

The Revd Canon Jordan Hylden,
Task Force on the Study of Marriage,
The Episcopal Church

29 January 2018

Re: Request from Task Force on the Study of Marriage, The Episcopal Church

Dear Canon Hylden,

My apologies for taking a much longer period than I had anticipated for responding to The Episcopal Church's request for the Inter-Anglican Standing Commission on Unity, Faith and Order's (IASCUFO) assessment of the impact of the authorization and use of liturgical rites for same-sex marriage and the blessing of same-sex unions. As the Commission reflected on these questions at its meeting 30 November-7 December 2017—and into the New Year at a distance—it became increasingly clear that responding to the single question was much more complex than anticipated.

IASCUFO noted that the request of The Episcopal Church is specific:

From your perspective and specific setting, what has been the impact of the Episcopal Church's authorization and use of liturgical rites for same-sex marriage and the blessing of same-sex unions on "the Church"?

Accordingly, IASCUFO has not addressed the content of the rites. Let me make some further preliminary comments about how IASCUFO tackled the question.

The members of the Commission did not find it feasible to attempt to separate the question of the impact of the authorisation and use of these rites from the wider context of the ongoing debate, and actions, around human sexuality, issues beyond The Episcopal Church, and the decisions of the 2015 General Convention.

Thus, for instance, the existence of the separated (North) American Anglican churches that in 2009 became the Anglican Church of North America (ACNA) predates the 2015 authorisation of rites same-sex marriage—although the underlying issues are the same. ACNA's relationships with Anglican provinces around the world, has created the abnormal complexity of some provinces being in full

communion with this body, although it is not a member of the Anglican Communion. The impact of the rites' authorisation re-echoes in this context.

IASCUFO's reflections were guided by the responsibilities given in its mandate (please see www.anglicancommunion.org/identity/doctrine/iascufo.aspx). These responsibilities include issues that relate to the communion shared between member churches of the Anglican Communion, as well as the relationships between Anglicans and other churches and traditions of the Christian *oikumene*.

IASCUFO serves the Instruments of Communion of the Anglican Communion by promoting common understanding, consistency, and convergence both in Anglican Communion affairs, and in ecumenical engagement. Within this broad perspective, the Commission identified a breadth and variety of ramifications, direct and indirect, in response to the rites' authorisation, within the life of the Anglican Communion, between its member churches and within its global ecumenical relationships.

While the members of IASCUFO can point to many areas where the impact should be considered, a precise quantitative analysis is beyond its capacity. The Commission's comments should be read in this light.

Lastly, IASCUFO reflected on the given question on "impact" with the working assumption that The Episcopal Church has asked the same questions of other member churches in the Anglican Communion, and of its immediate ecumenical partners. Given IASCUFO's mandate to deepen communion within and across the Communion, the Commission will follow with interest the responses of the member churches to this question.

The Commission is also eager to learn how the 2015 decision has impacted on the life of The Episcopal Church in other areas such as mission and evangelism, local ecumenical and inter-faith relationships; perceptions in the media and public opinion; in its dealing with governmental authorities; and so forth. On the last point, the Commission notes that the legal position globally is hugely varied, with over 70 countries still criminalising same-gender intimacy between consenting adults, while others make provision for same-gender civil partnerships and/or marriage – and thus the responses will be hugely varied.

1. The Instruments of Communion

Broadly speaking, questions of human sexuality and same-sex relationships have long required considerable time, energy and focus from the Instruments of Communion. These questions have shaped not only the Instruments' agendas but the way their work and priorities are reported on, and perceived among Anglicans, their ecumenical partners, their inter-faith relations, and beyond. Such reporting, whether positive or negative, often means that the priorities and messages that the Instruments of Communion would want to convey become eclipsed. These are the dynamics in which the rites' authorisation comes within the Instruments of Communion, and to which it can be seen as giving fresh impetus and focus.

Thus, for example, and most clearly, IASCUFO notes the impact on the frequency, agenda, content, and conduct of the Primates' Meeting, and most specifically the Primates' Gathering and Meeting of January 2016, as well as on its attendance, and the accompanying media interest. One further impact is the establishment of the Primates' Task Group, and the subsequent work required of those involved, both directly as members, and those who support them.

