

## **March 20, 1986 Canadian Gathering Re-Energizes Primates**

Episcopal News Service

Barbara Braver, Episcopal Times, Massachusetts

TORONTO (DPS, March 20) -- The 28 leaders of the provinces of the Anglican Communion gathered at a nearby retreat center March 12 to 19 for discussions on matters of substance and the sharing of common and (uncommon) experiences.

The triennial meeting was chaired by the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Most Rev. Robert Runcie, who is "first among equals" of the archbishops, and spiritual leader of the 65 million-member worldwide Communion. More than one-third of the primates had assumed their posts since the last meeting in 1983 in Limuru, Kenya, including the Most Rev. Edmond L. Browning, Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, who was installed on Jan. 11. Three-quarters of them are from Latin America, Africa and Asia, giving a rich diversity to the gathering and getting away from the "Englishness" which once seemed to characterize the Communion. Runcie said, however, that it is hard to get away from the image of Anglicans. "The idea that the Anglican Communion is the English Church abroad dies hard," he said, noting with wry amusement that "until quite recently the church wardens in Sierra Leone wore English morning dress, I'm told, at Matins."

In addition to all 28 Primates, the China Christian Council of the People's Republic of China was represented by Bishop K. H. Ting.

The ordination of women to the episcopate was a major agenda item, included at the specific request of Browning. (Eds.: DPS 86055, following). Though the Primates agreed that the ordination of a woman as bishop would be "just and appropriate" for the Episcopal Church and that there are no theological objections, they urged further consultation. The nature of this consultation was part of a Statement on Women in the Episcopate issued by the Primates. (Eds.: Statement follows in DPS 86056). They did not see the consultation as "requesting permission," and they noted the autonomy of each province, but neither did they see it as "merely informing." According to the statement: "Consultation was seen to include a spelling out of the consequences of the ordination of women to the episcopate within the wider Anglican family, in order that the Episcopal Church's decision should be as fully informed as possible."

The Primates asked the Archbishop of Canterbury to appoint a small "Working Party" to collate reactions of the provinces to the women bishops. Their work is to be completed prior to the September 1987 meeting of the Episcopal Church House of Bishops, at which time the House will also receive a report of a committee appointed by Bishop Browning to explore the topic.

In essence, the spirit of the meeting, as reflected in the statement and the press conference following, was that the ordination of women to the episcopate is inevitable, but that for the good of the total Communion, it would be prudent and sensitive to wait until after Lambeth 1988, the once-a-decade meeting of the bishops of the Anglican Communion, so more consultation may take place. (Eds.: Browning's response to the statement follows in DPS 86056).

Though the topic of the ordination of women to the episcopate took a major place on the agenda, it was only one of many items which occupied the Primates' time during the days of morning-to-night sessions.

The sessions were closed and press briefed at regular periods each day. The final press briefing filed by title the items discussed, which included: the need to provide viable pastoral ministries in areas where there is a shortage of ordained clergy, particularly in the "southern cone" dioceses of South America; recruitment, training, and deployment of clergy and laity for mission; the state of ecumenical dialogue and relations with particular reference to the Roman Catholic Church, the Oriental Orthodox, the Lutherans, the Reformed, the World Council of Churches and the Christian World Communion; and ways in which the Anglican Communion could respond to peace initiatives of John Paul II.

Plans for Lambeth 1988 were on the agenda, including themes, the ways in which bishops and their dioceses will study the issues and membership. The Primates voted to invite representative bishops of churches in full communion with the Anglican Communion to be members. This is the first time that such ecumenical representatives have been invited as members rather than observers.

The Primates spent time discussing the situations in which they live and work, and the efforts of the Church, particularly in areas in which there is particular tension, such as Uganda, Liberia, Ireland and South Africa. The common theme which emerged was the role of the Church as reconciler and what it means to be an Anglican in today's world.

The Primate of All Ireland, Archbishop Robert Eames, who was appointed by the Primates to chair a three-person press liaison group, said that there is an "unbelievable bond" between the Primates who often feel isolated and are tremendously benefited by spending time with people who are doing "the same job."

In fact, several observers stated that it could be said of the meeting that the fact that it happens is as important as precisely what happens.

The Archbishop of Canterbury said in an interview that he sees the "shared experience" as the most valuable part of the meeting. "Our awarenesses are heightened and reality is given to the particular experiences of a worldwide Communion which is so difficult to join together apart from gatherings of this sort."

He said the Primates' meeting is "carefully arranged" so that those in attendance have a great deal of time to be together and can move easily from chapel to meeting to meals to purely sociable times.

"When this ends, it is amazing how much we wish it could have gone on longer and we could see more of each other," he said. "No matter how divided we might ever be on issues, this is the most enriching, moving and energy-giving religious meeting I have to preside over."

The Primate of Canada, the Most Rev. E. W. "Ted" Scott, host for the gathering, was not able to join the group until Saturday, as he had been in South Africa with the Commonwealth Commission on South Africa, a group known as the "eminent persons group." Tribute was paid to Scott by Runcie, who called him the "father of the Primates in terms of being the senior Primate."

