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# The Parish Paper

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ST. JOHN'S CHURCH  
SAVANNAH, GEORGIA

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## **THE NEXT BISHOP, ONE MISSION; ONE MIND; THE CHALLENGE OF DISCERNMENT; FOUR PARAMETERS OF MODERATION; AND A PROVEN BASIS FOR UNITY**

### THE NEXT BISHOP OF GEORGIA

Last February Bishop Louttit announced his intention to retire, and the process to elect and consecrate the 10th Bishop of Georgia has now begun, with nominations due to open later this fall, election next August or September, and consecration (God willing) early in 2010. The election of a Bishop is a critical decision for any Diocese, and so we must welcome the care with which the Search Committee is approaching this task, under the chairmanship of Fr Robert Fain, Rector of the Church of the Good Shepherd in Augusta. We are also fortunate that one of the two represent-atives of the Savannah churches on the committee is 'Skip' Jennings, our Junior Warden. (See also the website, [www.georgiabishopsearch.org](http://www.georgiabishopsearch.org) .)

### ONE MISSION

The approach of the Search Committee is summed up in its motto: "Discerning the One Mind for One Mission". The end – all agree – is to promote and advance the mission of the Church in this Diocese. That this is so owes much to the example of Henry Louttit. As Bishop he has encouraged us to think boldly and imaginatively about setting forth the Gospel. Moreover, he has understood his task as the fostering of each congregation in planning and pursuing its part of the common mission. This is precisely the approach that we need to continue and develop. We need a Bishop who knows how to encourage the work of the Gospel at the level of each congregation.

### ONE MIND

There can be no common mission if there is not, at least to some degree, a common mind about what that mission is and what it entails for the office of Bishop. And so the first task of the Search Committee is the discernment of "the one mind". To that end, the laity of Savannah's parishes are invited to take part in a town hall meeting at St. Michael's Church (at the corner of Waters and Washington Avenues) Saturday 23rd August 10 a.m. to Noon. I trust that St.

John's will be well represented there, by clear thinking, courteous speaking, and strong conviction.

#### THE CHALLENGE OF DISCERNMENT

I have been told that there is a general desire to find a new Bishop of Georgia around whom the whole diocese can unite. Welcome as this news is, much difficult work needs to be done before this intention can be realized. The controversies of the last thirty years demonstrate that the discernment of "the one mind" will not be easy. In matters of morality, liturgy, ordained ministry, and even in fundamental doctrine the church does not have the clarity and unity which one might expect. We cannot expect a quick fix.

The difficult work is to discern the parameters within which the Diocese can live together with its next Bishop and from which it can work together to advance the Church's mission. These parameters involve perhaps painful compromise on all sides, but they offer a proven basis for unity in mission.

#### FOUR PARAMETERS OF MODERATION

I believe there are four parameters we all need to observe. First, Adherence to the Historic and Biblical Faith. In our current controversies lurks the suspicion that the Biblical and Historic Faith is being quietly diminished and diluted. To set these fears to rest, the next Bishop of Georgia needs to be someone who believes, teaches, and upholds Historic and Biblical faith in unequivocal terms.

Second, Compliance with the Windsor Report/Process. In the 'Windsor Process', the Primates have set forth a way to limit and repair the damage caused by the consecration of Gene Robinson. For the diocese to nominate a candidate not committed to teaching and acting within the Windsor parameters would ignite ferocious division. The ordination of non-celibate homosexuals or the blessing of homosexual partnerships would provoke a crisis of conscience for many. The next Bishop of Georgia needs to uphold the unity of the diocese in the Anglican Communion by adhering to the Windsor Process.

Third, Respect for Conscientious Dissent to the Ordination of Women. It is a matter of conscience for some Episcopalians to observe the historic restriction of Holy Orders to men. In conscience they cannot acknowledge the liturgical and sacramental ministrations of a female bishop – or, it should be noted, of a male candidate consecrated by a woman. (Such a person, for instance, would not be welcome to exercise liturgical functions at St. John's.) The right to conscientious dissent in this matter has been recognized by the Communion, since the ordination of women is a practice under "reception" and cannot be treated as established dogma. If the Diocese of Georgia decides to proceed in this direction, it would be wise to do so only after having set in place a generous provision for Alternative Episcopal Oversight. Fourth, Respect for Conscience in the use of Historic Liturgy. Since the adoption of the 1979 Prayer Book, a number of parishes in Georgia have continued to use the 1928 Prayer Book either partially or

exclusively, even in episcopal ministrations. At its core, this adherence is a matter of conscience, which if violated would provoke bitter and unnecessary conflict. While previous bishops have sometimes regretted this conservatism, they have also respected it. This needs to continue.

#### A PROVEN BASIS FOR UNITY

Since last fall, I have been asked why St. John's does not secede, given its dissent from the liberal mainstream of the Episcopal Church in matters of doctrine, moral teaching, ordained ministry, and liturgy. An important factor in this outcome was Henry Louttit's respect for conscience in these matters. He has himself been such a bishop, that for all St. John's disagreements with him and others about the right ordering of the Church, it has been possible for St. John's to remain in good conscience in the diocese. Our hope must be that this respect for conscience at a time of deep controversy in the Church will continue and will guide the election of the next Bishop of Georgia.

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**The Rev'd Gavin G. Dunbar**

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