



Suggested Talking Points Regarding Anglican Covenant Resolutions



Introduction. What follows are ideas for speaking at the General Convention hearing on resolutions about the Anglican Communion Covenant (a.k.a., the Anglican Covenant). As of June 21, there are only two such resolutions—A040, offered by the B005 Task Force on the Anglican Covenant; and D022, offered by Ms. Lisa Fox. (For convenience, the two resolutions have been reproduced at the end of this document.) Both resolutions have been assigned to legislative committee 05, Governance and Structure, and, no doubt, both will be offered for public comment at once. Ms. Fox is not able to attend the convention, so the task of being the primary supporters of D022 (or something much like it) falls naturally to the two endorsers, Ms. Mary Roehrich and the Rev. Canon Scott Quinn, both deputies from Pittsburgh. The support of any other speakers will be greatly appreciated. It may be helpful for those intending to speak against the Anglican Covenant to confer before the legislative hearing to plan their testimony to avoid unnecessary repetition.

Objective. We would like the 78th General Convention to make a clear and unambiguous statement that it will neither adopt the Covenant nor endorse, in any way, any part of it. The real purpose of the Covenant is to assure doctrinal uniformity throughout the Anglican Communion by committing churches to engage in Communion-wide shared discernment under threat of sanctions. The Covenant is intended to bring the teaching and actions of The Episcopal Church and the Anglican Church of Canada, particularly with respect to issues of sex and sexuality, into line with the views of the highly traditionalist churches of the Global South.

Background. A covenant among churches of the Anglican Communion was suggested by the Windsor Report, which grew out of a request from the Anglican primates in an “emergency” meeting following the consent to the consecration of Gene Robinson by the 74th General Convention of 2003. A Covenant Design Group was appointed under the leadership of Archbishop Drexel Gomez, who was on record as opposing, among other things, the Episcopal Church’s attempts to make ordination of women available throughout the church, the ordination of “active homosexuals,” and same-sex marriage. After the development of several drafts, the current Anglican Covenant was offered to Communion churches for adoption in December 2009, with the apparent expectation that all churches would, in fact, adopt it. To date, 11 churches have, some rather ambiguously. Four churches, including the Church of England, have declined adoption. Other churches have seemed reluctant, with many clearly leaning toward rejection. After 5½ years, progress on the Covenant appears stalled, and many have declared the agreement dead.

The Covenant and The Episcopal Church. In successive meetings of the Anglican primates, Presiding Bishops have meekly endured the criticism of their colleagues. The church even acquiesced to withdrawing from a meeting of the Anglican Consultative Council at the behest of the primates. In 2006, the 75th General Convention apologized for any discomfort the action of the 74th convention caused and committed to the development of a covenant. The 76th General Convention simply recommended the study of covenant drafts. At the 77th General Convention in 2012, a resolution was passed restating our commitment to the Anglican Communion. In spite of a sense that The Episcopal Church would never accept the Covenant, Resolution B005 was passed, asserting that, because opinion was divided in the church, the General Convention would not act on Covenant adoption for “pastoral” reasons. In 2015, it is time to end “consideration” of the Covenant by The Episcopal Church once and for all.

The Resolutions. The report in which Resolution A040 is proposed says nothing of substance about the Covenant, and the Explanation for the resolution simply asserts that the resolution responds “appropriately to the current status of this process in Anglicanism generally and the ACC specifically.” Yet again, the resolution leaves open the question of whether our church will ever accept the Covenant. Moreover, the resolution itself suggests that we accept the bulk of what it says. Resolution D022, on the other hand, attempts to make it clear that we are rejecting the covenant categorically. The body of the resolution restates most of the text of A040. Instead of suggesting that The Episcopal Church accepts the Preface and Sections One, Two, and Three of the Covenant, D022 says that we do not accept either the Covenant’s representation of the Communion as it is or as it should be in the future. The exact wording of the first Resolved of a resolution need not be that of D022. The objective, however, is to avoid any suggestion that the church approves of any of the Covenant and, preferably, to make it clear that our involvement in the “Covenant process” is at an end.

