

From the 28<sup>th</sup> of January thru the 2<sup>nd</sup> of February, the Covenant Design Group (CDG) held its second meeting. At this meeting the CDG reviewed the comments and submissions received on the Nassau Draft and developed a current draft known as the St. Andrew's Draft, which is offered for reflection. Deeply grateful for the work of the CDG, we, as the Diocese of Northern Michigan, offer our response.

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Whenever our diocese celebrates the commissioning of a Ministry Support Team we reaffirm our diaconal, priestly and apostolic ministries. Within the liturgy we are asked:

*My sisters and brothers, it is our apostolic ministry to guard the faith, unity, and discipline of the Church and to do all such things as might build up the body of the faithful for Christian responsibility. All baptized people are called to be one with the apostles in proclaiming Christ's resurrection, sharing in the renewal of God's world and interpreting the Gospel. Will you reaffirm your apostolic ministry?*

The reaffirmation is the response of the assembly formed as a community of perichoretic equals in the waters of baptism. Here we have the give-and-take of distinct ministries without a mistaken separation of orders. Community manifests in the reconciliation of very distinct members. Each member is a whole and yet part of a larger whole. The liturgical action incarnates our Trinitarian theology.

## **TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY**

The word "trinity" is a symbol attempting to make sense of our experience of the one Godhead in history. No symbol, no language, however deep and dear its history and use, is beyond change and reformulation. This is to say that no theological expression is God, but a finger pointing to the Holy One.

One of the remarkable discoveries of the interfaith dialogue of the late twentieth and emerging twenty-first centuries is that the human experience of "trinity" is universal. This makes sense and reflects the truth that "all things come of God" and bear the divine imprint. Creation, from quarks to galaxies, embodies the Trinitarian imprint.

This cosmic truth bears import to the Anglican Communion, because of the centrality the Trinity plays in our liturgy, our prayer and our polity. As a tradition, we treasure the Incarnation, because it reveals to us that all life incarnates the living God. The Incarnation is not an exception to the evolutionary unfolding of

creation, but its only and eternal source.

As Anglicans, we inherit an amazingly diverse language of the Trinity. Most of us are accustomed to the conventional expression, “Father, Son and Holy Spirit.” But this is simply one way of pointing to the inexhaustible truth of the Trinitarian expression of the Godhead.

The particular Trinitarian language we use matters. None of the expressions with which we are familiar is wrong. Each is partial, as is any theology. Each expression reveals something and obscures something.

The proposed Anglican Covenant rests upon a Trinitarian theology, which offers not only a basis for understanding communion among our Churches, but for deepening the dialogue among faith traditions. Our Trinitarian language thus matters greatly. What are we saying through our language about our faith, our common life and our apostolic mission?

God is Father. God is Son. God is Holy Spirit. – God is Mother. God is Daughter. God is Holy of Holies. – God is Creator. God is Redeemer. God is Sanctifier. Are any of these theological expressions of the Trinity literally true? Of course not. They do, however, point us to theological truths that reflect our experience of the living God in our lives. Each formulation acts as a prism, refracting experience, yet as it refracts limits our perception as well.

God Acts. God Receives. God Reconciles. This eternal dance of God is embodied in creation: God lovingly acts to create all that is; God graciously receives all that is being created as good (Jesus of Nazareth is the ultimate expression of this reception in history – embodied in Jesus is utter receptivity to the loving creativity of God); God mysteriously reconciles. Jesus, who receives everything, also gives everything (*kenosis*). Action and reception are reconciled in the wisdom of cross. Action and reception are not opposites. They are dynamic expressions of eternal divine reconciliation.

Apostolic ministry is not a choice between action and reception. The way of Jesus is the path of wisdom, discerning when the reconciling Spirit is inviting action and when she is inviting receptivity. There is a time to give and a time to receive. This is the eternal divine dance.

## **WHAT IS OUR FAITH?**

Our faith is that we, like all creation, are continually being born again from above (Jn. 3.1-17). We are continually being re-born as created co-creators, created co-receivers, created co-reconcilers. We are continually being reborn as incarnations of the living Trinity.

Faith is not belief. Faith reflects the divine Holy Faith, whereby we embody the courage to be directly present to the reign of God as it is unfolding here and now (Luke). Sarai and Abram are born again from above as Sarah and Abraham not because of any belief, but because they courageously receive the Spirit's invitation to embark (act) on a journey to discover God (reconciliation). They are icons of faith: creatively going someplace new, transcending former tribal identities, in order to receive a truer and more embracing identity in God. Humanity begins to realize that divine embrace moves ever trustingly outward in concentric circles, never constricting inward from fear.

The St. Andrew's draft is correct to speak of a faith that will "uphold," "seek," "ensure," "nurture" and "pursue." But as we speak of the faith we inherit, we must be sure to affirm and embrace that faith as a courageous and creative journey into truth. The act of faith inevitably involves responding to the Spirit who invites us to leave the familiar, experience conflict, journey onward and be born again and again from above. *What often requires protection and upholding are the courageous hearts of those who would pursue God at the cost of the familiar life currently known and treasured.* The Communion and the Churches need to ensure that the baptismal journey continues, for the journey itself is faith actively receiving and embodying the divine invitation to "come and follow".

The faith we inherit is the trust of persons in a living God who when received burns away fear, sloth, deceit, anger, envy, pride, lust, avarice, gluttony. As early desert Fathers such as Evagrius Ponticus and John Cassian teach, the burning releases a faith characterized by courage, right action, honesty, serenity, equanimity, humility, innocence, non-attachment, and sobriety. The fires of the Spirit give birth to Sarah and Abraham and Jesus and Mary. They birth an Anglican Communion committed to discovering the Truth that all are one in God.

