

Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?

(Amos 3:3. NIV)

A resource for discernment.

By the Rev. Benjamin P. Campbell

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A note from the author

Dear friends,

Bishop Lee asked me to consider preparing some materials to add to what was already being circulated in the Diocese to help congregations with a forty day period of discernment concerning their role in the Diocese.

I looked at the materials, and prayed about the discernment which I know many of my brothers and sisters in Christ are going through, and prepared this document.

Obviously, this booklet must come out under my own name and not as an official document from the Bishop and the Diocese. My only claim to any standing to write it is that I am a lifelong member of the Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Virginia. I was baptized at St. Mary's, Arlington, soon after my birth in 1941. I was confirmed there by Bishop Robert F. Gibson in 1952. I was an officer of the diocesan House of Young Churchmen and attended both summer camps and youth conferences at Roslyn before we held them at Shrine Mont. I received a graduate degree in theology (M.A. Oxon) from the Queen's College, Oxford, in 1964 and an M. Div. from Virginia Seminary in 1966. I received my initial training in spiritual guidance and discernment at the Pecos Benedictine Monastery in Pecos, New Mexico, in 1986.

I was ordained deacon by Bishop Robert Hall at St. Peter's, Arlington, in 1966 and priest by Bishop Gibson at Grace, Kilmarnock, in 1967. From 1970 to 1978 I served as editor of what is now The Virginia Episcopalian. I have served my entire ministry in the Diocese of Virginia. At present I am the Pastoral Director of Richmond Hill, an ecumenical Christian residential community and retreat center in the center of Richmond. I understand that, as I approach the 40th anniversary of my ordination to the priesthood, I have the second longest active service of any priest in the Diocese of Virginia.

I love this Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Virginia. I believe God has used this communion for wonderful witness. He has certainly redeemed me in and through it over and over again. The greatest gift he has given me is the prayer and support of honest Christians who were not afraid to face honestly the questions before them, seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit. They invited me to that same hope of true guidance.

I hope that you will find that kind of spirit here, and that you will be encouraged and strengthened in godly discernment by this document.

Yours faithfully in Christ,
The Rev. Benjamin P. Campbell

1. Discernment

Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so? (*Amos 3:3. NIV*)¹

In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, love.²

In September, 2006, several congregations in the Diocese of Virginia are entering a 40-day period of discernment concerning the future of their relationship to their Bishop and to the Diocese of Virginia.

Discernment is a holy task, one of the most essential of the works of the Holy Spirit of Jesus in this world. It is the way we live in this world -- the way we seek to make decisions and to be led by the Spirit of God. The Apostle Paul defines the process in one of his best-known passages in the Letter to the Romans:

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove (*Gk: discern*) what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. (*Romans 12:1-2 NKJV*)

The work of the Spirit of truth in discernment, and in the leading of Jesus' disciples, is described in the words of Jesus in John's Gospel:

If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you for ever -- the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.

But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.

When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me. And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning. All this I have told you so that you will not go astray.

I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you. (*John 14:15-18;14:26;15:26-16:1; 16:12-15 NIV*)

Discernment for the Christian is above all to be undertaken prayerfully, in humility, and with a willingness to listen. All sources of information may be used by the

¹ The prophet Amos is describing the relationship between Israel and the Lord. As an illustration, he notes that two persons cannot walk together unless they have decided to do so. The King James translators rendered "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" but most modern translators (NIV, NAS, RSV) describe an agreement to walk together, rather than a general agreement.

² Peter Meiderlin, Augsburg, 1626. Known by German Christians as the "*Friedensspruch*" or "Peace Saying."

Holy Spirit in the process of discernment. Scripture is central, as well as study and reading, reason, the traditions of the church, personal experience, and the wisdom and counsel of other Christians. Discernment is a holy obligation, and a holy opportunity. It is the way in which the Church, in its many forms, is a living organism, serving the Lord. It enables each Christian to play his or her own part in the fulfillment of the petition which Jesus taught us: "Thy Kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven."

We present here, therefore, a series of topics and issues for the prayerful discernment of Christians in the Episcopal Diocese of Virginia. Despite the intense debate, the many offenses, and the manifold hurts and resentments which the past days and years have occasioned, we remain responsible for one another's welfare in Christ. If we walk together, it would be good to make an appointment to do it better. If we do not make that appointment, it would be good to serve God's Kingdom together in our separation. In either case, none of us is exempt from the call to love one another, to serve the Kingdom, to seek healing in Christ's name, to allow ourselves to be transformed by the Spirit of God, and to work for peace and justice in Virginia and the world.

We invite you to continue to join with others in this Diocese in a process of discernment, not only about whether some should divide from others, but also about how we may do Christ's mission better together. This is not a document which presents arguments intended to convince readers of the validity of a particular point of view. It simply presents some considerations. It is up to the Holy Spirit to lead us to the truth, and in this leading there is no convincing argument except for the testimony of the Spirit. May the Holy Spirit guide all of us in all our deliberations.

"Not every one who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven." (*Matthew 7:21*)

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived.

But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in

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your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. (*Col. 3:1-17 NIV*)

2. The Bible

All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. (*2 Tim 3:16-17*)

Q. How do we recognize the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives?

A. We recognize the presence of the Holy Spirit when we confess Jesus Christ as Lord and are brought into love and harmony with God, with ourselves, with our neighbors, and with all creation.

Q. How do we recognize the truths taught by the Holy Spirit?

A. We recognize truths to be taught by the Holy Spirit when they are in accord with the Scriptures.

Q. Why do we call the Holy Scriptures the Word of God?

A. We call them the Word of God because God inspired their human authors and because God still speaks to us through the Bible.

