



The Report of
The Covenant Design Group
meeting in Nassau,
15th –18th January, 2007
under the chairmanship of
the Most Revd Dr Drexel Gomez
Archbishop of the West Indies

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The Status of this Document

This document is the Report of the Covenant Design Group and includes a draft text for a possible Covenant proposed by the Design Group for discussion. It has not yet been officially adopted by any of the Instruments of Communion and is not offered for approval or authorisation but released for wider consultation and debate. It was received and debated by the Joint Standing Committee and the Primates and changes are already proposed.



Report of the Covenant Design Group

The Covenant Design Group, appointed by the Archbishop of Canterbury on behalf of the Primates of the Anglican Communion, held its first meeting in Nassau, the Bahamas, between Monday, 15th and Thursday, 18th January, 2007. The Archbishop of the West Indies, the Most Revd Drexel Gomez, chaired the group.

The meeting discussed four major areas of work related to the development of an Anglican Covenant: its content, the process by which it would be received into the life of the Communion, the foundations on which a covenant might be built, and its own methods of working.

The JSC paper, *Towards an Anglican Covenant*, was one of the initial papers tabled at the meeting, together with a wide range of responses to it from both individuals and from churches and other alliances within the Communion. In addition, a number of correspondents had been invited to submit reflections to the group. The group noted that there was a wide range of support for the concept of covenant in the life of the Communion, and although in the papers submitted there was a great deal of concern about the nature of any covenant that might be put forward for adoption, very few of the respondents objected to the concept of covenant *per se*, but rather saw the covenant as a moment of opportunity within the life of the Communion.

In their discussion, all the members of the group spoke of the value and importance of the continued life of the Anglican Communion as an instrument through which the Gospel could be proclaimed and God's mission carried forward. There was a real desire to see the interdependent life of the Communion strengthened by a covenant which would articulate our common foundations, and set out principles by which our life of Communion in Christ could be strengthened and nurtured.

It was also recognised, however, that the proposal for a covenant was born out of a specific context in which the Communion's life was under severe strain. While the group felt that it was important that the strength of a covenant would be greater if it addressed broad principles, and did not focus on particular issues, the need for its introduction into the life of the Communion in order to restore trust was urgent.

There were therefore two particular factors which would need to be borne in mind:

1. Content

The text of the Covenant would need to hold together and strengthen the life of the Communion. To do so, it need not introduce some new development into the life of the Communion but rather be the clarification of a process of discernment which was embodied in the Windsor Report and in the recent reality of the life of the Instruments of Communion, and which was founded in and built upon the elements traditionally articulated in association with Anglicanism and the life of the Anglican Churches.

2. Urgency

While a definitive text which held all such elements in balance might take time to develop in the life of the Communion, there was also an urgent need to re-establish trust between the churches of the Communion. The faithfulness of

patterns of obedience to Christ were no longer recognised across the Communion, despite Paul's call to another way of life (Romans 14.15), and its life would suffer irreparably if some measure of mutual and common commitment to the Gospel was not reasserted in a short time frame. We were mindful also of the words of the Primates at Oporto, "We are conscious that we all stand together at the foot of the Cross of Jesus Christ, so we know that to turn away from each other would be to turn away from the Cross".

Bearing this in mind, the CDG recommends a dual track approach. The definitive text of any proposed Covenant which could command the long term confidence of the Communion would need extensive consultation and refining. Although several possible texts have already been developed, a text for adoption would need to be debated and accepted in the Provinces through their own appropriate processes before formal synodical processes of adoption, if the Covenant was to be received and have any strength or reality.

At the same time, there needed to be a commitment now to the fundamental shape of the covenant in order to address the concerns of those who feared that the very credibility of the commitment of the Anglican Churches to one another and to the Gospel itself was in doubt.

The CDG therefore proposes that the Primates give consideration to a preliminary draft text for a covenant which has been developed from existing models, that they commend this text to the Provinces for study and response, and that they express an appropriate measure of consent to this text and express the intention to pursue its fine-tuning and adoption through the consultative and constitutional processes of the Provinces.

The Primates are not being asked to commit their churches at this stage, since they are all bound by their own Provincial constitutions to observe due process. What they are being asked to do is to recognise in the general substance of the preliminary draft set forth by the CDG a concise expression of what may be considered as authentic Anglicanism. Primates are also asked to request a response from their Provinces on the draft text to the Covenant Design Group in time for there to be the preparation of a revised draft which could receive initial consideration at the Lambeth Conference.

The text offered is meant to be robust enough to express clear commitment in those areas of Anglican faith about which there has been the most underlying concern in recent events, while at the same time being faithful and consistent with the declarations, formularies and commitments of Anglicanism as they have been received by our Churches. In this way, nothing which is commended in the draft text of the Covenant can be said to be "new"; it is rather an assertion of that understanding of true Christian faith as it has been received in the Anglican Churches.

What is to be offered in the Covenant is not the invention of a new way of being Anglican, but a fresh restatement and assertion of the faith which we as Anglicans have received, and a commitment to inter-dependent life such as always in theory at least been given recognition.

An Introduction to a Draft Text for an Anglican Covenant

God has called us into communion in Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1:9; 1 Jn. 1:3). This call is established in God's purposes for creation (Eph. 1:10; 3:9ff.), which have been furthered in God's covenants with Israel and its representatives such as Abraham and most fully in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ Jesus. We humbly recognize that this calling and gift of communion grants us responsibilities for our common life before God.

Through God's grace we have been given the Communion of Anglican churches through which to respond to God's larger calling in Christ (Acts 2:42). This Communion provides us with a special charism and identity among the many followers and servants of Jesus. Recognizing the wonder, beauty and challenge of maintaining communion in this family of churches, and the need for mutual commitment and discipline as a witness to God's promise in a world and time of instability, conflict, and fragmentation, we covenant together as churches of this Anglican Communion to be faithful to God's promises through the historic faith we confess, the way we live together and the focus of our mission.

Our faith embodies a coherent testimony to what we have received from God's Word and the Church's long-standing witness; our life together reflects the blessings of God in growing our Communion into a truly global body; and the mission we pursue aims at serving the great promises of God in Christ that embrace the world and its peoples, carried out in shared responsibility and stewardship of resources, and in interdependence among ourselves and with the wider Church.

Our prayer is that God will redeem our struggles and weakness, and renew and enrich our common life so that the Anglican Communion may be used to witness effectively in all the world to the new life and hope found in Christ.