



ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY

To Primates of the Anglican Communion
Moderators of the United Churches

29 November 2011

My dear friends,

Greetings to you all in the Name of Jesus, who was, who is and who is to come.

1. This year has offered the opportunity of a number of visits to churches in Africa; and I can truthfully say that each of those visits has in its own way been an enormous gift and privilege. In June, I spent some time in Kenya and in Eastern Congo (DRC). The vitality of the Church in Kenya was deeply impressive. It has one of the best provincial structures I know for its work in holistic mission – evangelism and development work going hand in hand. And in Archbishop Eliud it has a leader whose courage and integrity have made him a figure of great national importance in a time when the country badly needs such public servants. In Congo, I was profoundly moved to see what this relatively small but intensely committed Church was doing, with visionary encouragement from Archbishop Isingoma, to rehabilitate those who had suffered appallingly in the long drawn out war in the country – especially women and young people.
2. Later in the year, I was able to visit the Province of Central Africa – and for part of the journey, this was in the company of the Archbishops of Tanzania and Southern Africa, as well as the Archbishop of the Province. To be able to travel with three brother primates was a great joy, and I hope this is a pattern that can be repeated. In our visit to Zimbabwe, it was of huge significance to have the Communion represented not just by the Archbishop of Canterbury but by the leaders of neighbouring churches who were prepared to give their strong support to their brothers and sisters who have suffered such appalling harassment and abuse in recent years. With great courage, Archbishop Albert is pulling together the witness of the Church in Central Africa in all kinds of effective ways, and our fellow-Anglicans throughout the Province are rising to all sorts of challenges with fresh energy. It was a moving experience to join in the celebration of 150 years of Anglican presence in Malawi, and to remember how the first Anglican missionaries had fought so valiantly against the slave trade. And in Zambia again we saw a Church manifestly close to the heart of a whole nation, growing in numbers and in eagerness for training and development.
3. Although this year has allowed only a short visit to the Middle East, the challenges of that region have been much in my mind, as, I'm sure, in everyone's. It is crucial at this time that we keep in the forefront of our minds the needs of all Christian communities in the region. President Bishop Mouneer has kept us regularly informed of the great challenges facing Christians in Egypt. I shall be leading a debate in the British House of Lords on the situation

of Christians in the Middle East in December. Please pray for a good outcome for this and other initiatives – and also for our brothers and sisters in the Holy Land, still suffering from the absence of peace, the threats of terror and the pressures of occupation and regional instability. A major international conference here at Lambeth this last July encouraged support for the ecumenical Friends of the Holy Land organization, which seeks to create more opportunities for young people in the Christian communities of the Holy Land, and I hope many will, through this and other bodies, give all the support they can to those who live with these daily trials.

4. We have been very keenly aware of the great challenges and opportunities involved in the birth of the new nation of South Sudan. The Church there has had a crucial role in encouraging and overseeing a democratic and peaceful referendum process and continuing to work for a just and sustainable future. Many in Sudan, both north and south, have suffered from renewed violence in border regions, and we must, as a Communion, keep alert to these challenges and make sure that our brothers and sisters in the Republic of the Sudan are properly supported, not least by advocacy with our own governments where possible and appropriate. The same applies to our fellow-Anglicans and all our fellow-Christians in Nigeria, where fresh conflict has broken out and there is much suffering. And the vulnerability of Christians and other minorities in Pakistan remains a matter of deep concern; I have been grateful for the chance to speak with representatives of our church and other churches there, and also with members of the Pakistani Government about these matters.
5. The new Anglican Alliance for development, relief and advocacy has made an exceptionally good start to its work, thanks to the labours of staff at Lambeth and the Anglican Communion Office and the global Steering Committee, the enthusiasm of regional bodies such as CAPA and a variety of local and international Anglican development agencies and networks – and above all the dynamic leadership of Sally Keeble as Director. Four regional consultations have been held, which have involved people from Africa, the Pacific, Asia and Latin America in a variety of ways and have drawn in practically all the Provinces of the Communion. There has been strong convergence around priorities – environmental protection, economic empowerment, peace and reconciliation. The Alliance has helped us share good practice across the Communion, and has – to refer back again to the example of Kenya – helped us see more clearly what ‘holistic mission’ means in action. Conferences in Nairobi and London on the food crisis in the Horn of Africa have shown the importance of Anglicans speaking with one voice on issues of poverty and injustice. I am deeply grateful to all who have helped to fund this initiative and all who have joined so effectively in the work. It is one of the true signs of hope for the Communion that we are capable of meeting and working together in this way for the sake of a gospel that is good news for both the material and the spiritual life of human beings, a true witness to the new creation in Christ.
6. Along with such signs of hope, the Communion still lives with numerous tensions. A number of Primates felt unable in conscience to attend the Primates’ Meeting in Dublin early in the year. However, two-thirds of the Primates were present to pray and take counsel together. In addition to a number of strong statements in defence of various Christian communities in situations of suffering and stress, and a very clear commitment to work together on issues of gender-based violence, the meeting produced a carefully considered statement on what those present believed was the proper role of a Primates’ gathering; and it was clear in the discussion that the position and powers of the Primate were very different in different Provinces. These differences affect opinions over the sort of powers a Primates’ Meeting could and should have. They still need more careful and dispassionate discussion, and a sustained willingness on the part of all Provinces to understand the different ways in which each local part of the Anglican family organizes its life.