Q. How do we understand the meaning of the Bible?

A. We understand the meaning of the Bible by the help of the Holy Spirit, who guides the Church in the true interpretation of the Scriptures.

(*"An Outline of the Faith, commonly called the Catechism," Book of Common Prayer, pp. 852-854*)

The Bishop says to the ordinand

Will you be loyal to the doctrine, discipline, and worship of Christ as this Church has received them? And will you, in accordance with the canons of this Church, obey your bishop and other ministers who may have authority over you and your work?

Answer

I am willing and ready to do so; and I solemnly declare that I do believe the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, and to contain all things necessary to salvation; and I do solemnly engage to conform to the doctrine, discipline, and worship of The Episcopal Church.

(*"The Ordination of a Priest," Book of Common Prayer, p. 526*)

The Anglican Church has traditionally based its discernment of God's guidance on the three principles of Scripture, Tradition, and Reason. To these must of course be added the central criterion: The Holy Spirit. It is in the prayerful fulfillment of Jesus' promise, that the Holy Spirit will lead us into all truth, that we work with Scripture, Reason, and Tradition.

The Anglican reformers recognized in particular the historic Episcopate, the Councils of the Church until 451 A.D. (*The Council of Chalcedon*) which provided the Church with the Creeds and critical doctrinal definitions, and the historic liturgies of the Church as contained in the Book of Common Prayer, to be the defining elements of Tradition and the examples of Reason.

The centrality and authority of Scripture in the Church cannot be disputed. All Christian doctrine and behavior must be based on Scripture.

From the earliest centuries of the Church, Christian disputes have been related to different interpretations of Scripture. The various groups which began the Protestant Reformation in Europe based their divisions on various interpretations of Scripture. Today the World Christian Database lists over 9000 different Christian denominations, not including the "non-denominational" churches which are the most rapidly proliferating bodies in many American cities. Nearly all Christian churches define their difference from one another by differing interpretations of Scripture.

The Anglican Church was born in the 16th and 17th Centuries with several differing interpretations of Scripture at its core. The Church eventually incorporated several different groups of Protestant reformers, together with a variety of persons who had remained committed to various Catholic visions of the Church, into a single fellowship.

Because of the nature of that fellowship, Anglicanism developed an understanding of unity which made it difficult for any one of the warring parties to enforce its particular Scriptural interpretation on the other parties, so long as the core of the faith was maintained. That core was found in:

1. Allegiance to Scripture (although not allegiance to one another's interpretation of Scripture);
- 2) Acceptance of the authority of the Bishop and in England, the Crown;
- 3) Use of the prescribed liturgies of the Book of Common Prayer. These liturgies are firmly based on Scripture; on the traditional definitions of the Faith from the first Seven Ecumenical Councils of the Church; and on the liturgical thinking of both historic Catholicism and the Protestant Reformation.

Debate over the interpretation of Scripture was rife at the time of the founding of the Anglican Church and has continued to this day. It is common for one party to attack another party as "un-Scriptural" or "un-Biblical" in its thinking.

The Anglican treatment of Scripture is very close to the treatment of Scripture (the Torah) in Jesus' own day, a treatment which continues in Judaism. The authority of the Torah was not, and is not, in dispute in Judaism. But Torah students learn to dispute the meaning of the Scripture with one another. The rabbis give their differing opinions of what it means, while joining in their reverence and respect for the revelation. It is in the text -- not the interpretation of the text -- that they find their unity.

We see this tradition in the question asked of Jesus, -- clearly the kind of test question asked rabbis at that time:

"Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love

your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets." (*Matthew 22:36-40*)

The question reflected, as we know, the need to establish a hierarchy of law in the face of an excessive legalism which seemed regularly to afflict the religion of Abraham, Moses, David, and the prophets. The rabbis had codified 613 different regulations from the Torah which the good Jew was supposed to keep. The trick of keeping all of these, -- or of redefining them so one could say one was keeping them -- had become quite intricate, and seemed to the prophets and Jesus to take people away from the central point of the service of God and neighbor.

Micah's well-known critique in the 8th Century B.C. rings through the years:

With what shall I come before the LORD and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. (*Micah 6:6-8 NIV*)

Jesus himself seemed to echo these words when he spoke to the Pharisees, the attentive religious middle class of his own day:

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faith; these you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. (*Matthew 23:23 RSV*)

The result of the Anglican experience with Scripture and Unity is that there is not, in Anglican experience, any significant history of the exclusion of one or another individual, congregation, diocese, or Bishop of the church based on interpretation of Scripture. A great variety of interpretations of Scripture has coexisted in the Anglican Communion. Unity has been based rather on common discipline, common worship, common prayer, shared reverence for and discussion of Scripture, and common allegiance to the Bishop.

Some of the of the disputes over the meaning of Scripture in Anglicanism today echo disputes which were contained in the Church in the 16th Century. Some are new. Some of the disputes have subsided or been resolved over time.

Issues and matters for discernment.

It is not respectful or realistic for Anglicans engaged in honest discernment to treat discernment as a polemical or argumentative exercise.

It is not accurate to characterize everyone who disagrees with a particular scriptural interpretation as having the same understanding of scripture as each other. If you see yourself as a Conservative, not all who have a different interpretation are "Liberals." They simply have a different interpretation. If you see yourself as a Liberal,

not all who differ from you are "Fundamentalists." They simply have a different interpretation -- and may also widely differ from one another.

