

A Preliminary Response to the Draft Covenant by the Anglican Church of Canada

1. The Anglican Church of Canada takes very seriously its mutual responsibility and interdependence in the Body of Christ, and specifically its participation in the life of the Anglican Communion. We welcome the invitation to covenant if it means that the mission of the church is being strengthened as we partner together. To that end, our church has diligently participated in various processes and responded to various documents which have sought to deepen and enhance the Communion and give expression to our common life.
2. In particular we highlight the responses of our Province to:
 - a. 'Belonging Together' (response in 1992)
 - b. *The Virginia Report* (response in 2001)
 - c. *The Windsor Report* (response in 2005 and 2007)
3. In addition we have responded to ecumenical documents in which Anglicans have been involved: agreed statements with Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Orthodox, and World Council of Churches' documents such as *Baptism Eucharist and Ministry*.
4. In the process of developing such responses, we have consulted widely with parishes, dioceses, and our internal provinces, and have tested the responses through our consitutional processes.
5. We are now being asked to respond to *An Anglican Covenant: A Draft for Discussion*. At the General Synod of 2007 we committed ourselves to 'the development and possible adoption of an Anglican covenant'. However, the timeframe proposed is impossibly short for us to engage in the adequate process of discernment and affirmation that our polity requires. The Covenant is an extremely important proposal, with longterm implications for all Anglicans, and we will need to take more time to prepare a response that truly speaks for the Anglican Church of Canada. Thus all we can do at this point is to repeat affirmations we have previously made and concerns we have raised, to offer some comment about the shape of the proposed draft covenant, and to ask some critical questions of the text in the light of those affirmations and concerns.
6. General Synod in 2007 endorsed a response to the *Windsor Report*. We commend the whole document for consideration by the Covenant Design Group and the instruments of communion, and wish to emphasize especially in this context paragraphs 30 & 31:
 30. We affirm the idea of developing an Anglican Covenant, noting the call of Windsor that it be developed through a "long-term process, in an educative context, be considered for real debate and agreement on its adoption as a

solemn witness to communion.” (§118) We are committed to such a long-term process and would hope that such a covenant would promote mutual responsibility and interdependence within the Communion. We have reservations about the constitutional tone of the example provided in the Windsor Report. We find that example too detailed in its proposals and we are concerned that such a model might foster the development of a complex bureaucratic structure which might stifle change and growth in mission and ministry. We would prefer a shortened and simplified covenant, perhaps based on the model of the baptismal covenant, or ecumenical covenants such as the Waterloo Declaration between the Anglican Church of Canada and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, or the covenant proposed by the Inter-Anglican Standing Commission on Mission and Evangelism. We value the Ten Principles of Partnership cited in Appendix 3 of Windsor and would hope that they inform the drafting of a covenant. We affirm that any group given the responsibility of developing an Anglican Covenant needs to be broadly representative of the membership of the Church, including men and women, clergy and lay people, a variety of geographical regions and theological emphases.

31. The Covenant process could provide a place where the evolving structures of the Communion can be discussed and agreed upon. The current practice seems to be the development of *ad hoc* agreements or actions based on reports which have not yet been received by the whole Communion. We affirm that “we do not favour the accumulation of formal power by the Instruments of Unity, or the establishment of any kind of central ‘curia’ for the Communion.” (§105) In responding to the Virginia Report in 2001, many Canadians felt that the present structures serve well when used fully and creatively. “The personal and relational life of the Church is always prior to the structural. ... Right structuring and right ordering provide channels by which, through the power of the Holy Spirit, the mind of Christ is discerned, the right conduct of the Church encouraged and the gifts of the many are drawn upon in the service and mission of the Church.” (*Virginia Report*, 5.4) We would be wary of the over-development of structures which would make it difficult for the Church to respond quickly and easily to fulfill its mission in its local context. We are distrustful of the development of structural changes driven primarily by issues and in the midst of acute crisis.
7. The report of the Covenant drafting Group requests from Provinces an initial response to the fundamental shape of the covenant. We have experience in Canada of two previous covenants. The ‘New Covenant’ of 1994 is an invitation from indigenous peoples for the rest of the church to walk with them in partnership in a particular way. The ‘Waterloo Declaration’ of 2001 is also a relational covenant. In that Declaration, Anglicans and Lutherans in Canada declared themselves to be in full communion on the basis of a shared history and an affirmation of shared convictions. As churches in full communion we then made commitments to one another to ensure the closest possible collaboration and

consultation to further our common mission in Christ. We believe that this shape of telling our common story, making common affirmations, and making commitments that arise from these is a helpful model.

8. Thus in this case, our approach was to analyze the motivation for the current draft; to assess the strategy employed to achieve that motivation and to examine the broad outline of how well that strategy has been achieved. With that in mind, we believe that there appears to be an overall consistency in both intent and presentation in the shape of the Covenant Design Group draft but the text itself could obviously be improved by careful editing. As already indicated, we are not able at this time to express an appropriate measure of consent to this text, as requested in the report of the Covenant Design Group, but study is continuing throughout our church.
9. We appreciate the emphasis on mission in the preamble to the document. We believe that the call to common mission could effectively become the central organizing principle of the covenant, and that this would be a faithful expression of the Anglican Communion's vocation to proclaim the good news afresh in every generation. It would, however, require a shift in emphasis and ordering of the remaining sections of the document.
10. We also understand that our common mission originates in and returns to the eucharistic fellowship which is established by God the Holy Trinity. Only at the table of the Lord can we discern our common calling and be fed by common food for the journey.
11. We recognize that the community falls into disputes, and may need to have agreed upon means of resolving those conflicts as we stay at the table. However, we are troubled by Sections 5 & 6. Section 6 is an attempt to describe those means, but these sections have aspects which are non-synodical and raise serious concerns that will require broad consultation both in the Anglican Church of Canada and throughout the Communion. We are particularly concerned about 6.6. and the potential role and power of the Primates' Meeting. We stress, as noted in para 31 of our response to Windsor, that this process needs to unfold over a much longer period of time, lest we create structures only in response to a particular crisis.
12. We thank the Covenant Design Group for their careful work on behalf of the Anglican Communion which we all love.

Adopted by the Council of General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada
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