

Griswold criticizes 'two-tier' plan for Anglican churches: Pragmatic solution is at the expense of deeper truth

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In his first full response to a high-level proposal to divide the worldwide Anglican Communion into voting and nonvoting camps, the top leader of the Episcopal Church has said it “raises serious questions about how we understand ourselves as being the church.”

Frank Griswold, the outgoing Episcopal presiding bishop, had reacted mildly in his early response in June to Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams’s proposed plan to establish a two-tiered membership for the 38 members of the Anglican Communion. The Episcopal Church could be placed into an “associate” category because of its willingness to ordain gays as bishops.

In a letter to the U.S. church released July 11, Griswold noted that Williams’s still-unwritten plan, aimed at avoiding rupture in the communion, “contained no directives . . . and no foreclosing,” according to a speech Williams gave July 7 at the Church of England’s General Synod.

Griswold, who will be succeeded in his post in November by Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori, also suggested in his letter that introducing a secondary, nonvoting level of membership within the Anglican Communion would contrast with New Testament images of equality among believing Christians.

“I am put in mind of Paul’s understanding of the church as the body of Christ of which we are all indispensable members in virtue of baptism,” Griswold wrote. “I think as well of Jesus’ declaration in the Gospel of John that he is the vine and we are the branches and that apart from him we can do nothing.

“A two-tiered view of our common life suggests to me amputated limbs and severed branches without any life-giving relationship to the One who is the source of all life,” he continued. “A pragmatic solution in this regard is at the expense of the deeper truth that the eye cannot see to the hand, ‘I have no need of you.’”

Many of the 37 other Anglican provinces consider homosexuality a sin, and at least 22 have declared themselves in “impaired” or broken communion with the U.S. church.

Particular provinces’ stances on homosexuality could be a crucial factor in deciding whether they are full communion members. *-Religion News Service*