

Missional Imperatives for the Anglican Church in the Caribbean

The Most Rev. Drexel Gomez, Retired Archbishop of the West Indies

Introduction

The Church in The Province Of The West Indies (CPWI) is a member church of the Anglican Communion (AC). The AC is comprised of thirty-eight (38) member churches throughout the global community, and constitutes the third largest grouping of Christians in the world, after the Roman Catholic Communion, and the Orthodox Churches. The AC membership is ordinarily defined by churches being in full communion with the See of Canterbury, and which recognize the Archbishop of Canterbury as *Primus Inter Pares* (Chief Among Equals) amongst the Primates of the member churches. The commitment to the legacy of Apostolic Tradition, Succession, and Progression serves to undergird not only the characteristics of Anglicanism itself, provides the ongoing allegiance to some Missional Imperatives, driven and sustained by God's enlivening Spirit.

Anglican Characteristics

Anglicanism has always been characterized by three strands of Christian emphases – Catholic, Reformed, and Evangelical. Within recent times, the AC has attempted to adopt specific methods of accentuating its Evangelical character for example by designating a Decade of Evangelism. More recently, the AC has sought to provide for itself a new matrix for integrating its culture of worship, work, and witness in keeping with its Gospel proclamation and teaching. The AC more recently determined that there should also be a clear delineation of some Marks of Mission. It agreed eventually on what it has termed the Five Marks of Mission. They are: (1) *To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom;* (2) *To teach, baptize and nurture new believers;* (3) *To respond to human need by loving service;* (4) *To seek to transform unjust structures in society to challenge violence of every kind and to pursue peace and reconciliation;* (5) *To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth.*

Characteristics of Anglicanism in general

1. Anglicans uphold the four constituent elements of the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral:- The Catholic Creed, the Three-fold Apostolic Ministry, the Authority of Sacred Scripture, and the Dominical Sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist.
2. Anglicans are committed to the principles of Mutual Responsibility of Interdependence (MRI), and to maintaining the historic "bonds of affection" between member churches.
3. Anglicans hold to a dominant culture of fellowship and participation in each other's ways, woes, and welfare, while striving at the same time to allow working consensus

through the exercises of the “Anglican Instruments” (Archbishop of Canterbury, Anglican Consultative Council, Primates Meetings, and the Lambeth Conference).

4. Anglicans treasure the legacy and utility of the Book of Common Prayer in which the basic structures of liturgical, spiritual, and canonical life have been maintained, and allegiances to discipline and moral rectitude are codified.
5. Anglicans are linked by a sense of liturgical order and corporate discipline undergirded by the use of Scripture, the observances of calendars, and the sanctity in the culture of worship.
6. Anglicans are wedded to the highest standards of a theological tradition that proclaims ‘Faith seeking understanding’ This tradition has always enabled the AC to wrestle creatively with contemporary modes of discernment in the context of human experiences and expectations.
7. Anglicans embrace the task of working with four basic sources of Theology: Scripture, Reason, Tradition, and Culture. It is often the fourth source that affords the wider and deeper meanings of context. This makes way for the traditional motif of ‘the middle way’.
8. Anglicans are sustained by the spiritual efficacy of Word and Sacrament. This not only enables diverse peoples to join in regular praise and worship in celebration of the mysteries of God, but also to affirm the sacramental nature of the whole people of God as the Body of Christ.
9. Anglicans have traditionally been marked out as a distinctive group of Christians who optimize the essential link between the prophetic, pastoral, and practical. Hence the challenges and inequities of society that assault the rights and freedoms of human beings can be addressed through the total ministry of the Church. This effectively brings the Church into a fertile or acerbic encounter with the structures of power and governance.
10. Anglicans are committed to moral response to social evils, moral deficits, and human injustices that occupy the public square. This inevitably involves strategies of advocacy and counter-cultural expressions and also the establishment of programs and ecumenical partnerships which attempt to overcome evil with good.

Caribbean Anglican Gifts

The foregoing list of Anglican characteristics finds their examples illustrated throughout the eight ecclesiastical dioceses that comprise the CPWI. But it is not just the Anglicans in the Caribbean region itself that exemplify these characteristics. The vast surges of Caribbean Anglicans who migrated north took their Anglican habits with them and have continued to embody much of the Caribbean Anglican gifts away from their homelands. Thus the assessment of Caribbean Anglican gifts must always include the encounter of Caribbean migrants in the

Diaspora with other expressions of Anglicanism. Five areas of such Caribbean Anglican Gifts readily suggest themselves as follows.

