

Thursday, September 27, 2007

FROM: Bishops Lillibridge and Reed

We have returned to the diocese after a very intense week at the House of Bishops' meeting in New Orleans and want to send you our thoughts on the statement that the House released Tuesday in response to the requests made of us. These requests, made of us by the Primates of the Anglican Communion, were that The Episcopal Church make an unequivocal common covenant that the bishops will not authorize any Rite of Blessing for same-sex unions in their diocese or through General Convention; and confirm that the passing of Resolution B033 of the 75<sup>th</sup> General Convention means that a candidate for Episcopal orders living in a same-sex union shall not receive the necessary consents to election unless some new consensus on these matters emerges across the Communion. The statement that the House of Bishops issued Tuesday is available on our diocesan website ([www.episcopal-dwtx.org](http://www.episcopal-dwtx.org)).

We have seen some of the reports of the meeting, and we (along with other bishops) are concerned at some of the conclusions being drawn by people who were not in the room or even in New Orleans. Please let us offer some first-hand observations.

First, the spirit of the New Orleans meeting was much better than the meeting of the House of Bishops last March. There was genuine movement toward one another at the New Orleans meeting, and the conversations were blunt yet courteous. There was no acrimony expressed toward one another or toward the Communion. This was not the case at our meeting in March, and we give thanks for the progress made in this area. The bishops listened respectfully to the somber and sobering reports from the Archbishop of Canterbury and the lay and ordained representatives of the Joint Standing Committee of the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC) and the Primates. These guests spoke plainly and honestly, but with great love and graciousness, about the effects of our actions on the rest of the Communion. Each received a warm greeting and round of applause when finished with his/her remarks. Bishops, wherever we find ourselves on the issues before us, all understand the pain both in the Communion and in The Episcopal Church because of our differences.

Second, the two of us, and several others, sought repeatedly – in public and in private – for clarity and directness in our response. In our view, we should have answered the questions simply and straightforwardly, and any other comments we wanted to make should have been issued separately. As one bishop noted to the House, we were asked left-brain questions and we offered right-brain answers.

Third, the response we made on Tuesday was less than the two of us had hoped for, but more than we had expected after our discussions on Monday. Despite our reservations about the final document, a careful reading shows we did go further than the Bishops were able to go in March. Is it far enough? Is our response adequate? As many have stated, we should know that in the very near future when the Archbishop of Canterbury, in consultation with the Primates and the Joint Standing Committee, offer their response to our response. Individuals can speculate about this, but the real test will be the response from the people who asked the questions in the first place. This is further complicated by the fact that the Joint Standing Committee and the Primates have different ideas among themselves as to what might constitute an adequate response.

Fourth, the majority of conservative and moderately conservative bishops labored very hard to get the statement to its current point. Previous editions of the statement were totally unacceptable to many of us. The "Windsor Bishops" spoke repeatedly to the House on our positions and opinions, and there were additional meetings of the Windsor group among themselves and with others on the more liberal side of these issues. Again, these conversations

were direct and often times difficult, but the mutual respect shown one another while clearly stating our thoughts was a gift we had not experienced, particularly at the meeting in March. However, it was to the Windsor Bishops' dismay that we could not get our resolution to be considered as we presented it. That was also true for many others. This is in part because of the many documents submitted by a wide array of bishops both before and during the meeting. We did speak clearly - and we were heard - concerning our own sense of being marginalized within the House, and we reminded others that to include all voices in the Church means including conservative ones, too. Nevertheless, efforts to strengthen and clarify the language of the statement were defeated, as were efforts to weaken it.

Fifth, some have asked why the Windsor Bishops have not issued a "minority report." After various conversations, we decided to wait for the response to this statement from those who asked the questions. Over the past several years, the Windsor group has met numerous times. We have issued signed statements, minority reports, principles, etc... and the prevailing view is simply to hear the response to our response. Another minority report isn't going to have much effect at this point. If the House's response is deemed inadequate, there will be an effort to gather a significant number of bishops to discuss the next steps. This gathering would likely be larger than previous Windsor gatherings.

Sixth, the two of us were greatly saddened by Jeffrey Steenson's announcement of his intention to resign as the Bishop of the Diocese of the Rio Grande and join the Roman Catholic Church. Jeffrey is a brilliant theologian, a gentle pastor, a wonderful teacher, a faithful disciple, and a good friend. While we grieve for him and us, we deeply respect his decision to simply step down and follow the Lord's lead in his life as best he can.

Finally, then, we look forward to hearing the "response to our response," possibly in the next few days. At that point, we will communicate with you again. We were and continue to be deeply grateful for your thoughts and prayers, and are honored to serve you as your bishops.

Bishops Lillibridge and Reed  
West Texas