

Executive Summary

With preparations for Lambeth 2020 well underway, the questions already raised about who will attend ([Section A](#)) have become even more serious following two events at the end of 2018: Archbishop Justin invited all bishops in Communion provinces to attend and one of those invited then married his same-sex partner in his diocese's cathedral. After setting out some basic information about the Lambeth Conference ([Section B](#)), it is shown ([Section C](#)) that Archbishop Justin's decision marks a definite, significant and unexplained break with both the invitation policy and theological rationale of his predecessor. The dilemma created by the Toronto bishop's same-sex marriage is then explored ([Section D](#)) by showing the major problems that arise particularly if he is invited ([Option A](#)) but also if only he (and other bishops in a similar situation) are not invited ([Option B](#)). Two alternative solutions are noted but rejected ([Section E](#)) before it is argued that the best way forward is not to focus on bishops in same-sex marriages but to take seriously the impairment of communion arising in relation to all bishops who have rejected Communion teaching on marriage ([Section F](#)). This approach requires a re-visioning of the Lambeth Conference by the incorporation within it of some form of visible differentiation, as already accepted in principle by Communion Primates. This would both recognise the reality of impaired communion and also seek to gather together as many Anglican bishops as possible. In conclusion ([Section G](#)) it is argued that the stakes here are now very high: if the apparent current policy is maintained and the issues raised by it are not adequately addressed there is a real risk that Lambeth 2020 will be a very different gathering from what it has been in the past and that it will fail to gather Anglican bishops from across the Communion "to safeguard, and take counsel for, the well-being of the Anglican Communion". There is therefore a real risk that these failures could mean it will mark the end of the Lambeth Conference as in any sense an effective Instrument of Communion.

A. Lambeth Preparations & Invitations – Questions Raised

The preparations for Lambeth 2020 are now well underway with a [developing website](#), the ongoing work of the [Lambeth Design Group \(which met again this past week\)](#), the [preparation of studies in 1 Peter](#), a [video message from Archbishop Justin Welby](#), and the issuing of invitations. There is much to be excited about but there are also signs that major challenges and dangers lie ahead in turning these visions and preparations into a lived reality.

At least since GAFCON met in Jerusalem in June 2018 and issued its [letter to the churches](#) there have been questions as to whether the Lambeth Conference will, as in 2008, fail to gather a significant number of Anglicans from across the Communion because of divisions over sexuality and ecclesiology.

GAFCON respectfully urged the Archbishop "not to invite bishops of those Provinces which have endorsed by word or deed sexual practices which are in contradiction to the teaching of Scripture and Resolution I.10 of the 1998 Lambeth Conference, unless they have repented of their actions and reversed their decisions". It also said that "in the event that this does not occur, we urge GAFCON members to decline the invitation to attend Lambeth 2020 and all other meetings of the Instruments of Communion". GAFCON also asked for bishops of new provinces in North America (ACNA, recognised by both GAFCON and [Global South](#)) and Brazil to be invited. Already the provinces of [Uganda](#), [Nigeria](#), and [most recently Rwanda](#) have stated their bishops will not attend Lambeth 2020 unless the GAFCON conditions are met, although [GAFCON Primates did attend the recent meeting of the Primates of the Americas](#) which included the Presiding Bishop of TEC.

These challenges became even more serious between Christmas and New Year with news (producing surprisingly little publicity or comment) that one of the partnered gay bishops within the Communion – [Bishop Kevin Robertson](#), an area bishop in the Diocese of Toronto in the Anglican Church of Canada – had [married his partner](#) on December 28th in a church service at St James Cathedral in the diocese.

