

GAFCON IV – The Kigali Commitment

[Christ] is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. Colossians 1:18

Greetings from Kigali, Rwanda, where the fourth Global Anglican Future Conference (GAFCON) met from 17-21 April 2023, bringing together 1,302 delegates from 52 countries, including 315 bishops, 456 other clergy and 531 laity.

We were grateful for the extraordinary hospitality extended by Archbishop Laurent Mbanda and the Anglican Church of Rwanda. We were deeply saddened to hear the news of the loss of Laurent and Chantal's son Edwin, and we continue to offer our prayers of comfort for the Mbanda family.

We were also privileged to be welcomed and addressed by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Rwanda, the Right Honourable Edouard Ngirente who spoke of the significance of our gathering.

Our conference theme for 2023 'To Whom Shall We Go?' (John 6:68), along with our Bible studies in the Letter to the Colossians, focused our attention on Jesus, the one in whom all the fullness of God dwells in bodily form, the Lord of all creation and the head of his body, the church (Colossians 1:15-19; 2:9).

Our Chairman in his opening address encouraged us to be a repenting church, a reconciling church, a reproducing church and a relentlessly compassionate church. This is the church we want to be.

We were reminded that the purpose and mission of the church is to make known to a lost world the glorious riches of the gospel by proclaiming Christ crucified and risen, and living faithfully together as his disciples.

Our Fellowship Together

We gave thanks for God's goodness and faithfulness to the Gafcon movement since its inception in 2008, as we rejoiced in a new generation of emerging leaders. It is God who unites us to himself and to one another in the power of his Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13). From the diversity of our different backgrounds and cultures we delighted in our unity in Christ and the love that we share.

Many among us are from contexts of persecution or conflict and we know that as one part of the body suffers, we all suffer. Some were unable to attend the conference because of this. We prayed for our brothers and sisters in Sudan, and for the suffering church. We also heard testimony of the power of the gospel to transform lives even in these circumstances through the prayer, kindness and compassion of Christians.

The Authority of God's Word

The current divisions in the Anglican Communion have been caused by radical departures from the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Some within the Communion have been taken captive by hollow and deceptive philosophies of this world (Colossians 2:8). Such a failure to hear and heed God's Word undermines the mission of the church as a whole.

The Bible is God's Word written, breathed out by God as it was written by his faithful messengers (2 Timothy 3:16). It carries God's own authority, is its own interpreter, and it does not need to be supplemented, nor can it ever be overturned by human wisdom.

God's good Word is the rule of our lives as disciples of Jesus and is the final authority in the church.

It grounds, energises and directs our mission in the world. The fellowship we enjoy with our risen and ascended Lord is nourished as we trust God's Word, obey it and encourage each other to allow it to shape each area of our lives.

This fellowship is broken when we turn aside from God's Word or attempt to reinterpret it in any way that overturns the plain reading of the text in its canonical context and so deny its truthfulness, clarity, sufficiency, and thereby its authority (Jerusalem Declaration #2).

The Current Crisis in the Anglican Communion

Despite 25 years of persistent warnings by most Anglican Primates, repeated departures from the authority of God's Word have torn the fabric of the Communion. These warnings were blatantly and deliberately disregarded and now without repentance this tear cannot be mended.

The latest of these departures is the majority vote by the General Synod of the Church of England in February 2023 to welcome proposals by the bishops to enable same-sex couples to receive God's blessing. It grieves the Holy Spirit and us that the leadership of the Church of England is determined to bless sin.

Since the Lord does not bless same-sex unions, it is pastorally deceptive and blasphemous to craft prayers that invoke blessing in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Any refusal to follow the biblical teaching that the only appropriate context for sexual activity is the exclusive lifelong union of a man and a woman in marriage violates the created order (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:4–6) and endangers salvation (1 Corinthians 6:9).

Public statements by the Archbishop of Canterbury and other leaders of the Church of England in support of same-sex blessings are a betrayal of their ordination and consecration vows to banish error and to uphold and defend the truth taught in Scripture.

These statements are also a repudiation of Resolution I.10 of the 1998 Lambeth Conference, which declared that 'homosexual practice is incompatible with Scripture,' and advised against the 'legitimising or blessing of same sex unions'. This occurred despite the Archbishop of Canterbury having affirmed that 'the validity of the resolution passed at the Lambeth Conference 1998, I.10 is not in doubt and that whole resolution is still in existence'.

