A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL OF THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH

APRIL 29, 2012 – FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

The following is an excerpt from a statement issued by Executive Council on April 20, 2012 in Salt Lake City, Utah.

In this joyous Easter season, Executive Council came together in Salt Lake City for its final meeting of this Triennium. It has been a time of reflection on what we have done, and what we have left undone. It has been a time to ask whether we have loved our neighbors – Council members and Church Center staff; bishops, clergy and laity of The Episcopal Church; our sisters and brothers of the Anglican Communion; sisters and brothers who chose to leave The Episcopal Church; the poor, the needy and the oppressed – as ourselves.

Have we had enough strength and courage for this work, or have we at times shrunk from the need to stand up and say things that are not only hard to say, but hard to hear? Have we cherished collegiality more than accountability? Have we used our structure to empower one part of the church while disempowering another? Have we been able to overcome fear of the unknown as we face the challenges of being church in a post-Christian world?

The Presiding Bishop spoke of this in her opening remarks: “We will be more faithful, and far more effective, in that discernment work if we can let go of suspicion, assumptions about others’ motives, and power politics – all of which are based in fear and scarcity. We do know that perfect love casts out fear, and when we can remember how deeply and completely love dwells within us, the fear does begin to recede.”

President of the House of Deputies Bonnie Anderson said, “I want us to change. But I want us to do it responsibly, with a conceptual framework that will keep us from the unintended consequences that come from reactive decision-making. I want us to keep the decision making in the hands of all the baptized and not an elite few.”

Chief Operating Officer Bishop Stacy Sauls said in his opening remarks, “The conversation I long to have with you as the elected leadership of the Episcopal Church is not about the panic of our declining numbers but about how we strengthen what is working best out there and make what is strong stronger so that the strong can serve the less than strong. The conversation I long to have with you is not about how to get more people in the doors to help us pay the bills but about how to make more disciples of Jesus to go about changing the world into God’s dream for it.”

The opening plenary session began with a frank discussion of Council’s extreme disappointment with the budget that was sent to PB&F. Council members were very clear that their disappointment was not simply a reluctance to let go of the budget but instead a very clear statement that the budget sent to PB&F is not the budget Council approved. Rather than spend time assigning blame, Council members moved fairly quickly to a discussion of how to rectify the situation within the confines of the canons. On Friday, Council passed a memo outlining their concerns to PB&F.

The plenary discussion strengthened our realization that while we attempted to save money by having shorter Council meetings, the amount of work remained the same or expanded. The result has been longer days with tired and stressed Council members and staff, resulting in a greater chance of errors occurring.

Having said that, we want to remind the Church that our work in this triennium involved much more than just the budget. Much of it is not as visible as the budget, but is structurally important, just as a lattice is often hard to see but is vital in supporting the vine as it grows toward the Light. This last meeting seemed an appropriate time to highlight the scope of our work.

The Committee on Local Mission and Ministry (LMM) was made up completely of new members of Council. This meant their initial task was discovering and developing the scope of their work. They decided that in addition to simply approving the continued funding of Jubilee Centers they would uphold and celebrate the work done by the various centers. At this meeting they celebrated the work of All Saints Cathedral on St. Thomas, whose work with elderly includes home visits, pastoral care, and work with grandchildren in after school care. LMM also spent a lot of time on multi-cultural issues with a particular focus on encouraging the whole church to engage in anti-racism work. This work calls the Church to continue, individually and corporately, to recognize, name and confront racism in all its guises.

In this meeting, Council’s anti-racism committee worked with members to focus on systemic racism. In our table discussions members recounted instances where they became aware of how racism permeates the world in which we live, move and have our being – most of us in positions of great privilege that insulate us from much of the destructive results of this sin and thus puts us in danger of being blind to its effect on those less privileged.

The report of the Committee on Advocacy and Networking around their work on issues of immigration led the Council into a heated and passionate discussion of how we tease out the differences between anti-racism training and diversity and inclusion training. Immigration includes more than issues of racism. How do we make space for people who come from other countries in our church? How do we broaden our conversation to address these issues without in any way lessening our commitment to the peculiar and dire necessity for anti-racism work in this church and in these United States? It is clear this will be an ongoing conversation in Council.

[Read more at www.episcopalchurch.org/notice/message-episcopal-church-executive-council-1.]