

## Secretary General's Report to ACC17

### Introduction

1. It is my honour to present my report to the Anglican Consultative Council covering the three year period since ACC16 met in Lusaka.
2. This report will touch briefly on subjects and proposals which will be reported under other items on the ACC17 agenda; they are mentioned here to put them in the context of the overall work and priorities of the ACO. This report will give an overview of the Communion and ACO from my perspective as Secretary General.
3. I should mention the significant change in my role from February 2019 when David White took up his appointment as Chief Operating Officer. His focus on leading the staff team and developing the operation of the office has been both a relief to me and released me for my primarily outward-facing role within the Communion and beyond.

### Instruments of Communion

4. I will start my report by considering in turn the instruments of Communion and how each of these has been a focus for my work and the work of the ACO during the past three years. I will mention each Instrument in turn. Although describing them separately, in reality there are closely inter-related and together form a complex and representative structure for churches in the communion to come together respecting both the decision making structures of synodal governance and the role of bishops in Episcopally led churches.

### *Lambeth Conference 2020*

5. The countdown to Lambeth Conference 2020 is underway with much preparatory work being undertaken. This falls into two main tasks: the practical arrangements for the Conference and work to build momentum and understanding across the Communion around the agenda for and commitment to the Conference.
6. Led by Chief Executive, Phil George, the practical and financial arrangements are being progressed and invitations to all Bishops across the Communion to attend the Conference have been issued. By early April the number of Bishops who had booked to attend the Conference was 511, together with 388 wives and husbands – these numbers are increasing all the time. Those who have booked come from 37 of our 40 Provinces, plus the extra provincial churches. There can be no doubt that this will be a gathering of bishops and spouses from all around the Communion. The momentum of expectation for the conference is building and is being evidenced through the engagement with Primates in the regional meetings held in the past 15 months.
7. The practical and spiritual programmes come together in the work of the Lambeth Design Group, chaired by Archbishop Thabo of Cape Town and with members from across the Communion. The design for the Conference is not something that emerges from Lambeth Palace or from the ACO. Rather it is very much the construction of the wider Communion, through the work of the Design Group and through wide consultations across the Communion.
8. As we move towards the Lambeth Conference there are consistent reminders that it is more than a unique gathering of bishops and their spouses. Like all Lambeth Conferences there is

enormous opportunity and expectation: the whole Anglican Communion, the wider Christian Church, other faith communities and the secular world will all be looking to the Conference to deliver a refreshed vision for being God's Church in God's World.

9. At the Lambeth Conference, the bishops represent their local churches, bringing with them their good news as well as their difficulties, and being upheld by prayers from around the world. The Conference carries a lofty moral authority, which is not legally binding on the provinces since they are autonomous, but when it speaks in a formal resolution, the whole Christian world, not just the Anglican Communion, should listen.

### ***Primates' Meeting and Walking Together***

10. After a five year gap following a relatively poorly attended Primates' Meeting in Dublin in 2011, Primates from across the Communion have met in Canterbury in both January 2016 and October 2017. The 2016 meeting issued a positive communiqué setting out the Primates' agreement to the principle of walking together at a distance as a means of recognising and addressing difference of understanding and practice across the Communion.
11. The October 2017 meeting was attended by 35 Primates. My personal regret was that Primates from three Provinces decided that they could not attend for reasons of church polity despite the agreement the previous year to walk together despite differences. Despite these absences the meeting was a success, with positive sharing and understanding about differences and a strong focus on priority areas of mission and evangelism and of concern and action in areas of social need and global difficulty including poverty, reconciliation, human trafficking, modern day slavery and creation care. The meeting also included the launch of the Anglican Inter Faith Commission.
12. The pace of change and challenge is significant. On average there are at least ten new primates elected every year, so there are always new Primates at each meeting. This rate of change in provincial leadership across the Communion creates a significant challenge in terms of the building of relationships and sharing of the journey taken by Primates together over the past few years. At the same time it provides great opportunity for Provinces to review their position, identify strongly with their peers and ensure maximum involvement in the global issues and initiatives being taken across the Communion. Plans are being developed to strengthen the support and induction for new Primates following their election.
13. The January 2016 Primates' Meeting established the Primates' Task Group to help the Communion walk together despite differences. The Primate, Bishop, clergy and lay members of the Group have come to recognise that the Anglican Communion is very diverse in terms of culture, ecclesiology and polity. The Task Group expect to report to the Primates Meeting to be held in January 2020.
14. A pilgrimage to the Holy Land in June 2017 enabled Primates, Bishops, Provincial Secretaries and others to experience walking together in reality. A further pilgrimage will take place in August of this year enabling bishops from across the Communion to walk together in the footsteps of Jesus. This pilgrimages bring together those from different positions in order to ensure that every voice is heard in dialogue together and to encourage relationships across theological and ecclesiological divisions.
15. The experience from these pilgrimages will be shared with others before and at the Lambeth Conference in order to demonstrate how physically walking together can be translated into improved understanding and respect for divergent positions and commitment to champion what unites rather than what divides.

