



Anglican Church of Australia

Prima : The Most Reverend Dr Philip L Freier

1 July 2017

To the bishops of the Anglican Church of Australia

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

You will have received correspondence from Archbishop Glenn Davies and Bishop Richard Condie advising of their intention to participate in the consecration of a bishop for Europe in the Anglican Church in North America (ACNA), a church that is not a member of the Anglican Communion and is not in communion with the Anglican Church of Australia. That ordination will by now have taken place. Each of our colleagues, according to their conscience, declares their intended participation to be an act of solidarity 'with those who will act to protect the gospel of Christ' or 'who contend for the faith once for all delivered to the saints' – an issue as to the Fundamental Declarations and Ruling Principles of our National Constitution (ss 1- 6).

As you will have seen from that correspondence, I advised both bishops against this course of action. I take the view that communion – *koinonia*, is a gift of our Lord to his Church and that in our context it is the Anglican Church of Australia, through its constitution and the framework it establishes, that determines how this is expressed in practical terms. As s5 of our National Constitution provides:

Subject to the Fundamental Declarations and the provisions of this chapter [Chapter 2] this Church has plenary authority and power to make canons, ordinances and rules for the order and good government of the Church, and to administer the affairs thereof. Such authority and power may be exercised by the several synods and tribunals in accordance with the provisions of this Constitution.

For reasons explained below, I do not think that it is for us individually, acting independently, to determine with whom we are in communion or to act unilaterally to that end. I do not think that it is for individual dioceses in the Anglican Church of Australia to determine with whom we, as members of that Church, are in communion. We must act in accordance with the Constitution that binds us as the Anglican Church of Australia.

The Anglican Church of Australia is a committed member of the Anglican Communion. Our National Constitution affirms the Communion in s6 which is also part of Chapter 2 and which provides–

This Church will remain and be in communion with the Church of England in England and with churches in communion therewith so long as communion is consistent with the Fundamental Declarations contained in this Constitution.

As you are well aware, the Anglican Church of Australia is a member of the Anglican Communion. That Communion comprises 38 autonomous national and regional Churches plus six Extra Provincial Churches and dioceses, all of which are in Communion - in a reciprocal relationship – with each other and with the Archbishop of Canterbury, who is the Communion's spiritual head.

Each Church makes its own decisions in its own ways, guided by recommendations from the Lambeth Conference, Anglican Consultative Council, the Primates' Meeting and the Archbishop of Canterbury.

The strength of the Anglican Communion today has been the close fellowship, co-operation and collegiality which has continued to flourish despite significant disagreements on certain issues. I have personal experience of the insights that arise and the goodwill that is fostered when we gather around the same table of the Lord.

None of this is to deny the central importance of the Fundamental Declarations contained in the Constitution which are as follows –

1. The Anglican Church of Australia, being a part of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church of Christ, holds the Christian Faith as professed by the Church of Christ from primitive times and in particular as set forth in the creeds known as the Nicene Creed and the Apostles' Creed.
2. This Church receives all the canonical scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as being the ultimate rule and standard of faith given by inspiration of God and containing all things necessary for salvation.
3. This Church will ever obey the commands of Christ, teach His doctrine, administer His sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion, follow and uphold His discipline and preserve the three orders of bishops, priests and deacons in the sacred ministry.

Nor must we overlook the plenary authority of General Synod in this matter. Section 26 of the Constitution provides-

26. Subject to the terms of this Constitution Synod may make canons rules and resolutions relating to the order and good government of this Church including canons in respect of ritual, ceremonial and discipline and make statements as to the faith of this Church and declare its view on any matter affecting this Church or affecting spiritual, moral or social welfare, and may take such steps as may be necessary or expedient in furtherance of union with other Christian communions.

“This Church” is the Anglican Church of Australia: s74(1) of the Constitution. “Synod” is the General Synod of the Church.

The consecration of Canon Lines and the participation of our colleagues raises significant questions how the close fellowship, co-operation and collegiality of the Communion to which I referred above is affected and, just as importantly, how individuals and member dioceses of the Anglican Church of Australia should conduct themselves to live out in accordance with the Constitution the mandated model of a Church in communion with other churches of the Anglican Communion so long as communion is consistent with the Fundamental Declarations contained in the Constitution.

On 8 June 2017, the Synod of the Scottish Episcopal Church, a member of the Anglican Communion, voted on same sex marriage. That day the ACNA announced their decision to proceed with the consecration of Canon Andy Lines ‘to serve clergy and congregations who are outside other Anglican structures in Europe, providing an opportunity for ordination and oversight from a perspective of Biblical orthodoxy.’ Neither the Archbishop of Canterbury (who has responsibility for Europe) nor the Primus of the Scottish Episcopal Church has given their concurrence to the consecration or the proposed Episcopal ministry.

Whilst I appreciate the courtesy of my Episcopal colleagues in seeking my advice, I regret very much that they have decided to act contrary to it. The consecration in the ACNA is not on any view an act in communion with the Anglican Communion and its member churches, particularly the Provinces of the Church of England, the Scottish Episcopal Church and existing jurisdictions in Europe.

Whilst every individual and any diocese may form a view as to whether continued communion is consistent with the Fundamental Declarations, it is for the General Synod of our Church alone to determine such a question.

Our *Consecration of Bishops Canon 1966* mandates the permissible manner of consecration of bishops. It binds all of us as bishops in the Church. It provides expressly for the circumstances of a bishop consecrated to serve in Australia being consecrated in a Church *in communion with* the Anglican Church of Australia in accordance with s6 of the Constitution and stipulates the manner of that consecration. It does not appear to provide expressly as to the current circumstances.

That canon has been said to express the spirit of what was enacted in the canons adopted by the Council of Nicaea (A.D. 325), canons 6, 15 and 16. Canon 6 provides – ‘And this is to be universally understood, that if anyone be made bishop without the consent of the Metropolitan, the great Synod has declared that such a man ought not to be a bishop.’ The ‘Metropolitan’ referred to is that of the jurisdiction where the bishop is to minister. The presumed intent of the canon was to avoid ‘great disturbance and discords’ (c 15). Of course these canons of themselves do not apply as canonical law in Australia.

Upon the understanding I have outlined above of the nature of our national Church and its constituent dioceses bound together as they are by the National Constitution, I have deep concerns that the participation by our Episcopal colleagues in the consecration of Canon Lines, with or without the support of their respective dioceses, is contrary to the spirit of the canons of the Council of Nicaea and, most importantly, outside of the authority of our National Constitution. It may also be outside the authority of the *Consecration of Bishops Canon, 1966* of the Anglican Church of Australia.

As we respond to these developments let us resolve to uphold each other in mutual prayer and to do all we can to strengthen the *koinonia* we share as bishops of the Anglican Church of Australia.

Grace and peace in Christ Jesus

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Philip Melbourne". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'P'.

The Most Reverend Dr Philip L Freier
Archbishop of Melbourne & Primate of the Anglican Church of Australia