

Moving Forward in Communion: A rationale for seeking alternative Primal oversight

Biblical, Missionary, Uniting

The Anglican Network in Canada (ANiC) is comprised of parishes and individuals who are committed to the faith once for all delivered to the saints, and to the global Communion, and to moving forward with gospel mission.

We are distressed by decisions and actions by various official representative bodies of the Anglican Church of Canada which represent a departure from the biblical gospel and the rending of the fabric of our communion. We are in “serious theological dispute” with bishops, dioceses, and synods and we have worked carefully and faithfully within the Anglican Church of Canada to represent Christ, to call for repentance and reconciliation, and to seek protection from actions hostile to gospel faithfulness.

Anglican Processes

We have sought to cooperate with every process provided at every level of the Anglican Communion:

- In New Westminster Diocese we submitted to the oversight of Bishop Buckle in 2003, until Bishop Ingham brought legal charges against Bishop Buckle and the parishes of the Anglican Communion in New Westminster, and the Canadian House of Bishops demanded Bishop Buckle cease and desist.
- We participated in mediation attempts in the Diocese of New Westminster in 2003 as called for by the Canadian House of Bishops.
- We cooperated completely with the House of Bishops Task Force under Bishop Matthews in 2004.
- We engaged fully in the Panel of Reference process. In response to the Panel’s Report, Primates Archbishop Gomez and Archbishop Venables publicly documented how the Panel of Reference failed to understand the political and theological realities of the decisions and actions of the Canadian church, and failed to offer adequate protection for orthodox parishes.
- Nationally, the Canadian House of Bishops is unwilling to bring resolution to the crisis or to mend the tear in the fabric of the communion. Despite a great deal of work and good will, they have failed to provide adequate protection to parishes that wish to practice the Christian faith as it has been received by the Anglican Church.
- The decisions and actions of the Diocese of New Westminster in 2002 have been copied and furthered by the dioceses of Niagara (2004-2007), Ottawa (2007) and Montreal (2007).

Internationally

Since 2002 the response of the Global Communion has been gracious, patient and decisive.

- In **1998**, the Lambeth Conference Resolved that Anglican teaching rejects “homosexual practice as incompatible with scripture” and “could not advise the legitimising or blessing of same sex unions nor ordaining those involved in same gender unions” (Resolution 1.10).
- In **2002**, when the bishop diocese of New Westminster acted to bless same sex unions, the then Archbishop of Canterbury, George Carey, stated that the action was a “clear undermining of the sanctity of marriage . . . schismatic . . . an “ecumenical embarrassment,” endangering Anglican relations with other churches.
- In **2003**, the Primates met in Brazil and issued a Pastoral letter that stated: “The Archbishop of Canterbury spoke for us all when he said that it is through liturgy that we express what we believe, and that there is no theological consensus about same sex unions. Therefore, we as a body cannot support the authorisation of such rites.” The diocese of New Westminster commenced its first blessing within a week of the release of the statement.
- In **2003**, the Primates met at Lambeth and wrote that the actions of New Westminster and the Episcopal Church threaten the unity of our communion and our witness to the gospel and jeopardize our sacramental fellowship. They warned that continuing such action would tear the fabric of the communion at its deepest level, called for the provision of Adequate Episcopal oversight for dissenting minorities and created the Windsor Commission to address the dangers.
- In **2004**, the Canadian General Synod passed Motion A134 affirming the integrity and sanctity of committed adult same-sex relationships.
- In **November 2004**, the Windsor Report bluntly asserted that the actions in the Canadian and Episcopal churches constituted a breach of the legitimate application of the Christian faith, called for a moratorium on same sex blessings, posited ‘withdrawal’ as a mechanism for reflection, recommended that oversight for dissenting minorities be sufficient to provide a credible degree of security against hostile leadership, and concluded with the forecast of the very real danger of having to learn what it means to walk apart.
- In **2005**, the Primates statement from Dromantine Ireland requested the Canadian and Episcopal churches withdraw from the Anglican Consultative Council until Lambeth 2008, called for a moratorium on the blessing of same sex unions, and for the creation of the Panel of Reference to supervise the adequacy of pastoral provisions in line with the 2003 statement.
- In 2006, the Panel of Reference report was immediately repudiated by several Primates as being entirely inadequate and merely palliative.
- In **February 2007**, the Primates Meeting in Dar Es Salaam again affirmed the 1998 Lambeth Resolution 1:10 as the standard of teaching for the Anglican Communion, and called for clarity with regard to the blessing of same sex unions from the House of Bishops of the Episcopal Church by September. They further indicated that it is wrong for interventions to end before there are robust schemes of pastoral oversight in place.

