



## The Rt. Rev'd D. Bruce MacPherson's August 2006 Message

*As most are aware, our Deputation to General Convention 2006 and I are currently participating, along with members of the Standing Committee, in five post-General Convention meetings across the diocese. The following is the text of the remarks that I am sharing at these events, and I felt them important enough to share with all of you through this column. +DBM*

This moment brings a great pause to what our ministry is to be about. The level of anxiety that is being experienced not just across the Episcopal Church, but the wider Communion, has created not only a sense of frustration amongst people, but a multitude of emotions. People everywhere are looking for answers, and want them now.

Sadly in the midst of this is the danger for the loss of vision as to what God is calling us to be about. Over and over I have shared that we must not allow ourselves to be entrapped in ditches and cease to do the mission of the Church, the mission to which God calls us in Christ Jesus our Lord, and this being one of faithfully lifting up the Gospel in and through our lives lived, and seeking to fulfill our Baptismal Covenant with each breath we take.

Sadly though, this is lost to a degree in the fear of the unknown, the sense that we don't appear to be doing anything. I know this as a result of the number of people that keep asking, "When are we going to do something?"

I have been tempted to quote the Prophet Habakkuk, and say, "... *there is still a vision for the appointed time; it speaks of the end, and does not lie. If it seems to tarry, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay.*" [Habakkuk 2:3]

This however, has not been my response as I know that I am not being asked about us doing something about our vision of the ministry that is before us, but rather, taking an action of some sort as it applies to the things taking place within the church nationally.

I have purposely not said within the Episcopal Church, for we are really talking about a segment of the church, not the entire church. And whether we want to admit it or not, we are a part of the Episcopal Church.

Dating back to the conclusion of General Convention 2003, a couple of parishes in the diocese expressed the desire to remove the word Episcopal from their signs and printed materials. This has now been raised once more. But as I said then, and say once again, we are the Episcopal Church. This is an important distinction, because the Episcopal Church is defined in the Preamble to the Constitution and Canons of the Church, as being in Communion with the See of Canterbury, and I cite:

*“... The Episcopal Church (which name is hereby recognized as also designating the Church), is a constituent member of the Anglican Communion, a Fellowship within the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church, of those duly constituted Dioceses, Provinces, and regional Churches in communion with the See of Canterbury, upholding and propagating the historic Faith and Order as set forth in the Book of Common Prayer.”* [Constitution and Canons of General Convention 2003].

At the moment, if you are not a part of the Episcopal Church, then you are not in Communion with the See of Canterbury. You will note, none of the dioceses, Network or otherwise, has made this separation. Each is careful to maintain clarity as to the fact they are a part of the Episcopal Church and intend to remain such.

This leads me to some items that have been raised with me.

Several bishops, and in some cases Standing Committees, have issued a request for “alternative Primatial oversight.” This raises the question as to why I haven’t done likewise. It is important to note in each of these cases the Bishop and/or Standing Committee has asked for this, and therein it rests. In none of these cases has the diocese as yet, through the action of diocesan convention, made this request formal. Until such time, it rests as a request without endorsement. One of the things that I have held up before this diocese, and this being from the onset of my episcopate here, is that I do not act unilaterally on issues that effect the entire diocese. There is a canonical process for this, and it is our diocesan convention.

The question has been raised about why I have not added my signature to the letter of the approximately twenty bishops that stated their disassociation with the actions of the most recent General Convention. The reason for this was the fact they incorporated the action that some of them had taken at the 2003 General Convention, and as I was not a part of that previous action, it did not seem appropriate.

I did however, take the same action as they did, and this was reported in my Pastoral Letter of June 26, and distributed or read in all of the congregations on the 2nd of this month. Following their statement, I rose independently and expressed publicly to the Chair that I *“was disappointed with the process and dismissive manner, and was disassociating myself from the actions of GC 2006 that were not compliant with the Windsor Report.”*

While on the subject of signing things, I will share now, for I know that it will be raised later, and this has to do with the current actions against the Bishop of San Joaquin, Bishop

John-David Schofield, and the retired Bishop Suffragan of Maryland, Bishop William Cox. Was I to be inclined to sign documents that were in support of, or opposition to, I can't, for I sit as member of the Court of Review of the Trial of a Bishop. I was elected to a nine-year term on this body at the General Convention in 2000, and was I to do anything that would align me with one side or the other, I would have to recuse myself should anything be carried this far through the ecclesiastical court system. This of course would provide for a shift in the representation on the Court.

