

The Episcopal Church's House of Bishops responds to the Dar es Salaam Communiqué.

When the Primates of the Anglican Communion met February 15-19 near Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, they issued an ultimatum to The Episcopal Church demanding an end to the appointment of gay clergy and the blessing of same-sex couples. Episcopal bishops were given until September 30 to respond to the demands. The Primates also announced that The Episcopal Church must allow its members who oppose gay clergy to worship under a newly formed Pastoral Council.

The House of Bishops met for their usual Spring gathering at Camp Allen, Navasota, Texas, March 16-21. The following three documents came out of their meetings: a resolution, a letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury, and a letter to the members of The Episcopal Church. All three are shown below, and I recommend their reading.

“The Episcopal church may end up benched from the world Anglican community, but if so it will be with honor and dignity, and reflective of the gospel.”

Mind of the House of Bishops Resolution Addressed to the Executive Council of the Episcopal Church

Resolved, the House of Bishops affirms its desire that The Episcopal Church remain a part of the councils of the Anglican Communion; and

Resolved, the meaning of the Preamble to the Constitution of The Episcopal Church is determined solely by the General Convention of The Episcopal Church; and

Resolved, the House of Bishops believes the proposed Pastoral Scheme of the Dar es Salaam Communiqué of February 19, 2007 would be injurious to The Episcopal Church and urges that the Executive Council decline to participate in it; and

Resolved, the House of Bishops pledges itself to continue to work to find ways of meeting the pastoral concerns of the Primates that are compatible with our own polity and canons.

**Adopted March 20, 2007
The House of Bishops
The Episcopal Church
Spring Meeting 2007
Camp Allen Conference Center
Navasota, Texas**

To the Archbishop of Canterbury and the members of the Primates' Standing Committee:

We, the Bishops of The Episcopal Church, meeting in Camp Allen, Navasota, Texas, March 16-21, 2007, have considered the requests directed to us by the Primates of the Anglican Communion in the Communiqué dated February 19, 2007.

Although we are unable to accept the proposed Pastoral Scheme, we declare our passionate desire to remain in full constituent membership in both the Anglican Communion and the Episcopal Church.

We believe that there is an urgent need for us to meet face to face with the Archbishop of Canterbury and members of the Primates' Standing Committee, and we hereby request and urge that such a meeting be negotiated by the Presiding Bishop of The Episcopal Church and the Archbishop of Canterbury at the earliest possible opportunity.

We invite the Archbishop and members of the Primates' Standing Committee to join us at our expense for three days of prayer and conversation regarding these important matters.

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A Communication to The Episcopal Church from the March 2007 Meeting of the House of Bishops

We, the Bishops of The Episcopal Church, meeting at Camp Allen, Navasota, Texas, for our regular Spring Meeting, March 16-21, 2007, have received the Communiqué of February 19, 2007 from the Primates of the Anglican Communion meeting at Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. We have met together for prayer, reflection, conversation, and listening during these days and have had the Communiqué much on our minds and hearts, just as we know many in our Church and in other parts of the world have had us on their minds and hearts as we have taken counsel together. We are grateful for the prayers that have surrounded us.

We affirm once again the deep longing of our hearts for The Episcopal Church to continue as a part of the Anglican Communion. We have gone so far as to articulate our self-understanding and unceasing desire for relationships with other Anglicans by memorializing the principle in the

Preamble of our Constitution. What is important to us is that The Episcopal Church is a constituent member of a family of Churches, all of whom share a common mother in the Church of England. That membership gives us the great privilege and unique opportunity of sharing in the family's work of alleviating human suffering in all parts of the world. For those of us who are members of The Episcopal Church, we are aware as never before that our Anglican Communion partners are vital to our very integrity as Christians and our wholeness. The witness of their faith, their generosity, their bravery, and their devotion teach us essential elements of gospel-based living that contribute to our conversion.

We would therefore meet any decision to exclude us from gatherings of all Anglican Churches with great sorrow, but our commitment to our membership in the Anglican Communion as a way to participate in the alleviation of suffering and restoration of God's creation would remain constant. We have no intention of choosing to withdraw from our commitments, our relationships, or our own recognition of our full communion with the See of Canterbury or any of the other constituent members of the Anglican Communion. Indeed, we will seek to live fully into, and deepen, our relationships with our brothers and sisters in the Communion through companion relationships, the networks of Anglican women, the Anglican Indigenous Network, the Francophone Network, our support for the Anglican Diocese of Cuba, our existing covenant commitments with other provinces and dioceses, including Liberia, Mexico, Central America, Brazil, and the Philippines, our work as The Episcopal Church in many countries around the world, especially in the Caribbean, Latin America, Europe, and Taiwan, and countless informal relationships for mission around the world.

Since our General Convention of 2003, we have responded in good faith to the requests we have received from our Anglican partners. We accepted the invitation of the Lambeth Commission to send individuals characteristic of the theological breadth of our Church to meet with it. We happily did so. Our Executive Council voluntarily acceded to the request of the Primates for our delegates not to attend the 2005 meeting of the Anglican Consultative Council in Nottingham. We took our place as listeners rather than participants as an expression of our love and respect for the sensibilities of our brothers and sisters in the Communion even when we believed we had been misunderstood. We accepted the invitation of the Primates to explain ourselves in a presentation to the same meeting of the Anglican Consultative Council. We did so with joy.

