

The Episcopal Civil War in the Episcopal Diocese of Fort Worth

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ABSTRACT AND INTRODUCTION

In the 1990s and early 2000s, The Episcopal Church, the U. S. member of the worldwide Anglican Communion, was embroiled in a controversy—a “civil war”—so virulent as to hold the potential of schism of the denomination, or even of the Anglican Communion itself.

In late 2008, the Bishop, most leaders, many priests, and many individual parish churches of what was then known as the Episcopal Diocese of Fort Worth (covering a large region in North Texas) left The Episcopal Church and affiliated with another Anglican Communion church, and claimed control over the land and buildings of many of those parish churches. The result was a gigantic upheaval in the church lives of Episcopalians in that area. Complex litigation ensued over many issues, even over which organization had the right to use the name “The Episcopal Diocese of Fort Worth”.

This article begins by describing the overall context within which this startling action took place, and continues to describe the various happenings in its immediate aftermath, including the onset of the litigation and its general premises.

The article then takes a ten-plus year hiatus, picking up the story in 2021, when the preponderance of the litigation had come to essentially its final conclusion.

PROLOGUE

The issues and actions in this matter are so complex, and in many cases are discussed in such arcane theological or legal terms, that I have taken the liberty of simplifying many of the issues and actions, and in some cases have forgone precise terminology for language that is hopefully more meaningful to the average reader.

THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Introduction

The Episcopal Church is a Christian religious denomination, principally operating across the United States of America (although it has dioceses elsewhere in the world).

It was essentially “spun out of” The Church of England shortly after the American Revolution.

Protestant?

The Episcopal Church is generally considered a *Protestant* Christian denomination (as distinguished from the *Roman Catholic* Christian denomination), but because of various theological subtleties, it is sometimes described instead as occupying a “middle way” (*via media*) between the Protestant and Roman Catholic hemispheres.

The name

The term *episcopal* literally means “of, by, or pertaining to a bishop or bishops”, and refers to the structure of spiritual and administrative governance of the denomination, which centers on the role of bishops.

The proper adjective *Episcopal* means “pertaining to the Episcopal Church”. An *Episcopalian* is an adherent of the Episcopal faith, and the word can be also used as an adjective for matters pertaining to those adherents. Thus we have *Episcopal* churches, teaching the *Episcopal* faith, attended by *Episcopalians*, who may have an *Episcopalian* outlook on certain things.

Although this is not its formal legal name, the current official “doing business as” name of this church is “The Episcopal Church” (TEC for short), and I will use that name here. Note that the “The” is a part of the name, not just a grammatical accessory.

Structure

The basic organizational unit of The Episcopal Church is the *diocese*. A diocese normally has a geographic realm, perhaps an entire state, or perhaps a fraction of a state (often an area surrounding a major city). The overall structure of governance of The Episcopal Church is very much a “federal” scheme, with a great deal of autonomy on the part of the individual constituent dioceses.

The spiritual and administrative head of an Episcopal diocese is its bishop (as suggested by the name of the denomination). The bishop has a high degree of autonomy in the operation of the diocese, but often with the advice and consent of a Standing Committee (like the board of directors of the diocese).

Significant policy and planning matters are decided by the diocese through a *Diocesan Convention*, normally held annually. Delegates to the convention include both clergy and lay members, elected by their individual churches. The Convention is, in effect, a unicameral legislature for the diocese.

Each diocese has a Constitution and a set of Canons, the latter of which (at the diocesan level) essentially play the role that is played in the U.S. federal government by both the United States Code (laws) and the Code of Federal Regulations (rules).

The chief pastor of The Episcopal Church (as a “national” church) is the Presiding Bishop, who is also the chief executive officer of the national church headquarters structure. The Episcopal Church also has a Constitution and a set of Canons. Major policies are decided by a bicameral legislature, General Convention¹, which meets in regular session every three years.

The Presiding Bishop is not the “boss” of the bishops who govern the various dioceses. But the constitution of each Diocese, as it is formed, must declare that the diocese agrees to be bound by the Constitution and Canons of The Episcopal Church.

Individual churches

A self-supporting individual Episcopal church is formally called a *parish*². It is headed, on both spiritual and administrative fronts, by a chief priest usually called the *rector*. It is governed by a body known as the *vestry*, sort of a board of trustees, elected from the membership, of which the rector is, *ex officio*, the “president”.

THE ANGLICAN COMMUNION

The Anglican Communion is an international association (rather like a “caucus”) of 40-some “national” or “regional” churches, with the common characteristic that they are all descended, in one way or another, from The Church of England. (The term *Anglican* means “of or pertaining to England”.)

