

The Anglican Church of Canada



L'Église anglicane du Canada

Office of the Primate

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**AN ECUMENICAL VISION
1920-2020**

To The Anglican Church of Canada

Grace and Peace to you in Christ!

Today marks the beginning of what was to have been an 11-day gathering of more than 800 Anglican bishops from across the global communion for the gathering of the 15th Lambeth Conference in the Anglican Communion. The continuing impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic have, of course, resulted in a necessary postponement in the interests of the health and safety of all participants and attendees. Although we had expected to gather in summer 2021 the Conference has now been postponed further to summer 2022.

Around this same time one hundred years ago, in 1920, some 250 Anglican bishops were meeting together for what was just the 6th Lambeth Conference. This was, of course, just a short time after the cessation of hostilities during World War I, and the subsequent Influenza pandemic which followed. It was a conflictual, fearful, and uncertain time in world history, with not a few parallels to our own.

It was in the wake of these challenging times that the bishops at Lambeth 1920 issued a milestone letter to all followers of Jesus across the globe entitled "An Appeal to All Christian People." The letter begins by acknowledging the scandal that is the divisive and sometimes violent history of the one-but-broken Body of Christ, and confessing the "self-will, ambition, and lack of charity" which has contributed to it. Conscious of living in a time of great conflict, the bishops speak of a new vision rising as a witness to another way: "that of a Church, genuinely catholic, loyal to all truth, and gathering into its fellowship all 'who profess and call themselves Christians,' within whose visible unity all the treasures of faith and order, bequeathed as a heritage by the past to the present, shall be possessed in common, and made serviceable to the whole Body of Christ." This unity of Christians is understood not as an end unto itself, but rather as a sign of a way of forgiveness, reconciliation, and peace – a sign "for which the world is manifestly waiting."

This “Appeal” traditionally marks the symbolic start of Anglican commitment to participation and leadership in the ecumenical movement, making 2020 a highly important anniversary year in the life of our church. In the century since this beginning, there have been many milestones and breakthroughs which have seen significant convergence and meaningful collaboration across the spectrum of the separated Christian family. The highlights of international and national theological dialogues and statements, world and regional and local level councils of churches, and grassroots partnerships and ecclesial sharing of all kinds are too numerous to name; we have much to celebrate in our growth in communion! There are also enduring and newly emerging challenges, as Christians in different contexts continue to discern new issues and respond to new questions in differing ways; the call to live in communion with diversity is always an ongoing vocation!

In the Anglican Church of Canada (ACoC), ecumenical engagement has long been a high priority for our church, with numerous lay and clergy leaders active in the work in all kinds of places and settings. The list following this letter represents just a few of the highlights of our efforts in this area.

In all this work, one thing remains as true today as it was one hundred years ago: the human family struggles to live together in peace and right relationship, and there are always many factors and forces that seem to strive to keep us at odds with one another – race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, politics, economics, social class, and many more. The spirit of the Lambeth 1920 “Appeal to All Christian People” calls to us still to respond to God’s invitation into another way. May our church be inspired by this call anew this year, and embrace again the ecumenical vocation of seeking unity in reconciled diversity with all our siblings in faith.

If you are interested in learning more, or in getting involved yourself in the task of advancing visible Christian unity, I invite you to reach out to the Anglican Church of Canada’s Animator for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations, the Rev. Canon Dr. Scott Sharman, who I know would be happy to hear from you. (ssharman@national.anglican.ca)

With every blessing for the next ecumenical century,



The Most Rev. Linda Nicholls, Primate

ANGLICAN CHURCH OF CANADA ECUMENICAL HIGHLIGHTS

- The ACoC was a charter member of the World Council of Churches (WCC), the largest forum for global ecumenical connections and collaboration with 350 member churches accounting for over 1 billion Christians around the world. We remain active in many bodies of the WCC, with Archbishop Mark MacDonald currently serving as North American President. We look forward to sending a delegation to its 11th General Assembly in 2022 in Karlsruhe, Germany. (www.oikumene.org)

- In 1944 the **Canadian Council of Churches** (CCC) was formed, with the ACoC as a founding member. Today its 27 church membership represents 85% of Canadian Christians, and the CCC continues to serve as a preeminent place where the rich diversity of the Christian family can be shared through partnership in areas like justice and peace, faith and witness, intercultural leadership and learning, interfaith relations, faith and life sciences, and more. (www.councilofchurches.ca)
- Going back to the early 1970s, the ACoC has been engaged in a church-to-church dialogue with the **Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops**, working towards greater common understanding and increased cooperation in ministry and mission. The A-RC Dialogue of Canada, as its known, has produced numerous theological studies and joint papers on historic areas of divergence. A dialogue of **Anglican and Roman Catholic Bishops**, the A-RC Bishops Dialogue, has also various documents and statements on pastoral questions of mutual interest and concern. (<https://iarccum.org/org/#national>)
- For almost 20 years now we have enjoyed a full communion relationship with the **Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada** (ELCIC). This communion was the work of the Holy Spirit, and the product of many years of careful dialogue and building up of friendship and trust. It stands for us as an especially meaningful sign of the fruits of our ecumenical activity, and of the need to press on. We continue to grow deeper in partnership with the ELCIC, seeking to share more and more as churches walking together in witness and service to communities across this land. (<https://www.anglican.ca/faith/eir/full-communion-partnership/>)
- The ACoC has been committed to seeking greater visible unity with the **United Church of Canada** (UCC) for many decades, having re-established an ongoing bilateral dialogue in 2003. Lately the ACUC Dialogue has been focusing its efforts on promoting the sharing of ministry between ACoC and UCC parishes/communities of faith, dioceses/regional councils, and national expressions of church, as well as pursuing ways forward in the mutual recognition of one another's ministers and ministries. (<https://www.anglican.ca/faith/eir/dialogues/ucc/>)
- Our newest church-to-church relationship is with **Mennonite Church Canada**, having established a dialogue in 2016. This group has adopted an approach which has come to be called "receptive ecumenism," a methodology which does not seek agreement or uniformity but rather an intentional giving and receiving of our distinct expressions of church as gifts. (<https://www.anglican.ca/faith/eir/dialogues/mcc/>)
- Internationally we have Anglicans taking part in formal dialogues with the **Eastern Orthodox Church, the Oriental Orthodox Church, the Global Christian Forum, and the Roman Catholic Church** – including myself as a member of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC). (<http://www.anglicancommunion.org/ecumenism/ecumenical-dialogues.aspx>)