

1 *A Statement by the Deputies to General Convention 2006, Leadership, and Bishop*
2 *of the Episcopal Diocese of Utah*

3 **March 13, 2007**

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6 *Ye are not now to learn, that as of itself it is not hurtful, so neither should it be to any man scandalous and*
7 *offensive, in doubtful cases, to hear the different judgement of men. Be it that Cephas hath one interpretation,*
8 *and Apollos hath another; that Paul is of this mind, and Barnabas of that. If this offend you, the fault is yours.*
9 *Carry peaceable minds, and ye may have comfort by this variety. Now the God of peace give you peaceable*
10 *minds, and turn it to your everlasting comfort.*

11 *(Richard Hooker, "Learned Discourse of Justification")*
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14 Introduction

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16 The Utah deputation to the General Convention 2006 and other diocesan leaders met on February 22,
17 2007, at the invitation of the Tenth Bishop of Utah, The Right Reverend Carolyn Tanner Irish, to
18 review and discuss the Primates' Communique from Tanzania. After several attempts to respond to its
19 various points, we felt called to state who we are as a Church and how we came to be where we are on
20 matters of great importance -- rather than simply to respond to descriptions and opinions expressed by
21 others.

22
23 Therefore this document seeks to reframe the conversation of matters now dividing the Anglican
24 Communion worldwide.

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26 In an effort to produce a document of readable length we have not explicated the issues as deeply as
27 their seriousness demands. In the hopes of presenting these comments for wider readership and
28 reflection, we make them concisely and offer them prayerfully.
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31 The Baptismal Covenant

32 *The Book of Common Prayer 1979 of The Episcopal Church, pp. 304-305.*
33

34 Our people seek to live out the covenant of Holy Baptism. This is the foundation of our identity as
35 Christians, and the vows we make in this covenant are based on our understanding of the essential
36 relationship between God and humanity.
37

38 The covenant is placed at the heart of the baptismal liturgy in the context of the Apostles' Creed.
39 Echoing the earliest known liturgies of the ancient Church, the covenant calls each baptized person
40 into faithfulness in prayer, fellowship, eucharistic celebration, repentance, and proclamation of the
41 Good News, asking for commitment in the questions which follow the Apostles' Creed. The two final
42 questions are these:
43

44 *Q: Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?*

45 *Q: Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of*
46 *every human being?*

47 (We note with appreciation that the substance of these questions is affirmed but differently stated in
48 Sections 3 and 4 of the *Report of the Covenant Design Group*.)

49
50 We cannot answer “I will, with God’s help” with integrity if we do not love the neighbor who is
51 lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgendered (hereafter “gay and lesbian”), if we do not strive for justice for
52 all persons, and if we do not respect their dignity by our words and actions. Our Lord Jesus Christ
53 himself modeled a ministry of care and respect for persons marginalized by their societies. Bigotry,
54 discrimination, and hatemongering have no place in the life of the baptized.

55
56 Our Baptismal Covenant describes our Christian commitment, solemnly sealed by water and the Holy
57 Spirit and regularly reaffirmed by each of us in liturgy. We will not lay it aside for the sake of an
58 outward unity. We are not willing to bear this cost, nor to set the cost on the backs of lesbian and gay
59 people.

60
61 The context of the covenant with the Apostles’ Creed is important here. The Anglican tradition has
62 over the centuries resisted the sometimes forceful calls to become a confessional Church, as in some
63 Protestant traditions. We hold firmly to the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds as our definitions of doctrine.
64 We have adopted versions of the *Book of Common Prayer* in our provinces which we believe rightly
65 reflect the doctrine of the creeds.

66
67 The creeds do not address particular ethical or moral issues, but formulate what is essential to the faith
68 about the nature and work of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. We do not accept any
69 attempt to elevate particular moral questions and answers to the level of *essential* doctrine. The
70 Church has always been free to establish its teachings and discipline with respect to moral issues in
71 ways faithful to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This freedom should not be diminished by temptations to
72 expand core doctrines with litmus tests of so-called “orthodoxy.”

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75 Defining and Redefining Authority
76 *The Holy Scriptures, Polity, and Documents of Meetings*

77
78 *The Holy Scriptures*

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80 *Did you receive the Spirit by doing the works of the law or by believing what you heard? ...*
81 *Having started with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh? (Galatians 3:2-3)*

82
83 Judgments about ethics by appeal to the Holy Scriptures alone are foreign to our Anglican traditions,
84 which have always included other sources of authority in their deliberations. The seminaries of The
85 Episcopal Church have taught biblical studies for more than a century by employing the hermeneutical
86 methods of modern biblical criticism.

