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## NEWS FOCUS -

### Archbishop Justin Welby reflects on Primates Meeting

**The Archbishop of Canterbury has written a reflection on the meeting of Anglican Primates in Canterbury last week.**

Last week the Primates of the Anglican Communion gathered in Canterbury for a week of prayer and discussion. You might well have been following the events in the media. I want to share some thoughts of my own here about what took place last week – which was without doubt one of the most extraordinary weeks I have ever experienced.

The first thing to say is that the week was completely rooted in prayer. The Community of St Anselm – the international young Christian community based at Lambeth Palace – took up residence in Canterbury Cathedral and prayed all day every day for the Primates as we talked together. As Primates we joined with all who

gathered for Morning Prayer, Eucharist and Evensong in the Cathedral each day. And meanwhile thousands – perhaps millions – of Anglicans and others in the Christian family around the world prayed in churches and posted prayers on social media. I want to thank everyone who prayed last week. We felt it and we appreciated it deeply.

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So onto what actually happened last week.

As leaders of the family of Anglican churches in a world so racked by violence and fear, we gathered in Canterbury with much to share and discuss – from climate change to religiously motivated violence.

A significant part of the week was spent discussing how – or even if – we could remain together as the Anglican Communion in the light of changes made by our brothers and sisters in The Episcopal Church (the historic Anglican Communion church in the USA and some other countries) to their understanding of marriage.

It is really worth stressing here that this was not a meeting where we discussed formally our differing views on human sexuality. Personally the fact that people are persecuted for their sexuality is a constant source of deep sadness.

As I said in the press conference on the final day of the meeting, I am deeply sorry for the pain that the church has caused LGBTI people in the past – and the present – and for the love that too often we have completely failed to show in many parts of the world, including England. The worst thing about that is that it causes people to doubt that they are loved by God.

We have to see that changed. In our [communiqué](#) the Primates condemned homophobic prejudice and violence. We resolved to work together to offer pastoral care and loving service irrespective of sexual orientation. And we reaffirmed our rejection of criminal sanctions against same-sex attracted adults. We need to act on those words.

But back to the response that we made about how to move forward together in the light of decisions taken by The Episcopal Church (TEC). This was a meeting where we discussed whether or not we could stay together as one family after one member has taken unilateral action – in this case, making a fundamental departure from the faith and teaching on marriage held by the large majority of Anglican Provinces globally. But the question could and undoubtedly will apply in the future to other issues. I should say that Provinces are described as autonomous (they

make their own minds up) but interdependent (we are linked as family to one another).

It's no secret to say that before the meeting, the signs were not good. It really was possible that we would reach a decision to walk apart – in effect, to split the Anglican Communion. In the debates that have raged around these issues for several decades now, some have said unity is worthless if achieved at the expense of justice. Others have argued unity is a false prize if it undermines truth.

Both of these views misunderstand the nature of the church, which is not an organisation but a body of people committed to each other because they are followers of Jesus Christ. We are put together as family by God, because we are all God's children.

The meeting reached a point on Wednesday where we chose quite simply to decide on this point – do we walk together at a distance, or walk apart? And what happened next went beyond everyone's expectations. It was Spirit-led. It was a 'God moment'. As leaders of our Anglican Communion, and more importantly as Christians, we looked at each other across our deep and complex differences – and we recognised those we saw as those with whom

we are called to journey in hope towards the truth and love of Jesus Christ. It was our unanimous decision to walk together and to take responsibility for making that work.

We remain committed to being together, albeit we asked that TEC, while attending and playing a full part in our meetings and all discussions, will not represent the Anglican Communion to other churches and should not be involved in standing committees for a period of three years. During this time we also asked that they not vote on matters of doctrine or how we organise ourselves.

It's clear in Christian teaching that it's not for us to divide the body of Christ, which is the church, but also that we must seek to make decisions bearing each other in mind, taking each other seriously, loving one another despite deep differences of view.

Because of that, the unity that was so remarkably shown by the Anglican Primates in Canterbury last week is always costly. It is always painful. It feels very fragile. We are a global family of churches in 165 countries, speaking over a thousand languages and living in hundreds of different cultures – how could we

not wound each other as we seek to hold together amidst great diversity?

There will be wounds for each other, but we must repent of wounding others who are especially vulnerable, whether they are LGBTI people or those menaced by religiously-motivated violence, terrorism and exile. Some, of course, will fall in many categories.

But that unity is also joyful and astonishing, renewing and nourishing – because it is unity in love for Jesus Christ, whose single family we are, often argumentative, sometimes cruel (which is deeply wrong) but created by God and belonging to each other irrevocably.

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We spent time talking about the desperate situation of so many Christians around the world living with the threat and reality of religiously-motivated violence. The primary fear for many, probably near a majority of Anglicans in the world today – just as it is for our brothers and sisters in other parts of the Christian Church and for other communities entirely – is the violence that confronts them and their families daily.

It's the risk of a Congolese woman getting raped by a militia when she goes out to fetch water. It's

the risk of church congregations in Pakistan being killed by a suicide bomber as they worship on Sunday morning. And it's a thousand other risks besides. We heard many moving stories from around the world, shared by fellow Primates, and discussed what we can do to challenge that violence.

All of us were deeply moved when the devastating effects of climate change were presented in terms of the very existence of peoples, communities and even nations. From rising sea levels, to drought and famine from the increase of unforgiving arid landscapes, the result is life-threatening for many of our brothers and sisters.

So there was much darkness to lament and to recommit ourselves to challenging. But there were rays of pure, joyful hope as well. The Primates committed ourselves – all of us, in every part of the Communion – to evangelism. To proclaiming the person and work of Jesus Christ – inviting all to embrace the beauty and joy of the Gospel and to proclaim that to everyone.

There will be plenty more to say on this in the coming weeks and months – certainly not just by me, but also by everyone who cares passionately about the Anglican Communion.

For now I wanted to share these initial reflections with you, and ask for you to keep praying for our unity as brothers and sisters in Christ. If Christ's flock can more or less stay together, it's hope for a world that tears itself apart – a sign of what can happen with the love and mercy of God through Jesus Christ.

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You can read the Communiqué by the Anglican Primates [here](#).