

**All are Welcome in God's Church:
Responding to the Lambeth Conference Invitation**

Proposer of Resolution: The Reverend Matthew Mead and The Reverend Winnie Varghese

Parish or Organization: The Council of The Episcopal Diocese of New York

Telephone and E-mail: (914) 738-5515, matthew@christchurchpelham.org;
(212) 602-0733, wvarghese@trinitywallstreet.org

Title of Resolution: All are Welcome in God's Church: Responding to the Lambeth Conference Invitation

Whereas, the 2020 Lambeth Conference will take place in July and August of 2020 at the University of Kent in Canterbury; and

Whereas, the bishops who gather at the Lambeth Conference represent the great diversity of theological and ecclesiological viewpoints of the thirty-eight provinces (representing more than 165 countries) of the Anglican Communion, including conflicting viewpoints around human sexuality and marriage; and

Whereas, the 2020 Lambeth Conference has been advertised as a conference for “active bishops and their spouses”, with separate retreats for bishops and spouses; and

Whereas, the Secretary General of the Anglican Communion has stated that the Anglican Communion’s position on marriage as set out in Resolution I.10 of the 1998 Lambeth Conference would make it inappropriate for same-sex spouses to be invited to the 2020 Lambeth Conference, noting that the Archbishop of Canterbury had privately notified Bishop Mary Glasspool of this position in December 2018; and

Whereas, the President of the House of Deputies of The Episcopal Church has disputed the accuracy of the Secretary General’s statement regarding the 1998 Lambeth Conference’s setting the Anglican Communion’s position on marriage; and

Whereas, The Episcopal Church, the Episcopal Diocese of New York, and the State of New York all affirm that two people of the same gender can be married; and

Whereas, notwithstanding the claim of the Secretary General that only a “few individuals” are directly affected by this decision, the Episcopal Diocese of New York includes numerous priests, deacons, and lay persons who are married to persons of the same gender, and this number is increasing both in our Diocese and in other dioceses of The Episcopal Church; and

Whereas, the decision of the Archbishop of Canterbury to exclude same-sex spouses has caused pain for many people both within and outside of The Episcopal Diocese of New York.

TEXT OF THE RESOLUTION(S)

[7] Resolved: that the 243 Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of New York recognize that the decision of the Archbishop of Canterbury to exclude an invitation of same-sex spouses to attend the 2020 Lambeth Conference was applied specifically to the spouse of one of the bishops of the Diocese of New York; and further

[8] Resolved: that the 243 Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of New York, recalling the words of Saint Paul, “If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it” (1 Cor 12:26), recognize that this decision has caused pain to lay persons, deacons, priests, and bishops of the Episcopal Diocese of New York, to their spouses, and to others; and further

[9] Resolved: that the 243 Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of New York encourage every congregation of this Diocese to offer public intercessions for our bishops and their spouses, for those who are in pain because of this decision, for the Archbishop of Canterbury, and for all who attend the Lambeth Conference; and further

[10] Resolved: that the 243 Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of New York recommend that the Archbishop of Canterbury reconsider this decision; and further

[11] Resolved: that the 243 Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of New York direct the Secretary of Convention of the Diocese of New York to communicate the full text of this resolution and accompanying explanation to the Archbishop of Canterbury.

Explanation

The 2020 Lambeth Conference has been specifically advertised as a conference for “active bishops and their spouses”. According to the home page of the official Lambeth Conference website (<https://www.lambethconference.org/en/>), the 2020 Lambeth Conference “brings together all active bishops and their spouses from across the worldwide Anglican Communion.” The program for the Lambeth Conference notes that there will be “two separate retreats: one for bishops and another for spouses.”

On February 15, 2019, the Secretary General of the Anglican Communion, Dr. Josiah Idowu-Fearon, stated in his blog on Anglican Communion News (<https://www.anglicannews.org/blogs/2019/02/the-global-excitement-about-lambeth-conference.aspx>): “Invitations [to the 2020 Lambeth Conference] have been sent to every active bishop. That is how it should be – we are recognising that all those consecrated into the office of bishop should be able to attend. But the invitation process has also needed to take account of the Anglican Communion’s position on marriage which is that it is the lifelong union of a man and a woman. That is the position as set out in Resolution I.10 of the 1998 Lambeth Conference. Given this, it would be inappropriate for same-sex spouses to be invited to the conference. The Archbishop of Canterbury has had a series of private conversations by phone or by exchanges of letter with the few individuals to whom this applies.” One of those individuals was Bishop Mary Glasspool who was privately notified in December of 2018.

The accuracy of the statement that the 1998 Lambeth Conference set “the Anglican Communion’s position on marriage” has been disputed by the Rev. Gay Jennings, the President of the House of Deputies of the Episcopal Church: “The Lambeth Conference does not get to set policy for the Anglican Communion, and the Primates’ Meeting does not get to set policy for the Anglican Communion, and the Archbishop of Canterbury does not get to set policy for the Anglican Communion. That’s the job of the Anglican Consultative Council.” See <https://www.episcopalcafe.com/president-jennings-on-the-exclusion-of-same-sex-spouses-from-the-lambeth-conference/>

Historically the Lambeth Conference has been a gathering of bishops. Whether or not a given bishop’s spouse attended did not affect the program offered or statements made by the Lambeth Conference. Notably, this Conference is different in that spouses are explicitly given a role that they heretofore did not have. The decision to refuse to invite spouses in same-sex marriages is discriminatory and an obvious effort to silence the voices of those who can speak most personally and perhaps most powerfully about same-sex marriage and its place in the Church. It is especially egregious to silence these voices considering the fact that issues of human sexuality and marriage have been and continue to challenge the Anglican Communion, presumably a major reason why spouses were invited to take on a larger role in the first place.