87
88 These methods require that Holy Scripture be interpreted not in their literal sense alone
89 (nearly impossible, since each of us brings our own lenses to the interpretive task), but with reference
90 to scholarship in linguistics, history, narrative, culture, anthropology, archaeology, and other
91 disciplines which, in combination and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, may reveal a yet
92 undiscovered richness in the text.

93
94 The interpretation of Holy Scripture is impoverished by narrow understandings and by the selective

95 application of such understandings to complex moral issues. There is no single biblical morality. Few
96 biblical scholars would claim that a monochromatic approach to ethics and human behavior exists in
97 the Holy Scriptures.

98
99 For these and other reasons Anglicans have historically rejected *sola scriptura* in the narrow sense that
100 some continental Reformers understood it. We hold that the Holy Scriptures are indeed the Word of
101 God and do contain all things necessary to salvation, as our ordination oath states, but this written
102 Word of God is a *witness* to our Lord Jesus Christ, not Christ himself. Or, to state it differently,
103 following Anglican theologian John MacQuarrie, the Holy Scriptures are not the revelation of God;
104 *Christ* is the revelation of God, and the Holy Scriptures are the *record* of that revelation.

105
106 The Holy Scriptures, written in antiquity, could not and did not foresee many of the ethical questions
107 we face in our age. We cherish the revelation of God which comes to us most perfectly in Christ, by
108 whose Mind and in whose perfect example all our biblical interpretation must be prayerfully tested.

109
110 Christ's risen presence and God's Holy Spirit assist us in the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures as
111 communities gather both in liturgy and in synod. Synods, solemnly and prayerfully met, have
112 historically held the weighty responsibility of interpreting the sacred texts as they formulate the beliefs
113 and actions of our provinces. The General Convention bears this responsibility, as do the highest
114 assemblies of each of our provinces.

115
116 ***Polity***

117
118 *Unity in essentials.*
119 *Diversity in nonessentials.*
120 *Charity in all things.* (Augustine of Hippo)

121
122 We are wary of setting forth any new design for our Communion which creates supra-provincial
123 bodies capable of directing or legislating for our provinces. Recent disagreements concerning human
124 sexuality have demonstrated that the hope of finding a worldwide path acceptable to all on this or other
125 major issues may be elusive (and, we believe, may not at all times be desirable).

126
127 We are called to demonstrate the values of living with diversity while still seeking to discover the unity
128 Christ alone can give. Unity cannot be forged violently or artificially out of the fires of dissent. It is a
129 gift of Christ fervently to be prayed for and thankfully to be acknowledged in those places across the
130 Communion where the fruits of our cooperative ministries are so richly evident.

131
132 We value and uphold the rights of provinces to provide for their own episcopate, locally adapted, and
133 to create provincial canons and structures that serve their people. We do not wish to become a
134 centralized Communion, even one focused on the so-called Instruments of Unity (or Instruments of
135 Communion). We note that these Instruments allow for precious little participation by lay persons and
136 even less for women, who are not yet called to leadership or even voice in many places across the
137 Communion.

138
139 We are concerned that the Communion is addressing proposals to change our polity substantially,
140 driven by the tensions around issues of human sexuality. We believe this will set a dangerous
141 precedent. There will come other issues that have the potential to divide us. These ought not to be
142 resolved by redefining our structures each time they emerge, nor can one newly-created structure hope
143 to anticipate all future demands.

145 Provincial autonomy has served us well thus far precisely because it has not demanded uniformity. It
146 has relied on the exercise of affection, not law, to bind us. The depth of our worldwide conversations,
147 and until recently their generally irenic spirit, demonstrate how well autonomy works when member
148 provinces and their leaders are committed to the exercise of respect among equals. Lack of such
149 commitment and practice does far more damage to the bonds of affection than do the contents of any
150 specific issues of debate.

151
152 We affirm, with the ancient Church, the principle of respect for diocesan and provincial boundaries,
153 which is foundational to the integrity of provincial relationships. Permission is required for any bishop
154 to exercise ministry in another diocese. Degradation of this principle weakens the whole.

