



THE ANGLICAN COMMUNION
*JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE
OF THE PRIMATES' MEETING
AND THE ANGLICAN CONSULTATIVE COUNCIL*

REPORT OF THE COMMUNION SUB-GROUP

Background

1. At their meeting in London in March 2006, the Joint Standing Committee of the Primates and the Anglican Consultative Council nominated four of its members to assist the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Secretary General of the Anglican Communion in discerning the response of the Anglican Communion to the decisions of the 75th General Convention of the Episcopal Church. Some of these decisions related to requests made of the Episcopal Church in the Primates' Statement of February 2005 at Dromantine, which incorporated the Primates' response to the recommendations of the Windsor Report. The group appointed met in London in September 2006.
2. At the Primates' meeting in Dromantine, the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church had made it abundantly clear that only General Convention was empowered under the constitution of the Episcopal Church to give a response to the sorts of undertakings requested in the Windsor Report on behalf of the Episcopal Church. The Primates at Dromantine therefore decided to give the Episcopal Church (and the Anglican Church of Canada – although that Church is not the focus of current consideration) space to allow its proper processes to function.

The 75th General Convention

3. It is clear to this group that in the period following the Dromantine meeting, the Episcopal Church took the Windsor Report and the recommendations adopted by the Primates extremely seriously, establishing a Special Commission to work on its response, dedicating a particular legislative Committee (Special Legislative Committee 26) at the 75th General Convention to carry forward business associated with the Windsor Report, and devoting a lot of time to considering this work.
4. The response of the 75th General Convention to the Windsor Report as a whole in its resolutions was positive – Resolution A159¹ affirmed the Windsor Report, and its vision

¹ **Resolution A159**

Resolved, the House of Bishops concurring, That the 75th General Convention of The Episcopal Church reaffirm the abiding commitment of The Episcopal Church to the fellowship of churches that constitute the Anglican

of the interdependent life of the Communion, including the appointment of a person to carry forward work on this proposal; the proposal for an Anglican Covenant was welcomed (Resolution A166²); resolutions reflecting what the Windsor Report had had to say about the pastoral care of dissenting groups, and provincial autonomy were passed (A163³).

5. The Primates gathered at Dromantine in February 2005 adopted three specific requests to the Episcopal Church from the Windsor Report:
 - a. first, a request that the Episcopal Church should express its regret that the proper constraints of the bonds of affection had been breached in the events surrounding the consecration as a bishop of a person whose

Communion and seek to live into the highest degree of communion possible; and be it further
Resolved, That the 75th General Convention reaffirm that The Episcopal Church is in communion with the See of Canterbury, upholding and propagating the historic Faith and Order as set forth in the Book of Common Prayer; and be it further

Resolved, That the 75th General Convention join with the Archbishop of Canterbury, the primates, and the Anglican Consultative Council in making a commitment to the vision of interdependent life in Christ, characterized by forbearance, trust, and respect, and commend the Windsor Report and process as a means of deepening our understanding of that commitment; and be it further

Resolved, That as an expression of interdependence, the Presiding offices of both Houses work (*contd.*) in partnership with the churches of the Anglican Communion to explore ways by which there might be inter-Anglican consultation and participation on Standing Commissions of the General Convention of The Episcopal Church.

² **Resolution A166**

Resolved, That the 75th General Convention of the Episcopal Church, as a demonstration of our commitment to mutual responsibility and interdependence in the Anglican Communion, support the process of the development of an Anglican Covenant that underscores our unity in faith, order, and common life in the service of God's mission; and be it further

Resolved, That the 75th General Convention direct the International Concerns Standing Committee of the Executive Council and the Episcopal Church's members of the Anglican Consultative Council to follow the development processes of an Anglican Covenant in the Communion, and report regularly to the Executive Council as well as to the 76th General Convention; and be it further

Resolved, That the 75th General Convention report these actions supporting the Anglican Covenant development process, noting such missiological and theological resources as the Standing Commission on World Mission and the House of Bishops' Theology Committee to the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Joint Standing Committee of the Anglican Consultative Council and the Primates, and the Secretary General of the Anglican Communion; and that the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church report the same to the Primates of the churches of the Anglican Communion.

