



St. Barnabas' Episcopal Church

Founded in 1704

P.O. Box 4528, 14111 Oak Grove Road, Upper Marlboro, MD 20775

December 23, 2006

To: The Vestry and Congregation of St. Barnabas' Church
Students, Staff, Members of the Board, Alumni, Parents and Friends of Queen
Anne School

From: Lawrence R. Harris, Jr., Rector

The front page article in the Washington Post earlier this week announcing the decision of seven congregations of the Episcopal Church in Virginia to “break from the U.S church in a dramatic demonstration of widening rifts within the denomination” opens the opportunity for comment and discussion on important issues for our communities – church and school. May I begin by saying that with St. Barnabas' Church – clergy, vestry, and most members – we remain in full support of our newly-elected Presiding Bishop, Katharine Jefferts Schori; our Diocesan Bishop John Bryson Chane, and the recent actions of triennial General Conventions of the Episcopal Church.

For most of the years since I was ordained, the Episcopal Church has been taking steps to open the opportunity for women to be included in the full spectrum of leadership – lay and ordained – at every level of our church. Female bishops, priests, deacons, vestry members, convention delegates, lay readers, lay eucharistic ministers, and acolytes are all a new aspect of our church life, which I – and clear majorities speaking through our democratic process of decision-making – have welcomed and affirmed. The process has not always been smooth, and the changes have not always been easy for Episcopalians to accept. But they are viewed as sound and faithful decisions by a majority of our members – locally and nationally.

A second most divisive issue we have addressed has been the willingness to include persons who are gay in the full life and leadership of our church. Once again, the actions have come with the voice of clear majorities, speaking and acting through our democratic process for decision-making. Most controversial has been the affirmation of an openly gay priest, duly elected as the Bishop of New Hampshire, to assume the duties of that office in his diocese, and to take a full and rightful place as a member of the House of Bishops of the Episcopal Church in the United States.

I join Bishop Peter Lee of Virginia, whom I have known since our seminary days, in expressing sadness – deep and genuine – over the decisions of the Virginia churches. I continue to believe that the genuine welcome and full inclusion of people regardless of gender or sexual orientation is vital for the future of the human community. This spirit of

openness – which includes our welcome of people regardless of their race or their religious persuasion – has prevailed and will continue to prevail at St. Barnabas' Church and Queen Anne School.

The Episcopal Church has long stood in support of people living, worshiping, and working together as members of the church regardless of their differences. Openness, acceptance, conversation, and mutual respect – together with a commitment to value one another and learn from one another – have made it possible for Episcopalians to remain a community while we have faced many difficult issues in the past.

Here, we look forward to the growing as a congregation and a school where young people and elders can sit down together to share frank and open dialogue without fear or separation on the basis of age, race, gender, money, sex or other realities that remain sources of division within our culture. This atmosphere of openness and inquiry in pursuit of new understandings remains essential for our future as a church, as a school, and indeed for the future humanity worldwide.

Comments and later developments from The Rt. Rev. Peter Lee, Bishop of Virginia, and from our recently installed Presiding Bishop, The Rt. Rev. Katharine Jefferts-Schori, may be found at the web site below:

http://www.episcopalchurch.org/3577_80625_ENG_HTM.htm