From a structural and administrative standpoint, most of the national/regional churches are each considered to be a *province* of the Anglican Communion. The Episcopal Church is the province of the Anglican Communion in The United States.

With a few exceptions, the names of the Anglican provinces do not have the word “province” in them. Rather, they are the names of the

¹ It is the custom, where the grammatical context does not demand otherwise, to speak of this body as “General Convention” rather than “the General Convention.”. I will follow that custom here.

² Unlike in Roman Catholic usage, in The Episcopal Church a *parish* does not have a rigidly defined geographic area that it serves.

"national" churches which constitute the provinces (*e.g.*, "The Episcopal Church", "The Anglican Church of Canada", "*L'Eglise Episcopale au Rwanda*", "The Church of Nigeria").

The Anglican Communion has no overall Constitution nor Canons. It has no "legislative" or "executive" authority over any of the national churches that are its members.

The head of the Anglican Communion is, *ex officio*, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the principal chief pastor of the Church of England. His role in The Anglican Communion is described as "first among equals" (*primus inter pares*), where the "equals" being referred to are the heads of the various national churches.

THE CONTROVERSY—OVERVIEW

Introduction

As of the 1990s, a strident controversy embroiled the Episcopal Church and, in parallel, the Anglican Communion. I speak of it, irreverently, as "The Episcopal Civil War".

In summary, the controversy relates to the position, by a certain camp, that, over time, the Episcopal "national church" had inappropriately adopted policies, practices, and outlooks that depart unacceptably from the tenets of what that camp considers "the traditional faith", thus supposedly weakening the value of the Episcopal faith to its adherents.

This camp felt that the national church (through actions of its leadership and policies) had pliantly accommodated the changing mores of society, whereas in their opinion the Episcopal Faith should be an unchanging guide to spiritual, moral, and ethical life.

Labels

Of course, there were not two clearly divided and defined "parties" to the overall controversy. Concerned individuals had a wide range of outlooks on the various issues.

Nevertheless, as in civil politics, it is convenient (if hardly precise) to speak as if there were two well-defined opposing camps, and we will generally follow this conceit in our discussion here.

The camp that strongly complained about the course of The Episcopal Church typically pejoratively characterized the church (or its policies), its leadership, and those that support its stance as "liberal", and in contrast often characterizes itself as "conservative", or sometimes as "orthodox" (and sometimes even as "evangelical").

Those labels are frequently used in reporting about the controversy. But, just as in civil politics, the labels are themselves judgmental, and relate to often ambiguous and self-contradictory concepts.

In an effort to identify the camps on the basis of actual observable properties, I will here identify the camp that complains about the behavior of The Episcopal Church as “the complainants”, and (in the spirit of Boolean logic) the camp that does not generally share their positions as “the non-complainants”. This usage is not intended to mock either camp—merely to provide a semantically-based, although still arbitrary, set of labels.

Disclosure

Although I make every effort to be objective in my presentation here, I don't claim to be “neutral”. I am, in many cases, not sympathetic to the positions or actions of the complainants, and that may be reflected in my tone.

THE HOT BUTTONS

Introduction

As in any situation of this type, the concerns of any given member of the complainant camp typically result from the impact of many events and issues over the years. And in fact, controversies over policy or practice changes in the Episcopal Church are hardly new.

The prayer book

In 1979 the General Convention of The Episcopal Church adopted a new edition of *The Book of Common Prayer (According to the use of The Episcopal Church)*, the “shooting script and user's guide” of the Episcopal liturgy, to succeed a version adopted in 1928. The new edition included a new form of the liturgy, a “more modern” one, although the earlier form (slightly updated) was also present for use when desired by an individual church.

The complainants of the time felt that this change seriously disrupted their faith. Some congregations left The Episcopal Church over this, while others just ignored the new edition and continued to conduct all their services in accord with the 1928 *Book of Common Prayer* (some emphasized that in their newspaper ads, presumably to attract “like minded” persons).

Some other controversies (many of much longer standing) revolve around even more arcane theological issues, which thankfully are beyond the scope of this article.³

The ordination of women

For many years, the Episcopal Church, like its parent, The Church of England (and like its parent, The Roman Catholic Church) did not permit women to be ordained to the clergy in any of its three "orders" (deacons, priests, and bishops). For some while, though, The Episcopal Church had allowed woman to serve as deacons (but not of the subtype recognized as on the way to priesthood).

After a long and agonizing period of debate (always characterized as "prayerful debate"), The Episcopal Church, by decision of its 1976 General Convention, decreed that henceforth, qualified persons of either gender may be ordained as priests or consecrated as bishops. This was an enacted policy of the national church, not a "suggestion".

