

THE ANGLICAN VOICE

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 PO Box 763217
 Dallas, TX 75376-3217
1-800-553-3645
 Rev. Todd H. Wetzel, Publisher
 Cheryl M. Wetzel, Editor

HOUSE OF BISHOPS' STATEMENT TO THE COMMUNION: THANKS, BUT NO ACCESSION

Written by Cheryl M. Wetzel, Editor My comments are in italics.

The long-awaited House of Bishops' meeting with the Archbishop of Canterbury is over. The House has crafted and released their Statement in response to the Dar es Salaam communiqué of February 2007. **The communiqué asked** our bishops to:

1) Make an unequivocal common covenant that the bishops will not authorize any Rite of Blessing for same-sex unions in their dioceses or through General Convention (cf TWR, §143, 144); and

2) Confirm that the passing of Resolution B033 of the 75th General Convention means that a candidate for episcopal orders living in a same-sex union shall not receive the necessary consent (cf TWR, §134)

3) The Primates urge the representatives of The Episcopal Church and of those congregations in property disputes with it to suspend all actions in law (stop lawsuits) arising in this situation.

4) Adequate oversight for those who disagree with either their bishop or the presiding bishop must be supplied.

The Summary of the HOB Statement includes 8 points:

- We reconfirm B033 (The Election of Bishop) "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."

- We pledge as a body not to authorize public rites for the blessing of same-sex unions. *[Prior to GC 2009]*

- We commend our Presiding Bishop's plan for episcopal visitors. *[Eight have volunteered for Pastoral Oversight.]*

- We deplore incursions into our jurisdictions by uninvited bishops and call for them to end. *[Be they foreign bishops or Americans consecrated abroad, e.g., AMIA, CANA and Kenyan consecrated bishops.]*

- We support the Presiding Bishop in seeking communion-wide consultation in a manner that is in accord with our Constitution and Canons.

- We call for increasing implementation of the listening process ...and for a report at Lambeth 2008. *[We will continue to press the "gay issue" world-wide.]*

- We support the

Archbishop of Canterbury in his expressed desire to explore ways for V. Gene Robinson to participate in Lambeth. *[Some are still refusing to attend Lambeth if Gene is not invited.]*

- We call for unequivocal and active commitment to the civil rights, safety and dignity of gay and lesbian persons. *[We will begin to use tools at our disposal to secure safety/civil rights for gays in Moslem countries and all provinces.]*

One of the most contested issues is public rites for same sex unions. We have two different definitions operative here for the same word. The primates call any worship service a rite, saying you have approved rites of blessing for gays if you allow them to take place in your dioceses. Our bishops insist that they have not approved a written, formulaic ceremony for this.

At the Press Conference, the Presiding Bishop said with exasperation, "We have replied yet again about the Rites for same-sex blessings; we have not and will not authorize them." These marriages will continue in all 14 of the dioceses that have approved them, now under the guise of pastoral ministry to gays and lesbians, authorized in the Windsor Report.

Our House refrained from discussing the law suits now proceeding in Virginia and

California, but did attempt to placate those in need of Alternative Pastoral Oversight by designating 8 bishops, including orthodox bishops John Howe, Central Florida and Jim Stanton, Dallas. Three dioceses who do not ordain women and seek a different bishop than the Presiding Bishop dismissed this plan as inadequate, prior to the meeting last week.

Finally, on Tuesday morning, Bp. Jeffrey Steenson, The Rio Grande (El Paso TX and New Mexico) announced his resignation from the House of Bishops, the diocese and the priesthood, so that he can join the Roman Catholic Church. It was an unanticipated sad moment. He will be the third bishop to join Rome in 6 months, effective January 1, 2008.

My strongest impressions are of a different character in this House and this meeting. They are actually speaking to each other as truthfully as possible. Those who disagree are being heard for the first time in years, and not jeered or derided. However, the fundamental disagreements involve basic issues of human sin and the Authority of Scripture as God's Word written. These items cannot and will not be compromised.

