

Growing Together — Rome and Canterbury, 22-29 January 2024

The IARCCUM Bishops' Call

Our Common Witness, Calling and Commitment

After four centuries of conflict and separation, the Catholic Church and the Anglican Communion have now been on a walk towards reconciliation for almost six decades. At times the path has been bumpy, but the Holy Spirit has been at work, and our churches have persevered in a dialogue which has been extraordinarily fruitful. As we have walked together, we have come to recognize each other as disciples of Jesus Christ who love God and desire to be faithful to the lead of the Spirit. With gratitude to God for the dignity and calling we each received in the waters of Baptism, we willingly proclaim that our communion in Christ is a source of joy and life. While that communion is not yet full, decades of rich theological dialogue, nourished by prayer for and with each other, have brought us to a place where the bonds which unite us are deep and profound. Yet in our churches we have barely begun to do all that it is possible to do together.

It is the task and mission of the International Anglican–Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission ([IARCCUM](#)) to build on the results of that dialogue, and ‘to bridge the gap between the elements of faith we hold in common and the tangible expression of that shared belief in our ecclesial lives’ (*Growing Together in Unity and Mission* §10). Mindful of God’s sending us forth to engage in common **witness**, to build relationships of **friendship** in Christ, to walk **a synodal path** together, and to share wherever possible in the Church’s **mission**, IARCCUM brings together bishops from across the world where Anglicans and Catholics live together side by side in significant number.

Witness

1. We, the fifty bishops of IARCCUM wish to bear witness to the profound experience of our week of pilgrimage in Rome and Canterbury (22–29 January 2024). Our pilgrimage took us from the tombs of the martyrs Peter and Paul in Rome to the shrine of Thomas Becket in Canterbury, by way of the modern martyrs commemorated in the church of San Bartolomeo on Tiber Island. Along the way we listened to the testimony of some of our bishops who minister courageously in circumstances of violence, acute suffering, oppression and warfare. In a world so scarred and wounded, we hear in many places of a suffering church and the call for all of us to be united in prayer. The vocation of the Church is both to love and to witness to the love of God in the face of suffering.
2. Martyrdom has long been at the heart of the Church’s witness. For the early Christians, the martyrs symbolised hope, solidarity and witness to the truth in the face of persecution or oppression. So too for the Church today. The martyrs of our own time are witnesses of hope in service of truth and love. Our Christian hope is found in God who goes before us always and we follow in the slipstream.



3. The Church is a communion called to serve the world that God loves. The mission of Jesus, which continues today, invites us to share in the life of God, the eternal love shared between Father and Son and Holy Spirit. The invitation to come to this IARCCUM pilgrimage, the hospitality we have received in Rome, in Canterbury, and most of all in each other's generosity and sharing, has been a tangible sign of the hospitality of God. Coming together from 27 different countries, our gathering reflected the wide diversity of church life and ministry in our two traditions today.

Friendship

4. Friendships have been cultivated on this pilgrimage, and this is much more than mere sentiment. Like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, we have been walking the road together with Christ in our midst. Because we recognize one Lord, we recognize one another as his disciples, and are strengthened for the journey ahead. Bonds of trust are being forged, challenging preconceived notions, and allowing us to speak to each other with the frankness that friendship allows.
5. At Morning Prayer in the Church of San Gregorio in Rome, we heard the words of Pope St Gregory to St Augustine, the first Archbishop of Canterbury: 'we are seeking in Britain brothers [and sisters] whom we do not know'. Ecumenism is always the rediscovery of sisters and brothers from whom we have been too long separated.
6. Our days together overlapped with the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, which this year focused on the story of the Good Samaritan, the parable that Jesus told in response to the question, 'and who is my neighbour?' (*Lk 10:29*). In his homily during the Vespers for the feast of the Conversion of St Paul, which we attended at the basilica of St Paul outside the Walls, Pope Francis said, 'the right question is not: "Who is my neighbour?" but "Do I act like a neighbour?"' adding that 'everyone in this world is my brother or my sister', and, 'only a love that becomes freely-offered service, only the love that Jesus taught and embodied, will bring separated Christians closer to one another'. Archbishop Justin, preaching immediately after Pope Francis at the same Vespers service asked, 'why was the Samaritan able to help the injured man?' He answered, 'because he was free, and what made him free was love'. In this moment in which Pope Francis and Archbishop Justin shared in the ministry of the Word, we were offered a powerful witness of bishops as friends, speaking a word together to build up our churches in the mission to which God calls us. Encouraged by their example, we were sent forth by the Pope and the Archbishop at the end of Vespers* to minister alongside one another and to bear witness to the unity for which our Saviour prayed.

