

THE ARCHBISHOP'S 2023 ANNUAL SUMMER ESSAY CONTEST

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Laity

Global Anglicanism: The Middle Way to the *Missio Dei*

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“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” - Matthew 28:19-20

The Great Commission encapsulates God’s grand plan for his church. This directive is common to all Christians, regardless of denomination, geography, culture, or status. This mission is not relegated to missionaries or charitable organizations but involves each individual Christ follower and each local congregation. Anglicanism has taken this to heart, spreading the gospel across the globe. As a mighty testament to the scope and scale of God’s work, every Sunday tens of millions of Anglican congregants of every people and race praise God in their own language in a splendid foreshadowing of the coming heavenly state. How then can we as individuals and as a local congregation participate in this awe-inspiring vision? First, let us cast greater light on the theme of global Anglicanism.

This mission of God, this *missio Dei*, is an ancient and crucial part of God’s redemptive work. When God first called Abraham, he said “in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen. 12:3). Israel was called to be a nation of priests, meaning they were to facilitate the other nations in coming to God (Exod. 19:5-6). The psalmist invoked God’s blessing that “[his] way may be known on the earth, [his] saving power among all nations” (Ps. 67:2). Solomon dedicated the temple “that all the peoples of the earth may know that the Lord is God; there is no other” (1 Kings 8:60). Isaiah affirmed that the temple “shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples” (Isa. 56:7). At the Ascension, Jesus appointed the disciples to be his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the end of the earth (Acts 1:8). In Revelation John tells us that in the resurrection “a great multitude... from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages” stands before the throne of God giving him praise (Rev. 7:9-10). From start to finish, God’s plan is to redeem all nations, a plan which he calls and blesses his people to actively participate in.

When Anglicans stand united, we are well positioned to make the most of this calling. Anglicanism recognizes the best parts of other denominations and combines them into a faithful, conscientious, and liturgical tradition. Like the Protestants we recognize the primacy of Scripture. By adhering to Scripture, we avoid doctrinal drift that undermines us. Like the Holiness movement we follow the imperative to love the poor. By remembering the call to minister, our hearts do not grow cold. Like the Catholics we believe in sacramental worship. By this devotion, we are rejuvenated and do not exhaust ourselves in the labor of ministry. Anglicans stand astride the headwaters of these three streams, holding them in tension without loving one at the cost of the others.

Anglicanism is often characterized as the *via media*, the “middle way.” This middle way centers us in the faith such that those on the periphery can find a home within. Protestant or Catholic, Calvinist or Arminian, Lutheran or Reformed, any follower of Christ can find room to worship within the wide arms of the Anglican communion. The core of our faith is expressed in the Nicene Creed, that great statement of belief as approved by the council of bishops long before such divisions took hold. We distinguish these essential beliefs from the unessential over which honest followers of Christ may yet disagree, thereby enacting the reformers’ maxim: “In necessary things unity; in uncertain things liberty; in all things charity.” Anglicanism creates space for all Christians to worship in unity and live out their calling as faithful witnesses.

For this reason, Anglicanism is well equipped to carry forth the gospel to all nations. We can accommodate differences of opinion on unessential matters without diminishing the core. Likewise, we can also avoid the pitfalls of compromising doctrine in the name of charity, or insistence on specific minutia that might place a stumbling block in the path of those we wish to help save. When it comes to priestly confession, making the sign of the cross, genuflecting, or a host of other practices, the old Anglican adage stands: “All may, some should, none must.” We allow for freedom of conscience, thereby lessening the obstacles a convert may face. We make our appeal as broad as possible without sacrificing those essential elements as laid out in Nicaea. As the Apostle Paul said, “I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some” (1 Cor. 9:22). This passion to extend the gospel to all nations, to grow and maintain the body of Christ, to keep essential doctrine pure and limit the intrusions of our own peripheral preferences, is the heart of global Anglicanism.

While we are each commanded to share in this mission, most of us are not called to pack our bags and move to a remote land among the unconverted. We each possess different gifts for the edification of the whole body, and it is equally important to continue building our local church and raise the next generation of Christ followers. Those that hear the call to go should

heed it, but the rest of us should work within our local congregations where God has placed us with a deliberate eye to serving the health and expansion of the universal church. How then can we as individuals and as a local congregation participate in global Anglicanism? There are at least four ways.

First, we must pray. We know that God hears and answers the prayers of his people (Matt. 7:7-11). As part of a great mission, we must pray with specific intent to see that mission fulfilled. Our Book of Common Prayer and our Anglican liturgy have many astute examples of collects for God's missional work. These prayers should move beyond the Sunday recitations and should be a part of our daily prayer routine. We must pray for those who carry the gospel forth to the unreached, for those who go behind them to build on their work, and for our brothers and sisters in Christ who face persecution for their faith. Moving beyond generalities, we can learn the names of those missions and missionaries supported by our local congregation. We can learn their needs, concerns, successes, and challenges so that in all things we may support them with implorations and praise to God. Proper prayer forces us to raise our awareness of the missional work already in progress.

Prayer need not be an individual endeavor. As a congregation we may form prayer groups or dedicate time during our various gatherings to recall and uplift those on the front lines of God's mission. Should we lack the words or direction, we can use the many collects in the Book of Common Prayer for guidance. We can coordinate our prayers with one another to help us maintain our focus and ensure that prayer needs do not go unmet. In addition to conforming our own hearts to God's mission, this helps those in the field and blesses those they reach (2 Cor. 1:11). By doing this together, we strengthen our bond with one another and bring our own strengths and insights to benefit the body as a whole.

