

## TOO QUICK TO REACT; TOO QUICK TO DISMISS:

An in-depth (hopefully) look at what happened at, and what might follow, the primates meeting?

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First, what you are about to read is long and may seem complicated. As this is intended to dig into the subject at some depth, you should plan to spend more than a few moments reading, following links, etc. I believe that, if you commit your time, this article will not prove to be helpful to you.

OK. For me to lead a reader on this journey into the depths of what happened at and what will follow the 2016 Meeting of the Primates of the Anglican Communion, it would be wise to start with what the Primates, themselves, said about their days together; their communique from the close of the meeting is here:

<http://www.anglicannews.org/features/2016/01/communique-from-the-primates-meeting-2016.aspx>

and in *Appendix 1* at the end of this article.

In the immediate aftermath of the meeting, The Episcopal Church's Presiding Bishop, The Most Rev. Michael B. Curry, spoke eloquently from Canterbury, England. His video-recorded remarks can be viewed here:

<https://www.facebook.com/episcopalian/videos/10155010038437925/?pnref=story>

In his video, Bishop Curry jumps right to the crux of the matter: Will the Episcopal Church pursue a different course as a result of the Primates' vote to exclude The Episcopal Church (TEC) from significant aspects of the life of the Communion? His answer is, essentially, no. TEC will continue to be inclusive and open and affirming to all regardless of sexual preference or any other distinctions such as ethnicity, gender, race, etc. We will continue to be who we are.

I applaud that.

One of the best, comprehensive and succinct explanations of what transpired this week is in this blog post:

<http://abmcg.blogspot.com/2016/01/no-episcopal-church-has-not-been.html>

This blog is straightforward, coherent, and accurate, but requires readers to have some familiarity with the warp and weft of the fabric that is the Anglican Communion — a familiarity that is often lacking in even the most dedicated Episcopalians, let alone non-Episcopalians. I want to help with that, even at the risk of repeating things I have written in previous days. So here goes.

### **Background: Polity**

The Anglican Communion is an association of 38 Provinces around the world. The term "Province" is used to indicate any of the autonomous national or regional Churches that make up the Anglican Communion. Indeed, when the Primates communique refers to the Anglican Communion *of Churches* (*emphasis added*), it strikes close to the true mark. The Episcopal

Church is one of those 38 Provinces and is present in 18 sovereign nations. Other Provinces are also international, but many (maybe most) are located within the bounds of only one sovereign nation. There are 2 Provinces in the United Kingdom: Canterbury and York, so outside of the UK, there are 36 others.

Membership in the Anglican Communion is determined by connection to the four “Instruments of Communion”, sometimes also referred to as the “Instruments of Unity”. They are:

A. The Lambeth Conference

The Lambeth Conference (first held in 1867) is a forum for all bishops of the Communion to meet collegially to promote unity, study the Bible, discuss matters of theology and mutual concern, deepen relationships, and pass resolutions intended to act as guideposts for the life of the Communion. Meeting roughly every 10 years or so, Bishops “in communion” with the ABC are invited as full participants, others may be invited as observers.

B. The Anglican Consultative Council (ACC)

The Anglican Consultative Council (which first met in 1971) was created by a 1968 Lambeth Conference resolution, and consists of representative bishops, clergy, and laity chosen by the thirty-eight provinces. The ACC meets every two or three years and actually coordinates the activities of the Anglican Communion (including the other 3 Instruments of Communion), mainly through its central secretariat, the Anglican Communion Office (ACO).

The ACO is led in turn by a Secretary General, a position analogous to a Chief Operating Officer, who works closely with the ABC. Though this is perhaps too simplistic, it is somewhat analogous to a large parish in which the Archbishop is in the role of Rector, the Council is in the role of the vestry, the General Secretary is the Parish Administrator, and the ACO is the parish staff.

The Archbishop of Canterbury is President of the ACC.

C. The Primates Meeting

The Primates Meeting (which first met in 1979) is a consultative gathering of the Primates of the 38 provinces for “leisurely thought, prayer, and deep consultation”.

D. The Archbishop of Canterbury (The ABC)

The Archbishop of Canterbury may be the most important of the symbolically among the Instruments of Communion, and should probably have been mentioned first, except that one needs to know the other three in order fully to appreciate the ABC’s role and importance to the Communion.

