



# House of Bishops

1977 INTERIM MEETING OF  
THE HOUSE OF BISHOPS OF THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH  
SEPTEMBER 30 - OCTOBER 7, 1977  
SANDPIPER BAY • PORT ST. LUCIE, FLORIDA 33452

## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDING BISHOP TO THE HOUSE OF BISHOPS

Port St. Lucie, Florida  
September 30, 1977

Customarily, one hundred and eighty eighth anniversaries pass without significant notice. On this occasion we happen to have the opportunity to commemorate the one hundred and eighty eighth anniversary of the first meeting of the House of Bishops.

I hope that we here are going to be so responsive to the lead of the Holy Spirit that from hence forth the 188th anniversary of the first meeting of the House of Bishops will be an event worthy of commemoration.

The second session of the General Convention of 1789 was called to order in Philadelphia on September 30. Early on in the session, Bishop Samuel Seabury and the two delegates from Connecticut agreed to accept the constitution that had been drawn up under the leadership of Bishop William White of Pennsylvania and others. The decision by Seabury and his delegation put to

rest the fears that there would be two Episcopal Churches operating side by side in this new nation. The new Englanders and the group from the Middle Atlantic states shared a vision of unity that proved stronger than their differing interpretations of church organization, ministry, structure, government and a whole host of other traditions. They agreed that unity was important - unity with Christian tradition through the Church of England and the historic episcopate; unity with each other from Georgia to Boston; unity with the future through a common commitment to the one mission of Jesus Christ. It is true that this vision of unity and the one mission has dimmed and has grown cloudy from time to time in the past 188 years, but thanks be to God that Episcopalians have never lost sight of it.

On the third day after the opening of the 1789 General Convention's second session - my calculating says it was on October third - the two bishops present, White and Seabury, withdrew from the larger assembly to organize the House of Bishops. They went into an upper room to the left of the sanctuary in old Christ Church: Samuel Seabury, high churchman, tory sympathizer, British Chaplain, somewhat suspicious of a church in which lay persons would directly share in making important decisions;

William White, low churchman, adviser to the statesmen who moulded the United States Constitution, strong believer in lay participation in church government.

Seabury had been consecrated first. White was the host bishop. Both have been recognized as the Presiding Bishop. Perhaps the significance of that first meeting for latter days is that the office of Presiding Bishop is meant to stimulate and provide for a shared leadership within the House of Bishops and throughout the Church.

My limited knowledge of church history does not include familiarity with the details of events in that room in Philadelphia during the first meeting of that first two-man House of Bishops. We can make some guesses.

They likely spent some time in prayer, perhaps using some of the forms in a very new Prayer Book that was just then in the process of being adopted. It is likely that they expressed concern about the fact that America's third bishop, Samuel Provoost of New York, had yet to be convinced that he should join their fellowship. They no doubt talked of the giant task of truly uniting the scattered Anglicans up and down the Atlantic seaboard into a church that would have unity in act and thought as well

as in name. Together they faced the almost impossible task of leading a remnant church into becoming a missionary church, of replacing mere survival with growth and outreach as the major concerns of the new church.

Two apprehensive, cautious, uncertain bishops entered that room in Philadelphia on October 3, 1789. Thanks be to God that later they emerged as a House of Bishops, united by total commitment rather than by total agreement and destined to set the tone for a church that could and would do far more than just survive.

Brothers, look around you at what has happened to the House of Bishops in just 188 years.

We have grown in size, but have we grown in wisdom?

We have grown in diversity, but have we deepened in commitment?

What would have happened to this church if any two of us had been chosen by God to be in that upper room in Philadelphia 188 years ago?

There are many more of us today and we are meeting in a

much larger room, but the questions we face are as demanding as those that concerned Seabury and White.

A key question before us during this particular week is: Can we (or how can we) sustain and strengthen our common commitment to Christ and to the unity of purpose of His one mission amid the diversity of temperaments, potentials and problems within the environment of this present rapidly changing world? This and other questions to be considered here present us with a two fold concern. Our responsibility is not only to understand what needs doing to respond to demands of the particular questions, but also what capabilities and limitations do we have as bishops in responding to such questions.

The church people who gathered in their distress in St. Louis catalogued some of the major questions which this House is facing. While listening to the four principal speeches opening that meeting, the Lord's parable of "the two men who went up into the temple to pray" stirred in my memory. God and history can best judge with which of the two men praying the speakers of that occasion are to be identified. As for the Presiding Bishop and other bishops of this House, however, it became increasingly clear that, both by the speakers' assignment and our choice, our appropriate identity is with the publican.

