



The
Episcopal
Diocese
of the
Rio Grande

May 29, 2007

Rt. Rev. Jeffrey N. Steenson, D.Phil.
Bishop

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The Standing Committee/Trustees and the Council of the Episcopal Diocese of the Rio Grande held a joint planning retreat in El Paso on May 18-19, 2007, to identify some of the challenges that might face the Diocese in the months ahead in light of the larger Anglican Communion developments. Specifically, we are concerned about what might be the impact of the Primates' Communiq   and the response from the Episcopal Church come Sept. 30, 2007 – Will there be a walking apart between the Episcopal Church and parts of the Anglican Communion? How might this affect life in our own congregations?

It seems wise that we identify some principles to guide us in dealing with the problems that will be created should one or more of our congregations attempt to alter their relationship with the Diocese and the Episcopal Church. Two resolutions were approved unanimously, which commit us to seek negotiated rather than litigated solutions. It is our hope that we will not have to face such a painful moment, and we will work diligently to keep the lines of communication open between the diocese and congregations deeply alienated from the actions of the Episcopal Church especially since 2003.

The effect of losing the active participation of even one or two of our larger congregations would be substantial, and we looked realistically at that scenario. Your diocesan leadership certainly does not have its head in the sand about the steps that need to be taken should this occur.

The Diocese has in Convocation made a commitment to the “Windsor Process,” the approach commended by the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Anglican Consultative Council, and the Primates based on the Windsor Report’s recommendations for maintaining communion amongst the member churches of the Anglican Communion. For this reason, our joint meeting voted 17-1 to ask the Presiding Bishop, the Bishops, and Executive Council of the Episcopal Church to approve the pastoral approach commended by the Primates and, should it become available, for the Diocese to participate in it. We believe this is the best available option to keep our congregations together in the months ahead.

Attached to this letter are the resolutions. Please use your pastoral judgment about the best way to make these available to the members of your congregation.

Very shortly, the Theology Committee (on which I serve) of the House of Bishops will be publishing a study guide to the Primates’ Communiq  , entitled “Communion Matters.” That we were able to accomplish this was certainly a pleasant surprise to me. I believe you will find it to be an honest and helpful tool to use in a discussion forum, so that your people might better understand what the fuss is all about. Printed and online editions should soon be available at www.episcopalchurch.org.

Yours faithfully,

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**Resolutions of a Joint Meeting of the Diocesan Council and Standing Committee
Concerning the Severing of Relations and the Temporary Withdrawal
of Parishes and Self-Supporting Missions from the Diocese and The Episcopal
Church**

Resolved, that the Bishop, Diocesan Council, and Trustees of the Property of the Episcopal Diocese of the Rio Grande, recognizing the authority of I Corinthians 6.1-8 in disputes amongst Christians, commits itself earnestly to pursue settlement through negotiation rather than litigation should one of its member parishes or self-supporting missions seek to sever its relationship to the Diocese and the Episcopal Church.

(Passed unanimously)

Resolved, that the Bishop, Diocesan Council, and Trustees of the Property of the Episcopal Diocese of the Rio Grande establish a policy which will allow a congregation which is strongly considering departing from the Diocese and the Episcopal Church temporarily to withdraw from the life of the diocese for a season of discernment while maintaining membership in the Diocese of the Rio Grande and the Episcopal Church.

In such a withdrawal, following a congregational vote and acceptance by the Bishop, Diocesan Council, and Trustees of the Property, the policy will be used to create an agreement that will address fair share and other issues such as voting membership in deaneries, convocation, and all committees and commissions. This agreement will be reviewed annually by the Bishop and Diocesan Council.

(Passed unanimously)

El Paso, Texas
19 May 2007



**Joint Resolution of Diocesan Council & Standing Committee
Diocese of the Rio Grande**

Resolved, that the Bishop, the Diocesan Council and Standing Committee of the Diocese of the Rio Grande enthusiastically endorse the Pastoral Scheme articulated by the Primate of the Anglican Communion at their meeting of 15-17 February 2007 at Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania, and commend it to the Presiding Bishop, House of Bishops, and Executive Committee of The Episcopal Church as the best way presently available for this diocese to remain united and move forward in mission and witness to the Gospel.

Be it further resolved that the Diocesan Council and Standing Committee of the Diocese of the Rio Grande urgently request of the Archbishop of Canterbury and the other Primate that the Pastoral Scheme be put into place at the earliest opportunity.

(Y-17, N-1)

El Paso, Texas
19 May 2007