

Report on the Guildford Diocesan Synod vote on the Anglican Communion Covenant

24 March 2012 (updated 16 May 2012)

The purpose of the proposed Covenant is to seek to hold the Anglican Communion together that has recently been splitting apart. My website gives more details ([click here](#)).

Each Province of the Anglican Communion has been asked to adopt the Covenant. Those Provinces that have voted so far have voted in favour. The Church of England has, under its Constitution to have more than half our Dioceses vote for it before the General Synod can give final approval to it.

The Guildford Diocese on 24 March voted against. The BBC News website <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-17500144> reports that, along with other Dioceses that voted against on the same day, the Covenant has now failed to be approved by the Church of England.

Prior to the meeting the Archbishop of Canterbury had posted a YouTube presentation which together with a transcript is on his website:

<http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/2380/archbishop-why-the-covenant-matters>

where he said "I believe with all my heart that what's offered to us in the Covenant is an adult, sensible, workable way of handling the conflicts that will inevitably arise in a spirit of real mutual respect."

The Bishop of Guildford also spoke strongly in favour of supporting the Covenant (see below).

At the Diocesan Synod the voting on the motion "That this Synod approve the draft Act of Synod adopting the Anglican Communion Covenant" was:

	For	Against	Abstentions
House of Laity	23	18	2
House of Clergy	14	22	1
House of Bishops	2	0	0

The motion was lost in the House of Clergy and was therefore lost. (I voted in favour).

About twenty people spoke in the debate, the text of my speech (which I departed slightly from in delivery in order to respond to other points made) was:

Some people say that we shouldn't have an Anglican Covenant and that instead we should just carry on talking with each other, being friends with each other and celebrating our diversity. However that argument ignores the reality of the current situation in the Anglican Communion. The reality is:

- That at the last Lambeth Conference in 2008, 150 bishops in the Anglican Communion boycotted it and held a rival meeting in Jerusalem.
- In America lots of parishes have said that they no longer associate themselves with the leaders of the US Episcopal Church, and have put themselves under the oversight of African Anglican bishops. The result of which has been years of on-going and expensive legal battles between those parishes and the Episcopal Church over who owns those parish churches.
- And at the recent Primates meetings, several Archbishops have refused to attend.

I don't know whether the best description is that the Anglican Communion is splitting apart and there is still time to do something. Or that it has split apart and that it is already too late. Personally I fear that the Anglican Covenant may be too little too late, but to do nothing will certainly mean that the current splits will become permanent. Please vote for the Covenant.

The below is from my notes of what was said in the debate. They are not the official minutes and should not be relied upon:

Those who spoke against the Covenant included: the Revd Canon Robert Cotton, Stephen Hofmeyr QC, Hilary Cotton, Revd Canon Dr Hazel Whitehead, Revd Canon Barbara Messham, Revd Robert Jenkins, Revd Stuart Thomas, Very Revd Victor Stock and Revd Simon Talbott. The points made against included:

- The Archbishop of Canterbury's YouTube statement said "If we can approach the Covenant in that spirit then I believe passionately that it's worth voting for and worth supporting". The key word was "if" and the problem was that people wouldn't seek to use the Covenant in the reasonable way of the Archbishop.
- Richard Hooker had written that the Christian religion should be an inn where all are received joyously, rather than a cottage where we decide which few friends are received. The Covenant will change us from an inn to a cottage.
- A Covenant should not be based on institutions but on the gospel. Two-thirds of the population of the Communion were part of GAFCON and we should all unite behind their Jerusalem Declaration instead.
- The Church Times had recently reported that GAFCON were to have a meeting in England which was "by invitation only". That was an example of an exclusive Church, and a Covenant would turn us into an exclusive Church. Jeremiah 31:31-34 says God will write his covenant on our hearts. That was the type of covenant needed, not a written one.
- The Covenant would be "managing God" telling God how He should operate, rather than allowing grace to abound. The Covenant would prevent debate.
- The best way to resolve disputes is by love, not by law.
- The experience of the Anglican-Methodist Covenant had shown that the problem with covenants is that unless everyone is committed to them they don't work.
- Unity comes from discussion that helps you to see the point of view of others. The Covenant doesn't do that.
- The Covenant goes against the DNA of Anglicanism. The attraction of Anglicanism is that it is a broad Church, living with each other in respect and love.