### ***Anglican Consultative Council and Standing Committee***

16. In many ways, including legally, the ACC is the legitimising body for my office and the ACO. Its resolutions set out working priorities and its Standing Committee members serve as Trustees of the charity registered under English law.
17. The three yearly cycle of ACC meetings has a particular impact on the life of the ACO with a focus of preparation and delivery every third year and a need for solid achievement and progress in between meetings. I was involved in the discussions during 2017 about the venue for ACC-17 and was very grateful to the then Primate of Brazil for his gracious agreement that the holding of an ACC in Brazil should be postponed. Whilst some have seen this decision as being in anticipation of the change of the marriage canon agreed by the Brazilian church, the reality is that the decision was made in the context of the economic and political difficulties in the country which would have made it hard for a relatively small Anglican church to deliver a successful ACC.
18. That the Province of Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui has been prepared to step up to hosting ACC-17 at relatively short notice is an act of grace and service for which the whole Communion should be grateful. The natural hospitality and welcome of the Province has been matched by its organisational capacity and we are set for an excellent ACC meeting this week.
19. In between meetings of the ACC, the role of Standing Committee is critically important as a body to which I am accountable, as is the ACO staff team through my office. The decision to allow Standing Committee (and Finance and Audit Committee too) to meet virtually has proved to be a very good development as it has allowed issues to come forward in a timely way rather than wait until the annual meeting.

### ***The Archbishop of Canterbury***

20. Not only does the Archbishop of Canterbury have one of the most complex and demanding primate roles, including leading a state church with the formal and political responsibilities that come from that position, he also has a critical role for the Anglican Communion. This means that there is intense scrutiny on developments within the Church of England and particularly on the statements and activity of the Archbishop of Canterbury.
21. No Secretary General of the Communion can operate without a close working relationship with the Archbishop of Canterbury. This is essential because the Archbishop of Canterbury is a critical part of three of the instruments of Communion, and is the fourth instrument in his own right! I have the privilege of living within Lambeth Palace which means that I can have regular contact with the Archbishop through the course of each week and as part of the worshipping community where we both live. Consistently I see God at work through Archbishop Justin: he is spirit-filled, prayerful and always a wise and sensitive counsellor.
22. It is impossible to over-state the commitment that Archbishop Justin has for the Communion. Early in his role he visited every province; since the beginning of 2018 he has attended five regional Primates meetings – with one more to come in October this year; he regularly invites new primates to visit him at Lambeth and Canterbury. This personal commitment does not go unnoticed and unrewarded: throughout the Communion there is recognition of his love for the Communion and his commitment to the relationships that are so critical to maintaining unity and understanding.
23. In the face of much pressure and some external criticism, I would say that the Archbishop of Canterbury is doing an outstanding job of weathering the storm and seeking to lead the Communion towards a successful Lambeth Conference in 2020.

### **Being an ambassador for the Communion**

24. My role includes a significant externally facing component which involves a heavy travel schedule and representation to a wide range of leaders and peoples both inside the Communion and outside.

