

This paper has not been commended to the Churches by any Instrument of Communion. The Primates' Task Group was set up after the 2016 Primates' Meeting to advise on the life of the Communion.

The Gift, Call and Challenge of Communion

A Teaching Document presented by the Primates' Task Group based on the work of the Inter-Anglican Standing Commission on Unity, Faith and Order

Preamble

1. Anglicans experience their communion with one another as a gift, a call, and at times as challenge. The Anglican Communion exists in 165 countries; it is a dynamic and diverse interdependent community of churches. The Primates' Task Group has been meeting together in a time of challenge for the Anglican Communion. It is asking Anglicans to reflect together on what it means to be a communion of churches. Why is being a communion of churches important? How do churches in communion together proclaim in word and deed the Gospel of Jesus Christ? The Primates' Task Group invited members of the Inter-Anglican Standing Commission on Unity, Faith and Order to reflect on these questions with it.
2. This reflection on the gift, call and challenge of communion begins with a broad and ecumenical theology of communion. It then examines in particular what Anglicans believe about communion. Lastly, it looks at how Anglicans live out the gift, call and challenge of communion, culminating in the Five Marks of Mission. Living together as a communion of churches, especially in times of challenge, is a costly witness to the Crucified and Risen Lord Jesus Christ, who promises to be with his body the Church, even to the end of time.
3. The hope of the Primates' Task Group is to renew in Anglicans around the world a sense of wonder, joy and responsibility for our communion of churches as a precious gift of God. As we seek to move towards a post-colonial world, our relationships with one another in Jesus Christ are central. We pray that, in God's grace, this way of living in relationship may be a witness and blessing to a broken world.

The Gift of Communion

4. The Churches of the Anglican Communion affirm that they belong to what the Nicene Creed calls the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. The faith of

Anglicans, including what Anglicans believe about the Church, flows from the faith of the whole Church of Jesus Christ.

5. From creation, human beings were made for communion with God and with one another. The Scriptures teach that human beings are created in the image and likeness of God, who is an eternal communion of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God's purpose in creation was thwarted by human sin and disobedience, which deny, distort and reject relationships of communion between God and human beings, within the human family, and between human beings and the created order.
6. The Gospel message of Salvation proclaims that God has restored irreversibly the gift of communion through the Cross and Resurrection of Jesus Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Bible testifies that God remains faithful despite human sin and error. As the Body of Christ filled with the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Church is the sign and servant of its Lord's life-giving mission to renew and restore the gift of communion within its own life, and in mission to all people.
7. The understanding of the Church as a communion emerges from the Bible. In the Greek New Testament, the word *koinonia*, translated as 'communion', means 'to have something in common', 'to share', 'to participate', 'to have part in' and 'to act together'. In modern languages *koinonia* is often translated as 'sharing', 'participating', 'fellowship' and 'communion'. It appears in passages recounting the sharing in the Eucharist as a communion or *koinonia* in the Body of Christ (1 Cor 10.16-17). In addition, the Bible understands that communion is also expressed in acts of reconciliation (Gal 2.7-10). The collection of money to support the poor is communion or *koinonia* (Rom 15.26; 2 Cor 8.3-4). In the New Testament, then, *koinonia* stands for the life of grace, which is living communion with God the Holy Trinity and living communion with all baptised believers (2 Cor 13.13).[i]
8. It is by its life in communion with Jesus Christ that the Church is called to make visible the irreversible gift of God's communion within the human family and indeed with the whole created order. The visible *koinonia* between Christians—the communion of the saints—is a particular way that Christians proclaim that 'Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again'. As the World Council of Churches has said in *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*:^[ii]

Communion, whose source is the very life of the Holy Trinity, is both the gift by which the Church lives and, at the same time, the gift that God calls

the Church to offer to a wounded and divided humanity in hope of reconciliation and healing.

Communion of Anglicans

9. The global Anglican Communion has understood itself historically as a communion of Churches within the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, and in communion with the See of Canterbury. The Lambeth Conference 1930 stated: ‘the true constitution of the Catholic Church involves the principle of the autonomy of particular churches based upon a common faith and order’.^[iii] Thus, the Anglican Communion whilst not constituted as a global church with structures for making binding decisions of policy, shares common characteristics in liturgy and canon law. The Anglican Communion, following early practice, has always sought to respect the full juridical authority of an archbishop or metropolitan within his or her province, and of a bishop in his or her diocese, as articulated in resolution 72 of the Lambeth Conference 1988.
10. In Anglican practice, the biblical understanding of communion or *koinonia* between Churches involves a threefold relationship: mutual recognition, mutual commitment, and mutual participation. First, it involves *recognition* of one another as sister churches belonging to and professing the faith of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. It further involves such *recognition* of one another as belonging together within a distinctive family of churches, the Anglican Communion. Second, the biblical understanding of communion calls us to mutual *commitment* as churches to live and act together in fellowship. Third, the biblical understanding of communion calls us to full mutual *participation* in the sacramental life of the Church. Such full participation for Anglicans is grounded in common Baptism and a shared Eucharist celebrated by a common ordained ministry led by bishops.

