



The Anglican Consultative Council

Chairs' Update

27 March 2023

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From the Standing Committee Chair and Vice Chair
Canon Maggie Swinson and Archbishop Hosam Naoum

To the Primates and Bishops of the Anglican Communion, members of the Anglican Consultative Council, and all Anglicans,

This is the first of our regular communications to you all in relation to the work of the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC). We plan to circulate an update each quarter at least and hope that this will keep it clear in all our minds that we are on a venture together for the Kingdom of God.

There may also be occasions when a piece of work, a network, commission or team in the office looks to take advantage of the skills of the ACC membership. To this end we created [a short survey for ACC members](#) which will help us to identify those on the ACC with the skills we are looking for as the first port of call in such circumstances. As you may be aware, there are many of you and it is unlikely that we will be able to call on

everyone for specific tasks in the coming three years, and of course there may be ACC members who, for whatever reason, do not feel able to accept additional responsibilities. Please be assured you are not required to say yes if you feel it is something you are unable to undertake!

On Monday 13 March, our newly elected Standing Committee met for the first time since last month's 18th plenary meeting of the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC-18) in Accra, Ghana. A significant proportion of the members are new and this meeting was a useful opportunity for us to reflect on our duties and responsibilities, not just as trustees of the charitable company that is the Anglican Consultative Council, but also to consider what it means to have day-to-day responsibility for one of the Anglican Communion's Instruments of Communion.

The elections for new Standing Committee members at ACC-18 produced a very geographically and culturally diverse group of trustees. We look forward to getting to know each other as we work together to further the charitable objectives of the ACC, which is “to advance the Christian religion and in particular to promote the unity and purposes of the Churches of the Anglican Communion in mission, evangelism, ecumenical relations, communication, administration and finance”.

We reflected on the ACC-18 meeting. We all agreed that it had been a huge success – and a great debt of gratitude is owed to Archbishop Cyril Ben Smith, Bishop Daniel Torto, Bishop Victor Atta-Baffoe, Canon Anthony Eiwuley, Reginald Frimpong Ansah Adjaye, and all the team from the Church of the Province of West Africa, who were such fantastic hosts.

The next meeting of the Anglican Consultative Council – ACC-19 – will be hosted by the Church of Ireland in 2026. It may be three years away, but discussions with Archbishop John McDowell have started and the staff team at the Anglican Communion Office are already considering how to improve the plenary meeting and make it even more successful than the last one.

While we were gathered in Accra, we received reports showcasing a huge programme of work being carried out by teams of volunteers in officially authorised networks and commissions; including church planting, discipleship, safeguarding, environmental protection,

ecumenical dialogues, liturgy, canon law, the Lambeth Conference and our relationship with each other as Anglicans.

Our deliberations at ACC-18 were not dominated by current controversies within the Anglican Communion; but we didn’t avoid them either. Members were well aware of the current tensions caused by a recent debate and vote by the Church of England’s General Synod. And we heard a number of passionate speeches and contributions from members who were theologically opposed to what the Church of England’s College of Bishops are proposing.

We are aware of some confusion about the nature of the Anglican Communion and its structures, and so feel we should make something clear: The Anglican Communion Office (ACO) is not part of the Church of England (C of E) and ACO staff are not employed by the Church of England.

ACO staff are employed by the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC), a completely separate charitable company. The trustees and company directors of the ACC are the Chair, Vice Chair, and seven other members elected by the Anglican Consultative Council, five Primates chosen by the Primates to represent each of the regions, and the Archbishop of Canterbury as President.

The Church of England is one of 42 member churches in the Anglican Communion. The Communion’s history and heritage is tied up with the history and heritage of the Church of England.

The Communion traces our lineage back to Christ and his Apostles through Saint Augustine of Canterbury among others, who was sent by Pope Gregory the Great in AD 597 to be the first Archbishop of Canterbury. Saint Augustine is regarded as the founder of the See of Canterbury. In some parts of the world, “Anglican Communion” is translated as “the English Church”.

But the Church of England can only decide policy for itself. Like all the churches in the Communion, the C of E is autonomous and independent-yet-interdependent. Its decisions are not binding on any other of the member churches of the Anglican Communion. Nonetheless, following publication of the Church of England’s bishops’ proposals, some people have questioned the role of the Archbishop of Canterbury within the Communion.

Again, this is an area where there is some misunderstanding – even within the Communion. The Archbishop of Canterbury is not the sole leader of the Anglican Communion, although he is sometimes described as the Communion’s “spiritual leader”. The Anglican Communion has four “Instruments of Communion” and the Archbishop of Canterbury has specific and limited roles within all four:

- **The Archbishop of Canterbury is President of the Anglican Consultative Council**

This is a legally established role, because this designation is stated within the ACC’s constitution. He is

an ex-officio member of the Standing Committee and an active participant – but the leadership of the ACC is an equal responsibility of all the members, as trustees, under the Chair and Vice Chair.

