
What Is Happening In The Anglican Communion? How Lovely Are Thy Dwelling Places, Lord Of Hosts

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*
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Late last week, various media outlets, and various pundits, were describing the Anglican Communion in all sorts of ways. They were all trying to interpret a communiqué from the "Primates' Meeting," delivered by 35 of the 38 primates of the Anglican Communion (a primate is the chief representative of a national church in historic fellowship with the Anglican Church; this group first convened as "primates only," in 1979. The Lambeth Conference, which includes all bishops, whether primates or not, was first convened in 1867). As has been the case for the last two years, much so-called objective reporting was really "hopeful" reporting. Folks, on both "sides" of the sexuality issues, were really reporting what they hoped the primates were saying. Such will always be the case, I am sure.

I, too, will say more about their communiqué, and many other folks will say more, as well. However, general comments I have made in the past remain more valid than ever at this time. 1) We are continuing a long conversation that has been developing over thirty years on the subject of human sexuality. There will be no quick end to that discussion, no matter what our own opinions are. 2) The Christian Church always has conflicts, and the Episcopal/Anglican Church does, too. I do not believe that our differences on the matters of human sexuality warrant schism or a breaking of fellowship. Indeed, odd as it may sound, I believe that the Anglican Communion is in a rather positive place. At our best, we are showing the world-I hope-how to have a healthy and positive discussion on an issue far larger than the Christian Church. Of course, we are not always at our best, and I lament those occasions.

3) My third general comment was proven in a powerful way this past weekend. That comment is this: Neither the actions of General Convention, 2003, nor the several reports or communiqués since then, dramatically change the ministry and mission of most Episcopal and Anglican parishes across the world. In parishes across the world, our ministry and mission strive forward, toward the upward call of God in Jesus Christ our Lord. I wish the media would cover these might acts by ordinary parishes, but they will not; that is not news to them!

So let me cover them! At the Cathedral of St. Philip, the week itself was beautiful and graceful. On Monday, we hosted Archbishop Wilton Gregory, the new Roman Catholic Archbishop of Atlanta, for a special ecumenical service, and for a small lunch afterwards. Thanks to all of you who volunteered and helped! We held Bible Studies and spiritual formation groups throughout the week. On Tuesday night, the Cathedral Chapter met, discussed regular issues of the parish, and also heard a very positive report from one of our parochial entities, the Cathedral Preschool. We also heard an exciting new plan for the Cathedral Counseling Center. It was a healthy and good meeting.

On Friday night, when much of Atlanta was going out, our St. Christopher's Ministry (families with young children) were gathering for another Family Movie Night in the Great Hall. I stopped by to soak up some of their energy before my own appointment. I loved seeing our Cathedral children bouncing around the Great Hall in their pajamas, their parents enjoying a few moments of serenity with friends before the trip back home! That afternoon, many of our Cathedral women had left for another Women's Retreat, led by Elizabeth Rechter, at Simpsonwood Retreat Center.

On Saturday, the Cathedral hosted another anti-racism training event. I saw a couple of our parishioners present as I took

care of some early morning business. That morning, all of the Cathedral clergy, except for Canon Rechter, were in South Atlanta for the ordination of George Maxwell to the diaconate. It was wonderful and fun to be at the Church of the Holy Comforter for that event, one of the diocese's great ministries to the poor and disadvantaged. That congregation includes many residents from nearby "group homes," and they have a fun and spirited liturgy. Also being ordained deacon that morning was our old friend Charles Castles, whose membership at the Cathedral led him to work with the poor at Holy Comforter. (Congratulations to both George and Charles!)

I left the ordination on Saturday to conduct a pre-marital session with an out-of-town couple being married here in June. I love doing weddings, and I love meeting with the couples planning marriage; it is a holy time.

Saturday night at the Cathedral of St. Philip was nothing short of magnificent. After months of planning and rehearsal and sheer generosity, the Cathedral hosted the Brahms Requiem. But this wasn't just any regular performance. The chancel choir from Peachtree Road United Methodist Church joined our own beautiful Cathedral Choir, and both were joined by the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, all under the direction of maestro William Fred Scott, of the Atlanta Opera!

Wie lieblich sind deine Wohnungen, Herr Zebaoth!-How lovely are thy dwelling places, Lord of Hosts (Psalm 84.1) goes one of the texts of that beautiful music. Those, then, were the words with which I greeted the audience. There was not a spare seat in the church; we looked as crowded as Easter and Christmas. We were packed and energized. Some of the most veteran music aficionados in the city said it was the finest Brahms Requiem they had ever heard. I agree. Thanks to all of you!

And, then, really sincere thanks to all the folks who moved the pews back into place for Sunday services the next morning! (We had moved eight of them from the front, to make room for the orchestra). Sunday morning began early, as usual, at the Cathedral; and I wanted to make sure we all understood how the gospel was to be read. Since it was so long (the story of the Samaritan woman at the well), I interspersed an expository sermon into the reading of the gospel itself, after every couple of verses. People actually heard scripture in a new way that morning. And I rather liked it myself.

When we were greeting children and families at the front door on Sunday morning, I noticed how many were carrying bags of groceries. February is our month to stock the food pantry at Buckhead Christian Ministries, and we are doing it. By Monday afternoon, our new Information Desk area was almost filled with grocery bags. There was hardly room for our new team of volunteer greeters! (By the way, we can ALWAYS use some more Information Desk volunteers; contact George Maxwell). We can use sign-ups for the Habitat For Humanity build, on March 12, too-and for our refreshed Foyers Groups!

Then, between services, at the Christian Education time, the Dean's Forum class hosted one of the great Old Testament scholars in the country, Dr. Walter Brueggemann. The new Great Hall was filled with over 400 people, listening intently to Brueggemann discuss holiness. He led us through some fascinating biblical verses. He prodded us and taught us. We were blessed. We even applauded his quick take on the state of the Anglican Communion.

The Sunday went on, despite the fact that by 1:00, many are tired. I attended to another pre-marriage appointment, this time for a May wedding. Some folks went to the Emmaus House meeting of the Board of Advisors. We conducted 4:00 Evensong and Eucharist, and the 7:00 Eucharist as usual. The Parents of Youth held a reception on Sunday evening at 6:00 pm.

The week had begun. Dr. Brueggemann spent much of his time on Sunday emphasizing the commandment to "Keep holy the Sabbath Day," and his words struck home. We all do need a Sabbath, just as God needs a Sabbath, if we are to be refreshed. But we need time to be refreshed from the anxious and frantic voices, too, that threaten stable Christian life these days!

So, what is happening in the Anglican Communion? In this community, the gospel is being preached, sins are being forgiven, children are being formed in the faith, members are serving the poor, gifted Christians are using their talents, and all are being challenged to be more faithful to the gospel of Jesus Christ our Lord. I know that the same things are occurring not just at the Cathedral of St. Philip, but all over the country-in both "conservative" and "liberal" parishes (I count us as both). In fact, the same things are occurring throughout the Anglican Communion of parishes, all over the world.

"So do not worry about tomorrow," we heard Brueggemann quote Jesus on Sunday. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God." (Matthew 6.34,33). That is the gospel that has fed me for forty-eight years. From the Cathedral of St. Philip, it can feed the world, too.

Wie lieblich sind deine Wohnungen, Herr Zebaoth!

Sam Candler signature



The Very Rev. Sam Candler

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