

The Anglican Communion

The Anglican Communion includes 38 self-governing Member Churches or Provinces in more than 160 countries on every continent. These churches are in communion with the See (diocese and bishop) of Canterbury and have historic roots in the Church of England. In recent decades, our communion has been described as one of mutual responsibility and interdependence that enables us to engage in God's mission to the world. Our communion is rooted in Christ and nourished by the Holy Spirit. It includes belief in the primacy of scripture (with considerable diversity in our interpretation of scripture), profession of the apostolic faith as articulated in the Nicene and Apostles' Creeds, practices of baptism and eucharist and the liturgical heritage of the Book of Common Prayer, and mutually recognized ministries, including the episcopacy.

Over the course of our history, relationships and structures have developed to allow Churches of the Anglican Communion to take counsel together:

- **Archbishop of Canterbury:** In his person and in his office, the Archbishop is a primary focus of communion. He offers a ministry of service, care, and support to the entire Anglican Communion, for example, representing the Anglican Communion in ecumenical and interfaith relationships and exercising a pastoral role in troubled regions of the world.
- **Lambeth Conference:** Bishops of the entire Anglican Communion meet every ten years for prayer and consultation on matters of common interest. The first conference, in 1867, was the result of a request from Canadian bishops, who asked that Archbishop of Canterbury convene a conference to address disputed teaching by a bishop in South Africa. Several meetings of the Lambeth Conference have described the body as advisory rather than legislative. Called and presided over by the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lambeth Conference embodies the collegiality of the episcopacy.
- **Anglican Consultative Council:** The 1968 Lambeth Conference established the ACC to facilitate cooperative work and common action, in light of the growth of the Anglican Communion and the ecumenical movement. The 1968 Lambeth Conference referred a number of issues to the new body, including questions of "violent and non-violent social and political change," the ordination of women to the priesthood, and ecumenical dialogues. Meeting every two or three years, the ACC includes one to three lay and clergy representatives from every province of the Communion; it is the only synodical structure of the Anglican Communion that includes lay people. At the 2005 meeting in Nottingham, England, the ACC called for a constitutional change that would add the primate of each province as ex officio members; this proposal will require the approval of the Primates' Meeting and of 2/3 of the Provinces.
- **Primates' Meeting:** As commended by 1978 Lambeth Conference, the primates of every Church of the Anglican Communion meet every one to two years for thought, prayer, and consultation on theological, social, and international issues.

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