Second, we must give. As stewards of the means God has given us, turning those means to his mission is of utmost priority. Giving can and should consist of our material wealth, but it can and should also consist of our time, abilities, and gifting. Each of us has been placed within the body of Christ, appointed by God for a specific purpose. That purpose will inevitably benefit the body as a whole, including those members which have yet to join (1 Cor. 12:24-26). As with prayer, our giving should be with specific intent. We should endeavor to learn the specific needs of those individuals and organizations engaged in missional work and prayerfully consider how our means might match those needs. It may be as simple as financial giving, but it could also mean opening our homes to transient missionaries, donating of our time or abilities to meet special demands, or to raise awareness within our circles. However it is done, we know that God

loves a cheerful giver and that those who sow generously will also reap generously (2 Cor. 9:6-7).

Giving, like prayer, need not be an individual task. Our congregations ought to give with intent, encouraging special offerings dedicated to missional work. As a congregation, we can take on larger projects, supporting a mission, school, hospital, or other charitable work. Again, as Anglicans, we have an advantage in the hierarchy of bishops which can coordinate our gifts to where they are most needed. This type of support provides a more reliable revenue source for those in the field and allows them to focus on the task at hand rather than fundraising. By working together, we have a much broader level of talent and means, and a small amount of coordination can pay enormous dividends.

Third, we must be faithful witnesses at home and in our own lives. Let us not forget that God's desire to reach all nations includes our own. While there are pockets in the far reaches of the world that the gospel has not yet penetrated, many more such pockets may be found in the hearts of our co-workers, our neighbors, and even our family members. Once more, Anglicanism provides happy succor. We practice weekly confession of sins and acknowledgement of our need for grace, as well as nourishing ourselves with sacramental communion. Whether in an ornamented cathedral or a humble village, Anglicans are united by our liturgy on our path to sanctification. By loving God and our neighbor, abstaining from fleshly sin, and doing good deeds, all Anglicans can bear witness to the unbelievers around us and help them to glorify God (1 Pet. 2:11-12).

Faithful witnessing should also be pursued as a congregation. As a congregation we can engage our local community and meet the needs of those closest to us. Opportunities abound to help with health, education, food security, childcare, and spiritual ministry. We should be aware of what our congregation is doing and consider how we might involve ourselves. If our congregation lags in community outreach, this is all the more reason to become involved and identify local needs. It bears repeating that God places each of us in a position to make use of our talents and means to build his church and further his mission. He plans to use you and your congregation; the harvest is plentiful, and the workers are few, therefore let us dedicate ourselves to the great work of salvation that God blesses us to share in. (Matt. 9:37-38)

Fourth, we may partner with fellow congregations by taking advantage of existing networks. The hierarchical structure of the Anglican Communion gives us another advantage in our global aspiration. Organizations such as GAFCON and GSFA provide networks to connect a variety of ministries and church plants that allow individuals and congregations to support one another. Congregations may be spread across a diocese, and dioceses across the world, but the

affiliation of our bishops means that we are never far from one another. As shepherds, our bishops know the needs, goals, and challenges of their flocks and can share this across the communion. What one flock lacks another may have in abundance. As living members of the body of Christ, we play a vital part in the health of the whole, and likewise need the service of those other parts, lest we ourselves wither (1 Cor. 12). If we work through our priests and bishops, we may find sister congregations that we can help to support and be supported in our own need in return (Gal. 6:10). The hierarchy of bishops functions as a nervous system, coordinating the actions of the individual members to sustain the entirety.

This partnership among congregations extends to missions. Established congregations can affiliate themselves with missional projects dedicated to the advancement of the gospel. Beyond organized efforts at prayer and giving, a congregation can write letters of support, invite missionaries to give updates or appear in person, organize short term mission trips, and educate students on opportunities in the mission field. Part of the goal is to keep missions at the front of our minds and to recall that our action, or inaction, has consequences that stretch far beyond the doors of our local church. By formalizing a partnership, congregations accept responsibility for the support of those on the front lines of God's mission. Such support is not without reward (Matt. 16:27).

To simplify and unite each of these points, let us remember our call to love our neighbor as ourselves. If we do not love, then our great Anglican tradition is only useless noise (1 Cor. 13:1). Our God is a great and glorious one. He created each of us in his image, imbuing us with divine and eternal worth. Though he foreknew our fall and the price that he would pay for our waywardness, he nevertheless reconciles us and gifts us the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18-21). He has revealed his heart, that his gospel should reach all people, and that all nations would stand before him redeemed. As Anglicans we inherit a rich tradition and liturgy that balances and equips us for the task. We inherit true doctrine, refined in the crucible of history. We inherit a legacy of missional work that spans the globe. We inherit a new family destined for glory, brothers and sisters united in Christ. And we inherit a mission. We have family, brothers and sisters, near and far, who are yet lost. Fellow congregants struggle and are in danger of falling away. As the body of Christ, we are the hands that reach out to them. We are the arms that rescue them. We are the lips that bless them. Each of us is gifted for this purpose, and each of us is needed. If we love God and his people that bear his image, then love compels us to answer the call to rescue the lost, nurture the saved, and one day see all nations give glory before his throne.