

**AFFIRMATIONS
All Saints Parish
March 31, 2007**

**Spring Meeting of the House of Bishops
Report to the Diocese of Utah**

Many of you will have seen the documents listed below, which will be referenced in this report. Hard copies of each are available at this gathering today, and may also be found on the Internet.

The Primates Communiqué (February 2007)

Utah Deputation's response to Communiqué (February 2007)

Anglican Draft Covenant (January 2007)

Mind of the House Resolution (March 2007)

Memo from the Diocesan Chancellor

Statement from the House of Bishops (March 2007)

*Letter from House of Bishops to the Archbishop of
Canterbury (March 2007)*

Message from the House of Bishops (March 2007)

Address to HOB by the Rev. Dr. Katherine Grieb

Summer study guide from the Worship Committee

(Due in late May)

I am pleased to have this opportunity to report my experience of the House of Bishops meeting in Texas earlier this month. The meeting was both intense and liberating: liberating because our new Presiding Bishop, Katharine Jefferts Schori truly presided and did not control the meeting, and intense because, as you may surmise, the Primate's

Communiqué released on February 19th hovered like a cloud over much of our work.

I want to say at the outset, however, that the document written by the Deputation of our Diocese (and affirmed by our leadership bodies) in response to the Communiqué was received with great interest by the press, and with high commendation by members of the House, and others from all over the U.S. and abroad, sending emails. Many have said it is as good a statement of our identity as they have ever seen, and asked to use it as a teaching document in their Dioceses.

The Presiding Bishop's Report of the Primate's Meeting

Bishop Katharine, who has been in office only about three or four months, reported to us her experience of the Dar es Salaam meeting. She said it was 'not entirely unpleasant'. She enjoyed getting acquainted with the other new primates (14 in all) and receiving supportive comments by the primates of other Provinces.*

Incidentally, she did not sign the Communiqué, as was feared or rumored; no one did. The document was quite positive in fact until the last night when it all began to go downhill. The penultimate version of it included a comment about respect for the Episcopal Church, whereupon the primate of Nigeria rose to say he had no respect for the Episcopal Church, so that clause was removed. At 11:30 p.m. the Archbishop asked if the version we eventually received was OK, and most or all said yes. Katharine herself said she would bring it to our House of Bishops.

* She did, however, allow that the low point of the meeting occurred when one of the Primates, when asked about the learning and listening process to understand homosexual orientation, remarked "We don't study murder; why should we study homosexuality." This was too much even for the Archbishop of Canterbury.

As you know she asked that we be patient and forbearing before giving a response, which we have tried to do. At the same time we were all annoyed that the Episcopal Church was singled out for a rather focused reprimand, and given an arbitrary deadline to respond. You will see from the several documents released after our meeting that we felt we had to speak up on some matters right away. Certainly this included the Pastoral Scheme mentioned in the first half of the recommendations in the Communiqué.

The Pastoral Scheme and Anglican Covenant Process

The provision for a ‘Pastoral Scheme’ would have given oversight of some matters in our Province over to a Primatial Vicar and Pastoral Council from outside. This group was already being appointed as we met, and we viewed it as a foot in the door for such provision to be made permanent in the Anglican Covenant. In fact it is said that this group will last only until the Covenant is finished and signed. Our Chancellor, Steve Hutchinson, has written a brief Memo, which spells out how the ultimatums of the Communiqué conflict with our constitution and our polity.

If or when such a covenant is made there then needs to be some one or some group to interpret its application, and when asked, the Archbishop indicated that would be the primates. Even though a separate team is writing it, and it will circulate before final approval (possibly at the Lambeth Conference ’08, if there is one) this still gives inordinate power to the Primates of the Communion.

We did not do much direct work on the draft covenant, as that is still in progress, but we did hear from two members of the drafting

committee. The Rev. Dr. Ephraim Radnor is on the Board of the Institute for Religion and Democracy, and ultra conservative group pressing for a U.S. theocracy among other things. The other address was given by my seminary classmate at VTS, The Rev Dr. Katherine Grieb. She is now an assistant Professor of New Testament at VTS, and was one of the principle authors of "To Set our Hope on Christ." I have made the text of her address available here because is so very thoughtful and interesting. Ephraim Radnor's address is on the Internet should you care to look it up.

It is Grieb's sense is that a covenant could be a good thing if rightly done, but as their work is now being rushed, she is doubtful about it. She also felt that agreeing now to extra-provincial oversight would put not only a foot in the door but quite possibly, the wolf among the flock as well.