It is easy -- but not an exercise in Holy Spirit discipline -- to seize upon some extreme person who disagrees with you and use that person to fuel one's own anger. Epithets such as "Fundamentalist" and "Heretic" may be accurate for some persons, but not every Christian who disagrees with you falls into that category. These epithets are not helpful when one is attempting to listen to what God may be saying through someone who disagrees. It is generally good to find someone who disagrees with you who does not trigger this kind of reaction, so that you can actually listen to their insight and evaluate it.

Scripture will always require interpretation and discernment for a number of reasons. On this position most Anglicans and scripture scholars in all denominations agree. For example, in a specific passage in the Hebrew Scriptures (*Lev. 20:13*) in which male homosexual acts are condemned, the text also says of the two men, "they shall surely be put to death." All Christians reading this text prayerfully, it is assumed, would determine on some basis or another that even if the condemnation of homosexuality were affirmed, the words prescribing capital punishment should be rejected.

In Christian experience, certain situations require that discernment be exercised in terms of the literal interpretation of Scripture. One can have a high view of Scripture as the Word of God and still need -- or need all the more -- to deal with these issues. Scholars and Christian teachers disagree on the importance of these, and on the way in which they can and should be applied:

- The meaning of words has changed and the literal translation of a passage may be misleading as to its initial intent.
- In a given situation one must choose between two emphases and passages of Scripture and, under the guidance of the Spirit give precedence to one.
- The Hebrew Scripture has been surpassed by deeper understanding in the later history of the Jews, or in the teaching of Jesus.
- The Scripture passage represents a teaching for a particular situation which is no longer appropriate because the situation is different.
- Christianity has learned something since the first century of the Church.

Jesus himself used most or all of these methods in working with Scripture. Any serious preacher or Scripture scholar takes this work on as his or her responsibility. In the work of discernment, there is no use of Scripture that is "pure" and not subject to these tests. There are, however, significant differences in the interpretation of Scripture in Anglicanism in the present day, as there have been for four centuries.

3. The Anglican Church in Virginia

The Anglican Church was the Church of the English settlers at Jamestown. The Rev. Robert Hunt, Anglican Vicar of Heatherfield, County of Sussex, since 1602, was chaplain of the Jamestown Settlement at the beginning. He died the year after the settlement of 1607. Hunt was regarded as a true voice of prayer and reconciliation in that difficult first year. Captain John Smith described him as "our honest, religious and courageous divine." Another Jamestown Chronicler wrote: "Many were the mischiefs that daily sprung from their ignorant spirits; but the good doctrines and exhortations of our Preacher Minister Hunt reconciled them." Governor Edward Maria Wingfield, first President of the Council at Jamestown, and Captain John Smith, who agreed in nothing else, agreed in praise of this worthy man. They wrote: "Our factions were oft qualified, and our wants and greater extremities so comforted that they seemed easie in comparison of what we endured after his memorable death...."³



Baptism of Pocohantas, 1614, by **Alexander Whitaker**, "Apostle of Virginia". Oil study for mural by John Gadsby Chapman, c. 1837-1840

³ "Robert Hunt: Jamestown's First Chaplain." National Park Service: Jamestown Historic Briefs, Colonial National Historic Park, by Jen Loux, 1995.

The Rev. Alexander Whitaker came to Virginia in 1611, and built a house near the new settlement at Henrico, nine miles down the James River from the present city of Richmond. Pocahontas stayed at his house and took her instructions before her Baptism. Whitaker baptized her and married Pocahontas and the tobacco planter John Rolfe of Varina. His *Good News from Virginia* was one of the first books sent back to England from the new Colony. According to one source, "His letters... express his great surprise that more of the English clergy did not engage in missionary work."⁴

The Church of England was the established Church of the Virginia Colony, and remained in that position until the American Revolution. Leaders of the Colony were the Vestrymen of the churches, which were spaced every ten miles throughout the Colony. Taxes supported the churches and after 1624 attendance was required.

Up until the middle of the 18th Century, as Michael Farris told the story in a recent lecture, "colonial laws still dictated the particulars of religious belief and practice. Under these laws, hundreds of Puritans were banished from the colony and courts ordered Baptists to pay thousands of pounds of tobacco for conscientiously refusing to have their children baptized by their parish minister. Few "dissenters," as they were called, could exist in Virginia; the established church had grown seemingly impenetrable roots.

"It was illegal in colonial Virginia for a group of ten or more to meet together even in a private home to pray or read Scripture or hear sermons written by people like George Whitefield, Martin Luther, and John Bunyan."

In the 1740's, a bricklayer named Samuel Morris of Hanover County "was so moved by what he was learning from the Bible and from these great heroes of the faith that he invited his neighbors to join him. Their spiritual hunger got the better of them, and they stopped attending services of the established church. In 1745, Morris and others were hauled before the General Court in Williamsburg and forced to pay heavy fines. But they endured the hardships and established themselves so firmly in the colony that soon the civil and ecclesiastical officials had few options other than to grant the licenses they wanted for their meeting houses and their preachers."

"Not long after, Baptists started settling in Virginia. They were ridiculed for lacking formal education and violently harassed by both mobs and civil authorities, who still insisted that they alone possessed the right to define orthodoxy."⁵

The Bishop of London, whose Diocese included Virginia, had little direct ability to influence the churches under his control for the first 180 years of the Colony. A pattern of strong lay leadership developed in the Vestry system, and occasionally that flowered in a kind of unauthorized dissent. At least one church in the Northern Neck⁶ called a Presbyterian minister in the mid-18th Century and kept him for a significant pastorate.

