

Walking Together in the Service of God in the World

The meeting of Anglican Primates, the senior bishops of the 38 Anglican Provinces, joined by the Archbishop of the Anglican Church of North America, took place in Canterbury between Monday 11 January and Friday 15 January at the invitation of Justin Welby, the Archbishop of Canterbury. The first morning was spent in prayer and fasting.



We came knowing that the 2016 Primates' meeting would be concerned with the differences among us in regard to our teaching on matters of human sexuality. We were also eager to address wider areas of concern.

The meeting started by agreeing the agenda. The first agreed item was to discuss an important point of contention among Anglicans worldwide: the recent change to the doctrine of marriage by The Episcopal Church in the USA.

Over the past week the unanimous decision of the Primates was to walk together, however painful this

is, and despite our differences, as a deep expression of our unity in the body of Christ. We looked at what that meant in practical terms.

We received the recommendation of a working group of our members which took up the task of how our Anglican Communion of Churches might walk together and our unity be strengthened. Their work, consistent with previous statements of the Primates' meetings, addressed what consequences follow for The Episcopal Church in relation to the Anglican Communion following its recent change of marriage doctrine. The recommendations in paragraphs 7 and 8 of the Addendum A below are:

“It is our unanimous desire to walk together. However given the seriousness of these matters we formally acknowledge this distance by requiring that for a period of three years The Episcopal Church no longer represent us on ecumenical and interfaith bodies, should not be appointed or elected to an internal standing committee and that while participating in the internal bodies of the Anglican Communion, they will not take part in decision making on any issues pertaining to doctrine or polity.

“We have asked the Archbishop of Canterbury to appoint a Task Group to maintain conversation among ourselves with the intention of restoration of relationship, the rebuilding of mutual trust, healing the legacy of hurt, recognising the extent of our commonality and exploring our deep differences, ensuring they are held between us in the love and grace of Christ.”

These recommendations were adopted by the majority of the Primates present.

We will develop this process so that it can also be applied when any unilateral decisions on matters of doctrine and polity are taken that threaten our unity.

The Primates condemned homophobic prejudice and violence and resolved to work together to offer pastoral care and loving service irrespective of sexual orientation. This conviction arises out of our discipleship of Jesus Christ. The Primates reaffirmed their rejection of criminal sanctions against same-sex attracted people.

The Primates recognise that the Christian church and within it the Anglican Communion have often acted in a way towards people on the basis of their sexual orientation that has caused deep hurt. Where this has happened they express their profound sorrow and affirm again that God's love for every human being is the same, regardless of their sexuality, and that the church should never by its actions give any other impression.

We affirmed the consultation that had taken place in preparation for the meeting by Archbishop Welby and commended his approach for future events within the Communion.

The consideration of the required application for admission to membership of the Communion of the Anglican Church of North America was recognised as properly belonging to the Anglican Consultative Council. The Primates recognise that such an application, were it to come forward, would raise significant questions of polity and jurisdiction.

In the wake of the climate change conference in Paris last month, the meeting heard about a petition of almost two million signatures co-coordinated by the Anglican Environment Network. Reports were

made about moves to divest from fossil fuels, the expansion of the African Deserts and the struggle for survival of the peoples of the Pacific as island life is threatened in many places by the rise of sea levels.

The meeting discussed the reality of religiously motivated violence and its impact on people and communities throughout the world. Primates living in places where such violence is a daily reality spoke movingly and passionately about their circumstances and the effect on their members. The Archbishop of Canterbury himself has taken important initiatives in bringing people together from a range of faith communities globally for discussion and mutual accountability. The Anglican Primates repudiated any religiously motivated violence and expressed solidarity with all who suffer from this evil in the world today.

The Primates look forward to the proposal being brought to the Anglican Consultative Council for comprehensive child protection measures to be available throughout all the churches of the Communion.

In a presentation on evangelism, the Primates rejoiced that the Church of Jesus Christ lives to bear witness to the transforming power of the love of God in Jesus Christ. The Primates were energised by the opportunity to share experiences of evangelism and motivated to evangelise with their people.

