



Having come back from Lusaka on 20 April, after 16 days in Zambia and Zimbabwe, once again the experience of a big Anglican Communion meeting has had an impact on my thinking about the Communion.

As usual, the impact is largely positive. Any time the Communion gets together, especially the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC) which has representatives from most Provinces who are bishops, priests and laity, I am more and more struck that we hold together, more or less, despite our diversity, because of the work of God among us. God is at work in the Anglican Communion, and my awareness of that has grown a lot in the last month. There are plenty of problems, I'll come to those in a moment, but the central news is that if God, by his Spirit, is working among us, that the future is one of hope, of purpose and of blessing in our call to fulfil the mission of God in the world.

The challenges in Lusaka flowed from issues that we have been facing for many years, especially those around human sexuality, and most recently the decision of the Episcopal Church (TEC) to change its canon on marriage in order to accept same-sex marriage in its churches. It should be noted that at the same time they also decided to make provision for those who disagreed, and no diocese could be compelled to accept this change, nor can an individual priest.

The Primates' Meeting in January set out some consequences for any Province, now or in the future, which goes out on its own on a significant matter without the support of the rest of the Communion. Provinces are autonomous and entitled to make their own decisions, but we are also inter-dependent, and although we can strike out differently to the rest of the Communion, and challenge the accepted principles of the Communion, if we do so, such action naturally has consequences. The consequences agreed by the Primates in January are basically that such a Province should not play a role in the leadership of the Communion for three years, and should not represent it ecumenically or on interfaith bodies.

By receiving my report, which incorporated the Primates' Communique, the ACC accepted these consequences entirely, neither adding to nor subtracting from them. There was no attempt during the Meeting to increase the consequences or to diminish them. No member of TEC stood for office at the ACC elections. All this passed without a vote, as part of a block of motions agreed.

So much for that issue, which has been much distorted in comments since the end of the ACC. The ACC also accepted and strengthened many of the other recommendations of the Primates, especially those around the care for refugees and people involved in migration with human trafficking, the issues of religiously-motivated violence and interfaith conflict, climate change which affects many provinces most severely, and especially a profound commitment to evangelism.

There was a lot of work on what it means to be safe churches, especially for children and vulnerable adults, and numerous other issues. The meeting was busy.

But more than being busy, the meeting was joyful. The Province of Central Africa welcomed us most beautifully and on the first Sunday a service at the Anglican Cathedral in Lusaka was one of the most joyful I have ever attended. The following Sunday it was matched by a huge open air service in Harare, Zimbabwe.

There was no hiding the fact that we had great differences, nor diminishing the sorrow that some Provinces (Nigeria, Uganda and Rwanda) had chosen not to attend for reasons which I fully understand. I hope they are reassured by the conclusions we reached which fully backed up those of the Primates' Meeting.

Yet amidst the inevitable sorrow, and full of the joy of worshipping Christ our Saviour together, there is this deep sense that we are called by God to be peace-makers between God and humanity through our evangelism, and a blessing to a world shaken by conflict, climate change and an incapacity to deal with the overload of information from technology, combined with the lack of relationship with which to interpret the information.

The meeting was not all joy, they seldom are. But looking back, I am consumed again with gratitude to God for the privilege of being part of such unity in diversity.

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