A SURVEY OF THE WORK OF
THE GENERAL CONVENTION AND THE LAMBETH CONFERENCE
CONSIDERING A THEOLOGY FOR INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

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Thesis under the direction of Professors Benjamin King and Robert Hughes, III

The challenge of accommodation and affirmation of non-Christian traditions in the
Christian environments of the West is a critical issue for Church and society today. The
Episcopal Church must embrace the challenge to develop methods and theologies of dialogue and
relationship with non-Christians that offer alternatives to previous methods of evangelism and
conversion.

A review of the historic work of the Lambeth Conference and the General Convention of
the Episcopal Church clearly demonstrates that in the late 19th and early 20th centuries interfaith
interaction was evangelistically driven. While the motivation might have been equal parts
colonialism and religious fervor, conversion was the goal of interfaith interaction during this
period. As non-Western, non-Christian people began to appear more and more in England
following World War II and the US following 1965, the foreign missionary paradigm along with
its evangelize-and-convert methodology became less useful. The continuing evolution of the
Church’s efforts to re-imagine relationships with the non-Christian other contributes
constructively and creatively to stability and harmony of the religiously diverse modern American
and Western societies. Both the Church of England and the Episcopal Church must explore the
complexities of interfaith dialogue and relations with an open approach and willing to consider
alternative expressions of evangelism and mission.

The Anglican Communion and the Episcopal Church have produced two documents from
which to launch further exploration of interfaith dialogue and relations. Generous Love from the
2008 Lambeth Conference and the 2009 General Convention Resolution A074 offers the
Anglican Communion and the Episcopal Church strong platforms from which to begin the next
stage of the journey of exploration, adventure, and vulnerability in the pursuit of interfaith
dialogue and relationship. Anglicans appear willing to take risks to discover more fully all God
has to offer in the diverse communities of people created in God’s image.

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Considering a Theology for Interfaith Dialogue

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The United States have adventured upon a great and noble experiment which is believed to have been hazarded in the absence of all previous precedent—that of total separation of Church and State. No religious Establishment by law exists among us. The conscience is left free from all restraint and each is permitted to worship his Maker after his own judgment. The offices of the Government are open alike to all. No tithes are levied to support an established Hierarchy, nor is the fallible judgment of man set up as the sure and infallible creed of faith. The Mahommedan, if he will come among us would have the privilege guaranteed to him by the Constitution to worship according to the Koran; and the East Indian might erect a shrine to Brahma if it so please him. Such is the spirit of toleration inculcated by our political Institution. The fruits are visible in the universal contentment which everywhere prevails. Christians are broken up into various sects, but we have no persecution, no stake or rack—no compulsion or force, not furious or bigoted zeal; but each and all move on in their select sphere, and worship the Great Creator according to their own forms and ceremonies. The Hebrew persecuted and down trodden in other regions takes up his abode among us with none to make him afraid . . . and the Aegis of the Government is over him to defend and protect him. Such is the great experiment which we have tried, and such are the happy fruits which have resulted from it; our system of free government would be imperfect without it . . .

President John Tyler
July 10, 1843

Chapter 1

Introduction

In May 10 1843, Mr. Joseph Simpson wrote to President John Tyler concerned about a religious gathering involving General of the Army Winfield Scott. Mr. Simpson was concerned the event was no more than a cover for suggesting only Christians have certain rights and privileges associated with full and free participation in American society. Concerned about those in public service using their position and stature to further this position of Christian exceptionalism and privilege in the American culture, Simpson wrote,

“... the enormous presumption of brotherly love requiring to correct the errors of others in such a subject as creed, this very peculiar piece of rudeness and vulgarity deserves a peculiar sound thrashing. I am decidedly of the opinion that we will never be able to cure the abolitionists (referring to those who would exclude non-Christians from public office or privilege) without curing the missionary evil (for) the last is the true source of the first.”

Tyler’s reply on the prior page represents an interesting insight into the history of American secular exploration of religious tolerance and relationships through separation of the interests of the state from the creeds of religion. While he notes the ‘great and noble experiment’ to be an experiment in the separation of Church and State on the civil side of society, from the religious point of view, it is equally compelling to imagine this experiment in secular separation as a good and proper precursor for an equally great and noble experiment in a new and innovative context for interreligious relationships, especially interfaith relations in a contemporary America with an ever-growing religious diversity.

