

Women in Church & Society: Report to ACC17, 2019

Introduction

1. As our church leaders and church communities become more aware of the pivotal role of faith values in transforming the gender injustices that are deeply embedded in our cultures, there is plenty of good news to share – and this report captures just some of this.
2. However the journey is long. Unjust power relations between women and men, girls and boys have far-reaching consequences for individuals, families, communities and nations, and present a barrier to the incoming of God's reign 'on earth as it is in heaven'.
3. Their effect within our church structures continues to detract from our capacity to serve as the Body of Christ in God's world. Jesus' teaching and ministry offered a radical reformulation of traditional male and female norms and values, and can inform and inspire us as we explore Jesus-shaped leadership models and relationships that enable healing, reconciliation and abundant life.
4. [ACC resolution 16.02](#) on 'Women and Men in Church and Society' provided an important framework for how our churches might pursue their work to "empower girls and boys, women and men to live and work in relationships that reflect Christian values of love, dignity, and justice".

Ministerial formation

5. The training, formation and equipping of church leaders and ministers in this area are essential as they prepare to show and tell the Gospel of Jesus Christ in Sacrament and Word, and in the lives they live.
6. In collaboration with the steering group of the International Anglican Women's Network and, since his appointment in 2018, with the Director for Theological Education in the Anglican Communion, Canon Stephen Spencer, I have worked with a group of academic theologians from six continents who have developed a biblical/theological programme of study on 'God's justice: Just relationships between women and men, boys and girls'. This resource, subject to ACC17 endorsement, will be offered to theological colleges, seminaries and training programmes as a component or module which can 'stand alone' or be incorporated into existing curricula and training schemes for women and men who are preparing for ministry, lay or ordained, or who are continuing to develop their ministerial education.
7. An electronic copy of the programme of study will be provided to ACC members in April this year, prior to ACC17 in Hong Kong.

Partnerships for gender justice

8. Working ecumenically, and sometimes with other faith traditions and governmental or non-governmental organisations, can increase our capacity to empower women and men to live and

work in just relationship. Anglican commitment and progress in this area are becoming well known and others look for our collaboration, and work with us with confidence.

9. Since its inception in 2015 following an international symposium organised by Christian Aid, I have co-chaired the steering group for the international Side by Side faith movement for gender justice. This is a growing movement of faith leaders, faith-based organisations and individuals who share the vision of a world where everybody, women and men, boys and girls, are valued equally; are able to share equitably in the distribution of power, knowledge and resources; and are free from cultural and interpersonal systems of privilege and oppression, and from violence and repression, based on gender.
10. The movement is locally led in national and regional coalitions or 'chapters' by faith leaders and faith-based organisations who have important insights into their particular contexts. To date, chapters have emerged in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, Scotland, South Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda, with Anglicans taking leading roles. Consultations have also taken place in Brazil, Burundi and Ethiopia, and are planned for Palestine and Myanmar. Focus themes vary according to context, from 'women, peace and security' in East Africa to advocacy for fair inheritance law in Burundi. Copies of the Side by Side strategic plan to 2021 will be available during ACC17.
11. We were very grateful to Lambeth Palace staff member Canon Flora Winfield who facilitated the presence of the Bishop of Swaziland, the Rt Revd Ellinah Wamukoya and myself as delegates at the Commonwealth Women's Forum in April 2017. Bishop Wamukoya joined a panel of experts on overcoming barriers to ending GBV and spoke about the role of faith leaders in sensitising their communities, changing attitudes and behaviours, and advocating for legislation relating to the rights and wellbeing of women and children, or the implementation of existing legislation. This brought the voice of faith to a new sphere and we ensured that faith communities were included as stakeholders in the Forum's outcome document which went forward to the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting which followed.
12. We have partnered with the World Council of Churches, ecumenical partners and Christian organisations in promoting the Thursdays in Black campaign. Thursdays in Black draws attention to the realities of sexual, gender-based and domestic violence, and encourages resilience and peaceful resistance. At its simplest level the campaign involves wearing black on Thursdays and the Thursdays in Black badge. At a deeper level it involves interrogating our cultural and religious belief systems, practices and teachings that have been misused as justification to perpetuate violence, stigma, intimidation and exclusion, and to compound negative masculinities and femininities. Thursdays in Black badges will be available at ACC17.
13. Anglican church leaders were among 150 faith leaders convened by the We Will Speak Out coalition in South Africa, who met with and listened to 100 survivors of sexual and gender-based violence who spoke about what they longed for from their churches – safe space, healing, and inclusion.
14. It is heartening to see more Anglican dioceses and local churches engaging creatively in their communities with the annual 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence, 25 November

