

Presentation for Via Media, Albany
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Holy God, be in our minds
 That we might let go of all that diminishes the
 Movement of Your Spirit within us.

Discerning God, be in our eyes, that we
 Might see You in the midst
 Of all the business that fills our lives.

Loving God, be in our hearts, that we
 Can be open to those we love, to those
 With whom we share ministry
 And to the whole human family.

Gracious God, be in that grace-filled silence
 That lies deep within us, that we might
 Live in Christ as Christ lives in us.
 Adapted from Celtic Daily Prayer: A Northumbrian Office

Good Morning. Thank you to the Via Media organizers for putting together this event. I ask Bob Dodd to introduce the planning group.

Thank you also to Bishop Love for celebrating, preaching and for being here and listening and participating. And thank you to all of you who have given freely of your time to be here together to talk about faith and diversity in the Episcopal Church.

There is a saying attributed to the 13th century mystic, Rumi:

“Beyond the place of right and wrong doing there is a field—I will meet you there.”

The essence of these words point to a belief that there is something larger, some bond that we hold in common that is more deeply important and beyond the “place of right and wrong doing”. Perhaps it is a place of generosity of spirit where ideas are exchanged and shared. Where different viewpoints are explored and valued. Perhaps it is our place, just waiting for us to arrive there. Maybe we are already there and do not realize it.

I want you to know why I am here today. First, because I was invited by the Diocese of Albany Via Media to be here to help in developing a process of open conversation. In addition to the planning and warm hospitality I have received from the Via Media organizers, I have been warmly welcomed by Bishop Love in the spirit of open conversation and dialogue. I hope that this conversation can be the first of many among you in this diocese in a growing sense of trust and commitment to God’s mission. When we talk about and try to live into Christian Unity we need to pay attention to HOW we live into that. Are the components such as tolerance, significance and reaching out ones that need to be carefully explored in our quest to be one with

God and with each other? How we treat each other is very important as we are meant to see the Christ in each other and to respect the dignity of every human being.

Secondly, I am here to assure you and to illustrate for you that, as Episcopalians, we have a rich history of living in creative tension and learning about God from each other.

Obviously, I am not an Episcopalian in the Diocese of Albany. I don't have your day-to-day life experiences, and I do not know how it is for you in living the spiritual life. But I am an Episcopalian in the Diocese of Michigan, and as Episcopalians, and members of the worldwide Anglican Communion, we all share bonds of affection, a commitment to common worship as provided for us in the Book of Common Prayer. Prayer, worship, community and reconciliation are among the aspects of the spiritual life. The spiritual life, as described by theologian Evelyn Underhill, "Still less does the spiritual life mean a mere cultivation of one's own soul. Even though in its earlier stages it may, and generally does, involve dealing with ourselves, and that in a drastic way, and therefore requires personal effort and personal choice, it is also intensely social; for it is a life that is shared with all other spirits, whether in the body or out of the body, to adopt St. Paul's words."¹

In our life together in Christ, in the community of Christ is bound together by our worship and in The Book of Common Prayer is one of the strong ties that bind the Anglican Communion together and has been a central point for Anglicans since it was compiled by Thomas Cranmer in 1549. We are the Episcopal Church and a province of the Anglican Communion.

"The Anglican Episcopal family consists of an estimated 80 million Christians who are members of 44 different churches. These make up 34 provinces, 4 United Churches, and 6 other churches, spread across the globe."²

Being an Episcopalian and an Anglican, is not an either/or. It is a both/and. Do we have different points of view in the Anglican Communion? You bet. You know that. Is this a new situation in the Anglican Communion? Absolutely not. For us here today, it is important to note that it is deeply held and experienced within our history and tradition to have differing points of view.

As a communion, as stated by Kathy Grieb, New Testament scholar and professor at VTS and appointed by the Archbishop of Canterbury as a member of the Anglican Covenant Design group, in her report to the House of Bishops:

"This coming time [of response to the draft proposed covenant] will require action around the Communion if we want to continue in the Anglican tradition of comprehensiveness, generous orthodoxy, listening to minorities and welcoming the stranger – the person with another point of view. Not everyone in the Anglican tradition views that sort of tradition as distinctively

¹ Underhill, Evelyn. *The Spiritual Life*. Harper and Brothers. 1936.

² Anglican Communion Official Website

Anglican."

I said Anglicanism has a "long tradition, not of closing our eyes to conflict, but of creating spaces where different points of view can be argued intelligently, coherently, and with attention to biblical interpretation in ways that we can move forward without everyone agreeing but with an understanding that though we don't see it the same way, we care deeply about our union."

I rooted that tradition in the early Church and the subsequent life of the Church throughout the centuries. "We've always been working it out; we've always been trying to figure out how to live together around the same table with different points of view. We will continue to do that unless we abandon the project of Communion."