The meeting of the Primates overlapped with the annual meeting of the eleven-member Standing Committee of Anglican Consultative Council (ACC). Their meeting began March 15 and concluded March 22. The ACC, headquartered in London, has a coordinating function within the Communion. It is made up of one bishop, one priest, and one lay person from each of the Communion's 28 provinces. The Rev. Samuel Van Culin is the Secretary General and Archdeacon Yong Ping Chung of Sabah is the current Chairman. Dr. Charles Lawrence, who completed nine years of service as president of the House of Deputies in September, is a member of the Standing Committee.

At a joint session on March 15, Primates and Standing Committee members heard a presentation on communications, including a panel discussion by English and American journalists. They also saw a video previewing Lambeth 1988 and heard a report on the media coverage plans for the gathering of bishops of the Anglican Communion.

The Archbishop of Canterbury, in introducing the session, said that he is most known for "marrying princesses, embracing Popes and having rows with Mrs. Thatcher," but that he doesn't really spend a lot of his time doing those things. "We are so much at the mercy of people's perceptions," he said, "and these are our friends who want to help us with this."

Source: [http://www.episcopalarchives.org/cgi-bin/ENS/ENSpress\\_release.pl?pr\\_number=86054](http://www.episcopalarchives.org/cgi-bin/ENS/ENSpress_release.pl?pr_number=86054)

## **March 20, 1986 Women in the Episcopate? Yellow Light Still Flashes**

Episcopal News Service

Barbara Braver, Episcopal Times, Massachusetts

TORONTO (DPS, March 20) -- Though the Episcopal Church in the United States does not need permission to consecrate women bishops, and such action would be considered "just and appropriate," the 28 Primates of the Anglican Communion would like further consultation before any such action is taken.

The Primates gathered at a retreat center near here March 12-15 with this issue very much at the top of the agenda. The question was brought before the gathering by the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, the Most Rev. Edmond L. Browning, at the request, last September, of the Church's House of Bishops.

A statement (Eds.: See DPS 86056 following) on Women in the Episcopate issued at the close of the Primates' deliberations referred to two resolutions from the Lambeth Conference of 1978.

Resolution 21 affirms that there are "no fundamental or theological objections to the ordination of women to the historic threefold ministry of the Church."

Resolution 22 recommends that "no decision to consecrate be taken without consultation with the episcopate through the Primates and overwhelming support in any member church and in the dioceses concerned, lest the bishop's office should become a cause of disunity instead of a focus of unity."

The essence of the final statement was to recognize the constitutional right of the Episcopal Church to ordain a woman bishop but to call for continued consultation within the Communion.

Prior to the issuance of the statement, Browning shared with the press the presentation that he made to the Primates in the closed session, saying that the question of the ordination of women to the episcopate "is not just a matter of a theory but it is a possibility in the not too distant future." He said that he wanted to assure the Primates that such an ordination would not be a precipitous action and that "we have no intent of bringing hurt to the Communion."

The Presiding Bishop gave an overview of the history of the decision to ordain women to the priesthood in the United States and what has happened since. "There is no question that the presence of women in ordained ministry has increased the effectiveness and outreach of the Church. The gifts women bring, their individual talents, have greatly contributed to a sense of the wholeness of ministry...and brought the whole ministry of women forward."

He also described the process a diocese must go through prior to an Episcopal election and the approval that is then required by the bishops and standing committees of the whole church. He stressed that this action would have to be "done by the whole Church, and not just one diocese that wants to make an issue."

He further said that the Episcopal Church is in the process of trying to fulfill the Lambeth resolution calling for consultation and that this meeting was part of that.

In addition, he described two resolutions passed by the House of Bishops at General Convention in Anaheim in 1985. (Eds.: See DPS 86056 following). One stated that "the majority of the members of this House do not intend to withhold consent to the election of a Bishop of this Church on grounds of gender" and calls on the Presiding Bishop to "seek the advice of the Episcopate of the Anglican Communion through the Primates..."

The second House of Bishops resolution asked for a special committee to "study and make recommendations concerning the ecumenical and ecclesiological consideration involved in the election and ordination of women Presbyters to the Episcopate..."

The committee, chaired by the Rt. Rev. Edward Jones of Indianapolis, has been appointed and will report to the House of Bishops meeting in 1987 and to Lambeth in 1988.

In a response to the primates (Eds.: See DPS 86056 following) Browning said that he welcomed the statement and that it "reflects the quality of the consultative process within the Anglican Communion..."

Observers felt that the Primates' deliberations and actions did indicate a spirit of unity in the Communion and an ability to go forward in that positive spirit, in spite of differences of opinion.

Source: [http://www.episcopalarchives.org/cgi-bin/ENS/ENSpress\\_release.pl?pr\\_number=86055](http://www.episcopalarchives.org/cgi-bin/ENS/ENSpress_release.pl?pr_number=86055)