A Synodal Path

7. Our friendship tells us a profound truth: we need one another. St John Chrysostom taught that 'Church and synod are synonymous'. In our days together we heard about the progress both our churches are making to reveal the fundamental synodality of the Church at every level. Synodality is not merely about the Church's governance; it is about putting relationships at the centre of the Church's life. 'First our brothers and sisters, then the structures', Pope Francis reminded us when we were in St Paul's outside the Walls in Rome. Synodality serves our deeper understanding of the truth and growth in holiness. We need one another. We need to attend to each other's witness of living the Gospel in different circumstances. We need the other's understanding of the one faith to broaden our own limited understanding. As bishops, our shared pastoral role is to assist the pilgrim people of God in discerning the truth of Christ's Gospel. Synodality is not only about the Church, but directed toward the embracing of all humanity, and all creation, set within the loving heart of God.

* The text of the commissioning is appended to this document.

8. Central to our joint pilgrimage have been our times of prayer: both in the daily offices of Morning and Evening Prayer and the Eucharist. Even though we were unable to receive the Eucharist together, we have been enriched and blessed by each other's devotion, spiritual traditions, and liturgical life. The act of approaching the altar for a blessing when we could not receive the Eucharist, though marked by sadness, was for many of us a moving experience of spiritual communion, and a further impetus to continue this journey so that we might one day break bread together around the same altar.
9. We know from our experience of Christian mission that we are richer when we do together everything we possibly can do together. We are enriched through shared prayer, profession of the faith of the creeds, and the one Baptism which unites us to the life, death, and resurrection of Christ.

Mission

10. It was fitting that our final visit in Rome before departing for Canterbury was to the church of San Gregorio on the Celian Hill, from where Gregory sent Augustine in mission to the English. As Christ was sent to reconcile us to God and one another, so he sent his apostles. We rejoice that through the sending of successive generations, the reconciling ministry of Christ has reached all of us in our diverse settings.
11. Coming together in mission, our churches seek to share the one hope and one faith with the world. The Church becomes enfleshed and pitches its tent wherever it is sent, and is called to unstinting evangelism. This Gospel commission is a broad task in service of the flourishing of human life in every aspect. There is a need for costly commitment if we are to be effective in mission. Such a task must not be built on our own fantasies but founded on a real and living relationship with Christ and with each other. We cannot live in isolation from each other as churches.
12. As we have shared the challenges and hopes of our peoples in different parts of the world, we have heard how in many places Indigenous Peoples, descendants of enslaved persons, and others, live with the legacy of colonisation and assimilation. We have heard the call to repent of our participation in efforts of colonisation, and to commit ourselves to new ways of walking together and to stand in solidarity with those marked by this painful legacy.
13. We are called to live in solidarity with all those among whom we serve. With and as the Church of the poor, and in places of protest, we seek to amplify voices that are otherwise unheard. We wish to hear and heed the voices of women and of minority ethnic groups wherever they experience marginalisation or the denial of their human dignity. With the cries of the poor, we wish to hear and respond to the cries of the earth, and to listen to young people who are searching for hope and meaning for the future. In the face of increasing secularism, solidarity in mission is ever more urgent. In many places, Christians live as a minority where such solidarity enriches our dialogue with other religions.
14. We shared stories about the catastrophic effects of climate change in the different parts of the world from which we come — not only on the planet itself, but on its most vulnerable creatures, and people already living on the world's margins. We were reminded that a primary and urgent aspect of our common mission as Catholics and Anglicans is to care for our common home, which is 'under threat and at risk of collapse' (Lambeth Conference 2022, [Lambeth Call 2 The Environment and Sustainable Development](#) §2.3) and 'near the breaking point' (Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation [Laudate Deum](#) §2).
15. Our solidarity with those who suffer cannot obscure the fact that our churches are called to conversion and renewal. We are deeply aware of our need to repent because of the grievous sins of abuse perpetrated by members of both our communions. We have been called to task by victims/survivors of sexual abuse by those ministering in the Church, who have asked us to take

