

Open letter to Archbishop Williams from Bishops of the Church of Nigeria

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An open letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury from the House of Bishops of the Church of Nigeria meeting in Osogbo, Osun State

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the one and only Lord Jesus Christ.

We write to you out of profound love for our beloved Anglican Communion and recognition that this current crisis in our common life together is an unrelenting source of anguish for you and for all concerned.

We have reviewed the paper "A Most Agonizing Road to Lambeth 2008" that was made available to us by our primate, the Most Rev'd Peter J. Akinola. We found it to be a compelling summary of many of the key events and meetings of the past ten years. It highlights the intractability of our current crisis.

We are persuaded that a change of direction from our current path is urgently needed and write to assure you of our willingness and commitment to work towards that end. We have noted your desire that the proposed Lambeth Conference be a place for fellowship and prayer and an exploration of our shared mission and ministry - all of these are of course commendable aims.

We all know, however, that the pressures of the present situation would adversely affect the outcome of the conference unless there is a profound change of heart; for how can we as bishops in the Church of God gather for a Lambeth Conference when there is such a high level of distrust, dislike and disdain for one another? How can we meet as leaders of the Communion when our relationships are so sorely strained and our life together so broken that we cannot even share together in the Lord's Supper? It would be a mockery and bring dishonour to the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus the King.

We are also concerned about the abuse directed towards those who hold to traditional views on matters of Human Sexuality. The spate of hostility in the UK is alarming.

We are all witnesses to:

- The presence of placard carrying and leaflets distributing campaigners at the last Lambeth Conference distracting Bishops who travelled thousands of miles for fellowship. These protesters effectively shifted the focus of the conference to human sexuality - as if that was all that mattered.

- The physical assaults against clergymen with opposing view, such as your predecessor attacked in his own Cathedral pulpit, and a Kenyan bishop assaulted by two people dressed as clergymen.

- The occasion when your own General Synod was disrupted by protestors angry over the handling of the Canon Jeffery John issue.

- Recent attempts to mandate unbiblical views in the UK through force of law and the protests and attacks by activists determined to disrupt and intimidate any group that seeks to uphold biblical teaching.

In truth anyone who does not embrace revisionist views is a potential target. We know it is possible to provide some security to minimize such occurrences but is the additional cost justifiable? Would the resultant atmosphere of fear and uncertainty be conducive to the goals of such a large gathering of bishops?

These are all matters of concern but in our opinion there is a way forward.

The proposed Anglican Communion Covenant is the one way for us to uphold our common heritage of faith while at the same time holding each other accountable to those teachings that have defined our life together and also guide us into the future. It has already received enthusiastic support from the majority of the Communion.

Therefore we propose the following action plan:

As a matter of utmost urgency, call a special session of the Primates Meeting to:

- Receive the responses made by The Episcopal Church to the Dromantine and Dar es Salaam Communiqués and determine their adequacy.

- Arrive at a consensus for the application of the Windsor Process especially in Provinces whose self-understanding is at odds with the predominant mind of the Communion.

Set in motion an agreed process to finalize the Anglican Covenant Proposal and set a timetable for its ratification by individual provinces. This cannot be done at the Lambeth Conference because it is simply too large and, we all know, the Anglican Covenant requires individual provincial endorsement and signature.

Postpone current plans for the Lambeth Conference (as has been done before).

This will:

- Allow the current tensions to subside and leave room for the hard work of reconciliation that is a prerequisite for the fellowship we all desire.

- Confirm that those invited to the Lambeth Conference have already endorsed the Anglican Covenant and so are able to come together as witnesses to our common faith.

We make these proposals in good faith believing that they provide an opportunity for us to reunite the Communion consistent with our common heritage and give us a way forward to engage the world with the holistic Gospel of Salvation in Jesus Christ.
Bishops of the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion)
September 13, 2007