⁴ Appleton's Encyclopedia, cited on www.famousAmericans.net/Alexanderwhitaker.

⁵ Michael Farris, Speech for National Day of Prayer, Richmond, 2006.

⁶ St. Mary's White Chapel, Lancaster County, founded 1669.

Despite the formally unified Christian church in Virginia, significant differences began to show among the white population. The class system made for great disparity among people, and brought forth different needs and experiences. Renewal, when it could not occur in established churches, occurred outside them. By the time the Continental Congress gathered in Henrico Parish in 1775 -- the parish Alexander Whitaker and Pocahontas had frequented 164 years beforehand -- there were significant groups of Quakers, Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians in the colony, as well as other evangelicals both inside and outside the Anglican Church. Africans in great numbers were drawn to evangelical Christianity, identifying their own independent religion with the Baptist sect.

In 1777, just two years after Patrick Henry cried out "Give me Liberty or Give me Death," at St. John's Church, Thomas Jefferson drafted his "Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom." This bill, which became the basis for the freedom of religion clause in the Constitution, accelerated the disestablishment of the Church of England.

Events moved quickly. Anglican clergy, mostly Tory, fled their revolutionary parishioners. Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, Quakers, and other evangelicals came out of hiding. John Wesley appointed Francis Asbury and Thomas Coke superintendents of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and they began to ordain others. Many Anglican churches were abandoned or became barns. Glebe lands were confiscated by the state.

Meanwhile, in 1785, the living Anglican Churches in the new nation organized themselves into the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America. Virginians elected James Madison, the Cousin of the President, bishop and he was consecrated at Lambeth Chapel in London September 19, 1790.

The Virginia church began to revive significantly under William Meade, who became assistant bishop of the Diocese of Virginia in 1829, diocesan in 1841, and President of Virginia Theological Seminary from 1842 to 1862.

The revived church was strongly Protestant and evangelical. No longer the established church of the Commonwealth, it profited from the diverse Christian environment in which it had developed -- having much in common with the Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, and Quakers with whom it shared the ministry of the Commonwealth. Episcopalians came to represent persons of differing theological perspectives who sought a common sacramental relationship under the Bishop.

The Diocese of Southern Virginia was made into a separate diocese in 1892, along the line of the James River, and in 1919 the Diocese of Southwestern Virginia, headquartered in Roanoke, was formed.

The Episcopal Church in Virginia had no resident bishop for 183 years. It has had a resident bishop for only 217 years. It is broadly spread through every county and independent city of the Commonwealth. There is no jurisdiction without at least one

Episcopal Church. Most of those churches, founded before bishops came to Virginia, have a proud lineage of congregational integrity and diversity.

Virginia's particular understanding of the church -- an Episcopal Church, sharing core values and maintaining communion with one another through communion with their bishop, common worship using the Book of Common Prayer, and a common evangelical desire for the healing of the Commonwealth, -- is an understanding which developed through Virginia's history and has been a witness to the entire world.

Having chosen the President of the College of William and Mary as its first bishop and having founded a Seminary in 1823, the Virginia Diocese has pursued an understanding of Christianity that is firmly rooted in the study of Scripture and the strong educational traditions of Anglicanism.

Significant renewal and mission movements have affected the Diocese through the 219 years since its founding. In those years it has embraced not only cousins of the Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, and Quakers, but also Anglo-Catholics, modern Evangelicals, Social Activists, Charismatics, and advocates of liturgical renewal. It has confessed its racist sins and sought to remedy them. It has survived the Revolutionary War with England and the horrible fratricide of the American Civil War.

Thoughts and issues for discernment.

How do the difficulties of the present time appear in the context of the history of the Episcopal Church in Virginia? Do you believe that the Holy Spirit, with the earnest willingness of the people, can sort through them by a combination of endurance, mutual witness, common prayer, and fidelity to the Gospel?

What would be the cost to the Commonwealth and the world's churches of a fractured church in Virginia? Would there be any blessing or positive witness in this schism?

As an Episcopal Church, under what circumstances is it possible for us to disagree with our bishop, and still remain in respectful, prayerful communion with him? What are the limits of this commitment to prayerful communion?

If we remain united, what positive and dramatic steps can we take to preach the Gospel together and witness together to the need for redemption in Virginia and the world in this next decade?

4. Homosexuality

It seems clear that Homosexuality -- the teaching of the Church about it, and the disciplinary regulations of the Church concerning it -- is the most serious topic over which some congregations are feeling they must pray for discernment about maintaining unity with the bishop and, therefore, with other congregations in the Diocese of Virginia.

Although few verses in the Scripture⁷ refer directly to homosexual activity, the verses which do refer to it are unambiguous in their condemnation of it. The verses are printed below.

- You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination. (*Lev. 18:22 RSV*)
- If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death, their blood is upon them. (*Lev. 20:13 RSV*)
- For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. Their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural, and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in their own persons the due penalty for their error. (*Romans 1:26-27 RSV*)
- Now we know that the law is good, if any one uses it lawfully, understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, immoral persons, sodomites (Gk: *or* homosexuals), kidnapers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine, in accordance with the glorious gospel of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted. (*1 Tim 1:8-11 RSV*)
- Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. (*1 Cor. 6:9-11 NIV*)

Jesus does not refer directly to homosexuality in the Scriptural record, but he does mention fornication; and one may legitimately assume that homosexual behavior, since it is not between married persons, is at least included under that category:

And he said, "What comes out of a man is what defiles a man. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, fornication, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a man." (*Mk. 7:20-23; cp. Matt. 15:19*)

The Scriptural witness, although brief, is definite, and it is reinforced by the interpretation of the Church in nearly all its iterations throughout the centuries. It is only in the latter half of the Twentieth Century that any serious Christian clerics or theologians have begun to bring into question this teaching. Still today the vast majority of Christian

⁷ Out of 31,103 verses in the Old and New Testaments, five verses refer directly to homosexuality.

bodies -- including the great majority of national churches in the Anglican Communion and nearly all major American denominations -- regard homosexual activity as something defined by the Scripture as sinful *in se*.

