



# A Pilgrim's Way

*Walter C. Righter*

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In the fall of 1990, Walter C. Righter, acting as an assisting bishop in New Jersey's Episcopal Diocese of Newark, ordained a highly qualified gay man who lived with his partner in a committed relationship. It was not the first such ordination and not even the first highly publicized one, but in 1995, a small group of fellow bishops brought charges against Righter for what he had done.

In *A Pilgrim's Way*, Bishop Righter tells his own story and the story of the ordination. He uncovers the machinations that set the conditions for such a trial long before the "victim" was selected. He recounts the accusation in 1995 of teaching false doctrine, the long wait for the process to unfold, the harassment, the hearings, the outpouring of support, the media attention, and the church court's eventual finding that no "core doctrine" had been violated. We see Bishop Righter's own rage and fear overcome as he begins to understand what fuels the rage and fear of his accusers. By the time his sixteen-month ordeal has ended he is proud to have been a catalyst for major decisions about gay and lesbian rights in the church.

Righter very forthrightly shares the insights he gained about the connection between misogyny and homophobia. He explains the inner, and often inglorious, workings of the House of Bishops. With great candor he reveals the undercurrents in his own life that may well have caused his opponents to think him vulnerable. It becomes quite clear, however, that those opponents badly misjudged both the man and the church. As Righter shows, the work begun in his defense and in his exoneration continued afterward and goes on still.

The "heretic" outed the church and became a hero. In *A Pilgrim's Way* we see how it happened.

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