

An Anglican Covenant - Preliminary Report

Report of the Covenant Design Group

The Covenant Design Group, appointed by the Archbishop of Canterbury on behalf of the Primates of the Anglican Communion, held its first meeting in Nassau, the Bahamas, between Monday, 15th and Thursday, 18th January, 2007. The Archbishop of the West Indies, the Most Revd Drexel Gomez, chaired the group.

The meeting discussed four major areas of work related to the development of an Anglican Covenant: its content, the process by which it would be received into the life of the Communion, the foundations on which a covenant might be built, and its own methods of working.

The JSC paper, *Towards an Anglican Covenant*, was one of the initial papers tabled at the meeting, together with a wide range of responses to it from both individuals and from churches and other alliances within the Communion. In addition, a number of correspondents had been invited to submit reflections to the group. The group noted that there was a wide range of support for the concept of covenant in the life of the Communion, and although in the papers submitted there was a great deal of concern about the nature of any covenant that might be put forward for adoption, very few of the respondents objected to the concept of covenant *per se*, but rather saw the covenant as a moment of opportunity within the life of the Communion.

In their discussion, all the members of the group spoke of the value and importance of the continued life of the Anglican Communion as an instrument through which the Gospel could be proclaimed and God's mission carried forward. There was a real desire to see the interdependent life of the Communion strengthened by a covenant which would articulate our common foundations, and set out principles by which our life of Communion in Christ could be strengthened and nurtured.

It was also recognised, however, that the proposal for a covenant was born out of a specific context in which the Communion's life was under severe strain. While the group felt that it was important that the strength of a covenant would be greater if it addressed broad principles, and did not focus on particular issues, the need for its introduction into the life of the Communion in order to restore trust was urgent.

There were therefore two particular factors which would need to be borne in mind:

1. Content

The text of the Covenant would need to hold together and strengthen the life of the Communion. To do so, it need not introduce some new development into the life of the Communion but rather be the clarification of a process of discernment which was embodied in the Windsor Report and in the recent reality of the life of the Instruments of Communion, and which was founded in and built upon the elements traditionally articulated in association with Anglicanism and the life of the Anglican Churches.

2. Urgency

While a definitive text which held all such elements in balance might take time to develop in the life of the Communion, there was also an urgent need to re-establish trust between the churches of the Communion. The faithfulness of patterns of obedience to Christ were no longer recognised across the Communion, despite Paul's call to another way of life (Romans 14.15), and its life would suffer irreparably if some measure of mutual and common commitment to the Gospel was not reasserted in a short time frame. We were mindful also of the words of the Primates at Oporto, "We are conscious that we all stand together at the foot of the Cross of Jesus Christ, so we know that to turn away from each other would be to turn away from the Cross".

Bearing this in mind, the CDG recommends a dual track approach. The definitive text of any proposed Covenant which could command the long term confidence of the Communion would need extensive consultation and refining. Although several possible texts have already been developed, a text for adoption would need to be debated and accepted in the Provinces through their own appropriate processes before formal synodical processes of adoption, if the Covenant was to be received and have any strength or reality.

At the same time, there needed to be a commitment now to the fundamental shape of the covenant in order to address the concerns of those who feared that the very credibility of the commitment of the Anglican Churches to one another and to the Gospel itself was in doubt.

The CDG therefore proposes that the Primates give consideration to a preliminary draft text for a covenant which has been developed from existing models, that they commend this text to the Provinces for study and response, and that they express an appropriate measure of consent to this text and express the intention to pursue its fine-tuning and adoption through the consultative and constitutional processes of the Provinces.

The Primates are not being asked to commit their churches at this stage, since they are all bound by their own Provincial constitutions to observe due process. What they are being asked to do is to recognise in the general substance of the preliminary draft set forth by the CDG a concise expression of what may be considered as authentic Anglicanism. Primates are also asked to request a response from their Provinces on the draft text to the Covenant Design Group in time for there to be the preparation of a revised draft which could receive initial consideration at the Lambeth Conference.