The ABC functions as the spiritual head of the Communion. The Archbishop's role is symbolic and uniting, and he is the focus of unity. In order to belong to the Anglican Communion, a Province must be “in communion” with the Archbishop of Canterbury, meaning the person and the office of the ABC recognizes the state of “in communion” exists. The Episcopal Church is the only church in the United States in communion with the Archbishop of Canterbury.

The person and office of the ABC is also the thread that runs through and binds the other three Instruments of Communion. He calls the bishops of the Communion to the Lambeth Conference (the next will be in 2020), and presides as the “first among equals” in its

sessions. He is the President of the Anglican Consultative Council. And he presides as “first among equals” at the meetings of the Primates.

The Most Rev. Justin Welby is the current Archbishop of Canterbury.

So, The Anglican Communion is administered principally by the ACC (with the ACO carrying out the wishes of the ACC and providing administrative support to Lambeth Conferences and Primates Meetings). It is the ACC that appoints some administrative committees to implement its directives. However, the main action of the Anglican Communion is in “networks.” You can learn about these networks at the ACC’s website: <http://www.anglicancommunion.org>

Membership on the official committees of the Communion is by appointment, mostly by the ACO acting for the ACC, sometimes by the ABC, sometimes jointly by the ACC and the Primates, etc. It’s a mixed bag. Participating in the work of the Communion’s many networks falls within the purview of the ACC.

#### Conclusions about Anglican Polity:

The Anglican Communion does not have a government in the sense that nations do. Some Churches, such as the Roman Catholic Church, have a very state-like, governmental structure – meaning a powerful, authoritative, top-down structure. The Anglican Communion does not. There is no body (like a parliament or congress or Vatican) and no titular ruler (like a king or archbishop or pope) entrusted to rule over the Communion or empowered to limit the autonomy of the Provinces in any way. The Provinces are connected to each other by common mission, shared ministries, and “bonds of affection.” A Province’s authority to make decisions for its own life resides fully in each Province.

#### **Background: Recent History**

But the autonomy of Provinces has been challenged in recent years.

In 2003, the ***Lambeth Commission on Communion*** was appointed by the Archbishop of Canterbury, at that time The Most Rev. Rowan Williams, who appointed Archbishop Robert Eames, Primate of Northern Ireland, to Chair the Commission. The Commission was tasked with studying “the state of unity” in the Communion, i.e. they were to analyze any problems that were arising or might arise from, and discern possible responses to, two other developments that happened that same year:

1. the election & consecration in TEC of The Rev. Gene Robinson, the first noncelibate, self-identifying, gay priest to be ordained as an Anglican bishop, and
2. The approval and use of a rite for blessing same-sex unions in the Diocese of New Westminster of the Anglican Church of Canada.

The Commission published its findings as the ***Windsor Report*** in October of 2004. The Report did not adopt a view on homosexual practice, but nevertheless recommended all Provinces observe a moratorium on further consecrations of actively homosexual bishops and all public Rites of Blessing of same-sex unions. It also called for all involved in Robinson’s consecration “to consider in all conscience whether they should withdraw themselves from representative functions in the Anglican Communion”. However, it stopped short of recommending discipline against TEC or The Anglican Church of Canada.

The report also recommended solidifying the connection between the Churches of the

Communion by having each church ratify an "Anglican Covenant" that would, in part, commit them to consulting the wider Communion when making major decisions. It also urged those who had contributed to disunity to express their regret.

In February 2005, the issue of homosexuality was heavily discussed at a regular meeting of the Primates of the Anglican Communion at Dromantine, Northern Ireland. The Primates issued a communiqué that reiterated most of the Windsor Report and also asked TEC and The Anglican Church of Canada to withdraw voluntarily from the Anglican Consultative Council until the next (the 2008) Lambeth Conference.

In 2006, Archbishop Williams established the Covenant Design Group (CDG) to draft, per the Windsor Report, a covenant for the Anglican Communion. The CDG met between 2007 and 2009 and produced three successive drafts. The final text of the Covenant was sent to the provinces of the Anglican Communion in late 2009. As of this date, the Anglican Communion Covenant has been accepted by some Provinces, rejected by more, and received a "no decision" by others, including TEC, which means the Communion has not shown a willingness to begin adopting overarching structures and authorities to which the Provinces must accede. As of now, each Province retains its full autonomy, but one must now wonder about the days ahead. Will the matter of an Anglican Covenant be raised again?