Another direct consequential impact is the 2016 decision of the primates 'requiring that for a period of three years The Episcopal Church no longer represent us on ecumenical and interfaith bodies, should not be appointed or elected to an internal standing committee and that while participating in the internal bodies of the Anglican Communion, they will not take part in decision making on any issues pertaining to doctrine or polity'. All such bodies are thus deprived of the membership, expertise and perspectives that members of The Episcopal Church both had until then been contributing in these ways, and might subsequently contribute – on which there is further comment below.

What happened at the January 2016 **Primates Gathering and Meeting** had further impact in the way it then influences subsequent meetings. For example, a precedent was provided that was then deemed to apply in another similar context, in relation to the Scottish Episcopal Church's decision to make a canonical change to permit same-gender marriage at the Primates' Meeting of October 2017.

The meeting of the **Anglican Consultative Council** in Lusaka took place in April 2016 (ACC-16). Conducting its business according to its own legal practices, the impact of the authorisation of the rites, and the consequent decisions of the Primates might be thought to be slight when looking only at the Resolutions of the meeting. Nonetheless, there was considerable bearing upon the issue, within the ACC's formal and informal debates, in attendance, and in reporting.

Though the members of the Commission are not party to the details of their deliberations, there has been impact upon the work of the **Anglican Communion Standing Committee**. The authorisation may have added to the concerns prompting the decision to change the venue for ACC-17 to Hong Kong from Brazil, where there were particular sensitivities around the Anglican Church in Brazil's plans to debate human sexuality.

The **Lambeth Conference** will convene in 2020. The Lambeth Conference Design Group might well be asked to what extent they have already had to be mindful of the rites' authorisation in their planning, and presumably they will also look to whatever arises from the General Convention in 2018.

A fourth Instrument of Communion is the **Archbishop of Canterbury**. The staff at Lambeth Palace is better placed to comment on the impact of the rites' authorisation on the time, energy and focus of the Archbishop's ministry and his capacity to pursue and communicate his priorities more widely. For instance, IASCUFO notes that the October 2016 "Common Declaration" of the Archbishop of Canterbury and Pope Francis specifically includes "more recent questions regarding human sexuality" among the new disagreements between the Anglican Communion and the Catholic Church.

2. Ecumenical Relations

As noted above, global ecumenical dialogues have been deprived of the contribution of previously appointed members with all that they offer, and of any fresh participation from The Episcopal Church, during the span of the Primates' decision.

The International Reformed Anglican Dialogue (IRAD) has been particularly impacted by the Primates decision when a much valued member of the dialogue from The Episcopal Church was suspended. In its 2016 Communiqué, IRAD recorded that it 'deeply regretted the three-year suspension of the Revd Dr Amy Richter, a priest of The Episcopal Church, from the Dialogue, because of the decision taken by the Primates' Meeting of the Anglican Communion.' The Anglican co-chair, the Bishop David Chillingworth, former Primus of the Scottish Episcopal Church, was subsequently suspended in October 2017.

Further, Anglican engagement with issues of same-gender relationship, especially marriage, is reflected in the agendas and functioning of some Anglican bilateral dialogues and ecumenical relationships.

- The International Commission for **Anglican-Orthodox** Theological Dialogue (ICAOTD) began its present phase with a profound reflection on theological anthropology. Although its agreed statement does not specifically address same-gender issues, it lays the theological ground for such a reflection in the future.
- The **Anglican-Oriental Orthodox** International Commission (AOOIC) was suspended by the Oriental Orthodox churches from 2002 to 2012.
- The **Anglican-Roman Catholic** International Commission (ARCIC) was on hold from 2005 to 2011 because of Roman Catholic anxieties around developments in human sexuality in some provinces of the Anglican Communion. The mandate of ARCIC III is to address questions of moral discernment—including same-sex relationship—from within the wider context of ecclesiology.
- While the churches of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) have a similar range of views and practices as the Anglican churches, the present agenda of the International **Reformed-Anglican** Dialogue (IRAD) is to reflect on communion in unity, diversity and disagreement. It has asked the poignant question: "Can communion contain conflict so that conflict loses its power to divide?"
- The **World Council of Churches'** (WCC) Commission on Faith and Order began a profound reflection on moral discernment from 2006. While the moral issues are not simply those of human sexuality, the degree of strain within and between churches on this issue gave rise to the need of such a study. Most Anglican provinces, including The Episcopal Church, are member churches of the WCC.