Canadian General Synod

Since 1992, the trajectory of General Synod has been to undermine the biblical view of marriage. In 2004, the Synod passed the motion affirming the integrity and sanctity of same sex relationships.

In 2007, although the Network contributed to supporting biblical faith in the recent General Synod, the decisions of the Synod dissented from Communion teaching, specifically:

- Electing a Primatial candidate most openly in favour of same sex blessing .
- Overwhelmingly defeating an amendment endorsing Lambeth 1:10, and committing the Canadian Church to comply with the provisions of the Windsor Report and impose a moratorium on same sex blessings.
- Voting on two motions regarding the blessing of same sex unions:
 - Passing A186 saying that the blessing same sex unions is not in conflict with the core doctrine of the Anglican church of Canada; and
 - Narrowly defeating A187, which would have allowed a 'local option' on same sex blessings.
 - Despite the incoherence of these two motions, recent opinions of Diocesan Chancellors have said voting on motions to approve the blessing of same sex marriages are "legal" and permissible.

Canadian House of Bishops

Although the official statements of the House of Bishops in the late 1990's upheld the doctrine of the Church, the Bishops have demonstrated themselves unwilling to take disciplinary action against those who have defied the accepted teaching.

In 2003, the House of Bishops was far more outraged by Bishop Buckle's offering oversight to congregations in the diocese of New Westminster, than with Bishop Ingham's defiance of Christian teaching and practice. Only one Bishop has indicated any impairment of communion with Bishop Ingham since 2002 and the recommendations of the Matthews Commission on Alternative Episcopal Oversight for biblically faithful Canadian Anglicans (in 2004) were not even discussed when the House met in April 2004 nor during the 2004 General Synod which voted to "affirm the integrity and sanctity" of same sex relationships.

The official House of Bishops plan for adequate oversight for parishes in theological conflict with their dioceses, called 'Shared Episcopal Ministry' (very like the DEPO plan in TEC) offers no real protection for orthodox parishes, has no recognition of the tear in the fabric of the communion, and calls for no moratorium on same sex blessings – thus institutionalizing schism. This rejects the framework of the Windsor Report and protects those responsible for the division in our communion.

In anticipation of the vote at General Synod 2007, the House of Bishops released national guidelines regarding same sex couples advocating using the Eucharist as a device to give the Church's recognition to gay and lesbian married couples and assumes that gay and lesbian practice is, in principle at least, a form of Christian holiness.

Pastorally

The leadership of the Anglican Network in Canada are convinced that all options within the ACC have been exhausted and that the issues of same sex blessing and pastoral protection of parishes are incapable of internal resolution within the Province of Canada.

The Pastoral Council, unanimously recommended by the Primates of the Anglican Communion in their Dar Es Salaam Communiqué (Feb. 2007) was a source of hope that has been completely ignored by the ACC.

Biblically orthodox parishes have declined offers of Episcopal oversight from jurisdictions outside the ACC since 2002, hoping, praying and working for a Canadian solution that would leave the door open for reconciliation and unity, and that might offer a genuine pattern for all Dioceses in Canada. All our efforts in this have been rebuffed, ignored or failed.

It would seem that that Canadian Anglicanism and the Panel of Reference view preserving institutional unity and conformity as more important than dealing with unorthodoxy, however extreme. It is now apparent that the institution of the Anglican Church of Canada is fully committed to accepting same sex unions.

Enormous energy has been given to seeking resolution to the tragic divisions created by the decisions and actions of dioceses and bishops. Many parishes are exercising ministry within an increasingly hostile diocesan environment. Pastorally, we are being denied adequate Episcopal oversight, which means the denial of confirmation, ordination and the normal participation in the Anglican Communion.

In summary

From the beginning the Anglican Network in Canada has sought to remain in submission to the Primates and to the Communion. Our desire is to please Christ, to serve him in our generation and to leave a faithful legacy. We wish to be in full communion with the global Anglican church and to work for the advancement of the Gospel unhindered by official harassment from those who have taken oaths to banish all erroneous teaching, to be to the flock of God a shepherd and not a wolf, to feed them not devour them.

We are grateful for the Global South Steering Committee's July 20th statement regarding the continued impasse within the ACC

8. We have also noted the decisions of the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada and are dismayed by their unilateral declaration that 'same-sex blessing is not core doctrine'. While we were grateful for the temporary restraint shown in not proceeding with any further authorization, we have observed that a number of the bishops are continuing to defy the recommendations of the Windsor process. We are exploring the possibility of additional pastoral provisions for those who want to remain faithful to Communion teaching and have been affected by the continuing actions of their own bishops.