

Transformation and hope: A message from Executive Council, February 14

The Executive Council of The Episcopal Church, meeting in Quito, Ecuador, February 11-14, 2008, rejoices in the signs of transformation in the Diocese of Central Ecuador, Province IX of the Episcopal Church.

We are gratified to see the rebirth of hope for the people of this Diocese, which has emerged revitalized from the necessary inhibition and deposition of its bishop and a restructuring of the diocese under the leadership of Bishop Wilfrido Ramos-Orench, appointed by the House of Bishops as Provisional Bishop.

The Rev. Israel Batista, a Methodist minister and general secretary of the Latin American Council of Churches, challenged us to claim our voice as Episcopalians in Latin America, a region characterized by ethnic and linguistic diversity and population mobility fueled by social unrest. He observed that The Episcopal Church provides a unique space for those who appreciate the stability of catholic tradition and structure, while sharing in the Gospel-centered social concerns of marginalized peoples.

On Tuesday, members of Executive Council were privileged to witness the transformative effects of a church organizing to serve the least among us. We visited various diocesan ministries, including churches, a health clinic, a school, an organic farm, a center for Colombian refugees, the diocesan offices and seminary, and ministries with indigenous peoples.

The transformation we have witnessed in the Diocese of Central Ecuador gives us hope in light of the attempt of the Bishop and Convention of the Diocese of San Joaquin to remove their diocese from The Episcopal Church and transfer it to another province in the Anglican Communion.

We are deeply concerned for those who are members of The Episcopal Church but now find themselves in parishes or dioceses attempting to depart. To the members of The Episcopal Diocese of San Joaquin, know we stand with you. Your struggles and needs inform our prayers, deliberations, and plans. This is a new and unfamiliar landscape for all of us. We stand with you and commit ourselves to provide pastoral care, to aid in re-organization, and to support legal actions necessary to retain the assets of the diocese for ministry. We will hold clergy leaders accountable to their vows to uphold the doctrine, discipline and worship of this Church, and lay leadership accountable to the fiduciary responsibilities of the offices they hold. Up to \$500,000 of income from trust funds will be made available in the calendar year 2008 to support the mission work of the Diocese of San Joaquin and similarly situated dioceses.

Regarding the financial health of The Episcopal Church, we learned that in a time of economic recession, Episcopalians have demonstrated a renewed commitment to stewardship with an anticipated 4 percent increase in diocesan commitments and an excess of resources over expenses for 2007.

The budget approved for 2008 reflects these increases in diocesan commitments and for that we are grateful. Appropriations for block grants, covenant relationships and most other mission programs will continue at GC approved levels or higher in 2008. Over \$1 million in new bequests for the support of the mission of The Episcopal Church were reported .

Executive Council has made a commitment to meet in every province of The Episcopal Church. We give thanks for this opportunity to observe firsthand the faithfulness of the Diocese of Central Ecuador and Province IX, to receive their enthusiastic welcome and to share in their witness to transformation and hope.