How do we deal with the divisions and fragmentations in the Church and in the world which separate us from one another and many from the good life? How do we relate our diversity and differences within the community of the Holy Spirit and reflect the true Glory of God?

How can we as bishops most effectively work together to resolve such problems to enable Christ's mission to the world, to benefit the whole membership of the Church and for our own soul's health?

I believe God is giving us a special opportunity in this meeting of the House to answer together these and many other even more specific questions which simultaneously threaten our relationships and mask our opportunities. The title of one report we are scheduled to receive sometime during this meeting can well serve as the theme for all of our work here, namely, "the office and work of a bishop."

When the report has been received and the committee thanked, let us take some ample time in small groups and/or as a "Committee of the whole" and test the mutuality (commonality) of our understanding of the office and work of a bishop by comparing the responses we believe a bishop should properly make to some of the problems pressing upon us. Both our hopes and obligations to resolve the problems and differences among us have greater

possibility of fulfillment, I believe, if we will mutually share two efforts. The first is to relax and reduce the tensions and pressures, emotional and otherwise, to which we are subject. Some relaxation, reflections and recreation while we are together here will not deny nor neglect the seriousness of our concerns. To press too hard in our efforts to solve the problems of our relationships and mission is to produce the same results of pressing the golf shot too hard. You end up in the "rough" with more problems than when you started.

The second effort I recommend for your consideration is that we attempt to avoid subjective entanglement and conflicts from the outset of this meeting by considering and discussing the work and problems of bishops in as objective a manner as possible. In other words, let's first talk of what we believe a bishop ought to do and how a bishop should behave and to what limitations a bishop is subject, before attempting direct pronouncements and answers to the subjective questions: "What must I do now?" or "What can they properly expect of me?"

I believe that our investment of both time and money will be greatly rewarded if by the means of a relaxed and objective approach to this contemporary consideration of the office and obligations of a bishop we can clear our perspective and recognize more accurately ourselves and our predicaments as bishops. Perhaps we could relieve our critics of some of their burdens,

as well as better serve the Church and provide aid to each other if we provide some objective criteria defining functions, attitudes, life styles, responsibilities and limitations for bishops. There is a neglected need among us, I believe, to recognize more specifically and measure more precisely the diversity among us. When our diversity is properly related through our common faith in the One Lord Jesus Christ, then we share the strength and glory of Christian Community and then only can we experience episcopal collegiality.

If we seriously examine and evaluate the Episcopal office during this meeting, it may be discovered that the concept of episcopacy held by some of us is too narrow. It may also be discovered that others of us have so stretched the office out of shape in attempting to identify with contrasting roles that the image is blurred beyond recognition.

The observation has been made that there are two principal concepts of episcopacy exhibited by this House. One is prelacy. The other is populist. It has been further observed that a major source of our confusion and difficulty results from the prelates trying to be populist and the populist acting like prelates.

Two causes of trouble arise out of a too narrow concept of

the episcopal office. One is the effort demanding conformity within too narrow limits. The other cause of trouble is exaggerated reaction to the legitimate limits of episcopal office. There is no freedom in either camp or condition to exercise effective episcopal leadership.

Are we taking our individual concept of the episcopal office for granted? Do we have a reasonable and accurate measure of our ability and capacity to relate constructively and accept graciously our diversity? Do we have accurate measure of the diversity we can tolerate faithfully before falling victims of faithless conflict? Is there sufficient grace between Christians (i.e. among us) to maintain a positive and honest relation and continue to work at resolving differences while sincerely holding opposite conviction on secondary issues? How apt are we in distinguishing between primary and secondary issues?

Although any of us may become distracted, confused or misled, is there any disagreement among us as to the primary responsibility we share, namely to be faithful to Jesus Christ? Are not all issues secondary to that responsibility?

Faith in Christ provides the motivation to continue risking the development of relations thus far incomplete and marred.

Faith in Christ strengthens the will to maintain Christian self-discipline. Faith in Christ frees us to allow others choices we either cannot or choose not to make. Faith in Christ enables us to continue accepting and forgiving one another even when we differ in significant details of belief. Faith in Christ requires us to continue our best efforts to share the good, true and abundant life he graciously shares with us. Faith in Christ helps us be good stewards of the gifts we've received, including our own personhood, without taking ourselves too seriously. Faith keeps us flexible and responsive to all sorts and conditions in Christian mission.