to 10 December. At the ACO we have promoted and supported this with resource materials and social media campaigns. Here are some examples from 2017 and 2018:

- An Anglican church in Melbourne, Australia, hosted an ecumenical ‘Holding the Light’ service to remember victims of domestic violence, tolling the church bell 42 times in memory of women murdered by an intimate partner in Australia during 2017.
- The Church of Uganda Planning, Development and Rehabilitation Department took the lead in organising a 16 Days ‘Big Run’ in Kampala to raise awareness. Watch the video at <http://bit.ly/2lLrDqX>.
- The long list of 16 Days activities in the Anglican Church of Burundi included the recording of a drama on tackling gender-based violence (GBV) for radio broadcast and public performance; a road show promoting the ending of GBV and HIV/AIDS and offering voluntary HIV testing; and public marches involving hundreds of people in Makamba and Matana dioceses to raise awareness.
- Revd Moumita Biswas, Director for the seminary in Shillong, Church of North India and Revd Elineide Ferreira, a priest in the Episcopal Anglican Church of Brazil who established and runs a safe house for women escaping domestic violence in Ariqueemes (a city where no such facility previously existed), contributed moving testimonies during a radio programme broadcast by BBC Radio in the UK.
- ‘My Faith Says No!’: The House of Sarah in Fiji in the Diocese of Polynesia co-ordinated leaders from across nine faith and cultural groups to produce an inspirational multi-media campaign advocating for an end to violence against women and girls.
- The Board of Social Responsibility of the Diocese of Trinidad & Tobago organised 16 Days activities under three headings: Pray; Connect & Explore; Act. They hosted a Prayer Breakfast with the President of the Republic of Trinidad & Tobago as guest speaker, and an inter-faith Healing Service for those affected by gender-based violence or domestic abuse.
- The Social Concerns and Development Committee of Episcopal Church Women in the Diocese of North Central Philippines held a ‘Conversation’ at the Cathedral of the Resurrection on the campaign to end GBV and the Five Marks of Mission. A senior police officer spoke about legislation and protective measures but noted that many victims of GBV do not come forward because of the burden of shame and stigma imposed upon them in their families and communities.
- The Mothers’ Union developed resources for the 16 days that were used at vigils and events held in churches, cathedrals, schools and even remote villages in the Anglican Communion, from Dublin & Glendalough in Ireland to Dogura in Papua New Guinea.

Women’s voices at the United Nations

15. Women’s advocacy and participation have a vital part to play across the United Nations’ Sustainable Development framework. As part of a broader strategy for Anglican participation in UN fora, I have been pleased to support the Anglican Communion Office at the UN in the re-shaping of our engagement at annual sessions of the UN Commission on the Status of Women in order to maximise the impact of a smaller, well-prepared Anglican delegations and to release resources to enable Anglican women to engage with other UN bodies and instruments concerning issues that are specific priorities for the Anglican Communion.

16. In September 2018, following her untimely death, we [paid tribute](#) to our colleague Beth Adamson in The Episcopal Church who for many years volunteered with great faith, passion and joy at the Anglican Office at the UN in New York, supporting Anglican delegations of women and girls to sessions of the Commission on the Status of Women. We have lost a very bright light but Beth's legacy will live on, not least in the lives of Anglican women and girls who have been mentored and inspired by her.