Communion in faith

11. The Churches of the Anglican Communion share a common inheritance of the apostolic faith, definitively revealed in the Holy Scriptures and articulated in the catholic creeds, and within its own history. It depends entirely on God’s gift of communion restored in the saving work of Jesus Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit. The historic faith of the Church, handed down through the generations, has expressed itself in various ways within a diverse and evolving tradition. The substance of the faith is ever the same, but the way that it is expressed and applied has varied

from one historical and cultural context to another. The Church is called to proclaim this faith afresh in each generation, showing the relevance of the Gospel of Christ to the broadest spectrum of human need.

12. It was in the context of the quest for Christian unity that Anglicans expressed their distinctive understanding of the 'faith and order' of the Church. The Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral (1888) expresses the foundation on which the Churches of the Anglican Communion desire to engage other Churches with the goal of restoring full communion. It affirms

The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as containing all things necessary for salvation and as being the rule and ultimate standard of faith;

The Apostles' Creed, as the baptismal symbol; and the Nicene Creed, as the sufficient statement of the Christian faith;

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;

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.^[iv]

Communion under pressure

13. Anglicans experience the fragility of communion whenever divisive issues place strains on relationships between the churches, and the unity of the Anglican Communion is jeopardised. When communion has been strained, Anglicans have discovered that it is precisely when the Church faces new challenges that it will also discover fresh opportunities to intensify the meaning of communion, and to recognise that diversity is a gift.
14. While communion or *koinonia* is always the gift of God flowing from the Cross and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, in the course of history its reception by the churches has varied. Because *koinonia* is dynamic and relational, its reception can be stronger or weaker, enriched or impoverished, enhanced or diminished. God's *koinonia* cannot, however, be created or destroyed by human beings. In recent decades Anglicans have reflected on experiences of limited reception of God's gift of *koinonia*, first with other

world communions, and more recently between the Churches of the Anglican Communion themselves and even more painfully, with churches that have split from the Anglican Communion. The God-given nature of *koinonia* means that the experience of ‘impaired communion’ should not be understood as ‘broken communion’. Communion that is impaired is still a living experience of communion. This vital distinction affirms the theological principle that it is never possible for Christian communities to sever absolutely their communion with one another. The reality of communion contains a theological and moral imperative: unity under the Lordship of Christ remains God’s irreversible gift to all as we are made in his image, as well as God’s call and command. There always remains some reality of communion between Christians, however strained.

15. As Anglican Churches from different parts of the world become more familiar with one another, the more they are enabled to recognise Jesus Christ in one another, especially at times of acute difference and disagreement. The Churches of the Anglican Communion, although distinct and different, are connected to one another by the faith, worship and witness that flows among them and from them. Baptism and the Eucharist express the heart of our common faith, and renew each particular Church’s encounter with the gift of communion. As our lives are formed by the Bible and shaped by worship, we are drawn more deeply into the life of God and with one another. Our common life as the disciples of Christ is a sharing of *koinonia* with God and with one another.
16. Spiritual disciplines sustain and deepen the reception of the gift of communion. They take account of our inevitable human failures and fallibility, and our capacity to allow difference and disagreement to lead to division. Such disciplines include prayer for unity, a sense of humility around judgements about others, and penitence for ways in which Christians impair the unity of the Church and undermine its proclamation that Jesus Christ is the Lord.
17. The practice of ‘reception’ has allowed the Communion in the past to live with significant differences while testing changes that initially divide. Reception is the ongoing process of listening and testing a change to know whether it can be ‘received’ by the Church as truly an action of the Holy Spirit in our midst. It is rooted in the reality that receiving new insights or changes in a dynamic process over time. Since the gifts of the Holy Spirit are given to all the baptised, the exercise of discernment belongs to the whole community of God’s people. The study of scripture, prayer and

theological reflection assist the community to discern truth. This process takes time and the commitment of laity, clergy and bishops. It requires the full commitment of each Church in the Communion.

