

A Covenant for the Church of England: Signatories and Questions

21 December 2006 - Print Version

News & Views

The signatories to "A Covenant for the Church of England" are now being made public together with some background explanation. Although it was our original intention to publish the list of signatories and the "Questions that may be Asked" at the same time as the Covenant, we have withheld them for one week at the request of Lambeth Palace. We are publishing them now in the hope that they will help people to understand the full context in which these conversations have been begun.

Signatories to A Covenant for the Church of England.

Bishop Wallace Benn (President) and Rev Dr Richard Turnbull (Chairman) for the Church of England Evangelical Council.

Bishop David Pytches (formerly of Chile)

Bishop Colin Bazley (former primate of the Southern Cone)

The Rev Dr John Stott CBE

The Rev Dick Lucas

The Rev John Coles, director of New Wine, a charismatic evangelical network, on behalf of the leadership of New Wine.

The Rev David Banting, (chairman of Reform on behalf of Reform).

Canon Andy Lines, (General Secretary of Crosslinks and the Board of Crosslinks)

The Rev David Phillips, (Director of Church Society and the leadership of Church Society)

The Rev Simon Vibert (St Luke's Wimbledon Park, Diocese of Southwark and Chair of the Fellowship of Word and Spirit)

The Rev David Petersen, (Principal of Oak Hill College).

Prebendary Richard Bewes OBE

Paul Boyd-Lee, (Member of General Synod)

The Rev Bruce Collins (Christ Church Harrow, New Wine International Director)

Mrs Sarah Finch, (Member of General Synod)

The Rev Jonathan Fletcher, (Emmanuel Church, Wimbledon, Diocese of Southwark)

Dr Philip Giddings, (Convenor of Anglican Mainstream and member of General Synod)

Rev David Holloway, (Jesmond Parish Church, Diocese of Newcastle)

The Rev Angus Macleay (St Nicholas Sevenoaks and member of General Synod)

The Rev Charles Marnham, (St Michael's Church, Chester Square, Diocese of London)

The Rev Justin Mote (North West Partnership)

The Rev Rob Munro (Cheadle Parish Church and member of General Synod)

The Rev Hugh Palmer (All Souls Langham Place, Diocese of London)

The Rev Ian Parkinson (All Saints Marple, Diocese of Chester)

The Rev Chris Pemberton (St Mary's Bredin, Diocese of Canterbury)

The Rev Paul Perkin (St Mark's, Battersea Rise, Diocese of Southwark and member of General Synod).

The Rev Vaughan Roberts (St Ebbe's, Diocese of Oxford)

Mrs Alison L Ruoff JP, (Member of General Synod)

The Rev Dr Mark Stibbe (St Andrew's, Chorleywood, Diocese of St Albans)

Canon Dr Chris Sugden, (Anglican Mainstream UK, member of General Synod).

The Rev William Taylor (St Helen's, Bishopsgate, Diocese of London)

Questions that may be asked.

1 Who do you represent?

We speak on behalf of the many Anglicans, (from among Evangelical, Charismatic and Anglo-Catholic traditions) who want to remain faithful to the biblical faith as the Church of England has received it, and who see that that faith is currently at risk. Those who wish to express support for the concerns of the Covenant are invited to e-mail any of the signatories to say so.

2 What are the problems calling for responses advocated in the Covenant? Are they only little local difficulties? Are they merely personality differences?

The present problems in the Church of England are widespread, varied and complex – but inter-related, focussing on issues of authority, scripture, the nature of God and creation. They transcend personality issues, and although manifesting locally are linked globally. We recognise that the fault-line running down through the

Anglican Communion is also running through the Church of England. The issues this precipitates can no longer be ignored or marginalized.

3. Why have you chosen to release A Covenant now? There is no current dispute.

While there are many situations of tension around the country, we are not responding narrowly to any isolated incident. Precisely because no immediate crisis event is current, it is important to express the deep concern that does exist and initiate a process of dealing with potential problems. It is too late when things go seriously wrong to put in place a way of making provision for those who are then in a crisis of loyalty, conscience and obedience. It is important in a principled comprehensive church to make provision for those loyal to the agreed teaching of the church when the leadership they are answerable to are going beyond Christian teaching. Further, the Church of England will not escape any fracture in the Anglican Communion. It needs to be prepared to handle the different and potentially powerful reactions to the Primates Meeting in February. If Communion is finally broken by some with The Episcopal Church, there will be those in the Church of England who will continue publicly to express their strong support for TEC. This will put many parishes and clergy who are in their charge in impossible situations. The fracture in North America or between North America and others will not pass the Church of England by. The same issues have arisen elsewhere in New Zealand and South Africa. There is no process in the Communion for handling them. It might even be possible to provide in the Church of England the beginnings of ways of handling them that could be a model for elsewhere.

