

A Pastoral Letter from
The Rt. Rev'd D. Bruce MacPherson
III Bishop of Western Louisiana

September 27, 2007

Please read at all services on the weekend of September 29-30, 2007. In addition to reading, this may also be reproduced and distributed. [Canon III.12.3(b) Constitution and Canons of General Convention 2006].

A response and reflections on the House of Bishops meeting
[September 19-25, 2007 New Orleans, Louisiana]

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

A week and a half ago Susan and I set out for New Orleans and the advent of the House of Bishops meeting. This gathering has been in the thoughts and prayers of many since March of this year when the bishops of the Church made their initial response to the Communique issued by the Primates. I know, and will say at the outset, there are varying views amongst people across the Church as to the response and outcome of this important meeting, and I speak to this a little later in this letter.

We went to this meeting with the knowledge of being held in prayer by so very many across our diocese and places beyond, and we are grateful. We went knowing the weight that rested upon the work of the bishops and the ultimate statement that would be made. As we travelled, the scripture passage from Joshua 24:15 kept coming to mind, “... *as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.*”

For Joshua, it was a declaration that would set the tone for those who shared in the story of Israel's life in its land. Pausing for a moment and looking back at the path taken by Joshua, we find that his book simplifies what was not only a long, but also complex process, by which the Israelites settled in Canaan. The history of their battles and struggles prevail over the course of twenty-two chapters, and then lead us into the concluding two chapters. It is in these concluding verses that we discover the loyalty of the Israelites to their God who has given them the land they now occupy.

A careful reading of the book in its entirety will reveal that the affirmation of God's purpose for Israel was served even by the difficulties and evil that were encountered, but more important, for you and for me it serves as a vehicle to lead us to an understanding of obedience to God, and in whose image we are created.

As shared some time back, the passage “... *as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.*”

is simply stated, yet expresses the focus that Susan and I have shared as we have sought to live out our lives in faithfulness before, and for, the Lord.

In reading Joshua's declaration there is no doubt as to what is intended. He has gathered all of the people together, reviewed with them the gracious acts of God toward them down through history, and then challenges them to choose whom they will worship – the God of all creation or other gods. They concur with him and in turn enter into a solemn covenant with one another and God. Down through the years, and to this day, life is always confronting us with choices and alternatives. We have a choice – God or the worldly things which surround us.

It was with this on my heart and mind that I entered the city of New Orleans. My prayer was that we would enter into a solemn covenant with God through the response that we would make as bishops of the Church.

Our time over the many days was spent sharing in Bible study with the Archbishop of Canterbury and others, worship, closed executive sessions, and at times with business being conducted with the media present.

A highlight for many was on Saturday, September 22, when most of the bishops and spouses spent the day in either Mississippi or the New Orleans area, doing hurricane relief work. Due to the condition of my knee, and the fact that I was on a crutch, Susan and I signed up to go and work in the kitchen of the Cathedral making sandwiches for those who were labouring in the field. This unfortunately didn't work out as they assigned us to go and work on a building site. The vision of me endeavouring to hang sheet rock while balanced on a crutch dissuaded us.

With this background, permit me now to speak to the larger, and more important picture, the response of the bishops of The Episcopal Church to the Primate's Communique. In the course of the week a portion of our time was shared with the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Most Rev'd Rowan D. Williams, and with some members of the Joint Standing Committee of the Anglican Consultative Council. I would not be honest if I didn't share that the week was intense, and the conversation for the most part, quite serious. I was taken a bit in our early conversations to find a number of bishops, whom have most often tended to disagree with me, expressing concern about the outcome of the meeting and our ongoing relationship within the Anglican Communion and with the See of Canterbury. These expressions were built upon by a number of them, and particularly following the presentations made by the Archbishop and some of the members of the Joint Standing Committee.

As a part of his time with us, the Archbishop shared his concern about the direction of the Church as it relates to our ecclesiology. I personally felt he was speaking with a sense of deep concern and pastoral care. The Joint Standing Committee, represented by both lay and ordained members, as did the Archbishop, spent time in conversation with us formally and informally. When each of them addressed the gathering, they demonstrated great candor while being gracious. Their messages were to the point, and they were uniform in their expressed feeling that The Episcopal Church needs the Anglican Communion, and the Anglican Communion needs The Episcopal Church. Underscoring this however, was the fact that we, The Episcopal Church, cannot be implementing change without regard to the effect it has on the wider Communion.

