



Anglican Church of Canada

Office of the Primate, 80 Hayden Street, Toronto, ON M4Y 3G2
Tel. 416-924-9199 Ext. 276 / Email primate@national.anglican.ca

January 9, 2008

To the Primates of the Anglican Communion
and the Moderators of the United Churches

My Sister and Brothers in Christ:

In this season of Epiphany, as we celebrate the manifestation of God in Christ, I greet you in the name of Jesus our Lord.

Let me begin by saying that we in the Anglican Church of Canada rejoice in the fellowship we share throughout the Communion. We embrace wholeheartedly the Five Marks of Mission for the Anglican Communion. We value international relationships developed over many years and we cherish the opportunity to participate in the work of global commissions and networks. We treasure our friendship in Christ.

In the six months that I have been Primate of our beloved church in Canada, I have repeatedly made reference to those things that draw us together as Anglicans in this country and throughout the world. There are, of course, the commonly held Instruments of Communion – the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lambeth Conference, the Primates' Meeting and the Anglican Consultative Council. To these four, Canadian priest and liturgist Paul Gibson has suggested adding a fifth – not legislated but real – the Eucharist. I would also add the Cycles of Prayer used within dioceses, provinces and the Communion; Companion Diocese relationships that span the globe; and churches acting together in relief, development, and justice work throughout the world.

I have also, as I have traveled and spoken to many groups among the faithful, made frequent reference to the *Mission Statement* of the Anglican Church of Canada, which begins with these two sentences:

“As a partner in the worldwide Anglican Communion and in the universal Church, we proclaim and celebrate the gospel of Jesus Christ in worship and action.

We value our heritage of biblical faith, reason, liturgy, tradition, bishops and synods, and the rich variety of our life in community.”

In the spirit of that statement and in the interest of clarity I feel it is important to write to you regarding conversations dealing with the blessing of same-sex unions in Canada. I hope to dispel rumour or misunderstanding by sharing with you what is actually happening.

Since the late 1970s there has been a long and significant history of statements from our House of Bishops and from our General Synod that have affirmed the place and contributions of gays and lesbians in the life of our church. Since the early 1990s our General Synod, a gathering of more than 300 bishops clergy and lay people that meets every three years, has devoted major blocks of time to consider the blessing of committed same-sex unions. We understand such unions as adult, monogamous, intended lifelong, same-sex relationships that include sexual intimacy. These conversations have evolved over a significant period of time. It is important to note that the Anglican Church of Canada has not altered its doctrine of marriage as outlined in our prayer books and canons. We do, however, live in a country where the federal Government in 2005 approved legislation that allows the marriage of same-gender couples.

I believe that the manner in which the blessing of same-sex unions has been and continues to be discussed throughout our church is comprehensive and respectful of diversity of perspective. As a church, we welcome and respect freedom of individual conscience and the theological convictions of our diverse membership. Our General Synods have consistently sought to honour every voice as we work patiently through this contentious and difficult issue.

In June, 2007, the General Synod received and concurred with the opinion of the *St. Michael Report*, prepared by the Primate's Theological Commission, (a group of 12 theologians from diverse perspectives) that the blessing of same-sex unions is a matter of doctrine, but not creedal. In other words, while this matter relates to important questions of doctrine, it is not ranked alongside doctrines such as the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Passion and Death of Christ, the Resurrection and the Holy Spirit. The 2007 General Synod asked the Primate to request the Primate's Theological Commission to consult with dioceses and parishes and to report in advance of our next General Synod in 2010 on:

- *The theological question of whether the blessing of same-sex unions is a faithful, Spirit-led development of Christian doctrine;*
- *Scripture's witness to the integrity of every human person and the question of the sanctity of human relationships.*

I have responded to this request and the Primate's Theological Commission has begun working on these matters.

General Synod also endorsed an April 2007 statement from the Canadian House of Bishops making provision for what was described as "pastoral generosity," whereby gay and lesbian couples who have been civilly married might ask the church for prayers for their relationship. These petitions, not to be confused with a nuptial blessing, would be offered in the context of the prayers of the people within a Eucharist. Requests for this provision have been granted in a number of places.

Notwithstanding the fact that the 2007 General Synod defeated a resolution, "*affirming the authority and jurisdiction of a diocesan synod with the concurrence of its bishop and in a manner respecting the conscience of the incumbent and the will of the parish to authorize the blessing of same sex unions,*" three dioceses -- Ottawa, Montreal and Niagara -- have since voted by strong majorities to request their bishop to consider authorizing public rites for the blessing of same-sex couples who are civilly married.

