

Anglican Church of Canada
Preliminary Response to the St. Andrew's Text for an Anglican Covenant

On May 24, 2008 the Council of General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada received the report of the Anglican Communion Working Group and directed that it be forwarded to the Covenant Design Group as a preliminary response to the St. Andrew's Draft Covenant (Draft 2) and forwarded it to the bishops of the Anglican Church of Canada for their use both before and during the Lambeth Conference.

Anglican Communion Working Group
Report to the Council of General Synod

The Anglican Communion Working Group met at the Aulneau Centre in Winnipeg, Manitoba, on February 7th and 8th 2008. The following were present for this meeting:

The Rt. Rev'd George Bruce, Bishop of Ontario – Faith Worship and Ministry (Chair)
The Rev'd Maureen Crerar, Diocese of Edmonton – Faith Worship and Ministry
The Very Rev'd Iain Luke, Dean of Athabasca – Faith Worship and Ministry
Ms. Caroline Chum, Diocese of Moosonee – Partners in Mission and Eco-justice
The Ven. Peter Fenty, Diocese of Toronto – Partners in Mission and Eco-justice
Canon Allen Box, Diocese of Ottawa - Anglican Consultative Council
The Rt. Rev'd James Cowan, Bishop of British Columbia – House of Bishops
The Rev'd Colin Johnson, Bishop of Toronto – House of Bishops
Canon Dr. Alyson Barnett Cowan - Staff
Dr. Eileen Scully - Staff (as member of the Covenant Design Group)

Regrets were received from the Rt. Rev'd Sue Moxley (Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island) and Ms. Suzanne Lawson (Anglican Consultative Council)

PURPOSE

The Anglican Communion Working Group (ACWG) met to review the responses to the Nassau Draft of by the Covenant Design Group (CDG) "An Anglican Covenant" (Draft 1), which had been received from Canadian Dioceses and individuals in order to prepare a detailed response to that document. However, in light of the issuance on February 6th, of the St Andrews Draft (Draft 2), the focus of the working group switched to a detailed examination of that text to determine whether its contents reflected the concerns which had been expressed by the Anglican Church of Canada. Responses were received from eight dioceses (Algoma, Athabasca, British Columbia, Calgary, Kootenay, New Westminster, Ontario and Toronto) and a total of five responses were received from individuals or small groups.

COMMENTS

It continues to remain unclear to the majority of the working group whether the purpose of the document has been adequately explained in the new Covenant text. We believe that

inclusion of the “Introduction” into the body of the Covenant would go a long way to providing this clarification. Nevertheless, as it is currently presented the document seems to have two conflicting purposes. One, which describes the nature of the Communion and our commitment to belonging to it, and another, (found mainly in the draft Appendix) which, delineates a process for resolving disputes where it is suggested that one or more Provinces are deemed to have breached the spirit of the document. We believe that further work is required to clarify this disparity because responses to Draft 2 and subsequent drafts will vary dependent upon which purpose has primacy. We also suggest that the addition of a glossary of terms might help overcome the differing understandings of some terminology used throughout the Communion and in the document e.g. the meaning of episcopacy and what is meant by episcopal authority.

AFFIRMATIONS

The working group congratulates the Covenant Design Group for their most recent efforts and believes that the text of this draft is a great improvement upon its predecessor. We are glad to report that many of the concerns raised by Canadian dioceses have been addressed, in whole or in part, in this revision. As a result, we take heart from the responsiveness of the Covenant Design process.