B. The Lambeth Conference – A Very Short Introduction

Before exploring the question of invitations to the Lambeth Conference, it is important to recall its historic purpose and authority (explored most fully in [a recent edited volume](#)) as the longest standing corporate Instrument of Communion bringing together the bishops of the Anglican Communion at the invitation of the Archbishop of Canterbury. [The Windsor Report](#) of 2004 stated (para 102) that “From its inception, the Lambeth Conference has proved to be a powerful vehicle for the expression of a concept central to Anglican ecclesiology, the collegiality of the bishops”. That collegiality of bishops is explored in [Towards a Symphony of Instruments](#) produced by [IASCUFO](#) which states (2.2.3) in its discussion of the Lambeth Conference:

Episcopal collegiality is intimately related to the communion of the Church: collegiality is not only a salient expression of ‘visible communion’ (Archbishop Longley’s phrase: see 2.3.2), it is also one of the key constituents of visible communion. In other words, the manifest collegiality of the bishops is not merely ornamental or functional: it is constitutive of the visible fabric of the Church. Collegiality manifests itself in several ways, but underlying them all is the acceptance of a shared responsibility for the welfare of the Church, for maintaining its unity and leading its mission.

The Windsor Report also included (Appendix 1, para 3) the following description:

While the decisions of Lambeth Conferences do not have canonical force, they do have moral authority across the Communion. Consequently, provinces of the Communion should not proceed with controversial developments in the face of teaching to the contrary from all the bishops gathered together in Lambeth Conferences. This might go to the heart of receiving what was said about synodality in The Virginia Report. It is a fact that just as bishops of a particular province meet together from time to time to take counsel together *as guardians both of the unity and teaching of the Church*, so too bishops in the past have come together in council to give leadership to the Church on important issues. The Lambeth Conference follows this tradition (italics added).

In the words of the [Anglican Communion Covenant](#) (3.1.4):

The Lambeth Conference expresses episcopal collegiality worldwide, and brings together the bishops for common worship, counsel, consultation and encouragement in *their ministry of guarding the faith and unity of the Communion* and equipping the saints for the work of ministry (Eph 4.12) and mission (italics added).

C. Lambeth Invitations – Archbishop Justin’s Reversal of Archbishop Rowan’s Practice and Theological Rationale

At the end of November, the Church Times [reported](#) that “Every “active bishop” within the [Anglican Communion](#)’s 40 provinces — [Chile became the 40th this month](#) — will be invited, with spouses bringing the total to more than 800”. The Lambeth website has [FAQs](#) which begin with “Why haven’t I received my invitation yet?” to which the answer is “Every active bishop should receive

their official invitation during late 2018. If you are eligible but have not received an invitation by 31 December 2018, please contact your provincial secretary”.

It would therefore appear that the decision has been made by Archbishop Justin to invite all bishops who are in good standing within each and every province of the Communion. Initial responses are apparently being requested for the end of March 2019.

What is significant about this decision and the events in Toronto is that for the last Lambeth Conference in 2008, then Archbishop Rowan Williams decided [not to invite a number of “active bishops”](#). It was confirmed [in March 2008](#) that this included Bishop Gene Robinson of New Hampshire, at the time the only same-sex partnered (but at that stage not legally married) bishop in a Communion province. A [report](#) on the options considered at the time provides insights into the various concerns and possible compromises which were explored.

In [his general letter of invitation in May 2007](#) Rowan Williams clearly set out the position and its rationale:

At this point, and with the recommendations of the Windsor Report particularly in mind, I have to reserve the right to withhold or withdraw invitations from *bishops whose appointment, actions or manner of life have caused exceptionally serious division or scandal within the Communion*. Indeed there are currently one or two cases on which I am seeking further advice. I do not say this lightly, but I believe that we need to know as we meet that *each participant recognises and honours the task set before us and that there is an adequate level of mutual trust between us about this*. Such trust is a great deal harder to sustain if there are some involved who are generally seen as fundamentally compromising the efforts towards a credible and cohesive resolution (italics added).

[The Windsor Report](#) had stated (para 110) that

This Commission is of the opinion that the Archbishop has the right to call or not to call to these gatherings [of the Lambeth Conference and the Primates’ Meeting] whomsoever he believes is appropriate, *in order to safeguard, and take counsel for, the well-being of the Anglican Communion*. The Commission believes that in the exercise of this right the Archbishop of Canterbury should invite participants to the Lambeth Conference on restricted terms at his sole discretion *if circumstances exist where full voting membership of the Conference is perceived to be an undesirable status, or would militate against the greater unity of the Communion* (italics added).