7. This of course relates also to the continuing discussion of the Anglican Covenant. How it is discussed, the timescale of discussion and the means by which decisions are reached will vary a lot from Province to Province. We hope to see a full report of progress at next year's Anglican Consultative Council (ACC) meeting. In spite of many assurances, some Anglicans evidently still think that the Covenant changes the structure of our Communion or that it gives some sort of absolute power of 'excommunication' to some undemocratic or unrepresentative body. With all respect to those who have raised these concerns, I must repeat that I do not see the Covenant in this light at all. It sets out an understanding of our common life and common faith and in the light of that proposes making a mutual promise to consult and attend to each other, freely undertaken. It recognizes that *not* doing this damages our relations profoundly. It outlines a procedure, such as we urgently need, for attempting reconciliation and for indicating the sorts of consequences that might result from a failure to be fully reconciled. It alters no Province's constitution, as it has no canonical force independent of the life of the Provinces. It does not create some unaccountable and remote new authority but seeks to identify a representative group that might exercise a crucial advisory function. I continue to ask what alternatives there are if we want to agree on ways of limiting damage, managing conflict and facing with honesty the actual effects of greater disunity. In the absence of such alternatives, I must continue to commend the Covenant as strongly as I can to all who are considering its future.
8. These questions are made all the more sharp by the fact that the repeated requests for moratoria on problematic actions issued by various representative Anglican bodies are increasingly ignored. Strong conscientious convictions are involved here. No-one, I believe, acts out of a desire to deepen disunity; some believe that certain matters are more important than what they think of as a superficial unity. But the effects are often to deepen mutual mistrust, and this must surely be bad for our mission together as Anglicans, and alongside other Christians as well. The question remains: if the moratoria are ignored and the Covenant suspected, what are the means by which we maintain some theological coherence as a Communion and some personal respect and understanding as a fellowship of people seeking to serve Christ? And we should bear in mind that our coherence as a Communion is also a significant concern in relation to other Christian bodies – especially at a moment when the renewed dialogues with Roman Catholics and Orthodox have begun with great enthusiasm and a very constructive spirit.
9. Such questions are very appropriate for the Advent season. In these weeks before Christmas, we Christians all have to acknowledge that in many ways we still live as if Christ had not come. We recognize the marks of the old habits in our lives; the 'works of darkness' that the Collect speaks of. We pray that the new light of Jesus may rise in our hearts. In other words, we as believers acknowledge that we are all of us, whatever ecclesiastical communion we live in, still on the way to being truly and fully the Church here and now in history, a place fully inhabited or indwelt by Christ through his Spirit. The gift of life in Christ is given us in baptism, and the reality of Christ's Body is at work in our life together; nothing can cancel out that supreme privilege. Yet we have to pray continually to be made more truly the Church by being set free to receive more of Christ, more of the gifting of the Spirit. As St Augustine wrote in his treatise on baptism, if we were a perfect Church, we should no longer need to pray the Lord's Prayer, asking for the Kingdom to come and for our sins to be forgiven.
10. This year has been the anniversary of the great 1611 Bible, the King James or 'Authorized' Version, and in the UK we have had a large number of very powerful and imaginative celebrations of this. It has focused for me yet again the question of what a Church looks like that is authentically *biblical*. It is clear enough that Christian communities that are vague or lukewarm about the unique miracle of the Word made flesh once and for all in Jesus of

Nazareth, and about the revolutionary demands this makes on individual lives and relationships, are imperfectly biblical churches. But we should remember too that Christian communities which consistently believe the worst of others who bear the name of Christ and attack or undermine them are also very imperfectly biblical. Our shared willingness to give thanks to God together for the inexpressible gift of the Word made flesh once and for all is the real foundation of a biblical church life, turning our attention away from ourselves towards our gracious Lord.

11. The overwhelming majority of Anglicans in every continent seem instinctively to understand this – not least the younger generation of Anglicans. But we can all recognize situations where one or other of these tendencies comes through. Throughout the time of my service as Archbishop I have tried to keep before my own eyes and those of the Communion the warnings given by St Paul about the risks of saying ‘I have no need of you’ to any other who seeks to serve Jesus Christ as a member of His Body. I make no apology for repeating this point. Advent is a good time to recall that we all live in imperfect churches, that we all must draw together in hope for the fuller presence of Our Lord, and that we all therefore must be willing to receive from each other whatever gifts God has to give through them.
12. The experience especially of visiting a Church that felt isolated and exposed in Zimbabwe reinforced powerfully for me the need to stand together with one another. When Archbishop Thabo from Southern Africa announced to the thousands who gathered in Harare for worship that ‘what touches you touches us’, he was giving voice to this. *This* is why the Communion matters – why it matters for a bishop in Jerusalem facing the withdrawal of a residency permit (a problem now resolved, thanks be to God), a congregation in Nigeria facing more interreligious violence, an island in the Pacific facing inundation because of climate change, an urban community in Britain wondering how to respond to rising social disorder as poverty and unemployment increase. The Communion is a gift not a problem to all such people and many more. Only in such a mutually supportive family, glorifying and praising God in Christ together, can we truly make known the one Christ.
13. Next year at the ACC I hope we shall be able to talk about all these things with candour and generosity. We are due to receive a report on the very significant project on ‘The Bible in the Life of the Church’ – very relevant to what I have just been mentioning. We shall also, I hope, take up the issues noted by the Primates around gender-based violence. We shall have a chance to give serious attention to the environmental crisis that is menacing the lives and livelihood of many in South Asia and the Pacific, in Latin America and Africa. And – responding to work done by the World Council of Churches – we shall be able to reflect in greater depth about our commitment to evangelism and conversion in a diverse world, about the challenges of being faithful to this calling and the variety of ways in which we have learned to respond to it. Above all, I hope that we shall bring with us to every Anglican gathering that longing to encounter the truth of Jesus Christ more and more fully day by day which we call to mind afresh in Advent – ‘that when He shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal.’

I wish you every blessing in the celebration of the Lord’s First Coming; may you know the joy of His presence and His promise in all things.

With love in the Lord Jesus,

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