The level of feeling about this topic is so high at this moment in history that it is virtually impossible to have a rational conversation about it in the church or anywhere else. Nonetheless, it is important to make certain statements which may be clarifying or helpful to persons of prayer who are genuinely trying to be a part of God's solution at this time.

Most significant Christian bodies in America are far more accepting of homosexual persons today than they were in the past. It is clear that God offers forgiveness to sinners, and that all continue to be in need of forgiveness. All we need do is repent. On this virtually all are agreed.

Why should anything be different today than it has been in the past 1900 years of Christianity?

The most significant difference in our time is the public openness about homosexuality. For the past 30 or 40 years in this country, people who believe themselves to be homosexual have been "coming out" or stating publicly that they have a "homosexual orientation." Today, a significant portion of the therapeutic community, as well as a significant portion of the public, believes that there are persons who are "gay" by nature or by birth or in some way that is irreversible.

The tendency on the part of the Church is to call this simply a newly virulent form of evil and immorality -- an onslaught of public relations by persons who, wittingly or unwittingly, are carrying out a demonic mission.

The problem with this reaction is that many very earnestly Christian persons have declared this self-understanding as homosexuals, and have sought to remain within the Church openly as faithful members. In the Episcopal Church, such persons began in the 1970's to form a group called "Integrity." In the Roman Catholic Church, a corresponding group called "Dignity" was formed in the same period. Similar groups have been formed in other denominations, and a new denomination, the Metropolitan Community Church, has been formed specifically for persons who regard their homosexuality as permanent and unable to be "cured."

In response to this, the Church has revived and strengthened ministries of prayer and healing to help persons who have issues with homosexuality be transformed and healed of their homosexuality. Truro Church supported such a ministry, called "Liberation," in the early 1970s. "Set Free" is a national ministry which has worked successfully in this field for several decades.

It has also become clear that a significant number of clergy in nearly all major denominations -- estimates vary from a minimum of 5% to a maximum of 40% in some

denominations -- are at least homosexual in orientation, if not in practice. This corresponds to estimates of similar experience in other professions, and most especially in drama, music, and education, among others. When William Clinton became President, he caused a furor by making public the conversation in the armed forces about sexual orientation. The conversation has not escaped any major area of society.

The increasingly public treatment of homosexuality has exposed what many clergy knew already: that many families have a secret about some member of their family -- often a son or daughter -- who is living somewhere else and often has left the church because he or she is homosexual. This affects families of both liberal and conservative Christian congregations and denominations.

There is no question that the predominant themes of homosexuality in the media and other areas of the society are often dangerous and misleading to children. The unfettered nature of television and media, as well as the tolerance required in public situations, has caused parents and church leaders to be concerned about what their children will be receiving. They feel that sexual orientation is not a matter of indifference. It is not that "one is just as good as the other."

On this account a surprising number of homosexual persons would agree. Very few homosexual persons who are concerned about others or are active and prayerful Christians will tell you that they "chose" homosexuality. Nearly every one would tell you that they tried to escape it. Over and over again, their story is that they could not escape what they came to regard as this inevitable truth about themselves. Most have been taught that homosexuality is wrong, and have sought forgiveness and healing. Some have found both. Some have found only forgiveness. These latter have, in many cases, decided they must opt for acceptance as homosexual persons.

It is important to note that the experience of the past 40 years of openness about homosexuality in the Western world has permitted a public discussion and exploration of the nature of this phenomenon that has never been possible in the history of the world. Because people have been open about it, everyone has learned much more. A lot of stupid things have been done and said. A lot of sound and fury has occurred. A lot of very bad advice and moral teaching has been given. But slowly, the society and Christian people are gathering information and experience.

Pastors and therapists who deal with homosexual behavior divide it into three categories:

a) Chosen behavior. Some people act out homosexually because they just want to. This is, most Christian theologians agree, to be regarded as destructive and sinful. This is at least one of the types of activity condemned in the Scriptural passages cited above.

b) Psychological dysfunction. Some people act out homosexually because of a psychological problem. This acting out can become obsessive, compulsive, and addictive. Most notably, it can be caused by sexual abuse as a child.

c) Orientation. Some people appear to have a homosexual orientation. That is, there appears to be no particular psychological cause of their situation, and it appears to be involuntary. They have no choice. There is nothing to be healed of.

How many of the people who practice homosexual acts are in which of these categories? Are there really these three categories? Are there more categories? Fewer?

If there is such a thing as a homosexual "orientation," this is probably the category into which a significant percentage of those who are active Christians fall. Christian churches, by and large, teach that homosexuality is a sin, and the Scripture passages that we have cited are clear on this. Many very prayerful and earnest Christian persons became prayerful and earnest Christians precisely because they were seeking God's help to deal with their sexual confusion.

The question which Christians must ask in this generation is this: Are we dealing with a theological issue or are we dealing with a physiological issue?

