Preamble to the Letter of Accession - Province of Southeast Asia

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In Photo: Bishop Albert Vun (Diocese of Sabah), Bishop John Chew (Diocese of Singapore), Bishop Bolly Lapok (Diocese of Kuching & Bishop Ng Moon Hing (Diocese of West Malaysia)

The Province of Southeast Asia has adopted the Anglican Covenant, accompanied by this Preamble to the Letter of Accession

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For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth. (2 Corinthians 13: 8)

Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit...one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God & Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (Ephesians 4: 3-6)

1. This Preamble gives an account of the decisions that led to the drawing up of the Anglican Communion Covenant. It also outlines the raison d'être for the Church of the Province of South East Asia’s agreement to sign the Anglican Communion Covenant. The historical events of the past decade which caused the ‘torn fabric of the communion’ set the context in which the Province and the constituent Dioceses see the need for this process. It follows that this Preamble also expresses our expectations that the background which has given rise to the need for this are recognised by the Churches of the Anglican Communion and provides the milieu in which it is signed.
2. In her December 2009 Meeting, the Standing Committee of the Anglican Communion approved the final text of the Anglican Communion Covenant for distribution to the Provinces of the Anglican Communion. The Provinces were asked to formally consider the Anglican Communion Covenant for adoption through appropriate processes. In the words of the Anglican Communion Covenant:

*The Covenant operates to express the common commitments and mutual accountability which hold each Church in the relationship of communion one with another. Recognition of, and fidelity to, this Covenant, enable mutual recognition and communion. Participation in the Covenant implies a recognition by each Church of those elements which must be maintained in its own life and for which it is accountable to the Churches with which it is in Communion in order to sustain the relationship expressed in this Covenant.* (4.2.1)

3. These words bear strong resemblance to the closing appeal in the Second South-to-South Encounter Kuala Lumpur Statement in 1997, where the need for accountability was also noted:

*We further challenge our Anglican Churches to ...guard the internal unity of our Communion. We therefore call on the Primates, the Anglican Consultative Council and the Lambeth Conference to take the necessary steps to establish such new structures (or reinforce old ones) that will strengthen the bonds of affection between our provinces, and especially, make for effective mutual accountability in all matters of doctrine and polity throughout the Communion.* (7.2, 3)

4. The similarities are not accidental. For the Anglican Communion Covenant is the culmination of a decade of intense disputes over ethical teaching and church order in the Communion. The Kuala Lumpur Statement, in fact, marked the beginning of a united stand, spearheaded by churches in the southern continents, for the faith that was once delivered to the saints across the Communion.

5. Faithfulness to apostolic teaching of the faith once delivered, right worship and godly living set the standards by which Christian communities order their communal life and practice. The implicit theologies that underlie unscriptural practices in some parts of the Church have been a matter of huge concern to many in the Communion. This prompted the appeal in the Kuala Lumpur Statement to “uphold the authority of Scripture in every aspect life, including the family and human sexuality” (6). [Lambeth Conference 1998](https://www.lambethconference.org) embraced these concerns:

*in view of the teaching of Scripture, upholds faithfulness in marriage between a man and a woman in lifelong union, and believes that abstinence is right for those who are not called to marriage; (Resolution 1.10b)*

*notes the significance of the Kuala Lumpur Statement on Human Sexuality and the concerns expressed...on the authority of Scripture in matters of marriage and sexuality and asks the Primates and the ACC to include them in their monitoring process.(Resolution 1.10g)*
6. Despite these Communion-wide pleas, the Diocese of New Westminster decided to authorize services for same-sex unions in 2002. In 2003, the Episcopal Church (USA) appointed Gene Robinson, a priest in a committed same-sex relationship, as one of its bishops. In October 2003, the Primates of the Anglican Communion issued a unanimous and strong warning in an extraordinary Meeting:

If [Gene Robinson's] consecration proceeds, we recognise that we have reached a crucial and critical point in the life of the Anglican Communion and we have had to conclude that the future of the Communion itself will be put in jeopardy. In this case, the ministry of this one bishop will not be recognised by most of the Anglican world, and many provinces are likely to consider themselves to be out of Communion with the Episcopal Church (USA). This will tear the fabric of our Communion at its deepest level, and may lead to further division on this and further issues as provinces have to decide in consequence whether they can remain in communion with provinces that choose not to break communion with the Episcopal Church (USA).