Those who spoke in favour of the Covenant included: the Ven Julian Henderson, Adrian Vincent, Keith Malcouronne, Revd Canon Jeremy Cresswell, Ken Mort, the Revd Dr Philip Plyming and the Bishop of Guildford. The points made in favour included:

- The Anglican Communion is a family and just like any family it needs certain values and a framework. Our current framework has proved insufficient to hold the Anglican Communion together. The gap has become so serious that provinces have not abided by decisions of the whole communion and have gone against the authority bodies; there is therefore a crisis of authority. There are court cases between Anglicans, irregular ordinations, removal of licenses. We are already divided and we need to find a way to hold together in a less mud-slinging way, with a framework for dealing with differences. Some fear it will prevent new developments, but the Covenant isn't about strict uniformity.
- It had been distressing that so many bishops had boycotted the Lambeth Conference. It was important to keep the two-thirds world part of the Church with us. Part 4 of the Covenant wouldn't excommunicate anyone, it will help to keep the Anglican Communion together.
- Our Bible study this morning had been on Ephesians 4, 'make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit'. The Covenant was an effort for unity and we should make it.
- The Covenant would put us on a level playing field with other provinces, thereby moving away from the old colonialism of the Western Church.
- Regarding the Hooker quotation that we shouldn't move from an inn to a cottage: the fact is that our current inn, the roof has caved in and the tables have been overturned. The

Covenant will help to repair the inn. Things are not alright at the moment, they need fixing; 'steady as she goes' will not fix it.

- The Archbishop of Canterbury has commended the Covenant in the strongest possible terms. His experience of the Anglican Communion is greater than mine and I will trust to his knowledge of the situation.

The Bishop of Guildford's speech has now been published on the Diocesan website and is worth reading in full. It is attached.

Despite what the Bishop said, the motion was lost.

After the motion was lost, a following motion from the Revd Robert Cotton was put and passed. I abstained because:

- the following motion said that we "(a) rejoice in the fellowship of the world-wide Anglican Communion...held together by bonds of affection..."

I would indeed rejoice if we are held together by bonds of affection, but the reality of the splits and the on-going lawsuits means that this statement is not factually accurate.

- the following motion also said that we "(c) call on the House of Bishops: (i) to find ways to maintain and reinforce strong links across the world-wide Anglican Communion..."

The House of Bishops had found a way to reinforce the links, it was called the Anglican Covenant and we had just voted against it.

I abstained, rather than voted against the following motion was because I supported "(b) thank the Archbishop of Canterbury for his tireless efforts throughout the Communion to sustain and strengthen unity in difficult times".

Anglican Covenant

I have been studying the breakdown of the votes in the various Diocesan Synods which have voted against the Anglican Covenant. The interesting thing is that in the majority of dioceses which have so far voted against there was a decisive vote against in the house of laity. This is the case in 15 out of the 20 dioceses that have voted against (where figures are available). In many dioceses the clergy vote was decisive, here the figures are 16 out of 20. The bishops have voted largely in favour, 27 houses of bishops out of the 32 that have so far voted.

I have also analysed that where bishops' houses voted against, their diocese (usually) has a twinning with the Episcopal Church in the USA. Mistakenly, I believe, they have taken a vote for the Covenant to be against the Episcopal Church. I think the lay votes against are, however, more to do with a lack of effective communication as to what the Anglican Covenant is *really* about. Canon John Rees gave us at our last Synod a very helpful background introduction. I want to do some clarifying and to urge you all, clergy and laity to vote *for it*, even if the odds are now that it will go down in a majority of Diocesan Synods and so cannot become an Act of Synod, the method the General Synod agreed by majority to seek to approve the Covenant. But Guildford should not be afraid to speak its mind and even swim against the tide.

