

## **A WORD TO THE CHURCH**

From the House of Bishops of the Episcopal Church

January 12 – 13, 2005

Salt Lake City

To the faithful in Christ Jesus, greetings in the season of Epiphany. We rejoice together with you that God has “caused a new light to shine in our hearts” revealing God’s glory in the face of Jesus Christ our Lord. The sufferings of our brothers and sisters in the aftermath of tsunamis in South Asia and flooding and mud slides in California and here in Utah where we are meeting, make us long all the more for this new light revealed to us in Christ. We are mindful as well of the suffering around the world caused by global poverty, HIV/AIDS, malaria, other diseases, and war. In this suffering world we are called to “serve and signify God’s mission to the world, that mission whereby God brings to men and women, to human societies and to the whole world, real signs and foretastes of that healing love which will one day put all things to rights” (Windsor Report, paragraph 3).

We decided at our September meeting in 2004 to set aside this time so we might together begin to receive the Windsor Report with humility. We have met for a day and a half in Salt Lake City. We welcome with gratitude the work of the Lambeth Commission on Communion. We realize this is a long-term effort which will most likely extend beyond our March meeting. In the meantime, we aim to practice the more intentional consultative processes called for by the Windsor Report. We also anticipate the Executive Council of our church joining in this consultation.

In this spirit of intentional practice, we affirm that all need to repent, as the Archbishop of Canterbury reminded us in his Advent Letter 2004. We repent of the ways we as bishops have sometimes treated each other, failing to honor Christ’s presence in one another. Furthermore, too often we have also failed to recognize Christ’s presence fully manifest in our sister and brother Anglicans around the global communion. We honor their full voice and wisdom. We desire mutuality. We recognize our interdependence in the Body of Christ.

Moreover, we as the House of Bishops express our sincere regret for the pain, the hurt, and the damage caused to our Anglican bonds of affection by certain actions of our church. Knowing that our actions have contributed to the current strains in our Communion, we express this regret as a sign of our deep desire for and commitment to continuation of our partnership in the Anglican Communion.

We note here that our decision-making structures differ from those in many parts of the Anglican Communion and that our actions require conciliar involvement by all the baptized of our church, lay and ordained. Therefore we as bishops, in offering our regrets, do not intend to preempt the canonical authority of the General Convention of the Episcopal Church. At the same time, we are keenly aware of our particular responsibility for episcopal leadership.

We long for the fullest expression of the gift of communion that God has given us through Christ. “The communion we enjoy with God in Christ and by the Spirit, and the communion

we enjoy with all God's people living and departed, is the specific practical embodiment and fruit of the gospel itself" (Windsor Report, paragraph 3). We rejoice in our partnership in the worldwide Anglican Communion and affirm anew our commitment to the interdependence of this church as a member of the Anglican Communion.

We agree that one important expression of our communion would be a Communion-wide study and discernment process on matters of human sexuality as recommended by Lambeth Conferences of 1978, 1988 and 1998 and are eager to continue to respond to this challenge. This would be a sign of respect for gay and lesbian persons in our common life and of our ongoing pastoral care for them. We also believe that such a process would strengthen our communion. By doing so, we will be able to share more of the prayerful conversations and studies on the ministries and contributions of homosexual persons in the church that have enriched our experience for many years. The Presiding Bishop has already established a committee to offer a theological explanation of how "a person living in a same gender union may be considered eligible to lead the flock of Christ" (Windsor Report, paragraph 135).

We pray our brothers and sisters throughout the Anglican Communion will forgive us and that together we may remain in steadfast relationship so we might open our lives and our hearts to one another and learn how the Holy Spirit is acting in our different contexts. We are eager to take steps to make this possible, and particularly would welcome invitations to visit other Anglican provinces to learn from them the many ways they are vital witnesses to the healing love of Christ, often in very difficult circumstances.

During this brief meeting we humbly struggled in our deliberations to discern how best to receive the Windsor Report. We had an extensive discussion about a "moratorium on the election and consent to the consecration of any candidate to the episcopate who is living in a same gender union until some new consensus in the Anglican Communion emerges" (Windsor Report, paragraph 134). We have only begun a serious and respectful consideration of how we might respond. Further, we have not had sufficient time to give substantive consideration to recommendations in the Report calling for a moratorium on diocesan boundary violations or the call for a moratorium and further discussion of the authorization of liturgical texts blessing same sex unions. (Here we note that there are those among us who do not agree with the statement in paragraph 144 of the Windsor Report that "the Episcopal Church has by action of Convention made provision for the development of public Rites of Blessing of same sex unions.")

In February 2005 the Primates of the Anglican Communion will consider the Windsor Report. We commit ourselves to a more thorough consideration of the range of concrete actions identified in the Report at our House of Bishops meeting in March 2005. We do not wish to act in haste. We believe it is extremely important to take the time to allow the Holy Spirit to show us ways we can engage with people throughout our church in a consideration of all of the invitations for further reflection and the recommendations of the Windsor Report.

We seek together the epiphany of Christ's reconciling love for the world, which lies at the heart of the mission we share. It is our prayer that along with Anglican Christians around the world we may be faithful to God's mission.