

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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EPISCOPAL FORUM OF SOUTH CAROLINA

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Episcopal Forum of SC alerts Episcopalians regarding the urgent need for reconciliation and unity within The Episcopal Church

The Episcopal Forum of SC published a full page Open Letter to Episcopalians on September 5, 2006 in the local section of the *Charleston Post & Courier*.

An Open Letter to Episcopalians in the Diocese of South Carolina

On September 16 The Episcopal Diocese of South Carolina will elect a new bishop. This election, between three approved candidates, will affect the life of every parish, member of the clergy, and layperson. We encourage you to consider this moment in our corporate life very seriously.

The integrity of each candidate is above reproach; the ministry of each is a faithful and inspiring witness. However, we are concerned that the new bishop be committed, without reservation, to the ordination oath signed by every new bishop to conform to the "doctrine, discipline, and worship of The Episcopal Church." We understand that commitment to include respecting the democratic actions of the General Convention, and the elected leadership of The Episcopal Church as it is now constituted.

In recent years our diocesan leadership has voiced opposition to actions of General Convention and the Church's leaders. The Diocese of South Carolina has joined fewer than 10% of all Episcopal dioceses in an alliance, The Anglican Communion Network, that threatens to lead us out of The Episcopal Church. That small group of dioceses includes none of our neighboring southern dioceses. This alliance proposes: to diminish our democratic tradition of governance; to narrow the permissible understanding of Scripture; to limit the role of women in the clergy; to take actions which would place members of this diocese under the authority of appointed leaders, some from other countries and cultures.

From its inception, our diocese has disagreed with The Episcopal Church over many issues, from slavery and civil rights, to revisions in the Book of Common Prayer and the role of female clergy. In each instance some people felt so strongly that the Church had violated the Will of God that they could no longer be a part of The Episcopal Church and left. Fortunately, most stayed.

The diocese weathered those storms. Recently, however, published statements by our diocesan leaders and the three nominees have raised concerns that our new bishop may lead us even further away from union with The Episcopal Church. We pray that in this election the Holy Spirit will unify

our diocese and lead it in a ministry of hope and reconciliation.

In the days ahead we ask you to discuss these concerns with your clergy, vestry, and convention delegates. In doing so, we hope you might find the following assurances helpful:

- We can have confidence in the unity of the Body of Christ. Jesus surely understood that His followers would argue over how to best carry forward His ministry. However, there can be no doubt that He wanted them to be One, even in their most bitter and disagreeable moments.
- We can trust the leadership in The Episcopal Church to make a place for those who are not always in agreement with its direction. Ours is a vibrant national church with a Constitution and Canons (the body of Ecclesiastical law) that bind us together in our common mission and ministry. This open and democratic governing structure has served us well for 217 years. Our diocesan bishops constitute our spiritual authority; consequently we will never be under the authority of anyone we have not elected as long as we are governed by the Constitution and Canons of The Episcopal Church.
- We can trust that Scripture is at the center of all that The Episcopal Church teaches and believes. Faith, as understood in The Episcopal Church, is based on the centuries-old Anglican understanding of Scripture, Tradition, and Reason. There always will be those whose experiences in Faith will be different from our own. We must see this as an opportunity to enrich our common life, not an occasion to destroy it.
- We can have confidence that The Episcopal Church affirms Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. In the midst of overheated rhetoric this summer, some of the Church suggested that some Church leaders had rejected this essential article of our Faith. However, the record of the 2006 General Convention proceedings demonstrates that such was not the case. Every instrument of our Faith - from the Book of Common Prayer to the creeds, to our worship services and outreach - resounds with the joyous news that Jesus is Lord.
- We can have confidence in the Church's call to a mission of reconciliation. The Episcopal Church believes that our broken world is desperately crying out for this ministry. Separation and alienation are the opposite of reconciliation.
- We can trust that in God's eyes the way we care for one another is far more important than theological uniformity. The Episcopal Church welcomes all with love, leaving judgment and rebuke to our Lord's great mercy and forgiveness.

About The Episcopal Forum of South Carolina

The mission of The Episcopal Forum of South Carolina is to preserve unity with diversity in the Diocese of South Carolina and within The Episcopal Church, through the inclusion of a broad range of Scriptural understandings, and by upholding the democratic actions of its Constitution and Canons, conventions and elected leadership.

In keeping with this mission, members of The Episcopal Forum of South Carolina consider affiliation with the Anglican Communion Network inconsistent with the accepted role of Episcopalians within The Episcopal Church.

Among its activities, The Episcopal Forum of South Carolina sponsors meetings and conferences in the Diocese of South Carolina through which Episcopalians find common ground in their shared

mission and ministry. All are welcome to attend these public events.

Go to www.episcopalforumofsc.org for more information. Add your name to the mailing list or become a member of The Episcopal Forum of South Carolina and be listed on its website as a supporter of its mission. Names of the current directors and members can be found on the website.

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