³ **Resolution A163**

Resolved, That the 75th General Convention of the Episcopal Church affirm the centrality of effective and appropriate pastoral care for all members of this church and all who come seeking the aid of this church; and be it further

Resolved, That the 75th General Convention commit the Episcopal Church to the ongoing engagement of and sensitive response to the request and need of all the people of God – in particular, but not exclusively, those who agree and those who disagree with the actions of this body, those who feel isolated thereby, and gay and lesbian persons within and without this Church; and be it further

Resolved, That the 75th General Convention recognize the agonizing position of those who do not feel able to receive appropriate pastoral care from their own bishops, and urges the members of the House of Bishops to seek the highest degree of communion and reconciliation within their own dioceses, using when requested in good faith the Delegated Episcopal Pastoral Oversight (DEPO) process detailed in the March 2004 statement of the House of Bishops, "Caring for All the Churches"; and be it further

Resolved, That the 75th General Convention urge continued maintenance of historic diocesan boundaries, the authority of the diocesan bishop, and respect for the historical relationships of the separate and autonomous Provinces of the Anglican Communion.

lifestyle contradicted the standard of teaching enshrined in the Lambeth Resolution 1.10 (see paragraphs 18-23 below);

- b. second, a moratorium on the election and consent of any candidate for the episcopate living in a same-gender union until some new consensus emerged in the Anglican Communion (see paragraphs 6-12 below); and
- c. third, a moratorium on public Rites of Blessing of same-sex unions (see paragraphs 13-17 below).

The Election of Bishops

- 6. Following debate on these matters throughout Convention, on the last day the Presiding Bishop, with the support of his successor who had been elected at the Convention, acted to propose a resolution which he believed expressed the mind of the majority of Convention delegates and bishops with respect to the second of the requests arising from the Windsor Report. This became resolution B033, and was passed with impressive majorities in both the House of Bishops, where it was voted upon first, and subsequently in the house of Deputies. The group believes that this resolution does express the clear view of the Convention.
- 7. The resolution states:

“Resolved, That the 75th General Convention receive and embrace The Windsor Report’s invitation to engage in a process of healing and reconciliation; and be it further Resolved, That this Convention therefore call upon Standing Committees and bishops with jurisdiction 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.”

- 8. The group noted that, in this resolution, the language of moratorium from the Windsor Report had not been used. It understood that legal counsel to the Convention advised that the language of a moratorium was difficult to embody in legislation under the provisions of the Episcopal Church’s constitution.
- 9. Instead the resolution uses the language of “restraint”, and the group noted that there has been considerable discussion since General Convention about the exact force of that word. By requiring that the restraint must be expressed in a particular way - “by not consenting ...”, however, the resolution is calling for a precise response, which complies with the force of the recommendation of the Windsor Report. The resolution, which was passed by large majorities in both houses, therefore calls upon those charged with the giving of consent to the result of any election to the episcopate to refuse consent to candidates whose “manner of life presents a challenge to the wider church and will lead to further strains on communion”.
- 10. In voting for this resolution, the majority of bishops with jurisdiction have indicated that they will refuse consent in future to the consecration of a bishop whose manner of life challenges the wider church and leads to further strains on Communion. This represents a significant shift from the position which applied in 2003. It was noted that a small

number of bishops indicated that they would not abide by the resolution of General Convention, but in supporting the resolution the majority of bishops have committed themselves to the recommendations of the Windsor Report.

11. The group noted that while the Windsor Report restricted its recommendation to candidates for the episcopate who were living in a same gender union, the resolution at General Convention widened this stricture to apply to a range of lifestyles which present a wider challenge. The group welcomed this widening of the principle, which was also recommended by the Windsor Report⁴, and commend it to the Communion.
12. The group believes therefore that General Convention has complied in this resolution with the request of the Primates.

Public Rites of Blessing for same-sex unions.