Instruments of Communion

18. Anglican Churches have received from the apostolic Church, and uphold in their practice, the historic threefold ministry of bishops, priests and deacons, ordained for life-long service of word, sacrament and pastoral care, according to their various callings. Anglicans have traditionally understood that the communion of the Church is firstly the Eucharistic community of the diocese with the leadership of its bishop, amongst its parish communities served by priests and deacons, with varieties of lay ministries. The ministry of bishops, priests and deacons is to call all the baptised into the mission of Jesus Christ, guiding and supporting all Christians in their individual callings and ministries. Parish communities are in communion with one another, because they are in communion with their bishop. Anglican parishes in one diocese are in communion with those in other dioceses, because their bishops are in communion with one another. The bishops are the primary ministers of communion between local Anglican communities, exemplified as those who ordain deacons and priests and consecrate bishops.
19. Bishops have a key role in the Anglican understanding and practice of communion. They are ordained to be the guardians and teachers of faith, the principal ministers of Baptism and the Eucharist and the other sacraments, and leaders in mission and evangelism. Bishops represent the local church (diocese) to the universal Church, the global Communion to the local diocese, and the local churches (dioceses) to one another. This ministry is exercised *personally* through the particular gifts of leadership of each bishop, *collegially* in consultation and collaboration with fellow bishops of other dioceses and beyond, and *communally* within and for the local diocesan community. Together, these complementary roles make the bishop a visible sign of the unity of the Church, especially when they participate in the Eucharist where communion with the Crucified and Risen Christ, and with one another in Christ, is most abundantly displayed.
20. The life of the Church beyond the diocese is also vital for Anglicans. Between the diocese and the global Anglican Communion is the provincial Church. Rather confusingly, Anglicans use the term 'province' in two different ways. The first

meaning is a group of regional dioceses under the leadership of an archbishop, also known as a metropolitan. The second meaning is a national or transnational member Church of the Anglican Communion; such a provincial Church is under the leadership of a primate, who is sometimes called an archbishop, or presiding-bishop, or a primus. In the United Churches, the primate is called a Moderator. Each provincial (or member) Church of the Anglican Communion, with its bishops in synod, orders and regulates its own worship, policy, ministry and mission through its own system of governance regulated by its own church law. This reality means that provinces will act in response to their context in ways that may not simply translate to the context or canon law of other provinces.

21. The Anglican Communion is a communion of dioceses and provincial Churches, rather than a single global 'Anglican Church'. The polity of the Anglican Communion is one of consultation, recommendation, persuasion and reception. There is no central or global authority in the Anglican Communion that is authorised to make any binding decisions for a provincial Church. Every Anglican provincial Church holds together the tension of their relative autonomy and their mutual commitment, mutual dependence and mutual accountability to every other member church and to the whole Communion. Autonomy is therefore balanced by interdependence and reciprocal accountability, which are key elements of ecclesial communion. As the *Windsor Report* put it:

What this bears witness to is the understanding that the churches of the Anglican Communion, if that Communion is to mean anything at all, are obliged to move together, to walk together in *synodality*. It is by listening to, and interacting with, voices from as many different parts of the family as possible that the Church discovers what its unity and communion really mean.^[v]

22. The Churches of the Anglican Communion value their relationships with one another. The relationship of Eucharistic communion between each Anglican diocese and the See of Canterbury, and the relationship of communion between each Anglican bishop and the Archbishop of Canterbury is a touchstone of Anglican unity. In addition, the Churches are sustained in their shared communion through three other formal 'Instruments of Communion': the Lambeth Conference, the Anglican Consultative Council and the Primates' Meeting. The Archbishop of Canterbury and

the three other instruments connect all Anglican provinces to one another, especially when they pray together, reflect on the Bible together, take common counsel together and celebrate their unity in the Eucharist.

