

Report to the 138th Annual Convention of the Diocese of Easton from the Windsor Report Task Force

The 137th Annual Convention of the Diocese of Easton adopted a resolution which encouraged Bishop Shand, the Chair of Convention, to appoint a Task Force “to prepare a summary of the Windsor Report which will be presented to each one of the Convocations” and to “submit a written report by July 1, 2005, which may include recommendations for further action, to the 138th Annual Convention of the Diocese of Easton.” (The full text of the resolution is attached.) We wish to express our gratitude to Bishop Shand for his strong support of our work and his participation at each Convocation meeting. As requested, herewith is our report.

The Rev. Nathaniel W. Pierce, St. Philip’s, Quantico; Chair
Mr. Jim Campbell, Wye Parish, Wye Mills
The Rev. David Green, Christ Church, Stevensville
[Ms. Amy Isaacs resigned due to scheduling conflicts]
Ms. Pam Quarstein, Shrewsbury Parish, Kennedyville
The Rev. David Robinson, Christ Church, Worton
Mr. Paul Reid, St. Mary Anne’s, North East

Convocation Meetings

We would like to thank the Convocation Deans and the host Parishes for their help and hospitality for the three meetings during which we made our presentation. A total of 150 persons participated, an indication perhaps of a wide spread interest in the topic. We sensed that being offered a full 45 minutes for unstructured discussion in a Convocation meeting was a new experience and many seemed unprepared to participate. Another factor may have been an unfamiliarity with the Windsor Report (WR) itself and the importance of the issues which it addresses.

We understood our task as enabling the written WR to be heard and then discussed here in the Diocese of Easton. Thus, in the Convocation meetings we presented to those who attended written excerpts from the WR itself and then read them aloud. We encouraged and attempted to facilitate dialogue. We did not presume to convey what we thought about the report or where we disagreed. Our focus was to allow the WR to speak for itself in summary form.

Based on various comments following each meeting we believe we fulfilled our mandate to summarize the Report. However, this turned out to be a far more difficult task than had been anticipated because the document is such a comprehensive analysis of the history and ethos of the Anglican Communion. In addition it contains many thoughtful biblical and theological insights. As an aside, we are pleased to learn that several congregations in our Diocese have already sponsored adult education groups with the WR as a primary focus.

We were prepared for the possibility that those who attended the Convocation meetings would want to discuss the consecration of the Rev. Gene Robinson as Bishop of New Hampshire and/or same gender blessings. This did not happen in any of the three meetings; we were able to stay focused on the WR itself which we consider to be a significant achievement.

We sensed that many participants did not grasp the seriousness of our current situation. To be sure, one does not have to have uniformity in order to achieve unity, but the presenting issues go far beyond that. At stake, we believe, is this question: what are we (the Episcopal Church) prepared to do in order “to move together, to walk together ... by listening to, and interacting with, as many different parts of the family as possible” (WR, paragraph 66) in concert with the rest of the Anglican Communion?

Few seemed able to verbalize the connection between the WR and our life together in the Diocese of Easton. We believe that the central issue in the Report is our understanding of communion or community (see WR paragraph 66 and Recommendation #3 below). What are our obligations and responsibilities as a member of the Anglican and/or our Diocesan community? In our Diocese, for example, over 70% of our congregations do not or cannot pay their full Diocesan asking, an unmistakable indicator of a serious community problem.

Recommendations

In the resolution adopted in January 2005, Diocesan Convention acknowledged “the publication of the Lambeth Commission’s Windsor Report and the importance of its recommendations not only to the world-wide Anglican Communion but also quite specifically to the Episcopal Church in the United States of America (ECUSA) and those Dioceses which, through their representatives, voted to give consent to the election of the Rev. Gene Robinson as Bishop of New Hampshire.” We also believe that the recommendations of the WR are important and are worthy of careful consideration at *all levels* of the Episcopal Church while recognizing that only General Convention can speak authoritatively for the entire Episcopal Church.

