

A Communiqué from the Primates of the Anglican Communion

March 28, 2000

We, the Primates of the Anglican Communion and Moderators of the United Churches, meeting in Porto, Portugal between 22 and 29 March 2000, give thanks to God for the opportunity which we have enjoyed to pray together, to study scripture and to reflect on some of the major issues facing the world and our Communion at the beginning of the new millennium. We have been enriched by a study of Ephesians led by David Ford, Regius Professor of Divinity at Cambridge University, which explored dimensions of the mystery of the Church and the holiness of our vocation and ministry.

We have been challenged and moved by the experiences of Primates from every Continent:

From the Philippines where the Province's missionary strategy is to be "a Church for the unchurched", seeking to empower congregations and communities through programmes of development, human rights and peace building.

From Madagascar where the Church, struggling with a sense of isolation and with few material resources, is responding to human need in the wake of recent devastating cyclones.

From Sudan where the Archbishop Joseph Marona, soon to be enthroned, assumes leadership of a Church in a nation where war has left over 2,000,000 dead and a people deeply divided.

From Canada where the Church is facing a crisis in relations with indigenous people as a result of a heritage from past missionary policies of assimilation.

From Bangladesh, beset by poverty, and natural disasters, where the Church strives to be a sign of hope against hope and tirelessly seeks "to wash the feet of the nation in the humility of our Lord."

In every place, God is speaking to us and challenging us and the Church is seeking to respond in faith.

We recognise that as a Communion we face a huge challenge to become an effective force alongside other churches, faith communities and many people of goodwill to ensure that the sea-change in international development which has been achieved largely through the Jubilee 2000 campaign, is sustained and strengthened. During our meeting the Secretary of State for International Development in the British Government, the Right Honourable Clare Short, expressed her admiration for the churches' role in addressing these issues and her belief that they, with other faith communities, could form the core of an "international conspiracy" to insist on adherence to the UN targets to halve abject world poverty by 2015. We commit ourselves to this challenge.

We warmly received the communiqué from the CAPA/World Bank Conference on the Alleviation of Poverty in Africa, held in Nairobi in March, and commend it for study and action in all our Provinces. We heard particular appeals for support from the Archbishops of Sudan and Burundi and wish also to express deep concern about the HIV/AIDS pandemic particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, and the failure of many governments to address this with the urgency it demands.

The search for world peace, justice and development of a healthy civil society is one in which we all have responsibilities and in which we can all engage. We look to one another to enter into that engagement with all the resources at our command.

A living Church conscious of its mission will always be seeking fresh ways of teaching the faith in a rapidly changing world. To develop a strong sense of common mission in the Communion, and to avoid misunderstanding and division, we commit ourselves to engage in joint theological exploration. The proclamation of the Gospel must be pastorally and prophetically relevant to particular contexts on the one hand, and grounded in the wholeness of the truth which the Church throughout the ages has proclaimed on the other. We encourage the Archbishop of Canterbury, in collaboration with the Anglican Consultative Council and others, to support and encourage programmes at every level of the Church which deepen theological learning while nurturing a sense of unity and direction to the whole Church.

During our meeting two issues emerged as points of particular convergence.

First, Primates reporting from around the world on their work and their hopes unanimously underlined the priority of evangelism for their provinces, together with a deep sense of their responsibility to and for the whole social environment in which they find themselves. All agreed in giving priority not simply to the proclamation of the gospel in words but to the `holistic evangelism` that looks to transform the whole person.

Second, in a session on the use and authority of the Bible, there was an equally unanimous witness to the unique role of Holy Scripture in realising such a transformation, and a shared acknowledgement of Scripture's decisive authority in the life of our Communion.

It was in this context that we approached the deep problems arising from conflicting teaching and practice in relation to sexual ethics in different Provinces or in parts of Provinces of the Communion.

For some, new life in Jesus Christ, the movement from darkness to light, necessarily involves the recognition that homosexuality is part of the brokenness of human life which needs to be healed by the power of the Gospel. Consequently, integrity and effectiveness in evangelism will require a clear stand on issues such as homosexuality. So, the differing views expressed or implied in the practice of other Provinces are experienced as actively hurtful to and undermining of mission.

For others, even if they share a traditional interpretation of Biblical ethics, this should not be identified as the question on which the Church's integrity depends. In their situations mission would be held back in a context where the Church is seen to be too concerned with sexual matters at the expense of other crucial issues.

We recognise the seriousness and sincerity behind both concerns, and the shared desire to be faithful to scripture and to strengthen our unity in Christ.

We believe that our call to faithfulness and unity makes demands on our life of interdependence in several ways:

We expect to see in one another a worshipping life, gratefully celebrating the sacraments given by the Lord Jesus and publicly proclaiming the Word of God in scripture.

We expect to see a passion to share the unique Good News of Jesus Christ.

We expect that, as we experience this worshipping life, we shall gratefully learn from each other aspects of the riches of Jesus Christ that no one local church could learn for itself in isolation.