The message that was delivered to us was clear: the Communion wants more from us than was offered in Resolution B033 (General Convention 2006), and it needs to be unequivocally so. As I listened to each of the speakers and the message of desired clarity, I honestly could not help but feel the resolution submitted by the Windsor bishops addressed their concerns exactly. Unfortunately though, not only our resolution, but the resolution submitted jointly by the Bishop of Louisiana in concert with the Bishops of Los Angeles and Washington, which was a modified version of the Windsor bishop's resolution, were not able to get to the floor. It was the posture of the House to have a writing committee that had been appointed, take these documents and draw upon them in the development of the statement of response.

This committee repeatedly brought drafts to the House for consideration in executive sessions, and in each case the contents were debated. I can assure you, every effort was made to produce a document that contained the Windsor compliant language of the Windsor bishops proposed resolution. Sadly, the effort was in vain.

The final document has left frustration on both sides of the aisle, and basically states the following:

“We reconfirm that Resolution B033 (General Convention 2006) that bishops and Standing Committees exercise restraint by not consenting to the consecration of any candidate to the episcopate whose manner of life presents a challenge to the wider church and will lead to further strains on the Communion.”

“We pledge as a body not to authorize public rites for the blessing of same-sex unions.”

“We commend our Presiding Bishop's plan for episcopal visitors.”

“We support the Presiding Bishop in seeking communion-wide consultation in a manner that is in accord with our Constitution and Canons.”

“We call for increasing implementation of the listening process across the Communion and for a report on its progress to Lambeth 2008.”

“We support the Archbishop of Canterbury in his expressed desire to explore ways for the Bishop of New Hampshire to participate in the Lambeth Conference.”

“We call for unequivocal and active commitment to the civil rights, safety and dignity of gay and lesbian persons.”

For those who have read the Communique and the Windsor Report, you will note this fails to respond clearly to that which has been asked of us. My disappointment with the above is that it falls short of providing the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Joint Standing Committee of the Anglican Consultative Council, and the Primates of the Communion with the response they sought with respect to definitive clarity.

As many are aware, the document was approved by the House of Bishops with one dissenting vote, and this coming from one of the more progressive bishops. As to my personal action, I sat mute, and in doing so, supported this work. Should I have been vocal at this stage, yes, but I failed to do so and take responsibility for my silence.

Where will we go from here? This will be determined by the response that will be made by the Archbishop, Joint Standing Committee and Primates, and the direction we take in living out the faith that has been entrusted to us, and the proclamation of the Gospel as we fulfill the mission of the Church, and this is in the *“Making of Disciples: restoring all people to unity with God and*

each other in Christ.” I pray the response will come in time for our Diocesan Convention on October 12-13 at the Holiday Inn Convention Centre Hotel in Alexandria.

It is important to note, we have accomplished much toward this end with our reconciliation and healing work over this past year; our unwillingness to be distracted from the ministry to which God has called us and to which we have responded with great commitment. Those participating in this endeavour spoke clearly as to what the expressed desire is – faithful submission to the will of God; maintaining a focus on the Gospel and the mission of the church; respecting one another and our differences, and being a continuing part of The Episcopal Church as a constituent member of the Anglican Communion in communion with the See of Canterbury. I pray that we, as the Diocese of Western Louisiana, will continue to focus on these things as we move forward together in the days ahead.

In closing, permit me to end with that which I began, “... *as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.*” This has not changed, and my prayer is that while not having changed, I trust there has been growth in my faith and relationship with Christ. Although I failed to speak out at the time of the final vote, I remain committed to the Windsor Report and in being the Bishop of a Windsor compliant diocese. My position with respect to the requests of the Primate’s Communique has not changed and I will continue to work toward the development of the Anglican Covenant.

As your bishop, I am committed to ministering to the whole of God’s people in this diocese, and ensuring that we live with fullness into our Baptismal Covenant. To do this, I need your help and prayers and trust you know of my prayers for each of you.

“O God, by whom the meek are guided in judgment, and light rises up in darkness for the godly: Grant us, in all our doubts and uncertainties, the grace to ask what you would have us do, that the Spirit of wisdom may save us from all false choices, and that in your light we may see light, and in your straight path may not stumble; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.” [BCP p.832]

Faithfully offered in the love of Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+D Mice". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'D' and 'M'.

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