



March 23, 2007

Dear Friends,

The power of the moment dawned on us. We stood together soaked in its light. We heard the last verse of the last hymn echo within and around us. With that moment, the last official action at the spring meeting of the House of Bishops in Navasota, Texas drew to a close. The hymn is familiar. "Lift Every Voice and Sing" (*The Hymnal 1982*, #599) has been called the African-American national anthem. On this occasion, however, the text took on significance of biblical proportions. Summing up for many the actions your bishops took on behalf of this church, we sang, "... shadowed beneath thy hand may we for ever stand, true to our God, true to our native land."

I characterize the tone of the meeting as that of clear speaking and respectful listening. I was privileged to be on the drafting committee for the House that sought to gather up the salient points from the meeting as "a message to God's People." I commend this document to you. Three other official statements come out of the meeting, and all these can be found on our diocesan website.

Along with a majority of the House of Bishops, I voted to decline participation in the proposed "pastoral scheme" section of the Communiqué (see "Message to the Church"). However, other requests from the Primates to the House of Bishops for our September meeting are still under serious consideration and discussion. In cooperation with this church's Executive Council (our "Convention between Conventions"), these requests are beginning to take on sharper focus in order to address them by the September 30 deadline requested by the Primates.

By unanimous vote, the House extended an invitation to the Archbishop of Canterbury and to the members of the Primates' Standing Committee to be our guests, at their mutual convenience, for a three-day meeting to discuss the most recent Primates' Communiqué from Dar es Salaam. I hope such a meeting

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will occur and that it will help facilitate positive and responsive decision-making by the Archbishop, the Primates, the House of Bishops, our Executive Council, and eventually by the General Convention.

We focused much of our attention on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). While the MDGs are not the church's mission, they provide the context within which we can effectively bear witness to Christ's saving love for the world. Emphasized in this meeting was MDG #7, Environmental Sustainability. The post- Hurricane Katrina coastal areas became a case study for our consideration. I hope that our newly formed diocesan task force on the stewardship of creation will take seriously many of the findings from this presentation and find ways to share them with you.

Two other official statements, while not receiving unanimous votes, received majority support of the House of Bishops. They should, I believe, be read together.

The first and shorter of the statements speaks of the desire of this Church to stay connected to the Anglican Communion. At the same time, it clarified who The Episcopal Church is and how we will operate within our own polity and Canons. This clarity sets out what I believe is necessary in any healthy system of relationships: clarity about ones own identity and clarity about the nature of the relationship each party involved will seek to honor and respect for the sake of the other. The second and longer statement addresses the rationale for the first. As always, I encourage you to read these documents for yourself.

A working draft for the creation of an Anglican Covenant received a great deal of consideration and discussion. Two presentations (also posted on our website) gave differing perspectives about the Covenant-making process and its implications. I support our Presiding Bishop's and Executive Council's plan to provide study materials about the proposed Anglican Covenant for use by this summer. The study allows our Province to begin our response to the Covenant after hearing from laity and clergy across our respective dioceses. This emerging plan is mentioned in outline form in the bishop's "Message to God's People." Once details are finalized, they will be shared with you.

I feel that your House of Bishops took seriously the ministry to which we are called and the context within which we are called to live it out in practical terms. As the hymn so eloquently put it, "... shadowed beneath thy hand may we for ever stand, true to our God, true to our native land." With that intent I remain

Faithfully yours,

The Rt. Rev. Don E. Johnson