

ConservativeAnglicans say 1,000 may attend Jerusalem event: The Global Anglican Future Conference

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An independent, pre-Lambeth Conference gathering in the Holy Land of Anglican conservatives who oppose churches they consider too liberal on gay and scriptural issues was expected to attract up to 1,000 participants to the June 22-29 event in Jordan and Jerusalem.

The Global Anglican Future Conference (GAFCON) reported that participants from 17 Anglican provinces would include 280 bishops, although “final attendance figures will depend on smooth processing of requested visas and other factors,” it announced.

The conference earlier was criticized by local church leaders, including Jerusalem’s Anglican bishop Suheil Dawani, who voiced concerned that GAFCON would “import inter-Anglican conflict” into his diocese. GAFCON organizers then moved the consultation part of the conference to Jordan, to be followed by a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Jordan is part of the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem.

“I wish to again stress that the Holy City is always an open city for all pilgrims coming to our diocese to join with us in our servanthood and witness,” said Dawani on May 16 to Episcopal News Service.

“Pilgrims are always warmly welcomed by our diocesan family when coming in a spirit of mutuality in devotion, reconciliation and goodwill that strengthens both the fabric of unity in the larger church and the interreligious communal collegiality among the three Abrahamic faiths that make Jerusalem their spiritual home,” he added.

Mouneer Hanna Anis, primate of the Province of Jerusalem and the Middle East, previously raised his concerns about the gathering. He said that his advice to the

organizers—that this was neither the right time nor the right place for such a meeting—had been ignored.

GAFCON will be held one month before the Lambeth Conference, when, starting on July 16, some 800 of the Anglican Communion's bishops will meet in Canterbury, England, for more than two weeks of study, prayer and discussions. Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams, the spiritual head of the communion, has emphasized recently that this Lambeth Conference will forgo parliamentary debates and decisions—in contrast to past once-a-decade meetings of the bishops.

Archbishop Peter Jensen of Sydney, Australia, a GAFCON organizer, has said the pilgrimage was designed for bishops who have decided they cannot in good conscience attend the 2008 Lambeth Conference. However, Episcopal News Service said it was understood that some bishops taking part in GAFCON have also acknowledged that they will be attending the Lambeth Conference.

Dawani said he met with Jensen in January and told him that he would “prefer that all Anglicans came together at the Lambeth Conference to discuss their concerns.”