The Christian faith is being tested in many ways in the Episcopal Church. The faith quality of our episcopal leadership is being tested. The question being put to us: Is our leadership comprehensive, flexible and sufficiently responsive to relate and release our diversity into the multiple channels of our Lord's one mission?

Here are some test questions for our consideration and response:

1) Can you accept the service of a Presiding Bishop who to date is unable to accept women in the role of priests?

As Presiding Bishop I have continually endeavored not to limit the faith of others, nor to lend the influence of my office to those on either side of the ordination issue. My commitment has been and is to encourage and provide for communication and continuing relations between those on both sides of the issue. I have prayed to be open to any new understanding of either priesthood or human sexuality which may be given to me. Thus far my understanding of Christian priesthood, of the inter-relatedness of the Christian ministry, of New Testament imagery and symbolism, of the roles and inter-relations of human sexuality prevent my believing that women can be priests anymore than they can become fathers or husbands. At the same time my mind holds no question or doubt as to the rights and abilities of women to be elders, rulers, executives, generals, presidents, judges or queens. The fact simply stated is: To date I remain unconvinced that women can be priests.

If it is determined by prayerful authority that this limitation prevents one from serving as the Presiding Bishop of this Church, I am willing to resign the office. The ministry must be offered voluntarily as the offering can only be accepted voluntarily and never upon the demand of the minister.

The necessity of finding new and/or different opportunities, locations and means of offering one's ministry is increasing more rapidly and is more widespread than the Church has yet recognized. Our provisions within the Church to assist most of these transitions are inadequate or lacking. Our study of the office of a bishop should lead us to develop effective and respectable means of translations and transitions of bishops in their ministries. Episcopacy should never have to be too long endured by either the occupant of the office or the diocese served. Too many times talented clergy have been overwhelmed, worn out or have lost their effectiveness (and in some cases their faith) long before their tour of duty is terminated. Some members of this House may have real need for relief, rest, change of position or early retirement and we should provide means for them to say so with honor. There is sufficient pastoral concern, experience and resource among us to correct this need.

Prevention and protection from the destructive pressures which cripple and destroy persons and relations require greater coordination of personnel and investment of resources than our dedication has thus far provided. Careful and candid analysis is needed with regard to our personnel and our system. We are vulnerable and subject to separations within this Church. The statistics on bishops and other clergy have been increasing with

the rest of society. Our increasing efforts to rationalize excessive drinking habits and increased divorce rates are misdirected and symptomatic.

Hearing is easily impaired both in today's church and world. The irony is the more talk about hearing, the less hearing there is. Among the distressed people in the Church, many are requesting only on thing: the assurance that the Prayer Book of 1928 shall continue to be available for use by congregations in this Church. Once again I plead with you to give such assurance and make proper provision graciously. The family that acquires new dishes does not systematically break the long used ones to pieces. They too are available for use. Why not well used and beloved prayer books? Such provision can be made and be orderly managed.

I know we've all been listening to the arguments of distressed and angry people, responding as we are moved. We recognize many of the arguments to be ill-conceived and non-converting. What response can we make? A positive response in recognition, even if we cannot accept the argument and are in turn rejected because of our failure.

The gathering of people in St. Louis, earlier this month represent a cluster of concerns, which require serious analysis. The Bishop of Kentucky merits special appreciation for his

application of pastoral concern. David Reed's efforts assembled an excellent team of representative of this House. Their presence among the people gathered in St. Louis was a more eloquent testimony that the members of this House and Church care for one another than any number of speeches could have been. I believe they represented us with both dignity and humility. I know we are grateful to them.

After much prayer and thought regarding the internal distress, disagreements and divisions the Episcopal Church has suffered, I call upon this House to join in special and additional efforts to implement pastoral concern, to continue communications and to offer all positive assistance within our capabilities. I request that you authorize the Presiding Bishop to designate and assemble, with your advice, support and continuing counsel, a task force to coordinate the efforts of this Church in seeking and offering means of healing, restoring or creating anew relationship with the distressed and the separated members of this Church. By God's grace our negotiations can be Christian if those on both sides of the divisive issues will continuously plead for God's protection from the sin of pride. Let us endeavor to share with those who claim our inheritance, even if they are separated from us. This may include offering episcopal orders if their needs

can be met. In accordance with scripture let us go "the second mile" ? many time over to avoid delivering one another to the magistrates (of the civil courts). Let us renew our cooperation as bishops in assisting one another extend episcopal pastoral care as members of an household of faith. In so doing, let us be doubly cautious that on the one hand we fail not to call in a brother bishop who may reach into an area temporarily closed to us, and on the other hand let us remember there is no such thing as an "Episcopal Free Agent". How bitter the irony when there is conflict between two parties, both of whom are striving for good.

