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House of Bishops response 'to questions and concerns raised by our Anglican Communion partners'

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House of Bishops of The Episcopal Church
New Orleans, Louisiana
September 25, 2007

A Response to Questions and Concerns Raised by our Anglican Communion Partners:

In accordance with Our Lord's high priestly prayer that we be one, and in the spirit of Resolution A159 of the 75th General Convention, and in obedience to his Great Commission to go into the world and make disciples, and in gratitude for the gift of the Anglican Communion as a sign of the Holy Spirit's ongoing work of reconciliation throughout the world, we offer the following to The Episcopal Church, the Primates, the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC), and the larger Communion, with the hope of "mending the tear in the fabric" of our common life in Christ.

"I do it all for the sake of the Gospel so that I might share in its blessings."

1 Corinthians 9:23.

Introduction

The House of Bishops expresses sincere and heartfelt thanks to the Archbishop of Canterbury and members of the Joint Standing Committee of the Anglican Consultative Council and the Primates for accepting our invitation to join us in New Orleans. By their presence they have both honored us and assisted us in our discernment. Their presence was a living reminder of the unity that is Christ's promised gift in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Much of our meeting time was spent in continuing discernment of our relationships within the Anglican Communion. We engaged in careful listening and straightforward dialogue with our guests. We expressed our passionate desire to remain in communion. It is our conviction that The Episcopal Church needs the Anglican Communion, and we heard from our guests that the Anglican Communion needs The Episcopal Church.

The House of Bishops offers the following responses to our Anglican Communion partners. We believe they provide clarity and point toward next steps in an ongoing process of dialogue. Within The Episcopal Church the common discernment of God's call is a lively partnership among laypersons, bishops, priests, and deacons, and therefore necessarily includes the Presiding Bishop, the Executive Council, and the General Convention.

Summary

- We reconfirm that resolution B033 of General Convention 2006 (The Election Of Bishops) calls upon bishops with jurisdiction 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."
- We pledge as a body not to authorize public rites for the blessing of same-sex unions.
- We commend our Presiding Bishop's plan for episcopal visitors.
- We deplore incursions into our jurisdictions by uninvited bishops and call for them to end.
- We support the Presiding Bishop in seeking communion-wide consultation in a manner that is in accord with our Constitution and Canons.
- We call for increasing implementation of the listening process across the Communion and for a report on its progress to Lambeth 2008.
- We support the Archbishop of Canterbury in his expressed desire to explore ways for the Bishop of New Hampshire to participate in the Lambeth Conference.
- We call for unequivocal and active commitment to the civil rights, safety, and dignity of gay and lesbian persons.

Discussion

Resolution B033 of the 2006 General Convention

The House of Bishops concurs with Resolution EC011 of the Executive Council. This Resolution commends the Report of the Communion Sub-Group of the Joint Standing Committee of the Anglican Consultative Council and the Primates of the Anglican Communion as an accurate evaluation of Resolution B033 of the 2006 General Convention, calling upon bishops with jurisdiction 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." [1] The House acknowledges that non-celibate gay and lesbian persons are included among those to whom B033 pertains.

Blessing of Same-Sex Unions

We, the members of the House of 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. In the near future we hope to be able to draw upon the benefits of the Communion-wide listening process. In the meantime, it is important to note that no rite of blessing for persons living in same-sex unions has been adopted or approved by our General Convention. In addition to not having authorized liturgies the majority of bishops do not make allowance for the blessing of same-sex unions. We do note that in May 2003 the Primates said we have a pastoral duty "to respond with love and understanding to people of all sexual orientations." They further stated, "...[I]t is necessary to maintain a breadth of private response to situations of individual pastoral care."

Episcopal Visitors

We affirm the Presiding Bishop's plan to appoint episcopal visitors for dioceses that request alternative oversight. Such oversight would be provided by bishops who are a part of and subject to the communal life of this province. We believe this plan is consistent with and analogous to Delegated Episcopal Pastoral Oversight (DEPO) as affirmed by the Windsor Report (paragraph 152). We thank those bishops who have generously offered themselves for this ministry. We hope that dioceses will make use of this plan and that the Presiding Bishop will continue conversation with those dioceses that may feel the need for such ministries. We appreciate and need to hear all voices in The Episcopal Church.

