

FIFNA AGREED STATEMENT ON COMMUNION *[Adopted 1 June 1999]*

PREAMBLE

1. Our participation in Christ, by faith and baptism, is a communion of adoption and grace with God the Father and with the Holy Spirit. Equally and inevitable it involves communion with our fellow Christians. Every Christian lives this communion in the fellowship of a particular Church. For those of us in the Anglican Churches in North America, Central America, and the Caribbean who hold an Evangelical and Catholic understanding of our Church and its ministry, the bishop's role in the life of the diocese is of particular importance, and the proper exercise of his role as the chief pastor of the diocese provides an important measure of assurance to the faithful.
2. It is precisely this assurance which we fear has been compromised by recent developments, such as the abandonment of Gospel standards of chastity, the mandate to accept women's ordination, and the virtual rejection of the resolutions of the 1998 Lambeth Conference on these issues by the bulk of the episcopate on this continent. Underlying all these manifestations is the abandonment of the determinative authority of Holy Scripture as historically understood by the Churches of the Anglican Communion and witnessed to in the classical Anglican formularies.
3. The Statement has been prepared with a view to helping orthodox members of the Anglican Churches in North America, Central America, and the Caribbean both to remain loyal to Evangelical and Catholic faith, order, and morals and to make a lively contribution to the life and witness of whatever jurisdiction in which it has pleased God to place them.
4. We want both an Evangelical and Catholic understanding of faith, order, and behavior and the practice of Evangelical and Catholic sacramental discipline to flourish in our Churches, for we are convinced that both are essential features in the presentation of the gospel to our nations. If these elements are removed, our Churches' witness will be greatly impoverished and weakened.
5. It is our earnest hope that the suggestions contained in this statement will make possible the continued growth of strong and effective Evangelical and Catholic parishes and enable orthodox Church people to play their part in the life of their parishes and dioceses and in the representative bodies of their Churches.

AGREED STATEMENT

1. As the Preface to the 1662 Prayer Book Ordinal makes clear, the orders of bishop, priest, and deacon, continued from the Apostles' time, are a sine qua non of the Anglican tradition. The fact very largely has determined and continues to determine the relationship of the Anglican Churches to other ecclesial bodies. The Anglican Churches have considered it necessary to distinguish themselves from churches where the apostolic ministry is not valued or retained.
2. But the Apostolic Ministry is not an end in itself. It exists, in part, to authenticate both the teaching and the sacraments which it administers in the name of the Lord. Within the diocese, its bishop is called to be the orderer, regulator, and guarantor of all ordained ministry. As an integral and inseparable element of his ministry, the bishop is charged to uphold the catholic faith and to ensure the reliability and validity of the teaching given and of the sacraments celebrated within his jurisdiction. To this end all those who exercise a pastoral or parochial ministry in a diocese do so under the canons and constitutions of the Church by license of its bishop ordinary, and are said to exercise their pastoral duties in communion with him and as his subordinates in the authority of holy order.
3. When the bishop of a diocese permits the teaching of clearly unscriptural error within his diocese, or teaches such himself, and when he fails to call to account fellow bishops who do this, he fails in his obligation to guard the faith, order, and unity of the Church. Sacramental communion rests upon the unity of the faithful in a common confession of the Gospel of Christ and a common life in Christ by the Spirit. When elements contrary to that confession and life are introduced, tolerated, or ignored, whether by positive action or through negligence, sacramental communion is impaired. It is undoubtedly true, as taught in the Articles of Religion (XXVI) that the

validity of sacraments does not depend on the worthiness of the ministers. However, it is equally true that the continuance in sacred office of those who teach or live contrary to the Gospel creates serious dilemmas of conscience for the faithful. Either clearly or intuitively, they realize that the act of receiving communion from heterodox ministers at best signifies a belief (which they do not hold) that his errors are of no great consequence.

4. As is clear from a complete reading of the same Articles of Religion already cited, the institutional Church has an obligation to remove such persons from the exercise of the ministry. However, when the institution defaults on this obligation, the responsibility for dealing with such ministers devolves on those who remain faithful to the Gospel and is properly expressed by their refusal to have communion in sacred things with them. This is entirely in conformity with the biblical call to the faithful to have no communion with unbelievers. [cf. 2 Corinthians 6:14-18]

5. The ordination of women introduces into this time-honored pattern of relationships and guarantees, already threatened by unbiblical teaching, an element of doubt. Not only do many faithful people in every diocese not accept that the Anglican Churches and their governing bodies have the ecclesial authority to authorize bishops to make this change, but the bishops themselves have expressed doubt about an action which they have nevertheless taken, for they allow that there must be a period of discernment and “reception” during which the rightness of the innovation is open to question. The Lambeth Conference of 1998 overwhelmingly affirmed “the principle of ‘Open Reception’ as it relates to the ordination of women to the priesthood as indication by the Eames Commission; noting that ‘reception is a long and spiritual process.’” [Resolution III.2(b)] Believing as we do that Scripture and Tradition witness against this innovation, a degree of separation from those whose orders result from this principle of deliberate experiment and declared uncertainty is inevitable.

6. When each part of the Body of Christ in an Anglican diocese “is working properly” [cf. Ephesians 4:11ff], the priests of the diocese act in accord with the bishop and in communion with the bishop. Every eucharist celebrated in obedience to Christ’s command is also celebrated in communion with the bishop, provided the bishop is himself faithful to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship. If he is thus faithful, then it can truly be said that the presbyters of his diocese act with the bishop and with one another because all act in communion with the bishop and in union with Christ. It follows that if a bishop permits the continuance in the diocesan college of presbyters that he is to govern and lead for the sake of the flock of Christ those whose teaching or life is contrary to the standards of Scripture, or if he introduces into his college of presbyters those whose orders are in doubt, this communion and the covenant it mediates are fractured. In principle, a priest who cannot assent to heterodox teaching propounded by or permitted by the bishop, or who cannot in conscience recognize the orders of one ordained by his bishop cannot in conscience have sacramental communion with that person or that bishop because the false teaching has broken the spiritual communion in Christ, he is obliged to seek communion with a bishop that he can obey with integrity and the communion of a college of priests in which he can wholeheartedly serve Christ and his people. A diocese is not merely an administrative territorial unit. It is also, properly and necessarily, a communion based on doctrinal agreement and sacramental assurance in union with Christ.

7. Such a re-alignment inevitably involves a degree of separation, both for laity and for clergy. But though our doubts about women’s ordination (which the Lambeth Conference clearly permits us to have without imputation of disloyalty) entail a degree of separation, they do not oblige us to any other conclusions about the general teaching or other sacramental acts of all those who ordain women or receive their ministry. With the vast majority of the bishops of the Anglican Communion, we accept the desirability of maintaining “the highest degree of communion possible.” [Resolution III.2(d)] Separation is not an end in itself, nor is it, in this instance, a moral judgment upon others. It is the necessary minimum expression of that rejection of experiment and uncertainty which naturally precedes a re-assertion of the unimpaired communion of layfolk, deacons, priests, and bishops which is the normative local expression of the Catholic Church.

8. By its very nature this regrettable, but inevitable, impairment of communion must be open and public. Just as the Anglican Churches distance themselves from other ecclesial groupings who have not valued or continued the apostolic ministry as the Church of England has received it, so now a similar distancing will be inevitable within Anglican Churches. But the degree of separation, though in every sense necessary, need not be acrimonious. Ecumenical relations with many of the non-Anglican churches clearly show to the contrary. In the spirit of the Resolution III.2 of the Lambeth Conference of 1998, both parties to the separation will need to co-operate closely and pray for unity and a common understanding.