

The Seventh Consultation
of
Anglican Bishops in Dialogue
Accra, Ghana
May 25-29, 2016

A Testimony of Unity in Diversity

For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.

Romans 12:4-5

For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

1 Corinthians 12:13

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. And each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift.

Ephesians 4:4

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful.

Colossians 3:15 (NRSV)

A Diverse and Unified Gathering

The Seventh Consultation of Anglican Bishops in Dialogue took place in the City of Accra, Ghana, May 25th through May 29th, 2016.

The Consultation brought together bishops from Ghana, Swaziland, Tanzania, Kenya, South Africa, Burundi, Zambia, Canada, England, and the United States of America. Originating after the Lambeth Conference of 2008 from a profound spiritual desire to continue the 'indaba' process of respectful listening in the face of deeply held disagreements, this gathering continued the pattern begun at the first Consultation in 2010. It was a time of fellowship, conversation, learning, and mutual support in our common ministry of leadership in the mission of Jesus Christ, a time founded upon shared worship, Eucharist, and prayer.

We remembered our journey thus far through six consultations. Our previous Testimonies have been offered to the wider Church as a humble gift with the hope that they may become a sign

of confidence in the future of the Anglican Communion. In these Testimonies we spoke of Grace (2011), Love and Continuing Grace (2012), Hope (2013), our Journey Toward Reconciliation (2014), and Bearing One Another's Burdens (2015).

We do not see ourselves as solving the problems of the Communion. We are not an official structure, but an informal fellowship with an ever changing and ever broader membership. We hope we may act as a witness to the Church's spiritual unity for which our Lord Jesus Christ prayed (John 17: 11). Our purpose is neither to resolve nor to ignore differences, but to deepen relationships and therefore to nurture mutual understanding. We continue in our desire to be globally diverse and to keep searching for the ties that bind.

Following our meeting in Richmond, Virginia in 2015, we continue to share with each other our unique missional contexts. Our intent is to share one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ (Galatians 6:2). In walking this path together we expect and anticipate that Christ will draw us nearer to discerning an authentic Christian life and to becoming that unity which he seeks for his Church and for all creation.

Our Varied Stories and Contexts

We came to Ghana full of hope, humility, and expectation that the Lord of the Church would bless us with renewed grace. Believing that the Holy Spirit is the Lord and Giver of life, we shared with each other the realities and challenges of our mission. We listened deeply to the movement of the Holy Spirit in dioceses across the world, in diverse and unique contexts, each living their common commitment to baptismal ministry by reaching out with the love of Christ in various situations of crisis and need.

The Church of the Province of West Africa is the fruit of missionary work, and reflects the imperative of mission in its identity and self-understanding. The dioceses of the Province are bound together structurally and also spiritually through the Five Marks of Mission. These are:

1. To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom.
2. To teach, baptize, and nurture new believers.
3. To respond to human need by loving service.
4. To transform the unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and to pursue peace and reconciliation.
5. To strive to safeguard the integrity of Creation and to sustain and renew the life of the earth.

In addition to vibrant worship, the Province provides social services such as schools, colleges, and universities, hospitals, clinics, orphanages, and also fresh water, relief from disasters and many other programs and projects promoting human well-being and dignity.

Further south on the continent, the Diocese of Swaziland is ministering in a context where 69% of the population is under the age of 25, where HIV/AIDS has ravaged entire communities, and where all development indices, including life expectancy, have gone down in the last decade.

Providing neighbourhood care points for children in the community, using property and infrastructure to meet educational and social needs, and developing servant leaders to work for sustainability in the face of economic collapse and climate change has moved the Church from being ecclesia-centred to missio-centred, and has brought a revitalized sense of relationship with the land and its people as well as with partners overseas.

