

Priest Lisa's Response to the Anglican Primates' call for temporary sanctions for the Episcopal Church

January 14, 2016

The end is reconciliation; the end is redemption; the end is the creation of the beloved community.
(-Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., December 3, 1956)

Beloved Saints,

This week I was asked what the decision of the Anglican Communion's Primate Meeting means to us at the local level and what I think of this decision. I am going to answer that question, but would like to begin with some context providing information about the Communion and our relationship to it as Episcopalians.

The Anglican Episcopal family consists of approximately 85 million Christians from 38 members churches (also called provinces) and 6 other "national or local churches" identified as "extra provincials" worldwide. The Episcopal Church is comprised of 109 dioceses and 3 regional areas in 17 nations and is a member of the Anglican Communion with Presiding Bishop Michael Curry serving as our elected Primate.

The Anglican Communion Primates Meeting is one of the three instruments of the Anglican Communion, including the Lambeth Conference of bishops (happening every 10 years since 1867) and the Anglican Consultative Council, comprised of bishops, clergy and laity representing the entire Communion every three years. The Anglican Consultative Council is the Communion's main policy-making body. Each province relates to other provinces within the Anglican Communion by being in "full communion" with each other.

Since 1978, then Archbishop Donald Coggan, the 101st Archbishop of Canterbury, started a tradition establishing a Primates Meeting every couple of years for "leisurely thought, prayer and deep consultation." That meeting of the Primates occurred this past week, January 11-15 in Canterbury, England. During the meeting a vote was taken and then a statement released calling for a 3-year suspension of The Episcopal Church, restricting our "full participation" in the Communion. The practical consequences of the Primates' action will result in a period of time in which Episcopalians will not be invited to serve on certain committees, and/or will be excluded from voting if in attendance. Our President of the House of Deputies, The Rev. Gay Jennings has issued a recent statement and I commend her letter to you.

The Primates, while "expressing their unanimous desire to walk together", voted these sanctions as a response to our General Convention's decision this past summer to change our church's canonical language defining marriage (Resolution A036) and authorizing two new marriage rites with language allowing them to be used by same-sex or opposite-sex couples (Resolution A054).

So, in light of that entire context, what does this past week's decision mean for us as a denomination and specifically to us at St. John's?

First, I am so proud to be an Episcopalian and a member of this branch of the "Jesus Movement," as our Presiding Bishop Michael Curry fondly calls us. We are boldly claiming

our identity and courageously articulating our discipleship as followers of Jesus and what we believe is the gospel message of full inclusion. At the same time, it is important to recognize there are many worldwide who do not share this freedom of expression—in their words or in their lives, especially Anglicans living in Africa where homosexuality is still illegal and punishable with prison sentences. I take seriously the responsibility to stay educated and open to how we can use our freedoms on behalf of those still being oppressed.

Many of us see this decision as a punitive action of sanctions. I interpret this as a result of the 44 Primates' majority belief that the Episcopal Church's message and actions to support full-inclusion have gone too far. Concurrently, this action is not the end of the story or our relationship in the Communion. This sanction will indeed be seen by many as hurtful and punitive, but I am of the mind that it may also be a grace-filled moment in which we are all called to a place of further reflection and prayer. I believe this clarity will help us serve others more genuinely, assist us in crafting a message of welcome and hospitality to all and in the end, influence the decisions we make as a community of faith pointing us outward to be the reconciling love of God in the world.

If asked if I am worried about the precarious nature of our relationship in the communion, here is what I would say: No. I am more concerned about finding ways to strengthen our outreach efforts in our community and beyond. I am more concerned about finding ways to invite more in our community to take up the mantle of leadership. I am more concerned about issues of gun violence, human trafficking, food insecurity, drug and alcohol addiction, race relations and religious persecution. I am more concerned that this will actually continue to distract us as disciples lest we forget our mission to be the reconciling presence of Christ in the world.

It is not lost on me that this Monday, our country will once again remember and reflect on the life and legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr. Of his many meaningful speeches, sermons and writings, it is this brief quote that resonates today with new depth and meaning for me: *The end is reconciliation; the end is redemption; the end is the creation of the beloved community.* I offer it to us today as a reminder, that our journey is in fact the call, the process is in fact the lesson, and in the end, the result of our lives is simply to have chosen paths paved with love, dignity and respect. I pray every day that we are together building the Beloved community; a place to belong and a way to believe.

I end with an excerpt from our Presiding Bishop Michael Curry, taken from his [interview](#) following the decision of the three-year sanction. I hear these words as hope-filled and optimistic, as I know Bishop Curry to be. I offer them as solace and strength trusting that you too will join me in the work we have still to do living into our baptismal promises every day to seek and serve Christ in all person, respecting the dignity of every human being.

Our commitment to be an inclusive church is not based on a social theory or capitulation to the ways of the culture, but on our belief that the outstretched arms of Jesus on the cross are a sign of the very love of God reaching out to us all. While I understand that many disagree with us, our decision regarding marriage is based on the belief that the words of the Apostle Paul to the Galatians are true for the church today: All who have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female, for all are one in Christ. (-Presiding Bishop Michael Curry)

May you never forget that you are loved.

Priest Lisa