

An Anglican Covenant

A Draft for Discussion



1 Preamble

(Psalm 127.1-2, Ezekiel 37.1-14, Mark 1.1, John 10.10; Romans 5.1-5, Ephesians 4:1-16, Revelation 2-3)

We, the Churches of the Anglican Communion, under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, solemnly covenant together in these articles, in order to proclaim more effectively in our different contexts the Grace of God revealed in the Gospel, to offer God's love in responding to the needs of the world, to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, and to grow up together as a worldwide Communion to the full stature of Christ.

2 The Life We Share: Common Catholicity, Apostolicity and Confession of Faith

(Deuteronomy 6.4-7, Leviticus 19.9-10, Amos 5.14-15, 24; Matthew 25, 28.16-20, 1 Corinthians 15.3-11, Philippians 2.1-11, 1 Timothy 3:15-16, Hebrews 13.1-17)

Each member Church, and the Communion as a whole, affirms:

- (1) that it is part of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church, worshipping the one true God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit¹;
- (2) that it professes the faith which is uniquely revealed in the Holy Scriptures as containing all things necessary for salvation and as being the rule and ultimate standard of faith², and which is set forth in the catholic creeds, which faith the Church is called upon to proclaim afresh in each generation³;
- (3) that it holds and duly administers 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 him⁴;
- (4) that it participates in the apostolic mission of the whole people of God;
- (5) that, led by the Holy Spirit, it has borne witness to Christian truth in its historic formularies, the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, the 1662 Book of Common Prayer, and the Ordering of Bishops, Priests, and Deacons⁵;
- (6) our loyalty to this inheritance of faith as our inspiration and guidance under God in bringing the grace and truth of Christ to this generation and making Him known to our societies and nations⁶.

¹ Cf. The Preface to the Declaration of Assent, Canon C15 of the Church of England.

² Cf. The Lambeth Quadrilateral of 1888

³ Cf. The Preface to the Declaration of Assent, Canon C15 of the Church of England.

⁴ cf. The Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral 1886/1888, The Preface to the Declaration of Assent, Canon C15 of the Church of England.

⁵ This is not meant to exclude other Books of Common Prayer and Ordinals duly authorised for use throughout the Anglican Communion, but acknowledges the foundational nature of the Book of Common Prayer 1662 in the life of the Communion.

3 Our Commitment to Confession of the Faith

(Deuteronomy 30.11-14, Psalm 126, Mark 10.26-27, Luke 1.37, 46-55, John 8: 32, 14:15-17, 1 Corinthians 11.23-26, 2 Timothy 3:10-4:5;)

In seeking to be faithful to God in their various contexts, each Church commits itself to:

- (1) uphold and act in continuity and consistency with the catholic and apostolic faith, order and tradition, biblically derived moral values and the vision of humanity received by and developed in the communion of member Churches;
- (2) seek in all things to uphold the solemn obligation to sustain Eucharistic communion, welcoming members of all other member churches to join in its own celebration, and encouraging its members to participate in the Eucharist in a member church in accordance with the canonical discipline of that host church;
- (3) ensure that biblical texts are handled faithfully, respectfully, comprehensively and coherently, primarily through the teaching and initiative of bishops and synods, and building on the best scholarship, believing that scriptural revelation must continue to illuminate, challenge and transform cultures, structures and ways of thinking;
- (4) nurture and respond to prophetic and faithful leadership and ministry to assist our Churches as courageous witnesses to the transformative power of the Gospel in the world.
- (5) pursue a common pilgrimage with other members of the Communion to discern truth, that peoples from all nations may truly be free and receive the new and abundant life in the Lord Jesus Christ.

4 The Life We Share with Others: Our Anglican Vocation

(Jeremiah 31.31-34, Ezekiel. 36.22-28, Matthew 28.16-20, John 17.20-24, 2 Corinthians 8-9, Ephesians 2:11-3:21, James 1.22-27)

- (1) **We affirm** that Communion is a gift of God: that His people from east and west, north and south, may together declare his glory and be a sign of God's Kingdom. We gratefully acknowledge God's gracious providence extended to us down the ages, our origins in the undivided Church, the rich history of the Church in Britain and Ireland shaped particularly by the Reformation, and our growth into a global communion through the various mission initiatives.
- (2) As the Communion continues to develop into a worldwide family of interdependent churches, we also face challenges and opportunities for mission at local, regional, and international levels. We cherish our faith and mission heritage as offering us unique opportunities for mission collaboration, for discovery of the life of the whole gospel and for reconciliation and shared mission with the Church throughout the world.
- (3) The member Churches acknowledge that their common mission is a mission shared with other churches and traditions not party to this covenant. It is with all the saints that we will comprehend the fuller dimensions of Christ's redemptive and immeasurable love.

