bible. As a diocese, San Joaquin stands firmly with mainstream Anglicans around the world in the defense of the faith and unity of the Church. (The Episcopal Church USA is the only province of the 38 provinces in the worldwide Anglican Communion to make such catastrophic decisions.)

Even within the Episcopal Church the orthodox bishops make up nearly half of the House of Bishop. In the vote concerning Canon Gene Robinson becoming a bishop, 43 of us voted against this request; 62 bishops with their vote prevailed. This means that the margin of his approval was only nine votes. And, had the Presiding Bishop chosen to remain silent, as most chief officers would have done, there would only have been an 8 vote margin. What does this mean? It means that almost half of the bishops in today's Episcopal Church voted against the innovations that an only slightly larger majority are trying to impose on the whole Church.

The orthodox bishops have requested the intervention of on one less than the Archbishop of Canterbury and he has responded with amazing speed! He has called an emergency meeting of the 38 Primates of the Anglican Communion to deal with the untenable position of the 74<sup>th</sup> General Convention has placed us in. That meeting of Primates will take place in mid-October just before our own diocesan Convention. Already 18 Primates have expressed outrage at yet another instance of the United States' Episcopal Church imposing an imperialism of its own wayward decisions upon the rest of the world. Many of these Primates have already said they will recognize the Diocese of San Joaquin and its bishop as a part of the true Episcopal Church and will not remain in communion with those who have sought to turn away from Scripture and the Church's teaching.

What does this mean for the Diocese of San Joaquin? As your bishop I want to assure you that we shall remain faithful to the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ and the clear teaching of the Bible as the authoritative Word of God. The General Convention may have abandoned the historic teaching of the Church on matters of human sexuality but we have not and will not. Further, as your bishop I repudiate and disassociate us from the decision to consecrate an openly gay man as a bishop and, as mentioned previously, I have already forbidden any priest of this diocese to bless same-sex unions under any circumstances.

In October a number of our priests will be participating in a nationwide meeting at Plano, Texas. At the end of the month many of the orthodox

bishops who stand with us in order to network with several other dioceses to clarify how we are to go forward together. (Due to previous commitments I shall be unable to attend the Toronto Conference to be held in response to the earlier meeting called by the Archbishop of Canterbury for the 38 Primates.)

As all of these deliberations take place and the situation unfolds, I will be in communication with you. I am certain that we shall be able to examine these matters more deeply at our Diocesan Convention Friday and Saturday, Oct. 24 and 25.

In conclusion I would like to say two things. First, instead of being dejected over the turn of events, I feel that at last--we can be honest about what the Episcopal Church has been engaging in illegally for some time now. No longer can those whose will has been expressed at the General Convention deny or hide from the rest of the Anglican Communion practices that have been widespread and destructive over the years. And, at last, the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Primates of our own Communion are able to weigh in and make a significant difference--so much so--that in deed we may witness a realignment of the Anglican Communion which could only prove a blessing to traditional and orthodox believers.

Second, I am fully aware that there are those who are homosexual persons in our own congregations. Surely they must be hearing this pastoral letter with dismay. I must add that one's sexual orientation has never been considered as a matter for judgment. One is not a sinner because he or she has a homosexual orientation any more than a man or woman of heterosexual orientation is good or bad. The Church is judging only behavior. Sexual acts outside the bounds of holy matrimony are sinful--no matter who is involved, homosexual or heterosexual.

Wherever anyone seeks to worship God, draw closer through the saving grace of Jesus Christ, repent and receive His forgiveness, that person is and must be welcomed by all of us. To fail in this, namely charity, is the greatest sin of all.

In these troubled times, I renew my commitment to be a faithful pastor of the flock committed to my care and to guard and defend the faith and unity of the Church. As all of you remain in my prayers, I ask for your prayers for boldness to continue to proclaim and live out the truth, unity for our Church, and the dawn of a new day soon when--free from the deviations of

the past--we shall be joyfully free to pour our energy into evangelizing a world in much need of hope, healing, forgiveness and the joy of life in Christ.