The Diocese of Oklahoma in the Episcopal Church was formed out of the Indian Territories as a final stop on the "Trail of Tears," the forced relocation of indigenous people during the formation of the United States. That legacy of disenfranchisement drives a commitment to social justice. Here, the Church is ministering to a society with high incarceration rates, increasing gun violence, and growth in human trafficking. In the Diocese of Oklahoma evangelism is understood to include providing safe alternatives to youth, opposing legislation that will allow the "open carry" of weapons in public spaces, and sensitizing Anglicans to the needs of the poor and to the necessity of a loving welcome to all.

The Diocese of Liverpool in England is painfully aware that 40% of the slave trade from the 16th to the 19th centuries involved that city, and that much of its wealth in those days came from human misery elsewhere. In recent years the region has been economically depressed, though there has also been substantial urban regeneration. The political outlook of the region differs from the national picture, and the Labour Party is the dominant force. Despite still-high levels of social deprivation, the Church is vibrant and growing; the Diocese aims to combine a focus on evangelism with a focus on community transformation: "a bigger Church to make a bigger difference." Thus the Diocese is strongly involved, for example, in establishing foodbanks, debt advice, and poverty advice centres. The Church has retained public credibility through its commitment to social justice, which is the launching-point for evangelism and church growth.

The Diocese of Kondoa in Tanzania is a new missionary diocese where 96% of the population is Muslim. Education is poor, there is little theological training for clergy, women are treated as, at best, second class persons and, at worst, invisible in the society. Mission and evangelism in this difficult context has led the Church to start Women Empowering programs, bringing together both Muslim and Christian women and building relationships of trust and dignity. Anglican leaders work together with Roman Catholic leaders to promote peace among the two communities. Wells are being dug to provide fresh, clean water and a new school will soon provide opportunities for education for children of all faiths. The church is joyful and increasing in number day by day.

Persecution and suffering is the Cross being borne by the Church in Zanzibar. As a 1% minority in an island almost entirely of Muslim faith, the Church bears witness to Jesus Christ with almost no opportunity to erect new buildings, start new churches, clinics or dispensaries, nor even for Christians to have access to public education or health care. The current internal conflicts within Islam have changed the harmonious relationships long enjoyed on this beautiful island among Christians and their neighbours. Yet Anglicans continue to be witnesses to the inclusive love of our Lord and to serve their neighbours with selfless care.

The Diocese of Cape Coast in Ghana is at the centre of what was once the monstrous slave trade and, during the same period, the headquarters of the British Colonial Administration. It is where Christian missionaries came and established the first churches, arriving on ships that brought Bibles and priests to the country - the same ships that took away slaves beyond the Door of No Return to an unwanted and unmerited life. Today, in gentler times, the area is a centre of tourism. The Diocesan Strategic Plan is to “love people, and love God.” Its core values are mission-shaped. Its identity is formed by Scripture and the Book of Common Prayer. Through a renewed vision for worship, prayer, resources, evangelism and discipleship the Church is affirming its baptismal covenant. “Bring them in, build them up, train them up, send them out!” is the program of the Diocese.

National and International Witness

Four Primates attended our Consultation and spoke to us of the recent gathering of Primates in Canterbury. Their decision to walk together was made in spite of principled disagreement over same-sex marriage. It was intentional and clear. There was never any discussion of suspending a member church. Media reports sometimes obscure these facts.

The Primate of Canada and the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church spoke of the conversations in their respective churches about same-sex marriage. Both emphasized the changed social and legal context with respect to equal marriage in their countries and the questions this poses to the Church’s mission.

Both emphasized the importance of other challenges to and opportunities for mission and evangelism. In Canada, reconciliation with First Nations peoples after the Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is a major priority. In the Episcopal Church, the growing threat of gun violence, the plight of immigrants and refugees, and the effort to move away from living as an institution to becoming again a ‘Jesus movement’ are the main goals of the lay and clergy leadership.

Mission and Unity

As we listened to these testimonies – and many more over several days – we were reminded that “mission makes us enter into *the very heart of God*” (Archbishop Sarfo). It is the place where God and humans meet, where the life of the world is made possible in its fullness. Mission is a four-dimensional holistic development – physical, spiritual, intellectual, and social.

