

Dean's Letter, May 21 2017

Dear Cathedral family

This coming week, Bishop Ebenezer will be travelling to Wittenberg, Germany, to represent ACSA at an event to mark the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. The event is being organised by the World Council of Churches, and Bishop Ebenezer is the ACSA representative on this body. The Reformation began in 1517, with Martin Luther's posting of his "95 Theses" on the church door at Wittenberg, on October 31st, 1517.

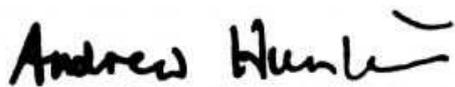
In a recent article on the Reformation, Richard Gunderman, who is the Chancellor's Professor of Medicine, Liberal Arts, and Philanthropy, Indiana University (USA), writes:

"The 95 Theses critiqued the church's sale of indulgences, which Luther regarded as a form of corruption. By Luther's time, indulgences had evolved into payments that were said to reduce punishment for sins. Luther believed that such practices only interfered with genuine repentance and discouraged people from giving to the poor. One of Luther's most important theological contributions was the 'priesthood of all believers' ... So powerfully did Luther's influence reverberate down through the ages that, during a visit to Germany in 1934, Rev. Michael King Sr. chose to change both his and his son's name to Martin Luther King. MLK Jr., namesake of the great German reformer, would make full use of the power of free speech in catalyzing the American civil rights movement.... In posting his 95 Theses, Luther was encouraging a vigorous exchange of ideas. The best community is not the one that suppresses dissent but one that challenges ideas it finds objectionable through rigorous argumentation."^[1]

The Reformation marked the beginning of the division of Western Christianity into the Protestant churches, and the Roman Catholic Church. As Anglicans, we stand in the middle of this divide: we embrace both Catholic and Reformed (Protestant) theological thought; we see our roots as going back to the early church of the apostles, and in the pre-Reformation Roman Catholic Church; we acknowledge the place of reason and tradition, together with scripture, in hearing and discerning the will of God and the mind of Christ; as the Anglican Communion we are a fellowship of self-governing independent ecclesiastical Provinces, without a central figure such as the Pope, as our source of authority and doctrine. Holding together in unity in the midst of diversity as the Anglican Communion is not always easy. The Archbishop of Canterbury (and each bishop in his/her diocese) is a focus of unity for all Anglicans. Bishops are called "to further the unity of the church, to banish error, to proclaim the demands of justice and to lead God's people in their mission to the world."^[2]

One of the sad consequences of the Reformation was the splintering of the body of Christ into different churches and numerous denominations, a splintering that continues today with the many churches that spring up all around us. How do we hold it all together? Is there room for diversity within one church? Are there better ways of doing church? Do any have the perfect answer?

My love to you all



[1] *The Conversation*. May 16th, 2017

[2] The Charge to the Bishop-elect, *An Anglican Prayer Book 1989*, pg 597-8, #66