

May 11, 1989 Primates Proclaim Decade Of Evangelism

Episcopal News Service

LARNACA, Cyprus (DPS, May 11) -- To proclaim the good news of the Kingdom; to teach, baptize and nurture new believers; to respond to human need by loving service; to seek to transform the unjust structures of society.

Thus did ACC-6 [Anglican Consultative Council], meeting in Badagry in 1984, summarize the mission of the Church. The Anglican Communion was urged to review its total life in the light of its missionary calling. From this "mission audit" undertaken in many dioceses, there began to emerge a renewed emphasis on our evangelistic task. Thus it was that the Lambeth Conference of 1988 called on provinces and dioceses of the Anglican Communion, in cooperation with other Christians, to make the closing years of this millennium a Decade of Evangelism (LCR 43).

Subsequent to Lambeth, the Mission Issues Strategy and Advisory Group (MISAG II) made helpful comments and suggestions regarding this proposal, including this definition of evangelism:

Jesus commanded His disciples to "go and make disciples of all nations" and to be his "witness... to the ends of the earth (Matt. 28:19, Acts 1:8). To evangelize is to make known by word and deed the love of the crucified and risen Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, so that people will repent, believe, and receive Christ as their savior and obediently serve him as their Lord in the fellowship of his church. (See also John 20:21, Luke 4:18ff.)

The primacy of evangelism derives not from a desire simply to increase Church numbers, but from God's unique provision of eternal life in Jesus Christ.

The Primates wish to commend the attached reflections of MISAG II to individual provinces and dioceses, as well as those reflections contained in the earlier report of MISAG I, entitled Giving Mission Its Proper Place. The report of the Mission and Ministry section of the Lambeth Conference (especially sections 1-23) is also to be commended. In all these reports, our people will find a theological and practical basis for effective strategies of evangelism.

The Primates of the Anglican Communion want, therefore, to affirm this call to a Decade of Evangelism, and request all dioceses, parishes, and religious communities to prepare for the decade with prayer.

We suggest the following guidelines for consideration by the individual provinces:

- a. Approach the Decade of Evangelism not as a terminal point but as a beginning. We carry on the decade as learners expecting its end to be followed by decade after decade of evangelism. God's calling and sending forth are measured not by decades, but by eternity
- b. Discover and use distinctive Anglican gifts. Our heritage of liturgical and sacramental worship, our apostolic continuity, and our "reasonable tolerance" are all evangelistic tools and distinctive gifts to the larger Christian community. Effective evangelists are true to themselves.
- c. Seek to work cooperatively with Christians of other Churches, many of which are also calling for a decade of evangelism. Two significant conferences in 1989 -- the World Council of Churches-

sponsored "Your Will Be Done: Mission in Christ's Way" in San Antonio, and the meeting of "Lausanne II" in Manila - will indicate numerous ecumenical opportunities for cooperation and sharing at all levels.

d. Focus on persons, not programs. The Christian faith is spread person to person, community to community. It is a movement. It is not a program passed down for others to follow. Human story touches human story in the midst of God's story.

e. Focus on the local, not the universal. The context of of evangelism is crucial. Some Anglicans live in a predominantly Christian culture; others are in the minority. Strategies for -- even definitions of -- evangelism will vary from situation to situation.

f. Learn from each other. Living in many different situations and contexts, Anglicans have much to learn from each other and from other Christians. Provinces are therefore encouraged to gather statements, stories, strategies and experiences for sharing with other Anglicans and the larger Christian community. The Anglican Consultative Council, through the secondment of a Volunteer for Mission, will seek to coordinate and facilitate this sharing, as well as the identification of further resources.

g. Use the laity, the forefront missionaries of the Church. Tremendous energy is released when we realize that every Christian is an agent of mission.

h. Prayer is essential. Surround and undergird all ministries of evangelism and new initiatives for evangelism with prayer.

Meeting so close to the world of our biblical origins, we are reminded that the God who called forth and sent out Abraham and Sarah and the Prophets, who in the fullness of time sent forth his only Son and the Holy Spirit, our comforter, is the same God who continues to call forth and send out His faithful people on that mission of reconciliation that is God's own. Jesus Christ in his ministry, in his life, death, and resurrection, modeled that mission for us. It involves no less than the fullest measure of service and proclamation. In a Decade of Evangelism, we seek for a moment to lift up this great act of proclamation, properly called evangelism, which holds out to women and men everywhere the person of Jesus Christ. As people in the power of the Holy Spirit are drawn to him, so are they drawn to God, to one another, and to all creation. On this sure foundation may be built all our ministries of love.

Larnaca, April 1989

Decade of Evangelism Comments and suggestions from MISAGThe Call from the Lambeth Conference.

The group acknowledges, with warm appreciation, the initiative taken by the bishops at Lambeth especially their recognition "that evangelism is the primary task given to the Church"; and their call "to make the closing years of this millennium a 'Decade of Evangelism' with a renewed and united emphasis in making Christ known to the people of his world" (LCR 43).

The group also notes that the Lambeth Conference urged that evangelism be undertaken in cooperation with other Christian bodies. In some places it may be most appropriate and fruitful for

the Anglican Church to take an initiative in calling for this partnership with other Churches in evangelism. We gladly note that the Roman Catholic Church has called for a decade of evangelization; the World Council of Churches (WCC) is convening an important meeting on world mission in San Antonio next year; and the "Lausanne II" conference for world evangelism will meet in Manila. We consider it important to have consultations with such Christian bodies and other Churches so that together the churches might bear common witness to the Gospel; and that any fears of proselytizing (or sheep stealing) might be allayed.