Lastly, the question has been raised about me becoming a "Network Bishop." The response to this remains as it has for the past many years with respect to any organization that represents a particular element of the Church. As shared on several occasions, and I repeat, I made a conscious decision when ordained some twenty-six years ago, not to affiliate with any group outside of the official action of the Episcopal Church or Anglican Communion. This decision having been reaffirmed seven years ago when I became a Bishop of the Church. The decision of which I speak is directly related to my understanding of ordination within the context of Apostolic order, and this being that God called me to serve the entire church, not portions. The Holy Spirit, through the people of Western Louisiana, called me to be the Bishop for all who make up the fabric of this portion of God's vineyard.

In conjunction with this, permit me to share a concern that I have with this notion of "labels." One of the dangers that I see in this is that we can be so caught up in our endeavors to identify whom we feel people are, that we lose sight of the fact that we are called to be the Body of Christ. Yes, as Paul wrote to the people of Ephesus, "... *one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all.*" [Ephesians 4:5-6]

I am not identified as a "Network Bishop," but rather a "Windsor Bishop," and this being brought about by my stand and support for the acceptance of the Windsor Report as has been delivered to us by the Anglican Consultative Council and Archbishop of Canterbury. The label that has been placed upon me provides basically the same recognition as that of the Network Bishops, and yes, I did meet with them and other Windsor Bishops during our time in Columbus, Ohio. But the important thing to me is that regardless of "label," I am seeking to be a faithful Bishop to the whole of God's people in this place. Thus, while some may disagree with my stand on some issues, and yes, for me to disagree with theirs, I am very much aware of my responsibility as the Bishop of this entire diocese, and the charge to provide pastoral and spiritual care. Paramount to this is in upholding the teachings of the Church as handed down through the ages.

It is important to say, that none of these things led to my invitation to meet with the Archbishop of Canterbury in May of this year, but rather, the fact that I brought a voice to the table that represented those who were not only endeavoring to be faithful to the authority of Scripture, but seeking to help find a way forward for the Church and the Anglican Communion.

My position with respect to not consenting to the election and consecration of practicing gays and lesbians to the episcopate remains as it did leading up to the 2003 General Convention. As was stated during the election process here in 2002, and reaffirmed several

times since, my opposition to the ordination of active gay and lesbian persons to the diaconate or priesthood, and the blessing of same-gender unions has not changed. The previously issued directive to the clergy that this will not take place during my episcopacy in Western Louisiana continues.

It is most important to note however, as the Body of Christ in this place, we have a responsibility to exercise Christian charity to all of God's people, and in doing such, to provide a welcoming and engaging setting for all who enter in. In keeping with our Baptismal Covenant, and to draw upon the words of the Windsor Report, the expectation "that is laid upon all Christians to respond with love and understanding to people of all sexual orientations." As your Bishop, I cannot express strongly enough that anything less than this is not acceptable.

Obviously my position on ordination and blessings places me at odds with not only the present Presiding Bishop, but also the Presiding Bishop-elect. Many are aware that in her capacity as Bishop of Nevada, Bishop Jefferts Schori not only consented to the election of the Bishop of New Hampshire, but has also permitted the clergy of the Diocese of Nevada the freedom to provide for the blessings of same-gender unions. I cannot and will not support this action. Nor can I support the position of the some twenty Bishops that declared they will continue to permit the ordination and blessings of gay and lesbian persons regardless of the action taken by our General Convention. This attitude is not going to provide for a way forward for the Episcopal Church as we now know it, and as has been said before, I will not compromise my faith and relationship with Jesus Christ in order to facilitate this.

This leads me to the heart of what myself and many others feel is the way forward, and this is the Windsor Report. The action of our just completed General Convention fell short of providing the response that was being sought, and this is strongly implied by Archbishop Williams.

