

Wednesday, July 23, 2008

Lambeth Conference II

Greetings from The Lambeth Conference:

Many of us here are talking about what is being reported in the press, both secular and religious, concerning the Lambeth Conference. Apparently, we are at each other's throats here and the Anglican Communion hangs by small thread. The reports in the press have caused me to wonder if somehow I have ended up at a Conference, which isn't the Lambeth Conference at all. My experience continues to be one of excitement and hope as I continue in conversation with other bishops and join fully in the process that is designed to strengthen bishops in discipleship and leadership as well as strengthen the Anglican Communion. I know that individuals are busy giving their opinions about what is going on here and I know that those individual opinions have the effect of increasing the anxiety of the clergy and people of God in the churches. However, to be here is to experience the peace and hope of the worldwide Anglican Communion and recognize that the vast majority of us are working at relationships which build up rather than tear down.

That said I would like to continue this communication with my experiences from Sunday to today.

The Conference liturgy at Canterbury Cathedral was most impressive. On our way into the Cathedral, protesters and the press lined the way. There was a bright spot even as we walked through a pathway of negative signs – a teen volunteer stood at the end of the line holding a small sign of his own, the sign read, "We love bishops!" I want you to know that my heart burst with pride as our Presiding Bishop entered the Cathedral near the front of the procession of the Primates. I am so pleased to be an Episcopalian. The liturgy itself including the sermon was inclusive. It gave us a glimpse of the ways in which other cultures praise and worship God.

Our work each day is in small groups and groups of up to forty. We are given assignments and "listeners" in the group report on the main themes that arise out of our discussions. The topics we address are designed to move us toward the difficult questions which are straining Communion. My experience in these groups is that all with whom I am working desire communion and are willing to listen with an understanding ear and see with the eye of faith. The atmosphere is one of cooperation and respect marked by a genuine desire to learn. Each of us is fully aware that the success of the Conference depends on our honesty, hope, and eagerness to grow. Clarity and patience mark our encounters.

Please be aware that the Conference goes beyond the interests concerning our lives together as Anglicans. It is permeated by an ecumenical presence. Bishops and

representatives from a variety of Christian faith traditions are present in the life of the Conference. It brings a reminder that the Christian faith goes beyond what it is that we ourselves represent. They join us in seeking where it is that God is leading us bringing their own unique perspectives.

One of the groups I participated in dealt with Scripture being informed by tradition and reason. We were all clear on the tradition part, however, we noted that reason was "culturally informed" and this was the root of our differences in Scriptural interpretation. Hence, the difficulties we are experiencing. When we reported back to the larger group our report was met with nods of affirmation and understanding. This is just one of many examples of the way I am experiencing the gathering working together. I have not yet met a bishop who isn't willing to work at being a single worldwide communion for the sake of common ministry.

I hope that my personal networking here will result in opportunities for us in Western Michigan to continue to broaden our opportunities for learning and ministry as part of the Worldwide Anglican Communion. I am talking with two dioceses who are interested in linking with us for mutual learning and common mission – one in Scotland and one in South Africa.

I hope that you can see and hear my excitement and hope as I engage this Conference in a way which is different than where I was before arriving here. Because of the "hype" around the Conference in the time leading up to it I was, shall we say, less than thrilled to be coming. My dread was short-lived and my hope abounds.

Please continue in your prayers for me, all those attending the Conference, and those of the Anglican Communion who are not here with us. I continue to pray for you.

Faithfully,

+ Robert