

Office of the Bishop
Episcopal Church Center
65 East Huron Street
Chicago, IL 60611

July 1, 2008

Dear Friends,

You may have read reports about a gathering of Anglicans recently in Jerusalem known as GAFCON, the Global Anglican Future Conference. This meeting, sponsored by bishops and primates of the Global South alliance, met despite serious misgivings of the Archbishop of Canterbury and leaders of other Anglican provinces and diocese.

A declaration issued at the end of the conference enumerates points which the organizers insist define genuine Anglicanism. Among other items, the document declares that the Thirty Nin Articles of Religion and the 1662 Book of Common Prayer are somehow definitive of orthodox Christian belief, that Anglican identity depends much less on recognition by the Archbishop of Canterbury than many assume, and that a self-selected Primates' Council should continue the practice of intervening in churches other than their own. It further asserts that in the United States, Canada and Western Europe a "false gospel" has taken the place of the true Gospel.

The Archbishop of Canterbury has responded that several of these assertions are "problematic," and I certainly agree with him. I see GAFCON and its declaration as one response to Anglicanism's continuing evolution as a living member of the Body of Christ. From the time of the Elizabethan Settlement, our church has been characterized by a generous view of what it means to practice the Christian faith. Remarkably, in a world of religious divisions and even warfare, Anglicans have been gifted by God with the capacity to tolerate quite substantial differences of theology and to find strength precisely in those differences. As one great church historian put it, our church is a pragmatic church. In contrast to confessional or experiential churches (where everyone must subscribe to the same doctrinal formulations or have the same experience), to belong to our church has meant simply doing what the church does: Proclaiming in word and action Christ crucified and risen. Our commitment to that great proclamation above all else shapes our common life.

Anglicanism is a web of living relationships. Archbishop Tutu said once that we are Anglicans because we meet! That's why the Lambeth Conference matters. That's why it's tragic that some bishops have chosen to boycott Lambeth because they disagree with other bishops. Authentic Christianity is always relational – St. Paul's theology of the Body of Christ demands nothing less than the recognition that we need each other...in spite of our differences. It demands nothing less and a very

great deal more. AS the youth theologian Peter Rollins put it, orthodoxy is not so much believing the right things as it is believing in the right way – believing by being drawn into the life of the Triune God, who is a dynamic relationship of love.

In her response to the GAFCON declaration, our Presiding Bishop Katherine Jefferts-Schori has made it clear that “Anglicans will continue to worship God in their churches, serve the hungry and needy in their communities, and build missional relationships with others across the globe, despite the desire of a few leaders to narrow the influence of the Gospel.” The Good News we have to share and proclaim cannot be contained by a manifesto or declaration that defines communion more through exclusion than inclusion. God’s love knows no limits I give thanks for our life here in the Diocese of Chicago and our capacity to transcend our differences. I rejoice that our name is given to an earlier marker of what defines authentic Anglican identity; the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral. I ask you to join with me in prayer for the unity of the church – not for unanimity on the issues of the day, but for the deep unity of love and faith that is the Holy Spirit’s gift to us if we are willing to receive it.

Faithfully in Christ,

The Rt. Rev. Jeffrey D. Lee
Bishop of Chicago