

Tract 2

“Suffer not the Little Ones”¹:
Why the Church Needs Young People

“He therefore passed through every age, becoming an infant for infants, thus sanctifying infants; a child for children, thus sanctifying those who are of this age, being at the same time made to them an example of piety, righteousness, and submission; a youth for youths, becoming an example to youths, and thus sanctifying them for the Lord. So likewise he was an old man for old men, that he might be a perfect master for all, not merely as respects the setting forth of the truth, but also as regards age, sanctifying at the same time the aged also, and becoming an example to them likewise.”

- St. Ireneaus, *Against the Heresies* 2.22.4

Introduction

In our document *Reconciliation in Communion: A Word to the 76th General Convention of the Episcopal Church*, we reveal our concern for the present and future states of the Episcopal Church (USA). One of the ways we do this is by focusing, in two different points of address, on the place of youth in our church. In the first of these, we state that we

Encourage the Bishops and Deputies to take with the utmost seriousness the recently released report by the House of Deputies Committee on the State of the Church. In particular, we request that “youth and young adults” be returned to our list of top priorities for the next Triennium. We fear that a church that places little emphasis on the young is a church that risks placing little emphasis upon its own future.

This is immediately followed by the second point, in which we

Encourage the leadership of the church, particularly the Bishops, to pursue constructive and charitable relationships with those that are currently estranged from the Episcopal Church, remembering that our quarrels and divisions will become burdens borne principally by future generations.

In what follows, I will consider the ways that these two points are related for American Episcopalians today. I will begin by summarizing the recent report by the House of Deputies Committee on the State of the Church, in which alarming decreases in church membership are discussed. I will, however, focus specifically on a point that is only lightly touched upon in the same report: the dearth of young people currently in the Episcopal Church. Far from being a marginal issue, this should be of overriding, central

¹ Matt. 19:14

concern. In the second section, I will reflect on the fact that the Church, through its liturgical and catechetical practices, already values young people; I will contrast this predisposition with some contemporary cultural practices in the section that then follows. The penultimate section of this paper consists of suggestions for further points of sociological inquiry and statistical analysis that may serve to more effectively guide our Anglican province in reaching out to young people. My conclusion is a thought experiment on a more painfully personal level, reflecting on how the future of the Episcopal Church (USA) is not just in the hands of its own youth, but in the hands of those outside of it, as well.

I. Raw Data: Membership in the Episcopal Church

The report by the House of Deputies Committee on the State of the Church², published in the *Blue Book* for General Convention 2009, offers a stark and disconcerting perspective on present trends within the Episcopal Church. Relying upon census data collected for the years 2003 – 2007 (inclusive), two statistics immediately stand out: first, the Episcopal Church lost more than 6% of its membership during this period and, second, it has lost an even greater percentage of its Average Sunday Attendance.³ These net losses must be contextualized by an additional inquiry made by the Committee into the age demographics of the Episcopal Church. Most simply put, the uneven distribution of age groups within the Episcopal Church is resulting in “a natural decline of 19,000 members per year.”⁴ More specifically, due to the heavy demographic skewing of our church’s population towards those who are 65 years of age and older, the number of deaths in the Episcopal Church so outweigh the number of births within and conversions into the church that the net growth in annual membership is, in fact, a *net loss of 19,000 people*. In the words of the same report, “*we lose the equivalent of one diocese per year.*”⁵

The Episcopal Church has an age distribution that correlates weakly with that of the United States of America. Whereas 25% of the USA’s population consists of those 17 years of age or younger, the

² <http://episcopalchurch.org/documents/BlueBook-HODCSC.pdf>. Accessed 04.13.2009. Hereafter referred to as HODCSC and followed by the page number in the *Blue Book*, with the page number of the report in parentheses.