Many wanted a larger number of bishops not to be invited (hence the significant number of bishops ultimately refusing to attend) because of their actions in relation to same-sex unions. At that time in 2007, however, there was (unlike now in 2019) a certain degree of unclarity as to whether the Episcopal Church (USA) was in fact working within the Windsor Report recommendations.

Archbishop Rowan explained this in his important [Advent Letter of 2007](#) in which he also set out an account of the problems this uncertainty created and their implications for Lambeth 2008. Some of the key parts of this letter are worth quoting despite their length in order to understand the former Archbishop’s thinking about the Lambeth Conference, the significance of the divisions within the Communion, and the implications for any Lambeth Conference:

...The deeper question is about what we believe we are free to do, if we seek to be recognisably faithful to Scripture and the moral tradition of the wider Church, with respect to blessing and sanctioning *in the name of the Church* certain personal decisions about what

constitutes an acceptable Christian lifestyle. Insofar as there is currently any consensus in the Communion about this, it is not in favour of change in our discipline or our interpretation of the Bible.

This is why the episcopal ordination of a person in a same-sex union or a claim to the freedom to make liturgical declarations about the character of same-sex unions inevitably raises the question of whether a local church is still fully recognisable within the one family of practice and reflection. Where one part of the family makes a decisive move that plainly implies a new understanding of Scripture that has not been received and agreed by the wider Church, it is not surprising that others find a problem in knowing how far they are still speaking the same language. And because what one local church says is naturally taken as representative of what others might say, we have the painful situation of some communities being associated with views and actions which they deplore or which they simply have not considered.

Archbishop Rowan was clear that

While argument continues about exactly how much force is possessed by a Resolution of the Lambeth Conference such as the 1998 Lambeth Conference Resolution on sexuality, it is true, as I have repeatedly said, that the 1998 Resolution is the only point of reference clearly agreed by the overwhelming majority of the Communion. This is the point where our common reading of Scripture stands, along with the common reading of the majority within the Christian churches worldwide and through the centuries.

Thus it is not surprising if some have concluded that the official organs of The Episcopal Church, in confirming the election of Gene Robinson and in giving what many regard as implicit sanction to same-sex blessings of a public nature have put in question the degree to which it can be recognised as belonging to the same family by deciding to act against the strong, reiterated and consistent advice of the Instruments of Communion

The implications of this for the 2008 Conference and his issuing of invitations to it were then clearly set out. These stand as the last statement by an Archbishop of Canterbury as to the principles by which Lambeth invitations are issued:

The whole of this discussion is naturally affected by what people are thinking about the character and scope of the Lambeth Conference, and I need to say a word about this here. Thus far, invitations have been issued with two considerations in mind.

First: I have not felt able to invite those whose episcopal ordination was carried through against the counsel of the Instruments of Communion, and I have not seen any reason to revisit this (the reference in the New Orleans statement to the Archbishop of Canterbury's 'expressed desire' to invite the Bishop of New Hampshire misunderstands what was said earlier this year, when the question was left open as to whether the Bishop, as a non-participant, could conceivably be present as a guest at some point or at some optional event). And while (as I have said above) I understand and respect the good faith of those who have felt called to provide additional episcopal oversight in the USA, there can be no doubt that these ordinations have not been encouraged or legitimised by the Communion overall.

I acknowledge that this limitation on invitations will pose problems for some in its outworking. But I would strongly urge those whose strong commitments create such

problems to ask what they are prepared to offer for the sake of a Conference that will have some general credibility in and for the Communion overall.

Second: I have underlined in my letter of invitation that acceptance of the invitation *must be taken as implying willingness to work with those aspects of the Conference's agenda that relate to implementing the recommendations of Windsor, including the development of a Covenant*. The Conference needs of course to be a place where diversity of opinion can be expressed, and there is no intention to foreclose the discussion – for example – of what sort of Covenant document is needed. But I believe we need to be able to take for granted a certain level of willingness to follow through the question of how we avoid the present degree of damaging and draining tension arising again. I intend to be in direct contact with those who have expressed unease about this, so as to try and clarify how deep their difficulties go with accepting or adopting the Conference's agenda (italics original).