Our recommendations which do not require formal action by Convention itself but must be considered and enacted by others are:

- 1) “As recognised in the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral, an episcopate at once local and universal is therefore an essential element of the life of the Anglican Communion. And, to link once more with scripture as the central fact of unity within the Communion, it is the bishop’s role as teacher of scripture that is meant, above all, to be not merely a symbolic but a very practical means of giving the Church the energy and direction it needs for its mission and therefore the motivation and the groundwork for its unity.” [WR, para. 63] We urge Bishop Shand to implement this recommendation by:
 - a) making bible study an integral part of his parish visitations;
 - b) including bible study at meetings of Convocations and Convention;
 - c) devoting at least one workshop during our Annual Convention to the challenge of understanding and interpreting Scripture.
- 2) Our sense is that in the Diocese of Easton there is by and large a lack of awareness of the history, spirituality, polity, and ethos of the Anglican Communion in general, the Episcopal Church in particular. A number of dynamics may be at work here, not the least of which is the fact that many adult Episcopalians have come to this branch of Christendom from other Christian traditions. We believe that our clergy could be helpful here in educating our members on the spiritual and catholic heritage of the Episcopal Church. As noted above, the Windsor Report itself could be a rich resource for this endeavor.

- 3) The WR is one result of a breakdown in community within the Anglican Communion. "... [T]he churches of the Anglican Communion, if that Communion is to mean anything at all, are obliged to move together, to walk together in synodality. It is by listening to, and interacting with, voices from as many different parts of the family as possible that the Church discovers what its unity and communion really mean." (WR, para. 66) We ourselves live in a time when the difficulties of living in community, whether at the parish or diocesan level, are manifest. The challenge "to move together, to walk together" here in the Diocese of Easton needs to be addressed by our diocesan leaders. We would urge that this work be undertaken in such a manner so as to foster community as we work towards a stronger sense of community. We cite the Dorchester Council of Episcopal Churches as one example of how this challenge can be creatively addressed. (The DCEC is comprised of lay and ordained leaders of the six Episcopal Churches in Dorchester County. This group has met more or less monthly since 1999 for the purpose of sharing resources.)

Proposed Resolutions

We put forward to the 138th Annual Convention two resolutions for consideration and action.¹ We wish to emphasize that we as a Task Force make no recommendation on how one should vote on either one although Task Force members may well choose to speak as individuals. Rather these are issues which the Windsor Report itself puts before all of us for our consideration and action as a Diocese. We honor the WR by taking the time during our Convention to debate and vote on these important concerns. Further, such resolutions are another way of enabling "the written WR to be heard and then discussed here in the Diocese of Easton." (see above)

In addition, our enabling resolution suggested that our report to Convention "may include recommendations for further action." We understand a resolution to be one way of placing before Convention "recommendations for further action."

Diocesan Canon 4, Sec. 7(b) [since renumbered] requires that a resolution submitted by a "Standing, Regular, or Special Committee of the Diocese" be given to the Secretary of Convention at least seven days prior to the start of a Convention. We consider ourselves to be a Special Committee created by the action of Convention and its Presiding Officer, Bishop Shand.

However, it must be emphasized that only our General Convention can respond to these issues authoritatively on behalf of the entire Episcopal Church. The Diocese of Easton will be represented at the 2006 General Convention by four clergy and four lay deputies (elected by our 2005 Diocesan Convention) and by our Bishop. Our sense is that our representatives would value the views of those participating in our own Convention.

We also recognize that our clergy and lay representatives are "deputies." As such they cannot be required by action of our Diocesan Convention to vote in a particular way on any issue

¹ After consulting with the Chancellor, five of the six members of the Windsor Report Task Force agreed that it was appropriate for the Task Force to submit resolutions to Diocesan Convention.

that comes before General Convention . Thus, these two resolutions are advisory in nature, but no less important if our voice is to be heard.

Resolution 1

Resolved, That this 138th Annual Convention of the Diocese of Easton acknowledges that the preamble of the Constitution of the Episcopal Church in the United States in America states: “The Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America ... is a constituent member of the Anglican Communion,” a fellowship of churches “in communion with the See of Canterbury;” and be it further

Resolved, That this Annual Convention of the Diocese of Easton express its collective desire to continue “to move together, to walk together” (WR para. 66) with the Anglican Communion, acknowledging that we, as members of the Episcopal Church, are bound to this Communion not just by “bonds of affection” (WR para. 134) but also by the plain language of the Preamble of our Church’s Constitution; and be it further

Resolved, That the Secretary of this Diocesan Convention forward a copy of this resolution to the Executive Officer of the General Convention before March 31, 2006.

