

## A LETTER TO THE DEPUTIES OF THE DIOCESE OF MINNESOTA AND OUR CLERGY AND PEOPLE

Due to some of my responsibilities in the House of Bishops, I have refrained from speaking publicly about the matter of the confirmation and consent to the election in the Diocese of New Hampshire. However, since it is likely that our vote will be public, I think it is appropriate to tell you how I am likely to vote and why. I say “likely” because I know all too well that the Holy Spirit does move through such gatherings as the General Convention, and when a decisive moment comes, a person may be compelled to vote differently.

Ten years ago, when I was elected Bishop, the press was told of my response to some questions during the “Meet Minnesota” tour. I said that I had officiated at the blessings of covenants between gay and lesbian people. I said that I believed the Church should be doing this when requested by parishioners for pastoral reasons. During the consent process there was a considerable debate and other, less pleasant, activity. In the end, I received 51% of the votes from the Standing Committees and 51% of the votes from bishops with jurisdiction. There were protests at the consecration and Presiding Bishop Browning made a statement saying we would proceed and I was consecrated.

During the ensuing ten years, the matters of blessing same-sex relationships and ordaining homosexual persons in a relationship have been the center of a great deal of controversy, some of it brutal and ugly. The Episcopal Church, opening itself to this consideration earlier than most denominations, has at times been able to talk about few or no other dimensions of mission, ministry and theology.

It is not surprising that we Episcopalians have been called to consider this matter now. As a communion, we have rather proclaimed Incarnation as the primary dimension of our theology—God’s incarnation in the person of Jesus the Christ, and, as we say so profoundly in our baptismal promises, as the “Christ in all persons.” Promising “to seek and serve Christ in all persons” has caused us a lot of turmoil. Our theology will continue to make our denomination, and our communion, a “messy” place. Transitions are messy, whether moving from one place to another, or moving from one way of seeing things to another. The Holy Spirit has and will continue to have us *see* those who have been invisible and *embrace* those we may have considered untouchable. We have been learning this for the past forty years or so with regard to ethnic diversity and for the past thirty years with regard to the place of women in God’s Church, the Body of Christ. As individuals within the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion, we learn to see at different tempos and learn to embrace at different times. And once we see and embrace others, barriers and exclusivities no longer apply.

We are not a denomination that affirms truths. We affirm what is true. There is a great deal of difference there between stasis and dynamism, between memorial and re-membering. When we promise “to continue in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship,” we do not promise to *hold onto* a certain collection of *truths*, we promise to *be true* to the living Christ and to the Spirit they knew as dynamic energy, forever calling them beyond the confines of culture and custom into the whirlwind of God’s continual creating. In the complexities of life in this world, it is very difficult (especially for us Anglicans who value the gift of ambiguity) to say what is *the truth* with such certitude that we are willing to risk using it as a weapon against others. And yet it is much more possible in an encounter, in an experience, for us to recognize and affirm *what is true* and *who is true*. We learn this from Jesus in his encounter with the Canaanite woman whose faith so arrested him that he learned something new about God’s mission for him and changed the whole direction of his ministry from an exclusive focus on “the lost sheep of the house of Israel” to anyone who was willing to listen. We learn this from Peter and the early church as they, too, were stretched beyond the comforts of the “certainty” of the Law.

This is what I know to be true in our common faith and tradition and in scripture, and so I expect to give my consent as Bishop of Minnesota to the election of the Rev. Canon Gene Robinson as Bishop of New Hampshire.

Many are concerned about the unity of the Anglican Communion and discuss the near future fearfully. If I believed this election *might be* of the Holy Spirit, I would be hesitant to move forward at this time.

However, believing as I do that *it is the Holy Spirit who has been moving us in this direction*, and who has brought us to this moment of decision, I have to trust that the Holy Spirit can and will keep us together as the Episcopal Church and as a communion.

Will there be tensions? Yes. Will there be anger? Yes. Will we be called to care alike for those with whom we agree and disagree? Yes. And will we be asked this no matter how things are decided? Yes. Communion is a grace, a gift, something with which we are blessed, and not something we hold onto with our hands or our minds. I pray that we may each say “yes” to this gift of communion so that God may use us to witness to the call to be of one heart even when we cannot presently be of one mind.

Faithfully, in Christ,

James L. Jelinek  
VIII Bishop of Minnesota

July 23, 2003