1. *The Archbishop of Canterbury:* Anglicans accord the Archbishop of Canterbury a primacy of honour and respect amongst the bishops of the Communion. The role of the Archbishop of Canterbury derives from the role of the ancient See of Canterbury with which Anglicans have historically been in sacramental communion. As a focus of unity and communion, the Archbishop of Canterbury gathers and presides among fellow bishops at the Lambeth Conference and at the Primates' Meeting. The Archbishop of Canterbury is the president of the Anglican Consultative Council;

2. *The Lambeth Conference:* The Lambeth Conference is the primary expression of the conciliar dimension of Anglicanism and brings into focus the collegiality of Anglican bishops worldwide. Approximately every decade, the Archbishop of Canterbury gathers together the bishops of the Communion for worship, retreat, consultation and encouragement in their ministry of guarding the faith and unity of the Communion to "equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ" (Eph 4.12). The Lambeth Conference normally offers teaching and guidance to the Churches of the Anglican Communion, to the wider Church, and to the world, as an expression of the teaching office of bishops. The authority of the Lambeth Conference is moral and pastoral, rather than juridical. It is for the provinces and the other Instruments of Communion to determine how to receive the teachings of the Lambeth Conference;

3. *The Anglican Consultative Council:* The Anglican Consultative Council (ACC) is the most representative of the Instruments of Communion, being composed of elected and appointed lay, clerical and episcopal representatives of the provincial churches. The ACC facilitates consultation and co-operation among the churches of the Anglican Communion. Through its Standing Committee and the Anglican Communion Office, it co-ordinates international Anglican work in mission and evangelism, ecumenism, theological education, gender justice, engagement with the United Nations, and the work of Anglican Alliance in advocacy, relief and development. It supports the commissions and networks of the Anglican Communion. The ACC calls the provincial Churches into a deeper relationship of mutual responsibility and interdependence and advises on developing provincial structures. It is constitutionally, through its Standing Committee, the body that formally recognises and admits provincial churches as members of the Anglican Communion that are listed in 'The Schedule' within the Constitution of the Anglican Consultative Council;

4. *The Primates' Meeting*: The Primates' Meeting is convened by the Archbishop of Canterbury for mutual support, prayer and counsel. The authority that individual primates bring to the meeting will vary according to the polity within their own churches. Like the Lambeth Conference, the Primates' Meeting has moral and pastoral but not juridical authority: it may advise, recommend and request, but has no power to decide anything for the Communion as a whole or for any provincial church, even when it asks provinces to accept consequences when they are deemed to have departed from commonly held practices. In the Primates' Meeting, the primates and moderators are called to work collaboratively in doctrinal, moral, pastoral and missional matters that have Communion-wide implications.

It follows from the interconnectedness of the Communion, that each Instrument has a responsibility to consult with, respond to and support the other Instruments and the Churches of the Communion.

23. Through an emphasis on *synodality*, Anglicans walk together, pray together and discern together by listening to as many different voices of the family as possible. Anglican theology affirms that lay people are essential to the life and governance of the church. This reality should express itself so that lay people and clergy together with their bishops are active in local parish communities and diocesan provincial structures along with global gatherings of representatives of the Communion. The Instruments of Communion exist in order to facilitate these processes of discernment and articulation of the shared faith of Anglicans and to provide a defined space for the study and debate of differences and disagreements among Anglicans worldwide. Life in communion must include an ongoing engagement with the diverse, inculturated expressions of the apostolic Gospel.
24. The Churches of the Anglican Communion are bound together not by a central legislative and executive authority, but by mutuality and relationship sustained by common counsel through the Instruments of Communion.

Communion in Mission

25. The Anglican Consultative Council, as an Instrument of Communion, has identified Five Marks of Mission that are shaped by the Bible and by common worship. They express the gift, call and the challenge of communion:

To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom;

To teach, baptise and nurture new believers;

To respond to human need by loving service;

To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation;

To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth.

The Five Marks of Mission, summarized as tell, teach, tend, transform and treasure, are a visible Anglican outworking of that communion, 'whose source is the very life of the Holy Trinity, the gift by which the Church lives and, at the same time, the gift that God calls the Church to offer to a wounded and divided humanity in hope of reconciliation and healing.'^[vi]

26. As Jesus prayed on the night before his suffering and death, 'The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may be completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me' (John 17.22-23). Our unity in Christ is therefore a prerequisite for all mission and evangelism, and looks outwards rather than inwards. It is expressed in common prayer and in intercession for one another.

^[i] See also: Acts 2.24; 4.32; Rom 12.13; 15.26, 27; 1 Cor 1.9; 10.16,18, 20; 2 Cor 1.7; Gal 2.9; Phil 1.3; 1 Pet 4.13; 1 Jn 1.3, 7

^[ii] *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2013) §1

^[iii] Lambeth Conference 1930, Resolution 48

^[iv] The Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral 1886/1888

^[v] The Lambeth Commission on Communion, *The Windsor Report 2004* (London: ACC, 2004), §66

^[vi] *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* §1