

**A Memo to the Parishioners of St. Dunstan's Episcopal Church
Bethesda, Maryland
2007**

To the People of St. Dunstan's:

The Vestry approved on July 23rd a resolution addressing the proposed "Anglican Covenant" - a new structure for the worldwide Anglican Communion, which would give legislative and executive powers to the 38 Primates (chief bishops) of the Anglican provinces. The Episcopal Church must respond to this proposal, and has requested input from Episcopal congregations.

John Longstreth has compiled a helpful summary of the issues involved. In it he states, "Contrary to the statement in the Covenant that it proposes nothing new, this would be a fundamental and extensive change to the Anglican Communion, ending the autonomy provinces now have and centralizing power in a small group." (The summary may be read without the bracketed parts, but they add useful detail and explanation of the issues.)

The Vestry thanks **Jim Wachob** for drafting the resolution for Vestry consideration. We believe it states well our position on the proposed change in government of our church.

Underlying this issue, of course, is the uproar (largely in African provinces) over American inclusion of homosexual persons in all areas of the church's life. While our resolution does not address this directly, we stand in support of the call for the church to be inclusive and hospitable to all, as Jesus was.

Jeff MacKnight, Rector
St. Dunstan's Church
Bethesda, Maryland

***St. Dunstan's Vestry Resolution
On the Draft Anglican Covenant (April 2007)***

The rector and vestry of St. Dunstan's Episcopal Church, Bethesda, Maryland,

Having carefully studied the draft Anglican Covenant, as revised in April 2007,

Esteeming Anglicanism for its ethos of respect for diverse views,

Cherishing the centuries-old tripartite administration of the Episcopal Church, shared by bishops, priests, and laity, with access to the best contemporary scholarship,

Confident that scriptural revelation affirmed by conventions of the Episcopal Church has promoted social justice in the spirit of the Gospel,

Recognizing that the Episcopal Church has not sought to impose its views on other members of the Anglican Communion,

Deeply concerned that the provisions of Article 6(6) would empower distant primates, not sharing the traditions and discernment processes of the Episcopal Church, to deny the Episcopal Church continued membership in the Anglican Communion,

*Therefore **RECOMMEND** that the Episcopal Diocese of Washington convey to the Office of the General Convention the opposition of the Diocese to the draft Anglican Covenant, as revised in April 2007.*

**The Proposed *Draft Anglican Covenant*
Background, Process, and Issues
A summary by John Longstreth July 2007**

The process

In January 2007 a group under the chairmanship of Archbishop Drexel Gomez of the West Indies met in Nassau and produced a report and *Draft Anglican Covenant*. This was given to the Primates' Meeting in Dar es Salaam in February 2007. In its Communiqué from that meeting the Primates commended the *Draft* to the Provinces for study. Every Province (Church) of the Anglican Communion, including the Episcopal Church USA, has been asked to respond to this Draft by January 1, 2008.

The ECUSA's International Concerns Standing Committee has recommended that the Executive Council of the Church provide a response to the current Draft Covenant on behalf of the Episcopal Church as a whole. To assist that effort it has urged **all** Episcopalians to send their responses to the Episcopal Church Center in New York (fax (212) 972-9322 or email gcsecretary@episcopalchurch.org). The Executive Council will then use these materials to inform its response to the Draft Covenant, which will be prepared by its October 2007 meeting. It is hoped that the views of all concerned will be expressed and reflected in the report produced by Executive Council.

Proponents of the current draft Covenant seek to have it debated at the Lambeth Conference 2008, and presented for final agreement to the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC) in 2009, and thence to the Provinces for approval.

The key objections to the Draft Covenant (and the motivation for the draft resolution)

The churches of the Anglican Communion, including the ECUSA, have historically been mutually responsible and interdependent, but autonomous, without an “executive” or “judicial” body empowered to impose resolutions of disagreements or disputes on any single Province. The central proposal of the *Draft Anglican Covenant*, contained in Section 6, is to concentrate and centralize power to prescribe and enforce doctrine in the hands of the 38 Primates (the heads of each Province) of the Anglican Communion. (Katharine, Our Presiding Bishop, is one of the Primates.) Contrary to the statement in the Covenant that it proposes nothing new, this would be a fundamental and extensive change to the Anglican Communion, ending the autonomy provinces now have and centralizing power in a small group. In contrast to centralized pronouncements of theological truth, classical Anglican theology asserts that there is no single infallible source of such truth. Rather, we have relied on the familiar “three-legged stool” of Scripture, reason and tradition. The change threatens to narrow the theological and communal life of the Anglican Communion, without resolving doctrinal conflict.

[In addition, certain key elements of the proposal are uncertain. The Primates would determine the “common mind” of the church and then enforce it on the Provinces, but there is no discussion of what the ‘common mind’ of the church might mean nor how would it be ascertained. The *Draft* does not detail how its proposals would work, what bureaucracy it would require, what matters should be decided locally, what safeguards would govern the Primates’ use of their power, or what the role of the laity would be in consideration of doctrinal matters.]

