

Communiqué from the Primates' Meeting Canterbury Cathedral, England, 2-6 October 2017

God's Church for God's World

The meeting of Anglican Primates, the senior bishops of the Anglican Provinces, took place in Canterbury between Monday 2 October and Friday 6 October at the invitation of the Most Reverend and Right Honourable Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury.

We affirm that we believe our time together to have been a gift from God, through which we experienced many signs of God's presence amongst us. The sense of common purpose underpinned by God's love in Christ and expressed through mutual fellowship was profound.

Primates from 33 Provinces attended the meeting. Three Primates were absent because of a combination of personal circumstances and difficulties within their Provinces. Primates from Nigeria, Rwanda and Uganda declined to attend citing what they believed to be a lack of good order within the Communion. We were saddened by their absence and expressed our hope and prayer that all will join us at future meetings.

We welcomed sixteen new Primates attending for the first time, including the Primate from the new Province of The Sudan. They received a briefing on the role of the meeting, within the Instruments of Communion, on the day before the main meeting.

The first morning was spent in prayer. The agreed agenda focussed on the Five Marks of Mission of the Communion, in particular the challenge of sharing the love, compassion and reconciliation of Jesus with those in need around the world. This followed initial consideration of the internal affairs of the Communion

Internal Affairs of the Communion

We welcomed the progress being made towards the 2020 Lambeth Conference (#LC2020) and encouraged all Provinces to seek to find ways to contribute towards the cost of their Bishops and spouses attending.

It was agreed that the Archbishop of Canterbury be invited to regional meetings of Primates and others during 2018 and 2019 so that the vision for the 2020 Lambeth Conference can be shared. The Archbishop of Canterbury will consider whether another full Primates' Meeting will be held before the Lambeth Conference.

We welcomed progress in implementing resolutions agreed by the Anglican Consultative Council in Lusaka in 2016; in particular the responsibility of all Provinces to ensure comprehensive safeguarding measures to protect children and vulnerable adults. The creation of the Anglican Safe Church Commission was welcomed and endorsed.

In our last meeting in January 2016 we made a clear decision to walk together while acknowledging the distance that exists in our relationships due to deep differences in understanding on same sex marriage. We endorsed this approach, which we will continue with renewed commitment.

The Archbishops' Task Group, established in 2016, gave an interim report on its work. This was warmly welcomed, particularly the recommendations around development of common liturgy, the principle and practice of pilgrimage and a season of prayer of repentance and reconciliation.

We listened carefully to the Primus of the Scottish Episcopal Church (SEC) and with sadness accepted that the consequences for our relationships agreed in January 2016 would also apply to SEC after its decision on same sex marriage. This means that for three years, members of SEC would no longer represent the Communion on ecumenical and interfaith bodies; should not be appointed or elected to internal standing committees and that, while participating in the internal bodies of the Anglican Communion, they would not take part in decision making on any issues of doctrine or polity. The Archbishop of Canterbury will take steps within his authority to implement this agreement.

We agreed the importance of all Provinces contributing to the operational costs of supporting the communion, but according to each Province's capacity and potential to contribute.

It was confirmed that the Anglican Church of North America is not a Province of the Anglican Communion. We recognised that those in ACNA should be treated with love as fellow Christians.

We discussed difficulties arising from cross-border interventions, agreeing that the principles were clearly stated from the Council of Nicaea onwards and in the 1998 Lambeth Conference. We recognised that there were opportunities for joint initiatives and mission partnerships for the benefit of the Gospel where these are agreed between Provinces. However consent was critical to any inter-provincial collaboration and it was essential that courtesy and love should be extended to Provinces at all times.

Attempts to deal with breaches of consent and courtesy should be made in regional Primates' Meetings and only referred to the Secretary General and the Archbishop of Canterbury as a last resort. We recognised that persistent and deliberate non-consensual cross-border activity breaks trust and weakens our communion.

We recognised that there is a need for a season of repentance and renewal including where interventions may have happened without prior permission having been sought.

We reaffirmed commitments made in 2016 regarding the LGBTI community, specifically the Communion's sorrow for previous failures to support LGBTI people and its condemnation of homophobic prejudice and violence.

We welcomed the news that the Church of England has embarked on a major study of human sexuality in its cultural, scientific, scriptural and theological aspects and anticipated considering the results of this work at a future meeting.

