



THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF FORT WORTH

The Rt. Rev. Jack L. Iker, D.D., *Bishop of Fort Worth*

A REPORT TO THE DIOCESE OF FORT WORTH FROM BISHOP IKER ON THE 75th GENERAL CONVENTION OF THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH

June 28, 2006

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ:

Instead of sending you all a formal Pastoral Letter and directing that it be read at all Sunday services in every congregation of the Diocese, I have decided to send you this brief Report on the most significant decisions of the General Convention just concluded. Nonetheless, it is my Pastoral Direction to every priest in charge of a congregation that you disseminate copies of this Report to every household in your congregation. It may not make for very good reading from your pulpit on Sunday, but it is essential that all our people hear directly from me as your Chief Pastor at this important time in the life of our Church.

For the sake of brevity, I am going to address only the two major decisions made by this Convention: the official response of the Episcopal Church to the Windsor Report and the election of a new Presiding Bishop. If you are interested in learning more about other actions, please go to our website (www.fwepiscopal.org).

The Windsor Report was issued by a special international commission appointed by the Archbishop of Canterbury to address the divisions that have been caused in the worldwide Anglican Communion because of the consecration of a bishop in New Hampshire who is openly living in a homosexual relationship, and because of the blessing of same-sex unions in various dioceses of the Episcopal Church (and one in Canada). Both of these actions are contrary to historic Christianity and to Resolution 1.10 of the 1998 Lambeth Conference of Bishops. As a consequence, just as the Primates had foretold, these actions have torn "the fabric of our Communion at its deepest level."

Essentially the Windsor Report invites the Episcopal Church to assist with healing our brokenness and reconciling our divisions by doing three things: expressing regret (repentance) for the actions which have caused such damage to our Communion, adopting a moratorium on consecrating any more gay bishops, and adopting a moratorium on the blessing of same-sex unions. The requested moratoria were to remain in effect until there was a new consensus in the Anglican Communion that would warrant such a drastic change in the teaching of the Bible

and the historic, universal church of the ages. The General Convention failed to adequately comply with any of these three requests.

1. The regret expressed by the Convention was for not having adequately consulted with other Provinces before taking the above actions and for the hurt that others in the Communion have felt as a result, but not for the actions themselves that caused damage to the Body of Christ.
2. No clear moratorium was adopted on consecrating bishops living in same-sex relations. Instead, the Convention was pressured in both Houses into accepting a vague resolution, very carefully worded, with the intention of giving the impression to the rest of the Church that we were willing to do this, when in fact we are not. (A copy of this Resolution B033 is attached.) At the time of decision in the House of Bishops, the Presiding Bishop ruled that a voice vote was sufficient and denied requests for a roll call vote that would have recorded exactly where each Bishop stood. Thereafter, some 30 Bishops presented a statement of conscience saying that they would not abide by the resolution, and Anglican Communion Network Bishops dissociated themselves from the attempt to give the misleading perception to the Church overseas that we were embracing a moratorium.
3. The matter of a moratorium on the blessing of same-sex unions was soundly defeated in the House of Deputies and never came before the Bishops for a vote. Such blessings continue unabated in many dioceses throughout this Church.

You will find several moderate and liberal bishops claiming that we did what the Windsor Report asked us to do. You should also know that several of them voted for resolutions which were intended to give that impression, for the sole purpose of assuring that our new Presiding Bishop would be invited to the next Primates Meeting and that all of our Bishops would be invited to the next Lambeth Conference. But make no mistake about it, however you try to spin the meaning of any of this - the Episcopal Church is going to keep right on doing what it has been doing in ordaining practicing homosexuals and blessing same-sex unions. ECUSA is not turning back.

Though some will claim that we really did comply with the spirit of the Windsor Report, Presiding Bishop Griswold was correct when he reminded us: "This is not a self-evaluation process." The Archbishop of Canterbury and the Primates will determine the adequacy of our response or lack thereof. Yesterday, Archbishop Williams said: "The recent resolutions of the General Convention have not produced a complete response to the challenges of the Windsor Report." In my judgment, the Episcopal Church has decided to walk apart from the Anglican Communion, and we are headed into a new season of fragmentation and division. The Archbishop himself acknowledged as much when he spoke of the need for the Communion to adopt a Covenant. In that case, those Provinces that signed on to it would be constituent Churches of the Anglican Communion, and those that did not would be "churches in association" with the Communion. He went on to explain that these two categories would not be "bound in a single and unrestricted sacramental communion" and would not share "the same constitutional structures." This will disappoint those who have been trying to straddle

the fence on the issues that have divided the Church. A clear choice will have to be made in due time.

In the election of a new Presiding Bishop, a person was chosen who favors the practices that the Windsor Report opposes. Katharine Jefferts Schori voted for the consecration of the gay bishop for New Hampshire and has authorized the blessing of same-sex unions in her diocese. That is the direction she intends to lead this Church for the next nine years. In addressing the debate on the B033 resolution, she said that she would vote for it for now, "in order to keep the conversation going" (and prevent us from being denied full participation in the life of the Anglican Communion), but that she would want it reconsidered at the earliest possible opportunity (i.e. after she was invited to the Primates Meeting in 2007 and after our invitation to Lambeth in 2008).

