

A TESTIMONY OF HOPE

THE FOURTH CONSULTATION OF ANGLICAN BISHOPS IN DIALOGUE

The fourth consultation among Canadian, American and African bishops took place in Cape Town South Africa from Thursday May 2nd to Sunday May 5th 2013. We met in the context of worship, prayer, Scripture reading and the breaking of bread. Through the presentation of papers, continuing conversation, and growing relationships we engaged in dialogue both in sessions and over meals. We came from South Sudan, Malawi, Burundi, Ghana, Kenya, South Africa, Canada, Zambia and the United States. We continued the same process as in the past of inviting people from different dioceses to reflect on God's mission in their contexts, this time using the lens of reconciliation, in accordance with Paul's exhortation:

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come:^[a] The old has gone, the new is here! ¹⁸All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. (2 Corinthians 5:17-20)

We engaged in theological reflection on reconciliation, and we heard presentations about the reconciliation process in Burundi, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Canada, reconciliation in The Episcopal Church, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa. We heard examples of people throughout Africa and North America intentionally seeking to meet with those from whom they differed.

We heard stories of such pain and of new life that was made possible by God's grace mediated through compassionate ministry, that many times we were left in silence and tears. We witnessed profound hope in God's transforming presence in even the most conflicted of situations which the world might call hopeless.

Our time in Cape Town was greatly enriched by the opportunity to visit local ministry initiatives: Fikelela Children's Centre – part of the diocese's HIV/AIDS ministry; the Fusion project in Manenberg – a ministry that seeks to inspire, partner with, and equip the church to see high-risk youth restored to Christ and

community; Sweet Home Farm – a broad based intervention of the church in an informal settlement of some 17,000 people where ministry includes HIV/AIDS support, forming a church community, a Seniors club, health and welfare initiatives and a restaurant; and The Warehouse – a ministry initiative that provides a place for support, both spiritual and physical, for poorer communities and which equips people from many churches to serve in new ways. We had heard in our theological reflection that the Christological foundation of the Church's ministry pushes us to pragmatic actions and commitments in the real situations of conflict and division where we live. On our local visits in Cape Town we were humbled by what we saw and our hearts were full as we heard story upon story of sacrificial ministry and steadfast commitment to the work of reconciliation. Our daily eucharists were held in St. George's Cathedral. We had the opportunity to share in Sunday worship in churches around the city and to meet local congregations. The grounding in the local situation enlivened and inspired our conversations.

We recognized that we have inherited the ministry of reconciliation from our Lord Jesus Christ; that God's mission is not a human achievement. It is something we are called to live into and to share. We observed that the engagement in the ministry of reconciliation is a costly process because it involves facing positive and negative truths about others and about ourselves with courage, honesty and humility.

We observed that a key part of the ministry of reconciliation is about reclaiming the humanity and dignity of those who have been dehumanized in various ways. It involves the preservation of the identities of those being reconciled to one another in Christ. It gives the powerless a voice to take up the challenge of speaking truth to power.

We observed that one of the dynamics of our group involved the history of colonization; that our present reflects the stories of both the colonized and colonizers. We talked about the dehumanizing parts of our history that fly in the face of our commitment to respect the dignity of every human being. We named many challenges in our contexts as evidence of systemic and spiritual evil in addition to identifying situations where the presence of God's transforming grace was evident.

We recognized that the church is called to be a place of safety and refuge with an authentic ministry of reconciliation but, regrettably, the church can also be a source of victimization of others. We agreed that we need to acknowledge our part in

conflicts that cause pain to people in order to become credible leaders and partners. We reflected on the statement that “To repent is to know that there is a lie in our hearts” of St. John of Kronstadt. We noted the importance of the church’s public apologies and of its participation in healing processes. We shared examples from the South African and Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (TRC), the reconciliation processes in Burundi, South Sudan and the situation in Kenya following the post-election violence in 2007.

We realized that it is only in speaking the truth in love to each other that we can understand each other’s contexts. We believe that this helps to reduce prejudice and misunderstandings. There can be no reconciliation without truth.

We heard of situations of such conflict that people were afraid to ‘pray with their eyes closed’. We were challenged to transform that phrase so that we could ‘pray with our eyes open’ - not out of fear, but because of a courageous willingness to face the truth. We discussed the role of the Church (as an ecumenical body) in reconciliation and the unique role of the Anglican Communion as a linking factor in many places. We acknowledged that this work of embracing reconciliation continues to be a work in progress within our communion.

We see our dialogue as having grown out of the recommendations of Lambeth 2008 and we believe that our work is important in building towards Lambeth 2018. We committed ourselves to share our learnings from these dialogues with the bishops and dioceses in our provinces and with others we meet. We would encourage similar dialogues across the Communion, dialogues that grow organically with emerging agendas as a way to develop understanding, build trust and foster reconciliation. These may be small regional gatherings. We suggest that such dialogues include opportunities to visit and learn from the ministries of the local church.

