

A Pastoral Letter and Call to Prayer

March 8, 2001

The frequent gathering of Primates is one of the main ways by which the 38 provinces of the Anglican Communion, representing over 70,000,000 Christians, express and build their unity. We are grateful to the Archbishop of Canterbury for inviting us to gather for this time of prayer and deliberation, and to the Episcopal Church, USA for their hospitality at Kanuga Conference Center, North Carolina. We have gathered for a week in which we have reflected deeply on the blessing of life in the Spirit of Jesus Christ that unites us as a Communion. We have been conscious of the prayers and support of the faithful in our Churches. Through close attention to St Luke's Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles, we have together begun to learn, and invite every Anglican to learn with us, the deeper meaning of the Scriptures for life in the world today.

We have perceived the living reality of the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, as dialogue begins between the Church in Iran and the government; in Congo, as our brothers and sisters under the care of Archbishop Patrice Njojo live and witness amidst the violence that has driven them from their homes; in Sudan as we hear of Archbishop Joseph Marona's courageous travels in north and south, and attempts to mediate between warring forces; in India, in the wake of the tragic deaths of Bishops Vinod Peter and Gerald Andrews and the constant threat of communal violence; in the pain of all those caught up in conflict in the Holy Land; in Zimbabwe where Fr Peter Wagner was recently murdered in an escalating atmosphere of intimidation; and in the struggle of the churches of the West to be faithful to the gospel of Jesus Christ in the face of a secular and pluralist environment. In coming close to these and many other situations, we have discovered the unity among us, and we call on all Anglicans to discover the same closeness through their prayer and common action.

"Jesus increased in wisdom" (St Luke 2.52). We have deepened our sharing in the truth and holiness of Christ, and we call every one of our Churches to learn and grow in his wisdom. The lack of such wisdom leads to disunity. We have renewed our commitment to learn and share the wisdom of Christ, and we call on all our Churches to be transformed in the renewing of our minds by the Spirit of Christ.

It is this constant renewal that strengthens our communion with each other. This is a special calling of the Anglican Communion amongst the Churches. We believe that our unity is constantly renewed by the Spirit of Christ. We call on all our Churches, in their varied cultural and political settings, to find their unity in this same renewal, and to witness to it, along with our brothers and sisters of other Christian traditions, in the face of the fragmentations and conflicts of the world.

The full richness of the truth and holiness of God given to us as our communion with one another, and celebrated in our worship, overflows in shared mission. Again and again, strangers become brothers and sisters, all declaring in their own tongues the wonderful work of God who has called us together.

Our common mission is to proclaim the good news to all people in God's world. There are none we dare forget or ignore. Our great challenge, then, is to seek those the world forgets.

The Rev. Gideon Byamugisha of Uganda moved us profoundly in his presentation of the unimaginable scale of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, and we heard other reports from throughout the

world. We are initiating intensive coordinated action. The potential of the churches in these areas is enormous.

We also considered again how many nations are rendered voiceless and enslaved by unpayable debt, by poverty and by the injustices of a globalised economy; and we developed plans for further action by which all of us - strong and weak - may be brought into the one communion of a forgiven and transformed humanity in Christ.

We have been reminded of alienated groups within the Church's own life. Some of our number spoke of the difficulties of those who are estranged from others because of changes in theology and practice - especially with regard to the acceptance of homosexual activity and the ordination of practicing homosexuals - that they believe to be unfaithful to the gospel of Christ. We have committed ourselves to seek for ways to secure sustained pastoral care for all in our Communion. We also resolved, as we did at our meeting last year in Porto, to show responsibility toward each other, and to seek to avoid actions that might damage the credibility of our mission in the world.

We live in a time of widespread fragmentation. One of the great benefits of our meeting together was to address the problems of mission and evangelism, not in mutual isolation, but through the patience and generosity that are marks of the life of God amongst us.

In order to strengthen our common life, we have also committed ourselves:

- to explore the common principles by which our Churches are organised beginning with the way we ourselves meet as Primates;
- to enlarge and deepen our theological vision; and
- to collaborate and share our resources in theological education.

Work will be done on these issues, so that God's people will be more and more able to read the Bible with wisdom, seeking to be formed in the truth and holiness of God.

This is a crucial and testing time for our Communion, but also a time of vitality, generosity and growth. We are being challenged to become a deeper and stronger Communion in ways we have not yet fully grasped. Like the disciples of Jesus Christ after his Ascension, we know what has been done for us, but we look for fresh outpourings of the Spirit, so that the unity given in Christ will become for us a joyful task and calling in our common mission and evangelism. We thank God for those outpourings of the Spirit we have heard of and experienced this week. We have committed ourselves, and we call upon all our Churches, to pray anew for the coming of the Spirit of Christ among us, to renew our unity in common mission.

We ask now for the observance of a time of special prayer, across the Communion, between Ascension and Pentecost:

- to give thanks for the many signs of God's work among us,
- to pray that God will show us how to grow in the unity he desires,
- to pray for the Anglican Communion around the world,
- to pray and work for those enslaved by poverty or wealth,
- to pray and work for those living with HIV/AIDS,

and to dedicate ourselves to seeking and following the wisdom of God in our situations, in the confidence that he will bring to fulfillment the work he has begun in us.

We do not live to ourselves or die to ourselves. May God help us to show what a living, generous and faithful Communion might be.

"Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, to him be glory in the church and Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen." (Ephesians 3.20-21).

The Primates of the Anglican Communion

Kanuga, North Carolina

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