7. In fact, the beginnings of the Anglican Communion Covenant can be traced to this extraordinary Primates’ Meeting in 2003. The Primates of the Anglican Communion requested the Archbishop of Canterbury to set up a commission to examine the legal and theological implications of these decisions of North American Churches. The ensuing Lambeth Commission on Communion submitted The Windsor Report in 2004. The Windsor Report included a key recommendation to adopt “a common Anglican Covenant which would make explicit and forceful the loyalty and bonds of affection which govern the relationships between the churches of the Communion” (WR, 118). In May 2006, the Covenant Design Group was appointed to further this project. The Anglican Communion Covenant is the Final Text that has undergone three earlier drafts (the Nassau Draft, 2007; the Saint Andrew’s Draft, 2008; and Ridley-Cambridge Draft 2009). Final revisions to Section Four were made after the Fourteenth Meeting of the Anglican Consultative Council in May 2009.

8. Back in 2003, the Episcopal Church (USA) went ahead with Gene Robinson’s consecration in November 2003. This action prompted a swift response on 2 November 2003 by the working committee of the Primates of the global South:

A state of impaired communion now exists both within a significant part of ECUSA and between ECUSA and most of the provinces within the Communion. By its actions, ECUSA is held solely responsible for this division. . . .

As Primates who represent over fifty million Anglicans, we have a solemn stewardship to steadfastly uphold and promote the historic and universal Apostolic Faith and Order of the Church throughout the ages as well as to protect those who are one with us in this same. We therefore affirm the ministry of the bishops, clergy and laity in ECUSA who have, as a matter of principle, and in fidelity to the historic teaching of the Church, opposed the actions taken at General Convention and objected to the consecration. We will continue to recognize and support their membership within the worldwide Communion fellowship and promise them our solidarity and episcopal support.
This twofold response would set off a chain of events that is still unfolding: setting-up of parallel structures, cross-boundary intervention and litigation. The Communion instruments since then have been unable to deal effectively with the escalating crisis in faith, unity and order in the Anglican Communion.

9. The Windsor Report ended with this sober assessment:

We call upon all parties to the current dispute to seek ways of reconciliation, and to heal our divisions. We have already indicated some ways in which the Episcopal Church (USA) and the Diocese of New Westminster could begin to speak with the Communion in a way which would foster reconciliation. We have appealed to those intervening in provinces and dioceses similarly to act with renewed respect. . . .

There remains a very real danger that we will not choose to walk together. Should the call to halt and find ways of continuing in our present communion not be heeded, then we shall have to begin to learn to walk apart.

10. The 2005 Dromantine Communiqué of the Primates’ Meeting again underlined:

We as a body continue to address the situations which have arisen in North America with the utmost seriousness. Whilst there remains a very real question about whether the North American churches are willing to accept the same teaching on matters of sexual morality as is generally accepted elsewhere in the Communion, the underlying reality of our communion in God the Holy Trinity is obscured, and the effectiveness of our common mission severely hindered.

Within the ambit of the issues discussed in the Windsor Report and in order to recognise the integrity of all parties, we request that the Episcopal Church (USA) and the Anglican Church of Canada voluntarily withdraw their members from the Anglican Consultative Council for the period leading up to the next Lambeth Conference. During that same period we request that both churches respond through their relevant constitutional bodies to the questions specifically addressed to them in the Windsor Report as they consider their place within the Anglican Communion.

11. Their 2007 Dar es Salaam Communiqué re-iterated:

Since the controversial events of 2003, we have faced the reality of increased tension in the life of the Anglican Communion – tension so deep that the fabric of our common life together has been torn. The Windsor Report of 2004 described the Communion as suffering from an “illness”. This “illness” arises from a breakdown in the trust and mutual recognition of one another as faithful disciples of Christ, which should be among the first fruits of our Communion in Christ with one another.

