

June 2008

Dear Friends in Christ:

An old friend recently sent me the article reprinted below, which was written years ago and continues to reflect the passionate love for our Lord and the Episcopal Church that burns in the heart of many of us. I offer it to you, slightly edited, as a witness to the enduring spirit of this Church, to the sure truth that as some things change much remains the same, and in hopes that it will bring a smile to your face.



I love the Episcopal Church, and in spite of the desirability of modern ecumenism, perhaps I secretly hope that I may die in her arms. I love her not conditionally or with calculation, not with careful reservations, but freely, joyfully, wholeheartedly.

I love the stone-and-brick stateliness of her old city parishes, even when they get down at the heels because "the neighborhood has changed." And her tatty little small-town churches, smelling faintly musty and damp, kept going somehow in the face of great challenges by devoted, self-giving souls. And her gleaming, spanking-fresh suburban churches too, whose modern architecture speaks of the unending creativity of the Spirit.

I love her high-church places with their clouds of smoke from the incense pot and their chants. And no less do I love her low-church parishes, all furniture polish and gleaming brass and memorial tablets, some still with the restrained but curiously exuberant dignity of choral Morning Prayer.

I love her Book of Common Prayer, her firm doctrine and emphasis on sound learning, her devotion to scripture and tradition, and the glorious cadences of her language. But I love too the freedom that she grants her children, her openness to the new, her breadth of humanity, her expansive love, learned at the feet of Christ.

I love the bright young families proudly ranged in their pews on Sunday morning, and the elegant elderly who have seen it all, and the sparse little congregations on weekdays whose hushed devotion to their Lord is an almost palpable radiance. And her old priests whose eyes show the compassion taught them in a lifetime, and her young priests who are so sure that the world can be won in five years at the outside.

I love the names of her heroes-Cranmer, Hooker, Julian, Pusey, Gore, Underhill, Lewis, Seabury, Breck, DeKoven. And a hundred others, including some private ones of my own.

I love the letters to The Living Church that begin, "Dear Sir: It is high time . . ." And the solemn verbiage with which the Executive Council launches a new project, the billowing sleeves of the bishops' rochets, and the whole mad range of possible headgear that clerics

can wear. I even love the battered Prayer Books in the pew racks that are sometimes confused with Hymnals.

I love the eccentric ladies in city parishes who dress in liturgical colors. And the uproarious stories about departed dignitaries that are told whenever the clergy gather and have time for small talk.

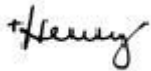
I love the Holy Communion, and the beauty of holiness, and the hands of young and old reverently raised to receive the sacrament.

I really can't help it. I don't know if everybody ought to be an Episcopalian; it may be that other people feel as strongly about their Churches as I do about mine. I do know that I love the Episcopal Church and that I am sworn to her, forsaking all others.

I'm glad of it. And it isn't denominational loyalty or sectarian spirit or party fervor or naiveté about her imperfections. It's love.

Written originally by the Rev. James Pearson, edited by the Rev. Don Henning, and further edited by yours truly.

With every blessing for your many ministries and a refreshing summer,
Faithfully in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Henry".

The Rt. Rev. Henry N. Parsley Jr.