This was considered an outrage by the complainants of that era. A number of bishops who did not agree with the new policy did not subsequently follow it in good faith. Three dioceses (including The Episcopal Diocese of Fort Worth) in fact announced openly that they did not consider the policy valid, and officially would not accept nor follow it.

This matter was still an issue of the controversy as of, say, 2006 (for some complainants).

The election of V. Gene Robinson as Bishop of New Hampshire

In 2003, the Episcopal Diocese of New Hampshire, proceeding under its Constitutions and Canons and those of The Episcopal Church, elected V. Gene Robinson, a well-respected priest, as the new Episcopal Bishop of New Hampshire.

Robinson was at the time openly living in a homosexual partnership. His election stirred outrage among the complainants.

The canons of The Episcopal Church require that the election of a bishop must be ratified by the church at large. At that time, the canons required that if a session of General Convention was scheduled within 120 days, the matter of ratification was to be treated there.

³ But, just to give the flavor, here's one: "Should the priest at the altar, serving mass, face toward the congregation or toward the far wall?".

In this case, that procedure applied, and the matter was brought before the 2006 session of General Convention. It overwhelmingly (but not unanimously) voted ratification of Bishop Robinson's election. He was subsequently duly consecrated (wearing a bulletproof vest, in reaction to death threats).

The vote for ratification precipitated enlarged outrage by the complainants, who now considered the entire leadership of The Episcopal Church to be complicit in what they saw as an unacceptable deviation from the doctrine of the traditional faith (in conflict, they felt, with the proscriptions of The Bible). The issues were not just that supposedly Robinson's homosexual "lifestyle" was, *per se*, repugnant to Biblical teaching, but also that he was presumably engaging in sexual contact outside of marriage, which would be sinful regardless of the genders involved.

In fact, for some while (perhaps even to this day), a "black list" of bishops who voted in favor of ratification at the Convention was maintained and often cited by the complainants.

Blessings on same-gender unions

In some cases, Episcopal priests had offered blessings on same-gender unions (which, conceptually, could include marriage or civil union, where eventually provided for by state law, or unions characterized by open proclamation of commitment). There was considerable ambivalence across The Episcopal Church as to the appropriateness of this. Some felt it was an appropriate forward movement of the church's expressed dedication of mission to all mankind. Others felt it was highly inappropriate, as it lent legitimacy to activity they felt was deemed sinful *per se* by the Holy Bible.

As of the early 2000s, there was not any formal "authorization" to provide such blessings given by the central authority of The Episcopal Church, and there were not any standard "scripts" established for such. But neither did the national church authorities "prohibit" clergy from, at their discretion, performing such blessings. That position was strongly denounced by the complainants.

At the 2006 session of General Convention, there was in fact earnest discussion of the possibility of adding, to the standardized rites of the Episcopal liturgy, various formulas for blessing same-sex unions (especially when such unions were not considered, under civil law, "marriages"). But the body concluded that it was probably not prudent to actually do so at that time, given the rising pitch of controversy over the matter.

However, at the 2009 General convention, a commission was chartered with the responsibility of developing liturgical tools for the blessing of same-sex partnerships and for the conduct of same sex marriages (where such were permitted by state law).⁴ The outrage of the complainants swelled.

The Election of Katharine Jefferts Schori as Presiding Bishop.

The Presiding Bishop of The Episcopal Church is elected by General Convention for a nine-year term. In its 2006 session, General Convention elected, as the new Presiding Bishop, Katharine Jefferts Schori, at the time Episcopal Bishop of Nevada.⁵

This prompted outrage by many of the complainants. After all, there were bishops who did not believe that women should be permitted to be priests, much less bishops or Presiding Bishop. Some bishops (especially those in the three dioceses that had openly never accepted the 1976 decision admitting women to the clergy) declared that she was not really a bishop at all, that her election as Presiding Bishop was invalid, and that they would, in any case, not in any way be “governed” by her.

Additionally, to her further discredit in the eyes of the complainants, Bishop Jefferts Schori had voted in favor of ratification of the election of V. Gene Robinson as Bishop of New Hampshire.

Perhaps even worse yet, it was known that same-gender blessings were performed in The Diocese of Nevada under her jurisdiction there.

The Presiding Bishop’s Theological Outlook

In an interview shortly after taking office, the new Presiding Bishop was asked if she believed that the Christian faith was the only route to “spiritual salvation”; whether, in effect, adherents of non-Christian faiths were just out-of-luck, salvation-wise.

She replied that “we would be putting God in a rather small box” were we to believe that.

