



HISTORY AND PURPOSE

A GUIDE TO THE LAMBETH
CALLS PROCESS AT THE
2022 LAMBETH CONFERENCE



History of the Lambeth Conference

The first Lambeth Conference took place in 1867 when the Archbishop of Canterbury, Charles Thomas Longley, invited the bishops of what would become the Anglican Communion to gather for a conference at Lambeth Palace.

The first Lambeth Conference in 1867 was attended by 76 bishops

There were two main issues that led to this invitation: First, a growing desire, expressed by many bishops around the world, to gather in order to pray, to study scripture and to confer together and, second, to address difficult pastoral and theological issues that were causing divisions between bishops around the world. These issues related to how the Christian gospel was and should be expressed in different cultures. It was therefore missiological and pastoral.

The conference was not attended by all the bishops who were invited, and it did not solve all the issues presented to it. The Archbishop of York and several other bishops who were invited did not attend. There was concern that the conference might claim the power of a synod but, whilst the conference passed 13 resolutions, Archbishop Longley made it clear, despite the hopes of some, that it was not a general synod for Anglican churches around the world. This principle remains: the Lambeth Conference does not have the power to legislate for or compel action in the churches of the Anglican Communion.

'Here the bishops come precisely to confer and not to take decisions that are binding on the member Churches'

A Lambeth Conference continues to be a place in which bishops from around the Communion gather to confer and to express their collegiality and their common sense

of witness to the world. As the important Inter Anglican Standing Commission of Unity, Faith and Order (IASCUFUO) paper, *Towards a Symphony of Instruments* notes, 'the Lambeth Conference can be seen as a conciliar event in a non-judicial mode. Here the bishops come precisely to confer and not to take decisions that are binding on the member churches.' The Lambeth Conference is one of the four instruments of communion of the Anglican Communion and, as another of the instruments it is the Archbishop of Canterbury who calls them together.



The Anglican Communion

It is important to note what the Anglican Communion is - and what it is not. It is a communion, a fellowship or a family of churches. Each church is interdependent, autonomous and self-governing.

The Four Instruments of Communion:

- The Archbishop of Canterbury
- The Lambeth Conference
- The Anglican Consultative Council
- The Primates' Meeting

As a Christian world communion, the Anglican Communion does have an identity and structure. The instruments of communion can and do make decisions and can and do speak out in our world as a witness to the Gospel of Christ. The instruments can encourage the member churches and can provide help and guidance based on prayer, wisdom and experience, but they cannot bind or compel. The decisions of the instruments and the traditions and common practices of the churches of the Communion are put into effect and made real by the decisions of the decision-making bodies of the churches themselves. Each church also will consider how it receives any matters that it believes are important and it is notable that Anglican churches have different understandings of what is meant by reception. The Anglican Communion has an influence and an authority, but it does not have juridical authority over or within the churches that make it up.

The Lambeth Conference brings together bishops from around the world. Each has influence and authority in their own diocese and according to the laws and practices of their own church. Bishops have, though, never exercised that ministry of oversight in isolation. In the Anglican tradition, they do



so in consultation with their fellow bishops and in collaboration with the clergy and all the faithful.

The Anglican Communion is not itself a 'church' but a body made up of member churches, each of which is part of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church of Jesus Christ.

The place of the Lambeth Conference within the Anglican Communion

Lambeth Conferences have played a significant part in helping shape the life of the churches of the Anglican Communion down the years and across cultures. Each Lambeth Conference has given priority to ensuring the bishops have time to pray together, to worship together, to study the scriptures together and to confer together. And, as the church always exists in and seeks to serve God's world, there have always been serious issues that the bishops of the communion have needed to face when they come together.

Over successive Lambeth Conferences the mind of the bishops was expressed through published resolutions. These resolutions have touched on every area of the life and mission of the church. The resolutions have called on churches (both Anglican churches and ecumenical sister churches)

and governments, on individuals and on society at large. But the authority of any resolution is limited. 'Member churches have distinct processes for receiving decisions from Lambeth Conferences and deciding/discerning to what extent they will have authority in their context.'

'Each autonomous church is free to order and regulate its affairs through its own system of government and law.'

The Principles of Canon Law Common to the churches of the Anglican Communion

The Lambeth Conference has always played an important role within the Anglican Communion and for the churches that make up the Communion. It has encouraged and enabled significant decisions to be made by the member churches. It has resourced discernment on the call to God's mission in myriad cultures across the Communion/world.



