

THE LAMBETH CONFERENCE AND THE COVENANT

The Lambeth Conference was asked to give consideration to the Covenant drafted by the Covenant Design Group. The Covenant was originally proposed by the Primates of the Global South and then adopted by the Windsor Report. The modified version is called “The St Andrew’s Declaration” and can be found on the Anglican Communion website. It is important to read the Covenant as well as the Appendix. The Covenant outlines the basis of the Anglican Communion and the Appendix the operation of the Covenant when an issue arises.

The background to the Covenant is the need to have an agreed basis of what it means to be a part of the Anglican Communion. At present a lot of this has been assumed, but isn’t spelt out anywhere. The Episcopal Church (TEC) has had a very different history to large parts of the rest of the Anglican Communion. It broke from England in 1770 and has evolved in a different way. At present, there is a lack of clarity about the so-called four instruments of communion – the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lambeth Conference of Bishops, the Primates Meetings and the Anglican Consultative Council. It is easy to be critical of this situation, but it is important to bear in mind we are a communion not a church. We are made up of largely independent Dioceses/Provinces linked together by a common heritage. Melbourne Diocese was an innovator in this regard as Perry established Synodical government in our Diocese, a first in the Communion.

My sense, at Lambeth, was that 70% of bishops (present) were in favour of the Covenant. Given that 20% of those present were TEC bishops, this would represent strong support. Archbishop John Chew (Singapore) was a key player in its design.

The Covenant will be taken to the ACC meeting in Jamaica in May 2009. Another key marker will be a Primates Meeting in late 2008. In June 2009 the TEC will hold their General Convention. If the TEC re-affirms their commitment to press on in relation to issues of human sexuality and break the current moratoria, then it would mean (in terms of the Covenant) that their membership of the Anglican Communion will come under further question.

The issues remain complex and the way forward remains confused. Do pray for wisdom for all concerned. At the same time, let’s keep it in perspective. The Anglican Church in Australia has no bishop contemplating going down the TEC path and we have great opportunities for gospel ministry.

Bishop Stephen Hale
Bishop of the Eastern Region
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