



July 16, 2004

The Reverend Canon Gregory Cameron  
Commission Secretary  
Lambeth Commission  
Anglican Communion

Dear Most Reverend Sir and Members of the Commission:

The members of Via Media USA (VMUSA) are appreciative of your invitation to add our voice to the many you have already heard. We are also appreciative that you have posted so much of the received material on your website. We will briefly share our experience and position with you.

Via Media USA was formed in March 2004 as an alliance of twelve groups from eleven dioceses with strong ties to the emerging "Network of Anglican Communion Dioceses and Parishes." Each VMUSA group formed out of its deep love for the Episcopal Church and the conviction that the calls for realignment and punitive action against the Episcopal Church were disproportionate and inappropriate as responses to General Convention 2003.

VMUSA's allied groups are made up of the full spectrum of positions within the Episcopal Church. There are those who oppose the decision made to confirm Bishop Robinson and those who welcome the decision as a courageous acknowledgment of what has long been a matter of secret practice. But, as an organization, we have taken no position on the confirmation. What unites us across our many individual beliefs is Unity itself. All of us are committed to working to keep everyone at the table because we continue to believe that what we share is far greater than what separates us.

VMUSA believes that the *via media* is a powerful part of our Anglican heritage: not a "compromise for the sake of peace," but, as the collect for the feast of Richard Hooker reads, "a comprehension for the sake of truth." We embrace our heritage of the middle way, which has found a generous and charitable path to unity based upon our deepest values, even in times of bitter controversy. We hope that the Commission will help us, along with all Anglicans, find the *via media* in this moment of controversy.

Finding the *via media* requires that all parties step back from the use of combative language and from precipitate action, especially threats and ultimatums, in order to sit at table with one another. We hear cries of pain and hurt, but the truth is that when they are cloaked with threats, there is almost no chance to resolve the most important question of whether or not people of the same faith can abide with each other through their differences. VMUSA trusts that everyone, in this moment of controversy, believes in and loves Jesus and is seeking to serve him as their hearts, minds, and spirits direct. We would hope that, as the Commission seeks to find the highest level of possible communion we might share, it might start with such an affirmation.

The Commission's mandate rightly acknowledges this extraordinary moment in the life of the Communion. There is no formulated, agreed upon international polity for our Communion; indeed, there is no process in place for formulating polity, much less for defining policy. A policy may well be needed now, and VMUSA believes that a call to create an international polity could be a forum for a lively and vigorous discussion among the provinces of the Communion. However, at the moment, there is simply no structure for adjudication of this sort of dispute.

We believe that the formation of an international polity is most properly framed as a discussion about unity, akin to the one that brought forth the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral. Everyone must be at the table to ask, among other things: What are the essentials of the faith that must be believed to be

Christian? How do reason, scripture, and tradition work together to provide authoritative decisions? How will we bring into harmony the issues that derive from our multiplicity of cultures and their particular challenges? How will we respect our differences in our forms of internal polity, some provinces embracing the laity in decision-making and some not? How will we hold one another accountable? Who will judge whether we have done so effectively? We have, of course, our own Richard Hooker's *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* as a foundation for such a discussion. Richard Hooker's work is every bit as relevant to this time of controversy as it was in the latter sixteenth century.

The present atmosphere, however, is the worst possible one for making international polity. In the absence of any polity, making one in reaction to specific incidents is counterproductive in the long run. The actions of the US and Canadian Churches may have pushed us to this place, but a reactive single-issue polity decision will not move us to the larger discussion we must have. VMUSA entreats the Commission not to fall prey to the passions of the moment, but to create a process to discuss the deeper issues outlined above, rather than rehashing precipitating events. We would invite the leaders of those who feel aggrieved, especially those who feel aggrieved on behalf of God, to offer leadership by emulating Christ's sacrificial love. We believe that a non-anxious, loving, and encouraging witness best exemplifies Christ's own ministry and would allow the enmities now present to be shed.

Finally, we believe that a clear statement on the validity of sacraments in disputed times should be developed. It is God who makes and protects sacraments, with even the best of us little more than damaged vessels for their delivery. Anglicans have always based their identity and sense of unity within their worship, and VMUSA believes that this is still a powerful place from which to grow and renew. Through celebration of the Eucharist, we separate ourselves from the world for a time to come into God's presence. We hear the witness of our ancestors and apply it to the present moment. We pray for our needs and shortcomings, and we repent of our sins. We are forgiven, and we are at peace. We walk again amidst God's mighty acts, and we participate in his last supper as his brothers and sisters. In receiving his body and blood, we are in Communion – that is, in unity with God and one another. Finally, we are sent into the world to serve God utilizing our particular gifts. In the end, there is unity whether we acknowledge it or not.

VMUSA hopes and trusts that Lambeth will help us find the sacramental route through this field of controversy. We, who represent the broadest spectrum of people in the Episcopal Church, know that this is possible in our small fellowship, and therefore possible in larger ones. You are constantly in our prayers.

Yours Faithfully,

Via Media USA

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