

Global economic forum addresses a “crisis of truthfulness”

By Matthew Davies

(*Episcopal News Service*) Describing the global economic downturn as a "crisis of truthfulness," Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams addressed more than 2,000 people attending a July 8 forum in Anaheim, California, as part of the Episcopal Church's General Convention.



Archbishop Rowan Williams confers with House of Deputies President Bonnie Anderson during the July 8 forum. *Photo by Matthew Davies*

During the last six to nine months, Williams said, "we have suddenly discovered we have been lying to ourselves. For the last decade or more there has been a steady erosion of trust in our financial life. Our word has not been our bond. We have learned to tolerate high levels of evasion and anti-relational practices.

"We have lied to ourselves about the possibility of profit without risk," Williams told those gathered at the forum,

titled *Christian Faithfulness in the Global Economic Crisis*.

"We have lied to ourselves consistently about the possibility of limitless material growth in a limited world. We have denied precisely that ubuntu that this convention seeks to venerate and reinforce," Williams added, referring to the convention theme that emphasizes the interconnectedness of people in community.

Moderated by President of the House of Deputies Bonnie Anderson, the forum featured a discussion panel with Sarah Eagle Heart, the Episcopal Church's program officer for Native American/Indigenous Ministries; Michael Schut, economic and environmental affairs officer for the Episcopal Church; and Dr. Stephen Dzisi, a physician and technical director for NetsforLife®, an Episcopal Relief and Development partnership program that fights malaria in sub-Saharan Africa.

Anderson asked the three panelists: "If you had one thing to say to the Episcopal Church in one or two sentences, what would it be?"

"We're being called to work together to find our priorities with one another," said Eagle Heart. "What can we do to make the most impact for our communities throughout the world? What is your vision so that we can soar like eagles and provide that hope for all?"

Schut emphasized Christ's message of healing the sick and setting the prisoners free. "We now acknowledge that if we don't care for all creation we're not going to care for all humanity," he said. "We need to create an economy that's God's economy."

Dzisi expressed his gratitude for the support the church has shown for NetsforLife, which recently announced it has distributed more than two million long-lasting insecticide-treated nets in sub-Saharan Africa.

Introducing the forum, Bishop Greg Rickel of the Diocese of Olympia welcomed the more than 70 international visitors to General Convention. "It's important that we look outward to the wider world. Our life as Christians compels us to see global poverty as our collective problem," he said.

"We are all interconnected," said Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori in introductory comments. "How we live, how we use resources ... each act has an effect on all our human siblings across the globe. We are beginning to recognize that each of those acts may be more consequential than we'd imagined."

Jefferts Schori said the world is "in the midst of a crash course in economic interconnectedness ... The excess and greed in this global economic crisis have been biblical in scale. As a human community we all share some responsibility. We've been quick to assert our own need while ignoring the privation nearby."

Jefferts Schori welcomed Williams and invited forum attendees to "share a taste of wisdom's fare."

Williams, who is attending General Convention for the first time, said that the "task before us as people of faith is to name this as a crisis of truthfulness and to challenge ourselves about the truth and above all to live in the truth."

He underscored the importance of transparency and the building of relationships. "Trust doesn't happen simply because someone says 'trust me,'" he said. "Trust happens almost when you're not noticing it -- when the relationship is such that you know the quality of the person you're dealing with, and that takes time."

Williams concluded his address by underscoring the need for human beings to grow together "in liberty and communion [which] is at the heart of what we want to say to world that is indeed in crisis."