

**Address to Media Conference 28 September 2007 by  
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**New Orleans meeting of the House of Bishops**

As you know I have just returned from New Orleans where I have been a guest of the House of Bishops of The Episcopal Church of the USA, and their Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori. The House of Bishops invited the Archbishop of Canterbury and members of the Joint Standing Committees of the Primates and the Anglican Consultative Council to meet with them as they considered the requests made by the Primates in Dar es Salaam in February.

The House of Bishops has now published its response.

The response wasn't available to us before we left New Orleans and it is still being considered. The Archbishop of Canterbury has asked members of the Joint Standing Committee to get back to him with their views over the next few days. So I am in the process of giving it careful consideration. What I say today are my preliminary views.

In short I think the House of Bishops has responded positively to the requests of the Primates. There were four basic requests.

**1. Consecration as bishop of persons in openly gay unions**

First the House of Bishops was requested to confirm that resolution B033 of the 2006 General Convention 'means that a candidate for Episcopal orders living in a same sex union shall not receive the necessary consent' (Primates Communiqué 2007).

The group set up to review the outcomes of the General Convention said: '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.' That is to say, the majority will refuse consent.

And this week the House of Bishops confirmed that that view was 'an accurate evaluation of Resolution B033' and that 'non-celibate gay and lesbian persons are included among those to whom B033' applies.

So, in respect of this first matter, the House of Bishops has given the assurance sought by the Primates.

## **2. Public Rites of Blessing of same-sex unions**

The second request from the Primates concerned public rites of blessing for same sex unions.

The 2006 General Convention declined to pass several resolutions that would have moved in the direction of developing and authorising such rites.

But the 2003 General Convention recognised that at the diocesan level some experiments were going on and left it up to bishops and dioceses. So there was ambiguity between the General Convention and individual bishops and dioceses.

The Primates requested the House of Bishops to ‘make an unequivocal common covenant that the bishops will not authorise any Rite of Blessing for same-sex unions in their dioceses or through General Convention’ (Primates Communiqué 2007, cf The Windsor Report 143, 144).

This week the House of Bishops has said: ‘We, the members of the House of Bishops, pledge not to authorize for use in our dioceses any public rites of blessing of same-sex unions ...’ and noted that ‘no rite of blessing for persons living in same-sex unions has been adopted or approved by our General Convention.’

The House went on to note that the Primates themselves in 2003 said there was a pastoral duty ‘to respond with love and understanding to people of all sexual orientations’ and that ‘it is necessary to maintain a breadth of private response to situations of individual pastoral care.’

## **3. Primate Vicar**

The third request from the Primates was that the Presiding Bishop appoint a bishop to represent her in some situations where a diocese did not wish to receive her personally.

This week the Presiding Bishop announced to the House of Bishops that she was in the process of appointing 8 bishops to represent her in this way and that she would be happy to involve others who wished to act in this way. In the course of the meeting 2 or 3 others came forward to do so.

Some of the details are yet to be worked out but the Presiding Bishop made it clear that she thought it best if the diocesan bishop concerned and the Episcopal visitor representing her had the freedom to work out practical details between themselves.

The House of Bishops then said: ‘We affirm the Presiding Bishop's plan to appoint episcopal visitors for dioceses that request alternative oversight. .... We believe this plan is consistent with and analogous to Delegated Episcopal Pastoral Oversight (DEPO) as affirmed by the Windsor Report (paragraph 152). We thank those bishops who have generously offered themselves for this ministry. We hope that dioceses will make use of this plan and that the Presiding Bishop will continue conversation with those dioceses

that may feel the need for such ministries. We appreciate and need to hear all voices in The Episcopal Church.’

This seems to me to be a generous response to the request of the Primates.

#### **4. Pastoral Council**

The final request of the Primates was that a Pastoral Council with international involvement be set up to ensure proper care of dissenting minorities in the US and to try to bring to an end interventions in the US from outside.

On the basis of legal advice The Episcopal Church expressed reservations about the details of the scheme proposed by the Primates. But the House of Bishops went on to say ‘Nevertheless, we recognize a useful role for communion-wide consultation with respect to the pastoral needs of those seeking alternative oversight, as well as the pastoral needs of gay and lesbian persons in this and other provinces. We encourage our Presiding Bishop to continue to explore such consultation in a manner that is in accord with our Constitution and Canons.’

There is a clear willingness to devise a scheme in conjunction with the wider communion which responds to the substance of the Primates request.

#### **Overall impressions**

It was very clear throughout the meeting that the Episcopal Church greatly values its place in the life of the wider Anglican Communion and strongly desires to maintain it.

At the same time a majority in the Episcopal Church is deeply convinced that it is right to include fully in the life of the church gay and lesbian people.

There is a wide variety of views in the Episcopal Church. The meeting of the House of Bishops this week worked very hard to find a way forward which retained the commitment of the majority of that Church yet was also respectful of dissenting minorities and of the need to walk together with the wider Anglican Communion.

On the basis of my direct participation in the meetings and my conversations with bishops of the Episcopal Church across the diversity of views, my preliminary view of their response is that it is positive and that the substance of the requests from the Primates has been met.