

The Bible in the Life of the Church



Anglican Communion Office

St Andrew's House
16 Tavistock Crescent,
London W111AP
United Kingdom

Background and introduction

The recent tensions within the Anglican Communion have had clear presenting issues but also deeper and less obvious underlying ones. One of these latter issues is the way we handle the Bible. The 2004 *Windsor Report* identified this in sections 61 and 62,

The current crisis thus constitutes *a call to the whole Anglican Communion to re-evaluate the ways in which we have read, heard, studied and digested scripture*. We can no longer be content to drop random texts into arguments, imagining that the point is thereby proved, or indeed to sweep away sections of the New Testament as irrelevant to today's world, imagining that problems are thereby solved. We need mature study, wise and prayerful discussion, and a joint commitment to hearing and obeying God as he speaks in scripture, to discovering more of the Jesus Christ to whom all authority is committed, and to being open to the fresh wind of the Spirit who inspired scripture in the first place. If our present difficulties force us to read and learn together from scripture in new ways, they will not have been without profit.

A mention of scripture today can sometimes seem actually divisive, so aware are we of the bewildering range of available interpretative strategies and results. This is tragic, since, as with the Spirit who inspired scripture, we should expect that the Bible would be a means of unity, not division. In fact, *our shared reading of scripture across boundaries of culture, region and tradition ought to be the central feature of our common life*, guiding us together into an appropriately rich and diverse unity by leading us forward from entrenched positions into fresh appreciation of the riches of the gospel as articulated in the scriptures. [Italics added]

The Bible in the Life of the Church project was born out of these tensions, and its purpose is very much in line with the call of the *Windsor Report* to “re-evaluate the ways in which we have read, heard, studied and digested scripture”; but it seeks to go further. It will not only look back in terms of ‘re-evaluation’ but will also look at how we *actually* use the Bible now by exploring scripture together and reflecting on the experience.

The project was welcomed and encouraged by the recent meeting of the *Anglican Consultative Council* (ACC14 meeting in Jamaica in May 2009 – full text of the resolution passed in Appendix B).

—
This paper outlines the aim of the project, its structural framework, its timetable and the way it will be carried out through the different groups responsible for taking it forward.

Aims of the project

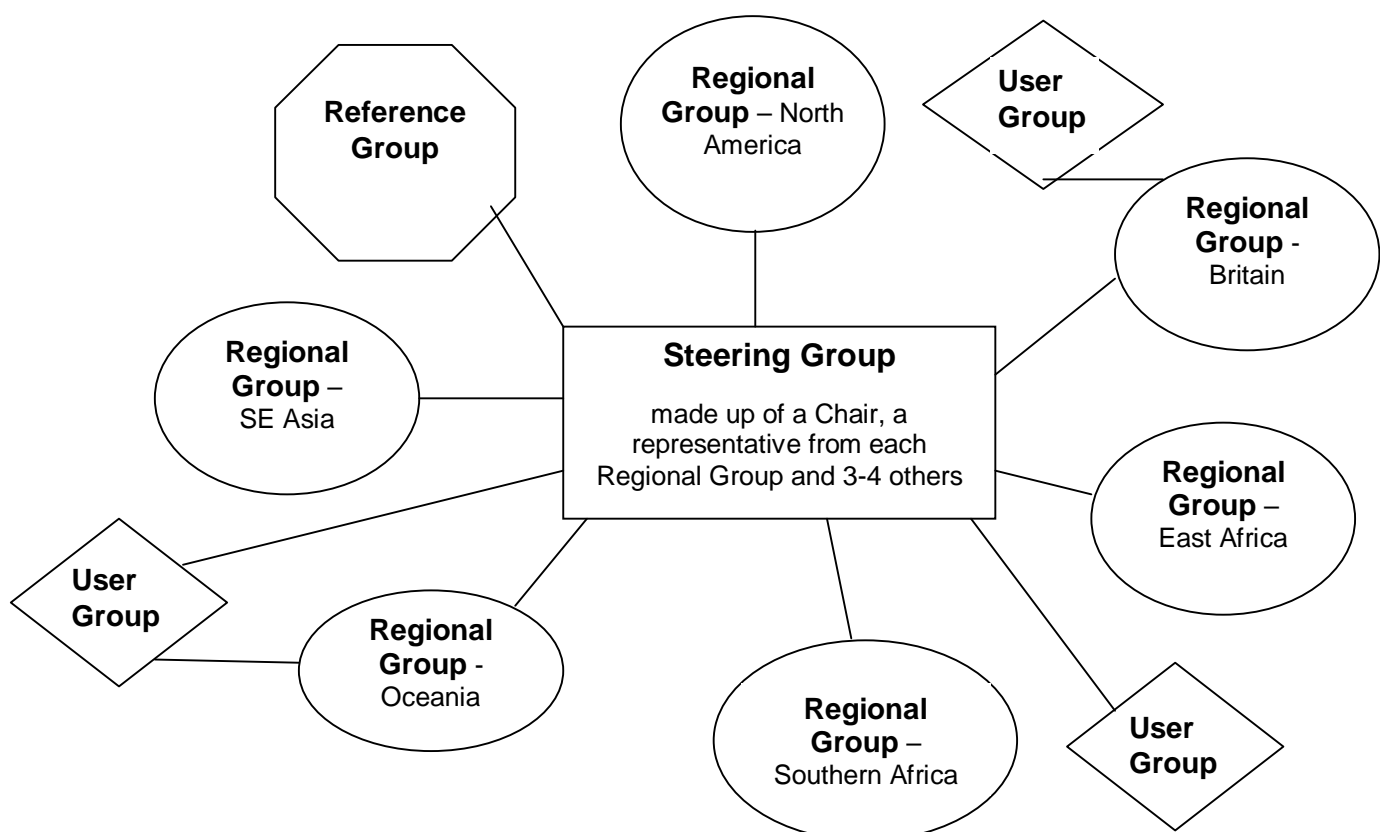
- to explore how we, as Anglicans, actually use the Bible by sharing experiences of using the Bible to explore two major contemporary issues;
- to distil from and develop these explorations the principles of Anglican hermeneutics;
- to produce resource materials for use at all levels of Christian education;
- to provide a guide to significant literature on this topic; and
- to offer a report and make recommendations to ACC 15.

