

It is right and a good and joyful thing

ALWAYS AND EVERYWHERE BY BISHOP PAUL V. MARSHALL

always and everywhere to give thanks.

Winning is not the only thing

Living out one's baptism as well as one can is the only thing



Bishop Paul Marshall

The most interesting and stimulating question I've been asked recently was why a person of my views, which are represented by only about 45% of the membership of the Anglican Consultative Council when they voted last year, would want to be part of the Anglican Communion.

Given that I do not crucify well, if at all, I have had to consider what it means to be a member of a minority, or even of a "loyal opposition." In the end, I think there are no options here, at least not for me.

I recently wrote that three years ago the pressure was on the conservatives to continue to play by the rules of a democratic church. I continued by saying that now that the pendulum has swung in the other direction, those of us who are more on the progressive side have the same obligation.

Just as I asked others not to use their absence or their money as weapons, I must ask that of myself now that the shoe is on the other foot. General Convention is going in a way I would not have supported, but I believe it is my duty to submit to the will of the majority. My mind hasn't changed about what I believe to be truth, but there is another truth: I do not have the option to walk away from sisters and brothers in Christ.

Let me explain about the non-option. Most of us belong to any number of organizations or clubs. The nice thing about a club is that when you are done with it or it goes ways you may not enjoy, you can up and quit.

The Church, however, is not a club, not even a voluntary organization. I remain a part of it because Jesus Christ calls me out of my private shell to be part of his body in the world.

It is contrary to the entire New Testament (and certainly the Old), to think that God's children have the option to practice their faith outside of an organized community. As a very private guy, I could wish that this were not the case, but it is, and because what you do with a Lord is you obey him, I'm here.

But there really is more. We are com-

manded (and I deliberately use a non-mushy word) to love one another and be in communion with each other because the reality of our baptism is that in Christ we are united, whether or not we think that is a good idea. As St. Paul said, we simply do not have the right to say to one another, "I have no need of you."

Communion with other Christians is not a human invention; it is God's gift and each of us is called to work for its fullest realization. I once wrote to you that "every schism is a result of human sin." Some of you took that to mean that holding a particular set of views automatically put some people in the wrong.

Actually, I meant something far worse! Separations in the church, just like separations in a family, occur when somebody decides to stop talking, decides to stop working together for a solution.

As intensely as I disagree with the leadership style of the Archbishop of Canterbury, for instance, I cannot disagree with his position that one of our most pressing goals at present must be to keep a space open for mutual witness and genuine attempts to understand each other.

Another reason for not withdrawing just because on a particular issue I do happen to be in the minority is my oft-expressed belief that the democratic form that the Episcopal Church takes is an accurate reflection of the church in Acts, and the best possible way to do business. When Churchill said that democracy was the worst possible form of government, except for all the others, he was right on target.

The spiritual discipline of being in the minority means having to jettison the idea that winning is the only thing (with all apologies to football fans who may be reading this). Winning is not the only thing. Living out one's baptism as well as one can is the only thing.

Do I mean to say that those of conservative or progressive points of view who feel that the time has come for them to go their own way are wrong? If "wrong" means mistaken, yes I do, by my lights. If "wrong" means damned, no I don't, as that leaves no room for those Christians who survived the great split of 1054, in which eastern and western churches condemned all who did not adhere to their particular point of view and claims of authenticity.

Whether one talks about 1054 or 2006, assigning blame is tricky business. We always need to ask ourselves if our own conduct has made it easier for others to leave. Few of us are beyond reproach. We all support the principles of community and honoring each other, but most of us, when threatened, can get edgy. I know of few exceptions, and certainly do not claim to be one. While it may be wrong to stomp off, it is also wrong to make that easier for others to do.

That is the grace of the current crisis or crises. Each of us can grow a bit in our ability to frame and discuss issues without inducing guilt, shame, or rage in others. We all know that this is by no means easy to do, but every millimeter of progress we make along the path of growth here is a gift to all concerned, and can only foster Communion.

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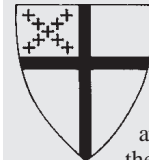
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