I believe I am correct in reporting that, as Presiding Bishop, I have conferred with each bishop in this house who, during the last two years, has been the subject of controversy in the national Church. I know I am correct in reporting that each of these bishops has, without exception, been attempting to extend Christian ministry.

The question we need acutely to discuss here and the consensus for which we must strive is: How do we constructively recognize, relate and coordinate the diversity among us to the Glory of God in the service of the Christian Mission?

I repeat, Brothers, my plea that we "let our weight down" here, help one another reduce the pressures we are under and talk with one another about our problems and predicaments, our distress and disagreements, our hopes and our potentials before we talk

to or at or about one another. I've talked with Paul Moore and Al Chambers and others of you. I know we need to sit in an equal circle and with one another talk and listen, before we mount any rostrum to proclaim judgment or resolve righteousness. Let our energies here be invested in combining leadership in and for ministry rather than in reactionary efforts of self-justification. Let us analyse our opportunities and resources for mission and plan strategies and logistics for better enlistment, training and deployment.

Four focal points of the deployment problem within the perspective of the episcopal office and the attention of this House:

1) First, there is the task of electing a successor to Clarence Hobgood, to serve as Suffragan to the Presiding Bishop for the Defense Services deployed around the world. Having personally visited with our Chaplains and their people during my journey around the globe last year, by direct sight and hearing I've discovered the dimensions and outreach of this ministry are beyond the comprehension of state-side people. We have most adequate causes to give thanks for Clarence Hobgood's episcopal Service.

2) Secondly, in taking official notice and also with abundant reasons for giving thanks to God for Irvine Swift's episcopal ministry as he approaches retirement, another aspect of the need for ministry to a modern form of episcopal diaspora is presented to us. By appointment of the Presiding Bishop both Irvine Swift and Edmond Browning have served as Bishop-in-Charge of our American parishes in Europe. Both have assisted in ministering to the families of the Armed Services of Canada and Great Britain as well as our own. They have also reached out to the great civilian diaspora which has carried members of this Church throughout the world. Since the Presiding Bishop, representing the ECUSA, bears official responsibility for our members dispersed around the world from our many dioceses, I've come to consider these two fellow bishops in their various roles of Suffragan to the Presiding Bishop, as Ambassadors-at-large for the whole Church. I think of our American congregations in Europe as our Episcopal Church embassies, through which and from which the Episcopal Church can share the Anglican presence in Europe, cooperate with the churches of other traditions, and minister to American expatriots and those traveling on to the East.

The need for a bishop resident in Europe in the role of Suffragan of the Presiding Bishop to the civilian Diaspora has been well tested. The method of selection for filling this office

is limited to the Presiding Bishop's appointment. I have committed the Presiding Bishop to consult with representatives of the American Congregations in any future selection. At this meeting of the House I would ask the House committees of the Office of a Bishop and Overseas Missions to meet and consider with me the possible provisions for election by this House of a Bishop to our Civilian Diaspora.

3) Thirdly, the responsibility of deploying bishops is given a focus by the need and request being reported to us by diocese in Columbia and Mexico. Can we adapt or revise our models of the episcopacy to meet these needs? Obviously, we are being asked for much more than a "yes" or "no" answer.

? 4) And forthly, considering the need for possibly revising our models and deployment methods for the Ninth Province, there should be stimulus to sharpen our focus and up-date our consideration of possibly developing better deployment of all our bishops. The work of a bishop is sufficiently demanding that it deserves better than being allowed to become an endurance ordeal.

For the endurance you've already experienced and the patience you've demonstrated I thank you. If I have made you drowsy with much speaking, please consider the experience a demonstration of my point concerning relaxation. If my words add to your frustration,

please consider the frustrations as but one more of the common bonds binding us together. If you feel overburdened, please be reminded that we are to bear one another's burdens.

And if you are wearied, then rejoice with me that a day's work is done, and share with me the faith that God approves of rest and provides us with hope for a new and better day.

On Wednesday, I will welcome the opportunity to share with you the clearing vision of our Venture in Mission. Others will join me in this witness. A preview of the perspective I pray we all can share with the whole Church is the vision of our Venture in Mission, including the whole life and work of the Church.

The Venture in Mission is our Venture together in Faith.