



The Bishop of Gloucester
The Rt Revd Michael Perham

25 July 2008

To All Licensed Clergy, Lay Workers and Deanery Lay Chairs

Dear Brothers and Sisters

Some Bishops are doing a daily blog from the Lambeth Conference, indeed some of the material that is appearing in the papers is drawn from them. I am being more reticent (not least because I have not yet entered the world of blogging!) But here, halfway through the Conference, are a few impressions I would like to share with you and which I hope might inform your continuing prayers for which I shall be very grateful.

I went to the Lambeth Conference somewhat reluctantly, wondering whether it would be useful and whether I would be at ease within it. I have to say that I am entirely glad that I went and very sure that it is where I ought to be at the present time. I very much regret the absence of the bishops who are not there. Being there has renewed and deepened my sense of what a worldwide Communion is and of the importance of hanging on to it at almost any cost.

It has been a wonderful learning growing time of experiencing the diversity of the worldwide Church, of hearing deeply moving stories from those who live out their Christian life and discipleship in extraordinarily challenging circumstances and of making friendships across almost every divide you can think of.

I am willing to believe that there are some angry meetings behind locked doors and I believe there has also been one somewhat provocative press conference by one province. But I have to say that the overall atmosphere as you walk around the campus at the University of Kent and in all meetings in which I have shared (and there have been a lot of meetings) is one of respect for one another, a gentleness and a growing affection. Behind that there is, I fear, an underlying lack of listening at a deep level to the viewpoint of others, so that I am not sure that many views are being changed or modified.

One thing that has struck me particularly is that, contrary to the view of many that the Episcopal Church of the United States does what it wants without great reference to others, I have found the Americans among the most open and gentle in their approach. There is a very real humility about them and a real sadness that what they have done in the consecration of Gene Robinson has caused such dismay in some other parts of the Communion.

I have to confess that my own hope for the Conference is, almost above everything else, that we can find a way of allowing the Episcopal Church to be able to continue to walk alongside those who believe that their action in consecrating Gene Robinson was utterly wrong. We have so much in common with them and our Communion would be so lopsided without them that we must find a way of continuing to walk and talk together, even while there are deep divisions on fundamental matters. Such a relationship does not stop other parts of the Church from stating their own views very clearly. But I am also aware that the African Christians, who are often

looking over their shoulders to how their involvement in Lambeth is seen by their very conservative governments and by their Muslim neighbours find this almost too difficult to contemplate.

The media has reported quite accurately that we are spending a lot of our time in small bible study groups and in what are called Indaba groups. My bible study group is not very finely balanced, but has 4 Tanzanians, a Sudanese, an American and 2 English Bishops. We have a really good personal relationship but our approach to Scripture is very different. Later each morning 5 of those bible study groups come together to create an Indaba group, a group of 40 people who consider some of the major issues before the Communion. There are 15 such Indaba groups; their membership is much more mixed, though neither my bible study group nor my Indaba group includes any of the women bishops. We are having good conversations. Whether they can lead to any kind of agreement on key issues remains to be seen but they are good settings for learning and for developing relationships that will last long beyond the Conference. In fact I think my greatest hope from the Communion is that the relationships that are created during the Conference will be kept going by one means or another and that this, more than anything decided at Lambeth, will be what enables us to move forward as a worldwide body. I have learned today that I am to be the representative of my Indaba group in drafting the final report from the Conference and I ask for your prayers in that task.

I am having some conversations that I hope might lead to something like that at a local level and wondering whether we can set up a relationship with an African diocese and an American diocese to continue the talking beyond Lambeth in something rather short of a full scale diocesan link that will keep the dialogue going, as well as giving us a broader picture in Gloucester of the international nature of the Communion, which at present is only mediated to us through our really significant South Indian links.

I mentioned that there are no women bishops in the groups in which I am working. I ought to add that I have had conversations with several of the women bishops and am deeply impressed by their quality and in what I believe they can bring to the life of the church.

You will have seen something in the media about our walk in London, the march for the Millennium goals in terms of world development. I am clear that one of the things that I shall bring back from Lambeth is a renewed commitment to the fight against poverty and injustice across the world with a far greater sense of solidarity with our brothers and sisters in the Africa continent and other places where their Christian faith is lived out against the most dreadful poverty.

Please continue your prayers for Archbishop Rowan, for me, for Bishop John and for the whole conference.

With Every Good Wish and Blessing

+ Michael Gloucester: