

April 7, 1995 A Pastoral Letter

Grace to you and Peace.

We, the Primates and Moderators of the 36 Member Churches of the Anglican Communion, have assembled in Windsor, England, March 10-17, 1995.

The theme of our meeting has been leadership as your servants in the light of the Gospel. Advances in the ministry of reconciliation continue to open new areas of Christian calling and sacrifice. Our being together has strengthened our vision in Christ and renewed our desire to improve our structures, leadership and communication.

In all our work we have been nourished by daily worship and guided study of the Scriptures. We have experienced anew the life-giving Word of God speaking to us of God's costly and gracious love in Jesus Christ. "We do not proclaim ourselves, we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake." (II Corinthians 4:5)

We have shared the vision of the Archbishop of Canterbury for the forthcoming Lambeth Conference 1998 and warmly welcome the plans that are being made.

Among the concerns we have addressed are the restructuring of the Church for mission in the face of secularism, including consideration of the Decade of Evangelism.

Our leadership in the Church is challenged by the denial of human rights, often leading to the displacement of people and the explosion of refugee populations, and by the persistence of poverty, racism, sexism, and tribalism in the midst of political and human strife. The importance of building inter-faith relationships is acknowledged and we abhor the growing fundamentalism in many parts of the world.

We give thanks for the moral and political miracle in South Africa which overcame the evil of apartheid. The prayers, the courage, and the suffering of many have encouraged people across the world. We also give thanks for the progress towards permanent peace in Northern Ireland -- and for the ministries of faithful people responsible for the new life in that corner of the earth. At the same time we reiterate our plea that the peace process be expedited in the Middle East, urging that there be a fair sharing of the City of Jerusalem, sacred to Jews, Muslims and Christians. We also pray for an end to the dispute in Bougainville Island and we support the churches there in their efforts to find a solution to this tragic conflict. We note with gratitude the heroic efforts of the National Council of Churches in Korea, including our own Anglican Church of Korea, towards the unification of the North and South over the past 50 years. We support these churches as they seek to celebrate this Jubilee spirit.

Despite these signs of hope, we deplore the world's continued massive expenditure on the personnel and weapons of war -- and the continuing threat of land mines to innocent human life.

We are distressed over the suffering in Rwanda, a dramatic symbol of the crucifixion which is central to our faith. The Meeting heard of the generous support provided by many sectors of the Anglican family.

We wish to express our continuing concern for the Church in Rwanda and to this end support the proposed visits by a delegation from the Council of Anglican Provinces in Africa and also the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Secretary General.

We also heard of the pain of the Church in Burundi, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Nigeria and the Sudan, and commend these situations to your continuing prayer and support.

There are large sections of humanity who suffer progressive impoverishment and oppression. Many countries are enslaved by debt. We deplore the fact that 20% of the world's people control 84% of the world's wealth, while 20% make do on a mere 1.4%. 40,000 people, mostly children, die every day of starvation and preventable disease. We challenge the rich to remember that wealth is a trust, not an entitlement -- and that impoverishment perpetuated among the many must ultimately rebound in reprisals against the few.

Around the world serious questions relating to human sexuality are being faced by the Church. The traditional response to these questions is to affirm the moral precepts which have come down to us through the tradition of the Church. Nevertheless, we are conscious that within the Church itself there are those whose pattern of sexual expression is at variance with the received Christian moral tradition, but whose lives in other respects demonstrate the marks of genuine Christian character. The issues are deep and complex. They do not always admit of easy, instant answers. A careful process of reflecting on contemporary forms of behavior in the light of the scriptures and the Christian moral tradition is required. We have to recognize that there are different understandings at present among Christians of equal commitment and faith. We invite every part of the Church to face the questions about sexuality with honesty and integrity, avoiding unnecessary confrontation and polarization, in a spirit of faithful seeking to understand more clearly the will of God for our lives as Christians.

We thank God for the witness and support of young people in the Communion. We encourage their continuing challenge of our complacency and we pledge them our willingness to listen to their deepest concerns.

As leaders of the Communion we approach the end of the second millennium conscious of our Lord's admonition not to be afraid. Spiritual hunger is growing all the time. The Christian mission has never been more needed.

We ask for your prayerful support as we return to our homes and work. We covenant with one another to be faithful in our ministries to the Church and to the world, upheld by the certainty that nothing shall separate us from God's love in Christ Jesus.

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