



Calvary Church

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A statement by the Rev. John H. Wengrovius following the 75th General Convention of the Episcopal Church held in Columbus, Ohio, June 12-21, 2006.

It is indeed providential that the gospel reading for the Sunday following the General Convention (GC 06) was Mark 4:35-41, Jesus calming the storm on the Sea of Galilee. It serves well to set the context of the task that is before us at Calvary.

As you recall, Jesus said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side," and promptly fell asleep in the stern of the boat. His disciples let him sleep until they were panicked in the face of the violent squall and pounding waves. They in desperation awakened Jesus who immediately calmed the storm and admonished them, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

There are a variety of ways to interpret this biblical account. The one that speaks to me at this point in the life of the Episcopal Church and Calvary is as follows. The disciples, several of whom had been fishermen who had made their living on the Sea of Galilee, let Jesus sleep, both literally and figuratively, as long as they thought they could handle the situation. They let him sleep in the stern of the boat and in their hearts and minds. Their focus was on their ability to get across the lake in the face of threatening weather. It was not until they thought the boat was about to be swamped, a situation they could no longer control, that they remembered who was with them and awakened Jesus to deal with their fears and situation at hand. If they had been men of mature faith, they may have allowed the tired Jesus to sleep in the stern, but they would have never let him sleep in their hearts and minds, and they would not have panicked in the raging storm, confident that if Jesus had called them to go over to the other side, they would surely make the journey safely.

It is also informative to note, that Jesus never showed any concern about not reaching the other side of the lake.

Storm clouds started gathering many years ago in the Episcopal Church. The presenting issue was human sexuality and in particular, the rights and privileges of homosexual persons. At the heart of the storm, however, were two more basic issues: the authority and interpretation of Holy Scripture and the nature of the Episcopal Church's relationship with the world-wide Anglican Communion.

The storm broke loose in 2003 at the 74th General Convention when consent was given to the election of a partnered gay man to be the next bishop of New Hampshire and permission was given to dioceses to develop liturgies for the blessing of same gender relationships. The Archbishop of Canterbury and other international church leaders had implored the General Convention not to take these actions, knowing that to do so would tear the fabric of the Anglican Communion at its deepest level.

The predicted straining and ripping of relationships immediately took center stage in the larger Communion and on the national, diocesan, and many local levels of the Episcopal Church. In the three years that followed, there were

numerous meetings, commissions, and publications seeking to clarify the positions of those who were in favor of the actions of GC 03 and those who disagreed with them.

The Windsor Report, commissioned by the Archbishop of Canterbury, stated what was required of the Episcopal Church in order to remain in full communion with the rest of the Anglican Communion. Among other requests, the *Report* requested from the Episcopal Church:

- A sincere expression of regret for having acted unilaterally in these areas in the face of clear and urgent requests not to do so.
- A moratorium on the consecration of bishops in a same gender relationship
- A moratorium on the development of and use of all public rites of blessing of same gender relationships.

Bishop Rob O'Neill's pastoral letter to the diocese following GC 06 is available as a link on the Calvary web site (www.calvarygolden.net). I ask you to read it, remembering that he is expressing his sense of what happened at the Convention. He worked very hard to hold the greater Episcopal Church and our divided diocese together over the past several years and at Convention. I greatly respect and appreciate +Rob for his tireless efforts in this regard.

Also available on the web site are two significant first responses to the actions of GC 06 from the Anglican Communion: a statement from the Archbishop of Canterbury and a statement from the Primates of the Council of Anglican Provinces of Africa. Both of these statements place Bp. O'Neill's words in the international context.

As a deputy to this Convention, it was clear to me that there is a deep and sincere desire on the part of a majority of leaders within the Episcopal Church to remain in full and abiding communion with our Anglican brothers and sisters throughout the world. It is also clear, however, that the Convention as a whole did not have the will to respond fully and adequately to all of *The Windsor Report's* requests. We will know well enough the reasoned and pastoral response of the Anglican Communion to GC 06's actions in the months to come.

Although I did not agree with all of the Convention's decisions, I experienced a great deal of peace during the long days of committee meetings and legislation. This peace came, I am convinced, as a gift from our Lord and as a result of the many prayers that were said on my behalf. I am totally convinced that there will be a way through this storm safely to the other side for those of us who hold full membership in the Anglican Communion as precious and who look to the authority of Holy Scripture as our primary guide.

At Calvary, we have weathered this storm by not allowing Jesus to sleep in our hearts and minds, by keeping our focus on him and the mission to which he has called us. Throughout the past three years, he brought not only calm to our church family but also great blessings and increase. We will continue to keep our trust and faith in his steady, unanxious leadership as the situation unfolds in the greater church at home and abroad.

At Calvary, we are not of one mind on the issues, but we are all united in our love for Jesus and around the challenging vision he has given us to be a community of joy and hope, where all seekers of Christ are welcomed as we all strive to be passionate disciples of him. We are thankful and humbled by his steady and gracious leadership and provision for our Calvary church family and look forward to the days and years to come with great joy and expectation.