Taking these stories into our hearts, the quality of our relationships is deepened and strengthened. To listen is to participate. To receive the story of another is already to share in it, to lift its burden, and to multiply its joy. Listening gives us the opportunity to hear something new, to ask important questions, to deepen mutual understanding.

Jumping to conclusions without first hearing and understanding the other is harmful and damaging. By encountering each other as persons, as fellow members in the Body of Christ, as

members one of another through the grace of the Holy Spirit, we become transformed in ourselves and honour God who has created us all.

Through attentive listening, laughing, weeping, and gently clarifying, we realize more deeply how we are all part of God's plan. God gathers us together from across the world regardless of race, language, origin, or gender, for the purpose of doing what is good and right. This is our calling. God is the author and finisher of our faith. We are not here by accident.

One reason why we participate in the Church's life is to learn how to accept our place in God's redeemed community. We come together to teach one another about 'our ways and your ways.' Through relationships of respect and understanding, listening and prayer, we can heal each other, and begin to heal the wounds of humanity. We come to hear what God is teaching us through the lives of other people. Whatever our culture or context, our calling is to reflect God's love proclaimed for all time on the Cross. Through our mutual respect and love across all our differences, we give reality to God's promise never to leave us or forsake us.

As we turn more and more to Christ, he helps us to understand the significance of our conversations, to transform our imaginations, and to see afresh the hand of God in matters that have caused us to despair. This has been our experience as a group on every occasion when we have gathered together.

Therefore we need to adopt new paradigms of respect and to focus on what we hold in common, not on our divisions. We should not be afraid to address the issues that divide us in the context of the mission of God, which is so much greater. It is insufficient both to ignore the conflicts that beset us, and equally insufficient to focus on them exclusively.

Triangles of Despair and Hope

Like many parts of West Africa, Ghana is scarred by the legacy of the slave trade. We wanted to experience something of this legacy. Accordingly, we journeyed together to Cape Coast in order to visit the Castle there, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It is one of about forty slave castles, or large commercial forts, built on the Gold Coast by European traders.

We were deeply moved and shocked as we visited the dungeons and punishment cells. Our visit ended with a time of prayer and reflection in the nearby Anglican Cathedral, where we recommitted ourselves to walk together in the search for justice and freedom. We are grateful to the Bishop and Diocese of Cape Coast for enabling this visit.

One outworking of our Consultation is the establishment of a new three-way link between dioceses whose areas were principal players in the slave trade – a "triangle of hope" to counter the slave triangle of despair and pain. Three-way relationships like this have existed fruitfully in the past, though it has not always proved possible to sustain them. But in the context of our personal relationships established at this Consultation, the bishops of Virginia, Kumasi, and Liverpool have agreed to develop this one.

We have high hopes that this triangle of hope will enrich us all as we walk together. These three dioceses are well placed to engage together in repentance, truth, and reconciliation as we recall and address the slave trade. Our cities still have the physical evidence of slave markets, slave gaols and slave-built property. At the time, our churches were complicit in this tragedy and scandal. Now we can commit ourselves together to face the past squarely and to pray, share, and unite around a future of peace and freedom.

Dialogue with Critical Voices

We are aware that our Consultations are not held in a vacuum. Letters and commentaries from all around the world in response to previous Testimonies enrich our discussions and generate a sense of connection with those who wish to contribute to our thoughts and our awareness.

Words of encouragement, tempered with requests to go more deeply into theological reflection, push us to resist easy slogans about, or simple solutions to, the reality of our Communion life.

Sharp critiques remind us of that continuing reality, and push us to name the issues that are at the centre of current divisions in our common life.

As we strive for honesty and authenticity among ourselves, we take to heart the constructive criticism that asks us for more than words. We wonder how, as an informal fellowship, we may move beyond words to praxis. This is a question not only for our Consultation but for all members of the Communion.

