

The Diocese of Fredericton
Response to the Windsor Report

February 1, 2005

"Holy Father, keep in your name those you have given me, that they may be one, as we are one." -St. John 17:11b



Jesus prayed that all his disciples might be joined in a unity of mutual love, a unity reflecting the very life of God the Holy Trinity. The mandate of the Lambeth Commission on Communion, to recommend ways to repair and enhance the unity of an increasingly fractured family of churches was a difficult one. We in the Diocese of Fredericton are thankful for the commission's efforts in mapping a way forward in difficult times.

It is good that we have been reminded that the nature of the church is, as described in the writings of St. Paul, an "anticipatory sign of God's healing and restorative future for the world" (Ephesians) and that every Christian is called to be a saint, using his or her God-given gifts to build up the unity of the body (1 Corinthians). It is equally good that we have been reminded of the foundational place of scripture in the life and teaching of the Anglican Communion, and that interpretation of scripture will be the starting point of any healing within our communion and the source of future unity.

The identification of differing views of what it means to be holy as the source of our present unhappy divisions is also important. It is important because while the fulfilling of the mandate of the commission is vital and fundamental to our future life as a communion, the commission's emphatic reminder that they were not asked to "comment or make recommendations on the theological and ethical matters concerning the practice of same sex relations and the blessing or ordination or consecration of those who engage in them," (para. 43) is a poignant reminder that whatever practical solutions are adopted by those receiving their recommendations, can be of a temporary nature only. Sooner or later the doctrinal and disciplinary matters that have vexed us for the past four decades will have to be thought through. We commend our Primate and other Canadian bishops for setting this task before our theological commission.

The establishment of a process by which differences of opinion can be arbitrated, within a "covenanted church" will, it is to be hoped, address the present crisis in the short term, and we pray for its success. At the same time, we reiterate that this process cannot address the long term difficulties of our communion. The defining of an Anglican doctrinal position, taking into account not only what makes us part of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church (scripture, creeds, Fathers, etc.), but also those documents that make us Anglicans (Book of Common Prayer, ordinal, articles, Lambeth Quadrilateral,

etc.), is essential to our future unity as a communion. And it is only if our bishops, the Archbishop of Canterbury in particular, acting through the Instruments of Unity, are guided by these foundational documents, that there can be true unity in our communion. The interpretation of scripture is, of course, most important, and it is essential that it be interpreted within the tradition, which, even within the report itself, does not seem to be the case. The use of the term regret in the commissioners' urging of those who have violated bonds of affection within our communion rather than repentance, we see as unfortunate.

It must be said that the redefinition of the term autonomous and the optimistic description of the process of reception as described in the Windsor Report, are problematic. It would appear that a new ecclesiology, isolating the Anglican Communion from its Roman and Orthodox sister churches, is emerging. If we are truly committed to the unity for which our Lord prayed, it must be the unity of all Christian people, for which we strive.

Also problematic is the seeming reduction of doctrinal and disciplinary differences between national churches to differences in culture. The hope that churches in the "global south" and those in the "west" will come to see their differences in terms of the "inculturation" of the faith in their particular part of the world is not only overly optimistic but also may be seen as trivializing genuine theological differences.

Practically speaking, there is no indication that either the doctrine of reception or the cultural explanation of differences will work given the hardening of positions. Theologically, we are not convinced that these solutions should work, in relation to the issues causing our disunity.

What we must seek, in the long run, is not a unity in which differences are given a veneer of culturally or sociologically based justification, but one that is rooted in scripture, as interpreted by tradition, using the God given gift of reason, to draw us into the life of the Holy Trinity. It is this reasonableness, once the hallmark of Anglicanism, that must be recovered, to prevent the continued willfulness that has characterized developments in the Anglican communion for the last half century.

Again, we commend the commissioners for their work on behalf of us all, and commit ourselves to the process they have outlined, until the important issues of doctrine and discipline that underlie our divisions, can be resolved.

Bishop of Fredericton
On behalf of the Diocesan Response Task Force