³ HODCSC, 61 (3)

⁴ HODCSC, 63 (5)

⁵ *ibid.*; emphasis mine.

same age group comprises only 16% of the Episcopal Church’s membership. Conversely, and at the opposite end of the distribution of age groups, 13% of the national population is above the age of 65, but more than twice this percentage – 27%, specifically – composes the Episcopal Church’s membership in the same cohort. Such variance between the church and the wider nation is not unique to this group, however; although 23% of the national population is between the ages of 18 and 34, only 12% of our church – nearly one-half of the national statistic – is in this age subset. Those between 35 and 49 years of age are present in the church in almost the same percentiles that they are present in wider population; those between 50 and 64 years of age are slightly overrepresented in the national church. This radical discrepancy between the church’s membership and that of the nation it is called to serve indicate that the Episcopal Church is not only out of touch with the United States of America, but increasingly losing touch with the same.

The HODCSC report contains a brief discussion about youth in the Episcopal Church. First, it notes that we retain only half of those that are brought up in the church. One can argue that this means the proverbial glass is “half full.” This is the take given within the report itself: “Despite these trends of decline, about fifty percent of “cradle Episcopalians” are being retained.”⁶ However, one-half of those up to 17 years of age is a mere 8% of the church’s total membership. Taking an optimistic view of this particular trend risks missing the larger point: not only are we losing approximately half of the next generation of Episcopalians, but those that we do retain amount to less than 10% of the church’s membership. To assume that those who remain will have the will power and the vision to keep the church going in the forthcoming decades is to hope for quite a lot, and perhaps unrealistically so.

Second, and of even greater concern, the HODCSC report notes that despite this underwhelming statistic, youth and young adults have been *removed* as one of the top mission priorities for the national church! Thus, not only is the Episcopal Church losing its already disproportionately small base of youth, but it is undermining its capacity to keep this important group from leaving in the first place. In sum, *if current trends continue, the age distribution within the church will look like an inverted pyramid: the*

⁶ HODCSC, 64 (6)

largest number of members, which should constitute the base, will be at the top; the smallest number of members, which should constitute the peak, will be at the bottom. *Such a structure cannot stand.* By removing an emphasis upon youth and young adults from its mission priorities, the leadership of the Episcopal Church might as well declare to both the United States of America and the wider world that it has little, if any, discernible interest in its future – especially when it comes to its very own.

II. A Sub-Culture of Life; a School of Virtue

Given my use of the phrase by “sub-culture of life”, I should state from the outset that I do not intend to here duplicate arguments made by the late Pope John Paul II about a “culture of life” set over and against a “culture of death.”⁷ Rather, my phrase *sub-culture of life* is intended to convey two ideas. First, it argues that the Church is not a culture parallel to the wider society, but is instead a sub-culture embedded within the wider society, and must therefore pursue a critical negotiation with the norms of the same. The Church, as a trans-cultural, historically bound community, has its own values and practices – its own culture, so to speak. However, aspects of the external culture are sometimes adopted by a church in local settings, either to its detriment (such as when Episcopalians allowed for slavery and segregation), or to its benefit (such as when Episcopalians allowed themselves to be transformed by, and to subsequently join in, the Civil Rights movement). To take an Anglican ecclesiological perspective, each Anglican province is geographically coterminous with a particular country or bloc of countries. Thus, each Anglican church – like every church, I would argue – is part of, rather than parallel to, the geographical boundaries that define its own institutional structure. The sense of the Church as a local sub-culture is not, however, a uniquely Anglican idea. Rather, it is seen in the history of early catholic Christianity, such as when the Church adopted the language of the philosophical schools for its own growth and development, even as it set out to transform the larger culture by making converts – a

⁷ These two terms form the thematic torque of his 1995 encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*.

philosophical, rather than religious concern in late antiquity⁸ – to the Church, rather than to other philosophical schools or religious cults.