With Archbishop Rowan's announcement of his resignation at the end of the year there has been inevitable speculation about his heroic efforts to maintain the unity of the Anglican Communion. Heroic failure? I don't know – without the Archbishop's huge investment in listening and praying and articulating Scripture in relation to the unity of the Church our divisions would probably have been far, far worse. The Archbishop is expected to unite the Communion yet he has no effective way of achieving this for the Anglican Communion as a whole. There are instruments of unity: Lambeth Conference, Primates Meeting, Anglican Consultative Council and the personal office of the Archbishop of Canterbury himself. But none of these have a shred of formal authority. Occasionally you do need things to *bind* people together in the Lord. As there *are* in a diocese, a province, the national church.

The Covenant idea went back *well before* the debate about Bishop Gene Robinson in the USA. I am *certain* that had this issue not become identified with the Covenant proposals they would have been acceptable to those who are suspicious about them. The Proposals emerged from a consultation held in Virginia, where the Episcopal Church was supportive, in preparation for the Lambeth Conference of 1998. *That* Conference asked for two things (one side or the other in the sexuality debate usually only remembers *one* thing). Yes, the first thing was that the Conference did not approve of bishops in active homosexual partnerships. But it *also* said that the two sides must listen to and respect each other. It encouraged a serious dialogue. That has only partly taken place and only in some places. (*We* have a good listening group established in this diocese led by John Ashe originally and more recently by Archdeacon Julian.) Developments nevertheless took place in the USA and Canada, meanwhile the Windsor Process drafted versions of the Covenant in consultation with *all* the Churches. They were revised twice in response to criticisms – the last time taking out rather legalistic language. So here are the proposals before us today.

There has been much misinformation. Some Evangelicals dismissed them from the beginning. Too soon in my view, but they complained that they had ‘no teeth’. On the liberal wing the complaint has been that there *are* teeth. That disagreement alone points to a need for accurate analysis and debate rather than rhetoric. What’s my take? All are agreed that the first three sections are unexceptional restatements of Anglican faith, depending as it happens very largely on the Church of England Declaration of Assent every deacon, priest and bishop makes at their ordination and subsequent ministries. Section Four however is deemed to be contentious. What it would do is allow a declaration of incompatibility with the Covenant to be made under specified and extremely rare circumstances. That asks for a Church of the Communion to either think again about a proposed action (for example lay-celebration in Sydney) or to go forward with the likelihood of some restrictions in terms of formal status at some international Anglican meetings. This is *not* an expulsion from the Anglican Communion. This is not a barring from all meetings. It is not a declaration that the Church of X is out of Communion. It is a bare, minimalist way of saying to a church, ‘look, the family of Anglican Churches don’t feel you’ve got this right, please continue talking for the moment rather than acting’. That does not seem to me to be a great ask. It *does* not stop such a church deciding that in its own culture such a course of action would be right. This is *not* a universal jurisdiction. It is more like an international agreement to try wherever possible to act together – can that really be so wrong? – or is it as the *Church Times* leader said percipiently this week that if the Covenant fails this weekend it will be because of the centuries old English dislike of being told what to do by foreigners!

There are I think *two* elephants in the room here – one at least is foreign. There is the spectre of universal Papal jurisdiction – the Roman Curia. But I repeat not one jot or tittle of jurisdiction is being ceded by the Church of England or any other Anglican Church by the Covenant – that is a misinformed myth. The other elephant is more subtle – it is the fear that the Covenant would inhibit or even prevent change and development. Well it was Newman himself who argued that to change and develop is to live. Moreover, the Church of England as a distinct ecclesial body separate from Rome was *born* by change – the Reformation. So this argument needs to be respected and seriously addressed.