This simply restated what had already been said in [the initial invitation letter](#) earlier in 2007:

I have said, and repeat here, that coming to the Conference does not commit you to accepting every position held by other bishops as equally legitimate or true. But I hope it does commit us all to striving together for a more effective and coherent worldwide body, working for God's glory and Christ's Kingdom. The Instruments of Communion have offered for this purpose a set of resources and processes, focused on the Windsor Report and the Covenant proposals. My hope is that as we gather we can trust that your acceptance of the invitation carries a willingness to work with these tools to shape our future. I urge you all most strongly to strive during the intervening period to strengthen confidence and understanding between our provinces and not to undermine it.

The understanding of the nature of the Lambeth Conference undergirding this approach and the consequent importance of attendance was then articulated towards the end of the Advent Letter:

How then should the Lambeth Conference be viewed? It is not a canonical tribunal, but neither is it merely a general consultation. It is a meeting of the chief pastors and teachers of the Communion, seeking an authoritative common voice. It is also a meeting designed to strengthen and deepen the sense of what the episcopal vocation is.

Some reactions to my original invitation have implied that meeting for prayer, mutual spiritual enrichment and development of ministry is somehow a way of avoiding difficult issues. On the contrary: I would insist that *only* in such a context can we usefully address divisive issues. If, as the opening section of this letter claimed, our difficulties have their root in whether or how far we can recognise the same gospel and ministry in diverse places and policies, we need to engage more not less directly with each other. This is why I have repeatedly said that an invitation to Lambeth does not constitute a certificate of orthodoxy but simply a challenge to pray seriously together and to seek a resolution that will be as widely owned as may be.

And this is also why I have said that the refusal to meet can be a refusal of the cross – and so of the resurrection. We are being asked to see our handling of conflict and potential division as part of our maturing both as pastors and as disciples. I do not think this is either an incidental matter or an evasion of more basic questions.

Clearly we are now, eleven years after this letter was written, in many ways in a different place in the Communion. Despite his explanation, many bishops did not attend Lambeth 2008. The Covenant

ratification process has subsequently stalled although its vision of what it means to be a communion of churches has not been replaced by an alternative vision. There are, however, also no longer any doubts whatsoever as to the settled mind of TEC and some other provinces (notably, the Scottish Episcopal Church and the Anglican Church of Canada). They are resolutely and formally opposed to the mind of the Communion on same-sex unions including now (unlike in 2008) in relation to same-sex marriage. They are also committed to proceeding with unilateral action in these matters – including in relation to appointments to the episcopate – and thereby disregarding the Communion’s own understanding of marriage, the episcopate, and what it means to live faithfully as a communion of churches.

Almost exactly three years ago, [the Primates decided](#) (following some of the logic found in the Covenant) that all this would have consequences for The Episcopal Church in relation to the Communion and the Primates then applied these consequences to The Scottish Episcopal Church at [their meeting in October 2017](#). No such action has been taken yet against the Anglican Church of Canada because, although Toronto and other dioceses in the province have approved liturgies for same-sex marriages such as that used for Bishop Robertson, the province will only decide at its [General Synod in July this year](#) whether or not to confirm and finalise [its initial decision in 2016 to revise its marriage canon](#).

Despite these previous statements from Canterbury and the subsequent developments in the Communion, it would appear from the reports at the end of 2018 and the FAQs on the website that invitations have now been sent out to *all* Communion bishops by Archbishop Justin. They have been sent without reference to any of these matters and in a marked departure from Archbishop Rowan’s carefully explained logic of invitations to the 2008 Conference as set out above.

D. Lambeth Invitations and Same-Sex Married or Partnered Bishops: A Painful Dilemma

The question raised by the marriage of Bishop Robertson last month brings to a fore, and at a heightened level, one of the crucial questions about Lambeth invitations: what about invitations to same-sex partnered (and now same-sex legally married) bishops within the Communion? Here Archbishop Justin seems to face a major dilemma in the light of the precedent set by Archbishop Rowan in relation to Gene Robinson in 2008.

