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To All Licensed Clergy in Hereford Diocese

Dear Fellow Clergy

Lambeth Conference 2008

As you will gather from the Press, despite all the stories that were written beforehand, the Anglican Communion has neither imploded nor exploded, broken up or fragmented. Indeed, we are in good heart and remain hopeful in God's work among us. That is not to say that all the divisions and differences are suddenly or immediately resolved but a path is charted and there is strong affirmation of what we hold together. There is also strong affirmation of our need to address, with others, the Millennium Development Goals.

As you will know, 650 bishops gathered in Canterbury for nearly 3 weeks for the Conference. We were from about 150 different countries with of course many different languages among us. At our worship together, it really did feel like "every nation under Heaven" before God. When we said the Lord's Prayer in our own languages there was an extraordinary sense, as there must have been on that first Pentecost, of all those different languages but all united and speaking the one same language in God's spirit.

There were a great many highlights both for the Bishops' Conference and for the parallel Spouses' Conference. Among those on my list would be:

➤ **The Pre-Lambeth Visits**

These were marvellously organised for us by Alan and Pene Seabrook in this Diocese when we had 8 overseas bishops come and join us for a week prior to the Lambeth Conference itself. Not only was that enriching for us as a Diocese but it played a crucial part in ensuring that all the overseas bishops arrived in Canterbury having had a chance to settle into our climate and culture, knowing some other people a little bit better, and having received hospitality with an emphasis therefore from the beginning of forming good relationships.

➤ **The Retreat**

Unlike the Conference in 1998, this one began with a 3 day retreat focused on addresses by Archbishop Rowan and our being together in the quiet, prayerfulness and beauty of Canterbury Cathedral.

The Conference began with dedicated time set aside to listen to God and, with the pre-Lambeth Conference, listening to one another. These helped shape the character and mood of what was to follow.

- Our **Common Worship** every morning and evening was led by different Provinces of the Anglican Communion which was not only inspiring but also highlighted the unity that we have in our worship, despite the diversity. For Anglicans, worship has always been a major unifying force as well as an inspiration, and of course our offering to God what is “our duty and our joy”.
- All the bishops met in **Bible Study** groups of 8 or 9 for an hour and a half every morning. The group that I was in had 2 bishops from Papua New Guinea, one from Australia, North India, Sudan, Bahamas, United States, Canada and me: a very international and global and fascinating mix. Hearing one another’s stories was a highlight of the Conference and very humbling. The Sudanese Bishop had been an NSM priest working as an executive for Shell for 20 years and gave it up to go and work in the war-torn south of Sudan where the buildings have been destroyed and there was nowhere initially for him, his wife and 5 children to live. They now have a mud hut with 2 rooms and almost no income. One of the Papua New Guinea bishops has 8 or 9-hour walks to some of his more remote villages, carrying 30 kg pack on his back and having to negotiate logs over ravines because the paths are so steep and there are no roads. One of the Indian bishops spoke of there being no water in his village and when the water arrives by container, it goes first to the upper caste Indians in his village, then to the animals of the upper caste and only after that, if there is any left, to the dalits who are the Christians. These are all brother and sister Anglicans to say nothing of brother and sister human beings.
- The focus on the **Millennium Development Goals**
The march in London was extremely significant, given the global experience and representation. We are right to focus on the continuing desperate need to reduce world poverty and to keep pressure on our politicians, as upon ourselves and one another to achieve the goals set which are within our grasp if only we have the will to match. (There is a crucial meeting taking place in New York on 25th September.)
- During the Eucharist led by the Korean Church, the **Archbishop of Japan** prayed for forgiveness for the Japanese for all that they had done in Korea in subjugating people there. This was typical, not only of the Japanese themselves, but of the spirit of the Conference as a whole.
- The Archbishop of Dar es Salaam, the Bishop of Masasi, the Bishop of Tanga and I took the opportunity of reaffirming the **Companion Link** between our 4 Dioceses and re-signing our mutual agreement for a further 5 years.
- **The Chief Rabbi, Sir Jonathan Sacks**, addressed the Conference and received a standing ovation twice. Not only was what he said about covenant thoughtful and inspiring, (perhaps rather as one might expect from him) but also he reminded us that in an age where people are very prone to break away from others and seek ever-smaller communities of the like-minded, the need for the Anglican Communion to stay together and be both comprehensive and global is all the greater.
- We met in “**indaba**” groups of 40 for an hour and a half every day, ensuring that every bishop had a voice. One of the Americans said in our last session that he had been changed by the experience because he now understood what pain the 2003 decision of The Episcopalian Church (i.e. the Anglicans in USA) had caused in Malawi. As a result he said he joined with others in not wanting to repeat that or cause further pain.
- The multitude of **conversations** that took place as we all walked from one part of the campus to another in company with others, or queued for meals or other occasions.

The aspect of the Conference that worked least well, I think, was the fact that there was a document produced as a result of the conversations and reflections that went on in the “indaba” groups which attempted to summarise many of the points made. The group that worked on this did brilliantly but the whole process, including the timescale under which they worked, was stacked against them so that the document itself does not seem to me to be truly worthy of the insights, thoughts, experiences, stories, wisdom and ideas that were not only present but expressed.

Notwithstanding the above, there was an enormous amount of good that took place for the twin aims of both equipping bishops in mission and strengthening the Anglican identity. In the first area, there was a

proper and right addressing of a great many issues including that of the Millennium Development Goals, such as mission and scripture, the environment and climate, ecumenism, other faiths, the Bishop's own ministry, sexuality, the Windsor Process and Covenant.

What emerged about the Covenant is of particular significance and broadly there was very strong support for what I would describe as a "relational covenant". Most bishops were unhappy with the juridical dimension of the St Andrews Covenant draft and wanted an approach that was much more a covenant of grace than a covenant of law. This must surely be right because that is how our God deals with us and also it is truer to our Anglican character. Furthermore, it is as we are enabled to be generous to one another because of God's generosity to us, that we can commit to each other and seek the common good in the best possible way, conscious of the pains and the hurts of each. There was strong support for 3 moratoria on the 3 most divisive issues within the Communion so that there are no more consecrations of bishops in same-sex relationships, blessings of same-sex partnerships or incursions into the provinces of other dioceses. We all hope and pray that these moratoria will be honoured, respected, and kept so that we can continue to seek more of a common mind as we work together to know God's will more fully. There was also strong support for a Pastoral Forum to be set up to aid the relational nature of our Communion and especially to assist over any issues where there are strains or disagreements.

The mood throughout the Conference was one of mutual respect, commitment to the Gospel and a desire to stay together in one Communion to witness to God's global love and mission across his whole world. This needs the encouragement, understanding, generosity and prayer of us all.

Yours sincerely

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