

Primates' Meeting ends with statement on global concerns as bishops prepare for Lambeth Conference

BY DAVID PAULSEN
Posted Mar 31, 2022

[Episcopal News Service] The heads of most of the [Anglican Communion's 42 provinces](#), including Presiding Bishop Michael Curry of The Episcopal Church, wrapped their four-day Primates' Meeting in London by issuing a written statement March 31 that addresses a range of global issues and looks ahead to the Lambeth Conference of Anglican bishops planned for this summer.

“We return to our churches and dioceses conscious of the calling that is given to us by God, through Jesus Christ, and of our need for grace,” the archbishops and presiding bishops said in [their communiqué from the March 28-31 meeting](#). “We have reflected on the servant leadership of Christ and our own roles as shepherds of his flock.”

The Primates' Meeting is known as [one of the Anglican instruments of communion](#), in addition to the Lambeth Conference of bishops and the Anglican Consultative Council, the communion's main policymaking body. Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby chairs the meeting of primates, calls the Lambeth Conference and is president of the Anglican Consultative Council.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Welby had led two meetings of the primates online. The Primates' Meeting this week was the first to be held in person since January 2020, when Welby and the other top Anglican leaders [met in Jordan](#).

“After being separated for our own good during the height of the pandemic, to just be able to be together and pray together and take Communion together and wash each other's feet quite literally, that's some holy time,” Curry said in a phone interview with Episcopal News Service before the meeting's conclusion. “It's been deeply, wonderfully spiritual.”

Curry also emphasized the importance of hearing stories from Anglican provinces around the world, especially in places where fellow Christians are dealing with war,

famine and persecution. “There are people who really do suffer, who are members of this church, and they suffer because of their faith,” Curry said.

The Primates’ Meeting communiqué specifically expressed alarm at the humanitarian crisis [caused by Russia’s ongoing invasion of Ukraine](#). “We call for an immediate ceasefire and the withdrawal of Russian troops from Ukraine,” the archbishops and presiding bishops said.

They also acknowledged ongoing conflicts and violence in other parts of the world, from Afghanistan and the Holy Land to South Sudan and Mozambique, and they described the plight of refugees from those and other countries as “one of the major tragedies of our time.”

Climate change was another issue highlighted in the Primates’ Meeting statement, which cited the example of four Indian Ocean cyclones to hit Africa in two months, devastating communities in Madagascar and Mozambique. “Environmental damage affects the most vulnerable people in the world, including indigenous peoples who are affected by the exploitation of forests and others natural resources.”

Primates also discussed a consultation from the Church of England on extending the involvement of the wider Anglican Communion in the [choice of future archbishops of Canterbury](#). And they addressed “the unilateral decision to construct the Grand Ethiopian Dam” and the potential for water shortage in Egypt and Sudan that may result from it.

“We strongly believe the Blue Nile is God’s gift to the countries through which it flows and should therefore be a reason for cooperation between Ethiopia, Sudan, and Egypt to achieve sustainable development,” they said. “We wish to appeal to the three countries to resume, with good will, their negotiations immediately to ensure a fair distribution of the water of the Blue Nile.”

This Primates’ Meeting was billed as a low-key gathering, with “very little ‘formal’ business” and intended primarily for prayer and conversation, according to the Anglican Communion Office. Bible studies focused on 1 Peter, which also will be the core

Scripture for the more than 700 Anglican bishops who are preparing to attend the [Lambeth Conference](#) from July 26 to Aug. 8.

The archbishops and presiding bishops initially intended to convene in Rome, but the Primates' Meeting was moved to England because of COVID-19 restrictions in Italy. A few primates still chose not to attend in person due to pandemic precautions that remain in effect in their home countries, but they were able to join their fellow primates online.

Three additional primates chose to skip this meeting entirely for other reasons. In a Zoom news conference on March 31, Welby identified those primates as the leaders of the Anglican provinces in Uganda, Rwanda and Nigeria. They did not give specific reasons for their absences, Welby said, but those primates previously have made clear they “don't want to be in the room” with leaders from other provinces, like The Episcopal Church, that have allowed same-sex marriage and LGBTQ+ clergy.

Such issues continue to fuel tensions around the Anglican Communion. At the news conference, Welby was asked about his handling of a recent controversy stemming from Ghanaian bishops' [support for anti-LGBTQ+ legislation in their country](#). Ghana in 1957 was the first country in sub-Saharan Africa to achieve independence from Britain, Welby said, and that colonial history requires a degree of caution in how he voices concerns over the policies and actions of an autonomous Anglican province.

“If I speak carelessly, it can still sound to many people around the world as though a white man from the former colonial power is giving instructions,” he said. “And since I'm passionately anti-colonialist and know that I have no authority, I'm constantly walking a tightrope in how I express myself.”

That said, he also affirmed the “need for proper and dignified and Christian treatment of all people, regardless of their sexuality,” which he said was backed by a [resolution to that effect from the 1998 Lambeth Conference](#).

The upcoming Lambeth Conference likely will [again face issues of LGBTQ+ inclusion](#), though Welby said he also hopes the bishops of the Anglican Communion will broaden

their conversations to the church's larger role in the world, following the conference's theme of "God's Church for God's World."

"The encouragement of it is to look outward, and to look at other issues which are deeply troubling to the way we treat people on the edge, whether it's food insecurity, whether it's rising sea levels, whether it's war, persecution, freedom of religion and belief, torture, unfair trade practices and a million other things," Welby said. "Those are things that come under the heading of God's call to the church to speak for justice in every area."

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