We also expect that, when we see in each other what we believe to be failure or unfaithfulness, there will be freedom for plain speaking and "fraternal rebuke" (Mt 18.15ff; cf. Gal 2.11; Eph 4.25). We expect honesty and challenge from each other. But we also look for humility, self-examination and a willingness to preserve those bonds of communion that reflect the unity we share.

Within our ministry to each other and our learning from one another challenge and disagreement are not only made possible but can be life-giving because of our commitment to one another in the family of the Communion. As in any family, the assurance of love allows boldness of speech. We are conscious that we all stand together at the foot of the Cross of Jesus Christ, so we know that to turn away from each other would be to turn away from the Cross.

It is deeply difficult to balance the expectation of learning from each other with the expectation of honest challenge. But we recognise the freedom to call one another to account in the name of the Lord. This clearly poses the question of what would be sufficient grounds for a complete and definitive rupture of communion between Provinces in the Anglican family. We recognise that one Province's adoption of certain policies may result in severely impaired communion with some other Provinces or dioceses (as has already happened in relation to the ordination of women). We believe that the unity of the Communion as a whole still rests on the Lambeth Quadrilateral: the Holy Scriptures as the rule and standard of faith; the creeds of the undivided Church; the two Sacraments ordained by Christ himself and the historic episcopate. Only a formal and public repudiation of this would place a diocese or Province outside the Anglican Communion.

We believe that the disagreement over sexual ethics and differences in the reception of Lambeth Resolution I.10 that clearly exists within and among the Provinces does not necessarily amount to a complete and definitive rupture of communion. However, it has caused very great concern in many parts of the Communion that the Lambeth Resolution I.10 which was overwhelmingly adopted by bishops at Lambeth '98 has been rejected in some dioceses of our Church. Such clear and public repudiation of those sections of the Resolution related to the public blessing of same-sex unions and the ordination of declared non-celibate homosexuals, and the declared intention of some dioceses to proceed with such actions, have come to threaten the unity of the communion in a profound way. We strongly urge such dioceses to weigh the effects of their actions, and to listen to the expressions of pain, anger and perplexity from other parts of the Communion. We urge all bishops to recognise that further public actions of the kind mentioned above strain the reality of mutual accountability in a global Communion, where what may seem obvious and appropriate in one context may be harmful and unacceptable in another.

Nevertheless, Resolution I.10 and the Section Report which accompanied it also calls on us all to listen to the experience of homosexuals in the Church. We endorse the Archbishop of Canterbury's concern in his letter to the bishops of the Communion (Feb 17th 2000) to encourage dialogue between those who hold that the Church's historic teaching on this matter is so clearly evident in scripture as to be fixed and final and those who are not convinced that the Bible speaks at all clearly to the questions currently before us. Such listening does not prejudge the outcome for the Church. But a careful, patient and pastoral process must be encouraged; it is not created by the demonising of opponents or by overheated, politicised and polarised language in our conflicts. More than ever, in an age of rapid and abundant electronic communication, our engagement with each other must be of the highest quality. As Primates we have first and foremost the responsibility to foster this

engagement and to exercise pastoral care and support towards each other. We were reminded in our Bible studies of the central spiritual importance of how we talk to each other - of "a holy communication". We intend our meeting, in the words of Archbishop Coggan, to be for thought, prayer and deep consultation. It is to help our mutual ministering of Christ's truth, so that witness, sharing of gifts, rebuke, conflict and encouragement may all alike be exercised freely in face-to-face relation, in the atmosphere of common prayer and Bible study, within what Professor David Ford described as the 'space' defined by Jesus Christ.

It is precisely because of our commitment to this mutual and collegial ministry that we noted with deep concern the recent consecrations in Singapore intended to provide extended episcopal oversight for Anglicans in the USA who, for various reasons, believe that their pastoral needs and theological commitments are not provided for by the Episcopal Church, and who consequently feel alienated from its life. Despite the strength and sincerity of these feelings, such action taken without appropriate consultation poses serious questions for the life of the Communion.

The Archbishop of Canterbury's letter of 17th February 2000 to the bishops of the Communion expresses a view that is endorsed by this meeting. We are grateful for this clear and decisive response. It is also our view that any issues of extended oversight should be fairly and openly dealt with within a Province's structures and procedures in the light of the Province's pastoral care for all its members. We believe that a rapprochement and reconciliation concerning any regularising of the status of the bishops consecrated in Singapore must include discussion between the Primates of the three Provinces involved. It is our firm hope that in future no steps, damaging to our mutual trust, will be taken.

We have valued the opportunity in our meeting to discuss these issues openly and together. We are convinced that the practice of a collegial ministry requires that the Primates' Meeting become a more frequent occurrence, in which the challenges and opportunities of different Provinces can be discussed honestly and constructively, so that we may seek wisdom together.

We are grateful for the welcome we have received from Bishop Fernando Soares and the clergy and people of the Lusitanian Church which this year is celebrating 120 years since its constitutive synod. We have learnt of its courageous and sacrificial witness throughout years of isolation and difficulty. We rejoice in the signs of vibrant faith and life we have seen. We have been moved by the opportunities for worship and fellowship that we have shared. May God continue to bless the mission and ministry of this beloved part of the Anglican family in Portugal.

Porto, 28 March 2000

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