

## **I will, with God's Help**

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By Bonnie Anderson, President of the House of Deputies

My name is Bonnie Anderson and I am an Episcopalian.

## **Baptismal covenant and our call**

I have my baptism certificate framed and hung on the wall. Every morning when I see it, I am reminded that I am marked as Christ's own forever and that I have been called to follow Jesus. I am answering that call every day of my life. The baptismal covenant is my marching orders.

## **Our Call as laity:**

I am a lay person. I am not called to the clerical order of ministry. I am called to the lay order and my ordination is my baptism, which I renew with enthusiasm regularly.

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. I have seen brilliant lay people check their brains at the door when they come to a vestry meeting, never mention to their friends that they are Episcopalian or ever ask

someone to come to Church with them

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.

Inform yourself also by reading the Catechism – particularly beginning on pg.855 of the BCP regarding The Ministry.

I would like to see us turn that ideological pyramid I was talking about into a circular model of leadership that uses the gifts and skills of all the baptized for the ministry of Christ in the world. One Body doing the work of Christ, using our God-given gifts, encouraging each other, celebrating each other's gifts for ministry.

## **Our Heritage as Episcopalians**

Some background information:

The Episcopal Church was formally organized in 1783 by members of the Church of England who met together in Maryland and organized the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States. It was not a foregone conclusion that PECUSA would have bishops, hence, the significance of the name. In 1785 the first General Convention was held in Philadelphia, there was only a House of Deputies, no House of Bishops, because there weren't any in TEC

In 1786 William White and Samuel Provost were consecrated bishops for Pennsylvania and New York. 1789 the first BCP was adopted 1789 the third GC became a bicameral body with a HoB.

We continue as a bicameral body – HoD and HoB we meet every 3 years at a General Convention. it is the General Convention and, in the case of the trial of a bishop, the ecclesiastical trial court, that can interpret the canons.

**Assurance that TEC is alive and well and doing important mission work.**

I want to assure you, that the Episcopal Church is alive and well and is engaged in important work in the name of Jesus Christ.

TEC has a triennial budget which you can look at and take. There are

copies on the back table.

The Budget of The Episcopal Church is funded largely by giving from the dioceses. All the dioceses contribute. In some dioceses, where a contribution to our common mission is not made, individual Episcopalians and/or groups of Episcopalians contribute directly.

The Episcopal Church has mission priorities, adopted by General Convention. The first priority as adopted by the General Convention in 2006 is Justice and Peace: promoting justice and peace for all of God's creation and continuing and accelerating the leadership role and programs of TEC, which support the eight MDGs in the dioceses of the Episcopal Church and in the world. To date 76 of the 111 dioceses have passed resolutions to give 0.7% of their diocesan budget to the work of the MDGs. This work involves understanding that for the first time in the history of the world, according to economist, Jeffrey Sachs, we have the means to eradicate world poverty and hunger. The moral question is: Will we do it?

As Nelson Mandela said in 2005:

“Sometimes it falls upon a generation to be great. You can be that great generation.”

Our mission of reconciliation in the world.

The Episcopal Church is a community of followers of Jesus who have proclaimed, by their baptism and, in the case of priests, deacons and bishops, to conform to the doctrine, discipline and worship of TEC, and in the case of all of us as the baptized, to continue in the apostle’s teaching, to resist evil, repent and return to the Lord, seek and serve Christ in all persons, love our neighbor as ourselves, proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ, strive for justice and peace and respect the dignity of every human being.

An interesting aside here based upon research responses from 4,102 Episcopal parishes and missions that completed an all-church 2005 Faith Communities Today Survey (57% response rate). The data were weighted by size and region to be representative of all Episcopal congregations.

Episcopal congregations are varied in their theological outlook. Relatively few (only 8%), however, say that their members are

predominantly liberal.

More statistics of this kind can be found on the website of the Episcopal church – which, by the way is a great resource and available to everyone – monthly income/expense statements from the treasurer’s office, Episcopal News Service has a daily electronic news service that is free and really good, [www.episcopalchurch.org](http://www.episcopalchurch.org)

### **Who can leave the Episcopal Church?**

People are free to leave TEC at any time. However, while individuals have the right and privilege to depart or return at any time, congregations and dioceses do not. Congregations exist because they are in communion with the bishop of a diocese, through recognition by diocesan governing bodies (diocesan synods, councils, or conventions). Congregations cannot unilaterally disestablish themselves or remove themselves from a diocese. Diocesan bishops are in communion with the presiding bishop. They cannot “leave the Episcopal Church and take “their diocese” with them. Dioceses are created by an act of General Convention. They are an entity in TEC. In addition, by canon law, property of all sorts held by parishes is held and must be used for

the mission of the Episcopal Church through diocesan bishops and governing bodies. As a Church, we cannot abrogate our interest in such property, as it is a fiduciary and moral duty to preserve such property for generations to come and the ministries to be served both now and in the future.

We are a part of a tradition of Episcopalians who have gone before us.

Archbishop Ndungane in his sermon at Southwark Cathedral in South Africa a few weeks ago was talking about tradition as holy remembering. He said, "We are part of a Christian tradition. This requires a fresh understanding of what tradition means. It is not dry forensic history, but holy remembering of God's abiding with his people, through the centuries. We must own our history – the living and life-giving history of God at work among us.

Holy remembering is far more than casting our mind across a widening gulf of years. Holy remembering is both to recall and to participate. It is to recognise God at work in our church throughout the centuries, and to know ourselves in living continuity with his faithful people in every age. To remember is to take our place within

God's story of redemption.

This diocese is worthy of holy remembering with its rich history built upon the faith of Episcopalians gone before us.

**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. We pick our way through the brambles and berries of what it means to live into all the ways God is revealed to us without letting go of the hands of others who forge along as well. But we must remember our polity. Unlike most of the provinces in the Anglican Communion, our bishops are elected, not appointed. Clergy and laity have an equal voice with bishops in the governance of The Episcopal Church. Only the General Convention, and, as I mentioned the ecclesiastical court in the case of the trial of a bishop, can interpret our canons. We have lived in a fellowship of communion, some call it "bonds of affection" in the Anglican Communion. We are still exploring what that means and whether or not it should be formalized in some way.

**Regarding the actions taken at the Diocese of San Joaquin's Convention:**

I am sorry that those actions were taken. When one part of the body

says “I have no need of you” there are grave consequences to the Episcopal Church community and the fulfilling of God’s mission of reconciliation in the world. This is a distraction from our common mission.

Yesterday morning when I read Tanzanian Bishop Mdimi Mhogolo’s Epiphany letter, posted by Episcopal News Service, I could not help but think about the 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 others who journey on this painful path. Courage is not the lack of fear. Courage is taking acting in spite of the fear.

**Finally:**

I want you to know that you are part of the Episcopal Church. You will be supported and defended and prayed for and with. You are loved as sisters and brothers in Christ. You will not be left alone. We have God’s mission to do together in the world and we need to get past these distractions. The promises we keep are a measure of how we live our lives. “I will, with God’s help” is a promise.

**Close with a verse from**  
Isaiah 43:1-7

Thus says the Lord,

He who created you, O Jacob,

He who formed you, O Israel:

Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;

I have called you by name, you are mine.

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;

And through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;