External Issues

For most of the meeting we focussed on external issues including evangelism and discipleship, reconciliation and peace building, climate change, food security, refugees, human trafficking and freedom of religion. On the final day the Anglican Inter Faith Commission was launched.

The world has never felt the need of a Saviour more keenly. We have shared stories of pain and loss, of natural disasters and tragedy, of violence and threat. However in this world we have joy, courage and hope because of the light of the Saviour of all, Jesus Christ. God has poured his love upon his whole Church by his Holy Spirit. The Church lives to proclaim this gospel in word and deed. We therefore commit ourselves afresh to lead those we serve in the joyful announcement of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We pledge to pray for the empowering of the Holy Spirit, that we may witness effectively to the good news. To this end between Ascension day and Pentecost in 2018 we call all those who are able, to join us in praying 'Thy Kingdom Come' – that the Holy Spirit may empower the announcement of the Gospel so that many may believe.

We recognised that at least half of the Provinces in the Communion had areas with food security issues. Whilst developing nations suffered more, there were pockets of food insecurity elsewhere, for example, reliance on food banks for many in the British Isles.

As at previous meetings, we were deeply concerned to hear accounts of the severe impact of climate change, including the threat of rising seas to many islands and low lying lands. We understood the importance of giving moral leadership because the effects of climate change are not evenly distributed. Drought and flooding most affect the poorest of the poor, with the least resources to rebuild a home, replant a field or seek medical care for flood-borne illnesses. We recommitted ourselves to advocate for improved stewardship of God's creation.

We heard powerful testimonies of the church's engagement in reconciliation in a number of places, particularly by those torn apart by apartheid, ethnic cleansing, and civil wars, historic and on-going: in places such as South Sudan, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo. We pledged solidarity with each other in this sacrificial and often costly ministry.

We are committed to mediating in situations of violent conflict; ministering to the victims of war, including refugees; upholding indigenous rights; supporting the victims of sexual and domestic violence; and maintaining a faithful presence in situations of extreme persecution and terror.

We discussed the role of reconciliation at every level, from personal relationships, to communal, societal and with the rest of creation, including care for the environment. Reconciliation is at the heart of the Gospel – it is because we are reconciled to God in Christ that all are given the message and ministry of reconciliation.

We recognised the vital role of all spouses in supporting bishops and archbishops, and particularly the importance of women placed in front line roles because of the offices held by their husbands. We appreciated the leadership and initiative of Mrs Caroline Welby and others in supporting women in such situations.

We heard of the plight of Indigenous Peoples, resulting from government policies of forced assimilation associated with colonial expansion. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission that addressed this history in Canada grounded its report and calls to action on the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. We reaffirmed our commitment to encourage all governments to support the UN Declaration.

We recognised God's call for justice and dignity for all humanity and raised with profound concern the desperate plight of millions of people facing hunger. We are committed to support actions which end hunger, promote sustainable agriculture and address the root causes of food insecurity.

We grieved for the 65 million refugees and internally displaced people forcibly uprooted by conflict, persecution and violence; the nearly 20 million displaced by natural disasters; and the millions of vulnerable migrants. We committed ourselves to respond with others to ensure protection, meet immediate need, and address underlying causes.

We heard about the suffering of 40 million victims of modern slavery and human trafficking – a crime against humanity which profits from the exploitation and abuse of vulnerable individuals. We committed ourselves to address this issue in our countries and across the globe.

We discussed freedom of religion and belief and heard about particular challenges faced in some Provinces. We endorsed the need to ensure that provisions relating to the freedom of religion are included and upheld in national constitutions, working with ecumenical and interfaith partners, where appropriate.

We heard of issues arising from living alongside those of other faiths; a painful daily reality in many Provinces. We commit to seeking ways to develop better understanding on the path to peaceful co-existence. We are excited at the prospect of the Anglican Inter Faith Commission working in this area.

We were deeply grateful to the staff of the Anglican Communion Office, and especially the Secretary General, to the staff at Lambeth Palace and at Church House, Westminster. We are especially grateful for the warm welcome, generous hospitality and kindness offered by the Dean of Canterbury and all at the Cathedral: their contribution was very important in setting the mood of the meeting in prayer and mutual listening. We also thank the Community of St Anselm for their prayer, help and support.

We leave enriched by the communion we share and strengthened by the faithful witness of Anglicans everywhere. We deeply appreciate the prayers of many throughout the world over our time together.