Second, and no less importantly, describing the Church as a *sub-culture of life* explicitly affirms that it has historically valued and liturgically marked and celebrated human growth and development in each of its stages, from infancy through childhood, onward through puberty, marriage, parenthood and, eventually, death. These liturgical practices are rooted in the Church’s own long-standing moral conviction that human life is an inherently good gift from God that reflects, in manifold ways, the Divine image. Thus, the Church baptizes infants and teaches children; youth are confirmed in their transition to adolescence; marriage is blessed; the experience of parenthood (and grandparenthood, for that matter) is recognized through the baptism of newborns; and, at the time of death, *life* is commemorated and resurrection is proclaimed through Christian burial.⁹ We must remember, however, that sacramental and liturgical practices which coincide with transitions on life’s way do not sanctify these transitions as such but, instead, effectually signify God’s own presence and grace at every point on our spiritual pilgrimage.

If the Church is indeed a sub-culture of life, what does this mean for our young people? There are many facets that define the Church, and any question about the place of young people within the church must yield an answer that gracefully dovetails with what the Church already knows itself to be. Although its full and final membership is known to God alone, the Church is nonetheless a visible community of baptized persons under the guidance of a bishop in apostolic succession, where the Word (i.e., the Scriptures) are preached truly and where the Sacraments are rightly administered. If young people are to (visibly) belong to the Church, they are to belong to precisely this biblical, sacramental, episcopal community.¹⁰ These three, each according to their own end, are equally important. The

⁸ Hadot 2002:172 – 233

⁹ It used to be that Anglicans liturgically also recognized motherhood through a special service called “The Churching of Women”, in which a mother who had survived pregnancy and childbirth – by no means a guarantee before modern medicine, it should be remembered – would present herself in the parish church, offer thanks to God with the priest, and then receive the Eucharist. Such a service is indeed worth revising and reincorporating into contemporary life.

¹⁰ The ancient distinction between the visible and the invisible Church is only glossed here. However, the visible Church has a historically discernible, set form. Those who are Christians and yet live either outside or against this particular form cannot be said to be a part of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church as it has historically existed.

Scriptures are, as St. Paul wrote to the young man Timothy, “inspired of God, and are useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.”¹¹ In other words, divinely inspired teaching *prepares us* for good works that we, as Christians, *must* do. Yet, the Scriptures do not stand alone, but exist alongside the sacraments. We are made regenerate and brought into the Church through baptism; we are gracefully sustained over the course of our lives through the Eucharist. Word and Sacrament are, furthermore, under the direct oversight of the local bishop who, as the successor to the apostles, has the authority and responsibility to make sure that the administration of both remains undefiled. Because Word and Sacrament are bound together in the Divine Service, the biblical equipping *for*, and the sacramental sustaining *of*, Christian life are given their fullness in the liturgical assembly which is always under the authority of the local bishop.

It is here that we must incorporate another facet of the Church’s self-understanding. To borrow from Richard Hooker, “the Church of Christ is the most absolute and perfect school of all virtue.”¹² Ideally, this schooling begins within the interlocking matrixes of the Church – defined above as the biblical, sacramental, episcopal community – and the Christian family, which – again, ideally – initiates this schooling by bringing its newborns to the font of regeneration. Parents seek to consecrate their children unto God through baptism; the Church responds by following Christ’s command and baptizing them. By doing so, the Church shows that it does not merely welcome but *desires* the youngest of the young as one of its very own, and thereby vows to spiritually birth and nurture the infant at its apostolic breast.¹³ The Church – comprised, at the parish level, of the entire baptized community – teaches the faith to the young, trains them in piety, disciplines them unto virtue and, just as importantly if not more so, assists parents with doing the same. The beauty and nobility of these images should not blind us, however, to the fact that the vow of the Church is not an absolute guarantee that the child will receive the faith or pass it on. Bishop Thomas Breidenthal’s observation that “Parental anxiety is the type of all

¹¹ 2 Tim. 3:16 – 17

¹² *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, V.72.2 (FLE II.385.12)

¹³ 1 Pet. 2:2; cf. Gal. 4:19, I Thess. 2:7. I Pet. 2:2

Christian care”¹⁴ is as prescient as it is uncomfortably true. The depth and intensity of the Church’s care must itself be disciplined; nurture must never, ever become akin to coercion¹⁵, no matter how tempting, noble, or necessary it may sometimes seem to be. In this way, common values – discipline, grace, and humility – may give rise both to a common moral discourse and to common expectations between those who are in authority and those who are not. The Church, as both the sub-culture of life and the school of virtue, not only guards those who are “the least of these”¹⁶ but allows itself to be “converted” by them into the likeness of Christ.¹⁷ Put somewhat differently, having received the gift of baptism, the newborn necessarily becomes the paradigm for all Christian self-understanding.

