



THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF FORT WORTH

The Rt. Rev. Jack L. Iker, D.D., *Bishop of Fort Worth*

February 28, 2018

"Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity." Psalm 133:1

RE: Appointment of Elizabeth Awut as Bishop

To the GAFCON Primates:

Greetings in the strong name of our Lord, Jesus Christ. In advance of the GAFCON meeting in Jerusalem this summer, we renew our gratitude for the many sacrifices the international body of Anglican Christians has made to maintain a community where "the faith once delivered to the saints" may be practiced and preached to the glory of God, the edification of the Church, and the conversion of the world. Indeed, the GAFCON movement has come to the aid of many groups, such as the Diocese of Fort Worth, in our hour of need, for which we maintain an attitude of thanksgiving in prayer and fellowship.

At the same time, we write to express our deepest concerns over the actions taken by the Episcopal Church in South Sudan in consecrating Ms. Elizabeth Awut to the office of Bishop. Firstly, we raise the concern of the mixed messages between "a senior member of GAFCON who asked not to be named" declaring this consecration to be akin to a "wartime expediency" and the quote attributed to the Most Rev. Daniel Deng that "he had long hoped to be able to appoint a woman as bishop and was pleased with the innovation." Indeed, it is difficult to maintain the thought that both sentiments can be true. While we recognize that the moratorium against the consecration of women to the episcopate established by the GAFCON Primates is of a voluntary nature, yet the disparate and conflicting public statements being made concerning her consecration are deeply troubling. To speak plainly, which is it, some kind of anomaly or a theological conviction?

Moreover, we struggle to understand why it is that the consecration of Ms. Awut has been seemingly kept as a secret within the GAFCON community for over a year. If it is the belief of the South Sudanese that women are rightly consecrated to the episcopacy, why was this not more openly celebrated from the start? Given that her consecration is an innovation within GAFCON, it would seem that this news would naturally be much more public than it has, yet it is not. Why is it only now – over a full year after the fact - being made so public and widely distributed? Why is it that a senior member of GAFCON is making public statements only on the condition of anonymity? Is there something to hide within the broader GAFCON community? If so, what and why? Are we not called to live in the Light?

Having now fought our way through decades of precisely these kinds of trials and tribulations, where various groups have acted unilaterally in similar fashion, not only within The Episcopal Church in the United States, but elsewhere in the Anglican Communion, as is well-known, we find the divergency of public statements being made over this issue distressing. We find the seemingly veiled nature of the consecration for over a year, along with the accompanying questions it raises, deeply disconcerting in the Diocese of Fort Worth, and particularly troublesome in light of the trust we are all trying to establish among us, which is foundational to our common life as brothers and sisters in Christ.

With every effort to maintain “the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace,” we find ourselves in agreement with the statement offered by the Most. Rev. Peter Jensen of 9 Feb 2018 which states, “...this issue poses a threat to the unity we prize...” not only on the basis of our biblical and traditional theological convictions, but also as it concerns the events surrounding Ms. Awut’s consecration, as articulated above. Therefore, we respectfully submit our objection in advance of the 2018 GAFCON meeting, in the hopes that this unhelpful irregularity will swiftly be addressed and resolved in a manner that honors the nature of the Body of Christ and the interdependency of what it means to be a Communion.

In Christ,

Handwritten signature of Fr. Christopher Culpepper in blue ink.

Fr. Christopher Culpepper
Standing Committee, President

Handwritten signature of The Rt. Rev. Jack L. Iker in purple ink.

The Rt. Rev. Jack L. Iker
Bishop, The Diocese of Fort Worth