“The Primates joyfully commit themselves and the Anglican Church, to proclaim throughout the world the person and work of Jesus Christ, unceasingly and authentically, inviting all to embrace the beauty and joy of the Gospel.”

(See Addendum B.)

The Primates supported the Archbishop of Canterbury in his proposal to call a Lambeth Conference in 2020.

Primates discussed tribalism, ethnicity, nationalism and patronage networks, and the deep evil of corruption. They reflected that these issues become inextricably connected to war and violence, and derive from poverty. They agreed to ask the Secretary General of the Anglican Communion to commission a study for the next Primates’ meeting. The Primates agreed to meet again in 2017 and 2019.

The Primates owe a debt of gratitude to the staff of the Anglican Communion Office, and especially the Secretary General, to the staff at Lambeth Palace and at Church House Westminster. The Primates were 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. Thanks to the Community of St Anselm for their prayer, help and support, Jean Vanier for his inspiring addresses, and the Community of St Gregory for the loan of the crosier head to sit alongside the St Augustine gospels.

The Primates received their time together as a gift from God and experienced many signs of God's presence amongst us. They appreciated the personal care and humility shown by the Archbishop of

Canterbury especially in his chairing of the meeting. We leave our week together enriched by the communion we share and strengthened by the faithful witness of Anglicans across the world. The Primates deeply appreciate the prayers of many throughout the world over our time together.

Addendum A

1. We gathered as Anglican Primates to pray and consider how we may preserve our unity in Christ given the ongoing deep differences that exist among us concerning our understanding of marriage.
2. Recent developments in the Episcopal Church with respect to a change in their Canon on marriage represent a fundamental departure from the faith and teaching held by the majority of our Provinces on the doctrine of marriage. Possible developments in other Provinces could further exacerbate this situation.
3. All of us acknowledge that these developments have caused further deep pain throughout our Communion.
4. The traditional doctrine of the church in view of the teaching of Scripture, upholds marriage as between a man and a woman in faithful, lifelong union. The majority of those gathered reaffirm this teaching.
5. In keeping with the consistent position of previous Primates' meetings such unilateral actions on a matter of doctrine without Catholic unity is considered by many of us as a departure from the mutual accountability and interdependence implied through being in relationship with each other in the Anglican Communion.
6. Such actions further impair our communion and create a deeper mistrust between us. This results in significant distance between us and places huge strains on the functioning of the Instruments of Communion and the ways in which we express our historic and ongoing relationships.
7. It is our unanimous desire to walk together. However given the seriousness of these matters we formally acknowledge this distance by requiring that for a period of three years TEC no longer represent us on ecumenical and interfaith bodies, should not be appointed or elected to an internal standing committee and that while participating in the internal bodies of the Anglican Communion, they will not take part in decision making on any issues pertaining to doctrine or polity.
8. We have asked the ABC to appoint a Task Group to maintain conversation among ourselves with the intention of restoration of relationship, the rebuilding of mutual trust, healing the legacy of hurt, recognising the extent of our commonality and exploring our deep differences, ensuring they are held between us in the love and grace of Christ.

Addendum B

We, as Anglican Primates, affirm together that the Church of Jesus Christ lives to bear witness to the

transforming love of God in the power of the Spirit throughout the world.

It is clear God's world has never been in greater need of this resurrection love and we long to make it known.

We commit ourselves through evangelism to proclaim the person and work of Jesus Christ, unceasingly and authentically, inviting all to embrace the beauty and joy of the Gospel.

We rely entirely on the power of the Holy Spirit who gives us speech, brings new birth, leads us into the truth revealed in Christ Jesus thus building the church.

All disciples of Jesus Christ, by virtue of our baptism, are witnesses to and of Jesus in faith, hope and love.

We pledge ourselves together to pray, listen, love, suffer and sacrifice that the world may know that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Come Holy Spirit.

Primates of the Anglican Communion at Canterbury Cathedral, 14 January 2016.

Declaration after the meeting of Anglican Primates