Call our office for the complete statement.

1-800-553-3645

DIARY: HOUSE OF BISHOPS' New Orleans by Cherie Wetzel, Editor

Wednesday, September 19 – All involved have tried to make this sound like just another meeting; but the tension is palpable. You see it in the small groups and their conversations; you hear it in the elevators; you see it in the wives' posture and demeanor, both towards their husbands and with the other wives.

Today began with a front page article in the New Orleans Times-Picayune with this headline: "New Orleans becomes the accidental backdrop for a high-stakes meeting to save the world's Anglican Communion". And yes, that is exactly what it feels like. A great deal is at stake.

Tonight the bishops and their wives had dinner in a meeting room at the Intercontinental. The laughter and chatter overflowed into the halls and the lobby. Now, two hours later, it is very silent. I am hoping that they are praying.

Thursday, September 20 - It has begun. These are dark hours for The Episcopal Church and THE LIGHT OF CHRIST must penetrate the darkness or there is abundant suffering and distress to come: for every one, regardless of their political or theological position.

The House of Bishops' opened this morning with Eucharist and there were few empty seats. I headed for the back row, Gospel side and found myself staring at the Archbishop of Canterbury, who was alone. After a moment of panic, I proceeded and sat next to His Grace. As the singing started, I found myself weeping for the loss of something precious and dear: The Episcopal Church. The Church that I joined newly married, in 1968. My home and haven from the assaults of human life. Now it is my battlefield. I wept freely. He patted my arm.

We exchanged the Peace and there was a marvelous twinkle in his eyes. I gave him a note, telling him that you all were praying for him every hour; that we needed his help in sorting out this mess in our church. I thanked him for coming and signed my name. You know, you just look at someone,

and you know they love God, follow Jesus and need the Holy Spirit just as much as you do. Many question his leadership; I no longer question his faith.

Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori presided and preached. She addressed the bishops saying, "We review the behavioral norms at the beginning of every meeting.... The expectation is that all will attend and there will be full participation. We honor direct communication, particularly when we are unsure of what the other is saying... In the Anglican Communion we have acted with disdain against those we disagree with, and used violent language towards them.... None of us is free of blame. We sought to judge those who opposed us.... I am acutely aware of the power of language to wound and marginalize... So maybe it is the youngest among us, who have no history of rancor, that will lead the way for this House" (6 newly consecrated bishops are in attendance.)

There was no AMEN at the end of the homily. She stood at the podium and looked firmly around the room, meeting eyes, affirming that she meant what she said. Her homily gave me a fresh sense of hope.

Press was excluded from the meeting. The press briefing at 4:00 was followed by a quick taxi ride to the Lower 9th Ward, where the Archbishop of Canterbury was meeting with the members of the newest church in the Diocese of Louisiana: All Souls Episcopal Church. This parish started in Big Jim's garage as- the garage sat on higher ground than the house and it did not flood to the rafters as his house had. Jim has lived in his garage without water or a bathroom for two years. Everyone in this new parish belonged to another church prior to Katrina. After the storm, their pastors did not come back and all of the churches are now boarded up, filled with mold. Wanting a church home, Big Jim gathered people in his garage two months after Katrina and since the Diocese had ministry vans in the area that supplied cleaning supplies, food, water and

medical treatment on a weekly basis, they asked if anyone could come and do Bible studies or worship services. Two years later, this new parish is well planted. The folks are renovating an abandoned Walgreens drugstore for their building.

From there, we proceeded to the Convention Center, which like the Superdome had to be rebuilt after housing nearly 100,000 people after Katrina. The Diocese held their celebration of the "Resiliency of Spirit" for New Orleans and the Gulf Coast. The Archbishop, spoke of the former days and the future days when older people will be safe rocking on their porches and little children will play in the streets of New Orleans again. It is remarkably silent here.