Meanwhile, in the Communion, Provinces differ as to where the bulk of authority lies. In some it is in the hands of the Primate. In others it is held by synods or conventions. The Episcopal Church would be among the latter, but even in this TEC is somewhat different. While our General Convention is the highest authority in TEC, from day-to-day most authority resides in dioceses, and dioceses regularly entrust most of the authority for daily church life to parishes. So we are connected, but not by a dominating central authority. For theological reasons as well as adherence to tradition, such a central dominating authority would not be "the Anglican way" as we understand it.

As mentioned above, the Primates Meeting is one of the Instruments of Communion. As I have been led to understand, at this meeting, six of the Primates threatened to walk out unless the Episcopal Church was reprimanded (*my word*) for decisions made at our General Convention in 2015, specifically about canonical changes dealing with marriage and about the approval of rites of marriage that use gender-neutral language and which may be used for the marriage ceremonies for same-sex couples. It seems, frankly, that the 6 Primates hoped to force (by what can only be honestly called a "strong arm" tactic, possibly even emotional blackmail) 1.) the exclusion of The Episcopal Church from the Primates Meeting, and 2.) possibly the exclusion of TEC from the Communion altogether. The first category of exclusion would have barred our Presiding Bishop from the meeting and the second category would have ended our status as "in communion" with the rest of Anglicanism.

Fortunately, most of the other 32 Primates were not willing to go along with that. A placating compromise was reached as a majority of the Primates voted to exclude us from working on committees for three years and 5 of the 6 remained at the meeting (one left anyway). But please note the tone of the final communiqué. It's title: ***Walking Together in the Service of God in the World*** is indicative of how the meeting ended. I quote from the communiqué's 4<sup>th</sup> paragraph: "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."

Ultimately, the Primates Meeting chose to communicate their decision about staying together in

spite of great differences on important matters of moral theology, such as the theology of marriage and the place in the Church of those with same-sex orientation.

### Conclusions about Recent History

So, in terms of The Episcopal Church's status within the Anglican Communion:

We are still in communion with the Archbishop of Canterbury. We attended the last Lambeth Conference (2008) and will attend the next one (planned for 2020). As far as I know, there is no plan to disinvite us, though that is within the realm of future possibility. We are still part of the Primates Meeting, which was affirmed by the Primates last month. We are still represented on the ACC. We are still part of the networks. We are still part of Companion Partnerships between dioceses in different provinces. In all relational ways we are still connected to the Anglican Communion, and the Anglican Communion, in the end, is completely made up of relational connections.

But we are still in a time of waiting. If the ACC does not invite TEC members to take part in the work of the Communion in any significant way in the next 3 years, we'll still be OK. Maybe better than OK. Here's what Bishop Dan Edwards, Diocesan Bishop of Nevada says, and I agree: "If being excluded from committees for three years is the price we have to pay for full inclusion of our LGBTQ brothers and sisters, it is a price I would pay many times over. If our not serving on committees for three years preserves the bonds of Christian fellowship that constitute the Anglican Communion, I am more than willing to pay the price for that good purpose as well. Our union in Christ does not depend on committees but on our love of God and service to God's people in common mission."

But, I fear this won't be over in three years. As I said in an earlier article, the three years of exclusion approved by the Primates' vote (laying aside whether they had any authority to call for exclusions in the first place) is exactly the same amount of time between our General Conventions. When our GC next convenes in 2018, and then the Primates meet in 2019 (they're meeting in 2017 and 2019, before and after our GC), will more attempts at expulsion, sanctions, or other punishments follow? Only time will tell.

### Where to from Here?

The reactions I've seen floating around social media and news publications or broadcasts this past week fall into three camps:

- one says there's nothing to worry about,
- another says the sky is falling, and
- a third says who needs them?

I'd like to find a middle road. (In that I'm trying to be very Anglican?)

We should not panic. We should not abandon our relationships. We should not underestimate the potential for more objections to the path TEC has taken. But we should wait patiently while maintaining our relationships. That's why I titled this article: *Too Quick to React; Too Quick to Dismiss*.