Option A: Invite Bishop Robertson

If Archbishop Justin invites Bishop Robertson to the Lambeth Conference (as it appears he already has done) he will be inviting as a fully recognised bishop of the Communion someone whose pattern of life would make them ineligible to be a bishop - and indeed place him under discipline as a priest - within the Church of England and in the overwhelming majority of Communion provinces. His ministry as a bishop is also one rejected by Communion teaching (the repeatedly reaffirmed Lambeth I.10 from the 1998 Conference) and by the decisions of the Instruments in support of the moratoria of the Windsor Report. Unlike Gene Robinson in 2008 he is not simply in a partnership recognised in civil law but in a marriage which he entered in a service in his diocese’s cathedral, using the rite approved by TEC, and [authorised in his diocese](#) since 2016 (despite the province of Canada not having yet officially approved same-sex marriages). This event in December 2018 marks a new development within the Anglican Communion and creates a further and deeper tear in the fabric of the Communion beyond that made in 2003 by the consecration of Gene Robinson in New Hampshire.

In summary, Archbishop Justin would be clearly stating that the Archbishop of Canterbury's policy as regards invitations has shifted from that set out and applied in 2008. He, unlike his predecessor, has from some unstated reason decided not to exercise his "right to withhold or withdraw invitations from bishops whose appointment, actions or manner of life have caused exceptionally serious division or scandal within the Communion" (Archbishop Rowan). The goalposts have thereby been moved and clearly moved in a direction which is more accepting of disregard for Communion teaching and decision-making processes so as effectively to treat a bishop being in a same-sex marriage as among matters of indifference (ie *adiaphora*) within the Instruments of Communion.

Such a break with the precedent set out and explained in relation to Gene Robinson with regard to Lambeth 2008 should require major public theological justification, just as Archbishop Rowan offered a rationale for his decision not to invite. Central to this justification would be explaining why different conclusions have now been reached. This has never been provided and it is hard to see how it could be offered on the basis of the theological account of the nature of communion which the Communion, in line with the wider church, has developed.

Even with such an explanation, this decision is likely to increase significantly the probability, and the number, of bishops refusing to attend Lambeth 2020. It is highly unlikely that those provinces which stayed away in 2008 (even though Gene Robinson was not invited) will now attend when a bishop married to his same-sex partner in a church service is invited to attend.

All bishops, including those from provinces who attended in 2008, will now need to think about what it means to attend a Lambeth Conference of Anglican bishops in which definite departure from Communion teaching and being a bishop in a same-sex marriage are viewed as of no consequence when it comes to gathering bishops "to take counsel together as guardians both of the unity and teaching of the Church" (Windsor Report). This situation is unprecedented and seems to change the very nature of the Lambeth Conference as it has been understood until now.

Option B: Follow Archbishop Rowan's approach and refuse to invite Bishop Robertson

If, however, Archbishop Justin follows the precedent set in 2008 and refuses to invite Bishop Robertson (or withdraws his already issued invitation) then it is very difficult to see such action as anything other than an unjust and discriminatory (in popular parlance, "homophobic") action. This is because it treats the bishop as a special case simply because his sexuality means that he personally lives out the theology of marriage now accepted and liturgically celebrated within his province. It would be saying that bishops authorising same-sex marriages, bishops presiding at them, and bishops approving of fellow bishops in such marriages within the episcopate of their own province, do not thereby render their full involvement in a Lambeth Conference problematic. Such unilateral disregard for the teaching of the Church in their episcopal ministry does not in any way alter their standing in the councils of the Communion. It is only if they are a gay or lesbian bishop who actually dares to enter a same-sex marriage themselves that a problem rises. Only that action of marrying someone of the same sex, on this understanding, amounts to crossing a red line.

In other words, although this option would appear on the surface to follow the 2008 precedent, once set in the new wider ecclesial context, it has a different meaning and significance and it too represents a shift from the ecclesiological and theological rationale that led to the non-invitation of Gene Robinson.