Sankofa

Sankofa is an Akan concept to which we were introduced by the Most Rev. Prof. Emmanuel Asante, who brought it as an ecumenical contribution from the Methodist Church of Ghana.

It means, literally, “It is not a taboo to fetch what is at risk of being left behind.” The concept assumes that the present does not exist on its own; that the past is a dynamic reality that cannot be divorced from and ignored in our consideration of the present and the future. The narrative of the past is relevant to the present. ***Tete wo bi ka*** (the past has a contribution to make to the present) and for that matter, the future.

Sankofa teaches us that we must constantly monitor the present by going back to our roots in order to move forward. We should critically examine the past and gather the best of what it has to teach us. Reclaiming what we have lost or been stripped of through modernity, and preserving and perpetuating it as we engage the present in view of the future, is critically imperative for both the present and the future.

Sankofa challenges us to ask questions of ourselves and teaches us that the past is a dynamic reality that is always present with us. It is this sense of history and tradition that informs and guides us. It can be seen as an inherited pattern of thoughts and actions. In our Anglican tradition this means unity but not uniformity. Unity in diversity is a distinctive feature of Anglicanism throughout the Christian world. Such unity always brings about dialogue and self-examination.

The Walk to Emmaus

A biblical example of this may be found in Luke 24, where the Risen Christ helps two confused travelers to understand the depths of his promise of resurrection.

As the two disciples walk from Jerusalem, they are anxious and uncertain about the recent event of Jesus' death. In their conversation with the stranger who falls in beside them, they learn to recover what they had lost – the memory of his transforming presence.

Human beings always have a tendency to focus their conversation on the latest scandal. Yet sad stories often create an opportunity for a fruitful conversation of the type we witness here. The Crucifixion had robbed the disciples of the joy, the company, and the hope that they had in Jesus. Yet because of this conversation, though they did not know it was with him, the story did not end at the graveside. The conversation went beyond the grave, to the streets and finally to all corners of the globe. The past was brought into the present and it transformed the future.

What Does Sankofa Mean for Us?

A. In our Dioceses:

Many Christians recall, and bring back into the present, models of early Christian communities and now seek to reclaim the role of things like house fellowships to gather believers for study and prayer. Some bishops have developed special liturgies and Bible studies for such groups.

Some are reclaiming the role of Catechesis in the Church. Others recall being spiritually formed by the Catechism of the Book of Common Prayer. Some are bringing it to the forefront of formation programs by context-specific and vernacular language, often around the Five Marks of Mission. Some are developing and encouraging a Rule of Life.

In our discussions we touched once again on the need for evangelization, realizing that in many of our countries at least one generation is not grounded in faith. Reflecting on the early church we recognize that people need to be afforded more opportunities to engage with, and be shaped by, the word of God. In such ways people can be encouraged in developing their gifts and we can, once again, be a people who are sent to share the Good News.

B. In Our Consultations:

We see in the short history of our Consultations part of the narrative of the life of the Church. We originally came together in the spirit of Indaba, so that we would have sustaining conversations that would bring us to a better mutual understanding. Our conversations are intended neither to condemn nor to condone, neither to agree nor to disagree, but to love. Without face to face encounters it is easy to apply labels, to stop listening, and no longer to see one another as brothers and sisters in the body of Christ.

To be fully the body of Christ we are compelled to be together. We are learning to live with our differences and with each other. We find that our conversations remove fear. We speak to each other, and about each other, with the love we find in Jesus Christ. We are developing greater cross cultural understanding and feel our episcopal ministries have been enriched.

We recognize the importance of memory-bearers who can remind us of previous conversations. Gatherings such as this provide the opportunity to meet and build relationships on a smaller scale than the Lambeth Conference. Looking back, we realize the importance of not only discussing difficult topics but also of talking more deeply about the challenges we have in common. In an atmosphere of trust we share things of great human and pastoral complexity. As the Emmaus story teaches us, our minds can often not be opened until we allow strangers into the conversation. We deeply appreciate the diverse voices in our dialogues and believe we have a role in bearing witness to the wider church.