We observed that sin infects systems as well as individuals. We reflected on the church’s responsibility to help people to see when the truth has become distorted and to speak out against systemic evil that leads to disrespecting the dignity of human beings which inhibits the proclamation of the gospel in every culture. We noted that the witness of the church is to stand beside people as they tell their stories as well as to listen to their stories with compassionate hearts.

We discovered in each of our contexts that the Church has a unique role in proclaiming and embodying a positive vision of the future. We have found that God has planted the seeds of our positive future in our past.

We started a discussion on how we can be part of the reconciliation of the refugees and outcasts in our midst. We were challenged to consider the role of the Church to engage with the Diaspora of one another's community, so that the ministry of reconciliation can continue and that these people may be resources to their own homelands for peace rather than the perpetuation of conflict.

We acknowledged that none of us has exclusive ownership of the truth. We understand that when all our stories are told we come to a fuller understanding of the truth. This meeting has confirmed the relational nature of the church and the understanding that all of us bring only a piece of the truth. We affirm once again that dialogue is essential to exploring the nature of theological truth that looks at what God is constantly revealing.

Our meeting in Cape Town had an added depth to it because we were all aware of the enormous work of reconciliation in South Africa following the time of Apartheid. We were blessed by the presence of Mary Burton, former Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) commissioner in South Africa. Hearing the stories of that time and watching footage of the TRC hearing, reminded us as a group that it is in the sharing of the stories of reconciliation by our global brothers and sisters that we are encouraged to pursue all that works for good (Romans 8:28).

We resonated with Mary Burton's advice to us to 'be mindful of the degree of hurt that so many people have, and to make provision for those hurts to be heard'. When stories remain untold disintegration follows. This is both an ongoing challenge and opportunity for the Church. In all our relationships we should try to be peace seekers.

We were also blessed and encouraged by the presence of Canon David Porter, the Archbishop of Canterbury's Director of Reconciliation. Canon Porter observed that Anglicans sometimes have "bad" fights, but need to learn how to have "good" ones, because there will always be points of conflict in our relationships. This gathering has had all the hallmarks of what good conversation should look like. Because we are all in Christ, we belong together.

We agreed that reconciliation is a gift of the Holy Spirit and only by the Grace of God are we reconciled.

We leave Cape Town with great hope. We have heard testimony of new life arising out of the most difficult circumstances and of Christ's power of reconciliation

healing the most tragic situations. We feel encouraged and empowered in our ministry and in our mission.

We extend our thanks to Bishop Garth Counsell and his local organising committee for their hard work and Marion Counsell for hosting us on Sunday evening. We thank Archbishop Thabo Makgoba for his hospitality in welcoming us to Bishopscourt and we extend our thanks to the members of the diocese of Cape Town for the warmth of their welcome. We thank the Rev'd Eileen Scully, although unable to join us, for preparing the handbook we used for worship. To the Rev'd Canon Isaac Kawuki-Mukasa who coordinated our meeting and provided wonderful support, we offer our sincere gratitude.

Cape Town, South Africa, May 5,
2013

1. The Rt. Rev'd Jane Alexander – Diocese of Edmonton, Canada
2. The Rt. Rev'd Johannes Angela - Diocese of Bondo, Kenya
3. The Rt. Rev'd Michael Bird – Diocese of Niagara, Canada
4. The Rt. Rev'd John Chapman – Diocese of Ottawa Canada
5. The Rt. Rev'd Garth Counsell – Diocese of Cape Town, South Africa
6. The Rt. Rev'd Michael Ingham – Diocese of New Westminster, Canada
7. The Most Rev'd Colin Johnson – Diocese of Toronto & Metropolitan of Ontario
8. The Rt. Rev'd Julius Kalu – Diocese of Mombasa, Kenya
9. The Rt. Rev'd Mark MacDonald – National Indigenous Anglican Bishop, Canada
10. The Rt. Rev'd Sixbert Macumi – Diocese of Buye, Burundi
11. The Rt. Rev'd David Njovu – Diocese of Lusaka, Zambia
12. The Rt. Rev'd Robert O'Neill – Diocese of Colorado, USA
13. The Rt. Rev'd Michael Oulton – Diocese of Ontario, Canada

14. The Rt. Rev'd Anthony Poggo – Diocese of Kajo Keji, South Sudan
15. The Most Rev'd Daniel Sarfo – Diocese of Kumasi, Ghana
16. The Rt. Rev'd Stacy Sauls – Chief Operating Officer, The Episcopal Church
17. The Rt. Rev'd James Tengtenga – Diocese of Southern Malawi, Malawi
18. The Rt. Rev'd. Joseph Wasonga - Diocese of Maseno West, Kenya

Observer:

Canon David Porter – The Archbishop of Canterbury's Director on Reconciliation

Staff:

The Rev'd Canon Isaac Kawuki-Mukasa - Anglican Church of Canada