

Anglican Church of Canada public witness process: for discussion

January 3, 2012, H. Thompson

What is public witness?

Justice is turned back, and righteousness stands at a distance; for truth stumbles in the public square, and uprightness cannot enter. Truth is lacking and whoever turns from evil is despoiled. The Lord saw it and it displeased him that there was no justice. He saw that there was no one, and was appalled that there was no one to intervene. Isaiah 59: 14 -16¹

As members of KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives, we resonate with the following description of public witness: “We take positions on issues through a process of discernment, beginning with hearing the voices of people most affected by injustice whether these are partners in countries of concern or Indigenous people in Canada. Believing that people are made in God’s image, we listen to their experience, hearing what stands in the way of God-given dignity and life lived to its fullest. We reflect theologically on the issues raised by these oft-marginalized voices, drawing from both the wisdom of scriptures and the social teachings of our different denominations. We also apply research and analysis, expertise from many years of experience in social justice work. Considering all of this information, our churches set priorities and develop positions for KAIROS.”

“(We) ... speak in the public sphere *not primarily as a political act, but rather as public witness to our faith*. We strive to participate constructively in policy debate on our priority issues. This leads us to at times support government positions and at times to critique and offer alternatives to government positions. We believe that in contributing to public debate and policymaking we are enhancing democracy, as are those contributing from other faiths or from conscience and experience. Our role is strictly non-partisan, as we critique and support positions regardless of the political party from which they originate.”²

Public witness relies on the effective coordination of keen eyes to read the current context with theological courage, the application of expert policy analysis, a movement of people ready for action, and, enabled by vision, staff and financial commitment from Christian denominations. KAIROS and various other coalitions thrive when member churches and agencies bring their justice and peace priorities to ecumenical tables, along with their staff and volunteer support and membership contributions, to create capacity for shared public policy analysis, movement building, and public witness.

This document is drafted for discussion purposes as the Anglican Church of Canada discerns a way forward in implementing the Vision 2019 priority: to establish a government relations presence in Ottawa.

¹ Quoted in PWRDF Advocacy Policy (final), November 2004

² Jennifer Henry, <http://kairoscanada.org/blogs/?author=12>, March 22, 2011.

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Mark of Mission 4: “To seek to transform unjust structures of society”

Sources, initiators:

- General Synod resolutions
- Ecumenical, Anglican or other partner invitations/requests*
- Ongoing priorities
- Request from Primate or Standing Committee
- A developing and presenting situation ...

...can initiate the public witness process.

References, guidelines:

- Theological framework; Marks of Mission
- Policy guidelines
- Implementation plan guidelines
- Memoranda of Agreements with ecumenical partners; principles of partnership
- Consultation protocols between General Synod departments
- Consultation with chair or members of Standing Committee if necessary

Decisions:

- Choose type of advocacy – issue, strategic priority and alignment, policy and engagement capacity, risk to partners or to ACC, identify possible outcomes and subsequent actions
- Choose techniques – Lund Principle (collective action) or Anglican action, timeframe, role of partner(s), Anglican network or primatial action, availability of staff time and budget, etc.
- Draft a plan including progress indicators

Implementation of the plan:

- Draft or comment on design or planned action
- Consult and communicate with stakeholders
- Track and communicate indicators and results; document and file
- Evaluate and learn from outcomes and process; report these to stakeholders.