The 2022 Lambeth Conference demonstrated the deep divisions in the Anglican Communion as many bishops chose not to attend and some of those who did withdrew from sharing at the Lord's table.

The Failure of the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Other Instruments of Communion

We have no confidence that the Archbishop of Canterbury nor the other Instruments of Communion led by him (the Lambeth Conference, the Anglican Consultative Council and the Primates' Meetings) are able to provide a godly way forward that will be acceptable to those who are committed to the truthfulness, clarity, sufficiency and authority of Scripture. The Instruments of Communion have failed to maintain true communion based on the Word of God and shared faith in Christ.

All four Instruments propose that the way ahead for the Anglican Communion is to learn to walk together in 'good disagreement'. However we reject the claim that two contradictory positions can both be valid in matters affecting salvation. We cannot 'walk together' in good disagreement with those who have deliberately chosen to walk away from the 'faith once for all delivered to the saints' (Jude 3). The people of

God 'walk in his ways', 'walk in the truth', and 'walk in the light', all of which require that we do not walk in Christian fellowship with those in darkness (Deuteronomy 8:6; 2 John 4; 1 John 1:7).

Successive Archbishops of Canterbury have failed to guard the faith by inviting bishops to Lambeth who have embraced or promoted practices contrary to Scripture. This failure of church discipline has been compounded by the current Archbishop of Canterbury who has himself welcomed the provision of liturgical resources to bless these practices contrary to Scripture. This renders his leadership role in the Anglican Communion entirely indefensible.

Call for Repentance

Repentance defines and shapes the Christian life and the life of the church. Each day at the Conference, in response to God's Word in Colossians, we were led in a time of repentance.

Recognising our own sins, and in humility as forgiven sinners, we pray that those who have denied the orthodox Christian faith in word or deed would repent and return to the Lord (Jerusalem Declaration #13).

Since those who teach will be judged more strictly (James 3:1), we call upon those provinces, dioceses and leaders who have departed from biblical orthodoxy to repent of their failure to uphold the Bible's teaching. This includes matters such as human sexuality and marriage, the uniqueness and divinity of Christ, his bodily resurrection, his promised return, the summons to faith and repentance and the final judgment.

We long for this repentance but until they repent, our communion with them remains broken.

We consider that those who refuse to repent have abdicated their right to leadership within the Anglican Communion, and we commit ourselves to working with orthodox Primates and other leaders to reset the Communion on its biblical foundations.

Support for Faithful Anglicans

Since the inception of Gafcon, it has been necessary for the Gafcon Primates to recognise new orthodox jurisdictions for faithful Anglicans, such as the Anglican Church in North America (ACNA), the Anglican Church in Brazil, the Anglican Network in Europe (ANiE), the Church of Confessing Anglicans Aotearoa New Zealand, and the Diocese of the Southern Cross. We encourage the Gafcon Primates to continue to provide such safe harbour for faithful Anglicans.

In view of the current crisis, we reiterate our support for those who are unable to remain in the Church of England because of the failure of its leadership. We rejoice in the growth of the ANiE and other Gafcon-aligned networks.

We also continue to stand with and pray for those faithful Anglicans who remain within the Church of England. We support their efforts to uphold biblical orthodoxy and to resist breaches of Resolution I.10.

Appropriate Pastoral Care

Aware of our own sin and frailty, we commit ourselves to providing appropriate pastoral care to all people in our churches. This is all the more necessary in the current context of sexual and gender confusion, made worse by its deliberate and systematic promotion across the world.

Appropriate pastoral care affirms faithfulness in marriage and abstinence in singleness. It is not appropriate pastoral care to mislead people, by pretending that God blesses sexually active relationships between two

people of the same sex. This is unloving as it leads them into error and places a stumbling block in the way of their inheriting the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

We affirm that every person is loved by God and we are determined to love as God loves. As Resolution I.10 affirms, we oppose the vilification or demeaning of any person including those who do not follow God's ways, since all human beings are created in God's image.

We are thankful to God for all those who seek to live a life of faithfulness to God's Word in the face of all forms of sexual temptation.