The Challenge

It is very hard to see how, when it comes to inviting or not inviting Bishop Robertson (and presumably also Bishop Mary Glasspool of New York diocese – whose original election in 2009 in breach of the

Windsor moratoria [contributed to a major boycott of the Dublin Primates Meeting in January 2011](#) - and any other same-sex partnered/married bishops) Archbishop Justin can avoid having to take one of these paths and facing the serious negative consequences that follow either way.

E. Two Possible but Flawed Alternative Ways Forward

One alternative path (Option C) would be to invite those bishops in a same-sex marriage but not invite their spouses. This would be on the basis that their marriage was not recognised by the Archbishop as a marriage and so the spouses are not eligible to attend. This, however, would also need to be justified and risks producing the worst of all possible worlds. It too breaks with the invitation policy and theological rationale of 2008, continues to treat such a bishop as a full bishop of the Communion, and so creates all the problems noted above under Option A. However, it then treats the partners of the married gay and lesbian bishops differently even though spouses do not have the same authoritative role as bishops within a Conference and same-sex spouses will be playing a very similar practical and spiritual role in the ministries of their episcopal husbands or wives.

Another option (Option D) would be to invite the bishops but on different terms to other bishops as [was explored in relation to Gene Robinson for 2008](#). This, however, like Option B of non-invitation, again seems to distinguish and discriminate against these bishops because of their sexuality and ignore the many “straight” bishops whose teaching and pattern of episcopal ministry is fully supportive of same-sex marriages.

Both these possible ways forward would also need a serious theological rationale to be given and each appears to face significant theological and practical problems.

F. Is There a Better Vision?: Wide but Differentiated Invitations

A better option (Option E) would be for this particular challenge and dilemma to engender a radical rethink which goes beyond the focus on individual same-sex partnered bishops and the simple binary question - “to invite or not to invite?” – only in relation to them. Such a rethink would require a recognition that global Anglicanism is now a large and fractured family where it is unhelpful to talk simply of “in communion” and “not in communion”. The reality is rather one of varying degrees of “impaired communion” (a subject on which Bishop George Sumner of Dallas, a member of the Lambeth Design Group and a Communion Partner bishop within TEC, [has recently written](#)). Given that “episcopal collegiality is intimately related to the communion of the Church” (IASCUFO), it follows that forms of episcopal collegiality will have to recognise this impairment (just as they do, to an even greater extent, in, for example, the relationships between Anglican and Roman Catholic bishops).

This means that some new vision for a Lambeth Conference needs to be developed if Lambeth 2020 is “to safeguard, and take counsel for, the well-being of the Anglican Communion” (Windsor Report) and be “a meeting of the chief pastors and teachers of the Communion, seeking an authoritative common voice” (Archbishop Rowan) in which the bishops are recognisable to each other and the wider church as bishops who are able to act together with integrity “as guardians both of the unity and teaching of the Church” (Windsor Report).

This new vision will require acknowledging that Anglicans now clearly no longer share once common convictions and judgments about key elements of Christian faith and practice. This means that some bishops cannot be trusted within the councils of the Communion to act as guardians of the Church’s unity and teaching. The question of whether a local church “is still fully recognisable within the one family of practice and reflection” (Archbishop Rowan) and the “degree to which it can be recognised as belonging to the same family by deciding to act against the strong, reiterated and consistent advice

of the Instruments of Communion” (Archbishop Rowan) are now matters which are, with same-sex marriage and the ministry of same-sex married bishops, even more pressing than they were in 2008.

And yet alongside this it also remains important to try to find - across these deeply significant differences and divisions - a way for as many bishops as possible within the Anglican tradition to come together to embody the communion that does still exist and to seek, with God's grace, a way forward. The Conference must be constructed so as somehow to gather as many bishops as possible “for prayer, mutual spiritual enrichment and development of ministry” and “to seek a resolution that will be as widely owned as may be” (Archbishop Rowan). The creating of forms of episcopal partnership even in the context of impaired communion is one which has been explored and embodied ecumenically, for example in the [2016 commissioning](#) of pairs of Anglican and Roman Catholic bishops for joint mission by the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Pope.

