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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Integrity Responds to Special Commission Resolutions

Integrity welcomes "One Baptism, One Hope in God's Call: The Report of the Special Commission on The Episcopal Church and The Anglican Communion" as a considered contribution to the listening process called for by the Windsor Report of 2004. As we read the report in detail, we have some important questions and comments—particularly in regards to the resolutions offered by the commission. We begin, however, by reiterating the good news we find in the report.

The Good News

We are grateful for the report's reiteration of the Episcopal Church's 30-year stance that "gay and lesbian persons are by Baptism full members of the Body of Christ and of the Episcopal Church and 'are children of God who have a full and equal claim with all other persons upon the love, acceptance and pastoral concern and care of the Church.'"

We are also heartened that the report reaffirms that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) persons everywhere in the world "are entitled to equal protection of the laws...and [that the Episcopal Church] calls upon our society to see that such protection is provided in actuality." Integrity concurs with the Windsor Report's clarification to the entire Anglican Communion, echoed by the commission, that "any demonizing of homosexual persons, or their ill treatment, is totally against Christian charity and basic principles of pastoral care."

However, these affirmations only repeat the Episcopal Church's stated convictions over the past four-decades—40 years during which LGBT Episcopalians have struggled for full inclusion in the Body of Christ. Despite open abuse of LGBT persons across the Anglican Communion over the eight years since Lambeth 1998—and greatly increasing since the consecration of V. Gene Robinson as Bishop of New Hampshire in 2003—the report says nothing new to them in acknowledgment of their continued suffering and their prophetic persistence within the church. This is a great weakness of the report—for the situation in some parts of the communion for LGBT persons is dire.

The Resolutions

Indeed, Integrity finds much in the report to cause LGBT persons deep disappointment and pessimism about their future in the church. Integrity is troubled in particular by resolutions A160, A161, and A162 presented by the special commission for debate at the triennial General Convention of the Episcopal Church in June 2006. It is essential that bishops and deputies to the convention understand the consequences of these resolutions for LGBT Episcopalians and Anglicans. A brief commentary on the eleven proposed resolutions follows.

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Resolution A159 (Commitment to Interdependence)

We support this resolution and ourselves seek this life of interdependence. Our vision of the Anglican Communion is of a fellowship of churches who seek the sharing of mutual ministry, bearing one another's burdens, and bearing with one another's differences as we worship and engage in mission together. We believe that theological litmus tests beyond those expressed in the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral are counter-productive to communion. Fundamentally, the Anglican Communion should be composed of the broadest possible fellowship within these basic principles. Recent statements of the Archbishop of Canterbury and others seem to denigrate the notion of a "fellowship of churches" as somehow being less than the Anglican vision. We believe it is the Anglican vision itself. Interdependence must be a choice made by otherwise independent bodies.

Resolution A160 (Expression of Regret)

We are adamantly opposed to the introduction of the language of repentance into the Episcopal Church's response to the Windsor Report. Despite the commission's attempt to nuance the word as a theological concept, the vast majority of Christians understand the word strongly and clearly to imply the admittance of wrongdoing. We also deny that the Episcopal Church is guilty of a lack of consultation. It is the Anglican Communion itself which is guilty of breaking its 28-year-old promise to listen to lesbian and gay persons—itsself acknowledged by the Windsor Report. Representatives of Integrity and other Anglican LGBT organizations were present to consult at the Lambeth Conference of 1998 at the invitation of the chair of Section One, but were abruptly denied the opportunity. It is simply hypocrisy to accuse the Episcopal Church of a lack of consultation when almost every attempt to do so has been rebuffed.

Resolution A 161 (Election of Bishops)

We also oppose this resolution as fundamentally interfering in the diocesan election process which has long been held sacred in our church. One cannot argue that the phrase "exercise very considerable caution" is not meant to have a direct impact on episcopal elections. And we are certain that the criteria of "whose manner of life presents a challenge to the wider church" is a dangerous statement whose implications are potentially vast. Are there to be no more elections of women or divorced persons (to name two obvious categories that currently "challenge the wider church")? Indeed, the issue of women's consecration to the episcopacy continues to deeply divide the Anglican Communion—with less than ten percent of Anglican provinces calling women to that order of ministry.