### ***Visits around the Communion***

25. It is my honour and privilege to visit Anglican churches around the Communion; this contributes to my understanding of what unites and what could divide within the Communion. Above all else I have the enormous privilege of seeing how God is at work amongst his people and within his church around the world.
26. In the past year three years I have paid official visits to Algeria, Canada, Chile, England, Egypt, Ethiopia, Fiji, Germany, Hong Kong, Iran, Irish Republic, Israel, Italy, Kenya, Myanmar, New Zealand, Nigeria, Norway, Rwanda, Solomon Islands, South Africa, South Sudan, Sudan, and USA. I am encouraged by the vigour and variety of Anglicanism everywhere and am grateful for the hospitality shown to me.
27. Highlights of my visits include attending Provincial Synods. In this ambassadorial role I have had first-hand experience of churches acting and making decisions synodically. I wish that all provinces would adopt the synodical process to ensure that the wisdom and contribution of all bishops and all believers can influence decision-making for these provinces.
28. Wherever possible I offer myself to serve the provinces that I am visiting. Examples of this include the role that I played in the retreat in advance of the primatial election in South Sudan in January 2018 – followed by a return visit to preach at the installation of the new primate – and the facilitation role I had for reconciliation discussions in Toronto Diocese over human sexuality differences. Whilst giving-out in such roles; I also get excellent opportunities to understand and consider different perspectives within the Communion.

### ***Education and understanding in the Communion***

29. It remains a significant frustration that I encounter limited knowledge and understanding of Anglicanism as I travel around the Communion. The majority of Anglicans in the global South - bishops, clergy and laity - have limited understanding of the nature of the Communion, or the Anglican understanding of Church. I hope and pray that understanding can be moved forward through the Lambeth Conference.
30. My travels and discussions have reinforced my understanding of two specific needs. Firstly, a deep and widespread need for theological education; secondly, support for the training and support for bishops and primates. The first of these needs is the focus of the five year Theological Education in the Anglican Communion project which is now underway with a mapping existing resources and which will lead to sharing good practice and raising of standards across the Communion. The second need will require development and coordination of specific initiatives to support bishops and primates.
31. In this latter area there are many very good initiatives such as the new bishop training of the Council of the Anglican Provinces of Africa and the courses for new bishops and others held at Canterbury; but the need for wider support for senior church leaders elsewhere remains.

### ***External representation***

32. As Secretary General, I represent the Communion in official roles and to outside bodies. In addition to providing an opportunity to explain and promote the Communion, I find these engagements personally enriching. The bodies on which I have an official role include:

- Anglican Centre in Rome (Governor)
- Compass Rose Society (Board member)
- Lambeth Conference Company (Trustee)
- The Archbishop of Canterbury's Anglican Communion Fund (Trustee)
- The Friends of the Archbishop of Canterbury's Anglican Communion Fund
- The Jerusalem & East Mission Trust (board member)
- St George's College, Jerusalem (member of Executive Foundation)
- Kings College, London (Trustee)

33. In every one of these roles my first and foremost responsibility is to serve our worldwide Communion. In addition it is my honour to serve as an Honorary Assistant Bishop in the Dioceses of London and Southwark and an Honorary Provincial Canon of Canterbury Cathedral.

34. During the autumn of 2017 I was asked to take on an additional responsibility as chair of a peace and reconciliation initiative in my own state in Nigeria: the Kaduna Peace Commission. With the blessing of the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Chair of ACC, I have accepted this role. My position is non-executive and the deputy chair and other members take the lead responsibility for practical work and arrangements enabling me to operate in a senior role of representation, persuasion and prayer to aid the search for peace and peaceful coexistence in this troubled part of Nigeria.

### **Ecumenical Dialogues**

35. The Anglican participation in ecumenical dialogue is led by the Unity, Faith and Order department within the ACO and with the engagement of Primates, theologians and others from the Communion. It is my privilege to be involved in representation to other Christian denominations.