We've seen a wide variety of personal reactions made public: quick rejections, angry retorts, calls to pull our money out of the Communion, etc. We've also seen dismissal of the matter as if

it should mean nothing to us. Both reacting too quickly and dismissing too quickly, in my estimation, are wrong thinking. Both dismiss the importance of relationship, even on such a broad scale as the Anglican Communion. Our faithfulness to the Gospel and to Jesus requires us to cherish and nurture relationships with anyone and anything God created, even distant sisters and brothers with whom we might disagree. The long history of Christianity is too checkered by the severing of relationships and the sinful breaking of the unity of communities of faith. Underestimating and overreacting are two ways to slight relationships, and that is not what Jesus prayed for at the Last Supper as recorded in John 17:20-21: "I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that **they may all be one** (*emphasis added*). As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me."

Please note: there's a purpose in Jesus' prayer. He wants us to be one for a purpose: so people will believe. When our unity is fractured, we wind up at cross-purposes with Jesus. People don't find a fractured, argumentative Church very attractive. And our job as the Church "is to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ" (BCP, p. 855), so even our purpose as a Church is defined in relational terms.

TEC has been much in the news this past month as a result of the Primates' decision. Our Church has been the target hate mail from the anti-religious and the religious alike who disagree with our path of inclusion. We are also receiving a great deal of appreciation for our inclusivity from unchurched and churchd people alike. Fifty-five clerics from the Church of Ireland recently wrote a public expression of their support and prayer for TEC. All this is to be expected in a sinful and broken world and is part and parcel of sticking our necks out to stand for something. It's the price I am gladly willing to pay.

But speaking of paying, as in money, I need to return to something I mentioned earlier in passing. Some Episcopalians have reacted by calling on The Episcopal Church to withdraw funding from the Anglican Communion. I understand that the disappointing action of the Primates has been painful to many, but it is likewise disappointing that we sometimes so utterly fail to practice a Godly understanding of stewardship.

A good and proper theology of stewardship teaches that our practice of stewardship is not about getting our own way. We should neither give nor withhold the resources of time, talent, and treasure, with which God has entrusted us, in order to bully, or leverage, or control. Our commitment to the Anglican Communion's missional work is far more important than any hurt or grief we may temporarily feel. If any of us feel the need to contemplate or advocate withholding money from the Communion, please remember that Jesus calls us over and over to forgive (reflect on Philippians 2:1-17; Luke 23:34; Colossians 3:13), but Jesus never calls us to coerce. Even if others attempt to coerce us, we who follow Jesus are not ever at liberty to do likewise.

Applying this even closer to home, I know that some congregations and parishes, continue to deal with the basic problem of people using money and power to attempt to force others to their moral perspective or personal inclinations. At stake is the fundamental question of the world's ways of wealth and power versus Jesus' way of living in true and truthful relationships. Many think money is the way to manipulate, to exert power and influence, and the example of the secular world teaches just that. The Church, however, has a duty to show "by word and example" the superiority of Jesus' way.

I believe TEC will relate better to the Anglican Communion by modeling forgiveness rather than retaliation – particularly as wealthy Americans using wealth against Provinces that are so poor would be a double blow to our credibility.

It does not serve us well to forget the context in which the Anglican Communion arose. It was a time of haves and have nots, of the powerful and the powerless, of the rich and the poor. Out of that background of Western imperialism comes much that still hovers over our Anglican Communion. Our using wealth to wield power would only deepen the divide and increase estrangement.

I believe we need to show compassion and understanding all around. According to an old quote attributed to a Native-American source, we should not judge another until we “walk a mile in his moccasins”. Most Episcopalians come from the racial, economic, cultural, and ethnic group that has always been “on top” in our country. Now we are in a time of role reversal.

In our current situation we are walking, at least for a bit, in the moccasins of those who have known powerlessness and in poverty, who have been ostracized and condemned, who have been exploited and dehumanized. I believe we are enduring a small taste of what LGBTQ people have known as they were excluded from family gatherings and social fellowship. We are walking the road that people of color have trod and that people of non-Anglo or non-European ethnic origins have been forced to march.

In short, I believe that many of us can learn from this, can experience life on the bottom side of the power equation in a way that those who lived under colonialism knew for generations.

I hope this short period of ostracism (should it actually come to that) will teach us compassion for all our brothers and sisters, whether they are straight or gay; African, American, or any other nationality or ethnic group; clergy or lay. The calling of this moment is to grow in empathy and respond with compassion.

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## **Appendix 1**

### **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 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."

*(The full text of the Addendum follows at the end of this Appendix)*

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-ordinated 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."*

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

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 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.

8. 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.