

Report of the House of Bishops

The House is composed of the Primate, the Provincial Metropolitans, diocesan, suffragan and assistant bishops. Retired bishops are welcome to attend. It is not a legislative body, but a gathering which offers an occasion for support, training and the opportunity to meet together collegially to consider matters of importance for bishops in the exercise of their ministry. Developed in 1992, the following purpose guides the House: providing an opportunity for the bishops to be afforded an environment in which they can confer together, support one another in episcopal ministry and share in the exercise of leadership.

The House meets twice in a year. Once during the triennium, a meeting includes spouses, usually immediately preceding General Synod. 1998 is an exception as General Synod takes place in the same year as the Lambeth Conference. Bishops and spouses opted to delay their gathering until 1999.

The following is a summary of the discussions and actions of the House since the last General Synod.

Continuing Education

In the last triennium, significant time was given to continuing education, and in particular to consideration of the ministry of a bishop. In the Fall of 1996, the House invited the Rev. Dr. John Simons, Principal of Montreal Diocesan College to address them on episcopacy. His theme was "What are bishops for?" At the Spring meeting in 1997, the Right Rev. Thomas Ray, Bishop of Northern Michigan, engaged the House in a discussion of "mutual ministry". He spoke of a renewal of mission and ministry which "...authentically integrates our activities in church with our life in the world of home, work and neighbourhood." In place of what he called 'minimalizing' and 'territorializing' descriptions of the historic orders of deacon, priest and bishop (a description which fixes them in terms of what they can and cannot do), he called for an "adult Christian responsibility" of all the baptized who exercise ministries of servanthood, reconciliation and oversight in their lives. The ordered ministry gives "a dramatic viewpoint into the depth of the mystery and meaning of our baptism". The Very Reverend Philip Turner, Dean of Berkeley Divinity School at Yale, addressed the bishops on topics related to authority: "Authority in a Divided Church", and "Authority and the Episcopal Office".

Midway through the triennium, the House was led in a Quiet Day by The Reverend James Koester, SSJE.

In the Fall of 1995, although there was not a meeting of the House, bishops who were relatively new in office, along with their spouses, met for a few days to reflect on their ministries with Bishop Harold and Nancy Hopkins of ECUSA. Many bishops are also taking advantage of The College for Bishops, a program offered through General Theological Seminary in New York for new bishops.

In the Fall of 1997, most bishops and their secretaries met together prior to the meetings of the House. This event proved to be a highlight in the triennium, perhaps especially for bishops'

secretaries who rarely have an opportunity to share together from the perspective of their 'front-line' ministry.

Sexuality

For many years, the House has spent considerable time in an exploration of questions to do with homosexuality. Since 1992, this has been a regular feature of our agenda. Most meetings have been held in camera to allow for as frank and open a discussion as possible. During this last triennium, there proved to be a willingness to become more open, and the last two meetings that gave time to this were held in open session. It will not surprise that among the bishops (as in the Church as a whole), there is a wide variety of understanding as to the matters of same-sex unions or the ordination of homosexual persons who do not promise celibacy.

However, a statement that tried to sum up the current mind of the House was developed and shared at the October meeting in 1997. The fact that it was accepted without change by an overwhelming majority of the members of the House suggests that it reflects well the general sense of bishops. The full statement is appended to this report. I draw your attention to the conclusion: "Our discussions over the past few years have taught us much. We do not have a common mind on all things. We see in part and we know in part. Where we disagree we need to continue to read the scriptures together and to engage in dialogue, that we might listen for what the Spirit is saying to the Church today."

In the Spring of 1996, the House sent a message to the House of Commons in support of Bill C-33 (legislation to amend the Human Rights Act to prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation). In doing that, the House made it clear that this action did not change the status of the 1979 statement in regards to the ordination of homosexual persons. Rather, support for the bill reflected "the Gospel imperative of love, compassion and justice... which continues to be the call of every Christian."

Anglican-Lutheran relations

The bishops regularly have been kept informed of the status of the Anglican-Lutheran dialogue. As well, they have actively participated in discussions regarding the issues as the Church moves towards a decision in 2001 about full communion. More importantly, the House of Bishops has met twice with Conference of Bishops of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (in the Fall of 1996 and the Fall of 1997). These meetings have proved fruitful in connecting, the building of relationships and the sharing together in the search for a deeper unity. Much of the facilitation for these sessions has come from the Joint Working Group. In particular, Archdeacon Jim Cowan of Victoria, BC, and the Reverend Al Miller from White Rock, BC, who are co-chairs of the Joint Working Group, and the Reverend Canon Alyson Barnett-Cowan, Director of Faith, Worship and Ministry, have given much time, energy and leadership to these meetings. Worship (using resources from both traditions) meals and social times have been held in common.

In October of 1996, much of the agenda was in joint session. Presentations were made by persons representing each communion on the history of the Anglican-Lutheran dialogue (both in Canada and internationally), concerns to do with ordained ministry and ways in which doctrine and faith are expressed in the two churches. The final morning was spent in considering the future of the

conversations. The meeting discussed what contact the two bodies ought to have in the future. The Lutheran bishops expressed a hope that joint meetings be held once a year. The Anglican bishops were generally receptive to this, but also have interest in regional/provincial gatherings.