36. When the ACC 16 resolved to “welcome and affirm the substance of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification” (JDDJ), the Anglican Communion became part of a significant gathering of global communions who have likewise affirmed the text that effectively resolves the theological disagreement which gave rise to the sixteenth century Reformation.

37. With the representatives of the other communions that have adhered to the JDDJ—the Roman Catholic Church, the Lutheran World Federation, the World Methodist Council, and the World Communion of Reformed Churches – I accompanied an Anglican Communion delegation to a consultation at the University of Notre Dame, USA. The aim of the consultation was to identify practical ways in which our mutual adherence to the JDDJ brings us closer to one another on the path to full communion. There were significant steps identified that will be followed up by the general secretaries later this year. The spirit of the conference is summed up in this short extract from its report:

*We should always begin from the perspective of unity and not from the point of view of division in order to strengthen what is held in common even though the differences are more easily seen and experienced. We will continue to review how this imperative is being addressed in our church programmes and ecumenical engagement. We rejoice that we are given fresh perspectives of seeing one another and given a new dynamic in our inter-relationships, helping us to find undiscovered fruit in what has already been done before.*

### **Anglican Inter Faith Commission**

38. Throughout my ministry I have had personal commitment to developing understanding and a culture of respect between Christians and Muslims, particularly on the ground in northern Nigeria. Beyond this specific experience, it is essential to pursue improved inter faith relations in our world in which religious difference is seen as a cause of international disagreement and conflict.
39. A significant development in the past 18 months has been bringing the Anglican Inter Faith Commission into being. Before the formation of this Commission there have been many inter faith initiatives and activities, but these have been limited to specific locations and situation and/or have been dominated by academics and practitioners in the global north.
40. The Anglican Inter Faith Commission was launched at the Primates' Meeting in October 2017 and has met twice in Cairo and Tunis. Following these meetings there is a focus on establishing regional networks across the Communion. The Commission is being further strengthened to ensure that it covers relations with beyond Christian-Muslim relations and covers relations with all other faiths.

## **The resources of the Communion**

### ***ACO Staffing***

41. The ACO has a dedicated and committed staff team with specialists who are very highly skilled in the area of their individual responsibility.
42. In addition to supporting the Instruments of Communion with an increased frequency of meetings and in the build up to the Lambeth Conference 2020, the ACO staff lead the work streams that develop from decisions made by those Instruments. Members of the ACO staff team will report on and present their work to ACC17.
43. The ACO staff team remains small, but undertaking an ever increasing workload. It is important the tasks to be undertaken are addressed properly and it is likely that some additional staffing will be required to achieve this. Senior staff leading major areas of work currently have very limited research and administrative support.
44. I cannot mention the role of ACO staff without giving special tribute to three Directors who will be leaving the ACO shortly. Revd Canon Dr John Gibaut, Director for Unity, Faith and Order will be leaving after ACC17 to take up an appointment as President, Provost and Vice-Chancellor of Canada's Thorneloe University. Adrian Butcher, Director for Communications will also be leaving after ACC17 to take up other interests.
45. Revd Canon Terrie Robinson, Director for Women in Church and Society
46. will also be leaving in June. A decision on how to replace her input will be made following ACC17 and in the context of the ministry priorities established at that time.

### ***Financial Matters***

47. I am pleased to be able to delegate much of the responsibility for financial management to colleagues and to the Inter Anglican Finance and Administration Committee. These specialists ensure that our financial affairs are in good order. But accounting for income and expenditure is only the outcome of our activities. There is a very real challenge to find ways of securing additional resources to fund the activities of the office and the networks, commissions and regional bodies of the Communion.

48. Income to the Inter-Anglican Budget is dominated by provincial contributions. However, there is a heavy reliance on a small number of provinces to provide most of the income: 67% comes from two provinces, 94% comes from 10 provinces. Many provinces make no contribution at all, a position that has remained frustratingly consistent for several years and despite commitments made by Primates at their meeting in October 2017. The current budget position is unsustainable and we are seeking to address this through a budget proposal for the six year period 2020-25 and a new formula for provincial contributions which ties contributions to the size and financial well-being of each province. There are also proposals for what happens when provinces do not contribute.
49. Funding for additional staffing is likely to be sought externally rather than assuming that it can be secured through provincial financial contributions. To this end I am so very grateful for support from the Compass Rose Society and from other external funders, including the St Augustine's Foundation who have made a five year commitment to the Theological Education in the Anglican Communion project. We have added a fundraiser to our staff team, specifically tasked with maximising income from grant making trusts and foundations for ACC activities, for the Lambeth Conference and for the Anglican Alliance.