III. A Definite Theological Problem

Given the rich congruence between liturgical celebration and the stages of life, why are young people so underrepresented in the Episcopal Church (USA); why do half of these young people later leave; why is it that people between the ages of 18 and 34 – the age bracket in which most people start their own families¹⁸ – are the most underrepresented demographic in our church today? These are hard questions that need to be asked, not least because their answers may be intertwined; it is hard to imagine, for instance, that the shortage of young people within the national church is unrelated to the even greater shortage of those who are beginning to start their own families. Without any hard data on point, answers given to these questions can only be provisional. However, because they are provisional they can operate in a broadly heuristic fashion, and provide some significant points for theoretical consideration and sociological exploration as we pursue more informed answers. In what follows, I will not attempt to

¹⁴ Breidenthal 1997:149

¹⁵ It should be noted that I reject here the idea that law is inherently coercive, and adopt instead Richard Hooker’s perspective that law is defined as “That which doth assigne unto each thing the kinde, that which doth moderate the force and power, that which doth appoint the forme and measure of working” (*Laws*, I.2.1 [*FLE* I.58.27 – 29]). Eternal law orients each thing towards its own good (*Laws*, I.2.3 [*FLE* I.60.20 – 23]); all other laws ought to do the same. In short, discipline is not necessarily coercion, but is – ideally – that which reorients us towards what is good.

¹⁶ Matt. 25:40

¹⁷ Matt. 18:3

¹⁸ The mean age for first births among American women is 25.0 years of age; information on fathers is more difficult to ascertain for a variety of factors. See National Vital Statistics Reports 57 (7): 7 & 12 (http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr57/nvsr57_07.pdf) for information about national trends in birth, and more detailed discussions about distribution according to sex, age, education, race, etc. Accessed 06.07.2009.

answer these questions, but to set forth the broad outlines of a theological critique of wider cultural trends that are at variance with the Church's own values.

As a sub-culture, one way of explaining shifts in our church's demographics can be done by looking at trends in the larger culture. It would be a considerable understatement to write that Anglican sexual ethics have undergone a tremendous shift in the twentieth and, now, early twenty-first centuries. Western sexual ethics as a whole have undergone an equally large if not greater shift during this same time period, and they show little sign of standing still. How do these changes impact children within the life of the Church? Jon Davies sees two issues, in which changes in the family and wider cultural developments perpetuate one another. First, he argues that "whereas 'sex' – historically centered in the family and in procreation – once expressed and symbolized the stability of relations between the sexes and the generations, it now – freed from both its familial and procreational purposes – expresses the individualized freedom of the sexual market."¹⁹ This leads to his second argument, made in a brightly polemical essay entitled 'Welcome the Pied Piper'. Here he labels this "individualized freedom of the sexual market" as the ideology of *ADORASS* – "the Adult Orgasm Association."²⁰ For the first time in history, he writes, "the concerns of adults take center stage"²¹ in society and in marriage, thereby marginalizing the needs of children. One of his targets is the Church of England's liturgy for marriage in the *Alternative Service Book* which, like the 1979 American Book of Common Prayer, places procreation last on its list of the purposes of marriage²², but he sees such changes as reflective of a larger shift in both worldview and practice. He does not believe that the old way is necessarily better, but he does believe that "it is the child-free vocabulary of *ADORASS* that now dominates" and that, because of this, "children as our direct responsibility will steadily disappear as both subject and object of social discourse."²³ If given a choice between the present tendency and that of the past, Davies believes that the older assumptions and practices are better for the young and for family stability over the long run.

