The Episcopal Diocese of Vermont
5 Rock Point Road
Burlington, VT 05408-2735

Telephone: (802) 863-3431 Fax: (802) 860-1562

This submission is in response to the Study Guide and request from the Executive Council that we comment on the Proposed Anglican Covenant. We, the undersigned lay and clergy leaders of the Diocese of Vermont support the response contained below. This response reflects the work of our Diocesan Council at its meeting on May 19, 2007, and has been circulated to various leadership groups in the diocese over the course of the last few days, with very little time for people to respond, due to the June 4, 2007, deadline. This document was circulated to members of the Diocesan Council, Standing Committee, General Convention Deputies and Alternates, and to clergy and lay delegates to the Diocesan Convention. The time allotted for this process did not allow for us to take a formal vote at any leadership meeting and so we have decided that the best we can offer is our own personal endorsement of this response.

Questions of the Study Guide for the Proposed Anglican Covenant

(1) Do you think an Anglican Covenant is necessary and/or will help to strengthen the interdependent life of the Anglican Communion? Why or why not?

No, we do not believe an Anglican Covenant is either necessary or desirable. The Preface to the first Book of Common Prayer asserts '*Christ's Gospel …. is a religion to serve God, not in bondage of the figure, or shadow, but in the freedom of spirit*.' We understand Christian covenants to be written on hearts, not tablets of stone, to be of the Spirit and life-giving and characterized by fluidity and mutuality. We believe that this document's agenda of compliance and uniformity weakens our interdependent life, and that our strength as a communion lies in our diversity and inclusiveness.

(2) How closely does this view of communion accord with your understanding of the development and vocation of the Anglican Communion?

We do not believe the document reflects the development and vocation of the Anglican Communion. Our Communion comprises national churches which have developed their own polity and ethos: again, the preface to the first Book of Common Prayer established the ground for this development when it stated *'And in these all our doings we condemn*

no other nations, nor prescribe anything, but to our own people only.' In so far as the proposed covenant seeks to 'prescribe to other nations' and might be used as a means by which to condemn others, it is contrary to the spirit of Anglicanism.

(3) Is this a sufficient rationale for entering into a Covenant? Why or why not?

While the goals specified in the Preamble are admirable and desirable, they are not advanced by the document that then follows. The Preamble presents no convincing reason for entering into a Covenant that is not already served by the Anglican Communion itself. While it acknowledges that member churches are called to proclaim the Grace of God revealed in the Gospel *in different contexts*, it subsequently fails to acknowledge and allow for how those different contexts present different challenges and demand different responses.

(4) Do these six affirmations adequately describe The Episcopal Church's understanding of 'common catholicity, apostolicity, and confession of faith'? Why or why not?

No. The affirmations attempt to expand on the four essentials of the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral. The 'Ordering of Bishops, Priests and Deacons', or the historic episcopate, mentioned in the fifth affirmation, is rightly considered a sign of catholicity and apostolicity, but it does not belong in the same category as purely denominational documents such as the historic formularies, the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, and the 1662 Book of Common Prayer. These cannot be considered examples of our shared catholicity and apostolicity: rather, they can only be considered as examples of our particular traditions.

(5) The Thirty-nine Articles of Religion and the 1662 Book of Common Prayer (of the Church of England) are not currently authoritative documents for The Episcopal Church. Do you think they should be? Why or why not?

No. Not only have the Thirty-nine Articles not been authoritative in the Episcopal Church, their association with the Test Acts of the United Kingdom, and their use as a means for excluding and disqualifying and subjugating minorities, is problematic in a North American context. Further, the 1662 Book of Common Prayer was *not* foundational in the life of this Church as asserted in the footnote to this section.

(6) Is each of these commitments clear and understandable with respect to what is being asked of the member churches and are they consistent with statements and actions made by The Episcopal Church in the General Convention? Why or why not?

No. While the commitments generally appear to be admirable, precisely what they mean is not always clear and understandable. An Anglican Covenant is being proposed precisely because members of the Anglican Communion cannot agree on what "biblically derived moral values" might be: we cannot support a document that presumes some sort of consensus already exists on what those values are. Further, when the document asserts that biblical texts are 'handled' primarily through the teaching and initiative of bishops and synods, it reveals a perception of the role and responsibilities of the episcopacy that is not shared by this church nor supported by its Ordinal.

