

A Pastoral Letter

from
Bishop Carolyn Tanner Irish
October 2007

Dear Friends in Christ:

I want to give you a brief and personal report on the House of Bishops meeting in New Orleans two weeks ago. I have delayed in doing so for two reasons. First, the Internet has already provided more than enough information and commentary on this gathering. And second, for the first time in my memory, the quasi-official responses to our proceedings have seemed as important as the proceedings themselves. It has been like waiting for the other shoe to drop.

The single most helpful thing about our deliberations was that we did not have the actual Primates' Communiqué (see Internet 1 reference below) issued from Dar es Salaam in February of this year on the table. That document had riled many of us – clergy and laity alike – because the primates (Episcopal heads of the Anglican provinces) seemed to assume they had an authority they simply don't have. They targeted our church with demands, a deadline, and what we felt was a threat if we did not comply. Emotional reactions to this ran high.

Instead of the Communiqué, we were presented with a Report of the Communion Sub-Group, comprising the Archbishop of Canterbury and members of the Joint Standing Committee of the Primates Meeting and the Anglican Consultative Council. Their report reviewed many aspects of the Episcopal Church's response to the Windsor Report issued in 2004, and it found elements of compliance with this Report since that time. (It is to be remembered, however, that it remains a report, not an authoritative prescription for membership in the Anglican Communion.)

The persons who wrote the above-mentioned Report for our meeting, including the Archbishop of Canterbury, were invited to come as guests to our New Orleans meeting. They had opportunities to speak to us, and while at times it felt like an indignant scold, it was also clear that they hoped for our continued participation in the Anglican Communion. I say 'participation' because historically speaking 'membership' proves to be a rather elusive concept.

In the end, we issued our response to the Questions and Concerns raised by our Anglican Communion Partners. This document (see Internet reference 2 below) has met with acceptance by most of our visitors; however, it did not satisfy the very conservative primates or bishops in our church and the larger Communion. They are working to set up their own Anglican body. The liberals were not happy with it either, even though on the critical issues of giving consent to the election of partnered gay bishops and blessing same sex unions, we said little more than was said at the General Convention of 2006. The writing team worked on endless drafts of our report to

accommodate the views and phrases to which the majority of the House could agree. Our Presiding Bishop, Katharine Jefferts Schori, said more than once, “No one is going to get everything they want.”

Two further elements in our response did ease the way for many of us. One was the expression of our “fervent hope” that the Archbishop of Canterbury would find a way to invite Bishop Gene Robinson to the Lambeth Conference next summer and to assure his full participation. Also, with our Presiding Bishop’s appointment of Episcopal visitors to dioceses not willing to receive her, we called for an immediate end to diocesan incursions by uninvited bishops in accordance with the Windsor Report and consistent with the statements of past Lambeth conferences and the Ecumenical Councils of the Church. We have not heard any response from the Archbishop of Canterbury.

For myself, I found the spirit of the Community of Bishops (as we call ourselves) much diminished since our meeting last spring. From that meeting we issued a statement profoundly descriptive of who we understand ourselves to be, absent the pressures of ‘compliance’ to the demands of the newly rising structures of authority and the doctrinal positions newly called the “standards of teaching” of the Anglican Communion. What we did in March was much like what our own deputation did in response to the Dar es Salam Communiqué, that is to say it was proactive and declarative, not defensive or reactive.

On the ground, the Diocese of Utah will continue its ministry and mission for the duration of my episcopacy.

Any people interested in a discussion of our church’s response to the primary issues of this meeting are invited to have lunch with me at 12:00 Noon on Friday, October 26th, at the Cathedral Church Center, prior to the opening of our Diocesan Convention. Boxed lunches will be provided for those who RSVP to Mary Kay Williams at mwilliams@episcopal-ut.org.

Faithfully,

Carolyn Tanner Irish (The Right Rev’d)
10th Bishop of Utah

Internet references:

- 1) The primates’ Communiqué may be found at http://www.episcopalchurch.org/3577_82571_ENG_HTM.htm
- 2) The House of Bishops response may be found at http://www.episcopalchurch.org/79901_90457_ENG_HTM.htm

A general listing of recent documents and press releases relevant to Anglican Communion relationships and issues may be found at
http://www.episcopalchurch.org/89878_26897_ENG_HTM.htm