

PROPOSALS FOR AN ANGLICAN COVENANT: THE STORY AND TEXT SO FAR

This document gives a short overview of the Covenant Process and a summary introduction to the St Andrew's Draft for the Anglican Covenant.

Background

In 2004, the Windsor Report recommended that, in order to rebuild trust in the Communion at a time of great strain on "the bonds of affection", it might be helpful to restate in clear language what exactly Anglicans mean when they talk about the existence of such bonds. It recommended the production of "an Anglican Covenant", which would state what exactly it was that Anglicans held in common, and how the thirty-nine (thirty-eight) Provinces of the Communion could express their commitment to live together in mutual care and responsibility as one Communion.

The Joint Standing Committee of the Anglican Consultative Council and the Primates (JSC) accepted the recommendation and in 2006 the Archbishop of Canterbury appointed a Covenant Design Group (CDG) to develop a draft text for such a covenant. In its work, the Group drew on work already done elsewhere: in the Windsor Report, by the Inter()Anglican Standing Commission on Mission and Evangelism, by the Global South Covenant Group, the Anglican Church of Australia and others. They produced a first draft (called the *Nassau Draft*) for the Primates and JSC at Dar es Salaam in February 2007. A second draft (the *St Andrew's Draft*) was written by the CDG at the beginning of 2008 following communion-wide consultation in the previous twelve months as a preparation for discussion at the Lambeth Conference. The bishops are invited to study this present text, and to respond by telling the CDG what they like about this new text, and what causes them concern.

The St. Andrew's Draft for the Anglican Covenant has three major parts: (1) a Theological Introduction; (2) the draft Text itself and (3) an Appendix giving detailed procedures.

The Introduction

The Introduction speaks of the history of covenant in the context of God's story and the history of the Anglican Communion. Communion is revealed through the Son and his relationship with the Father. Communion within the Church must reflect the communion within the life of the Trinity (§1). It is a gift for all of humanity, and as baptized Christians, we are called to share the gift with all people (§2). The calling and gift of communion bring responsibilities for our common life, even if we are separated from one another by sin (§3), as individuals or as churches (§4). The covenant of the Churches of the Anglican Communion is made in recognition of the "the wonder, beauty and challenge of maintaining communion in this family of churches, and the need for mutual commitment and discipline as a witness to God's promise in a world and time of instability, conflict, and fragmentation" (§4), not in order to change the nature of "this Anglican expression of Christian faith" but in affirmation of our commitment to each other (§5), to offer shared preaching of the Word of God through

words and deeds, (§6), and in the hope that the “truly global family” of the Communion might serve God’s promise in Christ (§7) and witness to the whole world (§8).

The Draft Covenant Text

After a short preamble, the draft text for the covenant is in three main sections, looking at

- (1) our common Anglican Inheritance;
- (2) our common Anglican Mission; and
- (3) our Life as a Communion.

Each section follows the same pattern: it begins with the things that as Anglicans we can agree together (Part 1 in each section), and then sets out the commitments we could undertake to sustain those things that hold us together (Part 2 in each section).

(Section 1) Our Inheritance of Faith

In Part 1, this section affirms: that we are a Communion of Churches within the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church of Jesus Christ (1.1.1), and that we believe that Christian faith proclaimed in the scriptures (quoting the Lambeth Quadrilateral on the authority of scripture), and to which historically the creeds and formularies of the Church of England bear witness (1.1.2). There follow the other elements of the Lambeth Quadrilateral: the Sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist (1.1.3), and the historic episcopate (1.1.4). The text then affirms the importance of worship (1.1.5) and mission (1.1.6) in the life of the Churches.

The commitments acknowledged in Part 2 of the first section, in order to sustain this inheritance are: faithfulness to scripture (1.2.1) which is reflected in holiness of life (1.2.2) and careful scholarship (1.2.4), maintaining eucharistic Communion (1.2.3), and boldness in proclaiming the Gospel (1.2.5) in a mission which is shared with all the Anglican Churches (1.2.6).

(Section 2) Our Anglican Vocation

In Part 1, each of the Churches of the Communion affirms the shared life that God calls us into, and which has been expressed in the history of the Anglican Communion (2.1.1). It describes the mission of the Anglican Communion (2.1.2) while acknowledging that the task belongs to the whole of the Christian Church and not just to Anglicans (2.1.3).

In Part 2, we commit ourselves to this mission (2.2.1), and acknowledge the Five Marks of Mission, set out in many Anglican Mission Reports (2.2.2).