Resolution 2

Resolved, That this 138th Annual Convention of the Diocese of Easton urges the 2006 General Convention of the Episcopal Church to honor and insofar as possible implement the following five recommendations of the Windsor Report:

- a) “the Episcopal Church (USA) be invited to express its regret that the proper constraints of the bonds of affection were breached in the events surrounding the election and consecration of a bishop for the See of New Hampshire, and for the consequences which followed, and that such an expression of regret would represent the desire of the Episcopal Church (USA) to remain within the Communion “ (para. 134)
- b) “the Episcopal Church (USA) be invited to effect a moratorium on the election and consent to the consecration of any candidate to the episcopate who is living in a same gender union until some new consensus in the Anglican Communion emerges.” (para. 134)
- c) “Because of the serious repercussions in the Communion, we call for a moratorium on all such public Rites [of blessing of same sex unions], and recommend that bishops who have authorised such rites in the United States and Canada be invited to express regret that the proper constraints of the bonds of affection were breached by such authorisation.” (para. 144)
- d) “We remind all in the Communion that Lambeth Resolution 1.10 calls for an ongoing process of listening and discernment, and that Christians of good will need to be prepared to engage honestly and frankly with each other on issues relating to human sexuality. It is vital that the Communion establish processes and structures to facilitate ongoing discussion. One of the deepest realities that the Communion faces is continuing difference on the presenting

issue of ministry by and to persons who openly engage in sexually active homosexual relationships. Whilst this report criticises those who have propagated change without sufficient regard to the common life of the Communion, it has to be recognised that debate on this issue cannot be closed whilst sincerely but radically different positions continue to be held across the Communion. The later sections of Lambeth Resolution 1.10 cannot be ignored any more than the first section, as the primates have noted. Moreover, any demonising of homosexual persons, or their ill treatment, is totally against Christian charity and basic principles of pastoral care. We urge provinces to be pro-active in support of the call of Lambeth Resolution 64 (1988) for them to 'reassess, in the light of ... study and because of our concern for human rights, its care for and attitude toward persons of homosexual orientation'." (para. 146)

- e) "We call upon those bishops who believe it is their conscientious duty to intervene in provinces, dioceses and parishes other than their own:
- ✘ to express regret for the consequences of their actions
 - ✘ to affirm their desire to remain in the Communion, and
 - ✘ to effect a moratorium on any further interventions.

We also call upon these archbishops and bishops to seek an accommodation with the bishops of the dioceses whose parishes they have taken into their own care.

We further call upon those diocesan bishops of the Episcopal Church (USA) who have refused to countenance the proposals set out by their House of Bishops to reconsider their own stance on this matter. If they refuse to do so, in our view, they will be making a profoundly dismissive statement about their adherence to the polity of their own church." (para. 155)

and, be it further

Resolved, That the Secretary of this Diocesan Convention forward a copy of this resolution (and the note below) to the Executive Officer of the General Convention before March 31, 2006

Note from the Task Force

The five recommendations in Resolution #2 are intended by the Windsor Report to be a "package deal." In other words, all five are essential. We have been aware that in recent months some individuals have focused on (b) & (c) and apparently forgotten about (d) & (e). The reverse is true as well. Yet, each single recommendation depends on the presence of the other four; take away one or two and this carefully crafted compromise quickly collapses. Therefore, we (the Task Force) encourage members of Diocesan Convention to defeat any proposal to "divide the question." (Dividing the question is a parliamentary means by which a resolution such as this one, comprised of several issues, can be separated into its constituent parts. Then each recommendation would be voted on separately.] An up or down vote on the whole package of five proposals would be more helpful at this point and also honor the intent of the Windsor Report itself.

Sixteen months have passed since the WR was released. The absence of clear time lines in the last four recommendations has now become a real issue. The word “moratorium,” for example, means a temporary cessation. But how long is temporary? Thus, we believe that (b) through (e) should be clarified by making the following changes: (b) & (c) need an end point, (d) needs a clearly stated starting point, and (e) needs a deadline. Such changes (if agreed to) could be best implemented by the appropriate committee(s) at the 2006 General Convention.