**Is this any longer a Church one wants to join?**

**A Plea to the Leaders of the Episcopal Church.**

The Episcopal Church (TEC) is experiencing a precipitous decline in Sunday morning attendance. Without addressing some of its institutional pathologies, TEC will render itself evermore irrelevant. Yet the current proposals to restructure the church ignore its basic problems.[[1]](#endnote-1)

The present practices, or likely outcomes in the very near future, of TEC raise a number of questions. Here is a sample:

* A proposed modification of the Book of Common Prayer Marriage Rite wherein the rubrics are malleable and the Biblical and canonical warrants[[2]](#endnote-2) are ignored or abandoned;
* The BCP definition of marriage is subverted without constitutional procedure; [[3]](#endnote-3)
* Tens of millions of dollars, perhaps over $40 million, have been spent on litigation without any budget line accountability;[[4]](#endnote-4)
* The rewriting of the Title IV canon gives the Presiding Bishop metropolitical authority vis-à-vis fellow Bishops, against the Constitution's plain sense;[[5]](#endnote-5)
* Bishops are disciplined for filing an amicus brief while other bishops and leaders file them with impunity with SCOTUS;[[6]](#endnote-6)
* Bishops are declared to have renounced their Orders without ever doing so in the manner called for by canon;[[7]](#endnote-7)
* The ‘National Church,’ when it is urged by GC to move its offices, simply ignores the recommendation;[[8]](#endnote-8) and
* Mandatory Diocesan giving is called for without any constitutional authority;[[9]](#endnote-9)

This list is incomplete, but it is sufficient to indicate the state of lawlessness into which the church has moved, and to pose the questions: Is TEC any longer a church of constitutional and canonical order? Is this Church acting decently and in order? How can there be a hope of restoring a level of trust across differences of theological conviction when the good order that this Church constitutionally and canonically expects is simply ignored?[[10]](#endnote-10)

* If the BCP is to be changed, let it be done in accordance with the rules established to do that.
* If money is being spent on litigation, let there be a public accounting of that.
* If the Presiding Bishop is to be given new authorities, let the Constitution be altered in the manner required.
* If it is not proper to file an amicus brief in one case, then it is not proper to file one in another case.
* If Bishops are declared to have renounced their Orders, let it happen in the manner called for by the Constitution and Canons.
* If we are uncertain, we cannot provide assurance to the members of the church and those who are seeking a church home?

It seems that these are reasonable and fair requests to put before the leaders of this church as they prepare to meet in General Convention this summer.

The Rev’d Dr. Chuck Alley, Richmond, Virginia

The Rev’d Frank Fuller, Corpus Christi, Texas

The Rev’d John Newton, St. Paul, Minnesota

The Rev’d Paul Minor, Belmont, Massachusetts

The Rev’d Cheryl Minor, Belmont, Massachusetts

The Rev’d Dr. Ephraim Radner, Diocese of Colorado, Professor at Wycliffe, Toronto

The Rev’d Canon Dr. Chris Seitz, Dallas, Texas

The Rev’d John Sheehan, Aldie, Virginia

The Rev’d Dr. Philip Turner, Austin, Texas

The Rev’d Stockton Williams, Kerrville, Texas

1. The Task Force For Reimagining the Episcopal Church has produced a long report that is simply silent about theological conflict and its sources, that has so drained the church; or the litigation of the past decade or more, that has drained resources and the structural issues around this; or the need to reconcile with Evangelical members and ex-members, whose loss and alienation has so limited the church’s outreach. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. E.g., Genesis 1-2, Matthew 19, Ephesians 5; BCP pp. 422, 423, 861; Canon I.18.Sec. 2(b) [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. The first proposed resolution by the Convention’s Marriage Taskforce seeks a change in canon that renders the actual language and context of the BCP’s marriage service both semantically incoherent and without authority. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Figures are hard to come by. A reputable, even if partisan, incomplete list of lawsuits can be found at <http://accurmudgeon.blogspot.ca/2015/02/annual-litigation-survey-for-episcopal.html>; Haley’s estimate is over $40 million, carefully detailed at http://accurmudgeon.blogspot.ca/2014/02/how-much-has-ecusa-spent-on-lawsuits.html. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. A full analysis of these changes, which was never properly rebutted, is given at http://www.anglicancommunioninstitute.com/2010/09/title-iv-revisions-unmasked/. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. The recent example is found at file:///C:/Users/radne\_000/Downloads/US%20Supreme%20Court%20Amicus%20Brief.Jennings%20et%20al%2003.06.15.pdf; earlier, of course, http://openjurist.org/290/f3d/699/dixon-v-l-edwards-w-b-j-a-g-e-e-j-l-m-l-w-b-iii-so-l-w-h. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. See <http://www.episcopalcafe.com/confusion_about_bishop_scriven_and_renunciation/>; <http://www.anglicancommunioninstitute.com/2009/01/is-the-renunciation-of-orders-routine/>; An interesting commentary on the novel approach, can be found in the blog of AKM Adams, and in the comments. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. See <http://episcopaldigitalnetwork.com/ens/2012/07/06/deputies-vote-to-sell-the-church-center-headquarters-in-new-york/>; yet other resolutions enacted are treated as law. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Cf. The TREC proposed Resolution A002. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Bishop Sisk of New York: “Where then does that leave us? We are left with a situation in which the mind of this recent Convention appears to be to allow such services. **However, The Constitution and The Book of Common Prayer still say something else**…. It is my interpretation that the actions of this 2012 General Convention permit, perhaps even encourage, those of us who live in jurisdictions such as New York, to act on that conviction” (bold added). See  <http://www.livingchurch.org/full-marriage-equality> [↑](#endnote-ref-10)