2. Ibid.
Tyler, a practicing Episcopalian in his lifetime and certainly familiar with the movement from established religion to religion as a free component of society, challenges, intentionally or not, the religious community, then and now, to imagine this American experiment allowing for the possibility of differing religious traditions, Christian and non-Christian, living in civil society without an established religious preference or hierarchy, as a necessary setting for new ideas, new thinking, new imagining for interfaith relations to develop. In such a setting, the challenge would be to find new ways for being in constructive and respectful community and relationship with those of differing religions. ‘Toleration’ in this context is not limited to isolated disinterest or cultural segregation/accommodation. Instead, it suggests the intentional creation of an environment of hospitality and acceptance by others of differing religious traditions. By extrapolation, Tyler’s assertion of the protection by the government of the religious minority extends to the religious majority as a source of hospitality and acceptance for this same religious minority. As Tyler states, the religious minority “takes up his abode among us with none to make him afraid.” Therefore, President Tyler’s statement, however specifically related to the civil/secular dimensions of the United States, offers an equally significant challenge to the ecclesial structures and faithful people in the present time. If civil/secular society in the ‘great and noble experiment’ allows for free exercise of broad and diverse creedal traditions in a time of only limited presence of non-Christian faiths, as Tyler asserts, how much more intentionally must the majority Christian religious communities find ways to be more open and accepting of differing non-Christian religious traditions in a time of growing religious diversity? The ‘missionary’ evil of forced or coerced conversion in the civil/secular environment
criticized in Simpson’s letter must be of equal concern today as differing creedal communities live in closer proximity and shared civil space. Tyler could not possibly imagine how religiously diverse the United States would become. Yet, his challenge of accommodation and affirmation is no less importance today than it was from the very beginnings of the ‘great and noble experiment.’

What remains is for the Christian community to embrace the challenges of this experiment and develop practices of dialogue and relationship with non-Christians that are balanced with our theologies of evangelism and conversion. Whether following the lead of our Episcopal forebears John Tyler or embracing the long tradition of the Episcopal Church in the Anglican tradition to be open to critical engagement of difficult and demanding challenges, the Episcopal Church today is uniquely suited to engage the challenge of interfaith dialogue and relationship. This is particularly true if the Church encourages and facilitates local parishes and communities to explore opportunities for interfaith dialogue and relationship. It will not be easy and the process will require serious consideration of seeming intractable conflicts between evangelistic priorities and new ideas of interfaith relations. Nevertheless, the Episcopal tradition and its people can engage this challenge and provide leadership to the whole Christian community in this endeavor.

It is worth noting here that American Cultural Anthropology and Sociology of the late 19th and early 20th century presents some interesting challenges to the matter of interfaith dialogue and relations. The competing theories of Henry Platt Fairchild (popularly described as ‘melting pot,’ borrowing from Fredrick Turner who applied his

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idea uniquely to the American west in the late 19th century) and Horace M. Kallen (popularly described as ‘cultural symphony’) did battle in the early 20th century. Fairchild, primarily in his book *Immigration*, argued for the complete assimilation of the newcomer into the ‘native American’ ideal (he did not mean American Indian, rather the idealized American/European). Whatever differences (i.e. cultural, morphological, religious, etc) the immigrant brought to America must be assimilated into the homogeneous cultural identity of what Fairchild thought to be a ‘national type’ as quickly as possible. Fairchild’s work was popularized in a 1908 play ‘The Melting Pot’ by Israel Zangwill. The theme can be captured in a single line from this play "*Understand that America is God’s Crucible, the great Melting-Pot where all the races of Europe are melting and re-forming!* Here you stand, good folk, think I, when I see them at Ellis Island, here you stand in your fifty groups, your fifty languages, and histories, and your fifty blood hatreds and rivalries. But you won’t be long like that, brothers, for these are the fires of God you've come to – these are fires of God. A fig for your feuds and vendettas! Germans and Frenchmen, Irishmen and Englishmen, Jews and Russians—into the Crucible with you all! God is making the American." Fairchild’s melting pot was reoriented by Edward Ross (The Old World in the New, 1914), a ‘progressive university sociologist’ of his day, who challenged the very notion of non-European immigration. Non-Europeans were “sub-common people of obviously low mentality who really belonged in animal skins, beside wattled huts . . . Ross was appalled by their

4. Ibid.
‘sugar-loaf heads, moon-faces, slit mouths, lantern jaws, and goose-bill noses.’ Jews he singled out as puny and sissified, the saddest possible contrast to the type of the American pioneer.”

