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A TIME TO BUILD ANEW

The workings of God's good providence are never failing and always glorious, but none more so than the events of these last two weeks. This past weekend we hosted a conference of the Georgia Chapter of the American Anglican Council, followed by the southeastern convocation of the Anglican Communion Network, and this coming weekend is the dedication of our newly refurbished building for Christian education, Cranmer Hall.

In the first instance, it was a joy to sponsor these conferences along with Christ Church. An enormous amount of good will was shared between our parishes: extensive preparation and flawless execution. Mostly responsible for this were Patti Victor of St. John's and Carol Rodgers Smith of Christ Church. While significant differences distinguish our churches - in a very inadequate way we might refer to us as Anglo-Catholic and to them as Evangelical - we stand together now in solidarity with those who claim the essentials of what it means to be within the Anglican Communion and the Church Catholic.

All of this might not have been possible for our churches, if by God's good providence, Dr. Robertson and I had not shared in a theological seminar for a year before the chaos of General Convention 2003. That seminar, as does all proper theological thinking, helped to establish trust, charity, and mutual joy.

The meeting of the Georgia Chapter of the American Anglican Council was very encouraging. There were a number of parishes represented from the Diocese of Georgia, and a few from the Diocese of Atlanta, as well as some from outside Georgia. We also heard from a young, courageous priest (an old friend from North Fulton High School in Atlanta), Dr. Foley Beach. His story of the gradual decline in the Diocese of Atlanta away from the Catholic faith was sobering indeed. But the story of how his faithful parish has come under the pastoral oversight of an orthodox bishop, the Rt. Rev. Frank Lyon of the Diocese of Bolivia, was inspiring and hopeful.

On Monday, at the meeting of the Anglican Communion Network, Dr. Beach's story was put in a much broader context when the Rt. Rev. Alex Dickson, retired bishop of West Tennessee, recalled for us the history of the past forty years and the gradual doctrinal decline of the Episcopal Church, something we have all come to recognize has come

full force with ECUSA's action in New Hampshire.

But what was most gratifying to me was the evidence of providence again, when we had the Rev'd Canon Michael Green, Senior Research Fellow at Wycliffe Hall, Oxford, preach for us

at Evensong. Lynne and I attended St. Aldate's Church at Oxford in the late seventies when Canon Green was the rector there. It was the time of Professor Maurice Wiles and the infamous publication of his *The Myth of God Incarnate*, to which, in a miraculous six weeks, a volume was published refuting Wiles' book, entitled *The Truth of God Incarnate*, edited by Michael Green. He was a defender of the faith then and he is now. His sermon and the most exquisite Evensong of the Choir was another glistening of our Lord's providence.

The rest of the Anglican Communion Network meeting saw a resolve for us to embrace the recommendations of the Windsor Report. The ACN has as its primary goal to be an orthodox Christian fellowship which holds to the supremacy of Holy Scripture, the historic formularies of the Anglican Church, and is in communion with the worldwide Anglican Church.

As for this coming Sunday, we dedicate our newly refurbished Christian education building, Cranmer Hall. I believe this must be seen within the larger context of what St. John's has been, is, and shall be.

Our church has been devoted first of all to the worship of Almighty God. It is wonderful when you hear, as I did the other night, people speaking of Bible studies and study groups in which they have discerned through the Bible and elsewhere that the first need that they have is the worship of God. That is why St. John's has not given herself over entirely to practical concerns, but keeps the focus of worship primary.

Cranmer Hall represents now the commitment to educate ourselves and our children more completely in the orthodox Christian faith. Its Rose window is a symbol of what such teaching means.

At its center is the Holy Family, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, enveloped by the Triune God. From this center, the window moves outward through the symbols of the twelve Apostles to twelve saints and worthies who made a profound influence on the development of Anglican spirituality. It is our intention to live into that heritage more fully and to share and teach it as well.

But more is required. We as a parish must prepare ourselves for greater mission work than in the recent past. We sometimes forget that St. John's was a mission of Christ Church, and that St. Paul's (originally St. Matthew's and later renamed) was a mission undertaken by St. John's. It is time now for other mission churches to be founded and for greater cooperation with Anglican Churches throughout the wider Communion. The ministry of Elliott House is set and on its way with our fourth theological seminar coming up in January. But now it is important for us to reach out in other ways to establish Christian mission in the Anglican Way. That will not happen unless we live into the theme of the Rose Window, and cultivate our heritage as orthodox Anglican Christians with missionary fervor.

Finally, the work of the Building Committee has now come to a very happy end. We should all be grateful for the many gifts and hours of labor, a labor of love, that the members of the committee have offered to the Lord and to their Church. Our Senior Warden and I have asked George Fawcett to oversee the final interior details of the building, and Martha has graciously consented for him to do so. As George represents a long family history at St. John's, this too is a remarkable testimony to the good providence of God. And so with our profound thanksgiving, Soli Deo Gloria.

The Rev. Dr. Michael L. Carreker

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