Incursions by Uninvited Bishops

We call for an immediate end to diocesan incursions by uninvited bishops in accordance with the Windsor Report and consistent with the statements of past Lambeth Conferences and the Ecumenical Councils of the Church. Such incursions imperil common prayer and long-established ecclesial principles of our Communion. These principles include respect for local jurisdiction and recognition of the geographical boundaries of dioceses and provinces. As we continue to commit ourselves to honor both the spirit and the content of the Windsor Report, we call upon those provinces and bishops engaging in such incursions likewise to honor the Windsor Report by ending them. We offer assurance that delegated episcopal pastoral care is being provided for those who seek it.

Communion-wide Consultation

In their communiqué of February 2007, the Primates proposed a "pastoral scheme." At our meeting in March 2007, we expressed our deep concern that this scheme would compromise the authority of our own primate and place the autonomy of The Episcopal Church at risk. The Executive Council reiterated our concerns and declined to participate. Nevertheless, we recognize a useful role for communion-wide consultation with respect to the pastoral needs of those seeking alternative oversight, as well as the pastoral needs of gay and lesbian persons in this and other provinces. We encourage our Presiding Bishop to continue to explore such consultation in a manner that is in accord with our Constitution and Canons.

The Listening Process

The 1998 Lambeth Conference called all the provinces of the Anglican Communion to engage in a "listening process" designed to bring gay and lesbian Anglicans fully into the Church's conversation about human sexuality. We look forward to receiving initial reports about this process at the 2008 Lambeth Conference and to participating with others in this crucial enterprise. We are aware that in some cultural contexts conversation concerning homosexuality is difficult. We see an important role for the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC) in this listening process, since it represents both the lay and ordained members of our constituent churches, and so is well-placed to engage every part of the body in this conversation. We encourage the ACC to identify the variety of resources needed to accomplish these conversations.

The Lambeth Conference

Invitations to the Lambeth Conference are extended by the Archbishop of Canterbury. Those among us who have received an invitation to attend the 2008 Lambeth Conference look forward to that gathering with hope and expectation. Many of us are engaged in mission partnerships with bishops and dioceses around the world and cherish these relationships. Lambeth offers a wonderful opportunity to build on such partnerships.

We are mindful that the Bishop of New Hampshire has not yet received an invitation to the conference. We also note that the Archbishop of Canterbury has expressed a desire to explore a way for him to participate. We share the Archbishop's desire and encourage our Presiding Bishop to offer our assistance as bishops in this endeavor. It is our fervent hope that a way can be found for his full participation.

Justice and Dignity for Gay and Lesbian Persons

It is of fundamental importance that, as we continue to seek consensus in matters of human sexuality, we also be clear and outspoken in our shared commitment to establish and protect the civil rights of gay and lesbian persons, and to name and oppose at every turn any action or policy that does violence to them, encourages violence toward them, or violates their dignity as children of God. We call all our partners in the Anglican Communion to recommit to this effort. As we stated at the conclusion of our meeting in March 2007: "We proclaim the Gospel of what God has done and is doing in Christ, of the dignity of every human being, and of justice, compassion and peace. We proclaim the Gospel that in Christ there is no Jew or Greek, no male or female, no slave or free. We proclaim the Gospel that in Christ all God's children, including women, are full and equal participants in the life of Christ's Church. We proclaim the Gospel that in Christ all God's children, including gay and lesbian persons, are full and equal participants in the life of Christ's Church. We proclaim the Gospel that

stands against any violence, including violence done to women and children as well as those who are persecuted because of their differences, often in the name of God."

[1] The Communion Sub-Group noted that "the resolution uses the language of 'restraint', and the group noted that there has been considerable discussion since General Convention about the exact force of that word. By requiring that the restraint must be expressed in a particular way – 'by not consenting ...', however, the resolution is calling for a precise response, which complies with the force of the recommendation of the Windsor Report." The group also noted "that while the Windsor Report restricted its recommendation to candidates for the episcopate who were living in a same gender union, the resolution at General Convention widened this stricture to apply to a range of lifestyles which present a wider challenge. The group welcomed this widening of the principle, which was also recommended by the Windsor Report, and commend it to the Communion."

