

Pastoral Letter to the Diocese of the Rio Grande

September 26, 2007



Dear Friends in Christ,

Yesterday at the House of Bishops meeting in New Orleans I began the formal process of resigning as Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of the Rio Grande by the end of the year. This has been an extraordinarily difficult decision to make, primarily because of the pastoral relationships I have with you, the people of this diocese. I deeply regret the distress this is bound to cause, but there should be no doubt that this diocese will move through this transition with renewed vigor for its mission and life.

As I wrote to the clergy of the diocese, it is a matter of conscience about a number of questions that go to the very heart of what I understand the nature of the Church to be. I hasten to add that the House of Bishops has gone out of its way to welcome me and has at this meeting taken steps to insure an honored place for conservative Episcopalians. But for me as a bishop, the obligation of my ordination vow to uphold the doctrine, discipline, and worship of the Episcopal Church presents a unique challenge. An effective leader cannot be so conflicted about the guiding principles of the Church he serves. It concerns me that this has affected my ability to lead this diocese with a clear and hopeful vision for its mission. I also have sensed how important it is for those of us in this position to model a gracious way to leave the Episcopal Church in a manner respectful of its laws.

I believe that God's call to us is always positive, always a to and not a from. Many of you already know of my love for the Catholic Church and my conviction that this is the true home of Anglicanism. I told the bishops of my hope that this not be seen as a repudiation of the Episcopal Church but the realization of something I have always felt as an Anglican. Many of them are my friends, and we made a commitment to see this as an opportunity to work more diligently toward the unity Jesus prayed for his Church and his disciples. I hope that we can make this commitment as well.

I want to assure you that the Standing Committee has already begun the process of planning for a harmonious transition, including interim episcopal ministry. The Standing Committee is in consultation with the Office of Pastoral Development and Bishop Clay Matthews about the necessary steps to elect a new bishop. I am confident that you will be able to elect a godly bishop who is right for this diocese.

The Standing Committee becomes more than a giver of advice and consent during a transition. It becomes the ecclesiastical authority, and I am pleased that this diocese will be in the hands of such faithful and wise leaders. My work these next weeks will focus on those congregations themselves in transition and to lay as good of a foundation as possible for the one God will call to follow as your bishop.

Please know of my love and appreciation for all of you in this wonderful family of faith. And please keep me in your prayers as you will be in mine.

Yours faithfully in Christ,

+Jeffrey Steenson

4304 Carlisle Blvd. NE
Albuquerque, New Mexico 87107-4811

505-881-0636 FAX: 505-883-9048