The Windsor Report identified two threats to our common life: first, certain developments in the life and ministry of the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Church of Canada which challenged the standard of teaching on human sexuality articulated in
the 1998 Lambeth Resolution 1.10; and second, interventions in the life of those Provinces which arose as reactions to the urgent pastoral needs that certain primates perceived. The Windsor Report did not see a “moral equivalence” between these events, since the cross-boundary interventions arose from a deep concern for the welfare of Anglicans in the face of innovation. Nevertheless both innovation and intervention are central factors placing strains on our common life. The Windsor Report recognised this (TWR Section D) and invited the Instruments of Communion to call for a moratorium of such actions.

What has been quite clear throughout this period is that the 1998 Lambeth Resolution 1.10 is the standard of teaching which is presupposed in the Windsor Report and from which the primates have worked. This restates the traditional teaching of the Christian Church that “in view of the teaching of Scripture, [the Conference] upholds faithfulness in marriage between a man and a woman in lifelong union, and believes that abstinence is right for those who are not called to marriage”, and applies this to several areas which are discussed further below. The Primates have reaffirmed this teaching in all their recent meetings, and indicated how a change in the formal teaching of any one Province would indicate a departure from the standard upheld by the Communion as a whole. (9-11)

12. What is clear is that from 2003, the General Conventions of the Episcopal Church (USA) have repeatedly ignored the pleas from the rest of the Communion. The recent consecration of Mary Glasspool, a partnered lesbian, on 15 May 2010, as a bishop in Los Angeles, further underscores The Episcopal Church’s “total disregard for the mind of the Communion” in matters of unity, faith and order. (Fourth Trumpet, 16).

13. From 2003 the Church of the Province of South East Asia has broken relationship with the Diocese of New Westminster Canada and with the Episcopal Church (USA), in response to their respective action to authorise public rites for same-sex union and to consecrate Gene Robinson to be bishop. It further pledged support to the dissenting minorities in those Churches. The Provincial Synod resolved in an extraordinary Meeting on 20 November 2003:

*We do not recognize the ministry of Dr Gene Robinson as a Bishop in the Anglican Church.*

*We are no longer in communion with the Presiding Bishop of ECUSA and all those Bishops and Dioceses who voted for the confirmation of Dr Gene Robinson’s election and those who joined in the consecration of the same.*

*We encourage and support our Primate to work with like-minded Primates, Bishops and churches in the Anglican Communion to urge ECUSA to repentance and to return to the faith that has been given to the Church Universal. If ECUSA refuses to repent, we will commit ourselves through our Primate to work with like-minded Primates for the realignment of the Anglican Communion.*
We support the call of the Primates of the Provinces concerned “to make adequate provision for Episcopal oversight of dissenting minorities within their own area of pastoral care in consultation with the Archbishop of Canterbury on behalf of the Primates.” We request our Primate to take an active part whenever required in this matter.

We support and reaffirm ourselves to be in communion with that part of the Anglican Communion including those faithfuls in ECUSA who accept and endorse the principles as clearly defined by Resolution 1.10 of the Lambeth Conference 1998 and the various Primates’ Meetings since 1998.

We affirm and endorse the Statement of Breaking Communion issued by the House of Bishops of this Province, to the Diocese of New Westminster, Canada, dated 6th June, 2003 in consequence of its authorization of public rites for the blessing of same sex unions and the implementation of the same, effective 28th May, 2003.

We further support our Primate’s involvement in giving appropriate help and support to those orthodox parishes under persecution, in consultation with the Archbishop of Canterbury.

14. Nevertheless, the crisis in the past decade has also provided Churches in the southern continents to rediscover their Christian heritage and to reflect on their own Church identity. The Churches in the global South came-of-age in the 2005 Third South-to-South Encounter on “The one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church”:

Apart from the world condition, our own Anglican Communion sadly continues to be weakened by unchecked revisionist teaching and practices which undermine the divine authority of the Holy Scripture. The Anglican Communion is severely wounded by the witness of errant principles of faith and practice which in many parts of our Communion have adversely affected our efforts to take the Gospel to those in need of God’s redeeming and saving love.

Notwithstanding these difficult circumstances, several parts of our Communion in the Global South are witnessing the transforming power of the Gospel and the growth of the Church. The urgency of reaching vast multitudes in our nations for Christ is pressing at our door and the fields are ready for harvest.