- **The Archbishop of Canterbury is the Convenor of the Lambeth Conference**

This is by tradition. Archbishop of Canterbury Charles Longley convened the first Lambeth Conference in 1867. Then, 77 of the Communion’s 144 bishops attended. The Conference has met roughly every 10 years since, each time at the instigation of the Archbishop of Canterbury. Each Lambeth Conference has developed a character of its own. Last year’s Lambeth Conference saw arguably the most dramatic change, with a conference in three phases.

- **The Archbishop of Canterbury is Chair of the Primates’ Meeting**

This is also by tradition. In practice the current Archbishop of Canterbury has called Primates’ Meetings only when requested by or with the agreement of, his fellow primates. The agenda is set and agreed by the primates and different primates have been called upon to chair different sessions. Here, amongst the primates, the Archbishop of Canterbury has been seen as *primus inter pares*, that is, first amongst equals.

The Primates’ Meeting does not have a formal constitution. It is a supportive gathering of the leaders of

the 42 Member Churches and usually takes place in the context of prayer, worship, Bible study, reflection and deep consultation.

- **The Archbishop of Canterbury is also an Instrument of Communion**

What this means isn't formally defined, and each Archbishop of Canterbury has developed his own thinking and way of working on this. It does not mean that the Archbishop of Canterbury can intervene in other provinces, or, dictate to the Communion, or decide what member churches must do. It does place on the Archbishop of Canterbury a duty of care and a responsibility to support the work and unity of the Communion. And Archbishop Justin devotes a significant proportion of his time to Anglican Communion affairs.

The relationship between these four Instruments of Communion isn't always clear; nor is it always understood, even by those involved in them. Three separate pieces of work are underway which will help to shape the Instruments into the future.

The first is a working party led by Archbishop Philip Richardson of the Anglican Church of Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia. This group is looking at ways to strengthen the relationship between the Instruments of Communion. Its work developed from a task group set up following the 2016 Primates' Meeting.

The second will be through the work of Phase Three of the Lambeth Conference journey. The Steering Group for Phase Three have recently announced that the revised Lambeth Calls will be published in late May. The Lambeth Calls cover a number of themes that are important to our life as an Anglican Communion and include a call on Anglican Identity that will add to our discussions. After Easter, the Steering Group will share more plans for Phase Three of the Lambeth Conference journey and how provinces can receive and explore the calls in their settings.

Third, we have a new piece of work being undertaken by IASCUFO – the Inter-Anglican Standing Commission on Unity Faith and Order – to “explore issues of structure and decision making in the Anglican Communion, as central to our call to be one”. The work was the subject of a presentation at our ACC-18 meeting in Ghana and the proposal was overwhelmingly endorsed by ACC members. In his presidential address, the Archbishop of Canterbury indicated that he thinks the Instruments should be reviewed and possibly changed – including the role that the office of the Archbishop of Canterbury plays in the life of the Communion.

These three pieces of work will not happen in isolation; nor are they new or set up to deal with any perceived crises. Work to review the Instruments has been taking place for a few years. In 2015, IASCUFO published a working paper called *Towards a Symphony of Instruments*, which offered an exposition

and reappraisal of the Instruments and their role to “help Anglicans throughout the world to understand the Instruments better and then to go on to re-focus them in the service of our common life.” We commend the paper to you for study. It can be downloaded from the [Anglican Communion website](#).

Progress on the three pieces of work is already underway, and we shall see the revised Lambeth Call on Anglican Identity in just a few months’ time, at Pentecost. Archbishop Philip’s working group will report back to Standing Committee in September. And IASCUFO hope to complete their work early next year in time for the Primates’ Meeting, which will take place in Rome in 2024.

Please pray for all those involved in this work, and please send any suggestions you may have about how the Instruments can better serve our Anglican Communion. We have set up a dedicated email address: instruments@anglicancommunion.org to receive comments on this work.

This letter is the first of what we hope will be regular updates to you from us, the Chair and Vice Chair of the ACC and Standing Committee. We will write to you again in June, after the next meeting of the Standing Committee in September, and again in December.

We hope that this new quarterly pattern of keeping you informed about the life of the Communion will be well received.

We look forward to working with you over the coming years.

Canon Maggie Swinson
Chair of the Anglican Communion
Standing Committee

Archbishop Hosam Naoum
Vice-Chair of the Anglican Communion
Standing Committee

PS: A reminder that members of the Anglican Consultative Council can complete the short skills survey by clicking this link: <https://forms.office.com/e/zXEdTD8ZGc>

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