

26 September 2007

Sept. 26 2007

The Feast of Lancelot Andrewes

To the Clergy and People of the Diocese of Alabama:

As I prepare to return to the diocese after participating in the House of Bishops Interim Meeting in New Orleans since last Wednesday, I am attaching hereto the communiqué that we have adopted in response to the requests of our partners in the Anglican Communion. Please read it carefully and know that it was written over a lengthy period of days and adopted by a very broad consensus of your bishops.

I believe that this communiqué represents a considerable spirit of compromise and collegiality in the House of Bishops, which I am pleased to see. There were only two voiced votes against its adoption and no minority report or open dissent. The communiqué will be "spun" in different ways no doubt in accordance with the biases of the press and the desires of different factions in the church. I lament this, but it is the way of the world in which we presently live. I was particularly disappointed by the inaccuracy of the New York Times article which appeared in the Birmingham News today. Let us not be misled by negative and ill-prepared comments.

A few of the elements of the document that I find encouraging are as follows. We are clear, in response to the request of the Primates' Meeting, that non-celibate gay and lesbian persons are included among those to whom the General Convention Resolution B-033 pertains. We reaffirmed this resolution that calls upon bishops and Standing Committees "to exercise restraint by not consenting to the consecration of any candidate to the episcopate whose manner of life presents a challenge to the wider church and will lead to further strains on communion." An Anglican sub-committee had earlier found this resolution to comply with the force of the recommendation of the Windsor Report, as a footnote explains.

Secondly, we have said that the bishops pledge not to authorize for use in our dioceses any public rites of blessing of same sex unions "until a broader consensus emerges in the Communion, or until General Convention takes further action." This recognizes and affirms the common discernment of the Anglican Communion, which the Archbishop of Canterbury highlighted in his address to us and to which many of us have been trying to appeal for some time.

Thirdly, the Presiding Bishop has developed a way to have episcopal visitors provide pastoral care on her behalf for dioceses that request alternative oversight. Consultation with the Communion about this is encouraged, and an appeal is made for the interventions by uninvited bishops, which imperil common prayer and long-standing ecclesial principles of our Communion, is urged. We emphasize that "we appreciate and need to hear all voices in the Episcopal Church."

Throughout the communiqué we stress the love of God and of the church for persons of all sexual orientations and the dignity of every human being. Quoting the Primates' Meeting, "we have a pastoral duty to respond with love and understanding to people of all sexual orientations... [I]t is necessary to maintain a breadth of pastoral response to situations of individual pastoral care." The listening process across the Communion on these matters is encouraged, and the important role of the Anglican Consultative Council is stressed. Our hope that the Lambeth Conference will include all duly-elected bishops is expressed.

There is more here to read and digest. I find the above points of our letter to be responsive to the concerns of the Communion and to members of our church who may have been unclear about certain things. Your bishops are not of one mind on every point of this document and we continue to struggle together with important and complex issues. But this provides a place of coming together which I find encouraging at this moment. I ask that you read the communiqué for its own merit and take care not to draw reductionist conclusions from what you may read in the press or on the Internet.

There will be opportunities for further discussion of these things in the days to come in our life together. I

ask that you continue to pray for the unity and mission of the church throughout the world, and I wish you every blessing in your worship and service of God.

Faithfully in Christ,

Henry N. Parsley

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Statement by the Secretary General on behalf of the Joint Standing Committee of the Primates and the Anglican Consultative Council.

The Joint Standing Committee of the Primates and the Anglican Consultative Council accompanied the Archbishop of Canterbury to the meeting of the House of Bishops of the Episcopal Church which has been meeting in New Orleans, Louisiana, between Wednesday 19 September and Tuesday 25 September.

We gathered at the invitation of presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori and of the House of Bishops in order to converse with them about the current tensions encountered in the life of the communion.

On Monday 24 September, the Joint Standing Committee met in formal session to reflect on the conversations, both formal and informal, in which they had participated over the previous four days.

The Committee would like to express their profound thanks to the Presiding Bishop and to the House of Bishops for the generosity and graciousness of the welcome that they have received.

They had also been invited by Bishop Charles Jenkins and the Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana to witness something of the ministry of the Church, as it plays its part in the healing and renewal of the City of New Orleans in the wake of hurricane Katrina. So, after two days of engagement and listening on the Thursday and Friday, members of the Joint Standing Committee joined members of the House of Bishops and their spouses in participating in active mission projects in the city of New Orleans so grievously affected by Hurricane Katrina.

The past few days have been a time of enormous learning and growth in mutual understanding. At the same time, the conversation has been honest, direct and even painful at times. The Committee is conscious that some of its members, in reflecting the very real concerns of the wider Communion, have spoken in a way which could be seen as challenging or even offensive to the Bishops of the Episcopal Church. Nevertheless, it has been important that each side has been honest, and free to speak the message which has been laid on their hearts. The words of the members of the Archbishop and of the Joint Standing Committee were met with patience, generosity and an intensity of debate on the Monday and Tuesday which illustrates how seriously the concerns of the wider Communion are taken by the Episcopal House of Bishops.

The Joint Standing Committee is also conscious that the very life of the Communion is standing at a crossroads at present. The Anglican Communion is a family of 44 autonomous churches. There is no central body which can pass judgement or issue directions for the life of the Communion. At the same time, however, it is the responsibility of the Instruments of Communion to enable conversation and discernment between the provinces and churches, and it was in this spirit that the Archbishop of Canterbury and the members of the Joint Standing Committee have approached this meeting.

A central focus of the discussions has been the requests of the Windsor Report to the Episcopal Church, as amplified by the Primates most recently at Dar es Salaam in February 2007. At that meeting, the primates specifically addressed three questions arising from the Windsor Report to the Episcopal House of Bishops.

The primates had requested clarification on the status of Resolution B033 of the 75th General Convention, and whether this did in fact reflect the request of the Windsor Report for a moratorium on the election and consecration of candidates for the episcopate who were living in a sexual relationship outside of Christian marriage.

Secondly, the primates had asked that the Bishops, as the chief liturgical officers in their dioceses, should mutually undertake not to offer public liturgies for the blessing of same-sex unions.

Thirdly, the primates had offered suggestions for the sort of pastoral care which could be offered in a way which enabled interventions from other provinces to cease.

While the Joint Standing Committee met in formal session on the Monday, the House of Bishops began their consideration of the concerns expressed to them by the wider Communion.

Although their response was not available to the Joint Standing Committee as they concluded their meeting on Tuesday evening, they were briefed before departure by the Presiding Bishop. The formal response of the House of Bishops is now available, and it is the intention of the Joint Standing Committee to consult with one another in the preparation of a report to be submitted to the Archbishop of Canterbury by the end of the week offering an early response to the statement that the House of Bishops have developed.

The Joint Standing Committee of the Anglican Consultative Council are grateful that the Archbishop of Canterbury has indicated that he intends to consult widely with all the Primates and with all members of the Anglican Consultative Council as the Communion discerns the way ahead.

We call upon all Christian people to remember the Churches and faithful of the Anglican Communion in their prayers, trusting in the Holy Spirit will guide us into the wholeness of truth and life which is Christ's will for his Church.

London Thursday, 27 September, 2007

Go to: <http://www.collegeforbishops.org/media/documents/Communion%20Matters%20color%20III.pdf> to view "Communion Matters" Document