¹⁹ Davies 1997:18

²⁰ Davies 2001:242

²¹ Davies 2001:244

²² Earlier Books of Common Prayer had placed procreation first.

²³ Davies 2001: 246

It should be emphasized that Davies is not talking here about promiscuity, but about marital life and the sexual and familial dynamics that define and are defined by marriage. If he is right, a broadly consumerist ideology, in which pleasure operates as capital, now defines our sexual mores both within and outside of marriage. Perhaps Karl Marx was all too observant with his poetically articulated, polemically charged statement that under capitalism, there is an "uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions" in which "all fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away."²⁴ This analysis is not far removed from that given by Davies; like him, Marx sees the pre-capitalist family as being defined by "venerable prejudices" – a seemingly contradictory statement if ever there was one, and which highlights the lack of a perfect solution for how the family ought to work. Both thinkers are concerned that capitalism has enthroned the individual as the basic economic unit, and that because of this we can only expect the larger networks of relationships that constitute human society to be in flux and, to at least some extent, dissolution. Unlike Marx, however, Davies appeals both to the Church as the primary institution for valuing children and to the nuclear family, which he defines as "the institution within which genders and generations transact, negotiate and elaborate their prototypical identities and moral careers."²⁵ Ideally, as argued above, the Church and the nuclear family would operate as interlocking matrixes for the good of the young. If this ideal is not striven for, and if cultural trends continue as they have been doing, Davies concludes (and I concur) that "We will be a lonely crowd, kept apart by sex."²⁶

Have these sorts of values – the preference for adult needs over those of children, and the enthroning of the individual over larger and deeper networks of relational commitments – begun to infiltrate the Anglican Communion, either in whole or in part? It may come as a surprise to some readers that debates within the Anglican Communion about sexual morality and family commitments are not merely or even primarily the result of current societal arguments about the same. For Anglicans, the

²⁴ Marx and Engels 1848[1998]:38

²⁵ Davies 1997:19. Although he does not do so, it would not be hard to take this definition and map it onto the communion of saints.

²⁶ Davies 1997:33

history of these arguments extends at least as far back as the Lambeth Conference of 1930, which stated in its fifteenth resolution that "in those cases where there is such a clearly felt moral obligation to limit or avoid parenthood, and where there is a morally sound reason for avoiding complete abstinence, the Conference agrees that other methods may be used, provided that this is done in the light of the same Christian principles."²⁷ This resolution provoked a pointed response from no less than Charles Gore, who wrote in protest that historically "The Church has regarded Birth Prevention as sinful because, like other sensual practices commonly called unnatural, it is a deliberate enterprise taken in hand to separate absolutely the enjoyment of the sexual act from its natural issue."²⁸ Although the Conference went on in the same resolution to state "its strong condemnation of the use of any methods of conception control from motives of selfishness, luxury, or mere convenience", from Gore's perspective the proverbial cat was being let out of the bag in such a way that many couples would not only "think that they have a morally sound reason for *avoiding* parenthood", but that "they cannot practise abstinence" either. This would cause them to turn to birth control, which Gore called "the easier course taken."²⁹ Given the lack of clear, thoughtful moral guidance on the use of contraceptives, one may ask if Gore has been proven correct – not necessarily, I should add, but through the failures of the church's present leadership to wrestle with this important issue.

For many if not most Anglicans, I wager, this sort of debate seems more like a dead historical occurrence than a live moral issue. I argue that it is not; happily, I do not argue alone. There is a growing recognition that birth control, which Anglicans do not inherently condemn, ought to be used precisely as Lambeth 1930.15 stated – namely, "in the light of ... Christian principles." Bishop Breidenthal, for example, has written that "The refusal to parent children calls into question the nature of the sexual union because it is such a blatant rejection of the neighbor – the neighbor here being a child."³⁰ Such a statement would be fundamentally unimportant if it did not address something that does, in fact, happen.