At the meeting of our House of Bishops at Camp Allen, Texas in March, 2004 we adopted a proposal called Delegated Episcopal Pastoral Oversight as a means for meeting the pastoral needs of those within our Church who disagreed with actions of the General Convention. Our plan received a favorable response in the Windsor Report. It was not accepted by the Primates. At our meeting in March 2005, we adopted a Covenant Statement as an interim response to the Windsor Report in an attempt to assure the rest of the Communion that we were taking them seriously and, at some significant cost, refused to consecrate any additional bishops whatsoever as a way that we could be true to our own convictions without running the risk of consecrating some that would offend our brothers and sisters. Our response was not accepted by the Primates. Our General Convention in 2006 struggled mightily and at great cost to many, not the least of whom are our gay and lesbian members, to respond favorably to the requests made of us in the

Windsor Report and the Primates' Dromantine Communiqué of 2005. We received a favorable response from the Joint Standing Committee of the Anglican Consultative Council and the Primates, which found that our effort had substantially met the concerns of the Windsor Report with the need to clarify our position on the blessing of same sex relationships. Still, our efforts were not accepted by the Primates in the Dar es Salaam Communiqué.

Other Anglican bishops, indeed including some Primates, have violated our provincial boundaries and caused great suffering and contributed immeasurably to our difficulties in solving our problems and in attempting to communicate for ourselves with our Anglican brothers and sisters. We have been repeatedly assured that boundary violations are inappropriate under the most ancient authorities and should cease. The Lambeth Conferences of 1988 and 1998 did so. The Windsor Report did so. The Dromantine Communiqué did so. None of these assurances has been heeded. The Dar es Salaam Communiqué affirms the principle that boundary violations are impermissible, but then sets conditions for ending those violations, conditions that are simply impossible for us to meet without calling a special meeting of our General Convention.

It is incumbent upon us as disciples to do our best to follow Jesus in the increasing experience of the leading of the Holy Spirit. We fully understand that others in the Communion believe the same, but we do not believe that Jesus leads us to break our relationships. We proclaim the Gospel of what God has done and is doing in Christ, of the dignity of every human being, and of justice, compassion, and peace. We proclaim the Gospel that in Christ there is no Jew or Greek, no male or female, no slave or free. We proclaim the Gospel that in Christ all God's children, including women, are full and equal participants in the life of Christ's Church. We proclaim the Gospel that in Christ all God's children, including gay and lesbian persons, are full and equal participants in the life of Christ's Church. We proclaim the Gospel that stands against any violence, including violence done to women and children as well as those who are persecuted because of their differences, often in the name of God. The Dar es Salaam Communiqué is distressingly silent on this subject. And, contrary to the way the Anglican Communion Network and the American Anglican Council have represented us, we proclaim a Gospel that welcomes diversity of thought and encourages free and open theological debate as a way of seeking God's truth. If that means that others reject us and communion with us, as some have already done, we must with great regret and sorrow accept their decision.

With great hope that we will continue to be welcome in the councils of the family of Churches we know as the Anglican Communion, we believe that to participate in the Primates' Pastoral scheme would be injurious to The Episcopal Church for many reasons.

First, it violates our church law in that it would call for a delegation of primatial authority not permissible under our Canons and a compromise of our autonomy as a Church not permissible under our Constitution.

Second, it fundamentally changes the character of the Windsor process and the covenant design process in which we thought all the Anglican Churches were participating together.

Third, it violates our founding principles as The Episcopal Church following our own liberation from colonialism and the beginning of a life independent of the Church of England.

Fourth, it is a very serious departure from our English Reformation heritage. It abandons the generous orthodoxy of our Prayer Book tradition. It sacrifices the emancipation of the laity for the exclusive leadership of high-ranking Bishops. And, for the first time since our separation from the papacy in the 16th century, it replaces the local governance of the Church by its own people with the decisions of a distant and unaccountable group of prelates.

Most important of all it is spiritually unsound. The pastoral scheme encourages one of the worst tendencies of our Western culture, which is to break relationships when we find them difficult instead of doing the hard work necessary to repair them and be instruments of reconciliation. The real cultural phenomenon that threatens the spiritual life of our people, including marriage and family life, is the ease with which we choose to break our relationships and the vows that established them rather than seek the transformative power of the Gospel in them. We cannot accept what would be injurious to this Church and could well lead to its permanent division.

At the same time, we understand that the present situation requires intentional care for those within our Church who find themselves in conscientious disagreement with the actions of our General Convention. We pledge ourselves to continue to work with them toward a workable arrangement. In truth, the number of those who seek to divide our Church is small, and our Church is marked by encouraging signs of life and hope. The fact that we have among ourselves, and indeed encourage, a diversity of opinion on issues of sexuality should in no way be misunderstood to mean that we are divided, except among a very few, in our love for The Episcopal Church, the integrity of its identity, and the continuance of its life and ministry.

In anticipation of the traditional renewal of ordination vows in Holy Week we solemnly declare that “we do believe the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, and to contain all things necessary to salvation; and we do solemnly engage to conform to the doctrine, discipline, and worship of The Episcopal Church.” (Book of Common Prayer, page 513)

With this affirmation both of our identity as a Church and our affection and commitment to the Anglican Communion, we find new hope that we can turn our attention to the essence of Christ’s own mission in the world, to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to liberate the oppressed, and to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor (Luke 4:18-19). It is to that mission that we now determinedly turn.

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