

Presiding Bishop Frank Griswold to the Primates

May 5, 2004

***For the Primates of the Anglican Communion***

My dear brothers,

Grace to you and peace in our risen Savior Jesus Christ.

I find myself, in these days of Easter in which we contemplate the mystery of the resurrection and its consequences in our lives, living with a sharp awareness of the reality of our being bound together in the Lord because of our baptism into the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And, that being thus bound we are called to share one another's sufferings as well as joys. Over these months I have been deeply grieved that recent events in the life of the Episcopal Church in the United States have caused suffering for many of you. I am very clear that what occurred is in accord with our Constitution and is widely regarded as a faithful action. However, as your brother I am profoundly sorry for the wound this has caused within our body.

As I have said many times to the bishops of the Episcopal Church and to others, what we do in one part of the Communion can have significant consequences elsewhere. I remember vividly when we were together last October at Lambeth hearing from some of you about finding yourselves ridiculed and made a laughing stock because of your association with the Episcopal Church. I completely understand why some of you have spoken so harshly about what has occurred here. At the same time, many of us who love you deeply in the Lord are profoundly saddened that our fellowship is so severely strained, and in some cases appears to be broken.

I pray that in spite of our differences, serious as they are, we can discover together in this difficult time the truth of what we said in our statement of last October that "what we hold in common is much greater than that which divides us in proclaiming Good News to the world." The prayer of my heart is that we can discover anew our unity in service to God's mission through these difficulties. Our world, which is so burdened by poverty, disease and civil strife, is much in need of our common witness and action.

I regret that this communication is through a letter rather than a conversation. I hope we as primates will encourage ongoing conversations at all levels between people of our various provinces. I do believe that as we explore what we share across our differences we rediscover our common ground in service to God's continuing work of reconciliation. In conversation our differences do not disappear. Instead we find ourselves grounded upon the rock of Christ whose deathless love is able to transform our mistrust and woundedness into mutual care and affection.

It is my deepest sense that we have much to learn from one another, particularly as we seek to proclaim the gospel in our often very different contexts. The visits I have been privileged to make to several of your provinces have certainly made that very plain, and I have come away with an enlarged and deeper sense of how God is acting in this world to save us all from the power of sin and death.

On another matter, I want to share with you the response of the bishops of the Episcopal Church to the concern expressed in our Lambeth statement of last October that there be "adequate provision for episcopal oversight of dissenting minorities within their own area of pastoral care in consultation with the Archbishop of Canterbury on behalf of the Primates." The bishops of the Episcopal Church are called to be chief pastors for all people in their dioceses. They have continued to shape a plan for pastoral care which they first put forward in 2002. They have addressed how bishops with different perspectives, overseeing dioceses in which there are varying points of view, can bear one another's burdens and uphold one another's ministries for the sake of the gospel and its proclamation. When we met in March of this year we further refined our plan, which was then agreed to by an overwhelming majority. It is set forth in the enclosed document: Caring for all the churches.

I am in conversation with a number of bishops, whose theological perspectives meet the pastoral needs of "dissenting minorities," about making themselves available to provide episcopal oversight at the invitation of the diocesan bishop. As well, I know of several instances where diocesan bishops have arranged or are about to arrange for Delegated Episcopal Pastoral Oversight.

Key to what we are trying to do at this time is the shared understanding of our bishops that an episcopal ministry of care and oversight is not a personal possession of any one bishop but is shared by all bishops for the well being of the church as a whole.

Please pray for us as we pray for you in these days that challenge us all in the various contexts in which the Lord has placed us.

This comes, as ever, with my love and prayers,

The Most Rev. Frank T. Griswold

Presiding Bishop and Primate

The Episcopal Church, USA