



# Virginia Theological Seminary

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### Former Secretary of State James Baker Weighs in On Episcopal Conundrum

**Alexandria, VA** – “The conflict within [the Episcopal] church over issues of sexuality has threatened to irreparably divide us,” said the Honorable James A. Baker III in his article, *Finding Our Way Forward*, written for Virginia Theological Seminary’s March 2010 newsletter, *News from the Hill*.

Referring to the 2003 election of the Episcopal Church’s first openly gay Bishop, the Rt. Rev. V. Gene Robinson, and more recently to the December 2009 election of the Rev. Mary Glasspool as Suffragan Bishop in the Diocese of Los Angeles, Baker wrote, “Calls for forbearance from church leaders who hope to prevent a permanent break in the fellowship have not been heeded.”

Baker—an Episcopalian—was approached with the article request by Virginia Seminary’s Dean and President, the Very Rev. Ian S. Markham, in the fall of 2009, following Markham’s Texas visit with former President, George H.W. Bush. During a discussion about the state of the Episcopal Church, Bush suggested to Markham that he contact “his good friend, Jimmy Baker.”

In his article, Baker seeks a practical solution to the seemingly insoluble divide between church conservatives and liberals regarding issues of sexuality. Weighing in with an “agree to disagree” approach, Baker offers a “local option” solution whereby individual parishes would vote on the position that their church would take on matters of sexual issues.

“In my experience,” writes Baker, “some issues can be so vigorously contested that resolution of them is unreachable... the most practical approach usually is to address those matters where progress is possible, postpone decisions on irresolvable issues, and mutually respect the differing opinions of each side.”

Concludes Baker, “With credence, fortitude, and especially leadership, we can maintain our church as it has historically been—a people united in ‘one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all.’” To read the full text of Baker’s article, visit [www.vts.edu](http://www.vts.edu).

According to Markham, “We are committed to living in the space that honors conversation. But there are ground rules: conservatives must honor the *Imago Dei* in all people and be willing to hear the stories that shape the experience of our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters; and liberals must honor the *Imago Dei* in conservatives and concede that advocating ‘traditional marriage’ should not be interpreted as homophobia. Both sides must share a commitment to a creedal faith and a recognition that all need to make a case why their position is both biblical and Anglican.”

James Addison Baker, III is an attorney, politician, political administrator, and political advisor. He served as the Chief of Staff in President Ronald Reagan's first administration and in the final year of the administration of President George H. W. Bush. Baker also served as Secretary of the Treasury from 1985-1988 in the second Reagan administration, and Secretary of State in the George H. W. Bush administration.

Virginia Theological Seminary is the largest of the 11 accredited seminaries of the Episcopal Church and was founded in 1823. The Seminary prepares men and women for service in the Church worldwide, both as ordained and lay ministers, and offers a number of professional degree programs and diplomas. The Seminary currently represents more than 42 different dioceses and five different countries.

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