

A Word to the Church

The House of Bishops

Camp Allen, Texas

March 16, 2005

Beloved in Christ,

We are gathered at Camp Allen in Texas for our annual spring meeting, this year on the eve of Holy Week. The work we have accomplished is in service to that act through which God reconciled the whole world to himself through Christ.

"We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him" (Romans 6:9). As we prepare to celebrate Christ's victory over sin and death, we rejoice to place our whole trust in the freedom Christ has won for us and to submit ourselves to the service of his mission.

During these days we prayed the common prayer of our church, and our daily celebration of the Eucharist brought us closer together in the presence of the paschal mystery. Tears were shed to see lives taken and displaced by the tsunami, as we heard from one of our community who traveled to that region on behalf of Episcopal Relief and Development and of us all. In hearing of the threats to the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, we were challenged to be good stewards of the creation. In considering Christian formation, we pondered how the Gospel is heard in diverse cultures: we were encouraged to listen to all voices, and to respect the dignity of every human being. Our hope and intention is to use the time ahead to initiate ways to speak with and learn from our brothers and sisters across the Communion about our common commitment to Christ and the different ways we seek to articulate, not only with our lips but in our lives, the gospel we share.

At our meeting in Salt Lake City in January 2005 we said that we would "commit ourselves to a more thorough consideration of the range of concrete actions identified in the [Windsor] Report at our House of Bishops meeting in March 2005." We also said we believe it is extremely important to take the time to allow the Holy Spirit to show us the way to deepen our communion together.

We believe that the Covenant Statement we have made has been achieved under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Our Covenant expresses remarkable convergences among us during these days and emerged from our mutual desire to speak as one House embracing widely divergent points of view. We sensed a profound solidarity and willingness to bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ (Galatians 6:2).

We pray that this Covenant Statement will be seen by brother and sister Anglicans as responding to some of their concerns. We pray that our overwhelming support for the Covenant may be a sign to them of our unwavering commitment to life in communion.

We pray as well that our Covenant will be useful for us all in healing relationships and opening the way for renewed solidarity in the service of Christ's work of reconciliation. We believe our Covenant Statement is a reflection of a fresh spirit of mutual forbearance and reconciliation among us. We faced into our deep divisions with an openness that has not characterized our recent past. We believe this marks the beginning of a new day in our life together as bishops and as the Episcopal Church.

We move now toward Holy Week with a renewed sense of community and of the work already accomplished for us through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Very soon we and our sisters and brothers across the globe will be walking the way of the Cross together. Following the footsteps of Jesus, we cannot help but be opened to the needs of others as we move forward as fellow members of Christ's crucified and risen body, the Church. As the Apostle Paul tells us: "We have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4).