I believe these resolutions present an opportunity to test the mind of the local church and the results speak of a pastoral need that cannot be ignored. In each case the bishop has indicated that he will consult widely before making a decision.

General Synod 2007 also concurred by resolution with the opinion of the *St. Michael Report* that the blessing of same-sex unions should not be a communion-breaking issue. Nonetheless some people feel compelled to leave our church over this issue. Their decision is regrettable given the fact that the bishops have made adequate and appropriate provision for the pastoral care and episcopal support of all members of our church including those who find themselves in conscientious disagreement with the view of their bishop and synod. These provisions are contained in a document known as *Shared Episcopal Ministry* approved by the House of Bishops in November 2004 and commended in September 2006 by an international Panel of Reference appointed by the Archbishop of Canterbury.

In light of these provisions, as well as of ancient canons of the church, statements of successive Lambeth Conferences, the Lambeth Commission on Communion (the *Windsor Report*), and the 2005 and 2007 communiqués from the Primates, we believe that recent interventions by another province in the internal life of our church are unnecessary and inappropriate. Our concern was voiced publicly in recent statements by the Council of General Synod (Nov. 16, 2007) and in a joint Pastoral Statement from myself and the Canadian Metropolitans (Nov. 29, 2007). I have appealed to the Archbishop of Canterbury in his capacity as one of the Instruments of Communion and as chair of the Primates' Meeting to address the very serious issues raised by this intervention and to make clear that such actions are not a valid expression of Anglicanism.

It is important to note that while some choose to leave our church over this issue a great many more, even in the midst of great personal struggle, choose to remain within our fellowship. We recognize and honour their intentions to do so.

As these conversations continue in Canada, there will be a focus on questions centered on scripture. The *St. Michael Report* acknowledges, “the interpretation of Scripture is a central and complex matter and that, at times in the Church’s history, ‘faithful’ readings have led to mutually contradictory understandings, requiring ongoing dialogue and prayer towards discernment of the one voice of the gospel.” We remain committed to this dialogue.

Two other significant questions that also come directly from the *St. Michael Report* will also be considered:

1. *“Is it theologically and doctrinally responsible for one member church of the Communion to approve a course of action which it has reason to believe may be destructive of the unity of the Communion?”*
2. *“Is it theologically and doctrinally responsible to accept unity as the value which transcends all others, and therefore for a member church of the Communion to refrain from making a decision when it believes it has an urgent gospel mandate to proceed?”*

I believe that Canadian Anglicans are strongly committed to the highest degree of Communion possible in our life in Christ at home and throughout the world. This was clearly demonstrated in our General Synod response to the *Windsor Report*, which stated:

The Anglican Church of Canada:

- 1. reaffirms its commitment to full membership and participation in the life, witness and structures of the Anglican Communion;*
- 2. reaffirms its commitment to the Lambeth Quadrilateral, as received by our church in 1893;*
- 3. expresses its desire and readiness to continue our participation in the ongoing life of the Communion through partnerships and visits, theological and biblical study, in order to foster Communion relationships, including the listening process and the development and possible adoption of an Anglican covenant;*
- 4. reaffirms its mutual responsibility and interdependence with our Anglican sisters and brothers in furthering the mission of the church;*
- 5. notes that, in response to the Windsor Report, the Diocese of New Westminster expressed regret, and the House of Bishops effected a moratorium on the blessing of same-sex unions, and*
- 6. calls upon those archbishops and other bishops who believe that it is their conscientious duty to intervene in provinces, dioceses and parishes other than their own to implement paragraph 155 of the Windsor Report and to seek an accommodation with the bishops of the dioceses whose parishes they have taken into their own care; and*
- 7. commits itself to participation in the Listening Process and to share with member churches of the Communion the study of human sexuality which continues to take place, in the light of Scripture, tradition and reason.*

This letter is intended to give you a factual, accurate and up-to-date picture of the state of the conversation regarding the blessing of same-sex unions in the Anglican Church of Canada.

I look forward to meeting you at Lambeth and to the opportunity to share face to face in conversation, fellowship and the proclamation of the Gospel. I pray that through grace we will maintain a capacity for respectful dialogue, a tolerance for diversity of opinion and a vision for the church that is as inclusive as the loving embrace of Our Lord Jesus Christ in the crèche and on the cross, in the River Jordan and in highest heaven.

In Him I am

Sincerely yours

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Fred Hiltz". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

The Most Reverend Fred Hiltz
Primate
The Anglican Church of Canada