1. **The “church” is not the building but the “people”** - Evidence suggests that the high levels of *Lay Involvement and Leadership* serve to accentuate one of the primary gifts among the people. Various historical reasons may account for this, but what stands out in Caribbean Anglican culture is the declining reliance on clerical orders to carry out the work and ministries of the church. The efficacy of ordained leadership in the liturgical life of the church is usually enhanced by the liveliness of the non-ordained lay-leadership in all the other spheres of ministry and witness in the life of the church.
2. **Educational Enrichment** - There is a distinctive demonstration of the Anglican Church’s commitment and achievement in education. The efforts to link the nurture of the soul with the development and formation of the intellect have given rise to the establishment of schools, colleges, and institutions of learning and human development.
3. **Pastoral and political relationship** - The history of Anglicanism has generally been associated with a fertile relationship between the Church and the State. This has not always meant that the relationship is mutually affirming, since the laws of God very often bring the laws of the state under veritable and moral judgment. Anglicans have generally been gifted in exercising their civic involvement by affording pastoral, prophetic, and practical advice and guidance to the political cultures in the region without endorsing or engaging in any subtle modes of partisanship. The ethical and spiritual demands of the Gospel are unconditionally committed to the supremacy of Truth over the dominance of Power.
4. **Indigenization of Clergy and Liturgy** - Because Anglicanism has historically spread through all the corners of the globe, and has taken root in almost every sphere of human cultural and ethnic endeavor, contextualization of the faith has inevitably been accompanied by the indigenization of the leaders of the faith communities. A very specific gift therefore, of Caribbean Anglicanism, has been demonstrated in the indigenization of clergy and liturgy. The early rise of Episcopal and clerical indigenization helped to radically roll back the legacies and residual effects of colonialism and external control of regional affairs, both sacred and secular. Caribbean liturgy, leadership, and living have all been blessed by a divinely inspired determination to give full meaning to Caribbean blessings.
5. **Celebration** - It is generally inherent in the Caribbean character to find ways of celebrating with thanksgiving. Indeed, it can truly be said that throughout the region the dominant mantra is summed up in these words: “We celebrate because we are”. It is that basic desire to celebrate life and all that comes with which is so highly evident in Caribbean Anglicanism. Accordingly, *The Celebration of the Gospel* by corporate means

of festivals, events, gatherings of various modes, serve to give life and substance to the vitality of worship, the virtue of witness, and the value of work.

Caribbean Missional Imperatives

Caribbean existence has been saddled with the inherent social, geographical, economic, and political challenges of poverty, fragmentation, dependence, and unemployment. These challenges have in more recent times been aggravated by surges of cultural miscegenation, moral and ethical relativism, family re-alignments, and the atomization of society in various and subtle modes of institutional, industrial, and civic arrangements. As if to make matters worse, the general ability of Caribbean peoples to resist the challenges that have just been outlined, Caribbean societies in general have been saddled with nefarious increases in crime, the drug culture, diseases from abroad, health disparities, unequal distribution of wealth and access to self-sustaining means of existence, rising un-employability due to skill-deficits, decreasing avenues for emigration, diminishing remittances from abroad, and the surges of deported criminal elements from Northern countries.

Each of these challenges demand in-depth study and urgent attention by churches throughout the Caribbean region. In the meantime, the Mission of the Church is to face these human challenges, and to develop an Action Plan to be adopted by various diocesan and regional judiciaries. The following **Action Plan** seeks to respond to the **Imperatives for Mission** inherent in the faithful proclamation of, and witness to, the Gospel of Jesus Christ for such a time as this:

1. **Pastoral ministry** - Effective pastoral and practical ministries to the sick, the shut-ins, the aging and infirmed members of our churches must continue. These ministries should be in partnerships with those institutions and agencies that are specifically established to bring healing and hope to the millions of our people who suffer patiently and quietly, without much professional guidance and assistance.
2. **Civility training** - The establishment of programs and projects for Civility Training especially for the younger generations are essential for the rearing of men and women who are the future parents, leaders, and shapers of the society.
3. **Transformational leadership** - Programs for the development of Transformational Leadership through our civic and ecclesial institutions. Patterns for leadership development have tended to be more incidental than intentional. The Church has an important obligation to engage in the creative ways of leadership formation that will bring about the positive transformation in homes, families, schools, and other places of social and civic gathering.
4. **Social Media applications** - Social Media is here to stay and there is abundant evidence that it has made a significant difference to modes of information and communication, and not always for the better. The Church has an opportunity to become more

purposefully engaged in participating in Social Media in ways that will not only guide its membership in the responsible uses and functions, but also in effectively producing the kinds of functions that will re-orient the value of these facilities towards the proclamation of the Gospel in multiple ways of engagement.

5. **Ethical engagement** - The political climate in the region is obviously in need of improvement, especially if it is to provide measurable benefits for the peoples of the region. The Church has a basic obligation to provide courageously, and prophetically, the kinds of ethical critiques that will correct and hopefully enhance the programs, policies and projects that bring hope and health to those who most need it, rather than merely to those who are on the “right side” of the political spectrum.
6. **Socio-economic Partnerships** - In order to bring greater strength to the efforts of those groups in society that are engaged in social development, CPWI should become more active in establishing socio-economic partnerships with such agencies and organizations that are committed to the highest values of human growth and development. There are innumerable resources and gifts at the disposal of, and under the governance of the church, that could readily be linked with other extra-ecclesial resources (particularly with human capital), that all strengthen the ministry to the poor, the marginalized, and the dispossessed.
7. **Ecumenical Partnerships** - The CPWI should once again take the lead in engaging in Ecumenical Partnerships wherever possible, not merely for the broadening of the Christian presence in society, but more particularly for the deepening of the means of spiritual enrichment and moral formation of the broad masses of our people who generally believe that organized religion is not geared towards their highest, noblest, and most productive well-being. A most urgent and important imperative has to consist in the fact that the church itself believes, and seeks to demonstrate in multiple and creative ways and works that the will of God is to bring life to all, and to bring it in all of its fullness (John 10:10).

Presentation designed to encourage discussion around the Theme for the CPWI Synod 2015

April 2015