

Lambeth call to walk together



BY BISHOP JONATHAN, BISHOP OF PORTSMOUTH

I'VE recently returned from the Lambeth Conference, a once-in-a-decade gathering of bishops and spouses from around the worldwide Anglican Communion.

Unlike some other church gatherings, Lambeth is not a legislative body that can decide policy or make decisions that are binding on others. Rather the Anglican Communion is a community of autonomous, yet interdependent, national churches held together by bonds of affection and the call to be 'God's Church for God's world'.

Lambeth gives brothers and sisters in Christ an opportunity to walk together and recognise our profound unity. Over 12 days, we considered our shared Anglican identity as part of Christ's universal Church. We recognised our common calling, expressed in diverse contexts and cultures, to participate in God's mission and to make disciples. We heard presentations on climate change, human dignity, war, and the vocation to be a reconciled and reconciling people in a broken and fractured world.

I was moved and challenged by the cultural diversity and breadth of life experience represented by those present. The sheer diversity of our gathering was a foretaste of that Day when the whole of redeemed creation is brought to completion in Christ.

My task was to facilitate a Bible

study group. It was a microcosm of a global Church held together, not so much by doctrinal agreement, but by the grace and faithfulness of Jesus Christ. It included a man whose faith was forged in post-apartheid South Africa, two women who continue to name and resist racism, homophobia and misogyny, and a man who now cares for his nephews and nieces after his brother was killed by Islamist militia.

Across a Communion in which profound disagreement exists, a host of long-standing links give expression to our unity in Christ. Our diocese is linked, through the patient development of friendships over nearly 40 years, with Anglicans in Ghana. In recent years, perhaps especially over the question of human identity and sexuality, the relationship between us has been strained. Lambeth gave us an opportunity for extended conversation. On some things we disagree deeply, but I am convinced that our unity in Christ runs deeper still. It is this unity that I am committed to nurture and take forward. It is a unity that involves bearing with profound cultural and theological disagreement.

For Christ's call is to walk together, to forbear and challenge one another – not in bland cultural conformity, or out of a desire to control or to impose cultural or theological norms upon each other – but in love for one another, "as he has loved us".

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