The text offered is meant to be robust enough to express clear commitment in those areas of Anglican faith about which there has been the most underlying concern in recent events, while at the same time being faithful and consistent with the declarations, formularies and commitments of Anglicanism as they have been received by our Churches. In this way, nothing which is commended in the draft text of the Covenant can be said to be "new"; it is rather an assertion of that understanding of true Christian faith as it has been received in the Anglican Churches.

What is to be offered in the Covenant is not the invention of a new way of being Anglican, but a fresh restatement and assertion of the faith which we as Anglicans have received, and a commitment to inter-dependent life such as always in theory at least been given recognition.

Preliminary Report - Introduction

An Introduction to a Draft Text for an Anglican Covenant

God has called us into communion in Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1:9; 1 Jn. 1:3). This call is established in God's purposes for creation (Eph. 1:10; 3:9ff.), which have been furthered in God's covenants with Israel and its representatives such as Abraham and most fully in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ Jesus. We humbly recognize that this calling and gift of communion grants us responsibilities for our common life before God.

Through God's grace we have been given the Communion of Anglican churches through which to respond to God's larger calling in Christ (Acts 2:42). This Communion provides us with a special charism and identity among the many followers and servants of Jesus. Recognizing the wonder, beauty and challenge of maintaining communion in this family of churches, and the need for mutual commitment and discipline as a witness to God's promise in a world and time of instability, conflict, and fragmentation, we covenant together as churches of this Anglican Communion to be faithful to God's promises through the historic faith we confess, the way we live together and the focus of our mission.

Our faith embodies a coherent testimony to what we have received from God's Word and the Church's long-standing witness; our life together reflects the blessings of God in growing our Communion into a truly global body; and the mission we pursue aims at serving the great promises of God in Christ that embrace the world and its peoples, carried out in shared responsibility and stewardship of resources, and in interdependence among ourselves and with the wider Church.

Our prayer is that God will redeem our struggles and weakness, and renew and enrich our common life so that the Anglican Communion may be used to witness effectively in all the world to the new life and hope found in Christ.

Preliminary Report - Draft Text

An Anglican Covenant Draft prepared by the Covenant Design Group, Updated Version April 2007

1 Preamble

(Psalm 127.1-2, Ezekiel 37.1-14, Mark 1.1, John 10.10; Romans 5.1-5, Ephesians 4:1-16, Revelation 2-3)

We, the Churches of the Anglican Communion, under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, solemnly covenant together in these articles, in order to proclaim more effectively in our different contexts the Grace of God revealed in the Gospel, to offer God's love in responding to the needs of the world, to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, and to grow up together as a worldwide Communion to the full stature of Christ.

2 The Life We Share: Common Catholicity, Apostolicity and Confession of Faith

(Deuteronomy 6.4-7, Leviticus 19.9-10, Amos 5.14-15, 24; Matthew 25, 28.16-20, 1 Corinthians 15.3-11, Philippians 2.1-11, 1 Timothy 3:15-16, Hebrews 13.1-17)

Each member Church, and the Communion as a whole, affirms:

1. that it is part of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church, worshipping the one true God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit [\[1\]](#);
2. that it professes the faith which is uniquely revealed in the Holy Scriptures as containing all things necessary for salvation and as being the rule and ultimate standard of faith [\[2\]](#), and which is set forth in the catholic creeds, which faith the Church is called upon to proclaim afresh in each generation [\[3\]](#);
3. that it holds and duly administers the two sacraments ordained by Christ himself – Baptism and the Supper of the Lord – ministered with the unfailing use of Christ's words of institution, and of the elements ordained by him [\[4\]](#);
4. that it participates in the apostolic mission of the whole people of God;
5. that, led by the Holy Spirit, it has borne witness to Christian truth in its historic formularies, the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, the 1662 Book of Common Prayer, and the Ordering of Bishops, Priests, and Deacons [\[5\]](#);
6. our loyalty to this inheritance of faith as our inspiration and guidance under God in bringing the grace and truth of Christ to this generation and making Him known to our societies and nations [\[6\]](#)