[Determination of theological truth by the Primates is likely to lead to a narrowing of Anglican theology and a more authoritarian approach. Given current circumstances, the power will almost certainly be used against liberal expressions of theology, but the draft does not safeguard against its use against any minority position.]

[The primary objections to the draft focus on Section 6. The other sections contain much that is relatively noncontroversial (and likely unnecessary). Section 4 (*The Life We Share with Others*), is inspiring, though misleading in suggesting there was a past era in which the church was “undivided,” a suggestion consistent with the tenor of the document as one of enforcing orthodoxy. Concern has been expressed over the statement in the Preamble that the Covenant is needed to proclaim the Gospel more effectively, since a more authoritarian structure will not likely ensure collaboration where such collaboration does not exist already, and with the suggestion that “unity of the Spirit” requires human consensus on social and political matters. References to Scripture as “the rule and ultimate standard of faith” (section 2) and to “biblically derived moral values” (section 3) are also problematic in suggesting that Scripture alone can be the source of readily derived and juridically enforceable rules, given its often conflicting commands on numerous issues and the difficulties of texts commanding, e.g., holy war against nonbelievers, that women not speak in the churches, discrimination on the basis of ethnicity and sexual identity; and adherence to dietary and purification laws not observed by Christians or most Jews. (The “ultimate standard of faith” for many is the life of Christ, who did not create legal structures for the purpose of oppressing the marginalized and the despised.) Ethical choices have more traditionally been made within our Church by each intelligent and responsible believer reading the Bible in community and in light of reason and tradition. The Covenant also seeks in Section 2 to single out certain documents such as the Thirty-nine Articles and the 1662 English prayer book, but these are not currently authoritative documents for The Episcopal Church.]

The history

Shortly after the consent of the General Convention of our Church in August 2003 to the election of Canon Gene Robinson, a partnered gay man, as Bishop of New Hampshire, the Archbishop of Canterbury, concerned about the deepening crisis within the Anglican Communion, appointed the Lambeth Commission “to seek a way forward” which would encourage greater unity within the Communion. This led to the Windsor Report, published in October 2004, which censured (for “straining the bonds” of the wider Communion) both churches that accept same-sex unions **and** bishops who intervene in other dioceses. Windsor recommended, in order to restore trust throughout the Communion, that the member churches should adopt a common Anglican Covenant “which would make explicit and forceful the loyalty and bonds of affection which govern the relationships between the churches,” and it offered a detailed draft of such a covenant for consideration.

Anglicanism has four international bodies that Windsor terms ‘the Instruments of Unity’— the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lambeth Conference, the Primates’ Meeting, and the Anglican Consultative Council. Two of these instruments are composed wholly of primates and three (all but the ACC) exclusively of bishops. Those bodies have traditionally not exercised legislative, executive or judicial authority over any of the churches in the Communion. Windsor stated that the process of adopting a covenant would need to be “a long-term process, in an educative context.” The consultation paper on Windsor’s covenant proposal issued in March 2006 by the Joint Standing Committee of the Primates and the Anglican Consultative Council, entitled “Towards an Anglican Covenant,” affirmed that the covenant process ought to be a transparent, collaborative dialogue with equal participation for all. It refrained from committing itself to any particular form of covenant, observing, among other things, that the idea of any province ceding authority to one or more of the Instruments of Unity “has been a sticking point since at least the first Lambeth Conference in 1867.”

The February 2007 report of Archbishop Gomez’ Covenant Design Group (CDG), and the communiqué of the Primates’ Meeting at Dar es Salaam issued at the same time, recommend that the Primates’ meeting should take strong action to adopt the Draft Covenant in its “fundamental shape” and with “an appropriate measure of consent to this text and express an intention to pursue its fine-tuning and adoption.” The Primates were asked to “recognize the general substance of the preliminary draft” as “a concise expression of what may be considered as authentic Anglicanism.” The Design Group further declared that there was an “urgent need to re-establish trust” in the Anglican Communion, and the life of the Communion “would suffer irreparably if some measure of mutual and common commitment to the Gospel was not reasserted in a short time frame.”

[The Anglican Consultative Council (a lay group) submitted that the Covenant should be relational, like those with other denominations, but the primates argued for a covenant that was more doctrinal, providing an interpretation of the faith. The primate draft does incorporate some of the relational suggestions of the ACC; for example, Section 4 outlines some common elements of the Anglican Communion's service to God's mission in the world, a vision consistent with the "Five Marks of Mission" articulated by the Anglican Consultative Council at their meetings of 1984 and 1990. However the key elements of the draft Covenant are those intended to promote doctrinal orthodoxy.]