This approach will entail some degree of visible differentiation to take place among bishops invited to such a Lambeth Conference. But this differentiation cannot be on the basis of their sexuality or marital status. It must instead be on the basis of their commitment to, or departure from, Communion teaching. Such a judgment could either be made on a provincial level and apply to all bishops of certain provinces or on the basis of each bishop's own pattern of episcopal ministry (thus distinguishing, for example, [Communion Partner bishops](#) from the majority of bishops in their provinces).

This principle is already established to some extent in the decisions of the 2016 and 2017 Primates' Meetings. These made clear that representatives of certain provinces “while participating in the internal bodies of the Anglican Communion” would “not take part in decision making on any issues of doctrine or polity”. There are, however, a number of unresolved questions here including:

1. The initial decision in relation to TEC has now officially lapsed after three years.
2. Canada has not yet had these consequences applied to it (although it may do after its General Synod this year) and so it is not clear how they would apply to Bishop Robertson despite the fact he has married his same-sex partner using an approved liturgy in the Cathedral of his diocese.
3. The application of the 2016 decision led to controversy after the last Anglican Consultative Council as it was unclear what it meant and also whether and how it had been applied in practice. This led to protests from [the Global South](#) in September 2017.
4. Nothing has been said as to how the decision will apply to a Lambeth Conference where it will certainly be in force in relation to the bishops of the Scottish Episcopal Church given the decision of the Primates in October 2017.

To follow this path forward will mean doing the hard theological, ecclesiological, political and relational work to seek to enable the gathering of [a new type of Conference](#). This will probably require differentiated functions and levels of authority that honestly but painfully acknowledge the degrees of communion that currently exist between Anglicans. Such an approach, embodying the already recognised reality of “walking together but at a distance” may enable a more positive response to GAFCON's pleas (including their request for invitations to ACNA bishops) than currently appears to be envisaged. It may also allow the participation, in some form, at Lambeth 2020 of both

- i. Those bishops who no longer believe and teach (and, in a few cases, fail to embody in their own lives) received Christian teaching about marriage and also
- ii. Those bishops who do accept Communion teaching - and whom a large number (perhaps the majority) of bishops committed to that Communion teaching recognise as Anglican bishops and would like the Archbishop to invite - but are not currently in communion with Canterbury.

In [a surprising offer after GAFCON](#), the Archbishop of Sydney signalled a willingness to consider attending such a way of gathering Anglicans together. Despite GAFCON's apparent rejection a few months earlier of meeting with TEC bishops, he floated the idea of a Conference which recognised we no longer share common doctrine but would be "the fellowship of bishops who share our Anglican heritage" and "could celebrate our heritage, our common desire to see Christ glorified, without pretending there are no differences among us". He asked "Would that not be a celebration worth having?".

G. Conclusion

At the moment in relation to Lambeth 2020 we have important preparatory work being done but we also appear to have the reversal of previous policy, the rejection of previous theological rationales in relation to invitations, no justification of these changes, and no public response to the requests from GAFCON or engagement with their theological rationale.

These are all worrying signs that preparations for the Conference are refusing to consider any creative proposals for its restructuring in response to the realities of impaired communion, even though the consequences of these realities have already been recognised by the Instruments. It is as if, in planning the Conference, we are in denial of the truth articulated by [Rowan Williams back in 2006](#): "There is no way in which the Anglican Communion can remain unchanged by what is happening at the moment".

It seems as if there is a determination simply to call the bluff of those who have warned they may not attend and even to aggravate them further by altering the invitation policy from 2008. Why not rather engage them in dialogue and offer them grounds on which they may conclude it is right and profitable to attend, despite their current concerns? The other side of this stance is an apparent willingness to accept that many bishops (particularly from provinces marked by significant Anglican growth) will indeed stay away but to say that this doesn't really matter and is a price worth paying in order to uphold the current but novel and unexplained invitation policy. It is almost as if, rather than address these issues, the view is that the Conference will happen as currently planned however many cannot in conscience attend it. Even if, as I've heard it put, the Conference ends up being small enough to meet in a telephone box.