3 Our Commitment to Confession of the Faith

(Deuteronomy 30.11-14, Psalm 126, Mark 10.26-27, Luke 1.37, 46-55, John 8: 32, 14:15-17, 1 Corinthians 11.23-26, 2 Timothy 3:10-4:5;)

In seeking to be faithful to God in their various contexts, each Church commits itself to:

1. uphold and act in continuity and consistency with the catholic and apostolic faith, order and tradition, biblically derived moral values and the vision of humanity received by and developed in the communion of member Churches;

2. seek in all things to uphold the solemn obligation to sustain Eucharistic communion, welcoming members of all other member churches to join in its own celebration, and encouraging its members to participate in the Eucharist in a member church in accordance with the canonical discipline of that host church;
3. ensure that biblical texts are handled faithfully, respectfully, comprehensively and coherently, primarily through the teaching and initiative of bishops and synods, and building on the best scholarship, believing that scriptural revelation must continue to illuminate, challenge and transform cultures, structures and ways of thinking;
4. nurture and respond to prophetic and faithful leadership and ministry to assist our Churches as courageous witnesses to the transformative power of the Gospel in the world.
5. pursue a common pilgrimage with other members of the Communion to discern truth, that peoples from all nations may truly be free and receive the new and abundant life in the Lord Jesus Christ.

4 The Life We Share with Others: Our Anglican Vocation

(Jeremiah 31.31-34, Ezekiel. 36.22-28, Matthew 28.16-20, John 17.20-24, 2 Corinthians 8-9, Ephesians 2:11-3:21, James 1.22-27)

(1) We affirm that Communion is a gift of God: that His people from east and west, north and south, may together declare his glory and be a sign of God's Kingdom. We gratefully acknowledge God's gracious providence extended to us down the ages, our origins in the undivided Church, the rich history of the Church in Britain and Ireland shaped particularly by the Reformation, and our growth into a global communion through the various mission initiatives.

(2) As the Communion continues to develop into a worldwide family of interdependent churches, we also face challenges and opportunities for mission at local, regional, and international levels. We cherish our faith and mission heritage as offering us unique opportunities for mission collaboration, for discovery of the life of the whole gospel and for reconciliation and shared mission with the Church throughout the world.

(3) The member Churches acknowledge that their common mission is a mission shared with other churches and traditions not party to this covenant. It is with all the saints that we will comprehend the fuller dimensions of Christ's redemptive and immeasurable love.

(4) We commit ourselves to answering God's call to share in his healing and reconciling mission for our blessed but broken and hurting world, and, with mutual accountability, to share our God-given spiritual and material resources in this task.

(5) In this mission, which is the Mission of Christ^[7], **we commit ourselves**

1. to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom of God
2. to teach, baptize and nurture new believers;
3. to respond to human need by loving service;
4. to seek to transform unjust structures of society; and
5. to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and to sustain and renew the life of the earth.

5 Our Unity and Common Life

(Numbers 11.16-20, Luke 22.14-27, Acts 2.43-47, 4.32-35, 1 Corinthians 11.23-26, 1 Peter 4:7-11, 5:1-11)

(1) We affirm the historic episcopate, locally adapted in the methods of its administration to the varying needs of the nations and peoples called of God into the unity of his Church^[8] and the central role of bishops as custodians of faith, leaders in mission, and as a visible sign of unity.

(2) We affirm the place of four Instruments of Communion which serve to discern our common mind in communion issues, and to foster our interdependence and mutual accountability in Christ. While each member Church orders and regulates its own affairs through its own system of government and law and is therefore described as autonomous, each church recognises that the member churches of the Anglican Communion are bound together, not juridically by a central legislative or executive authority, but by the Holy Spirit who calls and enables us to live in mutual loyalty and service.