If there are at least some persons for whom homosexual orientation is a fact, and one which cannot be "healed" by prayer or repentance, then we cannot call their orientation "sinful" in the particular way in which we have in the past. It is, certainly, difficult in any case to call homosexuality "natural." But it may be factual. And if it is "factual," then it is no more a particular sin than having six fingers on a hand. The moral issue for the homosexual person, like that for any other person, would be his or her behavior.

If there are at least some persons who have a genuine homosexual orientation, then moral theology must revise itself to take this new reality into account. The church should ask, then, these further questions:

- Is it ever appropriate for homosexual persons to be in committed homosexual relationships, or should they be advised to live lives of lifelong celibacy if they wish to be members of the church?
- Is it legitimate for celibate persons of homosexual orientation to be ordained clergy of the church?
- Is it moral for churches to create the kind of climate which requires that a number of their lay leaders, church staff, and ordained clergy must maintain a dual life in fear of being discovered and cast out?
- Is there any situation in which a church might accept as an ordained minister a person, fully qualified in all other ways, who is living in a committed homosexual relationship?
- Is it moral to be a closet homosexual in a position of ministry?

What would Jesus do?

Clearly, Jesus would be accepting of all who come to him, heavy laden, asking for his help and forgiveness. That is not the question. The question is, how would Jesus answer the questions above?

So far as the first two descriptions of homosexuality are concerned, the answer is clear. Homosexuality by choice comes out of inner distress, and needs to be repented, forgiven, stopped, and healed. Homosexuality as a result of psychological damage needs help; it will be forgiven and needs to be stopped and healed.

But a homosexual orientation? If there is no choice? The Christian jury is still out on this one, no matter what both liberals and conservatives may say, what legislation they pass, how loudly they shout, or whom they excommunicate. There are enough earnest Christian homosexuals in all denominations to learn over the next decades, and to share with the Church, the reality of their attempts to be faithful. If, after another generation, we continue to find that this orientation is unavoidable for some of our children, fellow parishioners, and brothers and sisters, perhaps we will as well develop a clearer sense of the healthiest path for homosexual persons and for teachers who must continue to teach children and the society the basic Christian teachings about man and woman, sexuality and marriage.

Without specific Biblical teaching on the matter of homosexual orientation, Christians look for guidance to Jesus' behavior and the behavior of the Holy Spirit as experienced in the New Testament. Here we find two criteria: truth and love.

Above all, there is a need for patience, loving conservatism, and honest exploration on the part of the People of God. The confidential experience of most pastors with homosexual persons is far more complex than either liberal or conservative folk are willing to say publicly. The hypocrisy of both conservative and liberal churches on this topic has been much more far-reaching than has ever been revealed. God can work this one out. We must be faithful. We must not be hysterical or afraid. We must, however, be both honest and compassionate.

5. Unity and Division.

1. Another parable he put before them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field; but while men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. And the servants of the householder came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then has it weeds?' He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.' The servants said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' But he said, 'No; lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. Let both grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.'" (*Matthew 13:24-30 RSV*)

2. Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said:

"I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people."

"Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you."

"I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty." (*2 Cor. 6:14-18 NIV; cp. Lev. 26:12, Isaiah 52:11, 2 Sam. 7:14.*)

These two scriptural passages reflect the dilemma which some honest and earnest congregations appear to be facing today in the Diocese of Virginia. The first passage, Jesus' Parable of the Weeds among the Wheat, describes the virtual impossibility of creating a church that is completely pure. Christian history has indeed proven this. One division by persons seeking to create a pure church has almost always been followed by another fragmentation, and another, as persons discovered the same impurity in the new church they still inhabited. (Perhaps the impurity was partially their own.) Thus Jesus teaches his disciples that, no matter what they do, they will not be able to create the perfect fellowship.

But Paul, writing to the Corinthians, presents the case that there have to be limits to this kind of thinking. There are times when it is very clear that one is dealing with Christ and Belial, and there is no point in pretending otherwise. When this becomes clear, some drastic actions may need to be taken.

The question of discernment before persons in the Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Virginia is this: Which of these passages do you believe, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, accurately reflects our situation?

Majors and Minors

There is always the story of the preacher who told his congregation it was time to "stop majoring in minors." One thing is very clear in Jesus' teaching: Christianity is a matter of finding God's perspective, of looking at what is most important:

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faith; these you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel! (*Matt 23:23-24*)

The major issues, Jesus says, are justice and mercy and faith. When it comes to morality, he talks about economics, servanthood, faith, and the misuse of power. Despite the church's preoccupation with it, sexual behavior is not the major topic of Jesus' teaching.

Above all Jesus is concerned about the hypocrisy of religious leaders. The Pharisees oppress people in the name of God, he indicates. "But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because you shut the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither enter yourselves, nor allow those who would enter to go in." (*Matthew 23:13*) He teaches his disciples to pray, "Thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven," and announces the coming of the kingdom of God:

And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up; and he went to the synagogue, as his custom was, on the sabbath day. And he stood up to read; and there was given to him the book of the prophet Isaiah. He opened the book and found the place where it was written, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." And he closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant, and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." (*Luke 4:16-21*)

For the past decade, while churches in the Diocese of Virginia have been arguing about matters of sexuality in New Hampshire, have they been neglecting the weightier matters of the Law? Have the needs of the poor in Central Virginia been a major concern? Where is the good news? Have Episcopalians in the suburbs of Washington, D.C., which lie in Northern Virginia been taking proper responsibility for the enormous poverty in Anacostia and other parts of the voteless center city?⁸

Many congregations in the diocese have made major efforts in overseas mission, but there have been significant attempts to do this separately from one another. Have Virginians profited properly -- and more to the point, have our Lord and those in need profited properly -- from what can and should be happening through the commonality of

⁸ The U.S. Census Bureau has just reported that five of the nation's seven wealthiest jurisdictions are in the Washington Metropolitan Area. Two of the five are in the Northern portion of the Diocese of Virginia.

our efforts? Have we accepted such a degree of alienation from one another that we have been unable to be united in service to those in need?

