

## Report on the Meeting of the House of Bishops

March 21, 2005

Monday in Holy Week

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

There is precious little to add substantively to the two documents issuing from the Spring Meeting of the House of Bishops. "The Covenant Statement" details your bishops' response to the Communiqué from the Anglican Primates and to the Windsor Report. "A Word to the Church" briefly narrates the meeting, describes the tenor of it, and lists its various actions.

I can add little to the material in these reports, but I do want to convey to you a sense of the meeting's character, which was nothing short of remarkable. This meeting was by far the most arduous in my three years as bishop. The Covenant Statement alone required fourteen hours of work during official sessions, not to mention the countless hours spent on the side and late into the night, informal meetings that made this agreement possible. Open and painful conflict also surfaced during our time together. Hard work and heavy emotion were evident in equal portions throughout the meeting.

The presence of conflict and toil, however, did not signal the absence of Spirit; quite the contrary. For me, these days were filled with a realistic hope, for it became clear early on that most bishops arrived at Camp Allen with a desire for ECUSA to remain one with the Anglican Communion. There soon emerged a longing to find some way to share as broadly as possible the cost of what the Primates have asked from us, with the sense that what touches one touches all. The hard work ensued as we sought, and eventually found, a consensus.

For the first time, I experienced the whole of the House of Bishops as pulling together, whereas in the past we might have given in to the forces seeking to pull us apart. I do not hesitate to bear witness to the Spirit's presence among us, precisely because of this. And

the core working group, who presented the first draft of an idea that eventually resulted in the Covenant Statement, was mind-boggling in its diversity. The spectrum of theological and political thought in our Church was represented in that group, and on this occasion, they spoke with one voice. I will say to you that it could not have been of their doing alone, for the One who has called us was much in evidence as we met.

The strife is not over, nor is this hard season of uncertainty finished, and, as our Presiding Bishop reminded us, sin lurks precisely in these moments of confidence and accomplishment. But I can bring you this news of hope.

Often we associate the Spirit's presence with the ease of a task undertaken or in some brilliant performance. Certainly that may be the case, but we do well to remember other realities, equally true. Scripture says that the Spirit, for example, was the One who drove Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted. During these last days of Lent, let us remember that perplexing aspect of the Spirit's life, and our life in faith. As we enter the mysteries of Holy Week, let us remember the Spirit's working through cross and resurrection—both.

In Christ,

George Wayne Smith

Tenth Bishop of Missouri