

A COVENANT FOR COMMUNION IN MISSION

English

The Lambeth Commission in its *Windsor Report* 'recommended and urged the primates to consider the adoption by the churches of the Communion of a common Anglican Covenant which would make explicit and forceful the loyalty and bonds of affection which govern the relationships between the Churches of the Communion'.^[1]

The Inter Anglican Standing Commission on Mission and Evangelism (IASCOME) has discussed ways to take forward mission imperatives in the Communion following the Partners in Mission process and the Decade of Evangelism. The idea of a Covenant for Communion in Mission has emerged as a key proposal. We believe that a Covenant enshrining the values of common mission that could be used as a basis for outward-looking relationships among the churches, mission organisations and societies, and networks of the Communion would provide a significant focus of unity in mission for the Anglican Communion.

In Scripture, covenants are central in the Old Testament to God's relationship to Noah, Abraham, Moses, and to the people of Israel. Jeremiah and Ezekiel foretell the coming of a new covenant – in which God will give God's people a new heart and new life and will walk with them, and they with him. In the New Testament Jesus inaugurates this New Covenant. It was marked by the breaking of his body and the shedding of his blood, celebrated in the central Christian meal of the Eucharist and effected through the Resurrection of Jesus the Christ for all people for all time.

IASCOME considered in depth the nature of covenant. We recognised that within our cultures a covenant is a serious and significant agreement. Covenants are fundamentally about relationships to which one gives oneself voluntarily, while contracts can be seen as a legally binding document under a body of governing principle. Covenants are free-will voluntary offerings from one to another while contracts are binding entities whose locus of authority is external to oneself. Covenants are relational: relational between those who are making the covenant and relational with and before God.

As Anglican churches, we have a tradition of covenants that help to clarify our relationships with other ecumenical churches, such as the Porvoo Agreement between Anglican Churches of Britain and Ireland, Spain and Portugal with the Lutheran Churches of the Baltic and Nordic countries. Another example is the Called to Common Mission covenant between the Episcopal Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

We recommend for consideration by the ACC and testing within the Communion the following nine-point covenant. We believe it provides a basis for agreements between Anglican churches at the national level – but local parish/congregations, mission movements and networks, companion diocese links, etc, may also use it. We believe the Covenant for Communion in Mission can provide a focus for binding the Communion together in a way rather different from that envisaged by the Windsor Report.

A Covenant For Communion In Mission

This Covenant signifies our common call to share in God’s healing and reconciling mission for our blessed but broken and hurting world.

In our relationships as Anglican sisters and brothers in Christ, we live in the hope of the unity that God has brought about through Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The preamble recognises that the world is one that has been graced by God but that God’s work through Jesus, empowered by the Holy Spirit, is to seek to heal its hurts and reconcile its brokenness. The preamble reminds us that as Christians we are called to share our relationships in the mission of God to the wider world, bearing witness to the kingdom of love, justice and joy that Jesus inaugurated.

The nine points of the covenant are predicated on Scripture and the Sacraments providing the nourishment, guidance and strength for the journey of the covenant partners together.

Nourished by Scripture and Sacrament, we pledge ourselves to:

1. **Recognise Jesus in each other’s contexts and lives**
The nine points begin with Jesus Christ, the source and inspiration of our faith and calls for those covenanting for mission to look for, recognise, learn from and rejoice in the presence of Christ at work in the lives and situations of the other.
2. **Support one another in our participation in God’s mission**
Point two acknowledges that we cannot serve God’s mission in isolation and calls for mutual support and encouragement in our efforts.
3. **Encourage expressions of our new life in Christ**
Point three asks those who enter into the covenant to encourage one another as we develop new understandings of our identities in Christ.
4. **Meet to share common purpose and explore differences and disagreements**
Point four provides for face-to-face meetings at which insights and learnings can be shared and difficulties worked through.
5. **Be willing to change in response to critique and challenge from others**
Point five recognises that as challenges arise changes will be needed as discipleship in Christ is deepened as a result of both experience in mission and encounters with those with whom we are in covenant.
6. **Celebrate our strengths and mourn over our failures**
Point six calls for honouring and celebrating our successes and acknowledging and naming our sadness and failures in the hopes of restitution and reconciliation.
7. **Share equitably our God-given resources**
Point seven emphasises that there are resources to share – not just money and people, but ideas, prayers, excitement, challenge, enthusiasm. It calls for a move to an equitable sharing of such resources particularly when one participant in the Covenant has more than the other.
8. **Work together for the sustainability of God’s creation**
Point eight underscores that God’s concern is for the whole of life – not just people, but the whole created order – and so we are called to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and to sustain and renew the life of the earth.
9. **Live into the promise of God’s reconciliation for ourselves and for the world**
This last point speaks of the future hope towards which we are living, the hope of a reconciled universe – in which ‘God’s will be done on earth as it is in heaven’ for which Jesus taught us to pray.

We make this covenant in the promise of our mutual responsibility and interdependence in the Body of Christ.

The conclusion provides a strong reminder that we need each other. We are responsible for each other and we are mutually interdependent in the Body of Christ.

IASCOME proposes that the ACC commend the Covenant for Communion in Mission to the churches of the Communion for study and action and remits it to the next IASCOME for evaluation of its reception in the Anglican Communion. IASCOME further proposes that the ACC advance the Covenant for Communion in Mission to the bodies of the Anglican Communion tasked to continue consideration of covenants for the Anglican Communion as commended by the Windsor Report and the “Communiqué” of the February 2005 Primates’ Meeting. To that end, IASCOME presents the following resolution for adoption by ACC-13:

ACC RESOLUTION - This Anglican Consultative Council:

1. **Commends the Covenant for Communion in Mission to the churches of the Anglican Communion for study and application as a vision for Anglican faithfulness to the mission of God;**
2. **Advances the Covenant for Communion in Mission to the bodies of the Anglican Communion tasked to continue consideration of covenants for the Anglican Communion as commended by the Windsor Report and the “Communiqué” of the February 2005 Primates’ Meeting;**
3. **Remits the Covenant for Communion in Mission to the next Inter-Anglican Standing Commission on Mission and Evangelism for monitoring responses to and evaluating effectiveness of the Covenant for Communion in Mission across the Anglican Communion.**

The covenant is deliberately general in its principles. In its understanding of mission it builds on the Five Marks of Mission of the 1984 and 1990 Anglican Consultative Councils^[2]. It provides a framework within which those entering into the covenant can identify specific tasks and learnings that relate to their particular situations.

[1] The Windsor Report 2004. London: Anglican Communion Office, 2004, Pp. 62-64.

[2] To proclaim the good news of the Kingdom of God; To teach, baptise and nurture new believers; To respond to human need by loving service; To seek to transform unjust structures of society; To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.