

## **A Statement from the House of Bishops**

*We being many are one body for we all share in one bread. (1 Cor 10:17)*

October 31, 2008

The meeting of the Canadian House of Bishops which concluded today was our first time together since we were in England at the Lambeth Conference last summer. We spent considerable time – more than two days – sharing impressions of the conference, discussing events in the Canadian Church since Lambeth, and seeking agreement among ourselves on a way forward for our Church and its dioceses in the context of the proceedings at Lambeth.

During this extended discussion, the Conference of Bishops of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, our partner in Full Communion, accompanied us in conversation, bible study, prayer and mutual support. We are grateful for their presence and contributions.

We acknowledged with gratitude the key role played by the Archbishop of Canterbury in leading us at Lambeth. In particular we noted with thanksgiving the retreat addresses and the three presidential addresses. We share with him the understanding that the Anglican Communion is a gift from God and commit ourselves to working together. We also rejoiced in the clear sense from the bishops gathered at Lambeth that we wished to continue to walk together while addressing the theological issues arising from discussions about same-sex unions.

One of our main topics of conversation was the agreement by many bishops at Lambeth on three moratoria: on the blessing of same-sex unions, on the ordination to the episcopate of people in same-sex relationships and on cross-border interventions. This discussion was in the context of decisions made recently by several diocesan synods in the Canadian Church that asked their bishop to prepare and authorize rites for the blessing of same-sex couples.

Our discussion initially comprised two parts. The first consisted of reports to the House from several bishops of whom such requests have been made – Ottawa, Montreal, Niagara, Huron, and the Anglican Parishes of the Central Interior – as well as bishops from other dioceses who anticipate such requests in the not-too-distant future and bishops whose dioceses have received unnecessary and unwelcomed “cross-border interventions.”

For the second part, we formed an *indaba* group to reflect on what we had heard in the previous session. (*Indaba* -- a model for discussion used at Lambeth -- is an African word meaning “a gathering for purposeful conversation among equals.”) Several themes emerged in this discussion.

- Some dioceses have not yet engaged in the listening and discernment process and some are just beginning;
- Some have been listening and discerning for many years and have reached differing conclusions;
- Even in the face of difference, there was a desire expressed to “stay at the family table.”

It became clear during this process that many individual bishops wanted something from the House as a whole “to take home” with them to share with members of the church.

In response to that request, we added to our agenda a third session on this vitally important topic. In April, 2005 at its meeting in Windsor Ontario, this House responded to a number of requests made in the Windsor Report including a commitment to the moratoria proposed in that document until General Synod makes a decision.

In this third session, the House heard from the Primate who set out for us his understanding of what was being requested of us by Lambeth and the Archbishop of Canterbury. He noted the Pastoral letter from the House of Bishops to General Synod in 2007 which asked for the greatest pastoral generosity possible to gays and lesbians, consistent with the current teaching of the church. He also reminded us of our agreement in 2004 for a process of *Shared Episcopal Ministry* (SEM) and indicated to us his desire for “gracious restraint,” to use the language of the Archbishop of Canterbury, on the matter of same-sex blessings.

The Primate said to us:

“I come to this meeting of the House of Bishops mindful of our Canadian context and the call for authorization of public rites for the blessings of same sex-unions in a number of our dioceses. I am also mindful of the place of the Anglican Church of Canada in our worldwide Communion.

“I trust the House of Bishops will support my call for respect for due process through the General Synod in this matter. In 2007, General Synod concurred with the opinion of the St. Michael Report (produced by the Primate’s Theological Commission) that the blessing of same-sex unions is a matter of doctrine. It is not creedal in nature but nonetheless it is doctrine. The same General Synod called for further work by the Primate’s Theological Commission in assisting the Church to determine if this matter of blessings is a Spirit-led development of doctrine. I believe that these deliberations across the church will have a significant impact on discussion at General Synod in 2010 and on the subsequent authority of dioceses through due synodical process to proceed with blessings.

“Please know that I am mindful of the continuing havoc created in several of our dioceses through cross-border interventions on the part of Primates and bishops from other jurisdictions. I believe we must call them to account. They too must honour the Lambeth call for ‘gracious restraint.’ I remain committed to addressing this issue within the Communion.”

We spent several hours in conversation on the implications of the appeal from the Primate.

As a result of these conversations a large majority of the House can affirm the following:

A continued commitment to the greatest extent possible to the three moratoria – on the blessing of same-sex unions, on the ordination to the episcopate of people in same-sex relationships and on cross-border interventions – until General Synod 2010. Members of this House, while recognizing the difficulty that this commitment

represents for dioceses that in conscience have made decisions on these matters, commit themselves to continue walking together and to hold each other in prayer.

The House also affirms:

A commitment to establishing diocesan commissions to discuss the matter of same-sex blessings in preparation for conversations at General Synod 2010.

Continued commitment to exercise the greatest level of pastoral generosity in keeping with provisions approved by this House in Spring, 2007 and continued commitment to the *Shared Episcopal Ministry* document approved in Fall, 2004.

We ask for your continuing prayers as we steadfastly seek to discern the mind and heart of Christ for the wholesome care of all members of his Body, the Church. We share a deep hope that though we may never come to consensus over this matter of the blessing of same-sex unions, we will live with differences in a manner that is marked by grace and generosity of spirit, one toward another.

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