(7) Is the mission vision offered here helpful in advancing a common life of the Anglican Communion and does this need to be a part of the Draft Covenant? Why or why not?

Yes. We wholeheartedly endorse this vision of mission and, if there must be a Covenant, suggest that this comprise the entire text.

(8) Does this section adequately describe your understanding of the history and respective roles of the 'Four Instruments of Communion?' Why or why not?

Yes, partially, but to claim that these instruments serve to 'discern our common mind' is to exceed the mandate of each and all of them. Rather, they exist to serve, encourage, support, and counsel the church.

Perhaps significance should not be attributed to the order in which the instruments are listed, but the Anglican Consultative Council is in all respects prior to the Primates' Meeting: it pre-existed the Primates' Meeting, it is truly and widely representative, and it includes bishops, clergy, and laity. It is the only instrument of communion that genuinely reflects the Anglican synodical principle; the other three suggest that bishops hold the communion together—or not.

(9) Do you think there needs to be an executive or judicial body for resolving disagreements or disputes in the Anglican Communion? If so, do you think it should be the Primates Meeting as recommended by the Draft Covenant? Explain.

No. A genuinely Anglican resolution to disagreements and disputes cannot be handed down by an executive or judicial body: it emerges from patient and respectful listening, from mutual trust and charity, and from honoring the boundaries on which our communion is built. The scriptures suggest that sometimes only time will reveal what is 'of God,' and what is not: in the meantime, we learn to live with a lack of resolution. (Acts 5:38-39) If the power and authority of any one of the Instruments of Communion should be enhanced, the ACC would be more appropriate. Recent events indicate that Primates have assumed an inflated status and influence inconsistent with Anglican tradition. This misrepresentation of their role has created more problems than solutions; constituting them as some sort of regulatory body would only be a further distortion, and once again reflect a polity not shared by this church.

(10) What does the phrase 'a common mind about matters of essential concern' mean to you?

Anglicans are 'Prayer Book People': for this church, matters of 'essential concern' have to do with faith and worship, the content of that Book. Historically we have insisted on little else. With great restraint, we have refrained from interfering in what we have considered egregious and systemic injustices in other parts of our Communion because we have been reticent to insist on our own understanding of 'biblically derived moral values,' and loath to demand 'common standards of faith.' The Draft Covenant presumes that a common mind is possible about matters of essential concern; clearly we have widely divergent understandings of what is of the essence and what is peripheral.

(11) Can you affirm the 'fundamental shape' of the Draft Covenant? Why or why not?

The headings of the sections provide a helpful framework. For the most part, the content is not acceptable and we cannot affirm it.

(12) What do you think are the consequences of signing such a Covenant as proposed in this Draft?

Every day we pray that God's Kingdom will come, and we believe that in this diocese and in this part of the Church we have been privileged to witness that Kingdom making inroads into our common life. We consider the type of Covenant proposed by this draft a betrayal of what we pray for, what we labor to make present and what we daily welcome. Signing such a Covenant would signal acceptance of and cooperation in a process that we consider unfaithful to what we believe of our God, our Church, and our culture. We consider the impetus for this document, and its likely impact, to be morally repugnant, and alien to the spirit and tradition of Anglicanism as received by this Church.

(13) Having read the Draft Covenant as a whole do you agree with the CDG's assertion that 'nothing which is commended in the draft text of the Covenant can be said to be 'new''? Why or why not?

If indeed there is nothing new in the Draft Covenant, then there can be no need for such a document. However, the Draft Covenant does attempt to introduce novelties: it seeks to redefine the role of the Instruments of Communion, and to impose 'common standards of faith'; it presumes that agreement on 'biblically derived moral values' is an essential component of communion; and it attempts to enhance the role and authority of the Primates' Meeting. The very concept of a Covenant is a new phenomenon within Anglicanism, and the model of communion it proposes is unrecognizable and unacceptable.

