

The Standing Committee of the Episcopal Diocese of Albany



The Very Reverend Tom Malioneck, *President*
Janet Papa, *Secretary*

TASK FORCE ON COMMUNION ACROSS DIFFERENCE August 24, 2022

The Diocese of Albany's Convention in June 2022 brought home the depth and extent of polarization within the Body of Christ in the Diocese of Albany that has existed for many years. Although specific issues were debated at convention, including changes to the Canons of the Diocese, it seems clear that different concepts of the structure and polity of the Episcopal Church, different hopes and aspirations for the church, and different understandings of Holy Scripture were also involved.

Immediately following Convention, the Standing Committee began to pray and discern how best to move forward as a diocesan community. While this may feel like new territory for all of us, it also can be seen as the painful legacy of a lack of communication, learning, and trust related to aspects of our life together that are essential to our flourishing as the Body of Christ and to the healing and reconciliation we seek with our brothers and sisters in Christ. It is complicated by the fact we have no diocesan bishop, and by our experience of the COVID crisis over the past two years.

The Standing Committee asked Bishop Smith to form and co-lead, with Bishop Carol Gallagher, a Task Force on Communion Across Difference, modelled after a similar undertaking by the Episcopal Church begun several years ago (see <https://www.episcopalnewsservice.org/2019/03/21/communion-across-difference-group-continues-churchs-on-going-lgbtq-inclusion-conversation/>).

The Diocese of Albany Task Force on Communion Across Difference is being established to help us find a way to flourish side by side as fellow disciples of Jesus Christ, while recognizing our deep disagreements over matters of human sexuality. The Task Force is working to create a safe environment in which differing views can be expressed and heard, with a view toward developing recommendations to the Ecclesiastical Authority (Standing Committee or bishop) about what this mutual flourishing might look like in practice.

For that to happen and develop in a healthy way, the Task Force must start small. At this stage, the Bishops are recruiting a manageable number of faithful Episcopal clergy and parishioners who hold differing views on the issues that came before Convention (Canon 16 on Marriage and Canon 11.8 on Standards for holy orders and clerical ministry); who are committed to listening to one another with profound respect and charity; and who can help expand the safe space for ongoing conversation beyond the Task Force. To ensure a

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balance of theological understandings, and to identify an optimal number of people who can commit to what may, at times, be intense interactions, volunteers are asked to supply their contact information via an on-line form and to indicate, broadly, their theological understanding of these issues:

- more “traditional” — that is, tending to hold, as consistent with Christian identity, positions on marriage and holy orders that are expressed in the existing Canons of the Diocese of Albany and other documents;
- or*
- more “progressive” — that is, tending to hold, as consistent with Christian identity, positions on marriage and holy orders that have been expressed in the canons of The Episcopal Church, General Convention Resolution B012, and other documents.

Volunteers are also asked to provide an indication of their unique qualifications and spiritual gifts that will help this process develop.

[CLICK HERE TO ACCESS THE FORM.](#) The deadline for submission is Thursday, September 15. The Bishops are being assisted in reviewing submissions by clergy from differing viewpoints who know the diocese well. Not all who volunteer will necessarily be invited to join at this point; invitations to join the work of the Task Force will be sent out by the end of September. Details on participation will be worked out and furnished later. Alternates will be identified in the event that an invited participant cannot serve.

Bishop Smith has taken on this project above and beyond the other responsibilities for which the Diocese of Albany has contracted with him; Bishop Gallagher is donating her time and energy out of love for Christ’s church and love for us. The priests assisting them also already have full lives and schedules. We are deeply grateful to each of them for their dedication and generosity. While a thirst for information, and a desire to contribute suggestions or critique are understandable, all involved recognize a need for focus, coordination, and discretion especially at this early stage. Consequently, Bishops Smith and Gallagher will speak for the Task Force when there is information to communicate. An e-mail address, TFCAD@albanydiocese.org, will be set up to receive communications when the time comes. Please know that we will welcome your contributions and concerns when the Task Force is formed and able to respond.

Your prayers and patience are urgently sought as we attempt to find a safe path forward for this hope-filled undertaking.

<p>O God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, our only Savior, the Prince of Peace: Give us grace seriously to lay to heart the great dangers we are in by our unhappy divisions. Take away all hatred and prejudice on all sides, and whatever else may hinder us from godly union and concord; that, as there is but one Body and one Spirit, one hope of our calling, one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of us all, so we may be all of one heart and of one soul, united in one holy bond of truth and peace, of faith and charity, and may with one mind and one mouth glorify thee; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (BCP 818)</p>
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