



In a historic meeting, Anglican Communion Primates from around the world have attended an audience with Pope Francis at the Vatican, during the morning of May 2.

In the hour-long meeting the Pope shared words of encouragement and affirmation, in conversation with the primates, responding to questions from those gathered.

In his address, Pope Francis spoke about themes of synodality, church unity and the prioritization of relationships, Christian love and service.

The Pope said: "Only a love that becomes gratuitous service, only the love that Jesus taught and embodies, will bring separated Christians closer to one another. Only that love, which does not appeal to the past in order to remain aloof or to point a finger, only that love which in God's name puts our brothers and sisters before the ironclad defence of our own religious structures, only that love will unite us. First our brothers and sisters, the structures later."

This was a significant moment in a week in which the Anglican Primates' Meeting has been held in Rome. They have gathered for pilgrimage, prayer and discussion about joint mission and witness, along with conversation about synodality, structures and decision making in the Anglican Communion.

Deepening synodality (or journeying together and collaborating as Christian sisters and brothers) has always been an important principle of Primate Meetings, which have been one of the four instruments of the Anglican Communion since 1978.

Primates of the Anglican Communion represent diverse cultural settings and Christian traditions, but through the Primates' Meeting they come together to discuss shared priorities and concerns and discern ways to cultivate shared wisdom and consensus.

The meeting with the Pope was a time of deep encouragement to the primates. Throughout his reign, Pope Francis has consistently called Christians to prioritise relationships and church unity.

Justin Welby, The Archbishop of Canterbury spoke of the Pope's address and its significance to the Primates and the Anglican Communion, saying it was: "... a most beautiful address around the nature of unity and synodality and of the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church – which took our eyes away from ourselves and lifted them to the faithfulness of God in Jesus Christ and the gift of the Spirit.

"This Primates' Meeting has been wonderful and has now become a moment in history where we have seen the closeness of our relationship with Rome at the pastoral, the missional and the spiritual level, which demonstrates the progress made over the last half century from real antipathy, to deep bonds of friendship all round the world. I am so grateful to God for the gift of the Spirit who worked among us this morning and has been working among us all week."

This is the second time this year that Pope Francis and the Archbishop of Canterbury have joined together in Rome. In January, they commissioned Anglican and Roman Catholic bishops at Vespers in the Basilica of St Paul's Outside the Walls, in an ecumenical partnership during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. During his Homily at Vespers, Pope Francis said, 'First our brothers and sisters, then the structures' (January 25).

In February 2023, Pope Francis was joined by the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Moderator of the Church of Scotland, on an ecumenical peace and solidarity visit to South Sudan in February 2023.

The audience with Pope Francis has happened on the closing day of the Primates' Meeting, which has seen the primates go on pilgrimage to holy sites in Rome including the Abbey of Tre Fontane, The Basilica of St Paul's Outside the Walls and the Basilica of Santa Maria in Trastevere.

It has been an important conclusion to a week of discussions for the Primates' Meeting which has been hosted by the Anglican Centre (ACR) in Rome. The ACR works with Anglican Communion and Vatican offices on joint projects for education, ecumenism, and shared mission, and cultivates friendship between Anglicans and Catholics to deepen communion. Archbishop Ian Ernest is The Archbishop of Canterbury's Personal Representative to the Holy See and Director of the ACR.

The Primates' Meeting gathers Anglican Archbishops, Presiding Bishops and Moderators from member churches of the Anglican Communion.

The meeting has been held in Rome due to its historical and spiritual significance for the whole Christian world. Pope Gregory the Great sent Augustine of Canterbury on mission to England in 597. Especially since the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), Rome has been a centre of inter-Christian encounter and ecumenical research.

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