I will do so by a development test case: the ordination of women. The fear is that the Covenant will prevent change. So it would have prevented the ordination of women if it had been in place some years ago. Yet a declaration of incompatibility within Anglican life in Covenantal fellowship can *only*, according to the Covenant, be made if no less than four bodies or persons agree: the so-called instruments of Communion. You have heard of them before. The Archbishop of Canterbury; the Primates of the Anglican Communion; The Anglican Consultative Council, laity and clergy as well as bishops; and the Lambeth Conference. But none of these Instruments of Unity, still less all four opposed the ordination of women. Way back in 1971 the first meeting of the Anglican Consultative Council at Limuru, Kenya said if a Province went ahead they would not be condemned by the Council. The more formal position of the Lambeth Conferences of 1978 and 1988 agreed that the ordination of women to both the priesthood and the episcopate was consistent with communion, while also stating that those who disagreed with the ordination of women to the episcopate had an honoured place. Archbishops and Primates have also accepted women in the episcopate. By 2008 they were present at the Lambeth Conference. So in no

imaginable or covenantal way could the Covenant have prevented such development – on the contrary the Instruments of Communion have encouraged it.

Yes, on the issue of human sexuality there is an ongoing and continuing debate and so a request for a moratorium, but this debate continues certainly within the Church of England, and in many other Churches of the Communion – and no-one can expect churches in cultures as different as Nigeria and the USA to be in agreement on this issue for the time being and maybe longer. There is also continuing debate within the USA, I don't only mean by reason of the dioceses or parts of dioceses which have left the Episcopal Church but also by remaining and loyal conservatives within the Episcopal Church. The Covenant would not take the name Anglican from any member of the Episcopal Church, it would be a way of retaining some structure and dialogue within the Anglican Communion.

After this debate (in the event of a no) you will be asked to consider a following motion. It invites the Archbishop and ourselves to work for unity in other ways. I shall not stand in the way of this by voting against. I am indeed in favour of its admirable sentiments. But how *practically* is this to be done? The instrument that has been worked on by Anglican theologians and others for many years (Virginia and Windsor Reports etc) is the only set of proposals around. Those who have been arguing against have signally not come up with any practical or even theoretical plan for the future, not a word.

Here, I want to be quite clear about what I am saying. Robert's Following Motion rightly and helpfully highlights the Indaba Process. I support that but it's a way of doing dialogue not an instrument which enables such dialogue to happen. There was no Indaba prior to Bishop Gene Robinson's election and consecration. The Covenant process if it had been in place would have *requested* precisely the Indaba which could have helped. But there was no prior dialogue. Within the Covenant there will be no mechanism to promulgate Indaba – until something else is invented.

If the Covenant goes down all around the Anglican Communion the outlook will be bleak for decades and we will all go our own separate ways. There will no longer be an Anglican Communion. But the outlook is not quite so bleak. Should the Covenant not be passed by the Church of England (as is likely enough by failing in the diocesan synods) the situation will be complicated enough. The Archbishop of Canterbury of the future might have to work for a Covenanted fellowship of which the Church of England was not technically part! This is a *real* possibility and conundrum. Of course at the moment there is very little likelihood of the Episcopal Church saying yes. Canada is uncertain. Scotland I am told is doubtful – but that's because of Scottish independence! But so far no church has said no. Some may not put the question – rather than say no. A yes has come from the Church of Ireland (subscription technically), the Church of Mexico, Myanmar (Burma), Papua New Guinea, South East Asia, Southern Africa (to be further ratified at their next Synod), the Southern Cone and the Province of the West Indies. So just under a quarter of Anglican Churches – with different, very different, churchmanships and cultural backgrounds have said yes. It will be very odd if a majority of Anglican Churches want the Covenant and the Church of England is not part of that Communion. I shall be deeply depressed if the Church of England became a little Englander and opts out of what should be an *enrichment* of our communion. But the Covenant may still have

a future. Years ago there was an important conference in Montreal about the missionary future of the Anglican Communion. It's slogan was even more important than what it said on its detailed reports: 'Mutual responsibility and interdependence within the Body of Christ'.

I urge Synod to pray and consider and vote. I urge you to vote for such mutual responsibility and interdependence.