Source: http://www.episcopalarchives.org/cgi-bin/ENS/ENSpress_release.pl?pr_number=89090

May 11, 1989 Primates' Statement on the Report of the Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission on Communion and Women in the Episcopate

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The Primates of the Anglican Communion, meeting in Larnaca, Cyprus, warmly receive the report of the Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission on Communion and Women in the Episcopate. They wish to express their enthusiastic gratitude to its members and chairman (the Most Rev. Robert Eames, Archbishop of Armagh) for the way in which they have tried to discover the language and context in which Anglicans can continue to live together, while recognizing that there will be limits to the degree of divergence that can coexist within the Communion. They recognize that the Primates' meeting does not include women and that women may view matters from a different perspective.

The Primates welcome the faithfulness of the report to the mandate given it by the Lambeth Conference, 1988. In particular:

That each province respect the decision and attitudes of other provinces in the ordination or consecration of women to the episcopate, without such respect necessarily indicating acceptance of the principles involved, maintaining the highest possible degree of communion with the provinces that differ.

That bishops exercise courtesy and maintain communications with bishops who may differ and with any woman bishop, ensuring an open dialogue in the Church to whatever extent communion is impaired

(Resolution 1)

The Primates reaffirm these convictions.

The Primates find the description of the historical imperfections of ecclesial communion particularly helpful as the actual context in which the Church has, nevertheless, continued to find ways of maintaining the highest degree of communion possible in the face of doctrinal disagreement and diversity of practice. They welcome this dynamic understanding of the communion of the People of God on pilgrimage through history (paragraphs 18-21).

The Primates are also particularly appreciative of the commission's analysis of the process of discernment and reception, together with its understanding of the authority of synods and dissent (paragraphs 28-32). It is recognized that some Anglicans will have difficulty with the language of "provisionality" in relation to decisions of Anglican Provinces in favor of the ordination of women to the priesthood and episcopate. But they believe the commission is right to point to the wider ecumenical context -- in which some of our major ecumenical partners do ordain women and some do not -- as indicative of the provisionality of all ministries and all decision-making structures in a divided Christianity (cf. paragraphs 21 and 33).

The Primates endorse the reciprocal emphasis of the report. On the one hand, opponents should show respect and courtesy for those women whom the Church has ordained by prayer and the laying on of hands, even if they are not in conscience certain of their ordination. On the other hand, supporters of women's ordination must show their courtesy and respect for opponents by making it possible for them to continue to live within the Church as Anglicans. There is need to reflect deeply upon what is happening in the Church, and to stand back and let the Holy Spirit work, by making room for each other.

In considering the guidelines, the Primates particularly wish to endorse and emphasize the judgment of the commission that parallel jurisdictions would jeopardize the role of the bishop as a symbol of unity (paragraph 57, cf. 38-40). They note that the proposal for Episcopal Visitors, commended by the commission (paragraphs 41-42 and 57), has been criticized by both those in favor and against the ordination of women within the Episcopal Church of the U.S.A. in the form in which it was passed by the General Convention 1988. However, such a proposal should be flexible, as there is believed to be support for its development that would meet some of the objections that have been raised on either side. The Primates encourage the exploration of such a proposal in provinces where there is need for such a scheme.

We strongly emphasize, with the commission, that persons confirmed by a woman bishop should not be excluded from Holy Communion (paragraph 62).

The Primates do not believe that the collegial participation of male bishops in the ordinations performed by a woman bishop is a practical or theologically appropriate way of achieving the recognition of those ordained by her (cf. paragraph 63). It would have the effect of questioning the validity of her own consecration and be demeaning to the woman concerned. But the Primates also acknowledge that some Anglicans will feel unable to recognize the validity of ordinations presided over by a woman bishop. They also recognize that some provinces are not yet able to give such ordinations canonical recognition.

The Primates recognize the very special difficulties faced by the Archbishop of Canterbury as a focus of communion for the Anglican Communion while there is division over the matter of the ordination of women to the priesthood and episcopate. It is understandable that there is expectation that the Archbishop of Canterbury should conform as much as possible to the tradition of the province he is visiting, even to the extent of being above his own province. Nevertheless, a bishop must be rooted in the particular Church he represents. Nor can any bishop act in a way that would threaten the unity of his own Church. Moreover, provinces other than the Church of England which do not yet ordain women to the priesthood or episcopate also look to the Archbishop of Canterbury as a focus of unity, and he will have to consider their position alongside those that do so ordain, as well as the canonical position of his own province (cf. paragraphs 73-76).

For the future, the Primates invite the Archbishop of Canterbury to renew the Commission on Communion and Women in the Episcopate. They recommend that it should continue to monitor developments within the Anglican Communion and ecumenically in the recognition that the situation continues to change and develop both within and between provinces. Where the Archbishop of Canterbury is asked for pastoral counsel from within a province in which there is

serious disagreement, he may wish, after consulting the Primate concerned, to invite the commission to use its good offices to foster unity. They invite the Archbishop of Canterbury to consider extending the membership of the commission with special reference to the non-Western world and to gender.

The Primates warmly commend the Report as a whole to the provinces for study and discussion and (with the exception of collegial ordination) endorse the guidelines as a means for furthering "the highest possible degree of communion" in the spirit of the Lambeth Conference of 1988.

Source: http://www.episcopalarchives.org/cgi-bin/ENS/ENSpress_release.pl?pr_number=89093