## **WHAT IS THE LIFE WE SHARE?**

### **INCARNATION**

The God who acts, receives and reconciles, is the Spirit who is always completely present in everything and everyone, but is never exhausted by that particular

expression. “We who are many are one.” Unity is a gracious given. Because the Spirit is always already present, a Trinitarian-based Communion actively listens. The Incarnation reveals there is always a divine inviting word to be heard. And yet, no single word exhausts the Word of God. And so the act of receiving does not end.

As we listen we awaken to the truth that all creation is *one* in Christ. To truly awaken is to have our blind eyes opened to the inherent beauty of all that is. As we awaken we are naturally drawn out in mission to care for others and to do all in our power to relieve their own bondage and suffering – whatever form it may take. In the words of the baptismal covenant, “we strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being.” Even more, we respect the dignity of every *creature*. We strive for justice and we respect the dignity of creatures not because we are commanded to do so; not because we fear our divine condemnation if we don’t. No, we strive for justice and peace because we can do nothing else – we are already one in Christ. We respect the dignity of all creatures because we can do nothing else – we are already one in Christ. Justice and dignity are manifestations of who we always already are – nothing less.

#### HOLARCHY AND ANGLICAN COMMUNION (ALTERNATIVE TO AUTONOMY-IN-COMMUNION)

One of the difficulties with the language of “autonomy” is its inability to adequately account for our radical interdependence. One of the difficulties with the organic language of “body” is that it is unable to account for the radically “whole” nature of individuals and Churches. The Church is not, strictly and literally speaking, a body, like a human body. Too often the analogical language of scriptures is used in a literal fashion, which simply breaks the metaphor. The Church is like a body in some ways, but in many ways is not.

The language of autonomy fears the intrusion and domination of the body. The language of body fears the irrational and irresponsible action of the detached part. Both languages remain rooted in fear of “the other.”

We need to journey from fear to trust. We need a new language that respects the insights of both languages as well as recognizes their inherent limitations. This journey will take time and courage and a new language.

The language of holarchy offers the possibility to see the journey with new eyes. The root concept in the language of holarchy is of “holon”: that which is a whole in one context is simultaneously a part in another. The sciences are quite clear that everything and everyone that exists is a holon. This vision enables us to move from

an ecclesiology that reacts and then perhaps dominates out of fear to a trusting language of holarchy.

The Anglican Communion is a communion of Churches that are holons: Each Church is a whole that is simultaneously a part of a larger whole (the Anglican Communion). Each Church is thus a complete constitutional whole, in whom the Spirit is completely present. It is also and simultaneously true that each Church is part of a larger whole, the Anglican Communion, in whom the Spirit is completely present. The ecclesiological perspective of the Anglican Communion embraces and transcends that of the Churches. In a holarchy such a transcending embrace implies by its nature respect by the whole of the parts that are also wholes.

#### HOLARCHY AND LEADERSHIP

Within a holarchical framework, to say that one holon (Church) is simultaneously a part of a larger holon (Communion) is to recognize that perspective deepens and transcends by broadening embrace, and never by denial and suppression. (We might speak of this dynamic also in terms of subsidiarity.)

Within a holarchy, Spirit is both the center and the essence of all that is. Leadership is recognized as a sacred perichoretic and playful dance. No one person or Church (i.e., holon) is the sole and permanent center. Our common life in the Triune God is the center, periphery and animating dynamic of all that unfolds. We live in a divine dance, where the Spirit invites each Church into the center at different times and in different circumstances to remind the Communion who we are and what we are about – the Truth that all are already One.

In the perichoretic dance of the Trinity, coercion and intimidation may play no role. When difference and conflict arise, the response is listening and learning, as well as the persistent invitation to journey onward.

#### **APOSTOLIC COMMUNITIES – GUARDIANS OF WHAT?**

“The truth of the matter” (Jn. 3.1-17), of which Jesus speaks in his nighttime conversation with Nicodemus, is that we are one with each other and one with God. This is the truth toward which Trinitarian theology points. This is the truth with the power to set us free from our fear. The Truth of our Oneness in God is the beginning and end of the journey of faith.

A Trinitarian vision of apostolic ministry moves our focus from singular bishops to communities of faith. Our focus is transposed from the bishop protecting a system of belief to apostolic communities of faith in which bishops reminds us all that

faith is a matter of learning to trust in the abiding presence of God who invites us like Sarai and Abram on a creative journey of discovering our true identity.

Apostolic ministry actively looks for ways to provide support to those Churches who would invite the fuller Communion into a more expansive ecclesiological vision consistent with the limitless compassion of the Triune God. Guardians of the faith ensure sanctuary to those Churches who accept the divine invitation to practically explore more expansive and transcending ways of being communities of faith: invitation rather than threat; trust rather than fear. Apostolic communities of faith actively look for ways to encourage creative inquiry, exploration, and practice from which all Churches might experience the Spirit's invitation to a deepening conversion of life.

And so, as the Diocese of Northern Michigan prays in our Commissioning Liturgy:

Gracious God, may we encourage and support one another in our many and various ministries,

**Seeking always to be faithful stewards of the gifts you bestow all creatures.**

May we hold in trust the questioning mind, the searching heart, the thirsting soul,  
**Guarding as sacred the many different paths into you, the Font of all Life.**

May we be as ready to hear the good news from your people of other denominations and faiths, as we are to proclaim the Gospel,

**Healing our false divisions, celebrating our diversity, and pursuing our common mission.**

My friends, do you reaffirm your commitment to this apostolic ministry?

**We do. Amen.**

20 March 2008

Standing Committee  
Diocesan Council

Core Team of Missioners and Rectors  
General Convention Deputation