

ENGAGING THE GREAT CONVERSATION An Introduction

Because we are a community of faith, a community that spans space/time, I feel it important for us *to own our story*. Like any family, we take pride in relatives of admiral qualities. We wince at others who seem a little off kilter. We alternately shun, then embrace yet others. Especially when we are the younger members of the family, we tend to be quite curious about uncles and aunts, great-grandparents and other more distant relatives whose progeny we are. President John Adams, on my side, and Martha Custis, on Joyce's side, are remarkable figures of whom we are descendants. On my side, however, there is also a 17th century Anglican clergyman thrown in jail for land fraud. So it is with the church. Figures wonderfully remarkable and regrettably sinister fill our past. Their passions, actions and thoughts are the mix from which we take our present form. It seems to me vital to us, individually and corporately, not so much that we all become professional theologians; but that we take seriously those who came before us, that we critically and appreciatively understand the what and the how and the why of the positions they took as they sought to be faithful to God and to God's Christ. In doing so, it may be that we will learn to take ourselves and one another more seriously, critically but appreciatively, than we ever have as we, in our time and place, take positions in relationship with God and God's Christ. In the hope of advancing that possibility, I invite you to engage The Great Conversation, individually and corporately. During my tenure as elder for the next three years, I will submit on a monthly schedule, a one-page essay portraying a dimension of the history of the Christian intellectual tradition more or less in chronological order, including a few questions raised in my mind, questions pertinent to us today. I invite you to play with the thoughts, the questions, especially to discuss them with others when possible, to form and reformulate your own responses and questions, and to take positions *prayerfully* as well as thoughtfully. Let's see what happens! If there is interest in pursuing any of these topics (See the list of Topics attached) in a small group setting (over wine and cheese, perhaps) I would be open to continuing the Great Conversation with you.

Jim Sterling