

**Speech by the Right Revd Anthony Poggo
Secretary General of the Anglican Communion
To the Provincial Synod of the Church of the Province of the Indian Ocean**

**Antananarivo, Madagascar
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As delivered

Thank you very much Your Grace [Archbishop James Wong], It is a pleasure to be here. As you heard, my name is Anthony Poggo. I am the Secretary General of the Anglican Communion. I took over that role in September and before that I was Adviser to the Archbishop of Canterbury, and before that I was a bishop in South Sudan. I was a bishop there for nine-and-a-half years. So when the opening came I applied to join the Archbishop's team and my then-Primate gave me permission to go and do that.

When this other opening came, again I went through a similar process and our current Primate, Archbishop Justin [Badi Arama] was also able to give me a go-ahead in order to be considered.

It is a privilege to serve as Secretary General of the Anglican Communion.

The first thing is to thank you. It is a huge privilege to be here. This is my first visit as Secretary General. I was here before for peer mentoring, but this visit as Secretary General is very important for me.

When I visit provinces in my role, I try to listen, to hear what is happening, because I – as Secretary General – want to take your stories and share across the Anglican Communion.

The Province of the Indian Ocean is one important province in the Anglican Communion – one of the 42 provinces in the Anglican Communion. It is a valued member because of the way you have also engaged with the rest of the Communion. Your former Primate, Archbishop Ian Ernest, played an important role as Chair of CAPA [the Council of Anglican Provinces in Africa] and continues to play a valuable role in his new role as Director of the Anglican Centre in Rome.

It was good to have your provincial secretary and Mrs Gertrude in the ACC which took place in Ghana in February. Many of you in the Province are also participating in the life of the Communion. Your participation is important because it also means that your voice is heard in the Anglican Communion family.

I am also glad that you were at the Lambeth Conference and you made your contribution, your voice heard, as part of the Lambeth Conference that met last year in the United Kingdom.

I am glad to hear that the work which emerged from the Lambeth Conference during the Covid crisis brought the bishops' spouses together, and they met virtually.

We, as the Secretariat of the Anglican Communion, we serve to support the 42 provinces of the Anglican Communion. We are not the "head office" of the Anglican Communion, because

every province is autonomous. And we serve and facilitate the four Instruments of the Communion.

The four Instruments are the Anglican Consultative Council, the Lambeth Conference, the Primates' Meeting, and the Archbishop of Canterbury, who is considered an Instrument in that role.

The use of the word "Instruments" of the Communion, if you want to summarise what we do as the Anglican Communion Office, I would say that we are the lubricants that oil the Instruments of the Communion.

I am also aware that the Anglican Alliance, which is based at the ACO, values the participation of this province in many of its activities. And your clergy and Mothers' Union played a leading role in the Anglican Alliance Disaster Resilience Course, going on to run the self-care course for clergy, spouses and leaders here in this country.

The Anglican Alliance and the Anglican Communion Fund also played a role in supporting your province during the time when we have had these cyclones that particularly struck this province in 2023, but also earlier.

You may also be aware that the Anglican Communion has representation at the United Nations. Recently, the Representative and I met with Professor Sands and talked to him on what is happening in order to give support to the people of the Chagos Islands. Earlier this year I spoke with your Primate on this matter and this morning I also had the privilege of speaking to the Bishop of the Mauritius islands in order to assure him, and them, of our support to do what we can to ensure that this matter is addressed.

Let me turn very quickly to something that I want to say with regards to the Instruments of the Communion.

The Instruments are there to facilitate and help the Communion to move at that level; as I said earlier, every province is autonomous. In the recent past, all the four Instruments have indicated their readiness for change in the ongoing structures of the Communion.

In February, the ACC mandated IASCUFO [the Inter-Anglican Standing Commission on Unity, Faith and Order] to lead an initiative in order to look into this.

And in 2016 the Primates' Meeting mandated a working group to focus on the strengthening of the Standing Committee and also to look at the Instruments of the Communion.

And at the Lambeth Conference, one of the calls, on Anglican Identity, is also going to be looking at how we consider the different Instruments of the Communion in order to review the different Instruments.

In Ghana, the Archbishop of Canterbury, as one of the Instruments, said that he is open and ready for a review of the role of the Archbishop of Canterbury.

So all the four Instruments have indicated their openness and readiness for change to happen. And as Anglicans are people of order, we would like to see that these changes in the structures take place through our normal processes that are already in existence.

A few weeks ago, I heard this phrase: "Canterbury-led Communion". The reality is that authority within the Anglican Communion is dispersed. There is no centralised power-base

within the Anglican Communion. There is indeed a historic link to the Church of England, however the Church of England is just one of the 42 provinces and is treated in the same way as all the others.

And as Secretary General, one of my roles is to ensure that provinces that appear to be smaller are also heard within the table of the Communion. And I do that through visits. Whenever I am invited, especially at provincial level, I do what I can to be there in person or, at least, to send a representative. I try during such visits to also encourage provinces when I am aware of issues of contexts and issues of challenges. I find a way to encourage them and share their challenges with the rest of the Communion, because we are one family.

Being part of that Anglican Communion Family also comes with its responsibilities. Participating in the Instruments of the Communion is an expectation. Contributing to the Inter-Anglican budget is another way you show your commitment to the Anglican Communion. And that is the key way you can support the work of the secretariat – the ACO – is through the contributions that come from provinces.

As we move forward as an Anglican Communion family let us consider the fact that context in each province is different. We need to be aware of that, and because of context, personal challenges differ from one place to another.

When I was in South Sudan, serving as a bishop, my context was different. In South Sudan, if someone said they were an atheist, you would say: “don’t you believe in God?” When you are an atheist, the immediate context in people’s mind is “what is that?” Or they may say: “is your god Satan, them?”

When I moved to England seven years ago I found that secularism is real. And I could see that there is some kind of marginalisation of the Church and believers. This is the reality of the different contexts where we live. In spite of all the differences in our contexts, there is more that unites us than divides us in our Anglican Communion family.

I want to conclude by saying this: you, as a province, are facing your own unique challenges. However, I have heard of the remarkable, courageous and faithful ways you are responding to your challenges and your contexts. You are being true salt and light in the contexts that you find yourself in.

I think of Matthew 5: 14-16, where we read, *“You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden.”*

My sincere hope and prayer is that the Church in the Indian Ocean continues to follow this call and act as salt and light. And I pray that, indeed, God’s wisdom guides you and His hope inspires you and His joy energise you, as you come together in this Synod.

You have challenges but also opportunities that God has before you.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to address you this morning. And, Your Grace, I look forward to continuing to work with you and supporting you in the ways I can during my time as Secretary General.

Merci.