

December 1, 2004

Dear Members of the St. Luke's on the Lake Family:

The Advent Season has arrived and the Church is calling us to wake up, to be alert and ready to receive the Messiah. I have always needed the Advent Season because it causes me to rise from my complacency and daily routines to see, hear and experience God in our midst. Like my alarm clock which wakes me from a sound sleep, Advent calls us to get up and get ready for a spiritual wake up call.

As a parish in the Episcopal Church (USA), we have certainly experienced a wake up call in the form of The Windsor Report, a major work created by the Lambeth Commission. This report, released on October 18, intends to recommend ways to keep the Anglican Communion together. It is now the Archbishop of Canterbury's responsibility to accept or alter the findings of the report. The Windsor Report is the response to the deep divisions in the Anglican Communion culminating in the consecration of Gene Robinson as Bishop of New Hampshire and blessing same-sex unions by the Anglican Church in Canada. There is no doubt that the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, will act in one way or another. We, like all Anglicans, now wait to see when and how the Archbishop will act.

What the Windsor Reports States and Recommends

The report states that ECUSA and the Canadian Church clearly violated the teaching and practice of the Anglican Communion that prohibits the ordination of practicing homosexual persons or the blessing to same-sex unions. It did so because such acts are contrary to scripture and the teaching of the church. Second, ECUSA and the Canadian Church caused hurt and scandal among Anglican Christians in the world by breaching "the legitimate application of the Christian faith as the churches of the Anglican Communion have received it, and the bonds of affection in the life of the Communion." Third, the historic position of the Archbishop of Canterbury should be regarded as the central focus of unity within the Communion, and he alone has the power to call or not to call to the Communion gatherings whomsoever he believes is appropriate for the well-being of the Anglican Communion.

Consequently, the report recommends that ECUSA "express its regret" (repentance?) for breaching the bonds that unite the Anglican Communion, and that "such expression of regret would represent the desire of the Episcopal Church to remain within the Communion." Also, the report recommends that ECUSA institutes a moratorium on the election to consent to the consecration of anyone living in a same gender union. Furthermore, those who took part as the consecrators (about fifty bishops, including the Presiding Bishop) of Gene Robinson "withdraw themselves from representative functions in the Anglican Communion" until a statement of regret is made.

In other words, the Windsor Report confirms that ECUSA violated the teachings of the Christian faith as received and held by Anglican worldwide.

“Checking In”

Now, I want to “check in.” Here at St. Luke’s on the Lake, the Vestry and I hosted a Town Hall Meeting on November 14, which was well attended. I was pleased (and not surprised) that many different viewpoints were expressed and that no one spoke or acted in a defensive manner. You are a mature congregation, and it showed to all that were present that day. Nevertheless, there is still work to be done. I urge you to read the Windsor Report with your own eyes and ears. You may read the report, which is tedious in places but very understandable, via the internet at www.anglicancommunion.org/windsor2004. On Sunday, December 12 in the Fellowship Hall at 10:30 AM, I have asked Bruce Byron to share the presentation Bishop Wimberly made to the clergy and lay leaders of the Diocese of Texas at Camp Allen on November 15. Bruce attended the meeting with me because he serves on the Executive Board, the Bishop’s “vestry.” Please make plans to be in the Fellowship Hall on December 12.

Last week, I wrote Bishop Wimberly a letter praising him for his boldness, clarity and responsible leadership. A sign of good leadership is to be clear and forthright in times of confusion, and to articulate hope for the future. I also pledged to pray for him daily, especially as forces are gathering to change his mind and his points of view. I believe prayers of encouragement and protection are appropriate for our bishop. He told us that he will be taking a leadership role, “from the front,” in order to stay in the Anglican Communion. If ECUSA declines to remain in the Anglican Communion, Bishop Wimberly told us he will have to look at new options for himself and this diocese. Bishop Wimberly stated, and I agree completely, that the Anglican Communion “makes demands upon all who are within it” and clearly the responsibility for ECUSA to stay in the communion is ours alone. Since we are a part of the communion by the Archbishop’s invitation, ECUSA is at a crossroads. ECUSA will have to accept the discipline recommended by the Windsor Report if it plans to remain in the communion. I also agree with Bishop Wimberly that the House of Bishops, unrepentant to date, is unlikely to express regret.

In addition, and this is my opinion alone, if ECUSA does not repent and change its way then ECUSA will have chosen to walk alone. Thus, the disturbing conclusion of the Windsor Report (#157) becomes a reality. “There remains a very real danger that we will not choose to walk together. Should the call to halt and find ways of continuing in our present communion not be heeded, then we shall have to begin to learn to walk apart.” The House of Bishops will meet in Salt Lake City on January 12 and 13. Also, it is important to note that Bishop Wimberly will host a meeting on November 29 and 30 in Houston of the 43 bishops (out of 105) who voted “No” on the Robinson consecration. My sense is that it is more important for Bishop Wimberly and the Diocese of Texas to be in communion with the Archbishop of Canterbury than with the Presiding Bishop of ECUSA.

The Primates of the Anglican Communion, which are the “presiding bishops” of the thirty-eight national churches, will gather in Ireland in late February. The Archbishop of Canterbury will chair this crucial meeting. I still believe that March will be the beginning of some sort of an Anglican realignment, with many changes in the familiar structures of the church. I also believe a more vibrant, mission-oriented church will emerge eventually, and that St. Luke’s on the Lake will be a leading parish in that focus. I am thankful to be your rector at this time, as we go forward carefully and prayerfully to be “a community in Christ and to be Christ to the world.” I pledge my best to serve you by keeping you informed. Join me in praying for each other and for our church. And remember, as a wise Bishop once said, “This is God’s church.” This means, I believe, that God will not abandon us.

Keep the faith

Michael Wyckoff