

August 6, 2008

TO: The Diocese of West Texas

FROM: Bishops Lillibridge and Reed

RE: Lambeth Reflections

We want to take a few moments to reflect with you on the recently concluded Lambeth Conference and give you some of our impressions of the conference as well as life in the Anglican Communion. We urge you to visit the Lambeth Conference pages on the diocesan website (www.dwtx.org) where you can read the Archbishop of Canterbury's final address to the bishops and the document written by the Reflections Group that compiled the reports from the Indaba groups in which the bishops participated. Reading both of these documents will give you a broader sense of the conference than we can summarize in the remarks below.

The Lambeth Conference was centered around two themes: *Equipping Bishops for Mission* and *Strengthening Anglican Identity*. Both of us feel that we are better equipped for our ministry as your bishops as a result of this conference. We also feel that Anglican identity was strengthened, even while we acknowledge this is an ongoing challenge for the Communion in its various complexities. We completely agree with the statement of the Reflections Group that "written words can never adequately describe the life-changing nature of our time together. We have gained a deeper appreciation of the worldwide Anglican Communion and of our common calling as disciples of Christ." We want to thank you, the Diocese of West Texas, for making it possible for us to attend this conference and grow both in our personal faith and in our ministry with you.

The breadth and depth of the Communion was evident from the first day. Through our Bible study groups, the Indaba groups, corporate worship, fellowship opportunities, and conversations over meals, we came to see the richness of our Communion. We also came to a deeper understanding of the challenges that many of our brothers and sisters face on a daily basis. Some of these challenges are centered in poverty and in the basics of life such as food, water, shelter, and safety. Other challenges are centered in places where proclaiming Jesus as Lord is met with extreme hostility and life threatening danger for Christians. These are stories of extreme hardship, Godly perseverance, terrible tragedy, and in some cases, great blessing.

There was no getting away from the reality that the Anglican Communion is at a very important point in its life as a global community. The challenge that was very apparent to both of us is the juxtaposition of "thinking globally" and "acting locally." This was true for everyone present, and it means that while we are a global family, local conditions and contexts vary widely -- in some places, so widely that we wonder where common ground may be found.

Certainly the “fault lines” in the Communion were visible. The Windsor Continuation Group, of which Bishop Lillibridge is a member, reinforced the need to observe the three moratoria called for by the Windsor Report. The WCG also proposed the formation of a Pastoral Forum at the Communion level to engage theologically and practically with situations of controversy in these difficult days. The WCG also suggested the consideration of a type of “escrow” situation in which existing ad hoc jurisdictions could be held “in trust” while differences are worked out. In addition, the idea of an Anglican Covenant was “sounded out” by the Covenant Design Group. While no votes were taken at the conference, the sense of the Reflections Group and the Archbishop of Canterbury is that these proposals were favorably received by a majority of the bishops present and will receive ongoing development and consideration as the Communion moves forward.

The bishops affirmed Jesus Christ as the Word of God, that the Holy Scriptures are central to our life together, and that the historic creeds are faithful and sufficient statements of the essentials of the biblical witness. On one level, these things should be taken for granted by the Church, and on another level these need to be reaffirmed in light of the current controversies facing the Communion.

It is apparent to us, and to many, that the current “Instruments of Communion” need to be revisited as to their role in the Communion. We wonder if these “instruments” are adequate in addressing the needs of the Communion in a world faced with rapid changes and globalization. For example, in a world of instant communication, how can a conference of bishops that meets every ten years even begin to address the challenges of a complex church and world? There are other questions about the various instruments that need to be seriously considered if we are going to be able to effectively minister as a family of churches committed to expanding the witness of Jesus Christ.

We noted with sadness the absence of many of the bishops of the Communion. Some who had attended GAFCON in June were present, others were not. We are grateful for the Archbishop’s statement recognizing the “need to look for the best ways of building bridges here.” Healing and reconciliation is the goal for all of our Communion, not simply parts of it.

In the days ahead, the Joint Standing Committee of Primates and the Anglican Consultative Council will meet in November, the Archbishop will call for a Primates Meeting in early 2009, and the Covenant Design Group will continue their work. In the next two months the Archbishop will address ways of identifying detailed specifications for the Pastoral Forum, and the Anglican Consultative Council meets in May of 2009.

We, your bishops, are also aware of the danger of “waiting for another meeting.” There is much life and ministry in West Texas and it is our desire to focus on strengthening God’s Kingdom here and now. Rather than simply looking toward another gathering to define our life, we hope that you will join us in seeing that while the larger life of the Communion is an ongoing process, the life of the Church is always a matter of

urgency. We should rejoice in our calling to be this branch of Christ's body in South Texas.

Did Lambeth solve all (or any) of the problems facing the Communion? No. Could it have? No. Do we wish it could have strengthened the Communion in more specific ways? Yes. Was it worth it? If you think that gathering over 600 bishops together to pray, worship, and center ourselves in God's word revealed through the Gospel of John as we seek to be better Christians, stronger servants, and more effective leaders is worth it, then "yes." Do we have deep concerns about the future of the Communion? Yes. Do we believe that God wants the Anglican Communion's witness? Yes. Are we without hope? Certainly not.

It will take time to see how the various aspects of Lambeth move forward and impact our common life. In the September issue of the Church News, we will have additional thoughts on our Lambeth experience, but it seemed important to send you these early reflections so that you might have a sense of what we experienced over the past several weeks. Again, we urge you to visit the website pages mentioned at the beginning of this report so that you might read for yourself the summaries offered of the conference.

We are committed to doing our part to strengthen the Communion, and hope that you will join us in this Godly work. Thank you again for the opportunity to represent you to the wider Church, and for your many and constant words of encouragement and prayer.