### **Growth in the Communion**

50. Beyond my responsibility for service to the Communion and to the Instruments, I have a personal commitment to doing all that I can to foster and encourage growth in the Communion. I see my prime calling as being to proclaim Jesus and his world-wide mission.
51. It is my special privilege to see signs of growth all around the world. This growth is both numerical and in depth: it is about intentional discipleship and it is about disciple-making.

### ***Provincial growth and ambition***

52. It is a constant encouragement to me to see aspiration for independent and autonomous status around the Communion. Just as in the post-colonial political world it is unsurprising that churches aspire to independent status and to govern their own affairs within the wider Communion.
53. Since ACC16 two new Provinces have been inaugurated; Sudan and Chile. The circumstances were different in each situation. In Sudan the church operates in a country with a strong Muslim majority and government, there are many challenges, particularly around finance, organisation and influence. Independent Provincial status was important because of the very different circumstances there compared to South Sudan and to enable strong indigenous representation to Government. In Chile the new Province is a direct response to active growth, evangelism and church planting. I congratulate the churches of Sudan and Chile and it is very good to welcome their representatives here to ACC.
54. I have one consistent message when church leaders talk to me about their aspirations: it is that church growth is the route to independent provincial status. Only where the body of Christ is seen to be strong through the results of evangelism, discipleship and church growth is it appropriate to consider independent status.
55. I am of course aware of provincial ambition from churches around the communion. Whilst everyone's first instinct might be to encourage such ambition, it is really important that we have processes and procedures to be followed to ensure that there is thorough investigation of the ecclesiological, operational and financial viability of a church and support from those around it – including those within existing provinces. The route to independent provincial status is therefore not short and may typically take a period of two to four years.

## The state of the Communion

56. I should not finish without touching on a question that is at the heart of all who love the Communion and want to see it continue and prosper. That question is how should we respond to GAFCON?
57. I know that ACC members would want me to answer this question openly and honestly. My first response is exactly the same as the Archbishop of Canterbury's during the GAFCON meeting in Jerusalem last year: to welcome the commitment to renewal and to commit to prayer for GAFCON'S activities. In as much as GAFCON is committed to renewal and growth, what is there that could be criticised? If that is what GAFCON is about then it is right for the Communion to welcome it as an influence for good and for the kingdom. The difficulty arises when GAFCON involves itself in the structures of the communion in a way that causes confusion and potential division.
58. As a consequence, there is much in the *Letter to Churches* that emerged at the end of the GAFCON Conference in June that is good, uncontentiously good. There are also comments in that letter about the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Lambeth Conference which are regrettable.
59. I do have difficulty with the GAFCON decision to set up networks in nine areas of ministry, announced in advance of their conference this year. If this initiative was attempting to fill a void that would be good. However, in each of these areas the Communion already has activity, including staff responsibilities within the ACO and active Networks involving many key players at grass-roots level.
60. I also have difficulty with the call for some to be invited to the Lambeth Conference as full participants who are clearly not members of the Communion, and for boycott of the Lambeth Conference and other meetings of the Instruments because of disagreements with some other Provinces. To me this feels a very long way away from the decision to walk together at a distance taken at the 2016 Primates' Meeting.
61. I join the Archbishop of Canterbury in calling all in the Communion to pray for a season of repentance and reconciliation over past differences. My personal prayer is for good leadership and wise counsel to prevail in all Provinces and for a focus on what unites us in Christ rather than what divides us in the actions of man and woman. Please join me in this prayer.

*The Most Revd Josiah Idowu-Fearon*  
*Secretary General*