²⁷ Lambeth 1930.15, <http://www.lambethconference.org/resolutions/1930/1930-15.cfm>. Accessed 06.01.2009.

²⁸ Gore, *Lambeth on Contraceptives*, §3

²⁹ Gore, *Lambeth on Contraceptives*, §2; emphasis mine

³⁰ Breidenthal 1997:151

We may, for good reason, attribute the growing trend of chosen childlessness to wider cultural trends, and this sort of critique has its benefits. Adrian Thatcher, however, warns that this sort of critique can also be “too easy”, because it forgets that undergirding capitalism and its attendant cult of the individual is nothing other than the “pre-modern and deadly sin” of greed.³¹ Like Gore, Thatcher is concerned that an unreflective, unfettered use of birth control distorts our understanding of love, undermines family commitments, and ultimately harms children, although – and fairly, I believe – he sees Lambeth 1930.15 as placing a far greater level of restriction upon the use of birth control than Gore did. Even as the Church now lives in a world where contraception is taken for granted and often abused, it must continue to preach and teach the need for children and their care. In Thatcher’s words, “Sexual experience between men and women who are fertile is a bodily self-giving that requires life-long commitment to complete its meaning, and to care for the children who, contraceptive mentalities notwithstanding, may nonetheless arrive.”³² Such a perspective witnesses to a recognized need for marital commitment – Thatcher is adamant that marriage is *fundamentally* good, especially for the family³³ – just as it witnesses to a recognition that the needs of children cannot come last within any society – marital, cultural, or ecclesial.

IV. Demographic Inquiries and Future Prospects

In what follows, I propose four points for further consideration, each pertaining to different inquiries that our church may wish to pursue in order to both reverse its current trend of rapid decline. First, between 1997 and 2007, almost every diocese in the Episcopal Church had a marked decline in membership; on a national basis, church membership shrank by 9.5% during these same years, with a 7.6% decrease in membership occurring between 2003, when Gene Robinson was ordained, and 2007.³⁴ Of those dioceses that did grow between 1997 and 2007, less than a handful grew more than 10%: North

³¹ Thatcher 2007:228 – 229

³² Thatcher 2007:229

³³ e.g., Thatcher 2007:115 – 141

³⁴ Active Baptized Membership by Province and Diocese: 1997-2007. http://www.episcopalchurch.org/documents/Members_by_Prov_Diocese_97-07.pdf. Accessed 06.01.2009.

Carolina increased by 11%, Alaska by 13.1%, Tennessee by 19%, and South Carolina by 23.1%. If the Episcopal Church (USA) wants to know either how to grow or, at the very least, maintain our size, it could do no better than consult these dioceses – South Carolina above all, it would seem. Clearly, they are doing something right. What is it, and how can the rest of us learn to do the same? Second, and related to this point, what dioceses within our national church have sizable populations of youth, and which of these populations are growing? I suspect that the answer to this question will not be unrelated to the answer given to the previous question; I also suspect to bet that one will find a strong correlation between growing dioceses and stable, if not growing, populations of young people. Related to this inquiry are additional inquiries into the value placed on family in these same dioceses, and the prevalence of liturgical celebrations of new life within the parishes of the diocese in question. It may be helpful to then take this information and correlate it with trends in those dioceses that are growing less, remaining stable, or shrinking.

Third, as young people transition from the first cohort (comprising those from birth thru 17 years of age) to the second cohort (comprising those between the ages of 18 and 34), which dioceses are most successful in retaining those persons within the national church? Strong college ministries may very well prove to be the key to keeping more young people in our church; we do well to investigate what works, to strengthen it, and to prune that which yields little or no fruit. Fourth, we must examine our moral teaching and moral witness. Does the Episcopal Church (USA) encourage and bless new life? Do we strengthen and support families in clear, tangible ways? Do we use our rituals, which place such an emphasis upon faith formation in all people – especially those that are newly born – as an opportunity to really give guidance? Or, have our weighty words become rote and empty, divorced from the way of life that they are intended to signify? Each of these four points of inquiry ultimately boils down to a simple question of discipleship: *does the Episcopal Church strive to provide each member, throughout every stage of life, with the necessary means for growth in holiness and virtue?* At best, I fear, we provide only in the most passive of ways. As the national church continues to shrink by 19,000 people – approximately the

size of one diocese – per year, we must study and then act on ways to change the present situation and reverse the present trends.