There has been significant partisan debate between the congregations of this diocese, and particularly in Northern Virginia. There have even been attempts to found competing churches in the same neighborhoods. Meanwhile, the number of sheep without a shepherd grows every day. Are we exporting to those sheep a Gospel which is poisoned with ungodly contentiousness?

God really knows what the major issues are, and what are the minor issues. Which ones are we selling? Which ones occupy our time? Are we burying our talents in the ground or investing them? (*Matt. 25:14-30*) At the end of the day, is the Kingdom moving forward, or are we all moving backward?

A diocesan church

The distinctive quality of Anglicanism, as opposed to Roman Catholicism, is that the Diocese is the primary unit of the church. Our Bishops are linked together in the House of Bishops, and our laity through the General Convention, but these define only the framework of the churches, not the daily reality. The Lambeth Conference -- the meeting of the Primates and leaders of the national churches -- meets only once a decade. The General Convention has some prescriptive authority over a diocese, but it is limited. The Lambeth Conference is simply advisory. The Bishop and the Diocese are the primary unit of the Episcopal Church. Dioceses are primary, and intimate.

The Diocese is, specifically, a geographical unit composed of geographical parishes. This represents the church's responsibility for the care of all souls and the mission of the church to all people on behalf of our Lord. It is the area in which a bishop, his priests, and his congregations share responsibility with others for all the citizens -- for the care of the poor and the establishment of a healthy and just community, as well as for the establishment of missions and congregations. The Bishop and Diocese of Virginia are responsible for prayer, love, and ministry on God's behalf for all the people living in Virginia between the James and Potomac Rivers.

Here, in the Diocese of Virginia, there has often been a spirit of common work and deliberation throughout the past decade. Many of the difficulties which have affected other dioceses have not afflicted us. The Bishop has maintained relationship with every parish; he has not forced clergy on any parish; and the Council has not passed legislation which would force one another to act against conscience. But we have also not always been good stewards of our common life in the Gospel.

The essence of unity in the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion is the sacramental and pastoral relationship between a bishop, the congregations, and the clergy. Sacramental theology does not require agreement, or even approval, of parties in communion with one another. The bishop is ordained as the central servant of the servants of God, and it is communion with him which unites the priests and congregations of the diocese. When an individual is excommunicated, it means he or she is out of communion with the bishop. That is the single criterion for unity. The

congregations, parishioners, and clergy of the diocese honor their bishop as an agent of God and as the sacrament of unity, whether or not they agree with him. The great charism of sacramental theology in Anglicanism is that it places this relation of sacrament and prayer -- a relationship not dependent on theological agreement or even personal approval -- at the center of the church's unity.

As the symbol of unity, the bishop himself is required by vows and vocation to maintain sacramental and pastoral relationship with all of his clergy and congregations, regardless of their treatment of him. He is under obligation to speak for the unity of the church, and to seek to discern God's leading in his judgements. His clergy and congregations may disagree with his judgements, but it is not up to them to say that he is wrong. They are not the ones who are consecrated bishop, must remain in relationship with the whole church, and must surely answer at the judgement seat of Christ for their episcopal decisions.

During the past three years, some congregations of the Diocese of Virginia have effectively declared themselves to be out of communion with their bishop. The stated reason is that Bishop Peter Lee did not vote to refuse to honor the decision of the Diocese of New Hampshire to elect and consecrate Gene Robinson, an admitted homosexual man living in a committed relationship, as Bishop of New Hampshire.⁹ These congregations have asked their bishop not to conduct visitations, and they have made similar requests of the assistant bishops because they have not publicly condemned the diocesan bishop.

There is no surprise, and no shame, in disagreement, or even great disapproval of the actions of one's bishop. But demanding that the bishop agree with one in order to honor his office raises grave questions about the obedience of clergy and congregations, and their willingness to be part of an episcopal church. You cannot have a real bishop if you claim the right to veto his decisions. No congregation, no bishop of integrity, and no honest episcopal church can function in this way. Changing dioceses or finding alternative episcopal oversight will not alter this reality.

Bishop Lee, in his behavior toward all of the congregations of the diocese, has maintained the traditional charism of a bishop by keeping relationship. He has even permitted some congregations to have alternate episcopal oversight for a time. He has worked tirelessly to maintain relationship with all of those under his care, even those who insult and vilify him. Meanwhile, he has not advocated the consecration of a homosexual bishop in Virginia. He has not advocated that congregations should call homosexual priests, or advocate in their congregations the practice of homosexuality. No one can force him, this diocese, or any other bishop to take those actions. Bishop Lee has remained faithful to his promise, at the time of his election, to be the Bishop of the whole Diocese of Virginia. He has sought to honor and support all legitimate expressions of the Gospel in the Diocese.¹⁰

⁹ Several other complaints listed in bills of particulars of several congregations relate to the same theme of homosexuality, including the Bishop's refusal to refuse homosexual persons entrance to the Virginia Seminary.

¹⁰ Again, the bills of particulars give Bishop Lee the credit for his consistent support of all congregations.