On June 27, 2006 a thoughtful pastoral and theological statement was provided by the Archbishop of Canterbury. Entitled "*The Challenge and Hope of Being an Anglican Today*," this piece is well worth your attention. I would trust that as a part of our shared work leading toward our own diocesan convention and beyond, that clergy and laity alike will give prayerful time for reflection and study to the Windsor Report and this document in your respective congregations.

Do not let me lead you into thinking the General Convention didn't provide some positive responses to the Windsor Report, for we did. But the critical point, as shared in my Pastoral Letter of June 26, was in our failure in not expressing "*regret for the action of the 74th General Convention and subsequent consequences; for the establishment of a moratorium on electing or consecrating a person that was living in a non-celibate relationship with a person of the same gender; and to also place a moratorium on same-sex blessings.*" Rather, the resolution passed (B033) calls for restraint to be exercised in the consent process for Bishops, and fails to address the matter of same-sex blessings.

These were two critical components of the response being sought, and as Archbishop Williams stated in his address given to the General Synod of the Church of England on July 7, 2006, it *“has become plain, the resolutions of Convention overall leave a number of unanswered questions, and there needs to be some careful disentangling of what they say and what they don’t say. This work is to be carried forward by a small group already appointed before Convention by the Joint Standing Committee of the Primates and the Anglican Consultative Council,”* and a final resolution brought forth by the Primates at their meeting in February.

And for now, what do we as a diocese need to do?

This is something that I have prayed and prayed and prayed about, and share with you at this time, and that is the importance for us as a diocese to accept and endorse the Windsor Report as has been delivered to us. The need for us to make a statement as a diocese, together with your Bishop, is important in order to remain a constituent part of the Anglican Communion in communion with the See of Canterbury.

We do not know the response that will ultimately come to us from the wider Communion, but we do know that the Episcopal Church as currently defined by the Constitution and Canons, is that which will be recognized as being in Communion with the See of Canterbury, and in turn the Anglican Communion.

Personally, I will remain, as described by Archbishop Rowan Williams, recognized by the wider Church, the Anglican Communion, and it is my intention for us to go forward together as a diocese in this relationship. The Archbishop and Anglican Consultative Council has placed a responsible process before us, and it is important for all of us in the days ahead to live into this. As he stated in his “reflections,” *“... the process currently going forward of assessing our situation in the wake of the General Convention is a shared one.”*

Now, it is with a heavy heart that I remind you of that which I have shared before, I cannot identify with, nor support, the national leadership of the church and the direction in which they have and continue to take the church, for they have chosen to *“walk apart.”* Therefore, as we look ahead to the response to come, it will be important for us as a diocese to seek to follow the process that will ensure our place and recognition, as constituent members of the Anglican Communion, in communion with the See of Canterbury.

In closing, please know it is an honor to serve our Lord and his people as a Bishop of the Episcopal Church, and as Bishop of Western Louisiana; to be a Bishop that shares in a relationship with the Anglican Communion, and the See of Canterbury; and that I intend to remain such. In keeping with the vows and commitment made at ordination, I am mindful that my role as a Bishop of the Church Catholic is *“to guard the faith, unity, and discipline of the Church”* ... and to be *“a faithful pastor and wholesome example for the entire flock of Christ.”* [BCP p.517] I am also mindful of the words offered at my consecration as I received the Bible, *“Receive the Holy Scriptures. Feed the flock of Christ*

*committed to your charge, guard and defend them in his truth, and be a faithful steward of his holy Word and Sacraments.” [BCP p.521]*

May we as a diocese, be led by the Holy Spirit to continued faithfulness in the proclamation of the Gospel as handed down to us through the Apostles, and as Paul wrote to the Ephesians, “*not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is ...*” [Ephesians 5:17] May we hold the Archbishop of Canterbury, and those with whom he seeks counsel, in our prayers in the days ahead.

Yes, my brothers and sisters in Christ, we are Easter people, resurrection people, and as the author of Hebrews has placed before us, we are people “*living in faith with hope ...*” and “*faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.*” [Hebrews 11:1-3]

Faithfully in the Risen, Living Lord,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "D. Bruce MacPherson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial 'D'.

The Rt. Rev'd D. Bruce MacPherson, D.D.  
III Bishop of Western Louisiana