The evening was capped by a jazz quartet playing "typical" funeral parade music. First the somber hymns in minor mode. Then, resurrection with bright, sprightly hymns played at break-neck speed. The crowd was on their feet clapping.

Friday, September 21 - They have a 3 hour session this morning, and we were told that everyone will have a chance to speak: the bishops, the Archbishop, and all of the invited guests. The invited members of the Primate's Council are the Rt. Rev. Dr. Mouneer Anis of Egypt, the Most Rev. Dr. Phillip Aspinall, Australia, and the Most Rev. Dr. Barry Morgan, Wales. The invited members of the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC) will also advise the House. They are the Rt. Rev. John Paterson, Bishop of Auckland, New Zealand, the Rt. Rev. Kumara Illangasinghe of Sri Lanka and the Rt. Rev. James Tengatenga of Malawi.

The House of Bishops' meetings are conducted at tables of 8. Each table is made up of different theological points of view, different sizes of dioceses and different geographical regions in the US. The usual practice is that after a subject is presented, the table discusses and writes comments. Each table presents their comments to see if the House has reached consensus. All of the guests above, with the exception of the Archbishop of Canterbury, who sits on the dais with the Presiding Bishop, were seated yesterday at a table with our bishops. From what I understand, exchanges and conversation flowed at each table.

12:30 PM The meeting with the Archbishop of Canterbury has ended. He leaves tonight. From all reports, this morn-

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ing's session was a surprisingly candid exchange of information between the members of the House, the Archbishop and the invited guests from the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC) and the Primate's Council. The Rt. Rev. Dr. Phillip Aspinall, Archbishop of Brisbane Australia, spoke to the House, telling them that they must reassure the Communion that they will live into the resolutions passed at General Convention last year. He asked what the rest of the Communion was to think when they vote to refrain from authorizing same sex blessings and 14 bishops publicly authorize rites for same sex marriages. Aspinall asked, "What good is your vote? How do we trust you?"

The same point applies to B-033 (see pg. 1). Within 2 hours, 20 bishops said they would not comply with this vote and subsequently, 9 dioceses repudiated B-033 at their annual conventions.

Bishop Mouneer Anis, Egypt said, "...Some say you are a different church; others say you are a different religion...You cannot say you value being members of the Communion while you ignore the interdependence of the members...to speak of laws and procedures, constitutions and canons; committees and process: you are missing the point!...If you really believe you should bless same-sex partners or marriages, you should say so and accept the consequences..."

I was told that the Archbishop became irritated when several bishops continued to complain about the African bishop's border crossings, saying that they had violated the Windsor Report and were not chastised. Our bishops felt the criticism they received on the gay issue was unfair when other provinces were also in violation of the Report.

The Archbishop of Canterbury stated at the press conference, "I think that in the light of the conversations we have come to a better understanding in the House in response to the questions and proposals of the Dar es Salaam Primate's Meeting. I hope that the House, equally, has understood more fully what those questions and proposals were meant to achieve."

Bishop James Adams, Western Kansas

said, "If they don't get it now, they weren't paying attention. No one could have made it clearer. So the question remains if those bishops who disagree with the rest of the House will be extended full inclusion or merely tolerated. Will there be a place in The Episcopal Church for me?"

I assured Bp. Adams, who is one of the really good, Godly men in this House, that all of our members want to know the answer to that question.

Saturday, September 22 - The newspapers and the email are filled this morning with "takes" on the meeting. I spoke informally with three bishops who felt that the statement by Bishop Mouneer Anis, Egypt, was 'hysterical rhetoric' that always comes from the continent of Africa. The two Anglican Consultative Council women who addressed the House Friday morning were also dismissed. Twelve different bishops answered my question: "Did you hear anything new in the last two days with the Archbishop?" To a person they replied that they had heard nothing new. The Global South is still pillaging their parishes (crossing boundaries) and using hysterical (read very critical) rhetoric. Some of the responses, "Same old, same old; heard it all before. Didn't impress me as Godly or authentic then and surely doesn't now. And, why would the Anglican Consultative Council send two African women to speak to us? Haven't we had the Africans up to here...?"

