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PASTORAL LETTER

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Dear Friends in Christ,

There is no question that this past week's 75th General Convention of The Episcopal Church has been historic in proportion—first, by electing the first woman in history to serve as our primate and presiding bishop; and second, by offering a significant and substantive response to *The Windsor Report*. Throughout this convention it has been evident that there are particular interest groups on all sides whose agendas will never be satisfied by any outcome but their own. But it has been evident also throughout the many hard, challenging, and honest deliberations of our gathering that the spirit of God has been at work—manifest in the prayerful attentiveness that has characterized even the most difficult conversations among us. In the end, I believe that the broad and very diverse center of our Church has spoken and modeled the way forward, as Paul would say, “with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” (Ephesians 4:2-3)

I am indeed privileged to have participated in the election of The Right Reverend Katharine Jefferts Schori as our new presiding bishop. I realize, of course, that her election will be welcomed by some while posing a challenge to others. Having worked closely with Katharine in the House of Bishops during the past three years, I believe that we have elected a very capable leader. I know her to be an intelligent and articulate woman, grounded in a life of prayer, whose well-spoken and steady presence will serve the Church well, both locally and abroad. Her election affirms the pastoral gifts and leadership that many women contribute to the life of our Church. Every indication from the many overseas guests among us—both bishops and primates, including those from the global south—has been positive as well, and I look forward to serving with Katharine in the days ahead.

During the past week and a half, there has been considerable attention given to the Episcopal Church's response to *The Windsor Report*, and given the many different spins that various interest groups are rushing to put on the resolutions that we have adopted, it is important to be clear about what action has and has not in fact been taken.

The time and attention given in this Church to *The Windsor Report* has been considerable—beginning with the work of the Special Commission on the Windsor Report and continuing through the work of the Special Legislative Committee that

conducted hour upon hour upon hour of hearings during the course of this convention. Some thirty-five resolutions were considered, and when all was said and done, seven were adopted:

1. a statement expressing the commitment of the Episcopal Church to being in communion with the other provinces of the Anglican Communion, to take practical steps to strengthen those relationships, and to live into deeper levels of the interdependent life commended in *The Windsor Report* (Resolution A159);
2. an expression of regret for “straining the bonds of affection” among us and asking the forgiveness of other churches in the Anglican Communion (Resolution A160);
3. a commitment to continuing in what Archbishop Rowan Williams has called the “Windsor Process” and to participating also in the “listening process”—that is, listening to the experience of gay and lesbian Christians, an undertaking to which successive Lambeth Conferences have committed this Communion and to which this Communion has not to date given significant attention (A165);
4. a willingness to explore the potential in developing an Anglican Covenant as suggested in *The Windsor Report* as a means of clarifying and strengthening the relationships among the provinces of the Anglican Communion (Resolution A163);
5. an affirmation of the provisions already made in the Episcopal Church to provide “Delegated Episcopal Pastoral Oversight” for dissenting minorities among us—a process commended by the Lambeth Commission in *The Windsor Report* (Resolution A163);
6. a statement condemning “any demonizing of homosexual persons or their ill treatment” and challenging all provinces in the Anglican Communion to be proactive in their advocacy for the human rights of gay and lesbian people (Resolution A168);
7. a resolution expressing the Episcopal Church’s desire to create the space necessary for healing and reconciliation in this church and in the worldwide communion by calling upon “Standing Committees and bishops with jurisdiction to exercise restraint by not consenting to the consecration of any candidate to the episcopate whose manner of life presents a challenge to the wider church and will lead to further strains on communion” (Resolution B033).¹

¹ The complete text of each of these resolutions can be found by searching for them by number at http://gc2006.org/legislation/view_Legislation.aspx .

The complete report of the Special Commission on the Windsor Report also provides a thorough analysis of The Windsor Report and provides a context in which to read and understand these resolutions. That report can be downloaded in a PDF Format at http://www.episcopalchurch.org/documents/3_SCECAC_reportbody_-_V2.pdf.

These resolutions offer a significant and substantive response to *The Windsor Report*, and the Archbishop of Canterbury has already expressed his appreciation for them. The Right Reverend John Paterson—Chairman of the Anglican Consultative Council, Bishop of Auckland, New Zealand, member of the Lambeth Commission, and one who was present throughout the deliberations of this General Convention—commended our work. “I have seen first hand the dedicated seriousness with which you have dealt with *The Windsor Report* and your relationships in the Anglican Communion,” he said. “My hope is that other member churches will work equally hard.”

Clearly, no one can be or will be completely satisfied by the outcome of this General Convention. Every one of us is being challenged in different ways to relinquish certain cherished and tightly held images of our church so that something new can be born both locally and globally among us. The process of rebirth—the act of dying and rising again—is never easy. But it is at the very center of our faith. It is the way of the cross, and it is, I believe, the way forward—neither a document nor legislative act, but a posture of the human heart. As our Presiding Bishop, Frank Griswold, said, “I would hope that we would all leave this convention in a spirit of sober but hopeful dispossession.”

It remains a fact that our world longs for a body that bears witness to the reconciling love of Jesus, a body that transcends both our self-limited and self-limiting interests and boldly and courageously crosses all the divides (and I mean *all* the divides) that plague us. One Body, in Love, embracing a suffering world. That is the vision. That is the gift, the challenge, and the divine opportunity that is now before us. I invite you to join with me in taking the next steps.

Yours faithfully in Christ,

The Right Reverend Robert O’Neill
Bishop

An additional resolution addressing the issue of blessing same-gender unions was discharged for a variety of practical reasons relating to time and our legislative process. But it was done with the clear understanding that the Episcopal Church has not authorized such rites to date.