

Address to Standing Committee on Lambeth 2008
Monday 18th February 2008

The decision of our bishops not to attend the Lambeth Conference in 2008 is the culmination of ten years of thought, prayer and action. We have played our part in challenging false teaching and practice, always hoping that those who have flouted the strong position taken by the last Lambeth Conference would turn back in repentance. As part of this, we have developed strong fellowship links with the many Anglican Christians all over the world who feel as we do that the crisis over human sexuality is of momentous significance, and who are determined not to accept unbiblical teaching and sinful practice.

Repentance has not happened. Instead we are involved in an extended period of delay. Obviously, many hope that we will all learn to live with the innovations of consecrating actively homosexual bishops and blessing same-sex marriages. Just as the general culture has been led to believe that the biblical standards concerning human sexual activity are completely outmoded, so Christians are expected gradually to come to terms with the world. It means that those who have paid a tremendous cost in immediately and decisively resisting the new teaching will be left on their own, as though they have done something wrong. This includes Rev David Short of the Diocese of New Westminster and his church who with other Canadians and Americans have sought alternative episcopal oversight and now face the possibility or reality of legal action.

The Lambeth Conference is more than a meeting to discuss differences. It is a fellowship with each other in the name of Christ to express our unity in the Gospel, to break bread with one another and to recognise each other's ministry. It functions to demonstrate and sustain the unity of the Anglican Communion. Those who are invited are given a degree of credibility as being a genuine part of the Anglican family. This also means that their teaching takes on a credibility in the wider world. It is significant that Archbishop Williams has not invited the actively homosexual bishop, Gene Robinson of New Hampshire. Clearly his presence would mean that he is to be accepted by all and his teaching is to be respected. This is not the case. But those who consecrated Bishop Robinson have been invited, as well as others who have endorsed and encouraged the blessing of same-sex unions in their dioceses. Why should he be excluded and

those who promoted him and consecrated him be included? They continue to teach the very doctrine which he exemplifies.

The actions of these bishops have been divisive. Those who wish to remain faithful to the word of God and not accede to the innovations, have little alternative than to leave or to seek a new bishop. When other bishops have offered to help by crossing ecclesiastical boundaries and becoming the shepherds of those who object, their efforts have been criticised. Court cases have begun or been threatened against pastors, congregations and diocese which have tried to disassociate themselves from those who have endorsed false teaching in this important matter.

What is at stake here is God's authority in the Bible. We are accustomed to living with various differences as Anglicans but here is a novel teaching on a matter of large importance to human happiness, and in clear opposition to God's written word. We are not arguing about trivia. We would be failing in our duty not to make our opposition plain and to join our words with action. Hence scripture says, " What you have heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you...." (2 Tim 1:13,14) Our conscientious decision is based on this and other passages of God's word.

I understand the view that we should attend and do our best to engage with the debates at Lambeth. Indeed, I have deliberately taken an extended period of time to allow for thought and prayer, and for discussion with my assistant bishops and others. But in the light of what has happened and of the nature of the Lambeth conference we have come to the firm view that for us the best and right action is not to attend, as a matter of conscience and of pastoral care to those who have needed to dissociate themselves from bishops and churches. It is important to understand the following points.

First, we remain thoroughly committed to the Anglican Communion, its good health and its future. But we do not believe that its good health will be advanced or secured by a conference which seems to give credibility and influence to those who have introduced false teaching and continue to commend it as often as they can. After much patient talk and delay, we have arrived at a time when the divisive consequences of this position must be made clear, not obscured by a

large and unified conference. Only on that basis can a healthy and united future occur.

Second, our non-attendance at Lambeth does not remove us from the Anglican Communion, or damage our continued participation and standing. The conference is based strongly on the idea of Christian fellowship. But we cannot have deep fellowship with the ones responsible for this innovation. To do so would betray conscience and our fellowship with those who have resisted at great cost to themselves.

Third, the Anglican Communion has been irreversibly changed by these developments and this Lambeth Conference is not able to turn the clock back. The best way of exerting influence is by not attending, thus signalling that the conference cannot act as an instrument of unity at this time, nor can it speak with the authority which it had in 1998, an authority which was set aside by this novel teaching. We will not accept the view that the debate concerns a relatively unimportant matter upon which we can seek and give accommodation. In these circumstances, absence is a decisive, though painful way of casting a vote, a way which is sometimes necessary when the issues are of great significance as in the present case.

Fourth, we need to have pastoral care for those who have been hurt. As you know, the Global South Anglicans have been in the forefront of the struggle of this issue since the beginning. Their leaders have expended vast amounts of time and effort in seeking repentance from those who have erred and in caring for those who have been disaffiliated. Now a number of the foremost leaders from Africa and South America, standing on conscience, have declared that they cannot attend Lambeth. I am including an eloquent letter from five such leaders addressed to certain English bishops. Given the fellowship which we enjoy with these leaders and their people it is inconceivable that we should not join them in standing aside. We must support those who have been so courageous.

Fifth, we have a duty of pastoral care to the Anglican Christians in North America and elsewhere who have made their protest against the local innovations. How can they feel confidence in us if we simply attend this conference and have what the world would see as fellowship in the delightful

surroundings of Canterbury - studying the Bible, receiving communion, meeting new people, enjoying gracious hospitality, attending a garden party at Buckingham Palace, while they endure prosecution, dispossession and doubt over their standing as Anglicans? Faced with the terrible choice between unity and truth, they have chosen to live by the truth. Should we not be witnesses that their choice is right?

These are momentous days. The Anglican Communion is one of the great groupings of Christians in the world and has enormous capacity for good. The struggle in which we are engaged has ramifications for Christian witness everywhere. I value the support of the brothers and sisters of our Diocese and your unambiguously clear commitment to biblical teaching. I know that not all of you will agree with our decision. But I do ask you to join with me in prayer that the Lord will hallow his great name, bring in his kingdom and guard and unify his people in the truth of the gospel. And pray for us, that we may have wisdom and discernment sufficient for the day.

**Peter F Jensen,
Archbishop**