There is of course no chance the Conference will be that small because whatever happens there will undoubtedly be a significant turnout on current plans. It would, however, be a serious error to (a) ignore the significant shift in the nature of the Conference which has been created by the moving of the goalposts embodied in the current invitation policy or (b) minimise how widespread and deep the concerns (and possible absences) are likely to be with that new policy. These concerns are not limited to the more hard-line GAFCON provinces or even just to GAFCON as a whole. The 6th Global South Conference in October 2016 was clear about the Communion's problems in [its communiqué](#):

27. The prolonged failure to resolve disputes over faith and order in our Communion exposes the Communion's ecclesial deficit, which was highlighted in the [Windsor Continuation Group Report \(2008\)](#).

28. This deficit is evident in the inability of existing Communion instruments to discern truth and error and take binding ecclesiastical action. The instruments have been found wanting in their ability to discipline those leaders who have abandoned the biblical and historic faith. To make matters worse, the instruments have failed to check the marginalisation of Anglicans in heterodox Provinces who are faithful, and in some cases have even sanctioned or deposed

them. The instruments have also sent conflicting signals on issues of discipline which confuse the whole Body and weaken our confidence in them.

“... for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.” (Jeremiah 2:13)

29. The instruments are therefore unable to sustain the common life and unity of the Anglican Churches worldwide, especially in an increasingly connected and globalising world, where different ideas and lifestyles are quickly disseminated through social media. This undermines the mission of the Church in today’s world.

[....]

32. The present and potentially escalating crisis poses challenges to the Global South in the shepherding of her people. We recognise the need for our enhanced ecclesial responsibility. We need to strengthen our doctrinal teaching, our ecclesiastical ordering of our collective life as a global fellowship and the flourishing of our gifts in the one another-ness of our mission.

33. The Global South Primates will therefore form a task force to recommend how these needs can be effectively addressed.

If the challenges identified in this article are ignored and if no attempt is made to find a consensus among the Communion’s bishops about the nature of the Conference and the status of participants, the real danger is that these Global South conclusions will simply be applied to Lambeth 2020, perhaps at their next Global South Conference later this year. It may even be that some bishops in the Global North draw the same conclusions and seriously consider the implications of this for their attendance.

If this happens, it will represent a tragic failure of leadership as the Conference will demonstrate how far apart from each other we are now walking. It will likely solidify the “walking apart” which The Windsor Report prophetically warned would follow were its vision of communion life and its proposals ignored, as they clearly have been by certain provinces and now also appear to have been by the Archbishop of Canterbury.

Were this to happen and were, once again, hundreds of invited bishops to refuse to attend, it will mean that (with the next Conference not due until 2028 or 2030) there will be at least 30 years without a global gathering of Anglican bishops at a Lambeth Conference as developed between 1867 and 1998. This means that the stakes are now very high. Such a prolonged failure to gather Anglican bishops “to safeguard, and take counsel for, the well-being of the Anglican Communion” risks Lambeth 2020 marking the end of the Lambeth Conference as in any sense an effective Instrument of Communion due to four factors:

- i. The failure to respond adequately to unilateral actions by various provinces which rejected teaching, decisions, and requests repeatedly issued by all the Instruments and by numerous individual provinces and networks within the Communion
- ii. The Archbishop of Canterbury’s changed but unexplained policy on invitations to the Lambeth Conference
- iii. The unwillingness to explore the logic of impaired communion, recognised by the 2016 Primates’ Gathering decision, for the structure of any Lambeth Conference
- iv. The conscientious conviction of a large number of bishops that they cannot, as a result of the above, meet together in a traditional Lambeth Conference with those bishops whose own

conscientious convictions have led them to act in ways which have ignored the fact that although the Lambeth Conference “does not claim to exercise any powers of control or command” it nevertheless “stands for the far more spiritual and more Christian principle of loyalty to the fellowship. The churches represented in it are indeed independent, but independent with the Christian freedom which recognises the restraint of truth and love. They are not free to deny the truth. They are not free to ignore the fellowship” (Lambeth 1920 Letter).

These factors now risk coming together to create a perfect storm in the aftermath of which it may well become clear that 1998 will go down in history as the last Lambeth Conference ever to be able to gather Anglican bishops together from all provinces across the globe at the invitation of the Archbishop of the Canterbury.