The General Convention should leave alone the canonical process of electing bishops and consenting to their election. Let the process work.

Resolution A162 (Public Rites)

This resolution is clearly meant to be pastoral, and we appreciate that intention. We are deeply troubled—and reject—the use of the word "private" in this context. Whether the commission intends this effect or not, what lesbian and gay couples are being asked to do here is to return to what has been known as "the closet." The truth is that, theologically and liturgically, there is no such thing as a "private pastoral response." If lesbian and gay couples are to be accepted as full members of our churches without excommunication for "living a notoriously evil life" (Book of Common Prayer, p. 409), which has been the effective stance of this church for 30 years, then they have the right to public prayer for their relationships.

Authorization of "official" diocesan or national public rites (which we emphatically support) may be a question open to debate, but the language of this resolution is simply denigrating to the dignity of the very persons it claims to pastorally support.

Resolution A163 (DEPO)

Ironically this is a much better resolution than A164 in its statement of the desire for "effective and appropriate pastoral care for all members of this church...[including] gay and lesbian persons within and without this Church." We can support this resolution as it is written.

Resolution A164 (Millennium Development Goals)

We wholeheartedly endorse the church's full embrace of the Millennium Development Goals and pray fervently that the Anglican Communion as a whole would understand their universal embrace to have the absolute claim on the church's mission and energy.

Resolution A165 (Listening Process)

We support resolution A165 as written.

Resolution A166 (Anglican Covenant)

Although we, along with many others, are uncertain about the need for an "Anglican Covenant," we support this resolution as calling for a process that will in itself be constructive.

Resolution A167 (Full and Equal Claim)

We believe it unwise to bring to a vote reaffirmations of previously passed resolutions—although we sympathize with the intent. However, this resolution will become completely unacceptable if Resolution A160, A161, or A162 passes. Passage of any of those three resolutions will make this resolution a matter of simple and clear hypocrisy, and it will be received by LGBT Episcopalians as such.

Resolution A168 (Human Rights)

We support this resolution—in particular if it is strengthened to include an invitation for an expression of repentance on the part of those in the communion who have participated in the demonization or ill treatment of homosexual persons and regret on the part of those who have not participated in the listening process.

Resolution A169 (Quadrilateral)

While we appreciate the attempt to lift up the Quadrilateral and its "generosity of spirit," we do not think it appropriate to amend the canons in this way—introducing particular theological criteria into the discernment process.

Conclusion

The Report of the Special Commission on the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion reveals the virtues and weaknesses of the committee drafting process. Integrity expresses its gratitude to the commission for conscientiously pursuing their task and acknowledges the self-sacrifice of personal views among many of its members.

Integrity also thanks the special commission for using, whenever possible, "gay" and "lesbian" rather than "homosexual." "Gay" and "lesbian" are the names we have proudly chosen for ourselves while "homosexual" is a sterile psychiatric/medical term.

As the report itself says several times, this is not the end but only part of an unfolding process. General Convention's actions will be another step—one with even greater impact on our church and our beloved worldwide Anglican Communion.

The American Anglican Council has characterized this General Convention as "an historic choice to walk together with the rest of the Anglican Communion or to walk apart." In other words, the AAC is asking General Convention to sacrifice LGBT Episcopalians to preserve the unity of the Anglican Communion. Integrity believes that most bishops and deputies will see beyond this false dichotomy—soundly reaffirming both the Episcopal Church's commitment to the unity of the Anglican Communion and the full equality of its LGBT members.

Integrity approaches Columbus with trepidation, but also with great clarity of purpose and enduring faith in the prophetic action of the Holy Spirit within the church today.

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