Talking Points

Organizational Issues

1. The final text of the Covenant has been available for 5½ years. We should be able to say that we adopt it or we do not adopt it. As the Explanation of D022 says, “[i]t is high time for us to let our ‘yes’ be ‘yes’ or our ‘no’ be ‘no.’”
2. It is clear that there is no substantial sentiment for adopting the Covenant, yet the church seems incapable of simply saying no to the question of adoption. It is cowardly and manipulative to draw out the decision process regarding the Covenant. The Anglican Communion has a right to have an answer from us.
3. Reluctance clearly to reject the Covenant appears to affect other Communion churches as well. The Episcopal Church has an opportunity to take responsibility for what it believes the Gospel to demand and to show some leadership, which has been lacking from our church for more than a decade. In particular, the Anglican Church of Canada, the other church the Covenant was meant to control or sanction, is scheduled to make a decision about the Covenant in 2016. A clear no from The Episcopal Church will make it easier for the Canadian church to give a like response.
4. Because The Episcopal Church is the primary church whose actions the Covenant seeks to rein in, rejection by our church, particularly after the Church of England has chosen not to adopt the Covenant, will likely put a nail in the Covenant coffin, bringing to an end this unfortunate period in the life of the Communion.
5. The church, concerned about its future, is engaged in making critical decisions about its polity and mission. Now is the time to get the Covenant off the church’s agenda, so that more existential matters can be given full consideration.
6. Ironically, the churches that seemed most to want a covenant, primarily those of the Global South, have largely abandoned the Covenant project as being insufficiently dictatorial to insure doctrinal uniformity among Communion churches. Those churches apparently will never accept the Covenant and have instead adopted the very conservative Jerusalem Declaration and formed the Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans. Rather than beating the dead horse that is the Covenant, the Communion should be trying either to get those churches to accept a fellowship of churches that agree to disagree on some issues or to plan for the breakup of the existing Communion into modernist and traditionalist camps.
7. Whereas the previous Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, invested his prestige in adoption of the Anglican Covenant, the present archbishop, Justin Welby, has ignored the Covenant, probably because he realizes that it will never achieve the goals intended for it. We should do our part in making the Covenant past history.
8. It is reckless to say that “our common identity and membership in the Anglican Communion” is properly captured by the Preamble and the first three sections of the Covenant without a detailed consideration of every assertion and commitment in those sections. Details matter, and A040 could allow the nose of a very nasty Anglican camel under the big tent that is The Episcopal Church. A040 should not be adopted without a thorough study of the Covenant by the General Convention.

Resolution Text Issues

1. D022 essentially declares the Covenant to be, at least for The Episcopal Church, not fit for purpose. Although some have called its wording harsh, it clearly indicates that it would be inappropriate to adopt the Covenant, and it does so without using words such as “reject” or “fail to adopt.”

2. It is unclear what meaning A040 is intended to communicate. By declaring that most of the Covenant is acceptable, the resolution suggests that The Episcopal Church might eventually come around to accepting the rest of the agreement.
3. By approving of the Preamble and the first three sections of the Covenant, we may be held to the content of those sections. The Communion lately has a way of converting Lambeth resolutions, reports, and the like into holy writ. The Virginia Report, the Windsor Report, and the 1998 Lambeth Resolution I.10, though never approved through any binding Communion-wide process, are often cited as Communion “teaching” by leaders of churches much more tradition-bound than our own.
4. In any case, approving of the Preamble, as A040 does, makes no sense. That section speaks of “covenant[ing] together in these following affirmations and commitments.” Clearly, this refers to *all* the following affirmations and commitments, including those in Section Four, which A040 fails to mention and which many Anglican churches have found objectionable.
5. Although not ideal, A040 could be improved by eliminating the words “as expressed ... Covenant.” This would eliminate any apparent approval of the Covenant text. The strategy has the disadvantage of not saying anything at all about the Covenant and The Episcopal Church. It leaves our church open to further consideration of the Covenant in the future. It is time to put an end to consideration of the Covenant.

Covenant Content Issues

1. A fundamental problem with the Anglican covenant is its dishonesty. While claiming to preserve the essence of the Anglican Communion, it is instead radically altering it.
2. The Communion has always avoided creating its own confession of faith, which would only provide ideas about which the diverse Anglican churches would fight. The Covenant, however, is part confession of faith, part mission statement, part constitution, and, of course, part restrictive covenant.
3. The Covenant takes a long step toward creating a global Anglican Church with centralized decision-making on difficult issues. Besides giving up the autonomy that most Episcopalians value, this is an impractical and expensive idea. We are having enough trouble with our own governance without granting other churches the power to interfere in it.
4. The Covenant says that churches are bound by the Covenant upon adoption. This, and the fact that it is clear that many churches will not ever adopt the Covenant, have already split the Communion into two camps. The Covenant will not be successful, and we would do well to move the Communion toward abandoning the Covenant program.
5. African churches have complained that acceptance of homosexuality by Western churches opens them to criticism by Muslims. In the current fellowship that is the Anglican Communion, such churches could have credible deniability were they to desire it, since they have no control over, for example, The Episcopal Church. Ironically, under the Covenant, which attempts to create doctrinal uniformity across the Communion, those churches could legitimately be held responsible for actions by other churches that they deplore.
6. Since the Church of England has rejected the Covenant—a majority of dioceses voted not to pursue adoption—the mechanisms defined by the pact become problematic, as the Archbishop of Canterbury, the ecclesiastical head of the Church of England, is intimately involved in all of them. This is yet another indication that the Covenant simply cannot work.
7. The Covenant contains many assertions that are questionable. For example, paragraph 1.1.3 describes “the Holy Scriptures ... as being the rule and ultimate standard of faith.” What does this mean? Some will view the Bible, taken as a whole, as an ultimate standard; others will engage in proof-texting; others will simply reject

