

Sorrento Statement

April 2002

The Council of Associated Parishes for Liturgy and Mission, meeting in Sorrento, British Columbia, in April, 2002, reaffirmed the Christian mission of embodying God's reconciling love for the world. As Christians, our identity is rooted in Christ, who died on the cross rather than repay violence with violence, thus breaking the power of evil to reproduce itself and opening a new way to live.

We met in British Columbia to witness and learn from the struggle for reconciliation between Native and non-Native peoples in the Anglican Church of Canada. We arrived in anguish over the escalation of conflict between the Israeli and Palestinian peoples. We shared our own experiences of acts of terror on this continent on September 11, 2001, and the responses in church, nation, and world.

In all of this we are amazed at the ways in which God brings good out of evil, for example, the acts of heroism and compassion on September 11; the enduring efforts of peacemakers in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; and the repentance of the Anglican Church of Canada, its repudiation of the ongoing victimization of Native peoples, and its commitment to reconciliation and healing.

Reflecting on the violence we are witnessing, we recognize and confess a tendency to dehumanize and even demonize others. This failure to recognize and honor the image of God in others is a sacrilege. Such dehumanization is a locus of evil which breeds violence and creates a license to kill.

The crisis in the Canadian church and the events of September 11 arose out of this very dynamic. Faced with acts of terror on September 11, the United States and its allies, including Canada, had the opportunity to respond by initiating nonviolent alternatives; instead we chose to continue the futile cycle of vengeance and violence. So also during the nineteenth century the Church of England in Canada encountered the First Nations and had the opportunity to enter a cultural and religious dialogue that shared the Gospel and honored the First Nations peoples. Instead, despite the intent to share the Gospel, in reality we chose the path of cooperation with the policy of assimilation of the government of Canada. In both situations our churches, acting out of our historical Anglican legacy as established churches, have collaborated with our governments in this sacrilege of dehumanization and demonization.

But as Christians we have another legacy: the Paschal mystery. In the crucifixion an innocent victim was put to death by the state, with the collaboration of religious authorities and the complicity of his own disciples. Yet this innocent victim refused to participate in the cycle of violence and instead healed and reversed its consequences. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus healed his arresting officer of the wound inflicted by one of his own disciples. On the cross, Jesus forgave his executioners. In his resurrection appearances, Jesus greets the despairing disciples with love and restores table fellowship with them. Jesus is risen in them and in us as we become a new humanity, peacemakers in the world.

As a grateful part of this new humanity the Council of Associated Parishes for Liturgy and Mission calls our churches to reclaim our Paschal legacy. We recognize such reclamation in the hard work of reconciliation between Native and non-Native peoples in the Anglican Church of Canada. Learning from their experience, we call upon all faithful people to make the daily and difficult choice for nonviolent and peacemaking action rather than revenge and violence. In the face of the United States government's reaction to the events of September 11 – including the resort to counter-violence, the sweeping and generalized interrogation of Muslims and Arabs, and the suppression of free debate – we call upon our churches to be advocates and agents of justice, respecting the dignity of every human being.

We further call upon our churches to end our unreflective collaboration with governments – for example, the designation in laws of church and state of the Cathedral Church of Saints Peter and Paul in Washington, D.C., as the National Cathedral, leading to the appropriation of that pulpit by the government of the United States to proclaim United States policy. We also call upon our churches to reclaim our Paschal vocation of creative tension with and witness to governments. We call upon all Christians to eschew “holy war,” and we invite peacemakers everywhere to join this disavowal. Only when we confess our sin and work to change the systems of hatred and violence will we truly honor all victims of violence. This work shows forth the reign of God in our midst.

Our liturgies are to be effective signs of the reign of God. In the waters of baptism we are given our Paschal identity as agents of reconciliation. We strengthen our Paschal identity by proclaiming the sacred story in Word and at Table. We love our enemies by praying for them. We are a community of reconciliation by sharing the Body and Blood of the crucified and risen One. We are sent forth to be Christ's Body in the world.

Sorrento, British Columbia