



The Episcopal Diocese of Vermont

The Windsor Report

Summary of Key Points and Recommendations

Outlined below are some key points and the recommendations made by the Lambeth Commission on Communion in *The Windsor Report*, presented to the Archbishop of Canterbury on October 18, 2004. This summary has been prepared for Bishop Ely's series of conversations with members of the Diocese of Vermont January 4-8.

The Lambeth Commission's Mandate:

1. To examine and report on "the legal and theological implications" of the election of the Rev. Gene Robinson as Bishop of New Hampshire and the decision by the Diocese of New Westminster (Canada) to authorize services for same sex unions; on the "canonical understandings of communion, impaired and broken communion, and the ways in which provinces of the Anglican Communion may relate to one another in situations where the ecclesiastical authorities of one province feel unable to maintain the fullness of communion with another part of the Anglican Communion."
2. To make practical recommendations "for maintaining the highest degree of communion possible" within and among churches of the Anglican Communion.
3. To make recommendations regarding the circumstances under which it would be appropriate for the Archbishop of Canterbury "to exercise an extraordinary ministry of episcopate (oversight)" with regard to the internal affairs of a province other than his own (page 8).

From the Foreword by the Most Rev. Dr. Robin Eames:

"This Report is not a judgement. It is part of a process. It is part of a pilgrimage towards healing and reconciliation." The Anglican Communion is encouraged to study and discuss its findings (page 6).

In Section A: *The Purposes and Benefits of Communion*, the Report:

- understands the *unity* of the church, the *communion* of its members and "the *radical holiness* to which all Christ's people are called" to be rooted in the trinitarian life and purposes of God (3) [*Numbers in parentheses refer to the paragraph numbers in the report.*];
- celebrates the diversity within the unity of the church (3);
- perceives a need "to develop a common mind about how this great Communion might actually function together in those situations in which mutual discernment is necessary to sustain the life of the body" (11);
- points to an understanding of the story of ordination of women as "a recent example of mutual discernment and decision-making within the Anglican Communion" (12);
- maintains that the actions of the Episcopal Church and the Diocese of New Westminster represent "surface symptoms" of an illness afflicting the communion (22-30);
- locates "deeper symptoms" in "six underlying features of our common life" that have led to the current "impasse":
 1. Neither the Diocese of New Westminster (DNW) nor the Episcopal Church (TEC) "made a significant effort" to explain to, or consult with, the Communion regarding a "significant *development of theology*" that might justify their actions (33).
 2. Neither TEC nor the DNW "went through the *procedures* which might have made it possible for the church to hold together across differences of belief and practice" (35).
 3. Many in TEC and the DNW believe the questions being decided "were things upon which Christians might have legitimate difference [*adiaphora*], while large numbers of other Anglicans around the world did not regard them in this way" (37).

4. TEC and the DNW assumed, in light of “the principle that matters should be decided as close to the local level as possible” [*subsidiarity*], that they were free to act, whereas others believed these questions should be decided on a Communion-wide level (38-39).
5. Churches have a duty not to breach the *relationship of trust* that should characterize life within the Communion. “As a Communion, we need a common forum for debate, a common table to which we can bring our questions for a proper family discussion” (40-41).
6. Recent decisions “have not taken into account, and/or worked through and explained” their basis in how *authority* works within Anglicanism (42).

In Section B: Fundamental Principles, the report:

- understands that Anglicans share in “bonds of affection” that flow both from shared status as children of God in Christ and from shared and inherited identity—a relationship of “covenantal affection” (45);
- claims that “the divine foundation of communion should oblige each church to avoid unilateral action on contentious issues which may result in broken communion” (51);
- notes that “scripture has always been recognized as the Church’s supreme authority” (53) and calls “the whole Anglican Communion to re-evaluate the ways in which we have read, heard, studied and digested scripture” (61);
- states that “our shared reading of scripture across boundaries of culture, region and tradition ought to be the central feature of our common life” (62);
- understands episcopacy to be “the foundational form of government within the Anglican churches” (63) and bishops to “represent the universal Church to the local and *vice versa*” (64);
- claims that the churches of the communion “are obliged to move together, to walk together in *synodality* [gatherings of representative bodies]” (66);
- notes that unity has been maintained by “subjecting fresh developments within the Anglican Communion to a test of *reception*” that includes “theological debate and discussion, formal action, and increased consultation to see whether the formal action settles down and makes itself at home” (68);
- understands diversity to be both a strength and a source of tension and division but also something to which there must be limits (71 and 86);
- notes that *autonomy* of the individual provinces is “fundamental to Anglican polity” (72), but states that “autonomy is a form of limited authority” (77);
- finds autonomy to be linked to a principle of *subsidiarity*, in which a central authority does only that which cannot be done at a more local level (83), and, “Each church has for itself the greatest possible liberty which is compatible with the unity and good order of the Anglican Communion, in governance, ministry, doctrine, liturgy, rites, ecumenism and property” (84);
- considers the notion of *adiaphora*, “matters regarded as non-essential, issues about which one can disagree without dividing the Church” (87), how, and by whom, decisions are to be made about what can properly be considered *adiaphora* and the relationship between the concepts of *adiaphora* and *subsidiarity* (88-95).

In Section C: Our Future Life Together, the report:

- focuses on what it considers the Anglican Communion’s four “Instruments of Unity” (97-104):
 1. the Archbishop of Canterbury, with whom member provinces are in communion and who alone can invite bishops to attend the Lambeth Conference of Anglican bishops;
 2. the Lambeth Conference of bishops that meets every ten years (beginning in 1867) and is considered an advisory (not legislative) body;
 3. the Anglican consultative Council, an advisory body established in 1968, and the only one of the four Instruments of Unity to include priests, deacons and lay people;
 4. the Primates’ Meeting, a gathering of the heads of the 38 Anglican provinces that met first in 1978 to consider the question of the ordination of women.

- **recommends** that “the Archbishop of Canterbury be regarded as the focus of unity and that the Primates’ Meeting, the Lambeth Conference, the Anglican Consultative Council, and possibly others, be regarded more appropriately as the Instruments of Communion” (105);
- **recommends** that the Archbishop of Canterbury have a Council of Advice that could “assist him in discerning when and how it might be appropriate for him to exercise a ministry of unity on behalf of the whole Communion” (112);
- **recommends** “adoption by each church of its own simple and short domestic ‘communion law’” regarding inter-Anglican relations (117);
- **recommends** “adoption by the churches of the Communion of a common Anglican Covenant [see Appendix Two of the report] which would make explicit and forceful the loyalty and bonds of affection which govern the relationships between the churches of the Communion” (118);
- claims that “the case for adoption of an Anglican Covenant is overwhelming” (119).

In Section D: *The Maintenance of Communion*, the report:

- regrets that:
 - “the Episcopal Church (USA) proceeded with the consecration of Gene Robinson”;
 - the General Convention declared that “local faith communities are operating within the bounds of our common life as they explore and experience liturgies celebrating and blessing same-sex unions”;
 - “the Diocese of New Westminster approved the use of public Rites for the Blessing of same sex unions”;
 - the Anglican Church of Canada’s General Synod “issued a statement affirming the integrity and sanctity of committed same sex relationships”;
 - “a number of primates and other bishops have taken it upon themselves to intervene in the affairs of other provinces of the Communion”(123);
- notes that “the contentious issue of ordaining women as bishops was the subject of extensive debate and discussion in the Communion for some considerable time before a common mind was reached” [n.b.—most provinces still do not approve of women as bishops, and the majority do not ordain women as priests] (126);
- **recommends** that:
 - the Episcopal Church “be invited to express its regret that the proper constraints of the bonds of affection were breached” regarding the election and consecration of a bishop for New Hampshire and “for the consequences which followed, and that such an expression of regret would represent the desire of the Episcopal Church (USA) to remain within the Communion;
 - “those who took part as consecrators of Gene Robinson should be invited to consider in all conscience whether they should withdraw themselves from representative functions in the Anglican Communion”;
 - the Episcopal Church “be invited to effect a moratorium on the election and consent to the consecration of any candidate to the episcopate who is living in a same gender union until some new consensus in the Anglican Communion emerges” (134);
- **recommends** that “the ‘listening’ process commended by the Lambeth Conference in 1998 might be taken forward, so that greater common understanding might be obtained on the underlying issue of same gender relationships” (135);
- **requests** the Episcopal Church to explain, “from within the sources of authority that we as Anglicans have received in scripture, the apostolic tradition and reasoned reflection, how a person living in a same gender union may be considered eligible to lead the flock of Christ” (135);
- states that “to proceed unilaterally with the authorization of public Rites of Blessing for same sex unions at this time goes against the formally expressed opinions of the Instruments of Unity and therefore constitutes action in breach of the legitimate application of the Christian faith as the churches of the Anglican Communion have received it, and of bonds of affection in the life of the Communion, especially the principle of interdependence” (143);