The draft Covenant gives the Instruments of Unity power to address "essential matters of common concern" within individual Provinces, and exclusive authority to declare a member church in breach of the Covenant and therefore no longer in covenant relationship with other churches. The Covenant goes on to assign roles to the four instruments of communion: (1) the Archbishop of Canterbury is to be accorded "honor and respect" and presides at meetings; (2) the Lambeth Conference is for "collegiality;" (3) the Anglican Consultative Council is to concentrate on coordinating ecumenical and mission work; and (4) the Primates will monitor global developments and handle "doctrinal, moral and pastoral matters that have Communion-wide implications." In addition the primates will deal with "matters in serious dispute among churches" and offer "guidance and direction" in such cases. The result of this process is spelled out in Article 6(6) of the Draft:

We acknowledge that in the most extreme circumstances, where member churches choose not to fulfill the substance of the covenant as understood by the Councils of the Instruments of Communion, we will consider that such churches will have relinquished for themselves the force and meaning of the covenant's purpose, and a process of restoration and renewal will be required to re-establish their covenant relationship with other member churches.

[Finally, the February 2007 communiqué that accompanied the draft Covenant and report also stated that those Primates who, contrary to Windsor, had intervened to oversee disaffected parishes in the U.S. "believe it would be inappropriate to bring an end to interventions until there is change in The Episcopal Church," including agreement to allow an alternate form of "pastoral care" to those who cannot accept the leadership of The Episcopal Church, and an "unequivocal common covenant" not to authorize "any Rite of Blessing for same-sex unions" or to approve any "candidate for Episcopal orders living in a same-sex union." On June 14, the Episcopal Church's Executive Council advised the Anglican Communion that no governing body other than General Convention can interpret past Convention resolutions or agree to deny "future decisions by dioceses or the General Convention," and agreed with the House of Bishops that the Primates' proposed "pastoral care" plan would be "injurious to the Church."]

The debate

Proponents of the Covenant believe it is imperative to deal with the question of whether 75 million people spread across 38 independent provinces, several countries, and innumerable cultures, can come to a common understanding of God's will without the benefit of a central authority. They believe that this is not possible, and that the center of Anglicanism needs to be strengthened to reestablish trust within the Anglican Communion and to ensure orthodoxy in Anglican theological and social practices. Proponents believe that without some statement along the lines of the Covenant, divisions will continue, and that a Covenant process represents, in the Archbishop of Canterbury's words, "the clearest way for mutual trust and interdependent life to be renewed in the longer term."

Opponents see the proposal as an effort to elevate the Primates' Meeting, itself a recent innovation, into a position similar to that of the Vatican in the Roman Catholic church, a so-called "papacy of the primates." Moreover, even if the new structure differed from that model in significant ways, such as by spreading the power of approving innovations and administering sanctions across all four Instruments of Unity, granting a major role to the lay representatives of the ACC, adopting criteria for judging the acceptability of proposed innovation such as agreement with Scripture, tradition and reason, and not regarding itself as infallible in any matter which came under its scrutiny, the tribunal would still have the authority to (1) issue

judgments that a doctrine or practice is unacceptable throughout the Communion, regardless of local circumstances and (2) discipline those who contravene these judgments. Under the draft Covenant those powers would include suspending or expelling the offending member church from the Anglican fellowship.

[As is already apparent, the immediate purpose of the Covenant is to institutionalize the influence of hardline thinking on homosexuality, enforcing a moratorium on change in order to enforce Resolution 1.10 of the 1998 Lambeth conference, which proclaims homosexuality incompatible with Scripture. In the past, the communion has had the flexibility to move past Lambeth pronouncements such as that divorcees could never be remarried in Church (Resolution 4, 1888), that "the use of unnatural means for the avoidance of conception" was disfavored (Resolution 66, 1920), and that women could never be ordained (Resolutions 113-116, 1948). Opponents of the draft Covenant believe that the communion was able to move past these issues that once divided it, but as to which change is now widely accepted, in large part because individual Provinces were allowed to adapt without the threat of banishment by a central authority. They fear that the Covenant would, in contrast, give authority to very senior clergy (among whom women and youth are hardly represented) to block initiatives for mission and ministry thousands of miles away. This would affect not only lesbians and gays, their families, and friends, but also many others who seek to live and proclaim the good news of Christ in their localities.]

The current more open system, it is argued, permits established doctrines to be properly challenged in the light of new information or new understandings of our relationship with God, as has happened on the occasions noted above. The insight that slavery is against the will of God, for example, had to be asserted over a long period against those who argued from the Bible for the retention of slaves. This tradition has helped the Church maintain its orthodoxy and continuity in one community, but has also allowed the Church to respond faithfully to internal and external change.

A Final Thought

‘The union that binds the members of Christ together is not the union of proud confidence in the power of an organization. The church is united by the humility as well as by the charity of her members. Hers is the union that comes from the consciousness of individual fallibility and poverty, from the humility that recognizes its own limitations and accepts them, the meekness that cannot take it upon itself to condemn, but can only forgive because it is conscious that it has itself been forgiven by Christ.’

-- Thomas Merton, 20th century Trappist monk and writer (Roman Catholic)