(Section 3) Our Unity and Common Life

In Part 1, we are asked to recognise that Baptism and Eucharist bind us into a common life (3.1.1), that the Anglican Communion is a family of Churches, each with its own autonomy, but living in interdependence (3.1.2), that bishops have a special role of oversight in the context of the threefold ordained ministry (3.1.3), and that so far, four Instruments of Communion have evolved a special role in our Communion’s life (The Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lambeth Conference, the Anglican Consultative Council and the Primates’ Meetings) (3.1.4)

Part 2 tries to set out the commitments that are needed if this family of Churches is to live out its vocation to Communion. We have to commit ourselves to care for the common good (3.2.1), to respect one another's autonomy and boundaries, and our responsibility to one another (3.2.2). There is a commitment to take time over decisions (3.2.3), and to seek a common mind, while respecting scripture and the rules of our own Churches (3.2.4). Finally, where there may be a threat to "the unity of the Communion" or "the effectiveness or credibility of its mission", the Churches are asked each to make a commitment for themselves that they will consult with other Churches (3.2.5.a), that they accept that the Communion can establish its own processes of evaluation (3.2.5.b), and that they will be open to mediation (3.2.5.c) or a request from the Instruments of Communion (3.2.5.d). Such a request is not binding on a Church, which is, after all, autonomous (3.2.5.d), but a failure to heed such a request may effectively be understood as walking away from the commitment to common life made in the covenant (3.2.5.e). This would be a denial of the commitment to communion (3.2.6).

The draft text closes with a declaration of commitment.

The Draft Appendix

The most difficult part of the draft covenant may well be the commitments to live in Communion. What might such commitments actually mean in the case of a dispute? The Covenant Design Group believed that to spell things out in detail in the covenant itself would destroy the spirit of the covenant which is about relationship between Churches seeking to be faithful to Christ. But if there was a dispute, what should the Churches in dispute have a right to expect?

Clearly, there should be a process which is agreed, which is fair, and which obeys rules of natural justice. The appendix tries to set out what such processes might look like. The processes try to live up to these principles of justice, and to build on the current Instruments of Communion – again, not to create something new, but to use the structures we have to address questions of dispute.

Section 1 tries to set out some general principles – a fair process which respects the autonomy of our Churches but which has a clear end point. Section 2 says that informal conversation is always the best way forward, but when it comes to the serious matter of deciding whether the covenant has been broken or not, only the Communion as a whole can decide. (The proposal is that the Anglican Consultative Council is the best existing body to do this.)

Section 3 suggests the principles that need to be followed if informal conversation fails, and a formal process has to take place. The proposal is that, in the end, a formal request, such as that set out in the covenant (3.2.5.d), would have to offer a resolution of the matter in question.

If the matter is urgent, the Archbishop might have to issue such a request himself, but the Church in question can always appeal to the Joint Standing Committee. (Route 1, section 4). If the matter appears fairly clear-cut, the Archbishop might ask one of the other Instruments of Communion to consider what request to make (Route 2, section 5), but it may need an inter-Anglican Commission to look at the question – either one that already exists (like the

Inter-Anglican Standing Commission for Mission and Evangelism) or specially appointed (like the Lambeth Commission for Communion.) In either case, the commission would have eighteen months to report. (Route 3, section 6). It may be a question that needs mediation rather than formal decision (Route 4, section 7).

In the end, if a Church exercises its autonomy to reject a request made to it from the Instruments of Communion, then a decision has to be made whether rejecting the request amounts to abandoning the commitments of the covenant. Section 8 states that a Church may decide itself that it is leaving the covenant, but otherwise, only the Anglican Consultative Council should speak on behalf of the whole of the Communion.

Where does the Proposal go from here?

At the moment (May 2008), the St. Andrew's Report has been sent to the Provinces for a formal response. The Churches of the Communion have been asked to answer three questions by the end of March next year:

- i. Is the Province able to give an 'in principle' commitment to the Covenant process at this time (without committing itself to the details of any text)?
- ii. Is it possible to give some indication of any Synodical process which would have to be undertaken in order to adopt the Covenant in the fullness of time?
- iii. In considering the St Andrew's draft for an Anglican Covenant, are there any elements which would need extensive change in order to make the process of Synodical adoption viable?

The Lambeth Conference is not being asked to vote on the Covenant. That is the responsibility of each of the Churches of the Communion. But they are being asked to give careful consideration to the text proposed, and to offer their reflections: does the St. Andrew's Draft offer a good description of our Anglican faith and life as we understand it? Are there particular challenges or questions about the text as it has been developed so far? How could the proposal be made better? The process of consideration of the covenant at the Conference, through both self-select sessions and indaba, will be designed to help the bishops give as thorough and helpful a response as possible. Their responses will be handed on to the Covenant Design Group (at its next meeting in September 2008), and to the Provinces to inform their thinking.

In May 2009, the Anglican Consultative Council will assess where the Covenant Process has got to.

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