- **calls** on all bishops not “to authorise public Rites of Blessing for same sex unions” (143) and “for a moratorium on all such public Rites” (144);
- **recommends** that bishops who have authorized such rites “be invited to express regret that the proper constraints of the bonds of affection were breached by such authorization” (144);
- **recommends** that such bishops “be invited to consider in all conscience whether they should withdraw themselves from representative functions in the Anglican Communion” (144);
- **urges** all provinces “engaged in processes of discernment regarding the blessing of same sex unions to engage the Communion in continuing study of biblical and theological rationale for and against such unions” (145);
- states that “any demonizing of homosexual persons, or their ill treatment, is totally against Christian charity and basic principles of pastoral care” (146);
- acknowledges “the hurt and alienation” felt by individuals, parishes and dioceses as a result of decisions made by “provinces within which there is profound disagreement” (147);
- **commends** the proposals for delegated episcopal pastoral oversight set out by the House of Bishops of the Episcopal Church to address concerns of dissenting congregations (152);
- **calls** on bishops and archbishops who have intervened in provinces, diocese and parishes other than their own “to express regret for the consequences of their actions, to affirm their desire to remain in the Communion, and to effect a moratorium on any further interventions” (155);
- **calls** upon “all parties to the current dispute to seek ways of reconciliation, and to heal our divisions;”
- and expresses concern “that we will not choose to walk together” (157).

In Appendix One: Reflections on the Instruments of Unity, the report:

- asserts that “the present membership of the Anglican Consultative Council could be made more effective, and more accountable, by being required to be drawn from those persons who have a voice within the highest executive body of each province,” and that “its authority would be strengthened if the episcopal house were to consist of the Primates of the Communion” (1);
- suggests that “provinces of the Communion should not proceed with controversial developments in the face of teaching to the contrary from all the bishops gathered together in Lambeth Conferences” (3);
- suggests a “special category of Lambeth Resolutions” that would be “seen as the definitive teaching of the Anglican Communion” (4);
- suggests that the Primates’ Meeting should serve as the “Standing Committee of the Lambeth Conference and as such should monitor developments in furtherance of resolutions of the Lambeth Conference,” thus giving the Primates’ Meeting enhanced responsibility as suggested by meetings of the Lambeth Conference (5);
- and **recommends** “a rethinking of the strategic role of the Anglican Communion Office” in order that it might “serve all the Instruments of Unity” (9).

In Appendix Two: Proposal for the Anglican Covenant, the report:

- sets out a model proposal for a covenant established “in order to foster greater unity and to consolidate our understandings of communion” (Preamble);
- proposes standards for common identity in a context of “common autonomous polity” (Part I);
- outlines the relationships of communion (Part II);
- states that “Communion is a gift of God” and outlines responsibilities for the maintenance of unity and “bonds of mutual loyalty” (Part III);
- defines how autonomy is to be exercised within the limits of communion and states that “What touches all should be approved by all” (Part IV);
- and describes a process for management of issues that are “essential matters of common concern to the member churches of the Communion” as designated by the Instruments of Unity (Part V).