



# Headlines

## Anglicans and the good fight of faith

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Every generation of Christians has faced their challenges and difficulties in standing firm in the gospel. It does seem however that the past decades were something of a golden age in North America and that society is now becoming much less tolerant of the Christian message. This is certainly apparent in the struggle of conservative Anglicans in Canada to maintain the historic standards of their faith. Yet despite possible major losses, financial and otherwise, these people are standing firm in their convictions, more joyful than ever in the practice of their life in the Church.

The issue which brought the Anglican Church of Canada (ACoC), and indeed the worldwide Anglican Communion, to a crisis situation was the move to bless same sex unions. This however was a mere symptom of the whole question of what the Communion represents. Theologian Dr. J.

I. Packer summed up the nature of the Anglican Communion in a 2009 lecture where he declared: "It's a way of being and doing Church that was shaped in England in the 16th century, as one of the fruits of Western Europe's Reformation. The key planks in the Anglican platform at that time were submission to the authority of Holy Scripture as God's word written, to quote Article 20, and acceptance of the doctrine of the 39 Articles of 1563 with their stress on justification through Christ alone, by faith alone and on salvation by grace alone."

Dr. Packer elaborated further what distinguishes this communion: "So what marks the communion out, and gives it a sense of identity distinct from that of other Protestant church families? First it is the worship style, rooted in or at least developed from, the Reformation and Restoration prayer books of 1549, 1552 and 1662. Secondly, its retention of bishops as the head persons, for leading leaders of dioceses."

Obviously, if there were universal agreement on Dr. Packer's definition of the Communion, the Church would not be in a state of crisis. However since the mid 1950s in Canada, schools of theology and various influential individuals began to espouse a greater interest in modern social issues and reduced interest in historic Biblical and theological principles. As a result of this trend, conservative organizations such as the Prayer Book Society of Canada, Barnabas Anglican Ministries and Anglican Renewal Ministries were formed within the ACoC to promote orthodoxy and renewal of life in the Church. Yet the trend to post-modern attitudes continued despite the best efforts of these organizations. A more focused effort was clearly required.

In June of 1994, the three conservative organizations jointly sponsored a conference to promote the essentials of the Christian faith. This conference produced a formal statement:

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*The Montreal Declaration of Anglican Essentials.* This document sets out the historic standards of the Anglican tradition in Canada as follows: the supreme authority of the teaching of Holy Scripture; the Book of Common Prayer as a standard of doctrine and worship; the Ordinal (form and manner of ordaining and consecrating of bishops, priests and deacons) with its preface which outlines necessary qualifications for these positions; the 39 Articles of Religion; and The Solemn Declaration of 1893.

The success of the Montreal conference led to the formation of the Anglican Essentials coalition which undertook to work across the nation for renewal within the Anglican Communion. Meanwhile there were other significant events within the ACoC. The question of sexuality had arisen and no amount of discussion seemed to settle the issue. In 1979, the Canadian bishops issued an interim statement which declared among other things that there must be no blessings of same sex unions and no persons in a same sex union were to be ordained. Later in 1995, a General Synod of the ACoC affirmed



J.I. Packer



Historic copy of the Book of Common Prayer.

the presence and contributions of gay men and lesbians in the life of the Church and it condemned bigotry, violence and hatred. Two years later, in 1997, a new draft of the 1979 guidelines was released which retained the original intent of the 1979 guidelines. A year later, in 1998, the primates (lead bishops of the national churches around the world), in their meeting at Lambeth, England, issued

resolution 1.10 which declared that homosexual practice is incompatible with Scripture and no practicing homosexual should be ordained.

Many thought that the Lambeth Resolution settled the issue for all Anglicans worldwide, but in June of 2002, the Diocese of New Westminster (which includes the Greater Vancouver area of British Columbia) became the first Anglican jurisdiction anywhere to formally authorize the blessing of same sex unions. This was followed, in October 2003, by the primates reaffirming their support for Lambeth 1.10 and declaring that the actions of the Diocese of New Westminster “will tear the fabric of our Communion at its deepest level.”