We pledge ourselves afresh to support and care for one another in a loving and pastorally sensitive way as members of Christ's body, building one another up in the Word and in the Spirit, and encouraging each other to experience God's transforming power as we walk by faith in the path of repentance and obedience that leads to fullness of life.

Resetting the Communion

We were delighted to be joined in Kigali by leaders of the Global South Fellowship of Anglican Churches (GSFA) and to host a combined Gafcon-GSFA Primates meeting. Together, these Primates represent the overwhelming majority (estimated at 85%) of Anglicans worldwide.

The leadership of both groups affirmed and celebrated their complementary roles in the Anglican Communion. Gafcon is a movement focused on evangelism and mission, church planting and providing support and a home for faithful Anglicans who are pressured by or alienated from revisionist dioceses and provinces. GSFA, on the other hand, is focused on establishing doctrinally based structures within the Communion.

We rejoice in the united commitment of both groups on three fundamentals: the lordship of Jesus Christ; the authority and clarity of the Word of God; and the priority of the church's mission to the world. We acknowledge their agreement that 'communion' between churches and Christians must be based on doctrine (Jerusalem Declaration #13; GSFA Covenant 2.1.6). Anglican identity is defined by this and not by recognition from the See of Canterbury.

Both GSFA and Gafcon Primates share the view that, due to the departures from orthodoxy articulated above, they can no longer recognise the Archbishop of Canterbury as an Instrument of Communion, the 'first among equals' of the Primates. The Church of England has chosen to impair her relationship with the orthodox provinces in the Communion.

We welcome the GSFA's Ash Wednesday Statement of 20 February 2023, calling for a resetting and reordering of the Communion. We applaud the invitation of the GSFA Primates to collaborate with Gafcon and other orthodox Anglican groupings to work out the shape and nature of our common life together and how we are to maintain the priority of proclaiming the gospel and making disciples of all nations.

Resetting the Communion is an urgent matter. It needs an adequate and robust foundation that addresses the legal and constitutional complexities in various Provinces. The goal is that orthodox Anglicans worldwide will have a clear identity, a global 'spiritual home' of which they can be proud, and a strong leadership structure that gives them stability and direction as Global Anglicans. We therefore commit to pray that God will guide this process of resetting, and that Gafcon and GSFA will keep in step with the Spirit.

Our Future Together

As we considered the future of our movement we welcomed the following seven priorities articulated by the General Secretary and endorsed by the Gafcon Primates.

We will engage in a **decade of discipleship, evangelism and mission (2023-2033)**.

We will devote ourselves to raising up the **next generation of leaders** in Gafcon through Bible-based theological education that will equip them to be Christ-centred and servant-hearted.

We will prioritise **youth and children's ministry** that instructs them in the Word of the Lord, disciples them to maturity in Christ and equips them for a lifetime of Christian service.

We will affirm and encourage the vital and diverse ministries, including leadership roles, of **Gafcon women** in family, church and society, both as individuals and as groups.

We will demonstrate the compassion of Christ through the many **Gafcon mercy ministries**.

We will resource and support **bishops' training** that produces faithful, courageous, servant leaders.

We will build the bonds of fellowship and mutual edification through **interprovincial visits of our Primates**.

Arising from our conference we encouraged the Primates Council also to prioritise discipleship for boys and men.

In order to pursue these priorities and to grow the work of the Gafcon movement, we endorsed the establishment of a foundation endowment. We also encouraged the Gafcon provinces to become financially self-sufficient, not only to advance mission but also to avoid being vulnerable to economic manipulation.

Most importantly of all, we commit ourselves afresh to the gospel mission of proclaiming the crucified, risen and ascended Christ, calling on all to acknowledge him as Lord in repentance and faith, and living out a joyful, faithful obedience to his Word in all areas of our lives. We will explore fresh ways to encourage each other, to pray for one another and to hold each other accountable in these things.

We commit ourselves into the hands of our almighty and loving heavenly Father with confidence that he will fulfil all his promises and, even through a time of pruning, Christ will build his church.

'To whom shall we go?'

We go to Christ who alone has the words of eternal life (John 6:68)
and then we go with Christ to the whole world. Amen

Kigali, Rwanda 21 April 2023