We note particularly the following areas:

- a The changes incorporated into Draft 2 indicate a serious effort on the part of the CDG to listen to the concerns expressed by the Provinces and are indicative of a desire for conversation and dialogue which form a valuable part of the listening process proposed by Lambeth 98. In both the Communiqué and the commentary, there is clear recognition that this will be a slow and careful process and we are heartened to see that the CDG will meet again following Lambeth to produce a third draft.
- b We believe that Draft 2 has taken into account concerns expressed about the role of the primates meeting and provides a much clearer recognition of the role of laity and of the synodical decision making processes in dioceses and provinces throughout the communion. Efforts have also been made to clarify understanding of autonomy and interdependence
- c fears expressed in some quarters that the covenant could assume the form of a narrow confessional document have been significantly allayed in this draft.
- d Draft 2 makes a serious effort to address the central role of worship and prayer as key in holding us together.
- e Almost all Canadian responses expressed concern over the way “formularies” were addressed in Draft 1. We believe that Draft 2 has made great strides in alleviating these concerns.

- f The St Michael's Report recognized that doctrinal developments occur over time. Draft 2 appears now to contain a similar recognition
- g We are pleased to see an addition to the preamble which recognizes the diversity to be found throughout the Communion
- h We are pleased to see the reworking of the sections dealing with the "Instruments of Communion" as they are now placed in a more coherent fashion and particularly are glad to see the redefinition of the role of the Primates' meeting as a gathering representing representatives of the provinces and not as a self styled "curia"
- i The working group was also pleased that the CDG undertook redrafting of the paragraphs relating to the use of, and interpretation of, scripture. The new draft is much clearer particularly as it relates to the interpretation of scripture.

AREAS OF LACK OF CLARITY

There are still a number of areas where greater clarity is required particularly in the discussion of achieving a "Common Mind". Further elaboration on how this occurs is required. We are glad to see the redrafting of the paragraph relating to the "prophetic voice", but believe this area needs more expansion to address the role the prophetic voice plays in developing doctrine.

The working group also believes that there is a need for further clarification of what in the language of the Covenant is meant by the word "Church". An effort is made in the Commentary to clarify this but it remains unclear whether individual churches, dioceses or provinces are referred to. While this is an ecclesiological question it needs to be answered so that all readers understand the same thing. It also may have impact on who approves the Covenant

AREAS OF OUTSTANDING CONCERN

The working group discussed possible problems that the covenant Draft 2 may cause for interfaith and ecumenical relations and dialogues. Although the draft acknowledges the mission of the Anglican Communion as being part of the Mission of the Christian church as a whole, it is not clear how the Covenant will affect ongoing bilateral and communion wide dialogue with Lutheran, Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches. Similar concerns were expressed with respect to inter-faith dialogue.

The working group also noted the absence of any formula for amending the covenant at a future date. Since in our opinion there is some provisionality in the nature and role of the Instruments of communion, this is an important issue.

Our greatest area of concern was reserved for the appendix. This is a document of great significance and the working group noted that there was a distinct change in tone in the language of the appendix and that while the tentative and provisional nature of the procedures outlined in the appendix is highlighted in both the Communiqué and the Commentary its presence as the only possible option for conflict resolution gives it greater significance than we believe is either intended or warranted. While it is scripturally based (Matthew 18) its tone is unnecessarily legalistic and offers little sense of reconciliation. Since the appendix is an expansion of paragraph 3.2.5.b, “according to such procedures as are appended to this covenant”, the working group believe that to respond adequately to it, a better understanding of the range of options which might be offered is required. In one Canadian Diocesan response, for example, a proposal was made for a Commission of Reconciliation. In these discussions, as in ecumenical conversations, starting from the point of what separates us is usually unhelpful. Any alternative model to that contained in the appendix needs to begin with an explicit recognition of what causes us to rejoice in each other acknowledging that we are all brothers and sisters in Christ. (Philippians 4)

Beyond the unnecessarily antagonistic and legalistic tone of the appendix, we believe that it also opens a Pandora’s box of potential complaints. If it is to continue in its present form there need to be clear limits on what kinds of matters can be dealt with and which bodies can bring them forward. We are also concerned that the appendix casts the Archbishop of Canterbury in a quasi-judicial role and wonder whether there have been consultations with the Church of England as to their views on the imposition on the archbishop of these extra duties?

Respectfully submitted

The Rt. Rev George Bruce
Chair, Anglican Communion Working Group