In short, life in the Diocese of Virginia has been inclusive for all congregations which have sought to remain in communion with one another. There is no indication that anything else will ever be the case. Should it be, the tradition of congregational independence in this diocese, going back to colonial days, is so strong that there would surely be a revolt by any congregation which is oppressed.

Separate denominations

Every opinion which is present in the Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Virginia is also present in some other specific denomination. The Anglican Communion is blessed with some distinctive spiritualities, particularly in its traditions of scholarly evangelicalism, personal ascetical spirituality, and eucharistic liturgy. But much of the theology and strength of various congregations is shared with persons in other denominations. Some Anglicans feel closer to Roman Catholics, some to Baptists, some to Evangelical Presbyterians, some to Lutherans, some to Charismatics, some to Quakers, some to independent megachurches.

Episcopalians in the Diocese of Virginia -- the original Anglicans in America -- could almost always be in another church where more people shared their particular spirituality. But they choose to be in a church which maintains a Catholic and Evangelical union with other congregations through a bishop, a Prayer Book, Biblical discussion, Common Prayer, and the sharing of the Sacraments. This kind of church can be an empty shell unless it is filled with a particular expression of the Gospel. But it can be a glorious taste of the Kingdom when its Christian diversity is truly celebrated.

In today's Christian world, most people pass through more than one denomination in their lives, as they seek to make their way to Christ. Paradoxically, if they leave the Episcopal Church because it seems wrong to them, they may well end up in a church which has better relationships with the Episcopal Church than they had when they belonged to it. God is one, and he is constantly bringing people to himself through Christ in many different ways.

Discerning what is important

- Is the situation in the Diocese of Virginia today better understood through the lens of the Parable of the Weeds and the Wheat, or through the lens of Paul's injunction not to be yoked with unbelievers?
- If our Bishop, acting prayerfully in the office to which he was called and consecrated, refuses to cut off communion with the Diocese and Bishop of New Hampshire, do we have the right to say that he is not making the correct judgement? Is it not his job to discern the will of God in fear and trembling? Is it not our job to honor that work and him as our bishop, while maintaining our own discernment in the areas for which we are responsible?
- The debate over sexuality has not, largely, affected policies within the Diocese of Virginia. To what extent has this debate about policies outside the Diocese affected the quality of our mission together, and diverted our attention from issues God considers urgent?

- To what extent is the debate and dissention within our own diocese a kind of "wedge issue" of the sort which divides the Red and Blue constituencies in American politics? Issues around homosexuality are the divisive currency of this fall's election in Virginia and the nation. How can we, through our relationship, testify to the power of God to span even this chasm in our community?
- To what extent have we become addicted to internal Christian debates rather than challenging the evil of our society, and doing battle with the demonic forces which are tearing apart our world? To what extent is our Christianity dependent on this inner conflict?
- Do you believe that God the Holy Spirit can, through the hearts of his faithful servants in the Church in the Diocese of Virginia, sort out the issues surrounding homosexuality during the next generation if we can remain prayerful and together? Are you willing to be a part of that prayerful time of service together?
- Do you believe that attempting to separate from the Episcopal Diocese of Virginia will enable your congregation to focus more or less on the most important matters of God?
- Is this issue of the consecration of an openly admitted homosexual priest as bishop so major that a congregation should leave the Diocese over it? Is that what God wants in your case?

Alternatives

Here are alternate ways which a congregation may choose to proceed. No prediction is made of the effect of various decisions, nor of the response of others to these decisions, nor of financial and emotional costs, legal consequences and prolonged uncertainties. They are offered only because they are clearly possible, and because we seek honest discernment in the Spirit.

1. Remain in the Diocese of Virginia and the Episcopal Church and continue to expend major energy on opposition to the persons who make ordination of homosexual clergy and some form of blessing of the unions of homosexual persons their major agenda, even if they are outside the Diocese of Virginia and do not threaten the policy and polity of this diocese. Continue to seek alternative episcopal oversight even though the Bishop neither asks approval of the controversial policies nor advocates policies within the diocese which will threaten the conscience of your congregation.

2. Remain in the Diocese of Virginia and work with the Bishop and other congregations to extend the mission of Christ and the power of his love throughout Virginia to one another, and to missions throughout the world. Seek ways to provide and receive witness from other congregations in the Diocese who have different strengths in the Body of Christ. Study the Scripture and learn rigorously about God's forgotten needs in our community. Provide an avenue in Scripture study and sacrament for reconciliation between "Red" Christians and "Blue" Christians. Testify to the enduring power of God in our generation.

3. Seek to separate from the Diocese of Virginia and the Episcopal Church and join an *ad hoc* group of congregations which are a mission of another Church, perhaps in West Africa, and under its bishop.

4. Seek to separate from the Diocese of Virginia and the Episcopal Church and, with like-minded congregations, start a new denomination with or without bishops.

Before his passage which tells the Corinthians not to be "mismatched with unbelievers" (2 Cor 2:14ff), the Apostle Paul makes a plea to the Corinthian Christians. If we are indeed dealing with Weeds and Wheat and are not representatives of Christ and Belial respectively, this disciplined response to Jesus represents the best we can do for one another:

From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once regarded Christ from a human point of view, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come.

All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Working together with him, then, we entreat you not to accept the grace of God in vain. For he says, "At the acceptable time I have listened to you, and helped you on the day of salvation." Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.

We put no obstacle in any one's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, tumults, labors, watching, hunger; by purity, knowledge, forbearance, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; in honor and dishonor, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

Our mouth is open to you, Corinthians; our heart is wide. You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted in your own affections. In return--I speak as to children--widen your hearts also. (2 Cor. 5:16-6:13 RSV)