In April of 1997 (not a joint meeting), Dr. Richard Leggatt of the Vancouver School of theology addressed the bishops in a talk titled “Bishops on Bishops: Lambeth and Episcopacy”. Bishop Bill Huras of the Eastern Synod of the ELCIC spoke of the question addressed to Lutherans: “*Are you prepared to take the constitutional steps necessary to understand the installation of synodical bishops as ordination?*” He informed the House that the ELCIC Council had unanimously agreed to forward the question to their national Convention with the recommendation that it be given a favourable response.

A question addressed to Anglicans, “*Are you prepared to view the historic episcopate in the context of the understandings of apostolicity articulated in Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, the Niagara Report, and the Porvoo Common Agreement?*”, was discussed in the House.

In October of 1997, the bishops of both churches again gathered in joint sessions. On this occasion, the “Waterloo Declaration”, *Called to Full Communion*, was presented with care by the Joint Working Group. The Declaration (after study throughout both churches) is to be put to National Convention of the ELCIC and the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada in Waterloo, Ontario in 2001. Discussion groups worked at questions of *What can you affirm in the Declaration? What do you need in the way of information? Is there anything that would prevent you from moving ahead?*

Joint meetings will continue.

Consultation on Discernment for Ordained Ministry

The House of Bishops requested the Council of General Synod to arrange a consultation to examine and make recommendations about the role of ACPO, alternate models of ministry, methods of discerning those models, and also for lines of accountability relating to the three levels of the church. Faith, Worship and Ministry Committee made further recommendations to the Council.

The consultation held two meetings and its results were reported to FWM and to the House. The House spent a good portion of time in the Fall of 1997 reviewing the report of the consultation, and together with Faith, Worship and Ministry made final recommendations to the Council, that fall into five broad areas: the Role and Governance of ACPO, Discernment for the Episcopate, National Standards for Theological Education, Continuing Education, Discernment and Theological Education with and for Aboriginal Anglicans.

Lambeth

The Lambeth Conference is a meeting of bishops held every ten years at the invitation of the Archbishop of Canterbury. The conference will meet this year from July 18 to August 9 and all active bishops have been invited. Over 800 bishops from throughout the Communion will attend.

Among the aims of the conference are these:

to maintain and strengthen the theological, spiritual and personal bonds of our Communion.
to stimulate, encourage and renew bishops in their episcopal ministry of guarding and interpreting the faith and leading the mission of the Church.

to clarify the mind of the bishops on certain designated issues which will be significant for the Church's fulfillment of its mission as we prepare to enter the 21st century.

The conference will be gathered under four sections:

Called to Full Humanity

Called to Live and Proclaim the Good News

Called to be Faithful in a Plural World

Called to be One

Bishops will meet in a variety of sub-groups of each section to consider specific concerns related to the section.

In preparation for the conference, provincial (national) houses of bishops have met to consider some of the themes. In Canada, in the spring of 1996, the House of Bishops met with Canon Roger Symon who is taking leadership for the bursary fund which helps bishops and spouses who might not otherwise be present to afford to participate, and Mr. David Long who is the Lambeth Conference Manager. Canon Symon outlined the bursary programme, and the House agreed to try to raise \$250,000 for the fund. Dioceses were asked on a proportional basis, and have pledged approximately \$235,000. Mr. Long led the House through a discussion of themes and issues.

The Primate and four bishops (including Bishop Victoria Matthews who is a member of the conference design team) attended a North American regional gathering later in that year. An equal number of bishops from ECUSA and the Province of the West Indies also participated. In all nine regions of the Communion had a preparatory event which gave input to the design team.

Handbook

Archdeacon Harry Hilchey (a former General Secretary of General Synod) had responded positively to an invitation from the House of Bishops of the Province of Rupert's Land to develop a handbook for bishops. The national House agreed that such a project was worthwhile, and it was expanded to make it a Handbook for all bishops. It was completed during the Triennium and is a valuable resource to bishops.

Religious Orders Standing Committee

Perhaps little known to the Church is the House of Bishops Standing Committee on Religious Orders. The Committee consists of The Primate, three bishops, and the heads of the religious communities in Canada whose communities "are in communion with the see of Canterbury, make vows to hold property in common, to live in celibate chastity and obedience to the Statutes and Constitution of the particular community".

The purpose of the Standing Committee is:

to provide liaison between religious communities and the House of Bishops

To seek the representation of members of religious communities at General Synod
To explore the relationship between religious communities and the dioceses in which they live and work.
To foster throughout the Church a wider knowledge and deeper understanding of the religious life.
To advise bishops on such matters as the role and function of a visitor, potential new communities, and application for private vows.

The religious communities in Canada presently represented on the Committee are
The Sisterhood of St. John the Divine
The Community of the Sisters of the Church
The Order of the Holy Cross
The Society of St. John the Evangelist (Incorporated in Canada but not present at this time)

The communities also are members of the Conference on Religious Life (CORL) in the Anglican Communion in the Americas. The General Secretary of CORL, the Reverend Dr. Donald Anderson, is a frequent participant in meetings of the Standing Committee.

The Committee reports occasionally to the House. In this past triennium, the heads of the orders met with the House and Sr. Constance Joanna, SSJD, addressed the House.

Conclusion

The House has seen a number of retirements and has welcomed many new members during the triennium. Two women are now members of the House, which has given me the opportunity to greet the members as “Brothers and sisters...”

Respectfully submitted,

Michael G. Peers
Archbishop and Primate