

GENERAL SYNOD

The Church of England and the Anglican Church in North America

1. On 10 February 2010 the General Synod debated a Private Members Motion concerning the Anglican Church in North America (ACNA). The Motion passed by the Synod, incorporating an amendment moved by the Bishop of Bristol on behalf of the House of Bishops, was as follows:

‘That this Synod, aware of the distress caused by recent divisions within the Anglican churches of the United States of America and Canada,

- (a) recognise and affirm the desire of those who have formed the Anglican Church in North America to remain within the Anglican family;*
- (b) acknowledge that this aspiration, in respect both of relations with the Church of England and membership of the Anglican Communion, raises issues which the relevant authorities of each need to explore further; and*
- (c) invite the Archbishops to report further to the Synod in 2011*

2. This note constitutes our response to the request in the final part of the Synod motion. It is necessarily a report on work in progress since the consequences of the establishment of ACNA some two and a half years ago are still emerging and on a number of issues any assessment at this stage must necessarily be tentative.
3. We are grateful to the Faith and Order Commission (FAOC) for devoting some time to studying the relevant issues and drawing together for us a range of resources on the underlying ecclesiological questions.
4. As was explained in the background note prepared for the Synod debate (GS 1764B), there are at least three different sorts of question, which arise for the Church of England in considering the implications of the creation of ACNA:
 - What is the range of relationship with other Christian churches that is possible for the Church of England?
 - How does a particular local Church become accepted as part of the Anglican Communion?
 - In what circumstances can the orders of another Church be recognised and accepted by the Church of England so that someone ordained in that church can be given archiepiscopal authorisation for ministry here?
5. The location of responsibility for determining each of these questions is distinct.

6. Thus, it is for the decision making bodies of the Church of England to determine the nature of its relationship with other Christian churches. Since the creation of the General Synod in 1970 the mind of the Church of England on such matters has been discerned in the General Synod, which, because issues of theology and ecclesiology are involved, necessarily looks for guidance to the House of Bishops.
7. This has been the case whether the issue has been about the Church of England entering into communion with another Church, as with the Porvoo Churches in the 1990s, or whether it has concerned a formal agreement of a different kind, such as the Covenant with the Methodist Church in 2003.
8. In relation to the second question, the concept of membership of the Anglican Communion is not entirely straightforward. The Communion itself (in common with the Church of England) has no legal personality. In addition (and unlike the Church of England) it does not have a set of canons which set out its core beliefs and regulate aspects of its internal governance.
9. Thus, from the time of the first Lambeth Conference in 1867, those Churches whose bishops have been invited by the Archbishop of Canterbury of the day to attend, participate fully and vote in the deliberations of the Conference have been regarded as part of the Anglican Communion.
10. The creation of a new legal entity in the 1960s – the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC) – created the need for a more formalised basis for membership of that body. Under the ACC’s constitution a Church can be added to the ACC schedule of membership by decision of the Standing Committee of the Communion and with the assent of 2/3 of the primates of the Churches already listed in the schedule.
11. The third question- how a judgement is made over whether someone’s orders are recognised and accepted by the Church of England- is not dependent on whether the Church from which that person comes is in communion with the Church of England or a member of the Anglican Communion.
12. The criteria set out in a report of 1980 from the Faith and Order Advisory Group on *Episcopi Vagantes* remain helpful namely:

“ . . . that the minister of ordination must be a bishop, himself validly consecrated, the recipient must have been baptised, the right matter must be used which is the laying on of hands, and the right form which consists of words of prayer referring to the special gift and showing the object of the laying on of hands.”
13. Thus, those ordained in other churches which accept the historic episcopate- for example the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church- may be received into the Church of England and authorised to minister, as may clergy from the Church of England in South Africa.

14. Authorisation by the Archbishop of the Province is considered on a case by case basis and will take a number of relevant considerations into account. It is not the case, therefore, that ordination in another Church of this kind confers any entitlement to minister here. But it does involve the conferring of orders which the Church of England is able to recognise and accept.
15. Where then do matters currently stand concerning ACNA on each of these three issues, namely relations with the Church of England, relations with the Anglican Communion and the ability of ACNA clergy to be authorised to minister in the Church of England?
16. The Synod motion rightly began by referring to “*the distress caused by recent divisions within the Anglican churches of the United States of America and Canada.*” That distress, in which we share, is a continuing element in the present situation and is likely to remain so for some considerable time.
17. Wounds are still fresh. Those who follow developments in North America from some distance have a responsibility not to say or do anything which will inflame an already difficult situation and make it harder for those directly involved to manage the various challenges with which they are still grappling.
18. We would, therefore, encourage an open-ended engagement with ACNA on the part of the Church of England and the Communion, while recognising that the outcome is unlikely to be clear for some time yet, especially given the strong feelings on all sides of the debate in North America.
19. The Church of England remains fully committed to the Anglican Communion and to being in communion both with the Anglican Church of Canada and the Episcopal Church (TEC). In addition, the Synod motion has given Church of England affirmation to the desire of ACNA to remain in some sense within the Anglican family.
20. Among issues that will need to be explored in direct discussions between the Church of England and ACNA are the canonical situation of the latter, its relationship to other Churches of the Communion outside North America and its attitude towards existing Anglican ecumenical agreements.
21. Where clergy from ACNA wish to come to England the position in relation to their orders and their personal suitability for ministry here will be considered by us on a case by case basis under the Overseas and Other Clergy (Ministry and Ordination) Measure 1967.

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December 2011

**Published by the General Synod of the Church of England
and on sale at the Church House Bookshop**

31 Great Smith Street, London SW1P 3BN

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