



Dear Clergy of the Gulf Atlantic Diocese,

I recently saw an article and a response to it that I think is important for you to take the time to read. This article is a response to an initial article written by Hannah King. The initial article was meant as a gracious encouragement for collaboration between The Episcopal Church (TEC) and the ACNA. She expressed sentiments that I have heard from many, including some of you. The responding article, by Wilgus, which includes a link to the original King article, is [here](http://northamanglican.com/respecting-our-elders/) (<http://northamanglican.com/respecting-our-elders/>).

The response by Alexander Wilgus is thoughtful and challenging. He points out the theological dangers of collaborating thoughtlessly. For your sake, and the sake of the gospel, I encourage you to take his response very seriously.

I am not saying there are no areas where we can collaborate. Feeding the hungry, providing shelter to the homeless, protecting the unborn, etc., are all areas in which we can work together with others, regardless of their religion or denomination. Unlike with many other Christian churches, however, we are explicitly not in communion with TEC. Many of our GAFCON partners have made this clear, at great cost to themselves.

This raises another issue. As a symbol of that sad division, let me state again what I have told many of you before. I ask that you, as clergy who represent the ACNA, neither distribute nor receive communion from a celebrant from TEC. TEC priests may receive communion from us, in the hope that they have adequately repented, the same hope we have for all who receive communion. This rule is for clergy only. It is a symbolic way of making it clear that TEC as a whole is no longer guarding the faith and therefore in broken communion with us. While the ACNA has not made a provincial ruling on this question, many bishops have similar policies.

I have wrestled with the question. Article XXVI of the Thirty-Nine Articles makes it clear that the validity of the sacraments is not dependent on the faithfulness of the priest. I am not here questioning whether the TEC sacraments are valid, although that case can be made. The issue here is different. We are in broken communion with TEC, and we, as clergy in general need to act as if that mattered. (Feel free to call me if you need more clarification about this, or need to request an exception.)

Should we pray for unity in the Body of Christ? Absolutely. Should we hope our sad divisions cease? Of course. Are there faithful brothers and sisters in TEC for whom we care? No question. But we as clergy have a responsibility to protect our flocks demonstrably. Paul writes, "By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you." And he also warns, "... from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore, be alert..." (2 Timothy 1:14, Acts 20:30-31).

My prayer is that this commentary, and these guidelines, will be helpful to you in your ministry. May the Lord uphold you all.

In Jesus the Messiah,

Neil
+Neil G. Lebhar
Bishop, Gulf Atlantic Diocese

Blessings to you all and prayers for your ministries as we embark on a new year!