



The Anglican Communion Environment Network

Report to the Anglican Consultative Council, Jamaica 2009

As a network we are relatively new; we had our beginning at the Global Anglican Congress on the stewardship of creation in Johannesburg in 2002, where a declaration and resolution were passed calling for our creation. This resolution was taken by the Anglican UN Observer to the 12th meeting of the ACC in Hong Kong in 2002 where it was passed. This resolution established the environment network as an official instrument in the Anglican Communion and it calls upon churches in the Anglican Communion to respond urgently to our fifth mark of mission. Three years later, in 2005 I hosted our first meeting in Canberra Australia; the meeting was devoted to climate change and received reports from Provincial representatives. The meeting made its own declaration in relation to climate change and renewable energy. As an Australian representative I was able to speak of the already present features of climate change on the Australian continent which are experienced in more frequent and prolonged droughts, the general decline of fresh water for urban areas, much reduced water for irrigation and a drastic decline in the health of the river systems. More recently the terrible February 2009 bushfires exploded because of the convergence of extreme heat, tinder dry conditions, and very strong winds.

Despite our relative youth and the extreme importance of our portfolio, since the last report the environment network has struggled to gain traction. This is due to three factors

1. No financial resources have been made available to enable representatives from the less resourced areas of the Communion to participate. There has been no face to face meeting since the Canberra meeting in 2005. The network most urgently needs financial resourcing to enable people from the two thirds world to be active and influential contributors.
2. Despite our best efforts it has been very difficult to enlist significant representation from across the Provinces.
3. Climate change has become so globally significant and urgent that it is literally impossible for a group of busy volunteers with absolutely no allocated resources to be anything other than marginally effective.

However during this time there have been important ways in which the Environment agenda has been pursued across the Communion by members of the network.

2007 Millennium Development Goals meeting in Johannesburg. This meeting with delegates from across the globe was an extremely important

vehicle for the furthering of these most important justice goals and the heightening of their awareness across the Communion. The environment received significant profile at the meeting and was strongly represented in the resolutions emanating from it. It became clear to all delegates that the environment agenda undergirds almost all the other agendas. (EG deteriorating access to water means that many women and children fill their day collecting water over long distances, negating attempts to build primary education and improve women's health and well being). Delegates went away from this meeting with a clearer understanding that environmental stewardship is a core Christian commitment and that the fifth mark of mission is as significant as the other four.

2008 Lambeth Conference. The Lambeth Conference met in an atmosphere of internal tension within the Communion; however despite this, the conference gave very considerable attention to the various marks of mission, the fifth mark of mission receiving perhaps the highest profile. It was encouraging that the vast majority of Bishops seemed to leave the conference convinced that they ought to take significant leadership in ensuring that the fifth mark of mission is effectively pursued. The Bishops were painfully aware that this is urgent, that time is not on our side, that it is no longer satisfactory to simply talk about the issue; genuine and substantial goals need to be set by the Church as well as by the wider community. From the Conference about 40 bishops across the entire spectrum of the Anglican Communion indicated they would like to be proactive in an ongoing network. The voice of Bishops from countries like Bangladesh, where the effects of climate change are immediate and potentially quite disastrous was profound.

The Network is aware that on the ground there have been some wonderfully creative and bold initiatives emanating from the local Church. These initiatives have come from as diverse a range of countries as Kenya, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka the US and Britain. In some cases proponents of these initiatives have won local and international recognition.

The Network is also very grateful for the leadership shown by some of our most influential leaders and especially from Archbishop Rowan.

In the last 12 months the political and scientific ground has shifted significantly. We are more aware than ever that environmental degradation generally, and climate change in particular, is connected to, and exacerbated by, the human footprint. We are also aware that time is not on our side. Very significant global conferences are being held later this year, it is vitally important that the voice of the Church is clearly heard.

The world economy must move away from its reliance on a carbon base to an economy thriving on the energy the sun brings to us daily (in its various forms). We must also balance the inexorable movement into globalisation with a recovery of sustainable local and regional communities.

Forward movement with the clarity passion and speed that is required will not come without a vision for what the future can be, and without a sense of

profound gratitude for the gift of creation itself. The Church is well placed to provide the lubrication for the wheels of change.

Because this is one of perhaps the two most pressing issues facing the planet today clearly the whole Church from its leadership to its membership must be energetic, committed, informed and passionate about our involvement in a solution, for the sake of the worlds' most vulnerable, for the sake of our children and grandchildren and above all for the sake of the integrity of the Gospel. This is not a situation of opt in or opt out. Only the ignorant, the fool hardy or the self interested will want to stay out of a movement so vital to us all.

The Network is somewhat at the cross roads of its existence. The contribution of a few is enormous and without their efforts the network would have failed. In particular I want to acknowledge the work of the Revd Ken Gray of Canada who almost single handedly keeps the network alive.

In this context the future of the network and its effectiveness is dependent on several factors.

- We need the assistance of the Anglican Communion Office, the Office of the Anglican Observer at the United Nations and of Provincial leaders to not simply help the network, but to be the network
- We need every Province to make the appointment of a network representative of the highest priority.
- We need the executive of the network, which has been in place for sometime to be renewed with new ideas and leadership

Speaking for myself, I do believe the time has come for me to relinquish the reins as convener; I am no longer in a position which enables me to regularly and easily communicate with the Church's leadership. I will not step aside however and leave the network rudderless, but I encourage the Anglican Consultative Council to see that the appointment of an effective and resourced person in this role is a very high priority.

Bishop George Browning
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