the statement, perhaps saying that we wrote the Bible, so we can rewrite it. Saying that such a statement is part of our Anglican identity only sets us up for Communion-wide arguments.

8. Criticism of the Covenant has mostly concentrated on Section Four, which speaks of imposing “relational consequences” on churches that take actions deplored by other churches. Most Episcopalians, if they studied the text carefully, would be equally appalled by the “shared discernment in the life of the Church” demanded by Section Three. Were we under the Covenant 50 years ago, we likely would not have women priests and bishops now, since there are churches of the Communion that still do not accept the ordination of women and certainly do not approve of making women bishops.
9. How can we accept that Section Three of the Covenant is part of “our common identity and membership in the Anglican Communion” if we have not asked the Communion if we can move forward in adopting liturgies for blessing same-sex unions?
10. The Covenant asks churches to surrender their autonomy and their ability to minister uniquely to their population. Surely, The Episcopal Church does not want to do this, to demand it of other churches, or to give any support to the very notion of giving up our communion of churches for a more unified but ossified global church.

Additional Materials

This document is intended only to suggest arguments favoring a clear rejection of the Anglican Covenant by the General Convention. For other ideas, it may be helpful to consult the references provided on the [Web site of the No Anglican Covenant Coalition](#). In particular, look at the [Resources page](#).

Resolution A040

Resolved, the House of _____ concurring, That the 78th General Convention of The Episcopal Church affirm our common identity and membership in the Anglican Communion as expressed in the preamble and first three sections of the Anglican Communion Covenant; and be it further

Resolved, That the 78th General Convention direct The Episcopal Church's members of the Anglican Consultative Council to express our appreciation to the 16th meeting of the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC16, Lusaka 2016) for the gift of inter-Anglican conversation and mutuality in God's mission engendered by the Anglican Communion Covenant process.

Explanation

Pursuant to the charge given the B005 Task Force, we monitored Anglican and ACC activities regarding the Anglican Covenant process and believe this resolution to respond appropriately to the current status of this process in Anglicanism generally and the ACC specifically. This resolution has no budgetary implications.

Resolution D022

Resolved, the House of _____ concurring, That the 78th General Convention of The Episcopal Church affirm our common identity and membership in the Anglican Communion, neither the present nor any desired future nature of which is properly described by the Anglican Communion Covenant; and be it further

Resolved, That the 78th General Convention direct The Episcopal Church's members of the Anglican Consultative Council

to express our appreciation to the 16th meeting of the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC16, Lusaka 2016) for the gift of inter-Anglican conversation and mutuality in God's mission engendered by the Anglican Communion Covenant process.

Explanation

The Communion-wide discussion of a proposed Anglican Communion Covenant has been helpful in elucidating the diversity within the Anglican Communion. The Covenant, however, does not properly describe our Anglican identity or the relationship we have or might want to have with our sister Anglican churches.

The first three sections of the Covenant contain assertions, particularly about our own church, that are not strictly true, as well as commitments we likely do not want to make. Section Four seeks to establish a centralized mechanism for resolving matters of belief and behavior for the Anglican Communion. Taken as a whole, the Covenant goes a long way toward changing our beloved fellowship of churches into a worldwide confessional church that imposes uniformity of belief throughout its provinces.

For this reason, the General Convention has been unwilling to adopt the Covenant, yet has been consistently coy about our church's relationship to the Windsor/Covenant process and reluctant to reject the Covenant outright. It is high time for us to let our "yes" be "yes" or our "no" be "no." Moreover, it is disingenuous to commend parts of a pact that is deeply flawed throughout. We should unambiguously decline either to adopt or to partially accept the Covenant.

Other initiatives, such as Indaba conversations, are more likely to enhance communion among Anglican Churches than adoption of the Anglican Communion Covenant.