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The Witness Magazine

# An Open Letter regarding the Meeting of the Primates called by the Archbishop of Canterbury

From members of the board of the Episcopal Church Publishing Company  
(ECPC)

October 9, 2003

The Archbishop of Canterbury has called an extraordinary meeting of the Primates of the Anglican Communion on October 15-16, 2003. The Primates will discuss decisions made at the General Convention of the Episcopal Church (USA) regarding the ministry, vocation and dignity of homosexual persons, both in personhood and in relationships. Archbishop Williams has said, "I am clear that the anxieties caused by (these) recent developments have reached the point where we will need to sit down and discuss their consequences."

It is our hope and trust that frank and helpful discussion will indeed take place. This consultation will be the subject of our deepest prayers for the effective presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

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***It is clear that this meeting was urged by persons with little sense of confidence in the power of God working in the church through the Episcopal Church's General Convention and thus, by extension, in any instrument of the church's actual life.***

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However, the power of the Holy Spirit cannot be assumed. It is clear that this meeting was urged by persons with little sense of confidence in the power of God working in the church through the Episcopal Church's General Convention and thus, by extension, in any instrument of the church's actual life. Rather, a small minority of U.S. bishops and dioceses, together with a number of the Primates, has urged this meeting in the belief that the actions taken by General Convention could not possibly be the work of the Holy Spirit. Their demand is to negate the actions of General Convention by the reprimand, shunning, or destruction of the Episcopal Church - at least insofar as the Episcopal Church is seen as a legitimate voice of Anglicanism.

The question is whether or not the forces that call for such negation and condemnation have any right to claim to know the will of the Holy Spirit in and for the Episcopal Church, or to know with certainty that the Holy Spirit has not informed the community of deputies and bishops that make up General Convention. Condemnation is a dangerous business, for those who accuse may quickly find themselves without warrant.

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***We must surely consider the notion that God is working out a purpose that includes challenging long-held beliefs, prejudices, assumptions,***

***and fears about homosexuals and affirming homosexual persons in their faithfulness and vocations within the church.***

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"The wind blows where it wills," says our Lord, "and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes; so it is with every one who is born of the Spirit" (John 3:8, RSV). We know that God is working out a purpose not known by us, and surely that includes the working of the Spirit in the church. We must surely consider the notion that God is working out a purpose that includes challenging long-held beliefs, prejudices, assumptions, and fears about homosexuals and affirming homosexual persons in their faithfulness and vocations within the church. We trust this will be part of the discussion among the Primates.

The undersigned members of the board of the Episcopal Church Publishing Company (publisher of *The Witness* and other progressive Christian instruments professing an orthodox, evangelical, catholic tradition of vision and justice) strongly support the decisions made at the 2003 General Convention to:

- consent to V. Gene Robinson as bishop-elect of New Hampshire, and
- recognize that local faith communities are operating within the bounds of our common life as they explore and experience liturgies celebrating and blessing same-sex unions.

We believe these to be theologically sound decisions as the Episcopal Church works to be open and receptive to the work of the Holy Spirit in our midst. In this we are in company with the majority of diocesan deputations and bishops of this church, and with the witness of progressive organizations and individuals throughout the Anglican Communion.

We believe that the discussions at Lambeth Palace this month may indeed shed light on how we can live through this period of our Communion's life. At the same time, we are determined that this church maintain its openness to the workings of the Holy Spirit in its decision making, notwithstanding any negative and condemnatory words brought to the Primates' meeting. We believe that it is precisely this openness to the Holy Spirit that is the mark of the faithful Christian progressive.

**Signed by:**

- ◆ Owanah Anderson (Fort Worth)
- ◆ Richard Bower (Vermont)
- ◆ Jane Holmes Dixon, chair (Washington)
- ◆ Mark Harris (Delaware)
- ◆ Elizabeth Kaeton (Newark)
- ◆ Tracey Lind (Ohio)
- ◆ Ben Matlock (Massachusetts)
- ◆ Muffie Moroney (Texas)
- ◆ Orris Walker, Jr. (Long Island)

A list of supporting signatories is below. If you would like to lend your name to that list, please send an email to [ethan@thewitness.org](mailto:ethan@thewitness.org).

**Co-signed by Friends of ECPC:**

**signatures included:**

**(The Rev. Canon) Richard T. Nolan (Connecticut)**