Our new Presiding Bishop-elect is an ardent feminist and gay rights activist. Her theology is thoroughly revisionist and liberal. In her first Convention sermon after her election, she declared that "our mother Jesus gives birth to a new creation!" Are these the words of a leader reaching out to the traditional members of our Church? It also is important to note that the General Convention, consistent with her stated positions, went on record in opposition to "any state or federal constitutional amendment that prohibits same-sex civil marriage" (A095). Many interpret this as an endorsement of same-sex marriage. Another resolution declared that no future General Conventions are to be held in any state that does not support same-sex partnerships.

While those who support her views are overjoyed by her election, it is widely viewed as an unnecessary provocation by those supporting traditional Biblical teaching and opposing the ordination of women as priests and bishops. I hope that those who support this election are sensitive to the untenable position in which it places traditional believers in the Episcopal Church. If you value church unity, this must cause you concern, whatever your views on the ordination of women. In the interest of preserving the unity of the Church, traditionalists have stuck with it for the past 30 to 40 years, while the Episcopal Church increasingly embraced the liberal, revisionist agenda and lost over one-third of our total church membership in so doing. The selection of a new Presiding Bishop who embodies the drift of this Church further into secular humanism and away from the historic faith and practice of orthodox Christianity does not bode well for the future of our Church, either here at home or abroad. If left unchallenged, our membership will continue to dwindle, for this is not a message that brings new souls to the Good News of redemption in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Those who are dismayed by this election must try to understand that those who welcome it see it as a wonderful statement of gender equality and an affirmation of social justice by this Church.

When she succeeds Frank Griswold in November, she will be the only female primate in the 38 Provinces of the Anglican Communion, with only Canada and the U.S. having any women bishops at all. These are also the two offending Provinces in the same-sex controversies that have brought the Communion to the breaking point. Because of conflicting theologies,

involving much more than the question of women bishops, it will be interesting to see how the Primates relate with her. I regret that her ministry cannot be received here in this diocese. A bishop's ministry is meant to be an expression of unity, not a new occasion for further division. But now we have a new PB-elect who is unable to be the Chief Pastor of those who cannot accept that women may be priests and bishops and whose consecrations and ordinations are questionable. This further marginalizes those of us who maintain the orthodox theology on this issue and places us in an untenable position as faithful Episcopalians.

We have appealed in good faith, therefore, as a faithful Anglican Diocese to the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Primates of the Communion for alternative primatial oversight and pastoral care based on irreconcilable theological differences with the new Presiding Bishop-elect of the Episcopal Church. To date, three or four other dioceses already have joined in this appeal, and several others are considering it. We hope that this request will be granted in the interest of maintaining "the highest possible degree of communion" in this time of conflict and division. But like the question as to whether or not our responses to the Windsor Report are adequate for remaining in the Communion, this appeal is also not in our hands, but those of the Archbishop of Canterbury. Pray for him. (Additional statements about the Presiding Bishop-elect and our appeal to Canterbury may be found on the diocesan website.)

As your bishop, I renew my ordination vows to guard and defend the faith, unity and discipline of the Church, as a faithful bishop of the Anglican Communion, standing in full compliance with the Windsor Report. And I call upon each one of you to remain faithful disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ and to continue steadfastly in your life of worship, prayer and witness in the world. Whatever decisions we may be called upon to make in the days ahead – or whatever decisions others may make for us – I can assure you of this: the Word of God will continue to be truly preached and truly heard in the churches of this diocese; the Sacraments will be faithfully administered and faithfully received; and we will continue to show the power of the love of Jesus Christ to all among whom we live.

Despite what the scaremongers and alarmists may say, no one is going to take your church from you. Whatever may happen in the future, our congregations in this diocese will continue to worship and believe, serve and evangelize, fellowship and witness as we have in the past. No one is going to take from us our faith or our beliefs, our buildings or our prayer books, our Scriptures or our creeds, our clergy or our Bishop. Our hope is built on nothing less than our Lord Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit. By His grace, we will remain faithful through whatever turmoil lies ahead.

Faithfully in Christ,

The Rt. Rev. Jack Leo Iker
Bishop of Fort Worth

Enclosure: Resolution B033

Resolution B033

Final Version – Concurred

Title: On Election of Bishops

Topic: Bishops

Committee: 26. Special Legislative Committee

House of Initial Action: Bishops

Proposer: The Rt. Rev. Dorsey F. Henderson Jr. (Upper South Carolina)

Resolved, [the House of Deputies concurring,] that the 75th General Convention receive and embrace the Windsor Report's invitation to engage in a process of healing and reconciliation; and be it further

Resolved, that this Convention therefore call upon Standing Committees and bishops with jurisdiction to exercise restraint by not consenting to the consecration of any candidate to the episcopate whose manner of life presents a challenge to the wider church and will lead to further strains on communion.