

# **A Brief History of the Ongoing Disassociation of the Diocese of SC from The Episcopal Church**

*By: Barbara Mann: 11/3/09*

## **Introduction:**

During the tenure of Bishop Allison, Bishop Salmon and now Bishop Lawrence the Diocese of South Carolina has become increasingly conservative. This is particularly evident in the recruitment and retention of clergy. The preference for a few conservative seminaries as sources of clergy has helped shape the narrow outlook of the Diocese. Consequently it has become more difficult for parishioners in the Diocese to hear balanced and clear information regarding The Episcopal Church (TEC), the General Convention (GC) and the World Wide Anglican Communion. The objective here is to provide a broader perspective in which to view current issues between the Diocese of South Carolina and The Episcopal Church and to give a brief history of the Episcopal Forum of South Carolina.

## **The Episcopal Forum of South Carolina:**

The Episcopal Forum of SC (EFSC) was formed following the General Convention of 2003 at a meeting of Episcopalians who were concerned with the direction the Diocese of South Carolina was taking. There was great concern regarding the Diocese's membership in the Network of Anglican Communion Diocese and Parishes and the trend towards separating the Diocese from TEC. The Episcopalians who formed EFSC and the hundreds of individuals who have joined with them since, value highly the traditional, broad character of TEC and strive to retain and celebrate its unity with diversity.

In March of 2004 representatives from EFSC met in Atlanta with representatives from ten similar groups from dioceses throughout TEC. These included the Dioceses of San Joaquin, Pittsburgh and Fort Worth. The leadership of these three dioceses has since left TEC. These eleven groups including EFSC continue to actively support TEC in their dioceses and associate with each other in an informal steering committee under the name Via Media, USA.

The mission of the Episcopal Forum in the Diocese of South Carolina is "to preserve unity with diversity in the Diocese and within The Episcopal Church through the inclusion of a broad range of Scriptural understandings and by upholding the Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church and the democratic actions of its Conventions and elected leaders." Learn more about EFSC at:

<http://www.episcopalforumofsc.org/>

## **Diocesan Actions to Disassociate from TEC:**

Since early 2004 the rhetoric of the leadership of the Diocese of South Carolina has become increasingly strident. Exaggerated and, at times misleading, claims have been made concerning the actions of TEC and General Convention. Diocesan leadership has encouraged an atmosphere that rejects many of the inclusive understandings endorsed by the General Conventions. This leadership has been separating the Diocese from TEC in ways such as:

- All of the 111 dioceses in TEC are asked to give 21% of their income to TEC to support the many programs and missions of TEC. While it is true that some dioceses are unable to pay the total asking and others pay more, the Diocese of South Carolina pays less than 1%. This action indicates a complete disengagement from the programs and outreach of TEC and is a major step towards separation.
- At General Conventions the deputation from South Carolina has generally worshipped each day at an alternative Eucharist instead of the convention Eucharist. The Episcopal Church has always been able to worship together even when we disagree with those with whom we worship. It is a way of acknowledging that we are all one in the sight of God. This refusal to worship with the community at GC is another sign of the separation encouraged by our leadership.
- Information concerning TEC and its programs is very difficult to come by in South Carolina. The *Jubilate Deo* publicizes very little concerning the rest of TEC and has refused to publish views common within TEC but contrary to those of the leadership of the Diocese. Parishioners in the Diocese do not have the information needed to form their own opinions on the issues.
- Recently Bishop Lawrence addressed the clergy. In this address he presented his opinions of some of the actions of our Presiding Bishop and GC 2009. He focused on two of the more than 400 resolutions at GC2009 and these he does not present accurately or objectively. I urge members of this Diocese to go online and read these resolutions for themselves at [www.iamepiscopalian.org/](http://www.iamepiscopalian.org/)

### **Diocese of the SC Special Convention held 10/24/09:**

The agenda for this convention consisted of five resolutions presented by the Standing Committee and the Deans. Four of the five were passed overwhelmingly. The fifth was tabled until the next regular convention of the Diocese.

The most problematic of these resolutions for many Episcopalians, states "Resolved that this Diocese authorize the Bishop and Standing Committee to begin withdrawing from all bodies of the Episcopal Church that have assented to actions contrary to Holy Scripture, the doctrine, discipline and worship of Christ as this Church has received them, the resolutions of the Lambeth Conference which have expressed the mind of the Communion, the Book of Common Prayer and our Constitution and Canons, until such bodies show a willingness to repent of such actions;" and it cites two resolutions related to sexual orientation approved by TEC which supposedly meet these criteria for rejection.

The Bishop has stated that such a withdrawal includes General Convention and the House of Bishops, but would not be a withdrawal from TEC. Most Episcopalians would probably consider withdrawal from General Convention as tantamount to withdrawing from The Episcopal Church. The Special Convention in fact has given approval to deepen the separation which already exists.

Another resolution states "Resolved that the Diocese of South Carolina endorses the Ridley draft of the proposed Anglican Covenant, as it presently stands, in all four sections, as an expression of our full commitment to mutual submission and accountability in communion, grounded in a common faith."

The Anglican Consultative Council (ACC), made up of lay and clerical representatives from each Province of the Anglican Communion, has authorized the development of an Anglican Covenant. This is a work in progress. Several drafts have been presented for comment by the Provinces (e.g.: TEC) which make up the Communion. The latest draft, known as the "Ridley Draft", was presented by a committee to the ACC in May of 2009. The ACC did not approve it and sent it back to the drafting group for further work. When and if the Anglican Covenant is finally approved by the ACC it will be sent to the Provinces of the Communion for ratification. This endorsement of a draft by a diocese is inappropriate to the polity of the ACC and TEC. In fact many Anglicans believe that such a covenant requires a conformity which is counter to the Anglican middle way often referred to as the "via-media"

### **Conclusion:**

After all is said, what was accomplished by the October 24 special convention, except to accelerate the Episcopal Diocese of South Carolina on its slippery slide out of The Episcopal Church?

There is no deadly threat to the core of Episcopal beliefs. The creeds remain intact; belief in the Holy Trinity is not in question; belief in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ as Savior, including his incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection, are not being questioned. Nor is the calling of Episcopalians as disciples to live out their baptismal covenant being endangered.

The Episcopal Church has a tradition of embracing a broad range of scriptural understandings while worshipping together as a community which reflects the diversity of God's creation. Jesus Christ included all sorts and conditions as his companions and friends. Following this model is one of the marks of The Episcopal Church.

The threshold questions are:

Are we going to allow one issue to separate us from our beloved Episcopal Church?

Will we continue to worship and reason together as Episcopalians in the Diocese of South Carolina?

We will with God's help.

**About the author:** *Barbara Mann moved to Charleston, S.C. from Asheville, N.C. twelve years ago, and is a member of Grace Church, where she chairs its Discernment Committee. She is a Director of the Episcopal Forum of SC and has held parish, diocesan and provincial leadership positions in the Diocese of Western North Carolina. A deputy or alternate to five General Conventions, she was elected to the National Executive Council in 1997, and chaired its Audit Committee. She also served on the National Episcopal Standing Commission on Stewardship and Development and recently completed a term as Chair of the Standing Commission on the Structure of the Church. For the last 15 years she has served as the Treasurer of Province IV. Barbara is a graduate of St. Lawrence University, and is a Certified Public Accountant.*