

The Proposed Anglican Covenant:  
3. Biblical Perspectives on Communion and Church Unity

The purpose of this session is to explore the biblical witness to the nature of communion and unity in the church, and to consider how this witness might inform our consideration of the proposed Anglican covenant.

- Mt 5.1-7.27 (see also Lk 6.17-7.49)
  - How might the Sermon on the Mount (and the Beatitudes in particular) bear witness to the unity and the conduct of the people of God?
  - Several passages in the Sermon on the Mount address the experience of conflict (e.g., Mt 5.21-5.24, 5.43-5.48, 7.1-7.5, 7.12); how might these passages inform disagreements and division in the church?
- Jn 13.3-17
  - How might washing one another's feet (Jn 13.14) contribute to the "share" we have in Jesus (Jn 13.8)?
  - Compare Jn 13.3-17 with Lk 22.24-27: how might the example of Jesus provide us with a perspective for resolving disputes and disagreements?
- Jn 17
  - Jesus prays for his disciples and for those who would believe in him on the basis of their testimony, expecting that their unity would testify to the relationship he shared with his Father. How does this inform your understanding of the unity of the church?
  - What does it mean to be "sanctified in truth" (Jn 13.17-19)?
- Act 2.41-47
  - What are the various ways this passage describes the life and practice of the church, and how are these related to the coming of the Spirit? Which of these various ways might be especially relevant for today's church?
- Rom 14.1-15.7
  - How might Paul's recommendations regarding welcoming those "weak in the faith" and not "quarreling over opinions" (Rom 14.1) inform the experience of today's church?
  - Paul makes considerable room for the freedom of individual conscience in the life of the community (Rom 14.5-6, 14.10). How does he suggest the exercise of this freedom should inform the unity of the community, and how might this inform today's church?

- 1 Cor 1.10-17, 3.1-17
  - Why does Paul suggest that divisions in the church are inconsistent with the gospel?
  - If “jealousy and quarreling” is a sign of immaturity in the life of faith (1 Cor 3.3-4), how are we to discern the mind of the Spirit in the midst of disagreement?
- 1 Cor 8.1-13
  - What is the difference between faith grounded in the kind of “knowledge” Paul describes in 1 Cor 8.1-2 and faith grounded in the kind of “love” Paul describes?
  - How might Paul’s willingness to forswear his own freedom (1 Cor 8.13) serve as a model for today’s church?
- 1 Cor 12.12-26
  - How might Paul’s account of the diversity in unity of the body of Christ inform our reflection on the diversity in unity of today’s church?
  - How might Paul’s account of the indispensability of the “weaker” and “less honorable” members of the body of Christ (1 Cor 12.22-24a) inform our reflection on the unity of today’s church?
- Other possible resources
  - Gal 5.13-6.10
  - Eph 4.1-16, 4.25-5.2
  - Phil 2.1-11
  - Col 3.12-17
  - Titus 3.8-11
  - James 4.1-12
- Questions for Discussion
  - Which of the passages listed above is most useful for you as a resource for thinking about the unity of the church and the exercise of communion in the body of Christ? Why? Which of these passages presents the most challenge to you?
  - One of the recurrent themes in the passages listed above has to do with the relationship between the freedom of the conscience, the exercise of liberty, and mutual responsibility. How might the way the biblical authors engage these issues inform the experience of today’s church?