13. A separate recommendation in the Windsor Report and adopted by the Primates was the proposal for a moratorium on the authorisation of public Rites of Blessing of same-sex unions. This issue, as well as others in the Windsor Report, had been addressed in a draft resolution, A161, which was defeated in the House of Deputies. General Convention as a whole did not therefore specifically consider the question of a possible moratorium on same-sex unions. However, it is significant that General Convention declined to take further a number of resolutions which had been drafted to support their introduction. A summary of the current situation was included in a letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury from Presiding Bishop Frank Griswold⁵.
14. While this states the position at national level, the group noted that decisions affecting the use of public rites have more usually been made at diocesan level. The Windsor Report, in recognising that fact, calls upon all bishops of the Anglican Communion to abide by the unanimous recommendation of the Primates in March 2003 and institute a moratorium on such rites⁶.
15. In a resolution of the 74th General Convention in 2003, the Episcopal Church recognised that local faith communities within its common life were exploring and experiencing such liturgies⁷, and while, at provincial level, it has done nothing to authorise such Rites, it has done nothing to check their development. This creates a level of dissonance between the life of the Church at national level and at local level, which makes it hard to discern exactly where the Episcopal Church stands on this issue.
16. While the bishops of the Episcopal Church pledged themselves in March 2005 not to authorize any public rites for the blessing of same sex unions, and not to bless any such unions, at least until the General Convention of 2006, there is evidence that a variety of practices now apply across the United States in accordance with the acknowledgement given at the 74th General Convention in 2003. (As we have already noted 75th General

⁴ The Windsor Report, paragraph 131.

⁵ Excerpt attached in Appendix 1.

⁶ The Windsor Report, paragraph 143, 144.

⁷ **Resolution C051(5) of the 74th General Convention**

Resolved That we recognize that local faith communities are operating within the bounds of our common life as they explore and experience liturgies celebrating and blessing same-sex unions.

Convention in 2006 did not speak authoritatively the issue.) There are dioceses in which progress towards the development of a public Rite of Blessing for same-sex unions has been initiated⁸; other dioceses where, while there is no standard rite, guidelines have been issued by the bishop giving circumstances in which it may be permitted for priests of the diocese to offer such blessings⁹. In other dioceses, permission has been given for the development of rites which cover a wide range of circumstances, but which could include circumstances where a same-sex couple were seeking a blessing on their relationship¹⁰. Experimental liturgical resources have been produced in some dioceses which address amongst other matters, the area of pastoral care for same-gender couples¹¹. There are also dioceses which have only adopted a process of study around the subject, but which have not moved to the adoption of any kind of rite¹². Some commentators allege that up to sixteen dioceses out of a total of 108 dioceses and jurisdictions have moved in the direction of the authorisation of public Rites of Blessing which can be used to celebrate same-sex unions, but this is probably not demonstrable: the real situation is very limited, but very complex and the wide range of practice and procedures means that it is difficult to establishment exactly what has and has not been approved.

17. It is therefore not at all clear whether, in fact, the Episcopal Church is living with the recommendations of the Windsor Report on this matter. The Primates in their statement of March 2003 did admit that there could be “a breadth of private response to individual pastoral care”, but it is clear that the authorisation by any one bishop, diocese or Province, of any public Rite of Blessing, or permission to develop or use such a rite, would go against the standard of teaching to which the Communion as a whole has indicated that it is bound. We do not see how bishops who continue to act in a way which diverges from the common life of the Communion can be fully incorporated into its ongoing life. This is therefore a question which needs to be addressed urgently by the House of Bishops of the Episcopal Church.

Expression of Regret

18. Finally, we must turn to the issue of the statement of regret requested by the Windsor Report, and affirmed by the Primates at Dromantine. It is to be noted that the Windsor Report did not request “repentance”, although this request has been voiced in some quarters in the Communion. Equally, the Windsor Report went beyond asking for an acknowledgement of the hurt and offence caused by the implications of the decision to consecrate a bishop living in an openly acknowledged sexual relationship outside marriage in contradiction to the teaching upheld in Lambeth Resolution 1.10. The report argued that there had been a breach of the proper constraints of the bonds of affection, and it was this breach for which regret ought to be expressed.

19. In the event, the relevant resolution, approved by General Convention is as follows:

Resolved, That the 75th General Convention of The Episcopal Church, mindful of “the repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation enjoined on us by Christ”

⁸ Cf. the diocese of Washington.

⁹ Cf. the dioceses of New Hampshire and Washington.

¹⁰ Cf. the diocese of Nevada.

¹¹ Cf. the dioceses of Long Island and Vermont.

¹² Cf. the dioceses of Atlanta and Hawaii.

(Windsor Report, paragraph 134), express its regret for straining the bonds of affection in the events surrounding the General Convention of 2003 and the consequences which followed; offer its sincerest apology to those within our Anglican Communion who are offended by our failure to accord sufficient importance to the impact of our actions on our church and other parts of the Communion; and ask forgiveness as we seek to live into deeper levels of communion one with another.