155 156 *Documents of Meetings*

157
158 Documents and resolutions that emerge from the Lambeth Conferences, meetings of the Primates, and
159 working groups have value in our ongoing discourse, but they have been recently accorded an
160 authority they simply do not have. Members of the General Convention of The Episcopal Church
161 2006 heard the Secretary General of the Anglican Communion assure us that the Windsor Report was
162 one step in a process which will take years to blossom fully. We know that the Lambeth Conferences'
163 resolutions have no legislative force, and that no province is required to take upon itself any demands
164 made beyond its own boundaries (and, indeed, some provincial canons make this expressly illegal).
165 Such is the current nature of Anglican polity.

166
167 We are concerned about a creeping authoritarianism, both in the claims made by the groups that
168 produce the documents and also in the manner they are employed in worldwide discussion. In places it
169 is noted that while such documents have no legal force, they are spoken of nonetheless as representing
170 the "standard of teaching" of the Anglican Communion or as bearing a "moral force."

171
172 We regret that the documents themselves are being used *as if they already have definitive moral and*
173 *juridical force across the Communion.* Authority cannot be claimed by itself. It must be recognized
174 and accepted by those whom it governs. The process of acceptance to which The Episcopal Church
175 and all provinces have been bidden has only just begun. It may be strongly argued that The Episcopal
176 Church has in fact addressed what has been asked of us through our churchwide structures with greater
177 fidelity than other provinces.

178 179 180 Human Sexuality

181
182 We are well aware that languages and cultures across the world speak of gay and lesbian persons and
183 the concepts of human sexual behavior differently. Some languages have no words for what the
184 English terms mean; some cultures describe no similar concepts.

185
186 The Holy Scriptures do not speak of what we describe in The Episcopal Church as loving, faithful,
187 monogamous, life-long commitments of two persons of the same sex, nor do they speak of the intimate
188 sexual lives such committed persons may express with one another in their relationships. We must
189 therefore look more deeply within as well as beyond the Holy Scriptures for guidelines that may be
190 brought into dialogue with those passages of Scripture usually employed to address matters of sexual
191 intimacy. Sustained study, dialogue, and prayer are critical to understanding the mystery and gift of
192 human sexuality. This Church has offered to the Communion a study entitled *To Set Our Hope On*
193 *Christ*, which speaks at length of these complex issues.

194 Some cultures have not yet engaged in public discussion of the issues on any significant level because
195 of religious or ethnic tensions within their communities or because of cultural norms or taboos. We are
196 fully conscious that respectful dialogue and education about human sexuality cannot happen with ease
197 in many places for various reasons.

198
199 Nevertheless, we believe the Church must take leadership in this. We are conscious that many
200 provinces where dialogue and education *are* possible have not yet undertaken such study. We urge the
201 Primates of the Anglican Communion to engage as a body themselves, and to offer opportunities to
202 their peoples, for serious study of the scholarship produced in the last decades by researchers in the
203 medical and human sciences as well as the work of a broad spectrum of theologians.

204
205 No true education can take place without hearing lesbian and gay voices in scholarship and in person.
206 It is deeply distressing to us that gay and lesbian people are being spoken *about* and not *with*.

207
208 We hold firmly that each person is a child of God, beautifully and wonderfully made. We do not
209 sanction the use of any language in our worldwide discussion or from our leaders that demeans,
210 demonizes, demoralizes, or damns people who are gay or lesbian. We are ashamed that any in our
211 midst have spoken with words that are hurtful and even shameful in our debates about human
212 sexuality.

213
214 Language is powerful. Words, including religious words, can and have incited violence against the
215 gay and lesbian children of God. No person should be spoken of with a single-identity “tag” meant to
216 define, often in demeaning ways, the whole person.

217
218 For these sins we ask God’s forgiveness and beg our Communion to repent of any participation in this
219 verbal abuse, the power of which to escalate into violence is all too well demonstrated.

220
221 At the same time we acknowledge and repent of our culture’s part in the degradation of human
222 sexuality and the ways this has affected other countries, particularly through the entertainment
223 industry. Many of the truly immoral dimensions of sexual behavior, including abuse, infidelity,
224 pornography, exploitation, promiscuity, and violence, have no doubt stemmed from this general
225 cheapening. Such behaviors are not to be found solely among people of any one sexual orientation,
226 however. We do not condone any of these behaviors, yet we understand why many in the Communion
227 may be reluctant to credit any words on sexual morality from the West.

