



February 23, 2007

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I regret that the season of documents and decisions requiring my response remains upon us, but such is the season in which we live and minister together. I would be remiss, as your bishop, if I did not put before you some of my reflections about the Communiqué released by the Anglican Primates' meeting earlier this month in Tanzania.

My first counsel to all of you in the Diocese of Missouri is not to over analyze this Communiqué, and to exercise patience for a process that still promises to be lengthy. In the Communiqué, there is English understatement and Anglican nuance enough to go around. Obfuscated and contradictory readings of the document are only too possible—I know, for I have seen them on the Net. Some of these readings do not come with a generosity of heart, from both sides of the question. I for one am eager to hear directly from our Presiding Bishop, Katharine Jefferts Schori, who was present at this difficult meeting, and who herself agreed to the Communiqué. Pray for her, for me, and for the entire House of Bishops as we gather March 16-21, at Camp Allen, near Houston. It is in *community* that *communion* is realized (you will notice the obvious cognates here). Typeface on paper or a flickering screen do not give the human touch so necessary to the sacramental life which is ours in Christ Jesus.

Let me simply note that the most heart-breaking and theologically problematic matter from the Primates' Meeting was the refusal of some of those present to participate in the Eucharist. It may be that, from that point, everything else is detail. It is my understanding of the catholic faith that we are being redeemed together—or else not at all.

There are Christians who are willing to say to other Christians, "I have no need of you." We Christians, all of us, too easily forget the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 12, where he describes the life and grace given us in Christ's Body: "The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of you, nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you." We desperately need one another, for the fullness of life in Christ and for our redemption. It pains me to hear otherwise faithful believers saying, for example "I have no need of Nigeria. We can be a Church without them." On the other hand, it pains me to hear others who say, "We can be a Church without *those* people." In this case "*those*" people happen to be gay and lesbian Christians. The Christian vision that falls short of a priestly kingdom formed out of "every family, language, people, and nation" is simply not big enough, not catholic enough.

I also recognize that the Communiqué asks some hard things from us in the Episcopal Church. I will not disregard or minimize the hard, but clear, stipulations set before us, and I will reiterate my intent to remain in communion. The most robust expression of catholicity, again, built from every family, language, people, and nation, remains my purpose. As one thoughtful cleric in this Diocese has pointed out to me, the Communiqué does not imagine much change from the status quo as many of us understand it, at least as it stands in the aftermath of General Convention 2006. "There is nothing different for us today than, say, on February 12th, before the meeting started," he writes to me. That seems correct. There is no substantive change required in the status quo, but rather a clarification of it. Here's the task before us, as I see it.

Archbishop Rowan, in his sermon at the Zanzibar Cathedral on Sunday, February 18, quoted John Newton, the one-time slave trader who later on wrote the words for Amazing Grace. Near the end of his life, Newton wrote these words to a friend, "I am a very old man and my memory has gone. But I remember two things: that I am a great sinner and that Jesus is a great saviour."

The Archbishop referenced this quotation later in his sermon, when he mentioned that here is the one thing that a bishop might say to another bishop, and a bishop might say to God's people, who might in turn tell it to their bishop: I remember two things; that I am a great sinner and that Christ is a great saviour.

It is with humility such as this, a humility befitting this Lenten season, that we might realize the full communion that Christ, once crucified and now risen from the dead, has won for us.

Ever faithfully, in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "George Wayne Smith". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a small cross at the beginning.

The Rt. Rev. George Wayne Smith  
Bishop of Missouri