Following Ross’s extension of Fairchild’s work, Horace M. Kallen, a former colleague of Ross’s at the University of Wisconsin and now at Harvard University, published an essay in the *Nation* (February 1915) titled ‘Democracy versus the Melting Pot.’ Kallen gave his thesis the name ‘Cultural pluralism.’ His basic theory is composed of three essential parts: 1) Kallen denied there was any unique, archetypal American; there was no collective identity into which immigrants must seek transformation. America, in his theory, was a political state containing a great diversity of distinct nationalities, religious, cultural traditions, ethnicities, etc, 2) these distinct aspects of the human community should be allowed to perpetuate themselves indefinitely, 3) because of 1 & 2, governmental policy should be guided by two distinct concepts: *unison* and *harmony*. *Unison* would be limited to basic patterns of social/governmental/economic functions—language, government structure, monetary policy, etc would be examples of *unison* policy. Of much greater interest to Kallen was *harmony* (which gave Kallen’s theory the name Cultural Symphony theory). For him, this was the brilliance of the American experiment. In matters of opinion “Its form would be that of the federal republic; its substance a democracy of nationalities, cooperating voluntarily and autonomously through common institutions in the enterprise of self-realization through the perfections of men according to their kind . . . each

8. Ibid., 50-52.
nationality (*religion, culture, etc*) would have for its emotional and involuntary life its . . . own individual and inevitable esthetic forms . . . Thus, American civilization may come to mean the perfection of the cooperative harmonies . . . a multiplicity in a unity, an orchestration of mankind.”

As often happens in history, surrounding circumstances influence outcomes. While we might imagine Kallen’s theory of a grand cultural symphony creating a rich and vibrant American culture capturing the imagination of the American people, circumstances in Europe and the world leading to World War I created an environment of cultural and political anxiety and fear. Fairchild’s *Melting Pot* augmented by Ross’s xenophobia became the prevailing metaphor and, sadly, the political context for immigration policy and American self-awareness. Kallen’s work almost completely disappeared by 1924. To this day, “the Melting Pot” is the default image for cultural assimilation into the America landscape. Yet Kallen’s work encouraging diversity, multiculturalism, and pluralism has been given, in recent decades, serious reconsideration and new development even if not by direct reference. It is the inherent fear of and limitations to diversity contained in the *Melting Pot* theory, whether consciously or unconsciously engaged, which will inhibit broad cultural comfort with interfaith dialogue and relations. It will take a religious community comfortable with its faith tradition and well differentiated in its identity to constructively embrace and engage the opportunity to discover new harmonies present in interfaith dialogue and relations.

9. Ibid., 52.
10. Ibid., 53.
Two concluding observations:

1) Kallen’s work seems very harmonious with President Tyler’s letter of July 10, 1843. Conversely, Fairchild’s theory seems inconsistent with the sentiment of Tyler’s ‘great and noble experiment.’

2) Movement into America by other than western Europeans following World War I was highly restricted and significantly limited until the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act. Consequently, the extremely limited movement of religiously, culturally, and ethnically diverse persons into America forestalled the need for the American Christian community to consider seriously interfaith dialogue and relations. In contrast, movement of culturally, religiously, and ethnically diverse persons from the world into Great Britain had been active since the conclusion of World War I. Without going deeply into the details, British policies concerning the movement of non-Western European and non-Christian people, either as refugees, as workers, or, after 1948, as citizens, was relatively open, resulting in a significant movement of non-Western, non-Christian persons into Great Britain early in the 20th Century, especially after World War II. Consequently, British society and the Church were experiencing by mid-20th Century what the American Church is experiencing today. As a result, the Anglican Communion leadership, especially the Church of England leadership, is ahead of the American Church on consideration, methods, and implementation of interfaith dialogue and relationship.

This paper will explore historical documents affecting the efforts of the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion toward developing a theology for interfaith

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dialogue and relations. It is not intended to explore or develop an actual theology for interfaith dialogue nor is it intended to review directly existing theological treatments of interfaith dialogue. A broad review of interfaith dialogue can be found in the Sewanee Theological Review, ‘Christian Theology of Interfaith Dialogue: Defining the Emerging Fourth Option,’ Robert D. Hughes, III (Volume 40:4 Michaelmas 1997). In addition, the writings of John Hick, Paul F. Knitter, Raimon Panikkar, and Jacques Dupuis, among others, would be a good place to search.

