

Proposal to loosen ties in Anglican Communion draws mixed response

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A proposal to loosen the ties of the 80-million-member Anglican Communion, currently the world's third-largest Christian body, drew a variety of reactions.

Justin Welby, the archbishop of Canterbury, floated a proposal in mid-September to invite all 38 national-church heads of the Anglican Communion to explore how Anglicans can stay together while going their separate ways when it comes to inclusion of LGBT people and the ordination of women.

"The difference between our societies and cultures, as well as the speed of cultural change in much of the global north, tempts us to divide as Christians," Welby said in a statement. "A 21st-century Anglican family must have space for deep disagreement, and even mutual criticism, so long as we are faithful to the revelation of Jesus Christ, together."

Welby's meeting of Anglican leaders is proposed for January in Canterbury, England.

"We will be seeking to know what he means by a more loose organization," said Joseph Kanuku, Anglican bishop of Machakos, Kenya. "For us, the Bible should be the compass and the pilot guiding the ideology of any new structure formed."

The Global Anglican Future Conference released a statement saying its primates "will prayerfully consider their response." GAFCON, started in 2008 in Jerusalem, says its aim is to restore the integrity of Anglican faith and order.

Welby's proposal would allow both the liberal churches of North America that recognize same-sex marriage and those in African churches who oppose it to call themselves Anglican. Welby planned to invite the Anglican Church in North America, a breakaway group from the Episcopal Church, to attend the meeting in January—but not as a full member.

GAFCON primates have said that they would not attend any meeting at which the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Church of Canada were present and ACNA was excluded.

At the 2008 Lambeth Conference, the Anglican Communion's ten-year meeting, nearly 250 of the 800 invitees stayed away. Welby had previously announced the indefinite postponement of the next Lambeth Conference.

Bishop Julius Kalu of Kenya's Mombasa Diocese said of the January meeting: "I don't think this will solve the problems of the communion. The Anglican Communion is such an old organization that may not be easy to replace. We know even before the emergence of the disputes over homosexuality the communion was a loose union of dioceses and provinces. It is still. We have been united in diversity." —Religion News Service

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