



***The Episcopal Diocese
of West Texas
The Bishop Jones Center***

Friday, January 22, 2016

TO: Clergy and Congregations in West Texas
FROM: Bishops Lillibridge and Reed

We are writing regarding last week's meeting of the Anglican Primates, the senior bishops of the 38 worldwide Anglican Provinces. The gathering was held in Canterbury, England, at the invitation of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby. The Primates are regarded as one of the four "Instruments of Unity" of the Anglican Communion; the other three being the Anglican Consultative Council, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and the Lambeth Conference. The Lambeth Conference is the meeting of Anglican bishops worldwide, and meets about every 10 years. The last one was held in 2008, the next one is now scheduled for 2020.

At the conclusion of their meeting on January 15, the Primates issued a communiqué to the Anglican Communion on many global issues and challenges, entitled, ***Walking Together in the Service of God in the World***. We commend the entire document to you, and you may find it by [clicking here](http://www.primates2016.org/articles/2016/01/15/communique-primates/) or type in browser <http://www.primates2016.org/articles/2016/01/15/communique-primates/>. The title is significant, especially since the portion of the communiqué responding to our General Convention's actions last summer regarding same-sex marriage and our marriage canon was leaked early and out of context. This portion was widely misrepresented and misinterpreted in news media and on social media.

In their communiqué, the Primates required *"that for a period of three years The Episcopal Church no longer represent us on ecumenical and interfaith bodies, should not be appointed or elected to an internal standing committee and that while participating in the internal bodies of the Anglican Communion, they will not take part in decision making on any issues pertaining to doctrine or polity."*

This is far different than saying, as was widely reported, that the Episcopal Church was suspended or removed from the Anglican Communion. All that they said came under the heading of "Walking together." While there is a process for a Church joining the Communion, there is no real mechanism for removing a Church, and that was clearly not the desire of the majority of Primates, anyway. They unanimously committed to "walking together," and this includes our own Presiding Bishop, Michael Curry, who participated fully in the meeting and whose initial response can be found by [clicking here](http://www.episcopalchurch.org/posts/publicaffairs/episcopal-church-presiding-bishop-and-primate-michael-curry-actions-anglican) or typing in browser <http://www.episcopalchurch.org/posts/publicaffairs/episcopal-church-presiding-bishop-and-primate-michael-curry-actions-anglican>.

While the Primates speak for themselves and not for the other Instruments of Communion, this does not mean that statements the Primates make are not influential or important. It remains to be seen how the Anglican Consultative Council will respond to all of this. They meet every two or three years, and their next meeting is coming up from April 8-20 in Zambia. The role of the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC) is to facilitate the co-operative work of the churches of the Anglican Communion, exchange information between the Provinces and churches, and help to coordinate common action. It advises on the organization and structures of the Communion, and seeks to develop common policies with respect to the world mission of the Church, including ecumenical matters.

No one, including the Primates themselves, knows what their action might mean in the longer term. In the meantime, they stated, *"We have asked the Archbishop of Canterbury to appoint a Task Group to maintain conversation among ourselves with the intention of restoration of relationship, the rebuilding of mutual trust, healing the legacy of hurt, recognising the extent of our commonality and exploring our deep differences, ensuring they are held between us in the love and grace of Christ."*

The communiqué was released as our Church, and many others, were preparing to begin the annual ecumenical "Week of Prayer for Christian Unity." This report underscores the divisions within and across our Communion, and also calls us to renew our commitment to live and work for unity and reconciliation for the sake of the Church's mission and for the sake of an increasingly divided world.

We live in a complex global family; and maintaining relationships and the "bond of peace" can be challenging. In times such as these, we believe that we all would do well and honor Christ by paying attention to Paul's advice to the Romans: *"Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all"* (Romans 12:12, 13, 18). In other words, we will continue to do our small part to work and minister for the building up of the Body of Christ through all of the relationships with which God has blessed us, here and throughout the Anglican Communion. We intend to continue (and to expand) our World Mission partnerships that have been so transformative and life-giving for us and our partners in mission.

This Sunday's appointed epistle reading (3 Epiphany, 1 Corinthians 12:12-31a), is quite pertinent to this overall situation: *For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body...Indeed the body does not consist of one member but of many. As it is, there are many members, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you.' If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. Strive for the greater gifts."* May God continue to guide us as we strive for the greater gifts, which Jesus' reminds us includes loving our neighbors, even and perhaps especially, those neighbors near and far with whom we disagree.

In closing, we commend to you and to your congregation the Collect for the Unity of the Church which is found on page 818 of The Book of Common Prayer. We pray that God might "Give us grace seriously to lay to heart the great dangers we are in by our unhappy divisions...that, as there is but one Body and one Spirit, one hope of our calling, one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of us all, so we may be all of one heart and of one soul, united in one holy bond of truth and peace, of faith and charity, and may with one mind and one mouth glorify you; through Jesus Christ our Lord."