The complainants were outraged, saying that she had discarded what they saw as an immutable and universal tenet of the Christian, and thus Episcopal, faith: that only through embrace of the meaning of the

⁴ By 2018, The Episcopal Church had fully embraced the performance of the sacrament of marriage between persons of the same gender.

⁵ Jefferts Schori had been, before her entry, relatively late in life, into the Episcopal priesthood, a well-respected marine biologist.

life and death of Jesus Christ could any mortal "find God" and become eligible to receive God's blessings.

THE AUTHOR AND HIS WIFE

The author and his wife, Carla, were for a while members of The Episcopal Church of the Good Samaritan, located in the eastern part of Dallas, Texas, not far from their home at the time (part of The Episcopal Diocese of Dallas). We had in fact been members when we had each been widowed in the late 1990s, and after we had eventually "gotten together", we were married there in 1999.

But neither of us were actually "religious", in that religion did not play a significant role in our lives. Rather, we were (at that time) just "regular church goers".

In the fall of 2007, we moved from East Dallas to Weatherford, Texas, about 30 miles west of Fort Worth. We did not affiliate with the local Episcopal church there (or any other church). We were "churched out".

THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF FORT WORTH

Weatherford was in the geographic region of The Episcopal Diocese of Fort Worth, which was a large region running west from about halfway between Dallas and Fort Worth, Texas. (Dallas, and much of the area to its east, was part of The Episcopal Diocese of Dallas.)

The Episcopal Diocese of Fort Worth was one of the most "conservative" (in both social and ecclesiastical terms) in the nation, and was in fact one of the three dioceses that refused to ordain woman as priests (despite that having been "normalized" by the national church in 1976).

And it was not even permitted in the Diocese for a woman priest from another diocese to, as a "visiting priest", upon the invitation of a parish church, to conduct a service in that church.

Not surprisingly, The Episcopal Diocese of Fort Worth was a hotbed of the "complaints" I referred to earlier about the increasingly "liberal" direction of the Episcopal Church overall.

DEFECTION LOOMS

After we moved, we began to read in the newspapers about the increasing pace of "complaint" within the Episcopal Diocese of Fort Worth, and in fact about the emergence of an actual notion that the Diocese "might withdraw from The Episcopal Church".

Although Carla and I were no longer members of any church, we still had considerable “intellectual” sympathy for The Episcopal Church. And accordingly, we were distressed to read of this talk.

One day, Carla read a newspaper article about a group that had been formed to support the integrity of The Episcopal Church in the area having a meeting to discuss the threat of “secession”⁶, which was having an open meeting. We decided to attend, and were pleased to find out that one of the leaders of the group had been a colleague of mine in my first job in the Dallas area.

We heard detailed discussions of some of the legal, administrative, and ecclesiastical issues that were involved in such an occurrences, and (a little vaguely) what things might “loyal Episcopalians” do to ensure the continuity of the church, as they knew it, in this region.

We left, pleased to have been so enlightened on this matter, but not in any way committed to join the “loyal Episcopalian” movement.

But a few weeks later, we got a call from a woman living in a town next to Weatherford who said that she had heard from my colleague, who had suggested to her that Carla and I would be good members of a small “loyal Episcopalian” group she headed in the area. She invited us to an upcoming meeting in her home.

Note that the two Episcopal Churches that served Weatherford and the immediately surrounding communities had been indicated as ones that would join the “secession” if and when it happened.

We attended, and in fact became members of that small group. What began to form was a plan to found, with the approval of the national church, a small new Episcopal church to provide for continuity of worship for the “loyal Episcopalians” in the area around Weatherford. This at first seemed to be in the vein of worship services held in members’ homes, but was later expanded to a far more ambitious project.

SAFE HARBOR

The heads of several “highly conservative” national Anglican churches (notably in various nations of Africa, plus the one serving the “Southern Cone of America” (essentially the southernmost part of South America), had announced that their provinces would offer a

⁶ My term, not widely used in connection with this matter.

“safe point of attachment”⁷ to the Anglican Communion for any element of The Episcopal Church which, dissatisfied with the direction of The Episcopal Church, wished to sever ties with The Episcopal Church but still formally remain part of the Anglican Communion.

Several of these churches (provinces) had even established outposts in the United States and in Canada for that purpose (usually styled as “missionary establishments”). Some dissident Episcopal bishops had left the Episcopal church and been consecrated as bishops of those national churches.

The Archbishop of Canterbury, the head of The Anglican Communion, had decried such “cross-border incursions” as out of line with the accepted principles of the Anglican Communion.

