



## ANGLICAN COMMUNION ALLIANCE

Dear Archbishops of the Anglican Church of Canada,

March 3, 2021

Thank you for your letter of February 11, 2021. We sincerely appreciate that you identify those things that can be agreed to at a time of tension within the Church.

We acknowledge that your message comes at a time of great strain and challenge across the Church, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. While considerations on issues so central to the Church need to continue, we want to say that we are grateful for your leadership and ministry in the Church in such a difficult time, and want to assure you of our continued prayers.

We agree with a key point within your letter, that reopening the debate on the Marriage Canon is not desirable. Nonetheless, we observe that your Letter does not address our core concern about the future treatment of our Canons and procedures in the Anglican Church of Canada.

One of the things many people respect about Anglicanism is that its processes are judicious and measured. Sadly, however, the way the Canons have been used recently diminishes this reputation. This is seen clearly in the Chancellor's 2016 Memo and its reception by the Church's leadership.

### **Missing Element**

You stated that authority for decisions in these matters, that is to say, matters of faith and order, is found in a balance between episcopal pastoral authority and the discernment of General Synod. There is, however, a third element that must be addressed by both bishops and synods and it is the law of the Church. Bishops and Synods are not a law unto themselves but are rightly constrained by the Church's doctrines expressed in Canons, liturgies, and Creeds which together find their root in Scripture. In matters that are currently in tension, synods and bishops are, by the Constitution of the Anglican Church of Canada (Declaration of Principles), to be constrained in their actions. Why else would there be Canons at all or the Declaration of Principles?

For example, if in the future a majority of members of the General Synod wanted to allow for lay presidency at the Eucharist, or the development of a Binitarian creed, would we be obliged to make the requested changes? Perhaps we would, except and unless we have decided as a Church to be constrained by our Canons, liturgies, Creeds and Scripture itself. The law of the Church matters, as does good governance.



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### **Affirmation #2**

Your recent letter referenced the 'Affirmations' of General Synod 2019. These Affirmations express a majority sentiment but they are not Resolutions of the General Synod and do not represent the law of the Church. In general, they uphold the values that we can all agree we share, but there is one notable exception. Affirmation #2, about diverse understandings of the Marriage Canon, acknowledges that there were some bishops and synods who proceeded with same-sex marriage *on the understanding that the Canon does not prohibit same-sex marriage*. This has now been shown to represent a serious lapse from which the Church needs to distance itself.

The reading of the Canon drawn from the Chancellor's Memo of 2016, quoted in Affirmation #2, can best be described as a convenient misreading. Its convenience explains why it is still accepted without question. Nobody would want convenient misreadings to become an operating principle in the Church.

### **The Point: Re-establishing Good Governance**

As we mentioned in our December 21 letter, we have no desire to reopen the contentious debates on Canon XXI. Our point in sharing [Mark Hill's assessment of the Chancellor's Memo](#) is that we believe good governance is important. The record of the two most recent synods gives us grave concern.

You will recall that at General Synod 2016, when the first round of voting on the Resolution to change the Canon was taken, some bishops declared that they were not willing to wait for the outcome of the second round of voting in 2019. They signalled their intention to contravene the Canon regardless. When the Canon was preserved without change in General Synod 2019, several bishops and synods did just that, relying on the arguments in the Chancellor's Memo of 2016. These actions are seriously flawed and represent a level of tolerated lawlessness that causes us serious concern for the future.

### **Consult Broadly**

We suggest once again that those who take part in the Councils of the Church keep on hand the work of the Legal Advisers of the Anglican Communion, including our own former Chancellor, Robert Falby. Their work published in 2008 under the title ["The Principles of Canon Law Common to the Churches of the Anglican Communion"](#) provides much wisdom for the future governance of the Church.

### **Moving to Resolution**

Referring to Canon XXI, you have indicated that there is no desire to engage in further discussion over whose interpretation is correct. Opinions on matters of governance and on the law of the Church will vary, but not all opinions are of equal value. To move forward effectively,



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it is incumbent on everyone, especially our leaders, to measure the internal logic as well as the experience of those who offer such opinions. How else can we take the measure of truth when the opinions are divergent and clearly contradictory?

We acknowledge with you the reality that some disagreements in the history of the Church continue for many years. We assure you of our commitment to discuss respectfully the things that divide us and to pray together for the work of the Holy Spirit in the Church.

We adopt the words of Richard Hooker (the author of a magisterial work on ecclesiastical polity) as the reason for seeking the Opinion in the first place and in bringing it to your attention. We speak, “though for no other cause, yet for this; that posterity may know we have not loosely through silence permitted things to pass away as in a dream.”

In this spirit, we hope for a careful discussion about Prof. Mark Hill’s assessment within the House of Bishops and within the Council of General Synod – bearing in mind that the content and use of the Chancellor’s Memo is a troubling example of a wider problem.

We note that this is a fruitful time for a careful consideration of the use of the Church’s law, because the Council of General Synod is examining the role of bishops in General Synod, and because Provinces have been asked to participate in a [Communion-wide discussion about our Canons and procedures](#).

We want to facilitate reflection within the Church, and have an obligation to our constituents to communicate what the Board has been doing. Our plan is to share both your Letter and this Response.

In Christ,

The Rev. Dr. David Smith, Prescott, ON

The Rev. Dr. Peter Armstrong, North Bay, ON

Mrs. Sheila Vanderputten, Calgary, AB

The Rev. Ajit John, Toronto, ON

Mrs. Rosemary Greer, Vineland, ON

Dr. Roseanne Kydd, Colborne, ON

Mr. Roger Spack, Roxboro, QC.

Sharon Dewey Hetke, National Director of ACA, Napanee, ON