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## A message from the bishops of the Episcopal Church

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### House of Bishops Meeting in New Orleans, Louisiana September 25, 2007

*"Thus says the Lord of hosts: Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with staff in hand . . . And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets." Zechariah 8:4-5*

Greetings in the Name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, in whose Name we serve and in whose Cross we glory.

We gathered this week in New Orleans in solidarity with the people of the Gulf Coast region as they continue the challenging work of rebuilding lives and communities devastated by Hurricane Katrina. We also gathered with the deep desire to rebuild trust and confidence with our partners in the Anglican Communion. Rebuilding is difficult work, but God invites us through our baptism to the challenging work of reconciliation, in communities and relationships. We have witnessed the remarkable continuing miracle of renewal in the myriad efforts of people from all over the world who are participating in the rebuilding of New Orleans and other communities along the Gulf Coast. We give thanks to God for their witness and pray that the ongoing work of reconciliation within the Anglican Communion can also bear as forceful a witness to the glory and grace of God.

We express our sincere and heartfelt thanks to our guests, the Archbishop of Canterbury and members of the Joint Standing Committee of the Anglican Consultative Council and the Primates. In accepting our invitation to join our meeting, they have both honored us and assisted us in our discernment. Their presence is a living reminder of the unity that is Christ's promised gift in the power of the Holy Spirit. We also thank The Most Reverend Katharine Jefferts Schori for her thoughtful and strong leadership as she approaches the first anniversary of her ministry as our Presiding Bishop.

Our shared experience of study, dialogue, worship and prayer strengthens our passionate commitment to maintain full participation in the councils of the Anglican Communion. More than one hundred fifty bishops and their spouses attended this meeting. The spirit of our meeting was enriched as we brought a remarkable diversity of perspective and experience to our common work.

We are grateful for the warm and generous hospitality shown us by our brothers and sisters of the dioceses of Louisiana and Mississippi. We are deeply moved and inspired by their faith and courage in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. The scope of the destruction was beyond comprehension. Even after two years the needs are very great. Many of the bishops, spouses and our Anglican guests were privileged to join in the ongoing ministry of rebuilding in both dioceses during our meeting. Through our work and conversation we and our guests were able to experience conditions first hand and to observe how both dioceses are addressing issues of education, racism, poverty, peace and ecological justice. These challenges are common to us all.

One of the highlights of our week in New Orleans was the ecumenical service held in the Ernest Morial Convention Center. The Archbishop of Canterbury preached, an ecumenical and multi-racial contemporary choir sang, and ecumenical leaders participated. Irvin Mayfield, Jr., renowned New Orleans trumpeter and artist in residence at Christ Church Cathedral, delighted us with traditional New Orleans jazz. The bishops presented a total offering of almost one million dollars gathered from all the dioceses of the Episcopal Church for continuing reconstruction in Louisiana and Mississippi. In a resolution adopted by the House we commended United States Senator Mary Landrieu for submitting to Congress the "Gulf Coast Rebuilding" Act. We also called our Church to a "unanimous commitment to healing the radical affront to God that racism constitutes."

In his sermon, the Archbishop of Canterbury quoted from prophet Zechariah. Zechariah paints a poetic picture of a renewed city in which all people live in blessing and peace. There is a great distance between the inspired vision of Zechariah and the reality of our own lives. The Archbishop challenged us to work and pray for justice and peace on earth.

We affirm the ongoing commitment of The Episcopal Church to the Millennium Development Goals as a framework for our engagement in mission work around the world. A presentation by Dr. Paul Farmer, whose groundbreaking medical work in Haiti and elsewhere is well known, deepened our appreciation for the spiritual and practical opportunities which these goals

offer us. Dr. Gus Newport guided in reflections on our experiences and asked us as moral teachers to take our reflections home. National Episcopal Health Ministries provided prayer shawls for all the bishops, spouses, and guests. They are a sign to us of God's enfolding love and the prayers that surround us.

In March 2007, we affirmed the "deep longing of our hearts that The Episcopal Church continue as a part of the Anglican Communion." At this meeting we engaged in significant discussions about important Communion matters. We deliberated and offered responses to questions and concerns raised by our Anglican partners. We believe that these responses will provide clarity and point toward next steps in an ongoing process of dialog.

While we acknowledge that we are not of one mind in all things, we strive to be of one heart. At the beginning of our meeting, our Presiding Bishop reminded us that to go forward in rebuilding our relationships we will need to cooperate with the Spirit and to create a space for the Spirit to work. We recognize that this requires real sacrifice from all, yet we know that the Cross of Christ leads to life. Communion in Christ requires that all of us come to the foot of the Cross. When we gather, we pray that we will greet one another with compassion and thanksgiving.

The spirit of this meeting was good. We were always keenly aware of the prayers that surround us. We give thanks for the faithful women, men, and children who in Christ's Name give so much to support the ministries of our Church. These blessings cannot be counted.