You may recall that we passed a resolution at the 2006 General Convention, (A166) in which we agreed to support the development of such a covenant as advised in the Windsor Report. But there are covenants and covenants, and many of us really want no part of it, fearing the centralization of the Anglican Communion either around leadership bodies or doctrinal statements. Inevitably it would be used to rule some provinces 'in' and some 'out,' or at least give them a much reduced status in the Communion. The whole point of a covenant of this sort is to tighten things up, diminishing the local autonomy all member provinces have always enjoyed.

So, the Mind of the House resolution, addressed to the Executive Committee of the Episcopal Church, asks them to decline participation in the 'Pastoral Scheme,' because it would be injurious to our Church,

being in violation of our Constitution. As you know this Committee is elected at General Convention, and acts for the General Convention between meetings. But the point is that we have already made provisions to care for those in our own Church who will not or cannot accept the ministry of their own bishop—through Delegated Episcopal Pastoral Oversight (DEPO). We do not need or want oversight from outside.

Letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury

We also agreed, unanimously, to send a letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury and members of the Primates Steering Committee urging them to come the United States for a face-to-face meeting with us as soon as possible. Rowan seems to be relying much more on what others say about us (including our own dissidents, who greatly exaggerate their numbers), than on first-hand knowledge of our Church.

It is worth noting that the Church of England is now as much or more divided than we are at this point, leading the Bishop of Los Angeles to say “what we need is a Churchill, not a Chamberlain.” As of yet, however, we have received no response from the Archbishop. We do know of other Provinces who are supportive of us, and would consider it a disaster if we were asked to leave the Communion, or not attend the Lambeth Conference in the summer of '08. These include Canada, Mexico, Central America, Japan, Korea, and others

And speaking of Lambeth, invitations were supposed to have gone out in January of this year, but did not. It was on the agenda of the Primates meeting, but was skipped over. Moreover, money not been raised for this very costly conference. In the past the U.S. Church has

paid about 80% of its cost. However, our bishops do not intend to use money as a weapon in this battle.

The Statement from the House of Bishops

The Statement from the House of Bishops is a separate document from the Message to the Church, which we always send, reporting the items discussed at our meetings. I believe the Statement to be a sound and even gracious document, expressing our deepest hopes for continued participation in the Communion, particularly in mission opportunities such as are outlined in the Millennial Development Goals.

This statement also reviews the recent history of our efforts to be responsive to the Windsor Report, most of which have been ignored, particularly those who have only sexual issues on their minds. It notes the continuing boundary violations or incursions into of our Church—which all deplore but never do anything about. The justifying phrase I heard at the Bishops meeting in Texas was, “yes but the children are running away from home.”

The document also iterates the various ways we proclaim the gospel of Christ, including our desire for the full participation of gays and lesbians. That was as direct a response as we got to the Primate’s Communiqué on this subject, and it is declarative not defensive. Personally I see no way on earth The Episcopal Church will accede to their request for a ‘clarifying’ covenant on our part which would rule out the blessing of same sex unions, or future bishops whose manner of life offends them.

The statement also explains in detail why we are rejecting the Pastoral Scheme, and closes with the affirmations and vows we all make

at our ordinations, and renew in Holy Week. There is nothing ugly or threatening in our statement, and I was proud to be part of the writing team's work.

House of Bishops: Message to God's People

This document represents the traditional way we have reported our meetings to the church at large. In this case it briefly describes the fuller range of topics we discussed. I would add that there is great energy for mission, particularly for our work on the Millennial Development Goals.

The message includes a brief mention of our task force on property disputes. The Communiqué had recommended, among other things that we get out of the courts on this matter but we cannot do this without giving away the land and buildings other generations have built, and for which we have a fiduciary responsibility. The verbal report on property was far more extensive and devastating than the little paragraph on it suggests, however. The chair of that task force read out many of the secret memos circulating among the Network and/or Windsor bishops who have a calculated strategy to take over the property of the Episcopal Church. It is a devious and destructive plan, and I will further a summary of it to you when it becomes available.

As I said the Message document mostly names the other topics we discussed at the meeting. But it cannot possibly express the new spirit of confidence, hope and collegiality so many of us feel at this time. The work we do is now out on the table for all to see, and many more bishops participate in it than at any time since I have been attending these meetins. Surely, God is doing a new thing!

This concludes my report for now. At the Presiding Bishop's request, the Theology Committee of the House will be sending out a document for all our members to read and discuss, so we can elicit your feedback regarding the Communion issues now before us. The House of Bishops will meet again in September, or earlier if the Archbishop chooses to come.