

Archbishop of Canterbury's Pentecost Letter to the Bishops of the Anglican Communion

13th May 2008

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams, has today sent an open letter to the bishops of the Anglican Communion, in advance of the Lambeth Conference.

The full text of the letter can be found below:

The Feast of Pentecost is a time when we give thanks that God, through the gift of the Holy Spirit, makes us able to speak to each other and to the whole world of the wonderful things done in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is a good moment to look forward prayerfully to the Lambeth Conference, asking God to pour out the Spirit on all of us as we make ready for this time together, so that we shall indeed be given grace to speak boldly in his Name.

I indicated in earlier letters that the shape of the Conference will be different from what many have been used to. We have listened carefully to those who have expressed their difficulties with Western and parliamentary styles of meeting, and the Design Group has tried to find a new style – a style more reflective of that Pentecost moment when all received the gift of speaking freely about Christ.

At the heart of this will be the indaba groups. Indaba is a Zulu word describing a meeting for purposeful discussion among equals. Its aim is not to negotiate a formula that will keep everyone happy but to go to the heart of an issue and find what the true challenges are before seeking God's way forward. It is a method with parallels in many cultures, and it is close to what Benedictine monks and Quaker Meetings seek to achieve as they listen quietly together to God, in a community where all are committed to a fellowship of love and attention to each other and to the word of God.

Each day's work in this context will go forward with careful facilitation and preparation, to ensure that all voices are heard (and many languages also!). The hope is that over the two weeks we spend together, these groups will build a level of trust that will help us break down the walls we have so often built against each other in the Communion. And in combination with the intensive prayer and fellowship of the smaller Bible study groups, all this will result, by God's grace, in clearer vision and discernment of what needs to be done.

As I noted when I wrote to you in Advent, this makes it all the more essential that those who come to Lambeth will arrive genuinely willing to engage fully in that growth towards closer unity that the Windsor Report and the Covenant Process envisage. We hope that people will not come so wedded to their own agenda and their local priorities that they cannot listen to those from other cultural backgrounds. As you may have gathered, in circumstances where there has been divisive or controversial action, I have been discussing privately with some bishops the need to be wholeheartedly part of a shared vision and process in our time together.

Of course, as baptised Christians and pastors of Christ's flock, we are not just seeking some low-level consensus, or a

simple agreement to disagree politely. We are asking for the fire of the Spirit to come upon us and deepen our sense that we are answerable to and for each other and answerable to God for the faithful proclamation of his grace uniquely offered in Jesus. That deepening may be painful in all kinds of ways. The Spirit does not show us a way to by-pass the Cross. But only in this way shall we truly appear in the world as Christ's Body as a sign of God's Kingdom which challenges a world scarred by poverty, violence and injustice.

The potential of our Conference is great. The focus of all we do is meant to be strengthening our Communion and equipping all bishops to engage more effectively in mission; only God the Holy Spirit can bind us together in lasting and Christ-centred way, and only God the Holy Spirit can give us the words we need to make Christ truly known in our world. So we must go on praying hard with our people that the Spirit will bring these possibilities to fruition as only he can. Those who have planned the Conference have felt truly touched by that Spirit as they have worked together, and I know that their only wish is that what they have outlined for us will enable others to experience the same renewal and delight in our fellowship.

This is an ambitious event – ambitious for God and God's Kingdom, which is wholly appropriate for a Lambeth Conference. And our ambition is nothing less than renewal and revival for us all in the Name of Jesus and the power of his Spirit.

May that Spirit be with you daily in your preparation for our meeting. As Our Lord says, 'You know him, for he lives with and will be in you' (Jn 14.17).

+ Rowan Cantuar

ENDS

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