

Episcopal News Service  
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House of Bishops: Message to God's People

Spring House of Bishops Meeting  
Camp Allen Episcopal Conference Center  
Navasota, Texas  
March 16-21, 2007

A Message to God's People...from the Bishops of the Episcopal Church.

As we prepare for Easter and the joyous celebration of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, we send you greetings from Navasota, Texas where we gathered for the spring meeting of the House of Bishops. We represent fifteen sovereign nations, the fifty United States, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, The Virgin Islands, and Micronesia bearing witness to the Gospel of Our Lord and the wonders of Christ's redeeming work in the world. We were reminded of the health and vitality of our Church as our new Presiding Bishop recounted her travels.

We have experienced a sense of identity, clarity, and purpose in fulfilling our vocation as bishops. We were blessed by the presence of the Primate and the House of Bishops of the Iglesia Anglicana de Mexico. Together we discovered a growing unity as we seek the mind of Christ. Our meeting was marked by a spirit of thanksgiving and respect, lived in a rich rhythm of worship, work, study, and rest.

That spirit moved us deeper into our focus on mission for Christ. In that context we discussed the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the Primates' Communiqué, the draft Anglican Communion Covenant, as well as a number of other mission opportunities.

The central theme of the address by the Rev. Dr. Ian Douglas of the Episcopal Divinity School was that "the mission of the Church is to participate in the mission of God". This observation set the tone for our study and discussion of the MDGs. We gave special attention to the challenge of environmental sustainability, the theme of a presentation by Dr. John Pine of Louisiana State University who addressed the environmental implications of global climate change.

We heard from the Rev. Dr. Ephraim Radner and the Rev. Dr. Katherine Grieb, members of the Covenant Drafting Committee, each of whom brought a distinct perspective regarding the proposed Covenant. Their presentations, which are available on line, will inform further conversations as the drafting process continues prior to the Lambeth Conference of 2008.

Mission concerns received attention in a variety of workshops and presentations, including: the rebuilding of the Gulf Coast, Darkness into Day campaign, TEAM (Toward Effective Anglican Mission), TEAC (Theological Education within Anglican Communion), Bishops Working for a Just Society, issues facing returning military personnel from Iraq and Afghanistan and their families, as well as immigration and border issues viewed from both the United States and Mexican perspectives. The fourth anniversary of the war in Iraq was marked by a prayer vigil for peace. Then, in both formal and informal ways, members of the House expressed their strong desire to keep God's mission at the center of the life of the Church.

We also heard a well-documented report by the House of Bishops' Task Force on Property Disputes on the history and strategy of groups, including some in the Network of Anglican Communion Dioceses and Parishes (NACDAP) and others, to remove congregations and church property from The Episcopal Church. This report will be made available at a later date. We commend it, once publicly available, to diocesan Standing Committees.

We had an extended and thoughtful discussion of the Communiqué from the Primates Meeting in Dar es Salaam, which represents the beginning of a longer process of response that will continue through the coming months.

It is our strong desire to remain within the fellowship of the Anglican Communion. The Primates' Communiqué, however, raises significant concerns. First among these is what is arguably an unprecedented shift of power toward the Primates, represented, in part, by the proposed "Pastoral Scheme." This proposed plan calls for the appointment of a Primatial Vicar and Pastoral Council for The Episcopal Church whose membership would consist of "up to five members; two nominated by the Primates, two by the Presiding Bishop, and a Primate of a Province of the Anglican Communion nominated by the Archbishop of Canterbury to chair the Council." We believe this proposal contravenes the Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church. Moreover, because it is proposed that this scheme take immediate effect, we were compelled, at this March meeting, to request that the Executive Council of the Episcopal Church decline to participate in this aspect of the Communiqué's requests. Nonetheless, we pledge to continue working to find a way of meeting the pastoral concerns raised by the Primates that are compatible with our own Church's polity and canons. We should note that our recommendation to Executive Council not to participate in the Pastoral Scheme, though not unanimously endorsed by this House, came at the conclusion of long and gracious conversation.

Finally, we believe that the leaders of the Church must always hold basic human rights and the dignity of every human being as fundamental concerns in our witness for Christ. We were, therefore, concerned that while the Communiqué focuses on homosexuality, it ignores the pressing issues of violence against gay and lesbian people around the world, and the criminalization of homosexual behavior in many nations of the world.

The Theology Committee of the House of Bishops was charged with the responsibility of developing a teaching guide for consideration of both the Primates' Communiqué and the proposed draft Covenant for the Anglican Communion. We anticipate this guide will be available by late May for use by bishops and dioceses in preparation for the September meeting of the House of Bishops.

The bishops unanimously affirmed a Mind of the House Resolution inviting the Archbishop of Canterbury and the members of the Primates' Standing Committee to meet, at a time of their choosing, with the House of Bishops.

As we prepare to celebrate the Paschal Mystery we call for your prayers for and commitment to God's mission of making all things new.

For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake. (2 Corinthians 4:5)