

A Response to the Proposed Anglican Covenant From the Diocese of Oklahoma

“This life is revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us – we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have communion with us; and truly our communion is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. These things we write so that our joy may be complete.”

(1 John 1.2-4)

We commend the Anglican Covenant Design Group which gave its heart and mind to the task of creating the proposed Anglican Covenant which is now before us. Their best effort to articulate an organizational structure that can help us negotiate our way as international partners in Christ is deeply appreciated; and we affirm with them the aspiration to experience a foretaste of the fullness of joy that inspired the writer of First John.

To covenant together is not intended to change the character of this Anglican expression of Christian faith. Rather, we recognise the importance of renewing in a solemn way our commitment to one another, and to the common understanding of faith and order we have received, so that the bonds of affection which hold us together may be re-affirmed and intensified. We do this in order to reflect, in our relations with one another, God’s own faithfulness and promises towards us in Christ.¹

We recognize that many of our sisters and brothers in Christ were offended by some of the decisions that our Church made with faithful intentions. We also recognize that the differing perspectives within our Communion have fractured the bonds of affection within our Communion and precipitated the creation of this document. We regret that the emotional climate created by our fractured relationships influences the way in which this document is interpreted. We believe the issues are more spiritual and relational than structural and contractual. Indeed, without the drive for conformity, a covenantal structure would not have been proposed.

We are grateful for the document’s use of scripture to benchmark its theological development and we acknowledge that the proposed structure of the Covenant “is not intended to change the character of [the] Anglican expression of Christian faith.”

We must report, however, that the consensus opinion of those who participated in the conversations focused on discerning the Spirit’s guidance for our Diocese and its relationship within the Anglican Communion believe that the proposed Covenant does in fact change the nature and the character of the Anglican Communion as we have known it. Therefore, speaking the truth in love, we must express our desire to withhold our consent in this final consideration of the proposed Covenant. We encourage a renewed focus on our common worship and mission in the Anglican Communion as an expression of the Body of Christ in the world today.

Section 1

We receive with reverence the faith willed to us by the saints, the Holy Scriptures, Creeds, sacraments, historic episcopate, and mission.² We affirm the primacy of Scripture in the theological enterprise and plead with the Holy Spirit to give us faithful eyes, ears, and hearts so

¹ Introduction to the Covenant Text, #5

² Response to Section 1.1

that we may faithfully interpret this revelation so that we may love what God loves. We are grateful that the Covenant embraces the interpretive discipline as one that “continues to illuminate and transform the Church and its members, and through them, individuals and societies.”³

Section 2

We can embrace the call to mission that the Covenant outlines. We recognize in its invitation “the need which all Christians continually have to renew their repentance and faith.”⁴ We also affirm the ecumenical awareness that we bring to our mission. We pray, along with our Lord, for unity among the faithful.⁵ Therefore, we embrace our vocation as Anglican Christians to pursue, by our best efforts, the visible unity of Christ’s Church.⁶ We welcome in Section 2.2 as a helpful expression of our Baptismal Covenant.

Section 3

We declare our desire to live as a constituent partner within the Anglican Communion and feel compelled to emphasize that “Churches of the Anglican Communion are bound together ‘not by a central legislative and executive authority, but by mutual loyalty sustained through the common counsel of the bishops in conference...’”.⁷

We acknowledge the unique ministry of those called into episcopacy as it is described in Section 3. 1.3 and we afford the Archbishop of Canterbury the status and respect as first among equals.⁸ We are aware that the role and authority of bishops in the Anglican Communion vary from Church to Church which complicates the process. We experience some discomfort with the degree of authority that the proposed Covenant ascribes to episcopal leadership. Three of the four Instruments are exclusively episcopal in nature. We experience the weight of this authority as being alien to our understanding of the Church and how we discern the work of the Holy Spirit. We believe that it is important for us to draw attention to the fact that the composition of the Anglican Consultative Council resembles the way we govern our province, our dioceses, and our parishes.

Section 3.2

We understand this section to be descriptive of the natural tension that exists within any human community that tries to negotiate its way between the forces of independence and interdependence. We reaffirm our desire remain as partners in the Gospel and constituent members of the Anglican Communion. It is also important for us to say that we find nothing disagreeable, in principle, about using mediation to resolve conflict.⁹ However, in truth there will always be differences of understanding and practice among the many Provinces of the Anglican Communion. The differences come from a variety of sources such as interpretations of Holy

³ Section 1.2.5

⁴ Ash Wednesday Liturgy: BCP, 265

⁵ John 17:11

⁶ Section 2.1

⁷ Section 3.1.2 quotes a statement from the Lambeth Conference 1930

⁸ Section 3.1.4, I

⁹ Section 3.2.6

Scripture, ecclesiastical polity and cultural diversity. Our bonds of affection assist us in transcending the differences to experience unity in Christ.

Section 4

Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.

(Galatians 3:23-29)

Our sad divisions notwithstanding, we believe that we are heirs of the promise. We believe, however imperfectly, that the fellowship and structure of the Anglican Communion strives to live in the promise to which the apostle Paul refers. The bonds of our affection, which are presently stressed, are in fact the love that Paul spoke about in First Corinthians.¹⁰

We recall a time when we lived somewhat more comfortably with differences in the practice of ministry, a time when we were not under pressure to seek comfort under a disciplinary process. Being heirs of the promise, we are not looking for a disciplinarian whose purpose is to discern "relational consequences."¹¹ We find joy in the content of Section 2 because it reflects the Communion's life and purpose, and we reaffirm our desire to be partners in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, embracing a shared mission, common prayer, and our Anglican heritage

While we appreciate the best intentions and efforts of the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Anglican Covenant Design Group as well as the conversations that have taken place around the world, we have found minimal support within our Diocese for the changes proposed in the Anglican Covenant. We are willing to wait and pray and trust in God that reconciliation will be achieved in due time.

¹⁰ 1 Corinthians 13

¹¹ Section 4.2.7