Structural framework for the project

The project will be coordinated through the Anglican Communion Office and is an integral part of the work of the Department of Theological Studies.

- A **Steering Group** will coordinate and drive the whole project.
- **Regional Groups**, hosted in the main by theological institutions across the Communion, will coordinate case study work within their geographical area.
- A **Reference Group** will appraise the on-going work.
- **User groups** will test out material that emerges from the work of the Regional and Steering groups.

In diagram form, the project looks something like this:



Purpose and membership of each group

Steering Group

The Steering Group is the body with responsibility for directing and managing the project and is accountable, through the Secretary General, to the ACC Standing Committee. It will determine what might be achieved at each stage and identify specific outcomes in terms of reports, educational material, reviews etc.

The Group will critically assess work, identify specific aspects of the emerging work that 'user groups' might be invited to consider and will report to ACC15 on the work it has undertaken, its achievements and any recommendations regarding future work.

Chair: The Most Revd David Moxon, Archbishop and Co-Presiding Bishop of the Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia and Bishop of Waikato.

Regional Group representatives:

Oceania: The Revd Dr Charles Sherlock, Anglican Diocese of Bendigo, Australia.

Southern Africa: The Revd Dr Jonathan Draper, academic coordinator of Biblical Studies, School of Religion and Theology, University of KwaZulu, South Africa.
[Also involved will be Prof Gerald West, School of Theology, University of Natal, and Director of its Institute for the Study of the Bible.]

East Africa: The Revd Dr Kabiro wa Gatumu, Senior Lecturer in Biblical Studies, St Paul's University, Limuru, Kenya.

Europe: Dr David Allen, New Testament Lecturer at the Queen's Foundation, Birmingham, England.

North & Central America:

The Revd Robert MacSwain OGS, Instructor of Theology and Christian Ethics, School of Theology, University of the South, Tennessee, USA

SE Asia: A representative was unfortunately unable to be represented at the first meeting of the Steering Group. Archbishop John Chew will initially act as the channel of co-ordination for this Regional Group, based in Singapore, that will include the Provinces of Myanmar and the Philippines.

Theological Consultants:

- The Rt Revd Dr Michael Olusina Fape, Bishop of Remo Diocese, Nigeria and a member of the Steering Group in his capacity as the Regional Co-ordinator for TEAC (*Theological Education in the Anglican Communion*).
- Dr Ellen Davis, Amos Ragan Kearns Distinguished Professor of Bible and Practical Theology, Duke University, North Carolina, USA.
- Dr Clara Luz Ajo Lazaro, who lives and works in Cuba as teacher in the Ecumenical Seminary at Matanzas and will act as a liaison with the CETALC network in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Anglican Communion Office staff:

Mrs Clare Amos, Director of Theological Studies at the ACO

Mr Stephen Lyon, project manager and administrator.

Regional Groups

The Regional Group is the body with responsibility for co-ordinating and delivering on that part of the project directed to them by the Steering Group. While the Steering Group will design the core task each group will devise its own processes for fulfilling that task. (See *Case Study 1 outline below.*)

Membership of each Regional Group consists of a **Co-ordinator** who will direct the work the Steering Group ask of the Regional Group throughout the life of project. Up to 6-8 **core regional group members** will provide a consistent membership throughout the project. These core members will represent the breadth of the region both geographically and theologically. They will also contain a variety of expertise in relation to biblical engagement ranging from those involved in academic institutions to those whose major engagement is at a grass-roots level.

