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## *Since General Convention, Where is the Cathedral of St. Philip?*

**an article from the Cathedral Times**  
**by the Very Reverend Sam G. Candler**

Sex is naturally an awkward subject to talk about. It should be. Sexuality is so intimate and personal that we should not naturally make it a part of every conversation we have. Nevertheless, the subject has driven much conversation about the Episcopal Church these days. In particular, our Church is uncertain about how we deal with homosexuality, an even more awkward subject than sexuality in general.

Over the next few weeks you will be reading about certain gatherings at Plano, Texas, and at Canterbury, England. Let me try to summarize what those proceedings mean to us as parishioners of the Cathedral of St. Philip. First of all, I certainly acknowledge that my own views on homosexuality do not represent the views of every Episcopalian, either here at St. Philip's or across the world. When I agreed to deliver a speech at General Convention this past summer, I made certain that my audience heard that point: my view is one side of an honest disagreement which is occurring everywhere, including the Cathedral of St. Philip.

**While I acknowledge legitimate disagreement, I steadfastly do not believe that this disagreement should divide the Church.** I actually appreciated the Atlanta Journal Constitution newspaper interview with me, which was printed on 4 October 2003, because it clarified my own view publicly: I do not believe that homosexuality, in and of itself, is a sin; but I do believe that promiscuous sex is a sin. Many of you have asked me for five years about my view on this issue, and I have answered quite honestly and directly, as you know. I believe there is room in the Episcopal Church, and in the Anglican Communion, for legitimate disagreement on this issue.

Since General Convention in August, 2003, I have listened to, and have heard, all sorts of responses to convention actions, most of which responses have been faithful and graceful. I have especially listened to responses from those in disagreement with General Convention action. While they have varied, several common themes have also developed. Let me try to respond to those questions.

**What does the Bible say about homosexuality?** For me, this is a central question, and it has the fortunate consequence of turning us to scripture. I enjoy discussing this issue in a biblical way with folks, and I believe those conversations will continue. I am actually glad that many of us are reading the Bible again with a moral seriousness and with an inquiring faith. Again, let me acknowledge that the Bible is being interpreted in two different ways, between those who consider homosexuality a sin and those who do not. I encourage each of us to become more familiar with scripture itself, and not simply with the four to six verses that mention some sort of same-sex activity.

**Will our Cathedral of St. Philip endorse same-sex unions or blessings?** I have been asked to officiate at a same-sex union, and I have refused. My reason is that I do not believe that this parish, as a whole, could faithfully support such a blessing service. After all, I believe that it is a community, not just a priest, who properly blesses and supports relationships. This is why, whenever we commission ministries, or whenever we baptize, or even when we marry a man and a woman, we ask the clear question, publicly, to the congregation: "Will you do all in your power to support this person in their new ministry?" Many, many individual parishioners could support such a blessing, but many, many could not, too.

Much of the concern at the Cathedral seems to be about whether this particular parish would ever hold a same sex blessing service. I have had this conversation with parishioners ever since I arrived. People know that other parishes, across the country, have observed same-sex unions; and that does not seem distressing. But a same-sex service --whatever it may be called-- occurring here does distress some of us. This concern was similar to one at General Convention; folks thought that if the national church authorized the development of certain liturgies, then priests would be forced to use them against their will. I did not, and do not, interpret the issue that way.

In those Episcopal parishes across the country who have observed same-sex blessings with community support, the vestry or Chapter have been fully informed of the event; and they have usually participated closely in the decision. At the Cathedral of St. Philip, I would not proceed, and I cannot pastorally proceed, in performing a same sex blessing until and unless the Chapter participated and agreed with the service. I know this has been disappointing information to many parishioners, but I believe this is a course of action faithful to our parish community.

**How do I talk to my children about "these issues" in the Episcopal Church?** I tell any parent the same thing about sex conversations. There are many different ways to say the right thing at the right time, but it is difficult to plan ahead for the right thing at the right time. Do have conversations with your children about sexuality, at the age-appropriate time and level; but do not think you have to have the perfect answer to every question they have. Most of us know that children often have no questions at all. Rather, what they learn about sexuality (like other subjects) comes from observing how we adults deal with the issue. It is what we adults are saying to each other, and how we are behaving towards each other, that teaches our children the most.

**Okay about our own parish; okay about our children; what about the national Episcopal Church? Are we still in the Anglican Communion?** This is the issue we will certainly be reading about every week in the national and local press. A group of Episcopalians meets this week in Texas to express their disappointment with General Convention action. They are being organized by a newly formed group called "American Anglican Council." Please recognize that this group is not a church; it has claimed the word "Anglican" (which has no "copyright" on it) because it wants the world to believe that the Episcopal Church is no longer Anglican.

Quite simply, the Episcopal Church is the only United States church who is officially part of the Anglican Communion of Churches. There are plenty of other churches who use the word "Anglican" in their title, but they have not been recognized by the Archbishop of Canterbury as part of the Anglican Communion of Churches. The Archbishop of Canterbury is not a Pope; he does not run, nor does he have any jurisdiction, over the national churches who have their historic basis in England. We are a loose confederation of national churches who constitute the Anglican Communion of Churches, most of which were formerly under jurisdiction of England: the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, etc.

Now, it is true that some folks are lobbying heavily for the Archbishop of Canterbury to "dis-invite" the United States Episcopal Church bishops from meeting with other Anglican Communion bishops. Some others want the Archbishop of Canterbury to allow another sort of church in the United States to also be "Anglican." The so-called AAC group is crying loudly especially for this second possibility. I do not believe it will happen any time soon. Even should it occur, that there be another sort of officially Anglican church in the same area as the Episcopal Anglican Church, then theoretically both churches would be in communion with each other. Furthermore, "The Episcopal Church in the United States of America" would certainly still be a full member of the Anglican Communion.

**Well, is there any importance to being in the Anglican Communion?** There is certainly historical and theological importance to our being in the Anglican Communion. We also offer one another missionary and material support. We serve one another and learn from one another. In particular, we share a certain principle of "catholic faith interpreted in local jurisdictions." We are not the Roman Catholic Church, which maintains through the Pope and the College of Cardinals a jurisdiction and authority over the entire world. That system may work well, but it is not the Anglican system.

Instead, the Anglican Communion churches have never forced their own individual "church order decisions" upon other national churches. Just as the Church of Nigeria is free to make its own internal decisions of church order, so is the United States Church free to do the same. We honor the historic Christian faith in these other countries (or provinces), with their own distinctive liturgies and traditions.

**What happens next?** What happens next is that the Cathedral of St. Philip takes on even more vigorously our routines of

prayer, worship, education, service, and fellowship. I cannot stress enough how critical those ordinary disciplines are. Our community has been questioned and threatened. Many of us are confused about an issue that others of us would rather not think about at all. **I urge all of us to bond together in the areas of Christian identity about which we are very sure. There can be no doubt that we, and the world, both need the grace and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ!**

It is the Cathedral's task to minister that grace with excellence and hospitality. Can we still do that after General Convention and the ensuing discussions? You better believe it! I am excited about what God has in store here. Yes, I have been disappointed about some things, as have some of you. But God has greater things in store for us. The Cathedral of St. Philip needs you and me, together; and the world needs the Cathedral of St. Philip.

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