

Handout: UNITY AND COMMON LIFE

IN THE WORLDWIDE ANGLICAN COMMUNION: HOW WE ARE TOGETHER AND HOW ARE WE APART?

The Anglican tradition has long held that while there are essentials in our shared Christian faith, unity will not always mean uniformity. At the Episcopal Church General Convention of 2003, a majority of deputies consented to the consecration as bishop of Eugene Robinson, who was openly gay and partnered. The Convention also suggested that, where local Episcopal leadership permits, such relationships might, given certain circumstances, be liturgically blessed. This was even more controversial in the international context.

The then-Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, appointed a panel of international theologians and church leaders to help address the subsequent divisions across the Anglican Communion. The Lambeth Commission, as it was called, was charged to comment on the “legal and theological implications flowing from the decisions of the Episcopal ... and specifically on the canonical understandings of communion, impaired and broken communion.” The Commission’s work was published in 2004 as *The Windsor Report*.

Subsequently, Rowan Williams called together a Covenant Design Group to further the study and a draft another document which was finalized in late 2009 and entitled the [Anglican Communion Covenant](#). While the Episcopal Church in this country opted in 2012 to “decline to take a position” on the Covenant, the work found in the document is helpful for understanding issues of unity.

Questions for discussion:

1. What do you recall about the controversial actions of the denomination’s General Conventions of 2003 and 2012? What do you understand to be the most important issues brought to the fore by those actions?
2. How might the Episcopal Church in the United States respond to the views and experiences of a wider faith community in the Anglican Communion? How are we both interrelated and independent?
3. Consider the familiar church dictum: “In essentials, unity; in nonessentials, liberty; in all things, charity.” How might that apply to the issues we face in our congregation, in the diocese, in the denomination, and in the Anglican Communion? In what ways are the issues brought to the fore now essentials or nonessentials?
4. What are the bonds of unity and common life in the wider Anglican Communion and other traditions in the worldwide Christian faith? What responsibility do we have?
5. What responsibility do our local churches have when it comes to living and serving together?