

# Remaining Faithful within the Church of England

## A response to the Letter to the Churches from the GAFCON Assembly 2018

1. We write as a group of evangelical bishops within the Church of England. We rejoice with you in a shared call to proclaim Christ faithfully to the nations. We praise God for the glorious good news that all can be reconciled to God through faith in Christ's atoning death and resurrection. We praise him too that he is creating a people for himself drawn from all nations – and that you experienced at your recent meeting in Jerusalem a wonderful reminder of the reality of God's promises in that regard.
2. We are aware that the Letter to the Churches was produced in the expectation that others across the world who would count themselves to be "faithful Anglicans" might make a response to the Letter. This is ours. It does not purport to speak for anyone other than those who are signatories to it – but what we would like to do is to try to engage with the affirmations and concerns in the Letter, and to indicate how we see our own role "in this great enterprise of proclaiming Christ faithfully to the nations."
3. We want first of all to affirm all that the Letter says about "**Proclaiming God's Gospel**". We share your commitment "to proclaim the gospel of the triune God in our churches and in all the world." There is nothing that this section of the Letter says from which we would dissent. We too see our task, as set out in the scriptures and in the ordinal, to be shepherds of the flock, to guard the gospel and to teach the faith.
4. The analysis of the current tragic situation in the Anglican Communion which is set out in the section on "**Reforming God's Church**" is one which resonates with our experience as Bishops in the Church of England. While we may disagree in some particular matters (which we specify below) with the solutions that GAFCON has adopted in order to address this ecclesial crisis, we cannot disagree with the GAFCON diagnosis concerning the tear in the fabric of the Communion.
5. It may be helpful if we set out something of our own thinking about the future. As the title of this document suggests, we see it as our present calling to remain committed to the Church of England, faithful to our ministry as Bishops in the Church of God. There may come a time when the Church of England (or indeed any Church) departs from the biblical and apostolic Faith – and this might occur for any number of reasons, although there are some obvious current presenting issues set out in the Letter. The core doctrine of the Church of England remains unchanged, and we as bishops are on public record as being fully committed to our historic formularies. There is some popular misrepresentation of the current House of Bishops which alleges that we are heterodox; we recognise the fears, but our personal conversations and experience lead us to the conclusion that that perception is far from the normative reality.
6. We recognise that the GAFCON movement is something that has united Anglican Churches across the world who are looking for a different shape for a global Communion (though we also want to affirm the Churches of the Global South as another manifestation of this same desire to work together). We regret that no recognition is given in the Letter to those who in good conscience believe it is right to stay within their current Anglican structure. Notably, we value the continuing witness of the Communion

Partners in TEC and Canada. We believe it is important that GAFCON recognises such brothers and sisters more clearly than appears to currently be the case.

7. We would like to see greater clarity about the relationship between GAFCON UK and AMiE. It would be helpful for us, in seeking to relate to those who also identify as evangelical Anglicans, to know who speaks for GAFCON and AMiE and how we can best build bridges with those two groups in order to further the work of the Gospel in England. We are also not convinced (and have voiced this to Andy Lines himself) that a leader of GAFCON UK ordained in a Church that is not part of the Anglican Communion (however well respected) is best placed to represent an authentic Anglican voice and to articulate the need for and work for the reform of the Church of England. We would welcome the opportunity to engage more fully in conversations with GAFCON UK about its polity, how it sees itself in relation to the Church of England, and about its missional strategy and purpose.
8. Most of us did not attend GAFCON 2018. We were grateful for your invitation to do so, but did indicate to you that for many, though not all, evangelical Bishops in the Church of England, the requirement that we sign the Jerusalem Declaration is a sticking point. Some were happy to sign and were able to be with you in Jerusalem. For those of us who can't sign it, some have a difficulty with affirming Clause 13, particularly in relation to our role within the Church of England. Others operate on the basis that the Church of England's Declaration of Assent, the Ordinal, and our adherence to scripture, creeds and formularies are sufficient. The Church of England is a reformed catholic Church, and the reason we can in good conscience minister within it is that it stands in that inheritance of faith. There are parishes who sometimes ask us to sign declarations before we visit them; this we have always resisted, and it would set a very difficult precedent for us to accede to your request. You will, we hope, understand our reasons. Perhaps there is room for some accommodation on this issue for those of us who would like to attend future GAFCON events.
9. We resonate with the call for ACNA and Brazil to be invited to Lambeth, and evangelicals within the Church of England have pressed for ACNA to be recognised as a partner with the CofE when it comes to the licensing of clergy ordained within ACNA. This latter point is a matter that can be taken up within the structures of our General Synod, and we are happy to add our support to the conversations between ACNA and the Archbishop of Canterbury.
10. With regard to GAFCON's call for other Provinces who have, in the words of the Letter "endorsed by word or deed sexual practices which are in contradiction to the teaching of Scripture" not to be invited until they have repented and reversed their decisions, this will of course strictly be a matter for the Archbishop. Clearly, representations will need to be made to him by all orthodox Anglicans, in order to indicate the strength of feeling on this issue.
11. We note the formation of GAFCON Branches and a move towards a more conciliar structure of governance. There are clearly ecclesiological and missiological questions posed by the evolution of GAFCON as a separate structure, which we hope we can address with the GAFCON leadership over the coming months and years. We see it as really important for us to stay in good relationship with our orthodox Anglican brothers

and sisters, and we hope that this response to the Letter can mark the beginning of better communication and liaison between us.

12. In relation to **“Reaching out to God’s world”**, we share your vision for the faithful proclamation of the gospel and for our obedience to the Great Commission to proclaim Jesus Christ to all nations. Within England, we find ourselves in the joyful and privileged position of receiving people from the whole world into our parishes and communities. The Church of England is fully committed to a mixed economy of continuing to sustain and grow the inherited church expressed in our parishes and chaplaincies, and to a vigorous policy of church planting in order to reach new communities and ethnic and national groups. We note GAFCON’s formation of strategic networks to better enable the furtherance of the proclamation of the gospel. What we would ask is that, as these networks develop in England, there might (as expressed in the previous paragraph) be liaison between us.
13. We love your biblical commitment to encourage each other “to give strength to the persecuted, a voice to the voiceless, advocacy for the oppressed, protection of the vulnerable, especially women and children, generosity to the poor, and continuing the task of providing excellent education and health care.” It is a vision that we share.
14. In summary, there is much in the Letter to the Churches that we would endorse. We rejoice in the testimony of those who were in Jerusalem that you met with God in Jesus Christ and were encouraged together by the study of Scripture, in prayer and in worship. We hope that you will understand our continuing commitment to the Church of England, which we see as privilege, gift and calling, and that you will hear our request to work together closely as partners in the Gospel as we journey into God’s future.

Donald Allister, Bishop of Peterborough  
Pete Broadbent, Bishop of Willesden  
Paul Butler, Bishop of Durham  
Tim Dakin, Bishop of Winchester  
Richard Jackson, Bishop of Lewes  
Julian Henderson, Bishop of Blackburn  
Alistair Magowan, Bishop of Ludlow  
Nick McKinnel, Bishop of Plymouth  
James Newcome, Bishop of Carlisle  
Mark Rylands, Assistant Bishop in the Diocese of Exeter  
Andrew Watson, Bishop of Guildford  
David Williams, Bishop of Basingstoke  
Paul Williams, Bishop of Southwell & Nottingham