⁶ Cf. The Preface to the Declaration of Assent, Canon C15 of the Church of England.

(4) **We commit** ourselves to answering God's call to share in his healing and reconciling mission for our blessed but broken and hurting world, and, with mutual accountability, to share our God-given spiritual and material resources in this task.

(5) In this mission, which is the Mission of Christ⁷, **we commit ourselves**

1. to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom of God
2. to teach, baptize and nurture new believers;
3. to respond to human need by loving service;
4. to seek to transform unjust structures of society; and
5. to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and to sustain and renew the life of the earth.

5 Our Unity and Common Life

(Numbers 11.16-20, Luke 22.14-27, Acts 2.43-47, 4.32-35, 1 Corinthians 11.23-26, 1 Peter 4:7-11, 5:1-11)

(1) **We affirm** 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 Church⁸ and the central role of bishops as custodians of faith, leaders in mission, and as a visible sign of unity.

(2) **We affirm** the place of four Instruments of Communion which serve to discern our common mind in communion issues, and to foster our interdependence and mutual accountability in Christ. While each member Church orders and regulates its own affairs through its own system of government and law and is therefore described as autonomous, each church recognises that the member churches of the Anglican Communion are bound together, not juridically by a central legislative or executive authority, but by the Holy Spirit who calls and enables us to live in mutual loyalty and service.

- I. Of these four Instruments of Communion, the Archbishop of Canterbury, with whose See Anglicans have historically been in communion, is accorded a primacy of honour and respect as first amongst equals (*primus inter pares*). He calls the Lambeth Conference, and Primates' Meeting, and is President of the Anglican Consultative Council.
- II. The Lambeth Conference, under the presidency of the Archbishop of Canterbury, expressing episcopal collegiality worldwide, gathers the bishops for common counsel, consultation and encouragement and serves as an instrument in guarding the faith and unity of the Communion.
- III. The Primates' Meeting, presided over by the Archbishop of Canterbury, assembles for mutual support and counsel, monitors global developments and works in full collaboration in doctrinal, moral and pastoral matters that have Communion-wide implications.
- IV. The Anglican Consultative Council is a body representative of bishops, clergy and laity of the churches, which co-ordinates aspects of international Anglican ecumenical and mission work.

⁷ Cf. The five Marks of Mission as set out in the MISSIO Report of 1999, building on work at ACC-6 and ACC-8.

⁸ Cf. The Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral 1886/1888

6 Unity of the Communion

(Nehemiah 2.17,18, Mt. 18.15-18, 1 Corinthians 12, 2 Corinthians 4.1-18, 13: 5-10, Galatians 6.1-10)

Each Church commits itself

- (1) in essential matters of common concern, to have regard to the common good of the Communion in the exercise of its autonomy, and to support the work of the Instruments of Communion with the spiritual and material resources available to it.
- (2) to spend time with openness and patience in matters of theological debate and discernment to listen and to study with one another in order to comprehend the will of God. Such study and debate is an essential feature of the life of the Church as it seeks to be led by the Spirit into all truth and to proclaim the Gospel afresh in each generation. Some issues, which are perceived as controversial or new when they arise, may well evoke a deeper understanding of the implications of God's revelation to us; others may prove to be distractions or even obstacles to the faith: all therefore need to be tested by shared discernment in the life of the Church.
- (3) to seek with other members, through the Church's shared councils, a common mind about matters of essential concern, consistent with the Scriptures, common standards of faith, and the canon law of our churches.
- (4) to heed the counsel of our Instruments of Communion in matters which threaten the unity of the Communion and the effectiveness of our mission. While the Instruments of Communion have no juridical or executive authority in our Provinces, we recognise them as those bodies by which our common life in Christ is articulated and sustained, and which therefore carry a moral authority which commands our respect.
- (5) to seek the guidance of the Instruments of Communion, where there are matters in serious dispute among churches that cannot be resolved by mutual admonition and counsel:
 1. by submitting the matter to the Primates Meeting
 2. if the Primates believe that the matter is not one for which a common mind has been articulated, they will seek it with the other instruments and their councils
 3. finally, on this basis, the Primates will offer guidance and direction.
- (6) We acknowledge that in the most extreme circumstances, where member churches choose not to fulfil the substance of the covenant as understood by the Councils of the Instruments of Communion, we will consider that such churches will have relinquished for themselves the force and meaning of the covenant's purpose, and a process of restoration and renewal will be required to re-establish their covenant relationship with other member churches.