1. Of these four Instruments of Communion, the Archbishop of Canterbury, with whose See Anglicans have historically been in communion, is accorded a primacy of honour and respect as first amongst equals (*primus inter pares*). He calls the Lambeth Conference, and Primates' Meeting, and is President of the Anglican Consultative Council.
2. The Lambeth Conference, under the presidency of the Archbishop of Canterbury, expressing episcopal collegiality worldwide, gathers the bishops for common counsel, consultation and encouragement and serves as an instrument in guarding the faith and unity of the Communion.
3. The Primates' Meeting, presided over by the Archbishop of Canterbury, assembles for mutual support and counsel, monitors global developments and works in full collaboration in doctrinal, moral and pastoral matters that have Communion-wide implications.
4. The Anglican Consultative Council is a body representative of bishops, clergy and laity of the churches, which co-ordinates aspects of international Anglican ecumenical and mission work.

6 Unity of the Communion

(Nehemiah 2.17,18, Mt. 18.15-18, 1 Corinthians 12, 2 Corinthians 4.1-18, 13: 5-10, Galatians 6.1-10)

Each Church commits itself

1. in essential matters of common concern, to have regard to the common good of the Communion in the exercise of its autonomy, and to support the work of the Instruments of Communion with the spiritual and material resources available to it.
2. to spend time with openness and patience in matters of theological debate and discernment to listen and to study with one another in order to comprehend the will of God. Such study and debate is an essential feature of the life of the Church as it seeks to be led by the Spirit into all truth and to proclaim the Gospel afresh in each generation. Some issues, which are perceived as controversial or new when they arise, may well evoke a deeper understanding of the implications of God's revelation to us; others may prove to be distractions or even obstacles to the faith: all therefore need to be tested by shared discernment in the life of the Church.
3. to seek with other members, through the Church's shared councils, a common mind about matters of essential concern, consistent with the Scriptures, common standards of faith, and the canon law of our churches.
4. to heed the counsel of our Instruments of Communion in matters which threaten the unity of the Communion and the effectiveness of our mission. While the Instruments of Communion have no juridical or executive authority in our Provinces, we recognise them as those bodies by which our common life in Christ is articulated and sustained, and which therefore carry a moral authority which commands our respect.
5. to seek the guidance of the Instruments of Communion, where there are matters in serious dispute among churches that cannot be resolved by mutual admonition and counsel:
 1. by submitting the matter to the Primates Meeting
 2. if the Primates believe that the matter is not one for which a common mind has been articulated, they will seek it with the other instruments and their councils
 3. finally, on this basis, the Primates will offer guidance and direction.
6. We acknowledge that in the most extreme circumstances, where member churches choose not to fulfil the substance of the covenant as understood by the Councils of the Instruments of Communion, we will consider that such

churches will have relinquished for themselves the force and meaning of the covenant's purpose, and a process of restoration and renewal will be required to re-establish their covenant relationship with other member churches.

7 Our Declaration

(Psalms 46, 72.18,19, 150, Acts10.34-44, 2 Corinthians 13.13, Jude 24-25)

With joy and with firm resolve, we declare our Churches to be partners in this Anglican Covenant, releasing ourselves for fruitful service and binding ourselves more closely in the truth and love of Christ, to whom with the Father and the Holy Spirit be glory for ever. Amen.

Notes:

- [1.](#) Cf. The Preface to the Declaration of Assent, Canon C15 of the Church of England.
- [2.](#) Cf. The Lambeth Quadrilateral of 1888
- [3.](#) Cf. The Preface to the Declaration of Assent, Canon C15 of the Church of England.
- [4.](#) cf. The Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral 1886/1888, The Preface to the Declaration of Assent, Canon C15 of the Church of England.
- [5.](#) This is not meant to exclude other Books of Common Prayer and Ordinals duly authorised for use throughout the Anglican Communion, but acknowledges the foundational nature of the Book of Common Prayer 1662 in the life of the Communion.
- [6.](#) Cf. The Preface to the Declaration of Assent, Canon C15 of the Church of England.
- [7.](#) Cf. The five Marks of Mission as set out in the MISSIO Report of 1999, building on work at ACC-6 and ACC-8.
- [8.](#) Cf. The Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral 1886/1888