

Pastoral Letter from the Primates of the Anglican Communion

May 27, 2003

The Primates of the Anglican Communion send this pastoral letter to all bishops, clergy and people of our churches, with the desire that it be read or distributed at public worship on the Feast of Pentecost, 2003.

"I have called you friends." (John 15.15)

United in Common Prayer and Witness

To our sisters and brothers of the Anglican Communion: Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and in the joy of the Holy Spirit.

We met as Primates of the Anglican Communion in Gramado, Southern Brazil from 19th to 26th May 2003, at the invitation of the Igreja Episcopal Anglicana do Brasil, to bring before God our common life as the Anglican Communion and to take counsel together on the life of our churches. Five Primates were unable to be with us, and we prayed especially for the Archbishop and people of the Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui, facing the difficulties of the SARS situation.

We gathered first and foremost in a spirit of common prayer and worship, listening for the voice of God as revealed in the Holy Scriptures and manifested in the lives of our communities. We give thanks to God for what was shared among us - for the welcome of the Brazilian Church; for the music and worship led by local Christians; for the Bible studies led by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams; for the theological reflections by Dr Esther Mombo and Professor David Ford; and for the stories of witness and Christian discipleship from across the Anglican Communion.

In particular, we listened to stories of the growth of our churches in mission, of the creation of new dioceses and provinces and of the fruits of discipleship. They reflect the richness of our diversity across the globe, and the abundant resources of the Gospel to address all people in all situations.

We heard accounts of how many people, including faithful Anglicans have faced extreme situations of natural disaster, disease, the threat of terrorism, social unrest, war and its aftermath. We were moved by stories of Christian witness:

- in Sudan, where the Episcopal Church faces the huge challenge of helping to transform a culture of war to a culture of peace;
- in other African nations, such as Burundi and the Congo, where despite war, death and disease, the Anglican Church is courageously expanding its mission in circumstances of deprivation and hardship;
- in the Holy Land, where we are saddened by the unbroken chain of violence but encouraged by some recent signs of progress towards a resolution of the Israel-Palestine conflict;
- in Afghanistan and Iraq, where the humanitarian crisis is in many ways worse than before the recent conflicts, and where we see a need for greater United Nations involvement in repairing the damage;

- in some island states in the Pacific, where the Anglican Church is playing a peacemaking role in conditions of great political instability and corruption.

We thank God for the courage and wisdom that he has given in these situations, and affirm our solidarity with all who face alienation, persecution or injustice. We are mindful of those who live out their Christian faith as small minorities within their societies.

We give thanks for our life together in the Anglican Communion, for the way in which churches of the Communion support one another and, in particular, for the contribution which the Episcopal Church (USA) continues to give to many provinces across our Communion. We send our brotherly greetings to George and Eileen Carey, with thanksgiving for all they achieved in their ministry among us.

We rejoice in the fellowship we share with other churches and denominations, at the same time recognising that any true ecumenical endeavour has to be built on the mutual recognition and respect which we must accord each other as fellow members of the Body of Christ.

Our Work Together

We take to heart the words of Dr Esther Mombo, who urged us to "talk to each other rather than about each other". We welcomed our brother in Christ, Rowan Williams, to his first meeting with us as Archbishop of Canterbury. We listened to him as he shared some of the priorities for his ministry. As reflected in the agenda of our meeting, these are:

- Theological education, which is facing different kinds of crisis in all provinces;
- The continuing engagement of our churches with HIV/AIDS;
- The nature of communion itself and, in particular, how we might be drawn together and renewed in an Anglican Gathering.

Theological Education

It is our conviction that all Anglican Christians should be theologically alert and sensitive to the call of God. We should all be thoughtful and prayerful in reading and hearing the Holy Scriptures, both in the light of the past and with an awareness of present and future needs.

We discussed what basic standards of theological education should be provided for and expected from all members of the Church. All regions face major challenges in this area, particularly in the provision of resources in non-English speaking provinces, and we considered how these should be met.

We recognise that there is a distinctive Anglican approach to theological study. This is reflected not only in the way our worship and liturgical life express our belief, and in our attention to Scripture read in the light of tradition, but also in our respect for exploration and experiment.

Theological education in the Anglican Communion honours each local context and, at the same time, calls us together into communion and mutual accountability. Therefore, though we wish to develop

common standards of theological education worldwide, we value the uniqueness of the work of the Holy Spirit in each place.

Supportive of the Archbishop of Canterbury and, with him, convinced of this need, we affirm and encourage the work of the Anglican Communion Task Group on Theological Education.

HIV/AIDS

We pondered the impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic on our lives and in our communities and provinces as we shared our experiences and sorrows. HIV tears at the very fabric of our nations and homes. We admitted that the "Body of Christ has AIDS".