All eyes were focused on Canada in 2004, the year another General Synod (national Church governance meeting) was to take place. Anglican Essentials worked very hard to galvanize orthodox participation in the Synod, first by organizing a national satellite conference entitled *For Such a Time as This* in February 2004. First class facilities were rented in major centres across the country and linked by satellite feeds so people could view the proceedings live on large screens and participate by asking questions. Later, at the Synod in June in St. Catharines, Ontario, Essentials provided a high profile presence and in August in Ottawa they sponsored another national conference entitled *The Way Forward*.

Despite these efforts, the results of the Synod were very disappointing. A surprise amendment on a motion to defer discussion of same sex blessings, ended up affirming “the integrity and sanctity of committed same sex unions.” The Synod also created a commission to examine whether same sex blessings was a doctrinal issue, but made no attempt to stop the actions of New Westminster or provide “alternative episcopal oversight” for theological conservatives in that

diocese – despite the global Primates’ clear call for these actions. This pattern of ignoring the requests and position of the broader Communion had become well established.

The significant event of 2005 was the declaration by the Anglican Church of Canada’s Theological Commission that same sex blessing was a doctrinal issue, but not a core or creedal issue. This declaration (entitled *The St. Michael Report*) set the tone for the next triennial General Synod.

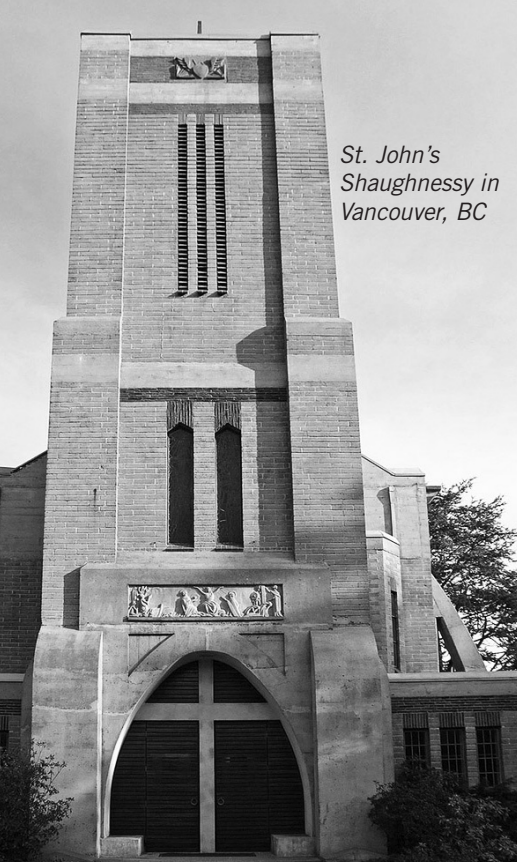
During Synod 2007, the Essentials people again made heroic efforts to influence the outcome. The delegates nevertheless supported the idea that same sex blessings are not core doctrine and are not a Communion-breaking issue. On this topic, in his 2009 book *The Bishop or the King: How the Anglican Church of Canada failed to defend its King*, the Rev. Ron Corcoran declared: “I don’t think that those who advocate a new doctrine of sexuality in the Church have the right to decide that this is not a communion breaking issue.... First, it is a major doctrinal change.... There is a clear thread from Genesis to Revelation confirming that this kind of activity is absolutely wrong” (p. 138).

And on the issue of the St. Michael Report, the Rev. Corcoran declared: “General Synod decided, on the recommendation of the St. Michael Report, that doctrine that is creedal is core doctrine and all other doctrine is secondary .... General Synod of 2007 may not have considered the issue to be core, but Scripture presents a different picture” (p. 139).

