

## The Bishop's Message September 2008

### To GAFCON, Lambeth and Back

The first Global Anglican Futures Conference (GAFCON) was held June 21<sup>st</sup> through June 29<sup>th</sup> in Jerusalem, Israel. The 2008 once a decade Lambeth Conference was held July 16<sup>th</sup> through August 3<sup>rd</sup> in Canterbury, England. As perhaps you are aware, I wasn't inclined to attend either one because I didn't think my participation would be worth the cost in time, energy and money. As a result of urging from a number of people, I changed my mind. First, I decided to go to GAFCON, then Lambeth. In retrospect, I believe it was important that I participated in both.

GAFCON was "billed" as a "pilgrimage" in addition to being a conference. Melinda and I, having never been to the Holy Lands, found visiting the Old City, the Mount of Olives, the Garden of Gethsemane, the Sea of Galilee, the Jordan River and Capernaum awe inspiring. The greatest gift, however, was joining with over a thousand committed, orthodox, Anglican Christians from around the world who are obviously on the same page theologically and spiritually -- the same page the Church has been teaching for two thousand years. Words are inadequate to describe how refreshing and renewing the whole experience was. Of all those bishops, priests and laypersons, I dare say nary a person attending GAFCON would question that Jesus is the Incarnate Son of God, born of a Virgin, who died for our sins, rose bodily from the dead, ascended into heaven and has sent the Holy Spirit to be our Comforter. Nor would anyone there suggest Jesus is something other than Lord and Savior.

The hard work at GAFCON was crafting from the bottom up the GAFCON Statement which contained the Jerusalem Declaration. Many hours were invested in writing and rewriting that document. The results were a straightforward and clear statement of what has constituted the Anglican Faith for more than 500 years and what those in attendance envision as a faithful way forward beyond the crisis that literally is killing the noble faith of Thomas Cranmer, Samuel Seabury and George Washington. What sustained us and led to the success achieved were the small Bible study groups and the larger focus groups which allowed full and open participation and discussion.

GAFCON, not surprisingly, has been criticized from various quarters. Most of it has been inappropriate. It was said the "Primates Council" was self-selected. That is patently untrue. First, the Primates present have not been self-appointed. They are faithful leaders of their Provinces who were called and chosen to serve. Secondly, they were seen as the logical prime-leaders and appointed by those in attendance to lead the faithful after GAFCON. It has been said GAFCON is a schismatic movement. The theology and history of our Church is clear. The schismatics are those who cause the separation, not those who declare separation is occurring as a result of the heresy and apostasy being espoused. It's been suggested that GAFCON was not needed. That position seems appropriate for those who either support the current, destructive agenda of

immorality, or are terribly naïve. If anything, GAFCON was birthed as an overdue gathering. Suffice it to say, I was honored to be a part of that significant forum.

Our time in England began on a very positive note. As part of a planned Pre-Lambeth ministry, Melinda and I were the guests of the Bishop of Birmingham. As such we participated in two Sunday morning worship services culminating in an afternoon service in the Cathedral which was followed by dinner at the Bishop's Close. I had the privilege of preaching in the small, country parish of St. Michael's in the suburb of Barnt Green outside Birmingham. St. Michael's is stately and beautiful having been built in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Additionally, we had the privilege to participate in a gathering which highlighted the diocese's companion relationship with a diocese in the African country of Malawi.

The hospitality couldn't have been more gracious. We were met at London's Heathrow Airport and transported to Birmingham. Following our visit there we were transported to Canterbury. That assistance was most helpful considering the amount of luggage we had with us.

The Lambeth Conference was preceded by a three day retreat for the gathered bishops led by the Archbishop of Canterbury. His words were inspiring as well as challenging. What I heard him say set the stage for the work of the Conference itself. He made it clear that the Anglican approach to Christianity is a wonderful gift of God's revelation of which we, as bishops, are to be faithful stewards. In a gentle and pastoral way, I heard him saying we need to get our act together.

The Conference itself began with a magnificent Eucharist in Canterbury Cathedral. Upwards of two thousand people were in attendance including George Carey, the former Archbishop of Canterbury. The Conference was organized into Bible Study groups of eight bishops each. (Bishops' spouses had their Bible study groups, too.) These groups focused on the "I am" references in the Gospel according to St. John. Five Bible study groups were combined into each Indaba group. There were three "Presidential Addresses" given by Archbishop Rowan Williams -- one at the beginning, one midway and one at the end of the Conference. In addition, there were numerous hearings and what were called "fringe" activities. Two major series of hearings were conducted by the Windsor Continuation Group and the bishops tasked with writing the Lambeth Reflections document. All-in-all, there was more than any one person could attend.

Early on I became aware that it was important for me to have been a part of this Lambeth Conference. It was important for me to observe that the overwhelming majority of the bishops present were orthodox. It also was important to experience clarity about how serious the crisis is which we have allowed to engulf the Anglican Communion. Unlike at the GAFCON, there was a high degree of tension, stress and political maneuvering.

A good many things were problematic. The Episcopal Church (TEC) had the largest number of bishops present. Though representing one of the smallest Provinces, we attempted -- albeit in vain -- to exert an undue influence over the proceedings. TEC,

along with Canada, were a small minority pressing the homosexual agenda to the chagrin of the clear majority.

As several African bishops noted, our Indaba activity wasn't really authentic. The African Indaba concept is to call leaders together in order to resolve the problems impacting the community. Our design was limited to only describing the problems and did not seriously attempt mapping a way forward. As a result, we left Canterbury perhaps more aware of the nature of the crisis but not significantly closer to a resolving it.

I came away with several strong impressions. One was Archbishop Rowan is a man of great integrity who is very trusting of the good will in others. It appears he sincerely believes others will take seriously the sound ideas he communicates.

In a letter months before the Conference convened, the Archbishop said if any cannot accept the Lambeth '98 resolution 1.10 and the appropriateness of a covenant as a way forward for the Communion, they should absent themselves from the '08 Conference. It is clear there is a majority of TEC bishops, including the Presiding Bishop, who do neither. For me this involves issues of honesty and integrity, two characteristics which appear scarce if not absent in TEC these days.

In his last Presidential Address, Archbishop Williams clearly called for three things: A moratorium on the ordination of non-celibate homosexuals, blessing of same sex relationships and cross-provincial ministry interventions without an invitation. What is clear is that the last moratorium would not be an issue if the first two were observed. Sadly, a number of TEC bishops have said post Lambeth they will continue endorsing that which is causing the provocation.

The question that must be answered sooner rather than later for the Anglican Communion not to be dragged down by TEC is this: Is non-celibate homosexual behavior a wholesome example for Christians and blessed by God or not? The GAFCON says it is not. The Lambeth Conference did not specifically address the question.

What the Lambeth Conference is proposing under Archbishop Rowan's leadership may be too little too late. If it is the GAFCON initiative will grow at the expense of the Anglican Communion. Though in ways that is very troubling, it is descriptive of a reality that recognizes the Body of Christ and the Gospel will continue while there is no such promise for TEC and the Anglican Communion if they are not truly part and parcel of that Body and that Gospel. As for me, I am content to continue to be related to TEC canonically, at least for the time being, recognizing we have little in common theologically or spiritually.

As I consider the problems afflicting TEC and the Anglican Communion, I cannot help but think of the Pauline words, "...if our Gospel is veiled, it is veil to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them" (2 Cor 4:3-4). It would seem anybody may choose to reject the Truth and appear incapable of embracing it.

Understand: Our calling is not altered! As always, we are simply to be faithful which is to pursue knowing God and assenting to Him.