The Lambeth Conference in 2022

In 2022 the Lambeth Conference will take place in Canterbury, the venue for each conference since 1978.

The Archbishop of Canterbury has once again invited bishops to gather together to worship, to study the scriptures (especially 1 Peter), to pray and to confer.

As has become custom, bishops' spouses are invited to take part in a related programme and there will be a number of ecumenical participants present, expressing the Communion's place within the wider church.

Bishops gather at a time where there are great and pressing issues facing God's World and God'. Climate change, the effects of a global pandemic, supremacies, war and violent acts against the vulnerable, threaten the dignity of human beings all of whom are made in God's image/the image of God.

The scandal of division between Christians, distinct approaches to science and ethics, strained relations across religious difference, and persecution, all call for deep discernment as the Spirit calls the church to mission and evangelism.

Lambeth Calls

At the Lambeth Conference in 2022 (like that of 2008), there will be no resolutions. The Archbishop of Canterbury has decided that the bishops gathered should adopt a process called 'Lambeth Calls' to shape discussions and make decisions.

In a series of themes, arising from the study of scripture (and especially 1 Peter) bishops at the 2022 Lambeth Conference will be invited to consider God's call to the Church and the world today.

The purpose of the Lambeth Calls will be to enable a deeper faithfulness to God, advance the ministry of the communion, and enable wider participation in the calls by churches and communities around the world.

Themes for the Lambeth Conference:

- Mission and Evangelism
- Reconciliation
- Safe Church
- Environment and Sustainable Development
- Christian Unity
- Inter-faith relations
- Anglican Identity
- Human Dignity/Identity
- Discipleship

On each theme, the bishops will spend time learning together and sharing their experiences. They will also have a document to consider on each major theme. The documents are being shaped in such a way that will include a summary on what the Christian Church has always taught about these matters, a summary of what the bishops want to say on these matters today and then a series of specific 'calls', to future witness. That is what actions or changes or challenges on these themes do we want to give to each other, to our fellow Christians and to the world.

Within each 'Call' there will be matters to discuss and decisions to be made. It may be that not all bishops will want to add their voices to every element of every call. As has always been the case at every Lambeth conference bishops will confer together but they will not necessarily agree on everything. Each 'Call' is being drafted by a group made up of bishops, clergy and laity from around the communion led by a Primate or senior bishop.

The intention is to make public each of the 'Calls' from the conference and to ensure that there is a process by which the outcomes included in each 'Call' can be received and implemented. Member churches will be invited to consider the calls in their own synods and other bodies. It is expected that several themes from the 'Calls' will be on the agenda for the meeting of the Anglican Consultative Council in 2023.

The reason the Archbishop has made this change to move from resolution to Call is that the word resolution implies legal decision which is binding and that goes beyond the powers of the conference (as this paper notes). A 'Call' represents what the so-called 'resolutions' did up to the conference of 1998. A call is a decision of the conference which comes as an appeal to each church of the Communion to consider carefully, and hopefully to follow it and respond to it in its own situation.

Summary

The Lambeth Conference is a gathering of bishops invited by the Archbishop of Canterbury to pray and confer together. It has never had authority to make binding decisions for the member churches of the Communion. It has always had influence and the ability to make decisions which can then be communicated to the member churches and beyond.

The conference will again provide an opportunity for the bishops to confer on important matters that affect the world and the life and mission of the churches of the Anglican Communion. Several 'Calls' will issue from this conference which will relate to each of the major topics being discussed. At the conference bishops will be asked to make decisions as part of each

'Call' and invited to add their voices to the call of the conference. Bishops are also invited to ensure the Calls are heard in their own churches and discern their own part in taking the Calls forward and making them happen.

By God's mercy, the Church is called into a living hope because it has heard the Word of the living Lord (1 Peter 1:3). A suffering Church is called to walk in joy amidst a suffering world (1 Pt. 1:6-9). Together, we are called to holy witness (1 Pt. 1:13-16). For this reason, the Archbishop of Canterbury has entitled this Lambeth Conference: **"God's Church for God's World: listening, walking and witnessing together."** For the times we live in, the bishops of the Communion are invited to discern the call of God to God's Church and to God's world.



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