

Anglicanism, the Lambeth Conference, and Us

On July 16, 600-plus bishops of the Anglican Communion will begin to gather in Canterbury, England, for the 14th Lambeth Conference. The first Lambeth Conference was held in 1867, called by then Archbishop of Canterbury Charles Longley. Bishop Longley recognized, really for the first time, that there was such a thing as Anglicanism – that what had begun as the Church of England had spread across the globe, primarily at that time to Africa and Asia. The Church had become an international community of many different people in many different cultures, and Longley wanted to gather the bishops of those local communities to hear their hopes, dreams, struggles, and priorities. The Lambeth Conference has been held about every ten years since 1867, always at the invitation of the current Archbishop of Canterbury.

The bishops who gather at the Lambeth Conference are the spiritual leaders of The Anglican Communion. They will include the Primates - the heads of the 38 Provinces of the Communion - as well as diocesan bishops and suffragan bishops and assistant bishops. Our bishops Lillibridge and Reed will be among them.

And what, exactly, is The Anglican Communion? Basically it is those churches around the world who are “in communion” with The Archbishop of Canterbury. Beyond that, as you will read in this issue, The Anglican Communion is hard to define. There is no one person, not even the Archbishop of Canterbury – the ABC, as he has been tagged lately – who makes the rules and regulations. The structure of The Anglican Communion is loose, depending on such things as “the bonds of affection” for its authority.

Perhaps never in recent years has so much attention been given to this body of which The Episcopal Church is a part. The world-wide Anglican conflict over homosexuality has raised awareness of what it means to be Anglican, with more questions than answers. Because of that, and because of the immediacy of the Lambeth Conference, almost this entire issue of *The Church News* is given over to “What Is Anglicanism?” It includes several writers’ personal views of what it means to them to be Anglican, a Q and A session with our bishop, and several articles and essays on the substance, structure, and spirituality of Anglicanism. You will see, as you read, that even our writers do not always

agree on what it means to be Anglican, proving the point that The Anglican Communion is an amorphous creature.

As for the Lambeth Conference, it convenes under a cloud of conflict. Some bishops of the Anglican Communion have not been invited – notably Episcopal Church Bishop V. Gene Robinson of New Hampshire. Bishops who have been ordained “irregularly” by foreign bishops to serve on American soil also have not been invited.

Some bishops, mostly from Africa, have indicated they will not attend because they consider themselves in “impaired relationship” with bishops who are attending.

But let’s be clear: the Lambeth Conference is not a decision-making body. While it does offer “mind of the conference” resolutions, it does not elect, does not pass legislation, does not make political decisions. The goal of the Lambeth Conference is to be a place for worship, prayer, Bible study, mutual support and encouragement, and discussion among the Anglican bishops of the world.

The current Archbishop of Canterbury, The Most Rev. Rowan Williams, is determined to keep it so. “What I would really most like to see in this year’s Lambeth Conference,” he said in a message released the end of April, “is the sense that this is essentially a spiritual encounter — a time when people are encountering God as they encounter one another, a time when people will feel that their life of prayer and witness is being deepened and their resources are being stretched. Not a time when we are being besieged by problems that need to be solved and statements that need to be finalized, but a time when people feel that they are growing in their ministry.”

The Diocese of West Texas will maintain special website pages during the Lambeth Conference, with regular updates from our bishops. We invite you to follow the Conference by logging on. And we hope this issue will give you some background and insights about what it means to be an Anglican.

– Marjorie George

To learn more about The Lambeth Conference, visit online at www.lambethconference.org.

For diocesan web pages about The Lambeth Conference, log on to www.dwtx.org, then click on Lambeth 2008 in The Broader Church section.