

## **Update on the Primates' Meeting**

Friday, February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2005

St Stephens/Sewickley, Pa

Dear Friends of St Stephens,

### **Background**

The Primates of the Anglican Communion gathered this past week in Ireland. They were together to consider the growing fractures in our Communion resulting from the Episcopal Church's decision to affirm an active homosexual, Gene Robinson, as Bishop of New Hampshire last General Convention. At that Convention the Episcopal Church also gave its support to "local option" on a diocese by diocese basis for the blessing of same-sex marriages. The Anglican Church in Canada has since joined the Episcopal Church in these decisions.

### **Knowing the Sides, Understanding the Issues**

The issues strike at the core of the Christian faith, not just because of the importance of sexual ethics, but also because they touch the issues of Biblical authority (is the Bible trustworthy?), of Communion authority (can any national church decide these critical issues by themselves?), of marriage and family life (are we free to redefine marriage?), and of the Gospel (does it offer the power to heal our deepest disorders?) It is not surprising that most advocating the gay agenda also advocate a radical revision of the entire Christian faith.

Arguing for a revision of sexual ethics (and a revision of the Christian faith) in our Communion are the majority of American Episcopalians and Canadian Anglicans, with strong sympathy from other "progressive" movements in western culture. These churches of the West are materially wealthy but spiritually revisionist and numerically in sharp decline. On the other side are the rising churches of the global south: the Africans, Asians, South Americans, etc. Their churches, by contrast, are materially impoverished but spiritually vital, biblically conservative and growing by leaps and bounds. St Stephens and the strong majority of our Diocese have been aligned with the leadership of the global south on these issues for well over a decade. The future of the Anglican Communion is at stake in this struggle.

### **The Windsor Report**

In October 2003 an international "Lambeth Commission" gathered at the request of the Primates (heads of national Anglican Churches around the world) and the Archbishop of Canterbury to consider particularly issues of communion, autonomy and authority in the midst of our profound differences. Their 80 page report ("The Windsor Report", see resources below) to the Primates was released late last year. It was a statement of theology and a series of recommendations to the 38 Primates. It is worth a careful reading. The Primates' meeting this past week was to consider and respond to the Windsor Report. Today the Primates have released a statement summarizing their conclusions.

## **Decisions of the Primates**

In their statement the Primates reasserted biblical values on marriage and the authority of scripture as Communion values; because of their actions the American and Canadian provinces have been asked to withdraw from formal engagement in the Communion's Councils until Lambeth in 2008 (the once every 10 year meeting of all Anglican Bishops); they have been asked to explain their actions supporting the gay agenda to the Communion by this summer; they have been asked to effect a moratorium on gay marriage and the election of gay bishops; provision for conservative churches at risk in liberal dioceses has been planned and linked to the Archbishop of Canterbury; under these circumstances the integrity of diocesan boundaries and pastoral compassion for homosexual people has been reaffirmed. All of this effectively places the American and Canadian churches on probationary status in the Communion. It is difficult to see how that will be healed without repentance. The entire statement and various comments can be found at the links below.

Like many others, I thought before the meeting that there were three possibilities: 1) The global south Primates could have gathered a clear majority willing to act and taken decisive action against the West, 2) it could have been a deadlocked meeting and the global south Primates would have withdrawn from the Communion, or 3) the global south movement could have collapsed under financial pressure from the West and Canterbury. I thought #1 was preferred but unlikely, #3 would have been a disaster, and #2 was probable. What we seem to have is a version of #1. The heart, courage and clarity of the global south have prevailed! Today, I rejoice that there is great reason to hope for the gospel future of our Communion.

## **Action, Finally!**

What is to me most significant at the Primates' meeting was the willingness of the global south Primates to take ACTION over these issues - rather than just talk about it forever. Significantly, they refused to come to the Communion Table with the American and Canadian Primates without repentance. They were willing to put much needed teeth in the Windsor Report and seem prepared to follow and strengthen its major recommendations, including the future development of an "Anglican Covenant" mandatory for membership. Until then, the American and Canadian progressives have been moved to the edge of our international fellowship, pending repentance and affirmation of core Communion values. North Americans must decide in the years to come whether they will remain in the Anglican Communion - or chose "to walk apart" (Windsor Report). A process of Communion wide resolution of the issues is planned, leading to Lambeth 2008.

## **Looking to the Future**

All this is a significant setback for revisionist forces, a dramatic emergence of the leadership of the orthodox global south, and – if truth be told – stunning news of hope for those caught in the riptides of the sexual revolution in the West. God is bringing something down, and God is raising something up. Today I have fresh,

deep and visible encouragement about the future of our parish, our diocese, and of the Anglican Communion Network that is rising as an instrument of Gospel mission and fellowship in this country. To my many friends in this parish, in this diocese, in the Anglican Communion Network and in the AMiA: I thank God for your faithfulness in decades past, for your vision, courage, and unrelenting perseverance - and for your willingness to sacrifice much for the sake of him who sacrificed all.

There are many difficult days ahead, no doubt, and many more battles to fight, but I believe we have just passed a tipping point in the life of our Communion. From the lands of the martyrs new leadership rises for a new century of gospel mission! May God be blessed and may the life changing gospel of Jesus Christ be heard anew in our own land and throughout the world.

Revelation 12.11

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The Windsor Report:

<http://www.anglicancommunion.org/windsor2004/downloads/index.cfm>

The full text of the Primates' statement:

<http://www.anglicancommunion.org/acns/articles/39/00/acns3948.cfm>

Lots of comment here...

<http://www.anglican-mainstream.net/>

And here...

<http://titusoneline.classicalanglican.net/>

And here...

<http://gs2004.classicalanglican.com/modules/news/article.php?storyid=338>

Bishop Duncan's statement here...

<http://www.pgh.anglican.org/news/local/duncanprimates>

And here...

<http://www.anglican-mainstream.net/news05022501.asp>