

# PRIMATES MEETING FACTSHEET

## Who?

The Primates of the Anglican Communion met at Lambeth Palace for an exceptional meeting. This was called by the Archbishop of Canterbury – Rowan Williams. The Scottish representative was the Most Rev Bruce Cameron, the Primus of the Scottish Episcopal Church.

## Why?

The meeting was called to discuss issues relating to homosexuality. In particular, what will happen when a gay man is consecrated at the start of November 2003 in the Diocese of New Hampshire in the USA. Also, the unease which some people feel at the Diocese of New Westminster in Canada issuing an official liturgy for blessing gay couples.

## Where?

The media finds it easiest to divide the Anglican world into the developing world and the decadent west. This is something of a caricature. Some of the most vocal opposition to gay recognition in the church has come from rich Christians in the USA. There are voices within Africa calling a more inclusive church. Indeed, some who were connected to the anti-apartheid movement have likened the exclusion of gay people from church life to the “heresy of apartheid”.

## How?

Decisions are made by different processes in the various Anglican churches around the world. This is seen by some as a strength and by some as a weakness. Those who see it as a strength affirm the appropriateness of decisions being made locally.

## Analysis & Comment

In making their statement at Lambeth on 16 October 2003, the leaders of the Anglican churches took time to pray and to listen to one another’s stories. It is clear that there are very many Anglicans in the world who feel uncomfortable with recent developments. For them, these are primarily moral issues. They believe that it is wrong for sexually active gay people to be endorsed and even blessed by the church. For others, this is a matter primarily of justice – gay people needing to be recognised as possessing the same degree of dignity as everyone else and deserving the same warm welcome by Christians that any human being should be able to expect.

Gene Robinson will not be the first gay bishop. He is to be the first bishop to be open about being gay. Honesty is one of the values which churches need to see in their leaders.

In Scotland gay and lesbian Christians are well represented in the life of the Anglican church. This includes both lay people and clergy. Some chose to be open about this – others chose not to be for a variety of reasons.

Questions about church authority have been paramount throughout this crisis. Many opponents of gay acceptance now appear to be calling for greater authority to be given within a stronger hierarchical model. Critics liken this to a papacy. Ironically, those who appear to want a papal model do not appear to want Rowan Williams to act as a Pope.

The modern Scottish Episcopal Church has tended to be shy of hierarchy. There is no archbishop in Scotland – church government has followed a more collegiate model. Few would welcome an Archbishop based in England who had greater jurisdiction over Scotland.