

March 14, 2007

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I am writing to report on the just-completed meeting of the House of Bishops at Camp Allen, near Navasota, Texas, and to pass on to you two important resolutions. At the heart of our meeting, we worked intentionally on the disciplines of reconciliation for almost two days, and it continues to be my sense that the bishops, even in this season of disagreement, are seeking to find ways to move toward one another. For this I am grateful.

We also spent substantial time together preparing for the Lambeth Conference, during the course of which we learned that the negotiations between Lambeth Palace and the Bishop of New Hampshire to find some way for him to be present had broken down. In the aftermath, the House passed the following resolution with near unanimity, a sign of the bishops' desire to find common ground and common voice:

*Give to your Church, O God,
a bold vision and a daring charity,
a refreshed wisdom and a courteous understanding,
that the eternal message of your Son
may be acclaimed as the good news of the age;
through him who makes all things new,
even Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (1)*

We, the House of Bishops of the Episcopal Church, approaching the forthcoming Lambeth Conference, are mindful of the hurt that is being experienced by so many in our own Episcopal Church, in other Provinces of our global communion, and in the world around us. While the focus of this hurt seems centered on issues of human sexuality, beneath it we believe there is a feeling of marginalization by people of differing points of view. Entering into Holy Week, our response is to name this hurt and to claim our hope that is in Christ.

As the Lambeth Conference approaches, we believe we have an enormous opportunity, in the midst of struggle, to be proud of our heritage, and to use this particular time in a holy way by affirming our rich diversity. The health of such diversity is that we are dealing openly with issues that affect the entire global community. Thus, even as we acknowledge the pain felt by many, we also affirm its holiness as we seek to be faithful to our Lord Jesus Christ.

Even though we did not all support the consecration of the Bishop of New Hampshire, we acknowledge that he is a canonically elected and consecrated bishop in this church. We regret that he alone among bishops ministering within the territorial boundaries of their dioceses and provinces, did not receive an invitation to attend the Lambeth Conference.

We appeal to the faithful of the Episcopal Church and the faithful in the wider, global Anglican family, to focus and celebrate our unity in the comprehensiveness of diversity. In union with Christian tradition through the centuries, we are willing to face challenges that precipitate struggle as a means towards reconciliation.

During our meeting we have been praying for a "daring charity and courteous understanding." With this intent and guided by the Holy Spirit, we go to the Lambeth Conference spiritually united and praying that God will sanctify our struggles and unify us for Christ's mission to a hurting world.

(1) This Franciscan-inspired prayer was offered by our chaplains during this meeting of the House of Bishops.

In our business session we also undertook the matters of John-David Schofield and William Cox, bishops of the Episcopal Church charged with abandoning the communion of this Church. The Canons direct the entire House of Bishops to consider and act upon such charges, and so we did. There was heaviness about the work and care for one another as we made our way through the deliberations. It was with no joy that the House voted for deposition in both cases, again with near unanimity. Subsequently, and without dissent, we passed the following resolution:

Calling on the reconciling love of our Lord Jesus Christ and mindful of our call to be servants of one another and of the mission and ministry of the whole church, we have taken the action of consenting to the deposition of our two brother bishops, John-David Schofield and William Cox. This outcome was [*sic*] is the painful culmination of a lengthy process of conciliation and review led by two Presiding Bishops. While earnest voices were raised asking if there were other alternatives at this time, the conclusion of the House of Bishops is that this action is based on the facts presented to us and is necessary for the ongoing integrity of The Episcopal Church. We seek also to respond to the needs of the people of the Diocese of San Joaquin. We are saddened by what we believe to be this necessary action and we have taken it only after deep prayer and serious conversation. We also wish to express our continuing commitment to work for reconciliation with our brothers and the People of God who have been the recipients of their pastoral leadership and care through the years.

As Holy Week begins in two days, we enter more deeply into the mystery of God's reconciling act in Christ Jesus—in His incarnation, His life, His teaching and miracles, but most of all in His death on the cross and His victorious resurrection from the dead. At the Great Vigil of Easter, the expanse of God's reconciling reach is praised in these words from the *Exsultet*, the great hymn of praise sung at the lighting of the Paschal candle: "How blessed is this night, when earth and heaven are joined."

The reconciliation won in Christ's resurrection is cosmic in dimension. This Holy Week, may we humble sinners in the Episcopal Church and the entire Anglican Communion discover anew the enormity of God's reconciling power and desire.

Ever faithfully, in Christ,

The Rt. Rev. George Wayne Smith
Bishop of Missouri