So, whom would they actually listen to? Well, The Archbishop of Canterbury was a definite maybe. According to ++Rowan, there are no "lines in the sand... Despite what has been claimed, there is no 'ultimatum' involved..." He will make his determination on the Statement in late October, after widespread consultation around the Communion.

The rest of this day is community work. The bishops are assigned to several different work projects and will do that until 2:30. Then the day is free, and since the expected Tropical Storm went ashore last night in

Florida, it is 85 and sunny.

Sunday, September 23 - The bishops were in churches across the area today and the rest of the day is free. The email revealed a story that I was not prepared to read or accept. The Rt. Rev. Jeffrey Steenson, Bishop since 2005 of The Rio Grande (El Paso, TX and the state of New Mexico) has announced his intention to resign from the House of Bishops and TEC. In 2005, Steenson was the only Biblically orthodox candidate elected. His Christianity is honest, forthright and uncomplicated. I have enjoyed every conversation we have had and Anglicans United wishes him the very best.

I wondered about the seemingly insoluble problems of the Lower 9th Ward, where I spent the afternoon. I spoke with many of the people at the dedication of the new parish. They have never been Episcopalians before and are so thankful to have a church that reads the Bible during the service. You can see 4 other church buildings from this corner, and only one is open now, as a day care center.

When you walk the neighborhoods, as Steve Waring [THE LIVING CHURCH] and I did, maybe one house in 10 has any sign of reconstruction. Jo, a resident who walked with us, told of the insurance reimbursements of \$5,000 for \$60,000 policies. This appears to be the norm, especially for the African American families. She told of the anguish of having to hire an attorney, who will take 1/3 of the resultant amount. One white family said they were offered \$12,000 for their \$90,000 policy – still inadequate to rebuild. I spoke with the music director of St. Paul's, Lakeview, a church 5 miles away that flooded to the rafters. He told of the heartbreak of seeing their prized pipe organ console hauled out the doors in a front loader, and dumped in the huge garbage pile, along with all the pews.

My taxi driver this morning spent 18 months in Houston with his wife and 6 children in one motel room. He worked 12 hour days Monday through Thursday, and drove to New Orleans and lived in a tent all weekend, working on his house. It took 13 months to get the supplies and do the work. No, his insurance company

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didn't pay either. (I haven't talked with anyone whose did) and he has all the charges for repairing his house on 5 credit cards, all maxed out. But, they are back home.

In stark contrast are the Garden District and the French Quarter. They received some wind damage. These two areas are the highest points in the city and were islands after the flooding. It was impossible to get here for several weeks until the water was pumped off of the freeways and all bridge structures were inspected. Merchants are struggling to stay in business because the tourists have not come back.

If your parish needs a good mission trip, consider coming to New Orleans. Bishop Charles Jenkins' has established a Disaster Relief office that helps parish groups make arrangements to come here and be involved in the rebuilding process. Call (504) 895-6634. You'll never find more appreciative people. And, no, you are not too old!

Monday, September 24 - At 10:45, the meeting was opened to press, after 2 hours of Executive Session. We flocked like lemmings. The Writing Committee charged with preparing the Statement, worked all weekend. The draft was read aloud by the committee. The initial draft is 4 pages single-spaced, a chatty narrative about the fun things done here in New Orleans, interspersed with the responses to the Dar es Salaam communiqué. Many bishops requested significant changes.

The continuing saga of boundary crossing, especially by African bishops, in their care for the orthodox, infuriates this House. It is such a sore point that some bishops I spoke with said they would consider compliance with Dar if and only if all foreign incursions cease. Stop the incursions first and THEN we will talk about complying with Dar.

6:00PM in New Orleans. The House of Bishops is working now 2 hours over schedule on the second draft of the Statement they will issue tomorrow. They cancelled the Eucharist.

