GAFCON Movement Spreads through Regional Fellowships of Confessing Anglicans

The Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans (South Africa) was successfully launched on 3rd September, at St. John’s Church, Walmer, in Port Elizabeth, South Africa.

The launch was hosted by Bishop Bethlehem Nopece, Bishop of Port Elizabeth. Recently retired Archbishop of Kenya, Benjamin Nzimbi, spoke to the gathering as one of the founding GAFCON Primates.

Bishop Bethlehem Nopece was the only Bishop from South Africa to attend the Global Anglican Future Conference (GAFCON) in Jerusalem in June 2008.

Greetings were shared from Archbishop Peter Akinola (Nigeria), Archbishop Peter Jensen (Sydney Diocese, Australia), Archbishop Bob Duncan (Anglican Church in North America), Retired Archbishop of Canterbury, Lord George Carey, and Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali. (Rochester Diocese, UK)

The theme for the day was “Be Faithful”. Each speaker emphasised that Anglicans are commissioned to fully express what they believe Anglicanism should be and what it should offer to the Christian community in Southern Africa.

“The Scriptures exhort us to remain faithful to the faith ‘once for all delivered to the saints’, to the Lordship of Christ and hence to Apostolic teaching and practice,” said conference organizer Rev. Gavin Mitchell.

The name “Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans” came from the GAFCON Statement passed by delegates at the Global Anglican Future Conference (GAFCON) held in June 2008 in Jerusalem. The Statement said, in part,

We, the participants in the Global Anglican Future Conference, are a fellowship of confessing Anglicans for the benefit of the Church and the furtherance of its mission. We are a fellowship of people united in the communion (koinonia) of the one Spirit and committed to work and pray together in the common mission of Christ. It is a confessing fellowship in that its members confess the faith of Christ crucified, stand firm for the gospel in the global and Anglican context, and affirm a contemporary rule, the Jerusalem Declaration, to guide the movement for the future. We are a fellowship of Anglicans, including provinces, dioceses, churches, missionary jurisdictions, para-church organisations and individual Anglican Christians whose goal is to reform, heal and revitalise the Anglican Communion and expand its mission to the world.

Conference organizer, Rev. Gavin Mitchell, said, “The launch of the Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans (South Africa) is very timely because of the resolution recently passed by the Diocese of Cape Town, Archbishop Thabo Makgoba’s own diocese.”

On 22nd August, the Diocese of Cape Town passed a resolution asking the church’s bishops to provide pastoral guidelines for gay and lesbian members of the church living in “covenanted partnerships.”

The resolution was proposed by St. George’s Cathedral clergy, whose Dean, the Very Rev Rowan Smith, is the only openly gay priest in the Anglican Church of South Africa. The Cathedral, they said, had come to be seen...
as “a safe space, a sort of liberated space” for gay and lesbian Christians in Cape Town. The cathedral, therefore, needed guidelines to help it provide pastoral care to gay and lesbian members in “faithful, committed” same-sex partnerships.

South Africa is the only country on the African continent that makes legal provision for same-sex couples to be married or to have a “civil partnership.” This provision was passed by South Africa’s Parliament on 14th November 2006, by a vote of 230-41. The governing African National Congress (ANC) backed the Bill and required its MPs to support the legislation.

Archbishop Makgoba said, “In South Africa we have laws that approve a civil union. The reason for this resolution was because we have these parishioners [in civil unions], and the law provides for them to be in that state, so how do we pastorally respond to that?”

The launch of the Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans (South Africa) followed the launch of its sister organisation in the UK and Ireland on 6th July.

1,600 people from 400 parishes across the UK and Ireland attended the 6th July launch of the Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans at Westminster Hall in London.

Among the speakers were Archbishop Greg Venables (South America), Archbishop Bob Duncan (Anglican Church in North America), Archbishop Peter Jensen (Sydney, Australia), and Bishop Nazir-Ali (UK).

In a stirring message, Archbishop Greg Venables said: “If we consider the track record after Lambeth ’98, the primates meetings, Lambeth ’09 and the recent ACC meeting, the message is that the Communion will continue to seek to accommodate incompatible and antithetical positions even though the Primates clearly said in this year's meeting, “We don’t believe the same things and something needs to be done.” If the system is given its head, the liberal agenda will be pushed forward and since no synthesis can replace the gospel, non truth will simply swallow up true truth. Unless there is a robust and clear voice in this part of the world as well as elsewhere, the very truth of Christianity will not only not be affirmed and proclaimed, it will be silenced in Anglicanism.”

Archbishop Peter Jensen (Sydney, Australia) told those gathered that Britain was “facing a battle for the soul of the nation.” In his address, titled “The Jerusalem Declaration – Why it matters”, Archbishop Peter Jensen’s made the following statements:

- “Unless you develop a deep confidence in the gospel of the saving work of God through Jesus Christ, a willingness to work together for Christ, and a determination to submit to the teaching of scripture… The culture will swallow you alive.”
- “The culturally captivated churches of the West are sending their gospel to the rest of the world. … this is not the time to wring hands… it is no time to say ‘peace, peace’ – for there is no peace.”
- “The conflict is over the authority of Jesus Christ. The fact that sexual ethics is where the contest is sharpest should not divert us from this basic truth.”

Archbishop Peter Akinola of Nigeria delivered his message through one of his Bishops who represented him. He concluded by saying, “We call on all faithful servants of God to stand up and be counted in this move of the Holy Spirit to renew the Church… let me pray that what we have begun today in this city of London… will reverberate all over Europe, and indeed all over the world to the glory of God. I pray you will live up to God’s expectation, and later be celebrated like some earlier Anglicans, the Clapham Sect, CMS, SPCK and others.”