Finally, some believe that those who are faithful orthodox will live with the innovations and lack of discipline that have already been put in place. For example, Changing Attitude records 46 couples who have entered civil partnerships registered in 15 dioceses. They include 36 ordained gay men, 2 ordained lesbians, 31 lay gay men and 6 lay lesbians, ignoring the House of Bishops Guidelines. Legal advice is that it is not possible to discipline anyone blessing a same sex union since it is a liturgical matter subject to the Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction measure under which no case has been successfully brought. The idea that nothing is wrong at the moment and that Church of England teaching remains unbreached is part of the strategy of those bringing these innovations. Continued silence is taken as consent.

4. How does A Covenant for the Church of England relate to the Windsor Covenant?

The Covenant has no relation or implications for the Windsor Covenant. There are many covenants, the one with the Methodists for example. "A Covenant" is between the many disparate groups across the orthodox spectrum who have come together to express agreement on fundamental theological and moral commitments and loyally to support each other.

5. Are you really Anglicans?

Yes. Being Anglican means giving priority to the bible in matters of faith and doctrine; engaging positively with our culture and being faithful to the tradition of the early church. Our concern is that some of our bishops are not giving priority to the scripture nor being faithful to the tradition. We understand ourselves to be in fellowship with over 70% of Anglicans who are in Africa, Asia and Latin America - and the majority of Anglicans world-wide.

6. Are you leaving the Church of England?

No. To a growing series of problems we are seeking a way forward that keeps within the procedures of the Church of England. For instance, there are already many churches and clergy who cannot take oversight from their diocesan bishop because he ordains women – and a solution has been found to hold them within the Church of England. In a very similar way, over a wider range of issues, we are looking for a process by which the required bishop's ministry can be made available.

7. Even if not leaving, are you dividing the Church of England?

No. We believe the very opposite – that this process may prove to be the best hope and maybe even the last hope for preserving unity in the Church of England. We are neither leaving the Church of England nor encouraging others to do so, but rather urging them to stay and to work for a better, more faithful and more confident Church of England.

8. Are you against the very idea of bishops? Are you essentially congregationalist?

No. The very reason for this action is that we believe we need faithful oversight, desire it for the good of our parishes, and are asking for it. We are parish people, ministering to all in the community, not congregational people ministering just to those who come. And it is because we believe in the connectional ministry of parishes around the country under a regional oversight, rather than simply in congregations drawing an eclectic membership, that we are so concerned to be faithful ourselves to this vision.

9. Are you, then, wanting to pick your own bishops?

No. The health of the church depends on a leadership recognised by the church as a whole, not merely by each individual congregation in a free-for-all. That is why we are seeking a way forward that represents a breadth of orthodox sympathies, for those who have deficient oversight that they justifiably cannot accept. The decision to receive oversight should not lie with an individual parish, but with an officially sanctioned solution.

10. Are you advocating unlawful oversight?

In the current position world-wide we are already in a situation of unregulated indiscipline. Our aim is to help prevent the situation getting worse. However, extraordinary times call for out-of-the-ordinary actions to deal with them.

11. Are you urging widespread and uniform action throughout England?

No. Situations vary very greatly around the country, and different conditions call for different responses. The Covenant expresses the teaching and principles which lie behind different local requests for oversight. It will enable individuals and groups to know the assurance of the support of the many in the wider church for the actions that may be appropriate and necessary in particular local situations. It provides a range of

possible actions according to need. It invites those in situations of relative comfort to stand alongside and support those in situations of discomfort.

12. What do you really want?

What is needed in the long term is a solution which recognises the central place of creedal and moral orthodoxy in the Church of England and the need for leaders for mission who affirm this. We want to ensure the continuing life, health and activity of those congregations who cannot recognise the authority of those who do not affirm orthodox Christian teaching.

13. What is the big picture?

The big picture is that there are those in the Church of England who wish to be Windsor Compliant, to recognise fellowship with the Global South and the orthodox in the United States, and to be a faithful part of the Global Anglican Communion. We want to stand alongside the churches of the global Communion with our fellowship, prayer and material support, as well as in partnership in mission.

14. What is your long-term vision for the Church of England?

We want to get on with the job of sharing the reality of the love and life of the risen Jesus with our communities and our nation. In the long term there need to be structural solutions, indeed Church of England solutions to Church of England problems. We do not have in mind all the answers. We are committed to working cooperatively with the regular, legal and synodical processes for ratifying those solutions. But actions now in the right directions to provide temporary emergency arrangements will help us to clarify the long-term requirements that need to be met.