Raising the profile of our work for just gender relationships

17. Having a Women in Church and Society desk at the Anglican Communion Office provides a hub and focal point for this area of mission and ministry and the Director has many opportunities to broker networking and relationship-building, and raise the profile of how the values and imperatives of our Christian faith contribute to this work, and what we are achieving and aspiring to achieve.

18. Over the past two years I have delivered keynote addresses at Christian, other faith and secular conferences, parliamentary events and UN parallel events, including in England, Scotland, Tanzania, South Korea (during the women's meeting held in the context of the Anglican Council of Churches of East Asia bishops' meeting) and during the annual sessions of the UN Commission on the Status of Women in New York.

19. In December 2018 I was grateful for an invitation to join a retreat for women clergy in Nippon Sei Ko Kai (the Anglican Church in Japan) and to preach during a eucharist at St Andrew's Cathedral, Tokyo, to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the ordination of women to the priesthood.

20. I was also grateful for the opportunity to visit Mothers' Union projects with women and girls in five dioceses in Rwanda, experiencing first-hand the value of local women's leadership and the realisation of community-based assets.

Looking ahead

21. Anglican women continue to provide leadership in seeking just gender relationships and ending and preventing gender-based violence, but the transformative masculinities and femininities we are seeking are relational. If we are to see more women in decision-making bodies inside and outside our churches and if we are to see women with equal power to influence and have agency in all spheres of their lives, then it is essential that more Anglican men and especially more church leaders explore their own role in dismantling unjust power relations between women and men, girls and boys.

22. The 2020 Lambeth Conference may provide an opportunity for bishops to reflect biblically and theologically on just relationships between women and men, and consider their own leadership role in teaching and modelling gender equitable norms, and providing guidance and support to their communities on how to prevent and respond to gender injustice issues such as gender-based violence and harmful gender stereotypes which place burdens on women and men, girls and boys.

23. There is more work to be done in exploring how liturgy and existing ministries such as preparation for Baptism, Confirmation and Marriage can serve more extensively in the promotion of right relationship and intergenerational teaching about the God-given dignity and status of all persons.

24. Gender justice is a core principle of the Anglican Alliance and is also at the heart of 'Women on the Frontline', an initiative of the Archbishop of Canterbury's Reconciliation Ministry which seeks to equip and nurture Anglican women as reconcilers. I hope that my own area of work, and networks already established, will be of assistance.
25. My prayer is that the Holy Spirit will empower us all in the transformative work that will move us from aspiration to praxis as we deepen our discipleship, and explore what it is to make visible the gift of God's communion within the human family.

Other work

26. Since ACC16 I have provided staff support to the Anglican Communion Safe Church Commission as it develops guidelines and other resources for the implementation of the Charter for the Safety of People within the Churches of the Anglican Communion and the Protocol for the disclosure of ministry suitability information. This included organising three in person meetings of the Commission in London, South Africa and Malaysia.
27. My support of the Networks of the Anglican Communion has focussed on the International Anglican Women's Network, the International Family Network and the Anglican Communion Environmental Network, with colleagues at the ACO taking on the support role for other Networks. At the end of 2018 the Director for Mission, Canon John Kafwanka, took on the support role for the Environmental Network and will take this forward. The Networks have provided separate reports which offer a glimpse of the extraordinary amount of time and energy poured into them by, for the most part, voluntary steering groups and members who are passionate about a particular strand of mission and for building up relationships around the Communion.
28. My role has benefitted significantly from the recruitment of Rachael Fraser as Research and Administration Assistant, who has wonderfully supported my own work as well as the work of our Permanent Representative to the UN Jack Palmer-White and Director for Mission, Canon John Kafwanka.

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