

**A statement by the Most Rev. Andrew S. Hutchison
Primate of the Anglican Church of Canada**

Now that several days have passed since the end of the Primates' Meeting in Belfast and the issuance of a communiqué that has received wide publicity, I thought that Canadian Anglicans might want to hear a bit more about the meeting, about the decisions that were made and about what those decisions will mean for the Canadian church in both the short and the long term. Where, in short, do we now find ourselves and where do we go from here?

Let's start by looking at where we are and where we are not. We still, today, have an Anglican Communion of which the Canadian and American churches are a part, and I have to say that prior to going to Belfast, I did not for a moment take this outcome for granted. There was, I believe, a real possibility that the Primates might disagree to such an extent that I would not be able to say today that we still have a communion. The fact that this did not happen is something we can be grateful for. It is also evidence that there may yet be truth to the notion that despite our difficulties in the Anglican Communion there is still more that unites us than there is that separates us. This is not to minimize the difficulties of the meeting nor the deep divisions that clearly exist in the Communion. But it is certainly worth noting that after these very difficult five days, the will emerged to find a way for us to stay together.

Our host Archbishop Robin Eames played a significant role in helping us to chart the way forward. After two days of bible study, prayer and listening, a model was presented that allowed us to take a step back and create the space necessary for further discussion and dialogue.

There are a number of key points in the communiqué that followed the meeting that I want to touch on. An important acknowledgement is the recognition that nothing that has taken place in the Canadian or American churches contravenes our constitutional process. We have done nothing that is illegal or improper.

The point that has received the widest attention is the request that the Canadian and American churches voluntarily withdraw their members from the next meeting of the Anglican Consultative Council.

The Anglican Consultative Council is one of the four instruments of unity in the Anglican Communion. The request to voluntarily withdraw is a serious step. This matter will be discussed by the House of Bishops in April and will go to the Council of General Synod in May. This is the proper procedure for us to follow. The final authority to make a decision of this importance and magnitude rests with CoGS, not with me, and not even with the House of Bishops.

Another request from the Primate's Meeting is for us (and the U.S. church) to come to the Anglican Consultative Council in June. We have been asked to make a presentation about the decisions and recent actions that have occurred in Canada and the United States. We welcome this opportunity for consultation and to help to properly acknowledge and address some of the issues around the bonds of Communion that are mentioned in section 141 of the Windsor report.

There was another section to the final communiqué that received considerably less attention than those I have just talked about which in my view is equally important. The primates recommended as a matter of urgency that the Archbishop of Canterbury

appoint a “panel of reference” effectively to ensure adequate Episcopal oversight of church members who disagree with their bishop. The Canadian church, through a near-unanimous decision at the last House of Bishops, has already done this.

It is worth noting that the Canadian church has been and continues to be the object of such “cross-boundary interventions” most notably by primates from the Global South. It is essential to the way we move forward that the Archbishop of Canterbury, by creating this panel will ensure that they stop. It is a very important sign that all of the Primates agreed, “neither to encourage nor initiate cross-boundary interventions.”

I want to say two things in conclusion. We have a difficult road ahead of us, leading up to the June meeting of the Anglican Consultative Council and beyond. We will, in prayer and with divine guidance, make the decisions that we make as a member of the Communion. The Anglican Communion is one of our contexts and a very important one. The other context, which I described to the Primates, is that we are a church in a vast and diverse country where seven provinces and one territory now recognize same-sex marriages and where the federal government is considering legislation that would do the same. That is the context in which we live.

This was, as I said at the beginning, a difficult meeting. I recognize that there is little in the final communiqué that will provide solace and encouragement to gay and lesbian members of our church. Too often we tend to forget that behind the issues and controversies that consume us, there are human faces. When this happens it is cause for distress. I ask you to continue to pray for our church as we seek the Spirit’s guidance in working towards a Communion that we all seek.