

Response to the Draft Covenant  
January 20, 2008

Thank you for the invitation to respond to the initial work of the Covenant Design Group. As you will read, my comments are more general than specific. They reflect the evolution of my thinking after my first reading of the Windsor Report and the outline of a suggested covenant that was included as an appendix. As a bishop, I am all too well aware of the challenges facing our communion and the efforts of the Covenant Design Group to try to find a way forward. I continue to be deeply saddened that the unity of our church, God's gift to us in Jesus Christ, is threatened by those who would abandon our Anglican tradition of holding middle ground and choose to walk apart.

My concerns focus on three areas. The first is the adopted use of the Instruments of Unity/Communion that were first included in the Virginia Report and then used again in the Windsor report. The second, is the continuing decay of the role of the laity in the life and governance of our church at the international/communion level. My third and final concern lies in the area of trying to legislate a unity that is a gift which is celebrated and lived out, despite our differences, from one corner of the earth to the other. Let me elaborate.

Although the Virginia Report and the Windsor Report have been read extensively and responded to by member churches around the world, neither Virginia nor Windsor have been 'received' in our jurisdiction here in Canada, and I suspect in others. Despite that reality, the use of the term 'Instruments of Unity/Communion' seem to have become *franca lingua*. At one level, I recognize the role that the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lambeth Conference, the Primates' meetings, and the Anglican Consultative Council play in supporting, nurturing, and in no small way embodying our worldwide family. The Archbishop of Canterbury has been understood for centuries to be the first among equals and a symbol of our unity as Anglicans. On the other hand, to suggest that these alone are first of all accepted universally by all member churches as 'the' instruments of unity/communion or that they alone are the only instruments of unity/communion within our church is a reality that I cannot accept.

As the draft Covenant acknowledges, member churches are autonomous, "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." (Sec. 5.2) The Draft Covenant's call to elevate the instruments of communion, especially the Primates' meetings, to be the arbitrator in matters of dispute is a direction I would not support. The increasing sphere of influence exercised by the Primate's meeting is very new in our tradition. From a gathering I understood was originally intended to offer mutual support to one another and a forum to share the ups and downs of Episcopal leadership, this body has somehow become the voice of the communion and an ecclesiastical 'big brother'.

The Canadian Ordinal, as do others, calls a bishop to “guard the faith, unity, and discipline of the church.” (BAS p. 636) However, the history of our Canadian Church reminds me that as an Apostle, my Church has lived into the experience of being episcopally lead, yet synodically governed. The first Bishop of Toronto, John Strachan, dared to invite laymen to share in the Diocesan Synod. Since that time ordained deacons, priests, and bishops have shared equally in the councils of diocese with their sisters and brothers of the laity, all of whom have been called in their baptism to follow Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. Similar governance is reflected both in our General Synod, a tri-cameral body, and our Provincial Synods.

It is with great concern I write to express my objection to both the inclusion of the Primates as members of the Anglican Consultative Council and the Primates’ Meeting, at which no lay persons are present as equal members of the group, being given the authority as described in Section 6.5. I realize that in many provinces of our communion the polity we enjoy in Canada does not exist. In this day and age, it is high time that we acknowledge, world-wide, the gifts of the laity who comprise by far the majority of the membership of our church. In saying that, I am not suggesting that I, or any other bishop, step aside from the responsibilities given to us in our call from God and from the church to exercise my Episcopal authority and leadership. What I would hope to see in a Covenant for our Communion is a strengthening of the role in laity in order that we may all be true partners in witnessing to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and sharing in the councils of the church. If I have learned anything in my seven years as a bishop and twenty eight years in ordained ministry, it is amazing scope and depth of charisms in the men and women with whom I share ministry. If a body is called to the role of arbitrator in our communion it needs to be a body like the Anglican Consultative Council where laity sit as equal partners with deacons, priests, and bishops.

Finally, for over two millennium the church, God’s people, have sought, with God’s grace, to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ. The crucified, risen, and ascended Lord Jesus opened the door for God’s Holy Spirit to descend upon the people of God and make them one. It was Jesus prayer on the night of his betrayal as he sat with his disciples and broke bread with them in their Passover celebration. Our unity is a gift from God. We celebrate that unity in our baptism and every time we too gather at the Lord’s table and break bread in God’s name.

It may be that a Covenant will evolve. If it does, in whatever form, please remember that it will not be what holds us together as a communion. Our divisions, whether it be within our communion or beyond in all that divides we Christians along our denominational lines, are a reflection of our sin and brokenness. All too often we have stopped listening to one another and to God, readying ourselves to abandon the unity for which Christ himself laid down his life on the cross.

I do not pretend to have the answer. As a person of the western world I understand that my worldview, my life experience is very different from my sisters and brothers in other parts of the world. One of the privileges I have enjoyed as a bishop is

sitting down in fellowship with bishops from Nigeria, Uganda, Ireland, the United States, and the West Indies to listen to their journeys of faith and share with them mine. We have opened scripture together, have shared in Eucharist, have enjoyed a meal together all of which have opened for me a window into their lives and their faith. I discovered that we share the same hopes and dreams and struggle with many of the same challenges in our dioceses. Is it ever thus! I look forward to continuing those discussions with all who will gather at the Lambeth Conference this summer. I hope and pray that God will give me the grace to listen in love, to speak in love, and to act in love as together, in the unity given to us by our God, we seek to live into the promises God offers to us and to all of humankind in the name of Jesus Christ.

Please know you will be in my thoughts and prayers as you meet in February to consider all the responses and to seek God's guidance in moving ahead.

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