C. In the Communion:

We wonder if there is a case to be made for the adoption of *Sankofa* in our councils and assemblies. Jesus is constantly having to come to us to sort out our confusions by *re*-presenting our past. We ask ourselves if all of us in the Communion could come together in the spirit of *Sankofa*. As we look back on the history of the Communion we see and recognize the strong desire everywhere to be a family. We grieve what has been left behind. We note that it is counter to African and most indigenous cultures to say that a person is disowned or left behind. Rather, the process of resolving differences and conflicts starts with the recognition that all belong, that "I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am."

The deep core of Anglicanism is grounded in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Across the Communion people come into that deep realization in different ways regardless of economic, social, and political differences. Over and over again in our meeting we heard stories of invitation as people in many dioceses find ways to connect others to the transforming power of Christ. Thus our future health will be as a missio-centric church with a renewed sense of evangelism and proclamation.

We wonder if we can return to a way of looking at our common heritage in Christ that encourages us to hold all our gifts in common and in love. We feel compelled to reach out and to bear each other's burdens not only in times of need, but constantly placing ourselves in

service of our neighbour. In such ways all things will work together for good and for the glory of God.

As a people of Scripture we understand in all our contexts the importance of story. Using the example of the parables we ask the Communion - what are the parables of the Church in our time? What are the parables of our lives? How is the past transformed by Christ as a sign of hope for the future? As followers of Jesus we seek to live an authentic Christian life. We commend the principle, or perhaps the lens, of *Sankofa* so that in the power of Christ our past informs our present and brings hope to our future.

We hope our dialogue will be seen as a sign of love for our Communion. Those who have been part of the consultations for some years speak of the way their lives and ministries have been re-shaped and supported by our growing relationships.

Our Thanks

We are sincerely grateful for the invitation from Archbishop Daniel Sarfo, Primate of the Church of the Province of West Africa (CPWA) and from Bishop Daniel Mensah Torto, Diocese of Accra, to come to the City of Accra. From London to Dar es Salaam and Toronto, to Cape Town, Coventry, and Richmond, the location of our meetings has enhanced our discussions in special ways. We have been reminded time and again that the Spirit calls to us both in the midst of our dialogue and from the place where we meet together.

We are grateful for the setting and for the staff of Hephzibah Conference Centre for daily support and nurture. We say thank you to the Canadian High Commission for an afternoon with the High Commissioner and staff in his home.

Our Sunday worship in 20 parishes took us to the communities of New Bortianor (Mile 11), Gbawe, Abossey-Okai, La, Kaneshie, Korle Gonno, Sakumono, Teshie, Kwashieman, Adabraka, Dansoman, Adenta, Osu, Accra, Mambrobi, Tema, Odorkor, Burma Camp, and Ashale-Botwe. In all we were graciously received.

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With humility, we invite all who read this Testimony to live an examined life, commit to difference and diversity with courage and affection, and continue to share the good news that in Christ we are one in our divinely created diversity.

Signatories:

Bishop Jane Alexander: Edmonton
Bishop Johannes Angela: Bondo
Bishop Victor Reginald Atta-Baffoe: Cape Coast
Bishop Paul Bayes: Liverpool
Bishop Cyril Kobina Ben-Smith: Asante Mampong
Bishop Michael Bird: Niagara
Archbishop Albert Chama: Primate of Central Africa
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Bishop Michael Curry: Primate, The Episcopal Church
Bishop Given Gaula: Kondo
Bishop Michael Hafidh: Zanzibar
Archbishop Fred Hiltz: Primate of Canada
Bishop Michael Ingham, New Westminster (retired)
Bishop Shannon Johnston: Virginia
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Bishop Edward Konieczny: Oklahoma
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