For many people the Synod of 2007 represented the last straw. At the annual vestry (congregational) meetings in February 2008, 16 parishes across the country voted to sever ties with the ACoC and to join the newly es-







*St. John's  
Shaughnessy in  
Vancouver, BC*

established Anglican Network in Canada – an outgrowth of the Essentials movement – under the Primatial authority of the Anglican Archbishop of the Southern Cone (South America), the Most Reverend Gregory Venables. Presently ANiC has grown to 34 congregations with eight forming congregations.

Response from the ACoC was not long in coming. Some congregations soon found their bank accounts and their church buildings, with all contents, seized – as well as their ministers declared to have abandoned the faith. Where congregations resisted these actions insisting they were still fully Anglican, litigation quickly followed. Currently, four ACoC dioceses are embroiled in legal action against ANiC parishes.

A major test case took place in Vancouver in May and June 2009. When the ACoC Diocese of New Westminster seized the bank accounts of two of the ANiC churches, four congregations – all former Diocese of New Westminster parishes – joined together to petition the court for protection of their properties. These parishes include St. John's Shaughnessy in Vancouver, the largest Anglican congregation in Canada, plus two

other Vancouver congregations and one in Abbotsford. Because of its location, St. John's church building is worth millions.

The four congregations petitioned the court to support traditional British and Canadian case law which holds that "As a rule, where a church organization is formed for the purpose of promoting certain defined doctrines of religion, the church property which it acquires is impressed with a trust to carry out that purpose, and a majority cannot divert the property to inconsistent uses against the protest of the minority however small." The plaintiffs declared that the Solemn Declaration of 1893 (printed in the front of the Canadian Anglican prayer book) provides the standard of doctrine and practice of any congregation. The Diocese of New Westminster on the other hand, declared that the Solemn Declaration was of historical significance only, "a statement of continuity with the past from which the future might begin its own trajectory." (as quoted by Mr. Judge Kelleher in his judgment [51]).

In his decision, Mr. Justice Kelleher rejected the four ANiC parishes' argument, maintaining that if it was accepted, churches would be forced into rigorous conservatism by a trust that is defined by 'historic, orthodox doctrine and practice' [246].

The judge chose instead to employ the "neutral principles of law" approach which is rooted in American law. Thus he wrote: "I acknowledge that the neutral principles of law approach is a consequence of the First Amendment's separation of church and state. Nevertheless, it has the benefit of approaching church property disputes in a manner that respects the corporate organization of the church and endeavours to resolve them according to the statutes and rules that govern the church and by which its congregants are bound" [249].

In rejecting the British approach, the judge declared "a trust which freezes

doctrine at a point in history is inconsistent with the history of change and evolution in Anglicanism" [258]. He therefore concluded that "the parish properties are held on trust for Anglican ministry as defined by the ACoC [281] and "the plaintiffs [the four ANiC parishes] and ANiC are not part of the Anglican Communion, as membership is by way of the province and they have left the ACoC" [244]. In making this statement, the judge discounted ANiC's close ties to the Anglican provinces of the Global South – which are in the southern hemisphere and account for the vast majority of Anglicans worldwide – since the Primates of the Global South provinces espouse conservative views similar to ANiC [242]. This decision is now under appeal.

Despite the threat of legal action and possible heavy losses new congregations continue to join ANiC. Furthermore ANiC itself is but one diocese in the newly constituted Anglican Church in North America which unites 100,000 Anglicans in more than 760 parishes in 28 dioceses in the United States and Canada. In the United States as well, many congregations are fighting litigation from the Episcopal Church. Secular judges may define churches in terms of institution and process, but it is the historic doctrines that define Christian faith, as the Rev. Ron Corcoran declares: "The Church is not built on diocesan or synodical canons, but on a faith that was entrusted to the saints. The heart of Anglicanism is Holy Scripture, and once Holy Scripture is removed, or re-interpreted to suit contemporary culture, the genuine article has vanished" (p. 204). Thus as Dr. Packer, a member of ANiC, prayed in 2009: "God bless his Church in these days. God guide us as members and ministers of his Church in these days. God glorify his name in his Church in these days. Amen."