The Regional Group may wish to call on **other 'experts'** for specific help. These might include, for example, people with expertise in the specific topic under consideration or in writing education material or in grass roots engagement.

Reference Group

The Reference Group will act as a sounding board and reference point for the whole project. It will undertake this role in, at least, two specific ways:

- (1) In the first year, as well as responding to any general enquiries regarding the overall plans for the project, it will be asked to review some of the current literature on the subject and especially help the Steering Group identify where an Anglican perspective is not adequately addressed.
- (2) In the second year it will critically assess work that has come from the Regional Groups to the Steering Group as a specifically Anglican contribution to this area of the Church's life.

The potential membership of the Reference Group has come from names suggested by the Steering Group: these people were approached in the early months of 2010. As this is primarily a group that will provide a body of expertise and a reference point for the project and will, in the main work on their own, membership can be wide ranging.

User Groups

As insights emerge from the project's work it will be useful to 'road test' these in various parts of the Communion and perhaps especially in places that may be under-represented in the Regional Groups e.g. West Indies, United Churches, Jerusalem and the Middle East, Latin America.

Theological institutions or dioceses in these areas can be invited to contribute to the project by forming a 'user group' to work on specific aspects of the project as they emerge. The insights from such groups will inform the central themes of the project and may also provide case studies or extra educational material that can be made available more widely as part of the final product of the project.

Timetable for the project up to ACC15

Following the first meeting of the Steering Group in late 2009:

<i>Nov 2009 - Nov 2010</i>	Case Study 1 in Regional Groups Literature appraisal by Reference Group
<i>November 2010</i>	SECOND STEERING GROUP MEETING
<i>Nov 2010 - Nov 2011</i>	Case Study 2 in Regional Groups Case Study 1 appraisal by Reference Group Case Study 1 material tested by regional User Groups
<i>November 2011</i>	THIRD STEERING GROUP MEETING
<i>Nov 2011- 2012</i>	'Report' produced by Steering Group General appraisal and further material tested out by Reference and Regional User Groups
<i>2012</i>	Presentation to ACC15 – future work?

Appendix A - Regional Groups - Case Study 1

Core task

To enable processes of biblical engagement with the Fifth Mark of Mission: 'To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth'.

Purpose of the task

- To engage biblically with an issue of global significance at the heart of Christian responsibility;
- To offer evidence of the way we, as Anglicans, actually handle the Bible;
- To discover processes of biblical engagement of this issue in particular;
- To identify different principles of biblical interpretation in general.

Specific resources for the task

- Key texts with suggested questions to open the engagement;
- Questions that would enable the processes used to be discovered.

Possible engagement groups	Possible engagement methodologies and supplementary resources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Regional Group – core or representative ➤ Existing gatherings or groups ➤ Regional groupings e.g. CAPA, CETALC, EFM ➤ Particular 'interest' groups e.g. young people, community groups, school groups ➤ Other regional 'user groups' ➤ Contrasting groups ➤ Other key hopes for this engagement: grassroots; cultural diversity - resulting in better self-awareness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Any number of group activities that focus on a biblical engagement with the Fifth Mark of Mission ➤ Sermon analysis ➤ Contrasting methodologies – cerebral and experiential ➤ Non-textual engagement – oral methods, role-play, art, images ... ➤ Web based approaches ➤ Community / contextual Bible study methods ➤ Brueggemann exercise

Outcomes from the Regional Groups

- A report on how the biblical texts were actually handled in the different engagements [4-6 sides of A4];
- Examples of methodologies that might act as resources for others to engage with the Bible generally or with the Fifth Mark in particular;
- Emerging principles of biblical interpretation;
- Any other interesting data, reports from the Region.

Appendix B - ACC-14 Resolution

Resolution 14.05: 'The Bible in the Life of the Church'

[Resolved, 09.05.2009]

The Anglican Consultative Council:

- Welcomes the presentation by Archbishop Phillip Aspinall and the Director of Theological Studies on the proposed project 'The Bible in the Life of the Church';
- Asks the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Secretary-General to appoint a Steering Group to direct the project until ACC-15;
- Encourages the development of the project along the lines presented, asking that the Steering Group take account of the work of, and work collaboratively with, the Listening Process and the Inter-Anglican Standing Commission on Unity, Faith and Order;
- Asks Provinces to contribute to the ongoing costs of the Project over the next three years;
- Asks that a report on the project be presented to ACC-15.

Bible in the Life of the Church Project

Project Coordinator: Stephen Lyon
E: stephenplyon@gmail.com