I spoke of two great traditions of biblical interpretation that live side-by-side in our congregations and throughout the Communion. "As we reflect on our present context, we can recommit ourselves to welcome those who share another interpretation of Scripture and therefore another interpretation of doctrine or ethics than we do." I said, "it is the time for the Anglican Communion at every level to renew its commitment to conversation about the Anglican Communion and about the history of biblical interpretation in Anglicanism."³

So what about the Episcopal Church?

I would like to tell you a bit about the Episcopal Church, how we are governed I think will illustrate our culture.

The Episcopal Church meets in General Convention every three years. The time between General Conventions is called the "triennium". The General Convention legislative system is composed of two houses. A house of bishops, which is composed of all the bishops in the Episcopal Church (TEC) and a house of deputies composed of four clergy and four lay deputies elected by each of the 110 dioceses plus the eight deputies from the episcopal church in Europe. All legislation considered must be passed, or concurred, in exactly the same language by both houses.

The first meeting to organize the Episcopal Church took place in October 1784 and the first General Convention (pre-constitution) in 1785. In 1784 groups of clergy and laity in a variety of states were just beginning to meet together in state conventions (not dioceses) to begin the process of organization. The national church structure and the structure of state conventions (later called dioceses) developed on parallel tracks simultaneously. By the end of the 1785 convention, there was a draft constitution and draft Book of Common Prayer, both of which would be modified before final approval in 1789. The 1786 convention cleared the way for William White and Samuel Provost to seek consecration in England as bishops. Connecticut, where action by some of the clergy had resulted in Samuel Seabury's consecration in Scotland in November 1784, was not participating in the conventions

³ Grieb, Kahty. "Interpreting the Proposed Anglican Covenant Through the Communique". House of Bishops. March 19, 2007.

The budget for TEC is created and passed by GC. It is based upon mission priorities that are also decided by GC. The 75th GC budget averaged about \$48 million per year for the triennium 2007-2009. About \$30 million of this income is from dioceses who in turn receive roughly 80% of their income from parishes and congregations. This works out to a bit over \$11 per year for every member of the church. There are some things we can do better together (like our mission and overseas partners work) than independently. As you can see, the Episcopal church has a history of participatory governance that is still practiced today.

How many people here are lay people? Well, even if you are ordained to another order of ministry, your baptism called you to the order of the laity.

I am a lay person also I think that our understanding of the laity and the ministry of the laity has slipped over the years. Somewhere along the way we have started believing that other orders are more important – that clergy and bishops have more important work to do in the name of Jesus Christ. That is just not true. We are the largest order in the Church, but we have begun to accept an ideological pyramid, placing bishops on top, then clergy and then laity.

Read the baptismal covenant again – once a month at least. It's US that is saying "I will with God's help". Lay people, claim your authority as a layperson. Hold fast to it and don't let go. By the same token, we need to understand exactly what it is that bishops and clergy by their ordination vows have promised to do. Read the Ordination of a Bishop" in the BCP – page 512. Read also about the ordination of priests and deacons. Our orders have different calls, but a common bond. One Body doing the work of Christ, using our God-given gifts, encouraging each other, celebrating each other's gifts for ministry.

Regarding the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion:

It is possible that you have specific questions and comments that could be shared during the panel discussion. Just let me say that five or so years ago, most people in my parish in Pontiac Michigan had no idea what the Anglican Communion is and they had no idea that the Episcopal Church is a part of it. Now they do. I think that is a good thing."

Finally:

I want you to be assured that we, all of us gathered here, all of us called by God to do God's work in the world, have God's mission to do together in the world and we need to get past these distractions. We need to be able to speak the truth to each other with love and respect. There is a depth of courage that is required to speak truth to power. Persons or groups who self identify as marginalized can use that experience to build empathy – which is a strongly lacking component of our western culture- for the other people who are in marginalized situations. To be courageous does not mean that we are free of fear. It means that we may be afraid, but we do what needs to be done anyway.

You cannot get on with God's work until you trust each other, see the Christ in each other and pray for and with each other. Can we talk? Can you talk, together? Yes you can. The promises we keep are a measure of how we live our lives. In the Baptismal Covenant, which we repeat

frequently, “I will, with God’s help” is a promise. Promise each other that you will and then just go ahead and do it.

I would like to offer you a challenge. This diocese is not the only diocese in TEC where Holy Dialogue and conversation is difficult. I challenge you to develop an intentional process for dialogue and conversation in this diocese. That you live into and, try it out and that you document it. Then I challenge you to offer this process as a gift to the rest of the Episcopal Church so that others who are having difficulty with Holy dialogue can learn from your experience.

You are amazing, faithful children of God. You are part of a community of saints that have gone before you and from whom you can draw strength and courage.

“God is the only reality,
and we are only real in
so far as we are in his
order and he in us.”

St. Augustine

Thank you for the honor of being here with you.