

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE — September 28, 2005

## SOUTHERN CONE PRIMATE ACCEPTS REJECTED BISHOP AND CLERGY

RECIFE, BRAZIL—The ongoing conflict between the conservative evangelical Diocese of Recife and the liberal Igreja Episcopal Anglicana do Brasil took a significant turn today when The Most Revd Gregory Venables, Primate of the Southern Cone of America extended recognition and protection in the unprecedented action of the Brazilian province to defrock and excommunicate the Bishop of Recife and 40 clergy earlier this year.

Personal letters of recognition were delivered Tuesday evening at the Cathedral Church of the Good Samaritan at an extraordinary diocesan meeting. Canon Bill Atwood, spokesman for Archbishop Venables said, "Although there is a Panel of Reference that has been created to deal with exactly this sort of theological disagreement, the slow pace at which the Panel has been moving has left Bishop Cavalcanti and his clergy vulnerable. All the institutional power has been in the hands of the Province. These letters and licenses from the Primate of the Southern Cone are intended to bring some stability to the situation and to make it clear that many leaders around the world do not accept the actions of the Brazilian Province in attempting to eject the Bishop and clergy from the Anglican Communion."

Earlier this year, Bishop Robinson Cavalcanti was deposed by the Province. Although the action was rejected as illegitimate by a number of Archbishops, the Brazilian province went on to "excommunicate" forty members of the clergy who agree theologically with Bishop Cavalcanti. The forty clergy represent about 90% of the clergy in the diocese and lead about 90% of the church members.

The action to recognize the bishop and clergy in the neighboring province is unusual in the Anglican world, because the norm has been for authority to be centralized geographically. The decision of the Episcopal Church in the USA (ECUSA) to install an openly active homosexual candidate as a bishop and the same-sex blessings in the Anglican Church of Canada have resulted in similar actions from many of the Archbishops of the Anglican Communion. Today, scores of churches in the USA look overseas for recognition and spiritual counsel. The action in Recife is the first time that the bishop and clergy of a diocese in conflict with their Province have received recognition from another part of the Anglican Communion. In the US, however, the Diocese of Fort Worth and other traditionalist dioceses have appealed to the Panel of Reference because their conservative stance has been rejected by the American Church leadership and made it impossible for a like-minded successor bishop to be approved by the current national structure.

Following the clergy meeting, Canon Atwood toured projects of the Diocese of Recife where the church is working in the slums and even in the garbage dump. "It is amazing," said Canon Atwood, "The bishop and clergy of Recife have been tremendously effective in bringing practical care and the Good News of Jesus Christ to people who live with little hope. Today as we toured the slums it was obvious which of the children in House of Hope were newcomers. The ones who have been there for a while are robustly more healthy, smiling, laughing, and outgoing. This is the ministry of the Gospel that must go on. It is and should remain Anglican even if the Province of Brazil no longer recognizes it."

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One attachment:

Text of Abp Venables' letter follows:

Iglesia Anglicana  
del Cono Sur  
de America

Obispo Primado:  
Rvmo. GREGORIO J. VENABLES  
September 24, 2005

To The Bishop and Clergy of Recife,

Greetings in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ from the Province of the Southern Cone of America. For His own purposes, Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Church, has called us into the Anglican Communion in this time of uncertainty and conflict. Tragically, the actions that are assaulting the Communion are sowing a great deal of pain and confusion. That is poignantly true in Recife as there has been unprecedented action to depose the Bishop of that diocese and excommunicate you, the overwhelming majority of the clergy of the diocese who rejected the action against Bishop Cavalcanti.

It is important to note that the actions against the bishop and clergy were prosecuted by the Province of the Church of Brazil despite the strenuous objections of senior leaders in the communion and the establishment of a Panel of Reference by the Primates and the Archbishop of Canterbury to address situation like this.

Due to the gravity of the attempt to declare the removal of the Bishop and the declaration of excommunication of 40 of the diocesan clergy and the extremely slow pace at which the Panel of Reference is operating, a great gap has been created exposing a need for the bishop and clergy of Recife to receive ongoing recognition and some measure of spiritual covering. To that end, after consultation with other Primates, I am issuing this statement of support to continue to recognize these ordinations and ministries, and provide a special status of extra-provincial recognition by my office as Primate of the Southern Cone until such time as the Panel of Reference, the Archbishop of Canterbury, or the Anglican Communion has, in some way, adequately addressed this crisis.

By this letter I recognize (Each of the clergy were named), and affirm the status described above.

Sincerely,

The Most Rev. Gregory J. Venables  
Presiding Bishop of the Southern Cone of South America

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