

Bishops Refuse to Share Communion

Comments from Dean James Diamond in response to the refusal of seven archbishops to share Communion with the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church in Tanzania on February 17, 2007.

Seven primates (Anglican archbishops) have refused to share Communion with our Presiding Bishop, Katharine Jefferts Schori. What that means is that bishops mostly from the "Global South," Africa, cannot accept that the Episcopal Church has consecrated a gay bishop and that it allows for the blessing of same sex couples. This also happens to be a set of bishops who do not ordain women. I regret deeply that these primates, by their refusal, have separated themselves from the essential unity of the Anglican Communion.

One of the great gifts of the Anglican Communion (of which the Episcopal Church in the U.S. is one province) is that for hundreds of years we have been respectful enough to allow for widely divergent opinions in a Christian community that still found unity in our relationship with God through Jesus Christ. This flexibility has made allowance for all sorts of cultural norms that were particular to the different regions of the Anglican Communion. It may be that the "big tent" approach to accommodation will no longer work in the 21st century.

One of the most distinctive facets of the Anglican branch of Christianity is that we are people of discernment. We do not believe in infallibility, nor do we believe in election or predestination. We do not have a high council, or curia, which dictates belief to the rest of the Communion.

Episcopalians express what we believe through our prayers, the creeds and the sacraments. We also continue to try to understand the will of God. We do not claim that one person or persuasion is exclusively right and that all others are therefore wrong. We keep listening for God and listening to one another. We may need to act while we are still discerning and others may disapprove of the action. But if someone claims to be exclusively right, beyond doubt or dialogue, then that individual removes him or herself from the community that believes God is still acting, still teaching us new things.

Even as my brothers in the Global South remove themselves from our discussions, I continue to pray for them and for us that we might find a time and a way to reconcile with one another.