significant steps towards transparency and accountability. We have been asked to listen to the experiences of victims/survivors, and to walk with them in learning how to respond in a compassionate way when they come forward, and to understand what is needed to bring healing. We have been encouraged to be less concerned with the reputation of our churches and to give primary importance to accompanying those who have been deeply wounded by members of our churches.

16. Sent to reap that for which we did not labour (*John 4:38*), we are now sent out to share the grace of this pilgrimage which we have undertaken with our Lord and one another: in our dioceses, with our clergy and lay leaders, with our fellow bishops, in our seminaries and in our schools. We can carry with us the words that were sung as Pope Francis and Archbishop Justin shared the greeting of peace with us at the end of the Vespers in St Paul's: '*When we as one are gathered all together, let us strive to keep our minds free of division.*' We are encouraged and inspired by their example of mutual affection and shared words and action in the service of the Gospel.
17. We are sent to proclaim the joyful message of God's everlasting kingdom as pilgrim companions to one another on the missionary journey. We promise to proclaim the Good News of peace to those in places scourged by ongoing wars, and to those who live under the threat of violence; the Good News of mercy to those who live with want and with guilt; and the Good News of justice and restoration to those who are oppressed or carrying shame inflicted on them by others. We seek our strength in the grace of God, and with love and prayer for those we serve. We strive to be united in preaching the Gospel in word and deed, united in serving those who are most vulnerable and marginalised.
18. Pope Francis and Archbishop Justin sent us forth from the tomb of St Paul, the apostle to the nations, as beloved co-workers of the Kingdom of God. Cardinal Stephen Chow reminded us in his sermon at the closing Eucharist in Canterbury Cathedral that 'the twelve apostles and disciples were not called to form camps working for their own missions or competing against each other. They were called to become an assembly, a community, a communion, a synodal *koinonia*, praying and discerning, teaching and serving for the mission of our Triune God'. We are resolved to bear witness to the hope of God's love as we preach and celebrate the sacraments with God's holy people.

As we return to our own local churches after our pilgrimage in Rome and Canterbury, we pray that our ministry alongside one another as Catholics and Anglicans will be for the world a foretaste of the reconciling of all Christians in the unity of the one and only Church of Christ.

Rome/Canterbury
28 January 2024



This document was drafted by the bishops participating in the IARCCUM *Growing Together* summit that took place in Rome and Canterbury (22-29 January 2024)

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Further Information: IARCCUM [website](#)



Text of the Commissioning of the IARCCUM Bishops *during the celebration of* Vespers on the Solemnity of the Conversion of St Paul

Pope Francis (in Italian)

Brothers and sisters,

Fourteen centuries ago, Pope Gregory the Great commissioned Saint Augustine, first Archbishop of Canterbury, and his companions, to set out from Rome to preach the joy of the Gospel to the peoples of England. Today, with gratitude to God for our sharing in the Gospel, we send you forth, beloved co-workers for the kingdom of God, so that wherever you carry out your ministry, you may together bear witness to the hope that does not deceive and the unity for which our Saviour prayed.

The Archbishop of Canterbury

Brothers and sisters,

God reconciled us to himself through Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation. As we send you forth from the tomb of the Apostle to the Nations, we call on you to make this ministry your special care. As you preach and celebrate the sacraments with God's holy people, bear witness to the one hope of your calling. May your ministry alongside one another as Catholics and Anglicans be for the world a foretaste of the reconciling of all Christians in the unity of the one and only Church of Christ for which we pray this day.

The Pope and the Archbishop of Canterbury together

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit
be with all of you.

