

The Anglican Covenant – Brief Timeline and Overview

Pre-Council Meeting Handout, 2010

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The Windsor Report in 2004 introduced the idea of a Covenant and said:

Purpose: clearly identify the loyalty and bonds of affection which govern the relationships between the churches of the Communion. Acknowledge a common identity, relationships, commitments, the exercise of autonomy in communion, and the management of communion affairs (including disputes) (paragraph 118).

Disputes will continue to arise, and a mechanism needs to be in place to enable and maintain life in communion; it is a practical need and a theological challenge; helpful to our ecumenical partners in their understanding of Anglicanism; will be susceptible to development through interpretation and practice; it cannot predict the impact of future events, so a covenant should be designed to allow parties to adjust that relationship and resolve disputes in light of changing circumstances (paragraph 119).

The **final draft** is now before the Communion.

General Convention 2009 passed **Resolution D020** which “commended the Anglican Covenant...for study and comment” before the next General Convention in 2012. It invites “dioceses and congregations” to consider the Covenant as a “document to inform their understanding of and commitment to our common life in the Anglican Communion.”

The **principles** behind the written words deserve our careful and prayerful attention. Significant purposes of the covenant, rather than creating winners and losers, might be to help us discern the mind of Christ together; call us to a deeper doctrine of the Church; and become a vehicle for an agreed upon set of values that supersedes our conflicts.

Some thoughts from the Preamble

We are called to reach across the dividing walls of human sin and estrangement because of our calling to communion with one another and with God in Christ.

The Covenant recognizes “the importance of renewing in a solemn way our commitment to one another, and to the common understanding of faith and order we have received, so that the bonds of affection which hold us together may be re-affirmed and intensified.”

Some thoughts from Section One (Inheritance of Faith)

Calls on participating churches to teach/act in consonance with Scripture, mindful of the common councils of the Communion and our ecumenical agreements. Theological and moral reasoning is answerable to the teaching of Scripture and catholic tradition. It recognizes that Scripture continues to illuminate and transform the Church and its members. It calls upon participants to uphold the solemn obligation to nurture and sustain Eucharistic communion.

Some thoughts from Section Two (Our Mission)

We are summoned into a more fully developed Communion life. As the Communion continues its development into a worldwide family of interdependent churches, we are called to mission at local, regional, and international levels. This section notes the importance of the ecumenical vocation so that “all may be one” per Christ’s prayer in John 17. It also calls on the members of the Communion to revive and renew structures for mission.

Some thoughts from Section Three (Interdependence/Common Life)

Each Church orders and regulates its own affairs and is therefore described as living “in communion with autonomy and accountability.” Churches of the Anglican Communion are bound together not by a central authority, but by “mutual loyalty” sustained through “bishops in conference” and the other Instruments of Communion.

Controversial matters should be tested by shared discernment in the life of the Church. The member Churches are to act with “diligence, care and caution” with respect to actions which may provoke controversy and/or threaten the unity of the Communion as well as the effectiveness or credibility of its mission. All commit to find ways to “uphold the highest degree of communion possible.”

Some thoughts from Section Four (Maintaining Covenant Dispute Resolution)

The member Churches affirm they are entering the Covenant as a commitment to relationship in submission to God and recognize the faith, mission and interdependence of the first three sections; and that these sections are consistent with each province’s own life and practice.

The Covenant is considered adopted (active) for a Church when that Church adopts the Covenant through the procedures of its own Constitution and Canons. The Standing Committee of the Anglican Communion (previously known as the Joint Standing Committee – JSC) has broad responsibilities in dispute resolution, and this is explained throughout this section.