Thus, questions of how Anglicans engage in moral discernment ethical decision-making, including human sexuality, are high on the bilateral and multilateral agenda of our ecumenical dialogues and commissions. The authorization and use of the rites feeds into and quickly becomes a focus point in these unfolding relationships.

3. IASCUFO

IASCUFO itself has been impacted in many ways by issues around human sexuality, since its inception in 2009. Initially, its members were appointed regionally in order to represent the widest range of contexts and views on a variety of issues affecting the wider Communion. From 2010, some provinces from the Global South inhibited their members from participating in the life of the Commission, as a means to protest the toleration of a variety of views within the Communion on same-sex relationships. From 2016 impact on the Commission has continued, though in a different way, through the three-year suspension of its one member from The Episcopal Church. Thus, IASCUFO's capacity to reflect and speak from the widest global perspectives has been diminished by the ways in which Anglicans express their disagreement on issues of human sexuality.

It is not only that IASCUFO has lost the particular significant expertise of the Revd Professor Katherine Grieb, but that in consequence the Commission is hampered in delivering its mandate – especially in promoting deeper communion between the churches of the Anglican Communion – in that this Commission, unlike other Anglican bodies, is unable to hear directly from a member who can bring the views of The Episcopal Church into its work. Nor does it have a member who can relate IASCUFO's deliberations back to The Episcopal Church.

Within the Anglican Communion, and thus within IASCUFO, the decision of The Episcopal Church to authorise these rites has prompted continuing or widening reflection in various ways around issues related to same-sex marriage and the blessing of same sex unions. Impacted areas under consideration within IASCUFO include:

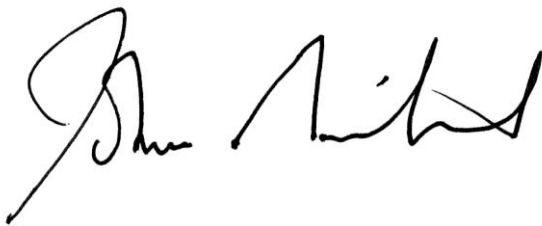
- The structures and practices of the Anglican Communion, including of the Instruments: for example, questions have been raised over whether the Primates Meeting broke new ground in how it responded to the authorisation of the rites.
- The Anglican Communion Covenant
- Theologies and practices of how Christians 'disagree well'
- Reception theory, and how do Anglicans understand 'reception' in relation to what might be seen as 'innovations', and what constitutes an 'open process'
- Biblical studies, together with exegetical and hermeneutical practices and assumptions.
- Heterosexual marriage, long term unmarried partnerships between men and women, remarriage after divorce, and wider questions of sexuality and culture, as found across the world today.
- Liturgy, including reflection on the distinction between marriage and blessing of a marriage (noting the breadth of legal practices around marriage – for example in some countries all couples must have a civil marriage before a church marriage, such that the latter might better be seen as a blessing); and, recalling the maxim that what Christians pray reflects what they believe, '*Lex orandi, lex credendi*', the potential theological implications if the 'trial use' rites become incorporated formally into *The Book of Common Prayer* of The Episcopal Church.
- Interchangeability of ministries within the Anglican Communion, for example, the non-reception of ordained ministers who are in same-gendered relationships and marriages.

Conclusion

In summary, while the direct and specific consequences of The Episcopal Church's decision to authorise these rites is most concretely experienced in relation to the Primates' Gathering and Meeting of January 2016, the wider consequences of disagreement on issues of same-sex relations and marriage continue to reverberate, both negatively and positively, in a wide range of ways across the Communion, its members and its partners, in the broad area of IASCUFO's interests.

If you would like further explication or clarification, please do not hesitate to be in touch with me directly.

With all good wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Gibaut', written in a cursive style.

The Revd Canon Dr John Gibaut,
Director for Unity, Faith and Order

cc. The Revd Canon Dr Charles K. Robertson
Canon to the Presiding Bishop for Ministry Beyond The Episcopal Church

The Most Revd Dr Josiah Idowu-Fearon
Secretary General of the Anglican Communion