SECESSION

The diocesan convention and its resolutions

The annual diocesan convention of The Episcopal Diocese of Fort Worth was held on November 14-15, 2008. It had been expected that the convention would take up resolutions that were described by their proponents (of the “complainant” persuasion) as “The Episcopal Diocese of Fort Worth leaving The Episcopal Church, and affiliating instead with The Anglican Church of the Southern Cone of America”⁸.

And in fact those resolutions were taken, on Saturday, November 15, 2008.

Interpretation

As I mentioned just above, the proponents of the resolutions (and the complainant group generally) characterized the action of the convention as being “The Episcopal Diocese of Fort Worth leaving The Episcopal Church . . .”.

But the national church took this view (and I paraphrase):

The Episcopal Diocese of Fort Worth is a portion of The Episcopal Church, and by definition cannot be separated from it. Of course, if the bishop of the diocese, and most of the diocesan administrative officers, and many of the clergy of the diocese, wish to resign their

⁷ “Safe” is apparently meant to refer to the concept of safety from oppression, or persecution, of elements of the complainant camp by The Episcopal Church.

⁸ In 2014 this province changed its name to “The Anglican Church of South America”.

positions within The Episcopal Church, and disaffiliate from The Episcopal Church, that is of course their prerogative.

Real property

It is rightly said that "brick and mortar do not a church make." But some adequate physical facility is usually needed for a church to conduct its mission, and a church building, no matter how modest, is a source of pride and identity to the congregation. The church building is, to the rest of the world, the physical manifestation of the church.

Very commonly, an individual Episcopal parish held the title to its land and buildings in its own name, perhaps as an "unincorporated association".

One might think that when such an individual parish congregation, by action of its own governing body (its "vestry"), chose to detach from The Episcopal Church, perhaps instead affiliating with some other religious body, it would have the right to continue to own, occupy, and use that property.

However, under the Canons of The Episcopal Church, to which each Episcopal Diocese has acceded via its own Constitution (a precondition for the diocese's formation within The Episcopal Church), all such property, regardless of how it is titled, is declared to be "held in trust" for the parish by the cognizant Episcopal diocese, and through it by the national Episcopal church, a long-standing doctrine that was codified in the Canons of The Episcopal Church in 1979.

The complex legal ambiguities in this situation formed a central issue in the decade-plus long period of litigation that followed the "secession".

In any case, the local leadership of the parish churches that joined in the "secession" continued to operate their churches in the same buildings and campuses as before. But the national church took the view that these premises (and in fact the Diocesan offices in Fort Worth) were now "occupied by an unfriendly force" (my term), and insisted that those occupiers vacate them promptly so that new leadership, comprising "loyal Episcopalians", could take over.

In the litigation, among other things, the "complainant" group held that, while Texas law provided several ways in which a "trust" for real property could be established, the working of the canons of a religious organization was not one of them.

The congregations

The members of the congregations of these “seceding” parish churches of course took a range of viewpoints as to what it meant to them, two ends of the spectrum perhaps being:

- Alice: “I have attended St. Whatsit’s Episcopal Church since I was a child, and I consider myself a loyal and devout Episcopalian, and plan to make no change in that. It is still St. Whatsit’s Episcopal Church, an Episcopal church, and Father Whosit is still its rector, as he has been for 20 years. Some sort of ‘bureaucratic’ change has happened, which I don’t understand nor need to understand, but there is no problem.”
- Bob: “I have attended St. Whatsit’s Episcopal Church since I was a child, and I consider myself a loyal and devout Episcopalian, and plan to make no change in that. But now a dissident group has taken over the church and said that it is no longer part of The Episcopal Church, so I feel I can no longer practice my Episcopal faith there, so what am I going to do?”