228
229 Finally, mindful of our commitment to respect the dignity of every human being, we hope that all
230 Primates and other bishops will work to ensure that pastoral care is provided for all their people,
231 including gay and lesbian members of every province.

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233

234 Communications

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236 We note that the Internet, so useful a tool for human communication, has served both those who would
237 truly be in dialogue across the globe as well as those who would wield it as a weapon. The Internet has
238 the capacity to amplify the voices of a few and to misrepresent the positions of others. While it gives
239 voice to those previously excluded from debate, it can also allow people to hide behind its anonymity.
240 Its speed and its tendency to suggest urgency lend themselves neither to thoughtful theological inquiry
241 nor, at times, to the dissemination of accurate information.

242 There is no doubt the Internet has shaped the conversation on human sexuality worldwide. It has
243 brought many points of view to the fore. It has also forced our Communion to make quick responses
244 to momentous issues. While the Church has never been known for moving with particular dispatch, its
245 employment of the Internet as the primary locus and voice of the current conversations has contributed
246 in large part to the sense of urgency the Communion feels. The artificial pressures of polity and
247 theology at high speeds are now propelling the Communion to issue demands that The Episcopal
248 Church make responses out of season with our constitutionally sound and canonically-bound processes
249 of decision-making, processes which have served this historic Church well for more than two hundred
250 years.

251
252 These demands for nearly immediate responses misrepresent or ignore our polity. As is only becoming
253 clear to some across the Communion, our House of Bishops may not speak for the Episcopal Church
254 definitively. Our House of Deputies, composed of equal numbers of lay and clergy persons from each
255 diocese, must participate and concur in decisions that bind this Church through our own Constitution
256 and Canons and in our relationships worldwide.

257
258 Our ongoing dialogues with other provinces of this Communion will benefit from a more accurate
259 understanding and acknowledgement of the polity of The Episcopal Church. The Communique
260 requests that our Bishops

261
262 *make an unequivocal common covenant that (they) will not authorize any Rite of*
263 *Blessing for same-sex unions in their dioceses or through General*
264 *Convention...and confirm that the passing of Resolution B033 of the 75th General*
265 *Convention means that a candidate for Episcopal orders living in a same-sex*
266 *union shall not receive the necessary consent...unless some new consensus on these matters*
267 *emerges across the Communion.*

268
269 Our bishops are bound by the decisions of the General Convention of this Church. They may not, even
270 by common covenant amongst themselves, agree to do otherwise. They may, of course, individually
271 exercise the latitude allowed them in canons and in General Convention resolutions. But they may not
272 covenant to act unilaterally to clarify or sidestep the processes of General Convention and to frustrate
273 the freedom and intent of the Constitution and Canons of this Church.

274 275 Conclusion

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277 We respectfully present these thoughts and concerns to the wider Church, praying that they may assist
278 in reframing the debates away from the narrow consideration of human sexual conduct and toward the
279 humanity of those persons who are gay and lesbian, the place of Holy Scripture richly interpreted in
280 our moral decision-making, and the structures of our communities through which we seek to live in the
281 light of Christ.

282
283 We encourage our Presiding Bishop, The Most Reverend Katharine Jefferts Schori, to foster the
284 formation of networks with Primates who are supportive of the actions and directions of The Episcopal
285 Church. Their collective voice will assist the Communion in understanding that the issues we have
286 spoken of in this paper have support in other provinces and are not solely expressed by many in The
287 Episcopal Church.

288

289 We express our desire to continue in the bonds of affection that tie us by the Spirit's tether, not by the
290 shackles of our own making. We continue to pray that the Anglican Communion may be a worldwide
291 witness to the saving grace of Jesus Christ in the lives of all its diverse peoples.

292

293 *O God, you have made of one blood all the peoples of the earth, and sent your*
294 *blessed Son to preach peace to those who are far off and to those who are near:*
295 *Grant that people everywhere may seek after you and find you; bring the nations*
296 *into your fold; pour out your Spirit upon all flesh; and hasten the coming of your*
297 *kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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299 *(The Book of Common Prayer 1979, p. 100)*

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307 **The Deputies to the General Convention 2006** **The Alternate Deputies 2006**

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317 **The Canon for Ministry Formation**

318 *The Reverend Canon Mary June Nestler*

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320 **The Members of the Standing Committee**

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322 **The Members of the Diocesan Council**

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324 **The Tenth Bishop of Utah**

325 *The Right Reverend Carolyn Tanner Irish*

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