7 Our Declaration

(Psalms 46, 72.18,19, 150, Acts 10.34-44, 2 Corinthians 13.13, Jude 24-25)

With joy and with firm resolve, we declare our Churches to be partners in this Anglican Covenant, releasing ourselves for fruitful service and binding ourselves more closely in the truth and love of Christ, to whom with the Father and the Holy Spirit be glory for ever. Amen.

AN EVANGELICAL COMMENTARY ON THE DRAFT COVENANT

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I am grateful to the Covenant Design Group, of which I am a Consultant, for taking up the work of preparing a Draft Anglican Communion Covenant (www.anglicancommunion.org/commission/d_covenant/index.cfm). The events of the past decade in the Communion have made clear, in a way not seen since the 16th century, the need of a strong statement of doctrine and discipline among Christians in our tradition.

I am submitting the comments below as articulating an Evangelical perspective and corrective. I believe that the great debates and events of the Reformation remain foundational for our Christian heritage. In a world where Evangelical Christians are spreading rapidly, including those in many Anglican Provinces, it is important that our convictions be represented in an all-Communion document.

The Draft Covenant is, in my opinion, an orthodox statement of the Christian faith; it is less characteristically Evangelical. I propose that with relatively minor amendment, this document can express more fully the Anglican Evangelical perspective.

All church statements emerge from particular contexts, indeed particular controversies. Likewise, this Covenant should address forthrightly the theological errors that have torn the fabric of the Communion. It is not clear at this moment in time whether the Covenant Design Group appointed by the Archbishop of Canterbury has the cohesiveness to do this. Like the Windsor Report, it is difficult for a group of people who hold not only diverse but divergent views to come up with a clear and relevant statement. The Covenant Design Group has made a good start, building on proposals from a prior Global South working group. It is hard to imagine, however, that the Lambeth Conference, if it includes Canterbury's current invitees, will be able to come behind any formulary that is not hopelessly muddled. And any muddled statement will negate the original purpose behind the Covenant proposal, which is for the Anglican Communion to return to its foundation in the biblical Gospel and apostolic faith and practice.

So the comments and proposed revisions below may or may not, at the end of the day, be useful for the Anglican Communion as presently constituted. It may, however, allow those who wish to mend the net torn by the Western churches over the past decades to smelt the good metal from work done to date and to forge it into a useful instrument for what I have called "The Global Anglican Communion" (see www.mereanglicanism.com/presentations.htm).

In my view the emendations suggested below (in *bold italics*) will strengthen the Covenant document and better represent the Evangelical understanding of the faith.

(5) and (6) renumbered from (4) and (5)

Explanation: The amended introductory phrase recalls the “once for all” character of the Christian faith, as contended for by St. Jude. The catholic and apostolic nature of the Church is give it its due in subsection 1, along with the Reformation insights mentioned above.

I believe the authority of Scripture should receive a separate subsection (2) and be given priority in the order of “Word and Sacrament.”

The use of the phrase “God’s Word written” from Article XX is of great importance in the present crisis of authority. I propose interpretation in the “plain and canonical sense” as a somewhat stronger wording to stress the Reformation emphasis on the clarity and unity of Scripture, and I note the joint responsibility of upholding Scripture by people, pastors, scholars and bishops as a classic application of biblical authority.

Finally, I think that the Covenant should openly confront the presenting error of our day: the substitution of personal sexual fulfillment for obedience to God’s order of marriage and procreation. I refer to the “unchangeable standard” of marriage in the words of Resolution 66 (Lambeth 1920).

Sec. 4. *Our Call to Mission*

Proposed Amendment

(see section title)

We affirm that Communion is a gift of God *in Mission. In response to the Risen Christ’s command*, we commit ourselves:

- (1) To present Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit so that men and women come to put their faith in God through him, to accept him as their Saviour and to serve him as their King in the fellowship of his Church;*
- (2) To reach with the Gospel message every tribe and language and people and nation;*
- (3) To teach, baptize and nurture new believers;*
- (4) To respond to human need by loving service;*
- (5) To seek to transform unjust structures of society and safeguard the integrity of creation.*

We gratefully acknowledge... etc. (from para. 1 through 3)

Explanation: Evangelicals believe that Christ’s Great Commission to the nations should be highlighted in the Covenant. The changes in title and opening sentence attempt to do this. I think the missional priorities as listed represent a proper balance of the Church’s preaching, teaching, serving and prophetic call. By using William Temple’s classic formulation of Evangelism, adopted by the Lambeth Conference, I wish to make clear the need for call to response as well as proclamation.