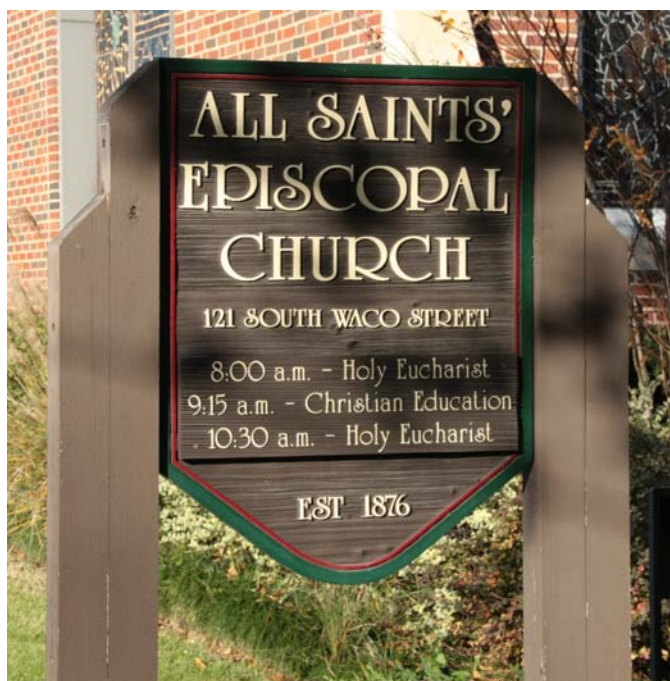


Photo: Douglas A. Kerr

All Saints' Episcopal Church, Weatherford, Texas November 30, 2009

Terminology

The “seceding” group, although by their action clearly were no longer part of, nor in any way affiliated with, The Episcopal Church, still called their (actually new) organization “The Episcopal Diocese of Fort

Worth.” And many of the seceding churches, for some while (some until now, in 2021), continued to call themselves by their former names, as for example “All Saints’ Episcopal Church”?

Just above we see the pretty sign for that very example, in Weatherford Texas, about a year after the secession,

That church, as of a year before the date of that photo, was no longer part of The Episcopal Church, but rather had become a parish of *Iglesia Anglicana del Cono Sur de America* (The Anglican Church of the Southern Cone of America), and maybe as of then also a parish of The Anglican Church in North America.

So, as to the seceding diocese, why would a group that overtly and pointedly disaffiliated from The Episcopal Church, and decried its policies, still want to call itself “The **Episcopal** Diocese of Forth Worth”? Well, one might imagine this reason:

- There would be protracted (to say the least) litigation over, among other things, which body controlled the real property of the various “seceding” churches, and the position of the seceding group that **they** were “The Episcopal Diocese of Forth Worth” would, with a little luck, lead to them automatically win that battle.

And why would the seceding churches, pointedly no longer part of The Episcopal Church, still call themselves, for example “All Saints’ Episcopal Church”? One might imagine this reason:

- Perhaps if the church name were not changed, parishioners (like Alice in my discussion above) would think nothing noteworthy had happened, and would continue attending (and making their monetary contributions to) what they saw as the same church as before.

One of the arguments proffered during the litigation by the seceding group to justify these practices was, “Well, ‘episcopal’ means ‘of, by, or pertaining to a bishop or bishops’, and this diocese is in fact headed by a bishop, so it is certainly an ‘episcopal diocese’”. Yes, “episcopal”. But as to “Episcopal”, no.

Meanwhile, within The Episcopal Church, a new acting bishop was appointed to lead “The Episcopal Diocese of Forth Worth” (that is, the organization that was, and remained, a component of The Episcopal Church). And it steamed on, albeit somewhat debilitated by the loss of access to and the *de facto* loss of governance of many of the parish churches.

BACK TO THE WEATHERFORD AREA

Backing the clock up a bit, as the fateful date of the 2008 annual diocesan meeting of The Episcopal Diocese of Fort Worth approached, the little group of faithful Episcopalians in the Weatherford area, meeting in various members' homes, solidified plans for a really splendid response to the secession that seemed inevitably almost upon them. Indeed, as described above, the secession (however one might wish to describe it) happened on Saturday, November 15, 2008.

On the morning of the following Sunday, November 16, 2008, the newly formed, and nationally sanctioned, "Episcopal Church in Parker County" held a full-blown Episcopal worship service in the spacious all purpose room of a brand new middle school, with a giant plate glass wall behind the altar, with a large hawk soaring outside.

The liturgy was fully fleshed out, with the "bells and smells", altar vestments, and the like beloved to Episcopal traditionalists.⁹ Presiding over the ceremony was a retired Episcopal Priest, still licensed, who had earlier been relieved of his pulpit by the (now departed) Bishop of Fort Worth.

THE LITIGATION

Overview

No sooner than had "the secession" taken place, The Episcopal Church (that is, the national church) and other interested bodies filed suit against the "seceding group" and various of its manifestations.

The principal pleas of the plaintiffs (including The Episcopal Church itself) were (rather simplistically, and I certainly paraphrase):

- The seceding group should no longer be allowed to call itself "The Episcopal Diocese of Fort Worth", or anything similarly involving the implication that it was a part of The Episcopal Church, nor use (as it had been doing) the seal of The Episcopal Diocese of Fort Worth.
- As to churches that were formerly a part of the (real) Episcopal Diocese of Fort Worth, their real property should be considered under the control of The Episcopal Church, and they should be vacated by alleged leaders no longer part of The Episcopal Church.

⁹ The author and his wife, who a while later realized that they had been atheists all along, are very proud to have played a significant role in this extraordinary accomplishment.

