

A Testimony of Grace from the Consultation of Bishops in Dialogue

March 1, 2011

To the bishops and people of the Anglican Communion,

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you!

(2 Corinthians 13:13)

From February 24 to 27 nineteen bishops of the Anglican Communion met thanks to the initiative of the Anglican Church of Canada. We came from the Sudan, Botswana, Malawi, Burundi, Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania, South Africa, Canada, the United States, and England. We met as a group of partner pairs and triads. This meeting had its origins in the Lambeth Conference, where many of the relationships represented in our gathering were established. Bishops in Bible Studies and Indaba groups at Lambeth became friends, committed to diocese-to-diocese partnership mission work, and to continued dialogue beyond Lambeth.

We worshipped together, praising God for the many gifts of partnership, and praying for the Church and for God's world, mindful of the disasters and crises happening in our world whilst we were meeting. Our work was shaped by our worship (Philippians 4:1-9). We shared testimonies from our partnership mission and dialogue work. We visited the local Church and its projects in education and community service. We enjoyed one another's company, sharing both pain and joy from our hearts with stories and with laughter. We engaged in theological reflection and dialogue. We tasted the wonderful *karibu* welcome of the hospitality of all who cared for us during our stay. We are grateful for the welcome made to us by the Primate of Tanzania, Archbishop Valentino Mokiwa.

We gathered assuming friendship and collegiality, extending goodwill and humility to one another, knowing that we are one in shared faith and values (Ephesians 4:1-6). We gathered as friends to share with deep gratitude our testimonies to the work of the Holy Spirit in our dioceses, and found in our gathering the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in our midst. As a part of the Anglican Communion, and recognizing that we are but a small sampling of many such conversations in holy friendship taking place around the Communion, we offer the following as gift to the Church.

We have been engaged in a process of patient and holy listening, as Anglicans, coming from a wide diversity of contexts and theological positions, who have chosen to listen to one another (Colossians 3:12-17). Some diocesan partnerships have been involved in dialogue about human

sexuality prior to the meeting and these continue. We have found that in the wider context of conflicts around sexuality in the Anglican Communion, the conflict has provided us an opportunity to build bridges of mutual understanding as we choose to turn face to face with each other. We know that this topic requires the best of us in our dialogue: our mutuality and humility and prayer in listening and in speaking as we seek together for God's wisdom (1 Corinthians 2:6-16). The commitment to true theological dialogue has led us to know one another, to discover ourselves in each other, and to deepen our engagement in mission with one another (John 15; 1 John 3:17-23).

We are aware that when we talk, the words we use may not be heard in the same way as we intend and we do not always understand language in the same way. We are engaged in a quest for language that will bring us to common understanding and to better dialogue. That does not mean that we agree or that we seek an agreement on particular issues. What we do intend is to take our responsibilities of episcopal leadership in the life and work of the Church with seriousness, to engage in our calling to bring the local to the universal and the universal to the local, to connect brothers and sisters across Provinces. We are taking responsibility as bishops to lead our people forward in their baptismal call to deepen relationship with Jesus and with each other, in love and service. This is the work of the Holy Spirit leading the whole people of God.

True dialogue is not about convincing the other of the rightness of one's position. Dialogue is about turning to one another with openness. Christian dialogue is about turning to one another within the Body of Christ, knowing one another to be and trusting each other as brothers and sisters in Christ (1 Corinthians 12:4-27). We often behave as though we are in court defending ourselves, but that is not indaba; that is not dialogue (1 Corinthians 1:20-25). Rather we seek to understand each other, not to justify or to defend, but to enter into a deep holy conversation, broadening our understanding of each other, of the Church, of mission, and of Christ's call to us (Ephesians 4:31-5:1-2).

We found that in the testimonies offered about partnership mission work, a common thread emerged: our experience of finding ourselves in each other. Across the globe, across the Communion, we actually really need one another. We are stronger in relationship than when we are apart. This, we believe, is a work of engaging in Communion building rather than Communion breaking. In the words of the Toronto Congress of 1963 we are engaged in living in "mutual responsibility and interdependence" (Ephesians 2:13-22).

As we have listened to each other in our partnership relationships and around the wider table, we have learned about the contexts of our Churches in these very different countries. The realities and issues of poverty and of peace emerged as our deepest concerns. We shared stories of the common mission of Christ that takes different form in different parts of the world. We devoted time to sharing and reflection about the aftermath of colonialism and our collusion in slavery and the slave trade. Its legacy touches all of us. We believe it would be healing for us as a Communion to engage in broad-based conversation about this history and its legacies, and to work towards reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18-21; Luke 4:18-19).

As episcopal ministry links the global to the local, it is the theological understanding of the incarnation that grounds our faith in reality. Global partnerships can have significant positive

impact for the poorest among us on our planet (Acts 4:32-35). We witnessed the impact of our faith through the visits to the MEA Foundation and to St. Augustine's diocesan primary school, meeting students, orphans, those in need of health care, and those dying of AIDS (Luke 6: 20-49). Each of these local projects is being reached by partnerships between the Anglican Church and other charitable organizations. It is important to note that we heard that because of the global economic crisis, some of the ministries we witness will no longer exist after this year. Which AIDS orphan will not be cared for? Which person in need of health care will not receive it, and who will sleep another night without a mosquito net to protect them from malaria? Programmes such as Nets for Life, which we witnessed in action, are greatly enhanced by partnerships, and greatly need our support.

We engaged together in discernment about our common work and witness, coming to a deep conviction that we are personally called to this work, the church is in need of this work, and that we have the will for this work. We committed to finding further resources to continue this work. We are committed to continued engagement and so we agreed to meet again to continue on our journey together. The Holy Spirit has made space in our midst for the power of grace. We offer thanks and praise to the God who has made us one, that the whole world may believe, and all will have life abundant (John 17:20-25). We end this letter with grace, as we began it, and with humble hope that our dialogue may in fact make a difference in our faith. We strongly encourage other bishops to develop similar networks for mission and dialogue.

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In Grace and Peace,

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The Rt. Michael Bird
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The Rt. Rev'd George Bruce
Ontario

The Rt. Rev'd John Chapman
Ottawa

The Rt. Rev'd Garth Counsell
Cape Town

The Rt. Rev'd Terry Dance
Huron

The Rt. Rev'd Mary Gray-Reeves
El Camino Real

The Rt. Rev'd Michael Ingham
New Westminster

The Most Rev'd Colin Johnson
Toronto

The Rt. Rev'd Shannon Johnston
Virginia

The Rt. Rev'd Julius Kalu
Mombasa

The Rt. Rev'd Sixbert Macumi
Buye

The Rt. Rev'd Sadock Makaya
Western Tanganyika

The Rt. Rev'd Mdimi Mhogolo
Central Tanganyika

The Rt. Rev'd Gerard Mpango
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The Rt. Rev'd Musonda Mwamba
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The Rt. Rev'd Michael Perham
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Those bishops who were gathered are available to tell their stories.