V. My Brother, My Sister

I conclude on a more deeply personal note. Since the ordination of Gene Robinson in 2003, the Episcopal Church (USA) has increasingly lost members – not just due to death, it should be noted, but due to defections. Between 1997 and 2002, my own diocese of Florida grew by nearly 1,500 active members (from 31,961 in 1997, to 33,494 in 2002); between 2003 and the end of 2007, my diocese shrank by more than 20%, with active membership decreasing to 26,083 members.³⁵ A rather large parish broke off in Tallahassee before I moved here in 2006. Now known as St. Peter’s Anglican Church, it was affiliated early on with the Archbishop of Uganda, Henry Luke Orombi, but is now a part of the American Convocation of the Church of Uganda, itself a part of the Anglican Church in North American movement, which aims to create a new Anglican province in North America, replacing the Episcopal Church (USA) in the process. I have a number of friends who attend St. Peter’s, several of whom I speak with on a regular basis. I have far fewer friends – less than a handful – who attend St. John’s, where I worship and teach. I have friends at St. Peter’s who are ambivalent about its ecclesiological convictions and actions; I have friends there who disagree with the parish leadership on matters as seemingly central as same-sex marriage. Yet, they continue to attend there rather than at St. John’s. The reason is simple: St. Peter’s has a large number of young people and a dynamic college ministry, and the relational ties between young people there are deep and many. They could not forge such a wide network of substantive relationships with other young people at St. John’s, even if they tried. The reason is simple: there are not very many young people at St. John’s with whom to have such relationships with in the first place. Despite attempting to make converts to my own perspective and way of life, I have yet to meet a single person at St. Peter’s for whom the ideals of ecclesiology ultimately outweighed the emotional and

³⁵ Active Baptized Membership by Province and Diocese: 1997-2007 (1). http://www.episcopalchurch.org/documents/Members_by_Prov_Diocese_97-07.pdf. Accessed 06.01.2009. It is my understanding, however, that our diocese has indeed begun to grow again!

spiritual ties that they have with friends there. This is, in my opinion, a reality as regrettable as it is understandable.

I do not have any statistics concerning how many young people are in the Anglican Church in North America movement. I do not suspect that it is a numerically large number, although I do suspect that it is not terribly smaller than the number currently within the Episcopal Church (USA). I cannot and will not make any attempt to predict the future, although I am intelligent enough to recognize that my own future as an Episcopalian and as an Anglican is very much tied up with both the fragmentation of the Episcopal Church (USA), and the young people in the Anglican Church in North America who will be that movement’s future. When the authors of *Reconciliation in Communion* ask the Bishops to pursue “constructive and charitable relationships with those that are currently estranged from the Episcopal Church”, it is very much because we recognize that “our quarrels and divisions will become burdens borne principally by future generations.” Memory is long; the imagination and its distortions of memory last far longer. Seeds of potential resentment, no matter how seemingly legitimate in the present, may bear disproportionately bitter fruit over the long term. Whether or not any of us like it, the simple truth of the matter is that we will eventually have to work with those who have made different ecclesiological decisions than we ourselves have made. The present leadership ship of the Episcopal Church (USA), like the present leadership of the Anglican Church in North America, has the ability to either make the future more difficult, or to keep from doing so (and, perhaps, even to make it less difficult). As Bishop Breidenthal has wisely – and, perhaps, even prophetically – written, “The generation in power must always deal with the fact that the next generation will have the last word, until in turn it too must give way.”³⁶ In short, there is no moment more urgent than the present one for beginning to think very, very hard about the place of young people in our church’s present and in its future.

³⁶ Breidenthal 1997:141

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