20. A number of things have to be noted about this resolution. In the first place, General Convention voted down a proposal to adopt the precise wording of the Windsor Report, arguing that it was impossible to know what “the proper constraints of the bonds of affection” were. The group has some sympathy for this view. Instead, however, Convention expressed regret for “straining the bonds of affection”, and offered its apology “to those offended by our failure to accord sufficient importance to the impact of our actions on our church and other parts of the Communion”. It goes on to “ask forgiveness”.
21. The group was unsure how these words should be understood. On the one hand, there does not seem to be any admission of the fact that the action of consenting to the particular election at the centre of this dispute was in itself blameworthy. On the other, there is the use of the strong language of “apology” and the request for “forgiveness”. These words are not lightly offered, and should not be lightly received. Taken with the apparent promise not to repeat the offence (Resolution B033 discussed above) we believe that the expression of regret is sufficient to meet the request of the primates.
22. The Group feels that the reality of the change of direction that some see in the resolutions of the General Convention can only be tested however by the way in which the Episcopal Church lives out these resolutions.
23. There was clearly a strong groundswell within the General Convention to walk more closely with the Communion and in the commitment to a common life. There is considerable diversity of opinion within the Episcopal Church – as indeed there is across the life of the Communion. It is clear that Lambeth Resolution 1.10 is going to continue for the foreseeable future as the standard of teaching by which the Anglican Communion as a whole will live. It is also clear that it is not only those who have expressed their strong disassociation from the decisions of the 74th General Convention in 2003 who have a commitment to the life of the Communion. There are many elements of the Episcopal Church who share that commitment, who wish to abide within the full recommendations of the Windsor Report and still remain committed to the life of the Episcopal Church. It is the duty of the wider Communion to nourish and encourage all those within the Episcopal Church who wish to embrace our common and interdependent life.

Afterword

24. The issue of same-sex relationship has been on the agenda of the Instruments of Communion of the Anglican Communion since 1978. Failure to address it then and on subsequent occasions has only exacerbated that situation. Our churches and Communion have suffered greatly from that failure. Our Instruments of Communion must be proactive in identifying such potentially divisive issues in the future.

25. We recognise that the Windsor Report was addressed to the whole of the Anglican Communion. This report has been concerned with the response by the Episcopal Church to that Report. We understand that the Anglican Church of Canada is in the process of preparing its response. We have to express our concern that other recommendations of the Windsor Report, addressed to other parts of the Communion, appear to have been ignored so far.

Members of the Sub-Group

The Archbishop of Canterbury
The Archbishop of Central Africa
The Archbishop of Wales
Chancellor Philippa Amable, Province of West Africa
Canon Elizabeth Paver, Church of England
The Secretary-General

Appendix One

Extract from a letter sent by Presiding Bishop Frank Griswold to the Archbishop of Canterbury, 12 July 2006

With regard to the blessing of same sex unions, the report from the secretary of the Committee shows the following actions. The Committee considered three resolutions that pertained to the blessing of same sex unions. Resolution D054 would have directed the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music "to prepare for study and consideration by the 76th General Convention rites for inclusion in the Book of Occasional Services by means of which the Church may express that support...." Resolution D054 was neither considered nor acted upon by either House.

Resolution D017, entitled "Marriage Rite in Book of Common Prayer for Same-Sex Couples" was rejected by the House of Bishops upon the recommendation of the Special Legislative Committee #26.

Resolution C004, entitled "Response to Windsor Report" would have affirmed "support (of) the blessing of (same-sex) unions and the ordination or consecration of persons in those unions." Another provision of the rules is that once a matter is addressed in one resolution, resolutions bearing on the same topic can be "discharged," which means they are not considered further. Upon the recommendation of Special Legislative Committee #26, the House of Deputies discharged C004.

In all three of these cases of Resolution D054, D017 and C004 there was little support for the resolutions within the Special Legislative Committee. It was very clear from the actions of both the Special Legislative Committee, the House of Bishops and House of Deputies that the General Convention did not wish to move forward with the blessings of same sex unions.

In sum, therefore, the General Convention discharged or rejected or declined to consider all resolutions put forward with regard to authorization of blessings of same sex unions. Therefore, the position of the Episcopal Church remains unchanged: no rites of blessing are authorized and neither is the development of such rites.