The defendants (the “seceding group”) pled for the opposite conclusions.

This litigation was unimaginably complex and protracted, and involved many cycles up and down through the court system of Texas, with some intermediate issues even having been ultimately addressed by The Supreme Court of the United States.

HIATUS

Here I take a break of about 13 years, during which this wearisome process slogged on, and on, and on. A good time for the reader to go to the lobby (or kitchen) and get popcorn.

IN 2021

Introduction

In 2021, the important aspects of the litigation came to what is essentially their end, the Supreme Court of the United States having declined to review the “final” decision of The Supreme Court of Texas, and thus the decision of the trial court remained confirmed.

Here is a very concise (and certainly oversimplified) summary of this seeming conclusion to the litigation, and thus, for practical purposes, to the “Episcopal Civil War” in its “Fort Worth theater of operations”.

Decisions of the court

- The seceding group, which by its own decision is most decidedly not a part of The Episcopal Church, has been given the right to call itself “The Episcopal Diocese of Fort Worth” (and I think as well the right to use the associated seal).
- The diocese that is still an actual arm of The Episcopal Church may no longer call itself “The Episcopal Diocese of Fort Worth”.
- Control of many of the church properties that had previously served Episcopal congregations under the (real) Episcopal Diocese of Fort Worth has now been granted (in various ways) to the seceding group.

In the wake

- The diocese that is still an actual arm of The Episcopal Church has adopted a new name, "The Episcopal Church in North Texas".¹⁰
- Many of the congregations of the churches that lost the use of their real properties are still, for the time being, worshipping in various other facilities (theaters, schools, churches of other denominations, etc.)

WHAT HAS BECOME OF THE NOW-CALLED EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF FORT WORTH?

Introduction

In this section, I discuss in basic terms what has happened, "structurally" to the body that, in 2008, seceded from The Episcopal Church, but which, as a result of litigation, is now the sole body entitled to call itself "The Episcopal Diocese of Fort Worth".

The Anglican Communion

Before I can do that, I need to discuss in more detail than before some matters of structure and terminology in the Anglican Communion.

As I briefly noted earlier, The Anglican Communion is an international "caucus" (my term) of "national churches" that have common ancestry, in one way or another, in The Church of England ("Anglican" meaning, of course, "pertaining to England").

For the most part, the Communion is composed of a number of provinces, which are in fact "national churches" ("national" suggesting that the realm of each of these churches is a nation, or maybe several nations). But the formal names of these provinces are not, for example, "The Anglican Province of Australia", but rather (for the same example) "The Anglican Church of Australia" (although "the Anglican Province of Australia" is a perfectly apt "description", just not the "name" of that entity).

The formal overall defection of the Communion refers to its members being those churches that are "in communion with the see of Canterbury". "See" in this field formally refers to the area of a bishop's jurisdiction, and is often used for the location from which the

¹⁰ The author and his wife note with some satisfaction that the first new Episcopal parish formed in the Weatherford, Texas area in the wake of the "secession", named itself "The Episcopal Church in Parker County." Perhaps that had some influence on the choice made by the Diocese.

bishop operates (the location of his “chair”), but in fact here actually means the Archbishop of Canterbury, the chief pastor of the Church of England, and *ex officio* the head of the Anglican Communion.

But how can a national church become a province of The Anglican Communion—“come into communion with the Archbishop of Canterbury”? There is no clear answer to that. The Communion does not have a constitution nor bylaws, so there is really no established protocol for that.¹¹ Can the Archbishop of Canterbury just confer it? Maybe, maybe not.

For many years, new provinces arose only when, for example, a provincial church serving two countries decided to “spin out” a new national church for one of those countries and then limit itself to serving the other country. Then that new church essentially automatically (as if “by inheritance”) became a member province of the Communion (with maybe some administrative concurrence done, but no real “acceptance” process being required).

But the situation we discuss here is much different from that.

An “Anglican” home for the seceding organization.

We learned earlier that, in November of 2008, The Episcopal Diocese of Fort Worth announced that it had “left The Episcopal Church” and would instead affiliate with The Anglican Church of the Southern Cone of America.

By doing the latter, this organization seemingly intended to retain its status as a *bona fide* part of the Anglican Communion, which among other things was probably thought to be important to many of the parishioners of the affected parish churches (those who saw their “Episcopal” faith as just being the American manifestation of the Anglican faith).

This arrangement was thought to be, at the least, “irregular” by the leadership of The Anglican Communion, but there were no rules that prohibited the arrangement.