15. What do you see as the steps towards that vision?

Likewise, we do not have a 'road-map' on the way to a reformed and renewed Church of England. In the short term we want temporary emergency arrangements to be able to have new believers baptised and confirmed; their ministers to be selected, trained, ordained and deployed; and to be given wise and biblically faithful guidance by bishops whom we can trust to be faithful to the Bible and the Christian tradition. We want this to be a prelude to an accepted structural solution.

16. Are you trying to take over the Church of England to shape it into your views?

No. The formularies and teaching of the Church of England are orthodox and biblical. We simply desire to be faithful to them and to have oversight from those who are also faithful. This will include a wide range of evangelical, charismatic and Anglo-Catholic churches, congregations and members. We are seeking to be truly evangelical (a church based on the authority of scripture), truly catholic (preserving the unity through word and sacraments of the Anglican Communion across the globe, and in fellowship with other creedally and morally orthodox churches and denominations), and truly liberal (releasing, rather than controlling and stifling mission)

16. Is this at any rate a narrow evangelical take-over bid?

No. On the contrary, as with any healthy democracy, the church also needs a resistance to a one-party leadership. The Church of England in its central decision-making structures is largely in the hands of a liberal leadership. This initiative aims to help the church more truly to reflect the values and variety of both leadership and membership in the parishes. In this we carry the wide support of a diverse spectrum of church leaders.

17. Are you inviting people/churches/organisations to sign up to the Covenant?

No. The covenant is not an opinion poll or a voting petition form. It has been signed by a few in recognised leadership positions of parishes, networks of churches, and central positions of responsibility in this country. There are very many others who have voiced similar concerns to those expressed in the Covenant, both in this country and overseas, and who have indicated their desire to identify with the process, and to associate with us.

19. Are you advocating illegal cross-boundary plants?

No. Innovative, experimental, and even irregular, do not necessarily mean illegal. The Mission-Shaped Church report, wholeheartedly endorsed by General Synod, has already accepted in principle that: "Existing ecclesiastical legal boundaries should be seen as permeable". We believe that the issues concerning mission to the nation are more urgent and important than the issues of ecclesiastical order and structure. Therefore we want to support every congregational outreach, conventional church plant and fresh expression of church that proves effective in reaching sections of the nation at present unreached by traditional methods.

20. Are you attempting to by-pass the normal selection, training and appointments procedures?

No, the present systems are necessary, but are not adequate or sufficient for the challenge of the new mission task. There are already some interesting initiatives being pursued to discern, train and deploy mission leaders in more innovative and experimental mission contexts. We want to nurture and support these alternative tracks towards ordination and appointment.

21. Are you provoking parishes to withhold/set unilaterally/'cap' their parish contributions, or 'quota'?

We believe that parishes should not only take greater responsibility for the self-sustaining support of their own ministry, but should also be encouraged to a greater generosity towards churches, projects and mission initiatives at home and abroad with which they can be in full sympathy. This is already recognised and implemented in many dioceses in this country, and even more widely in the Anglican Communion. A less centralised tax system than that which perpetuates a dependency culture will multiply resources, strengthen partnership, liberate generosity and encourage mission.

22. Are you suggesting an exclusive fellowship only of the like-minded in local areas?

No. However, Christian fellowship must be based on both love and truth, or it is an illusory and unreal association. We rejoice in the fellowship of believers across the cultural, social, ethnic and age groups, and we

are committed to the inclusive, multi-faceted diversity of Christ's body. However, we recognise that our fellowship with believers of other churches, networks and denominations may be more real than an artificial connection with those with whom we have profound differences within our own denomination.

23. Are you paving the way for trans-geographical episcopal jurisdiction in the Church of England, even across provinces?

We are not seeking oversight in this country from overseas, on the model presently being explored in other parts of the world. We will understand those parishes which, in unusual times and circumstances, have no other option. However, we are looking for a Church of England solution to the problems of Church of England oversight. **24. Is women's ordination a central issue being addressed by the Covenant?** No. The signatories of the Covenant vary in their views about this. Of course, many people are concerned that proper provision is made for people of the traditional integrity.

1 Responses. Comments closed for this entry.

1.



mccabe Says:

21 December 2006 at 8:44 am

From the above article:

Item 22.

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Matthew, Chapter 7: 11-23

"11: If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

12: So whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them; for this is the law and the prophets.

13: "Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy, that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many.

14: For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few.

15: "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.

16: You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles?"

17: So, every sound tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears evil fruit.

18: A sound tree cannot bear evil fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit.

19: Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

20: Thus you will know them by their fruits.

21: "Not every one who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

22: On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?'

23: And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers.'"

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