

Communiqué from the Primates' Meeting, November 2020

The Primates or senior representatives of 37 of the 41 Anglican Communion provinces met online in two video conference calls totalling five hours on 5 and 6 November 2020.

The first day was focused on the global pandemic and the direct and indirect impact it is having on the social, economic, health and emotional situations of the provinces of the Communion.

The meeting began with prayer in which we remembered with sorrow and gratitude Archbishop Alan Migi, former Primate of Papua New Guinea, who died very recently.

We were very grateful to receive presentations by Dr Michael Ryan and then Dr Sylvie Briand of the World Health Organization (WHO). Dr Ryan said memorably: "Epidemics are about communities. Communities stop epidemics". For this reason, they were eager to work with faith leaders who were committed to building good communities.

Dr Briand's presentation was a superb exposition of the state of the pandemic, the progress towards a vaccine, the relative penetration of the virus and the challenges of control. She spoke especially clearly about the epidemiology of the infodemic – the plague of false information spread about the virus and vaccines. The Primates resolved to increase their efforts in providing good and accurate health information, working with the WHO.

In almost 45 minutes of questions Dr Briand answered with transparency and humility and rightly received the very warm thanks of all listening. Through her the Primates expressed their deep thanks to the WHO for their service to the world. It is clear that there is opportunity for mutual collaboration both within Provinces and globally. The Primates appeal to the Governments of those countries developing vaccines to work closely with the WHO to ensure that distribution is on a just and fair basis, to the most vulnerable and not merely to the richest.

After the WHO presentation and questions, we received regional reports from Primates on the impact of the pandemic across the globe. Remarkably, there were strong similarities across the very different parts of the world. The most important concerns apart from health are the economic impacts leading to joblessness, hunger and loss of education and hence future development. Domestic violence is a hidden pandemic afflicting every part of the world.

The regional reports also showed that churches are rising to the challenge. In obedience to the call of Christ they are Good Shepherds, seeking those lost and fearful and providing stability, education, love and hope. We rejoiced at what we saw of the work of the Holy Spirit and the signs of the Kingdom of God. Yet more is needed. In many countries Covid-19 is but one of many plagues including those of conflict and cruelty, corruption, environmental degradation and natural disaster. We are resolved to fulfil our vocation to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ in word and deed.

On our second day we focused on internal matters in the Anglican Communion.

We received a presentation from Garth Blake, the Chair of the Anglican Communion's Safe Church Commission. He reminded us of our responsibility to make our churches safe for everybody, particularly children, young people, and vulnerable adults. We affirm our commitment to the Anglican Communion's Safe Church Charter, and to statements and resolutions made in previous Primates' Meetings and the Anglican Consultative Council.

The Archbishop of York, Stephen Cottrell, and the Archbishop of Wales, John Davies, set out the findings of the UK's Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) which recently published a report about safeguarding failures by the Church of England and the Church in Wales.

A number of Primates from around the world set out their own experiences in safeguarding; one of us described the IICSA report as "a mirror on all of us". Abusers can hide in the plain sight of churches around the world; and deference towards church leaders has inhibited proper investigation and reporting of allegations of abuse.

We repent of the hurt and damage caused to victims and survivors; and commit to building a culture which can prevent this happening in the future.

We were joined by the Bishop of Oxford, Dr Stephen Croft, who set out the development of the new Anglican Communion Science Commission, which has been approved by the Anglican Consultative Council. We warmly welcome the creation of the Commission and the work it will do at the interface of science and faith; and we look forward to the fruits of its work, particularly in the area of health, agriculture and climate change.

The Archbishop of York, Stephen Cottrell, briefed us on Living in Love and Faith, which will be published by the Church of England on Monday 9 November. We note that this teaching resource is designed to help the Church of England and its members discuss issues of identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage in a biblical context.

At our meeting in Jordan in January, we confirmed the formation of the new Episcopal / Anglican Province of Alexandria as the 41st Province of the Anglican Communion. We were elated at this meeting to be joined by the first Episcopal / Anglican Archbishop of Alexandria, Dr Mouneer Anis.

We rejoice at the formation of the Episcopal / Anglican Province of Alexandria and fully support Archbishop Mouneer and the leadership of the new province in their efforts to receive recognition from the Egyptian government. We endorse the recent letter from Anglican primates on the continent of Africa to the Egyptian government and respectfully request the government to recognise the Episcopal / Anglican Province of Alexandria as an independent Anglican province.

The pandemic has effected the ability of organisations to hold face-to-face meetings. Some of our planned meetings have been cancelled, rescheduled or postponed. One of these is the 2020 Lambeth Conference of Anglican bishops, which will now take place in 2022.

The Archbishop of Canterbury shared his renewed vision for the Lambeth Conference. This will take place in 2022, around it will be a gathering online both before and after to build up the sense of the whole body of Christ.

We welcome the plan for an 18-month pre-conference phase as a virtual Anglican Congress, drawing in bishops and spouses, young and old, lay and ordained; ahead of the face-to-face conference and the following implementation phase involving everybody in the Communion, working together to be God's Church in God's World; while recognising that the Lambeth Conference itself – one of our four Instruments of Communion – will be the face-to-face meeting of bishops.

Within this framework, we note that the next meeting of the Anglican Consultative Council will take place in Accra, Ghana, in early 2023. We will meet again as primates in an online meeting in November 2021 and face-to-face in Rome, Italy, in March 2022.

We note that the Standing Committee of the Anglican Consultative Council is undertaking a review of the operational priorities of the Anglican Communion Office; and is continuing to consider a report prepared by an independent review group chaired by the Archbishop of Cape Town, Dr Thabo Makgoba.

“The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it” (John 1:5). Amidst our sharing we were conscious above all of the strength of the light of Christ. The struggles of the world against injustice, poverty, disease, cruelty, war, corruption and much more must be seen through the light that Christ shines. In this Kingdom season of the Christian here we rejoice in the authority of the ascended Jesus, of His love and intercession for His church and of the certain, unstoppable victory of Christ who conquers evil. We urge God's people to give thanks, to rejoice, to celebrate as well as to bring all their burdens and needs to God.