7:30 PM. The Press Briefing is over: the Rt. Rev. David Alvarez of Puerto Rico (who deposed all the orthodox clergy in Puerto Rico after the 2003 General Convention), the Rt. Rev. Neil Alexander, Atlanta, and the Rt. Rev. Jon Bruno, Los Angeles commented. Their statements include, "It is a democratic process (read: the majority vote wins). We are genuinely striving to produce a clear, concise statement. And Bp. Bruno stated that fudge is something you eat, not write." He got into a fair amount of trouble by claiming, "I have not authorized clergy in my diocese to perform gay marriages. He was SHOCKED to find out that the *Los Angeles Times* reported one yesterday at All Saints, Beverly Hills. "I knew nothing about it, but I sure am going to look into it," he replied when questioned. I think it is fair to conclude that this house will stand on the decisions made at General Convention 2006.

Tuesday, September 25 - The big talk in the pressroom was about Bp. Jon Bruno and his phony shock about the gay wedding performed at his flagship parish

last weekend. Bruno stated without equivocation that he has not authorized gay weddings in his diocese. He stood firm on that, even in the elevator this morning. What he did not say is that they have been happening in Los Angeles for about a decade. No clergy have been disciplined.

So, what are the Primates to think? When a bishop tells you that they are not permitted and they happen with public acclaim and pictures of the happy couple in the paper, where is the truth?

The press looks like the march of the penguins as we file into the meeting. We were in for 26 minutes and heard reports on where the Presiding Bishop has traveled in her first year; those who have resigned from the House of Bishops, which includes this morning Bp. Jeffrey Steenson of the Diocese of the Rio Grande. We heard the necrology of those who have died, which included my dear assisting bishop and friend Steve Jecko.

Next, we heard the report about parishes in dioceses that have disassociated with TEC and gone "foreign." There was no way to gloss over this report or minimize its impact on the press. Clearly more than 40 parishes were listed, 50+ clergy named and other announcements of new parishes begun by CANA and the AMiA in more than 10 dioceses. At the conclusion of the report, Bishop Dean Wolfe of Kansas stated that he wanted the visitors to know that given the long list we had just heard, TEC had only lost 2 parishes. The press was dismissed from the meeting. Incredulous at the statistical analysis just given, the question in the pressroom is, "Are they lying to us again? What are the real figures on these issues?" I had the figures and yes, they are devastating.

Late today, the House of Bishops adopted an 8-point State-

ment that reiterates the decisions of the 2006 General Convention. They promised to refrain from giving consent to gays in the episcopate; but refused to stop gay blessings. (see story, Pg. 1)

The Statement's Introduction claims, "It is our conviction that The Episcopal Church needs the Anglican Communion, and we heard from our guests that the Anglican Communion needs The Episcopal Church." It was stated and restated many times that they want and expect to remain a part of the Communion. That is not obvious from the Statement.

When Presiding Bishop Jefferts Schori remarked at the Press Conference that this Statement represented true sacrifice on the parts of the members of the house, it rang hollow. One reporter asked how she could possibly say that, since they hadn't acceded to any of the Primate's requests. The response, "What was given up and what was compromised reflects the desire of our Bishops to stay in the Communion."

Nothing significant was sacrificed. The gay community claims local rites for marriages are second-class rites. Make no mistake about it: the gay community watches these things keenly. The gallery always has homosexuals. They come, they take notes, and they follow up with their bishops. They are very determined.

I am also aware that several of the Primates I know and have spoken with recently will not read good news into today's Statement. They will read defiance and a refusal to bend.

The next three months will be telling for the Biblically orthodox in this country. Last Thursday ended with a funeral procession by a jazz quartet at the Convention Center, the splendid celebration with the Archbishop for the people of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast. And I was starkly reminded again why I had come. Was I here for a funeral for the Church home I have known almost 40 years? Maybe. Cheryl M. Wetzel, reporting from New Orleans