(14) In general, what is your response to the Draft Covenant taken as a whole? What is helpful in the draft? What is not helpful? What is missing? Additional comments?

The scriptures attest that Jesus had little patience with the multitude of laws that had encumbered and distorted genuine covenant fidelity; he reduced hundreds of commandments to just two: love of God and love of neighbor. A proliferation of rules and conditions for belonging seem to us contrary to the inclusiveness and hospitality of the Gospel. This proposed Covenant attempts to encumber what can only be an essentially spiritual relationship with regulatory compliance; it does not attempt to draw people into the kingdom, but to exclude them; it does not leave judgment to the angels (Mt 13:49), but claims it as a human and ecclesial prerogative; it does not enhance possibilities for communion, but diminishes them.

Signed by:

NAME	TITLE
The Rt. Rev. Thomas Clark Ely	- Bishop of Vermont
Mike Austin, PhD	- Secretary, Standing Committee
Stan Baker	- Postulant for Holy Orders
The Rev. Gordon A. Bardos	- Priest (retired), Diocese of Vermont
Ann Cooper	- Standing Committee
The Rev. Victor Horvath	- Priest Associate, Immanuel Church; Diocesan Council
James Larkin	- Deputy to General Convention
The Rev. Mary Robb Mansfield	- Rector, St. John's in the Mountains Church; Alternate Delegate to General Convention
Steve Reynes	- Diocesan Council
The Rev. Diane Root	- Deputy to General Convention
Steve Smith	- Treasurer, Diocese of Vermont; Administrative Warden, St. James' Church
The Rev. Canon Thaddeus A. Bennett	- Rector, St. Mary's in the Mountains Church
The Rev. Molly Comeau	- Priest, Diocese of Vermont
The Rev. Reid Farrell	- Rector, Holy Trinity Church; Diocesan Council
Dale Willard	- Alternate Delegate to Diocesan Convention
Barbara A. Hoar	- Diocesan Council
Carol Ann Lobo Johnson	- Delegate to Diocesan Convention
The Rev. Linda Maloney	- Priest in Partnership, St. Matthew's Church
Roy J. Morgan	- Diocesan Council
The Rev. Donald R. Morris	- Priest (retired), Diocese of Vermont
The Rev. Ramona Rose-Crossley	- Priest (retired), Diocese of Vermont
The Rev. Remington Rose-Crossley	- Priest, Diocese of Vermont
Peter D. Galbraith	- Deputy to General Convention
Jutta von Tiesenhausen-Hush	- Delegate to Diocesan Convention
Leroy T. Hush	- Delegate to Diocesan Convention
Robert Bowler	- Delegate to Diocesan Convention
The Rev. C. Leland Udell	- Priest (retired), Diocese of Vermont
Rev. Sister Laurian Seeber	- Diocesan Council
Elise A. Roessler	- Delegate to Diocesan Convention
The Rev. Canon Peggy Crane	- Canon Pastor, Immanuel Church
The Rev. Rolfe Lawson	- Priest, Licensed in the Diocese of Vermont
The Rev. Anita Schell-Lambert	- Rector, St. Peter's Church; Standing Committee; Delegate to Diocesan Convention
Frances Farnsworth	- Delegate to Diocesan Convention
Robert Wertz	- Delegate to Diocesan Convention
The Rev. Anne Webb	- Priest (retired), Diocese of Vermont

NAME	TITLE
Dee Roberts	- Delegate to Diocesan Convention
Kate Conner	- Delegate to Diocesan Convention
The Rev. Judson Pealer	- Priest In Charge, St. Paul's Church
The Rev. Jackie Arbuckle	- Deacon, Diocese of Vermont; Delegate to Diocesan Convention
Lynn Bates	- Canon to the Ordinary, Diocese of Vermont
The Rev. Keri Aubert	- Priest, Diocese of Vermont
Catherine M. McCauley, Esq.	- Delegate to Diocesan Convention
The Ven. Rev. Catherine Cooke	- Archdeacon, Diocese of Vermont
The Very Rev. Kenneth Poppe	- Dean, Cathedral of St. Paul; President, The Standing Committee
Mr. Scott Paul	- Diocesan Council