

A Brief Reflection on our Understanding of Partnership in Mission

***In our relationship as Anglican sisters and brothers in Christ, we live in the hope of the unity that God has brought about through Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit.
A Covenant for Communion in Mission (IASCOME 2005)***

For more than 40 years following the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC) gathering in 1963, in Toronto, the Anglican Church of Canada has committed itself to mutually responsible, interdependent relationships with Anglican Provinces and ecumenical organizations in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America, North America, the Middle East and South Pacific. Acknowledging our brokenness and complicity in the world's pain and suffering, the Canadian Anglican church seeks to respond with others in fulfilling God's healing and reconciling mission.

Canadian church members, global partners, the Five Marks of Mission (ACC 1984; 1990), Ten Principles of Partnership (MISAG 1993), and A Covenant for Communion in Mission (IASCOME 2005) continue to inform and inspire the Anglican Church of Canada to participate meaningfully in the *Missio Dei*. We are asking ourselves: What does it mean to be Anglican, to be the Anglican Church of Canada today in our neighbourhoods, villages, cities, regions and beyond? Are we living faithfully in relationship with one another, responding to those in need, speaking truth to powers and principalities about economic and social policies without undermining human dignity and the integrity of creation?

We are learning that if the Anglican Church in Canada is to be faithful to Christ's good news for all, we must expose and repent of the sin of racism within our church and Canadian society. We are learning that the deep suffering and pain of former students of Indian residential schools, operated by Anglican and other historic churches, continues to this day, and that healing for survivors, their families and communities will be a long process for generations to come. The Anglican Church of Canada strives to be a prophetic witness to government, industry, and public consumers, calling for values of economic, social, and ecological justice in foreign policy and trade, the exploration and extraction of natural resources, the use of fossil fuel and pesticides.

Our global Church partners, as companions along the way, help us discern our purpose and set a clear direction for participating in God's mission. An example of this is these words from an African Primate to a gathering of Anglicans from different Provinces: *Before [this] Church existed, God knew it would come into being, knew what you would experience, knew what you are now facing. You are either ready for what comes now, and tomorrow, or you are not. The Lord has brought you to this place to do His work, now. Encourage your people. Share. Repent. Forgive. The only way to reconciliation is through a broken and contrite heart, to touch the bleeding heart of another with deep humility. Love one another in Christ, and work for God's diversity in your church and in the world.*

An Asian ecumenical leader teaches us about prayer: *The Christian response to all that is unfolding is to pray, which means to commit yourself to what you pray for. We try to view our situation from God's perspective, that is, we are all God's children. This is the hardest call of the gospel: to love our enemy, which are our rulers and oppressors, and to teach that love will transform fear to compassion, enemy to friend. Our enemies have been brutal but they are also human beings who have a heart. Love and forgiveness of our enemy is a very difficult, painful part of our ministry. Yet who on earth can demand justice? We are justified by the grace of God and we are called to be gracious to one another. We cannot demand justice from another. Only God justifies. We must meet heart to heart as human beings. Then change will happen.*

And there are many others whose words and witness in Christ inform our discernment and guide our feet in approaching partnership with others in God's mission.

In recent times, among the Anglican Church of Canada's most pressing prayer concerns are the issues of healing and just reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people and the inclusion of sexual minorities, i.e. lesbian and gay people, in Anglican Church life. Both issues have been before the church for almost 40 years, as councils and committees study, discuss and decide what it means to be a Spirit-led church within the Anglican tradition and contemporary Canadian context. The latter issue has been particularly provocative within the Canadian Anglican church, as throughout the Communion, for the past 6 years. Sadly, affirmation of the blessing of committed, Christian same-sex couples by 6 Canadian Anglican dioceses has led certain local church members and parishes, and some Primates and Provinces within the Communion, to declare relationship with the Anglican Church to be impaired, and in one case, severed completely.

Canadian Anglicans mourn the broken ties with sisters and brothers in Christ over the course of this long process of discussion and discernment, and continue to pray for the unity of the church. We try to listen and respond faithfully to the critical voice of global Provincial partners, to take the long view 'in preparing the way of the Lord'. We recognize that pressing for a quick reconciliation of impaired relationships, or worse, ignoring the state of impairment altogether, will be offensive to some. We accept that some will regard relationship with the Anglican Church of Canada as not possible. We would not knowingly encourage an estranged friend to compromise their beliefs and dignity or their trust in the wisdom of senior leaders for the sake of money or to assuage our distress.

In conclusion, the words of Archbishop Fred Hiltz, Primate, serve as a summary of our approach to partnership in mission. Responding to the recent GAFCON accusation that the Canadian Anglican Church proclaims a false gospel, he said: "*The Mission Statement of the Anglican Church of Canada professes that we 'value our heritage of biblical faith, reason, liturgy, tradition, bishops and synods, and the rich variety of our life in community.' And we do. The Anglican Church of Canada also values its role in the worldwide Anglican Communion. We are committed to constructive dialogue on all issues facing our beloved church and the Communion, including the blessing of same-sex unions. We remain convinced that as contentious as this issue may be, it should not be a Communion-breaking issue. We have a deep and abiding commitment to the Windsor Report, and the Communion-wide conversations regarding a Covenant among the provinces*".

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References

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Mission Statement of the Anglican Church of Canada
www2.anglican.ca/about/mission-statement/htm