

What is Gafcon – Russell Powell

I do sympathise with you this afternoon sitting there on those chairs! Please stay with us this afternoon because I think what Phillip has to say next is extremely important. While I have sympathised with you, I will give you an opportunity to sympathise with me. What we will spend two and a half hours listening to this afternoon is what I have two minutes to brief journalists on, and what the archbishop has 20 seconds to comment on in the media. Not an easy task.

My purpose over the next couple of minutes is to unfold some of the aims of the Global Anglican Future Conference and then some of the detail. The speakers before me have set the scene in which it takes place. The organisers, including Archbishop Jensen have been meeting this week in England. In their preparations they have restated the goals of the conference that will be useful if I mention here.

The Goals are –

1. Provide an opportunity for fellowship, to continue to experience and proclaim the transforming love of Christ.
2. Develop a renewed understanding of our identity as Anglican Christians within our current context.
3. Prepare for an Anglican future in which the Gospel is un-compromised and Christ-centred mission a top priority.

The idea for such a conference came out of a meeting of Primates and Bishops in Nairobi in December. The event was not designed to be an alternative Lambeth – if you had wanted to do that you would have put it on at the same time as Lambeth. It was always envisioned that there would be people who could go to both. But Gafcon is for a different purpose – it is to look to the future – the idea that we have spent so much time discussing internal divisions we are failing to look and prepare for mission into the next few decades. Of course, there was a recognition that the future would be like the recent past - that Anglican Christians world-wide would increasingly be pressured to depart from biblical standards. There was a clear need for many to draw together to strengthen each other over the issue of biblical authority and interpretation and gospel mission.

It was considered that Jerusalem was the place for such a fellowship opportunity. That the historic nature of our faith would be clearly symbolised by drawing together there. Consultations have been wide – although you must realise the magnitude of the task before the organisers – to draw together these groups across cultural and geographic and communication barriers. It has been a massive effort, and a massive effort is still before us.

Let me outline who is involved in the leadership of this – the leadership team is

Archbishop Peter Akinola (Nigeria)

Archbishop Henry Orombi (Uganda)
Archbishop Emmanuel Kolini (Rwanda)
Archbishop Benjamin Nzimbi (Kenya)
Archbishop Donald Mtetemela (Tanzania)
Archbishop Greg Venables (Southern Cone)
Archbishop Peter Jensen (Sydney)
Archbishop Nicholas Okoh (Nigeria)
Bishop Bob Duncan (Moderator Bishop of Common Cause, North America)
Bishop Martyn Minns (Convocation of Anglicans in North America)
Bishop Don Harvey (Canada)
Bishop Bill Atwood (Kenya)
Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali (England)
Bishop Wallace Benn (England)
Canon Vinay Samuel - Oxford (India and England)
Canon Chris Sugden who heads the Communications team.

I am involved in the Media team as are the media liaison officers of some of the leaders I have just mentioned. It did take some time to finalise dates and organise accommodation – that is to be expected – but those arrangements are now in place and registration has begun.

The gathering will be in two parts – there will be a consultation in Jordan from 18-22 June will include the conference leadership, theological resource group, those bishops serving in majority Islamic settings and other key leaders. The Archbishop and Dr Mark Thompson will be in attendance there. The rest of the contingent will join in the Jerusalem pilgrimage, which will focus on worship, prayer, discussions and Bible Study. That will be June 22nd through to the 29th. It is anticipated that there may be up to 1,000 people in attendance. Of course this differs from Lambeth in that both clergy and key lay leaders will be involved but in Lambeth only Bishops are involved. If you want to talk in terms of numbers, it is a rough guide to say that the leaders involved in Gafcon – although around 25 percent of the number of bishops represent about 75 percent of the Anglican Communion. It is anticipated there will be 250 bishops and their wives, and 500 clergy and lay.

Attendance at Gafcon is by invitation only. Each leader is responsible for invitations in their area and our Archbishop is responsible for 50 invitations in Australia and 10 in New Zealand.

The clergy and lay invitees will be from a variety of backgrounds, including church planters, those who have taken mission initiatives, those involved in poverty work and those involved in theological education. It is anticipated these will be key people and many will be the next generation of leaders. There are various task groups preparing the ground for GAFCON. Our Archbishop is involved and the planning and preparation is well advanced.

The latest word from the archbishop and the leaders is and I quote “We are confident that our time together in the Holy Land will be one of great blessing for the wider Christian community, a positive witness of Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour and anticipation of our future as Anglican Christians.” We pray that will be so.