During this era, the Web site of the (seceded) “Episcopal Diocese of Fort Worth” spoke of its “being a diocese that fully supported the

¹¹ In September, 1967, the Secretary-General of The Anglican Communion said that “There is a long-standing process by which a province is adopted as a province of the Communion. ACNA has not gone through this process.”. Still, I have not seen that process described.

Anglican tradition” etc. etc., but made no mention of which church it was a diocese of.

I enquired of the “public information officer” of the Diocese about that, and she replied, “Well, Doug, you of all people should know the answer.” (I was recognized there as being a “keen student” of, and commenter on, the events of the time.)

THE ANGLICAN CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA

In 2009, an earlier organization of churches and individuals in the US and Canada interested in following what they saw as the true Anglican tradition, but not as part of The Episcopal Church (or The Anglican Church of Canada, which had been tarred with the same brush as The Episcopal Church) reorganized and solidified as “The Anglican Church in North America” (ACNA).

It soon turned out that this body aspired to become a recognized province of The Anglican Communion, or maybe even better, **the** province of the Anglican communion in the US and/or Canada, superseding in that role The Episcopal Church and/or The Anglican Church of Canada.

But, especially since there was really no prescribed procedure for a newly created church (one not “spun out of” an existing Anglican Communion province) to become a province, much less to “bump” another provincial church from the roster in the process, nothing has (still at this writing) become of those aspirations.

Nonetheless, the Anglican Church in North America has become a force in North American organized religion, in 2020 reporting that it comprised 972 congregations, with a total of 126,760 congregants.

Many churches that had earlier individually left The Episcopal Church (perhaps over the matter of the adoption of the 1979 Book of Common Prayer), and had since labeled themselves as “Anglican” churches (although not a part of any national church that was part of the Anglican Communion) now became part of ACNA (they still not being part of any national church that was part of the Anglican Communion).

BACK TO THE NOW-CALLED “EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF FORT WORTH”

What is now officially called “The Episcopal Diocese of Fort Worth” was a founding organization of ACNA, and became a diocese of ACNA (as well as remaining a diocese of The Anglican Church of the Southern Cone of America).

Still, its Web site made no mention of which church it is a diocese of.

In fact, at this writing (November, 2021), the Web site makes no mention of the diocese being “Anglican”, much less any mention of which church it is a diocese of.

But on its page “Documents and Publications”, in the *Polity* section, is an item, “ACNA Constitution and Canons”.

It is interesting that on the Web site of ACNA, in the list of its now-28 dioceses, the majority (not surprisingly) have “Anglican” in their name. But the diocese of interest to us here is not listed with “Anglican” in its name, nor as “The Episcopal Diocese of Fort Worth” (its now legal name), but rather just as “The Diocese of Fort Worth”. (That is, “The Diocese of Fort Worth of The Anglican Church in North America.”)

The Constitution of the (now officially known as) “Episcopal Diocese of Fort Worth” includes this:

ARTICLE 1

ANGLICAN IDENTITY

The Episcopal Diocese of Fort Worth is a constituent member of the Anglican Communion, a Fellowship within the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, consisting of those duly constituted Dioceses, Provinces and regional Churches in communion with the See of Canterbury, upholding and propagating the historic Faith and Order as set forth in the Old and New Testaments and expressed in the Book of Common Prayer.

Presumably the Diocese is “a constituent member of the Anglican Communion” by virtue of its role as a diocese of the Anglican Church of the Southern Cone of America (not mentioned there, or any place else); it does not receive that status by virtue of its being a diocese of The Anglican Church in North America (ACNA), which is not “in communion with the See of Canterbury”, else it would be a province of the Communion, which it is not.

COMING CLEAN IN WEATHERFORD

By 2015 or so, some of the parish churches in the now-called Episcopal Diocese of Fort Worth (not part of The Episcopal Church) had given up having “Episcopal” in their names.

One such church is All Saints’ Anglican Church in Weatherford (formerly, even for some while after it disaffiliated from The Episcopal Church, “All Saints’ Episcopal Church”). Here is its pretty new sign, in 2016:



Photo by: Michael Barera
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(Edited from original)

**All Saints' Anglican Church, Weatherford, Texas
May, 2016**

As an editorial comment, I note that "Anglican Church" is hardly prominent in the graphic design. (I also note a small change in the stated founding date.)

But, as of 2021, many of the churches in the in the now-called Episcopal Diocese of Fort Worth still have "Episcopal" in their names.

IN CONCLUSION

Hopefully no one has been killed or maimed in the Episcopal Civil War. Perhaps it is only a war game. Each participant, with the right attitude, can be a winner.

To quote from The Book of Common Prayer of The Episcopal Church, and The Book of Common Prayer of The Anglican Church in North America:

Go in peace.