Adhering to the teachings of the Church, we determined to engage more deeply in challenging cultures and traditions which stifle the humanity of women and deprive them of equal rights. We agreed that our greatest challenge is to nurture and equip our children to protect themselves from HIV, so that we can fulfill the vision of building a generation without AIDS.

AIDS is not a punishment from God, for God does not visit disease and death upon his people: it is rather an effect of fallen creation and our broken humanity. We were reminded at our meeting that Christ calls us into community as friends so that we might befriend others in his name. In that spirit, we resolved to build on what has already been achieved and to re-commit our efforts, prayers and support for all who are living with, and dying from, the effects of HIV/AIDS.

Our Shared Communion in Christ

As Primates, we believe that the 38 provinces and united churches in the Anglican Communion are irrevocably called into a special relationship of fellowship with one another. We thank God for our common inheritance of faith, worship and discipleship - an inheritance which has sustained our journey as one Christian family, and in which we have been united in our proclamation of the Gospel.

We recognise that all churches, and not just Anglicans, face challenges in applying the Gospel to their specific situations and societies. These challenges raise questions for our traditional teaching and understanding - questions which require of the Church a careful process of thought and discussion in order to discover a way forward that is true to our inheritance of faith in Christ and to our duty as Christians to care for all people.

Recalling the Virginia Report's exhortation that we should strive for "the highest degree of communion possible with tolerance for deeply held differences of conviction and practice" (Report of the Inter-Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission, 1997, chapter 1), we are committed as Primates:

- to the recognition that in each province there is a sincere desire to be faithful disciples of Christ and of God's Word, in seeking to understand how the Gospel is to be applied in our generation;
- to respect the integrity of each other's provinces and dioceses, acknowledging the responsibility of Christian leaders to attend to the pastoral needs of minorities in their care;

- to work and pray that the communion between our churches is sustained and deepened; and to seek from God "a right judgement in all things" (Collect of Pentecost).

Human Sexuality

We take seriously the duty laid upon us by the Lambeth Conference 1998 to monitor ongoing discussion of this matter and encourage continued study and reflection in the context of common prayer and worship. We are grateful to the Archbishop of the West Indies, Drexel Gomez, for taking forward our discussion on matters of sexuality by introducing the booklet "True Union in the Body?", which fruitfully illuminated our study. We are also grateful to Presiding Bishop Frank Griswold for drawing our attention to the Report of the Theology Committee of the House of Bishops of the Episcopal Church (USA) on this issue. We commend the study of both documents.

The question of public rites for the blessing of same sex unions is still a cause of potentially divisive controversy. The Archbishop of Canterbury spoke for us all when he said that it is through liturgy that we express what we believe, and that there is no theological consensus about same sex unions. Therefore, we as a body cannot support the authorisation of such rites.

This is distinct from the duty of pastoral care that is laid upon all Christians to respond with love and understanding to people of all sexual orientations. As recognised in the booklet "True Union", it is necessary to maintain a breadth of private response to situations of individual pastoral care.

Anglican Gathering

We discussed the proposal for an Anglican Gathering of lay and ordained people, drawn from all parts of our Communion, which could be held in association with the next Lambeth Conference.

There would be significant financial costs, but we firmly believe that such an event would offer the Communion an important opportunity to renew its life, witness and mission together. The Archbishop of Cape Town, Njongonkulu Ndungane, has offered to welcome a Gathering and the Lambeth Conference in Cape Town, which has the facilities for such events. We encouraged the Archbishop of Canterbury to move ahead with planning for the Gathering in 2008. This would be an occasion for celebration, learning and the deepening of our communion.

Invitation to Prayer

Having been renewed in the fellowship of our meeting, we invite Anglicans everywhere to pray with us. In his Bible studies, the Archbishop of Canterbury spoke of the joy we have as friends of God in Christ. "Jesus' joy is given to us", he said, "so that we might become nourishing to one another, nurturing and feeding one another in the Body of Christ." It is this vision of the rich blessings to be found in the fellowship of Christ's Body that inspires us.

Give thanks to God for the vibrant life of the Brazilian Church; for the diversity of the Anglican Communion, with its 75 million Christians, witnessing in 164 countries in a thousand languages; and for the faithful and courageous witness of Anglicans as they seek to bring God's love into situations of hardship, danger and despair. Pray that, by the power of the Holy Spirit, the Anglican Communion may everywhere be a faithful witness to what God has done in Christ, and to the abundant fullness of life to which he calls us.

The fire of love which binds together the Father and the Son be shed abroad in our hearts by the ministry of the Holy Spirit, and renew us in our lives and in our discipleship; and the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always.

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