Surrounded by these challenges and seeking to discover afresh our identity, we decided to dig deeper into God’s Word and into the tradition of the Church to learn how to be faithful to God’s gift and call to be His one, holy, catholic and apostolic people. (South-to-South Encounter, Third Trumpet, 7-9)

15. The Anglican Communion Covenant offers a concrete platform in ordering the Churches in the Anglican Communion to be a Communion with a clear ecclesial identity. This is why global South Churches embraced the concept of the Anglican Communion Covenant when it was first
proposed (South-to-South Encounter, Third Trumpet, 22). Global South Primates have participated actively in the drafting processes.

16. We recognise at the same time that the overcoming of ‘ecclesial deficit’ that the Windsor Continuation Group (Report of March 2008, Section D i,ii) identified is a longer term undertaking. The Anglican Communion Covenant begins this process. In their Alexandria Meeting in February 2009, the Primates affirmed the recommendation of the Windsor Continuation Group that fundamental work will need to be done to develop the existing Instruments of Communion. Implicit to this is the deeper need to review and develop the canonical basis on which inter-Anglican bodies and officers interpret their tasks and make executive decisions (Windsor Report, 113-120). The recent controversy on Standing Committee membership underscores this concern. We regret the decisions of the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Secretary General to include TEC members in the Standing Committee, despite Mary Glasspool’s consecration (para 12). The Inter-Anglican Standing Commission for Unity, Faith and Order, inaugurated after Lambeth Conference 2008, is mandated, amongst other matters, to be a major platform to engage in this longer term theological task. The said Primates’ Meeting instructively recognised “the need for the Primates’ Meeting to be engaged at every stage with all these developments” (Alexandria Communiqué, 11).

Churches that accede to the Anglican Communion Covenant need to subject their common life to the reforming and transforming work of the Holy Spirit, so that the Communion may be built up until all “reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Eph 4: 13). The Anglican Communion should adopt more uniform processes in the election and appointment of bishops, to ensure that such processes are not held hostage to local politics and to parochial understandings of the episcopal office.

17. Given the theological – doctrinal – ecclesiological context that gave rise to the need for the Anglican Communion Covenant (documented above in paras 1-12 and 15-16), and given the present state of our impaired relation with particular office bearers and dioceses in The Episcopal Church and the Anglican Church in Canada (paras 13-14), it becomes clear that our accession to the Anglican Communion Covenant is based on the following understanding:

(a) that those who accede to the Anglican Communion Covenant will unequivocally abide by Lambeth 1998 Resolution 1.10 in its spirit and intent;

(b) that those Provinces and Dioceses whose actions violate Lambeth Resolution 1.10 as well as subsequent Primates Communiqué statements that have placed a moratorium on the consecration of gay bishops and the authorization and implementation of public rites for the blessing of same sex unions, are expected to rescind their actions, and bring their public doctrine and practice in line with Lambeth 1.10, before acceding to the Anglican Communion Covenant; and

(c) that Churches that accede to the Anglican Communion Covenant should bear authentic witness to the orthodox faith by an unequivocal commitment to the standards of moral and ethical holiness as set by Biblical norms in all aspects of their communal life.
(Mt 19:4-6; Rom 1:21-32; 1 Cor 6:9-11; Gal 5:16-26; Eph 5:3-14; Col 3:5-14; 1 Thess 4:3-12; 2 Tim 3:1-5; Heb 13:1-5; 1 Pet 4:1-11; 2 Pet 2:13-22; Jude v18-21; Rev 18:1-8).

(d) that the Primates Meeting, being responsible for Faith and Order, should be the body to oversee the Anglican Communion Covenant in its implementation (Anglican Communion Covenant Section 3.1.4.IV and South-to-South Encounter, Fourth Trumpet, 21).

18. In acceding to the Anglican Communion Covenant, we (Diocese or Province) are seeking with other Covenanting Provinces and Dioceses to express our communion with the Triune God and with one another, to guard the boundary-markers of the good deposit of the faith once for all delivered, and to be faithful witnesses of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the fellowship we have with God and one another, and in common mission and ministry to the world.