

Bishop-elect Tom Breidenthal
March 23, 2007

I have just returned from the House of Bishops' meeting at Camp Allen. It is the House's generous custom to invite bishops-elect who have received the necessary number of consents to participate in the meeting with voice (not vote). I felt welcomed into this body and was highly impressed by the collegiality, mutual respect and affection that marked both the public discussion and our informal daily interactions.

It was also a delight to see Bishop Price in action as Secretary of the House. I am grateful to him for helping me navigate the ins and outs of life in the fellowship of bishops.

Most of you will by now be familiar with the actions taken by the House of Bishops at this meeting. These actions, which I endorse, boil down to the following: (1) the rejection of a proposal by the Primates to create a "primatial vicar" for the Episcopal Church; (2) a reaffirmation of the House's commitment not to act independently of the House of Deputies or the Executive Council; (3) the expression of grave concern over the Communiqué's failure to address violence against gay and lesbian persons and the criminalization of homosexuality in many nations with a strong Anglican presence; and (4) a request to meet as soon as possible with the Archbishop of Canterbury and the standing committee of the Primates.

For a full explanation of these actions, please refer to the House of Bishops Message to the People of God, printed in full in this *Interchange* and accessible via the link provided on the diocesan home page. What I want to do here is to give you my perspective.

To begin with, it is very important to note that the House of Bishops is not backing off from its commitment to this Church's full participation in the Anglican Communion. Nobody wants to see the worldwide Anglican fellowship unravel. There is general concern among our bishops, however, that the character of the Episcopal Church as an autonomous national church would be compromised if we allowed our internal affairs to be governed from outside. My impression is that this concern was shared by bishops across the board, whatever their views on the blessing of same-sex unions. If our own identity and authority as an independent body is compromised, we will be impaired in our ability to engage fully and freely the issues facing the Communion, including the proper balance between autonomy and mutual accountability. The bottom line is that we take mutual accountability very seriously, and are willing to take steps to ensure a greater degree of it. But such progress must arise out of our own freedom and autonomy as a church.

The bishops' commitment to the Anglican Communion was nowhere more evident than in the passion with which they embraced the countless partnerships Anglicans are

engaged in to further the mission of Christ around the world. Some bishops pointed out that these relationships – many of them informal, all of them deeply personal – constitute the true substance of the Communion. The Anglican Communion remains essentially a grass roots movement. If that Communion is impaired at the highest level, it will surely persist on the ground. This was evidenced at a recent world summit of Anglican women, who committed to keep working together against hunger, AIDS, malaria, infant mortality and sexual violence, no matter what the Primates decided to do. Their resolve to stick together in the face of the present crisis provides a needed corrective to the claim that the Anglican Communion is in danger of falling apart. Our fellowship is and always has been voluntary, emerging out of freedom and affection at every level. I have every confidence that these bonds will remain strong and grow stronger in the months and years ahead, and I look forward to our own engagement as a diocese with our brothers and sisters around the world, as we explore the establishment of new companion relationships and hone our own approach to achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

Finally, we need to be aware that the House of Bishops did not take any action regarding the blessing of same-sex unions. There remains a wide spectrum of conviction on this issue in the House, and this divergence was repeatedly acknowledged and respected in the course of its deliberations. This does not mean that the bishops are avoiding taking on this issue directly. But they are unwilling to do so in isolation from the House of Deputies, and rightly so. If anything characterized the force and weight of this meeting, it was the bishops' insistence that the Episcopal Church must remain true to its democratic process and to the full participation of all its orders – laity, deacons, priests and bishops – in the governance of the church. I am proud of this heritage, and look forward to seeing it further lived out and modeled as we move forward together.