The first modern document will be the 1965 encyclical of Pope Paul VI, *Nostra Aetate*. This document is perhaps the most significant modern Christian document in the recognition of the growing integration of the human community in the world and the consequent necessity of more constructive interaction between all religious traditions, Christian and non-Christian. Second is a 1976 document of the British Council of Churches and the Council of the Conference of Missionary Societies in Great Britain and Ireland ‘A New Threshold: Guidelines for the Churches in their relations with Muslim Communities.’ This document is a first attempt at providing specific guidelines and strategies for Christian-Muslim dialogue and relations. Third resolutions and statements of the Lambeth Conference from 1897 until 2008 will be reviewed for commentary and direction on interfaith dialogue and relations as will resolutions and reports from the General Conventions of the Episcopal Church, 1886-2009. Fourth, several critical reports and documents of Lambeth and General Convention will be explored in more detail: 1) the 1984 booklet ‘Towards a Theology for Interfaith Dialogue,’ 2) the 1988 Lambeth document ‘Jews, Christians, and Muslims: The Way of Dialogue, 3) the 1988 Lambeth Report ‘The Truth Shall Make you Free,’ 4) the 1994 ‘Principles for Interfaith
Dialogue’ prepared by the Presiding Bishop’s Advisory Committee on Interfaith Relations, and 5) ‘Generous Love: The Truth of the Gospel and the Call to Dialogue. An Anglican Theology of Interfaith Dialogue.’ The exploration of these documents will illuminate the progress the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion have made in the development of a theology of interfaith dialogue and relations. The concluding portion of the paper will consider some of the structures and actions of the church arising out of this process as well as suggested methods and guidelines for interfaith dialogue and relations. Finally, this paper will propose a model action for local Episcopal congregations to provide leadership in the development of real interfaith dialogue and relation at the parish and local community level.
Chapter 2

Nostra Aetate

When considering documents that have guided and influenced interfaith relations and dialogue in the modern era for Anglicanism, Nostra Aetate proclaimed by Pope Paul VI in 1965 seems to occupy a unique position as a benchmark. Recognizing a sea-change in human community and society characterized by a new world reality of human diversity, including religious, brought into ever closer proximity, Nostra Aetate declares the task of the Church is to promote “unity and love among men, indeed among nations . . . (considering) what men have in common and what draws them to fellowship.”

Nostra Aetate bases this premise on an affirmation of God as the single source of creation regardless of all other soteriological concerns. Consequently, as Nostra Aetate acknowledges, while epistemologies, symbologies, mythologies, mysteries, etc. may differ, persons of all religions are seeking to solve the same complex questions of human existence and the same compelling challenges of moral and responsible living. Out of these pursuits, different religions may create different narratives, different rules for living, and different rites for expressing faith; but, according to Nostra Aetate, the Church should not reject what is “true and holy in these religions.”

The Church “regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which,
though differing in many aspects from the ones (the Church) holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflects a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men.”

While the Church must continue to proclaim Christ ‘the way, the truth, and the life,’ it must also seek to “recognize, preserve, and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among these men” as discovered through dialogue and collaboration with adherents to other religions. Moreover, *Nostra Aetate* asserts, “We cannot truly call on God, the Father of all, if we refuse to treat in a brotherly way any man, created as he is in the image of God. Man’s relation to God the Father and his relation to men his brothers are so linked together that Scripture says, ‘He who does not love does not know God.’ (1 John 4.8).” Indeed, *Nostra Aetate* claims discrimination or harassment of humans based upon “race, color, condition of life, or religion” is “foreign to the mind of Christ.”

*Nostra Aetate* suggests broadness to this idea of creative engagement by Christians with those of other faiths. With specific attention to offered Judaism and Islam, *Nostra Aetate* suggests a much broader consideration of diverse religious traditions, moving well beyond the classic Abrahamic trilogy. *Nostra Aetate* asserts a primacy of the unity of human community and relations as an outward and visible manifestation of the unity of Creation as an expression of God. Consequently, in a modern era characterized by a growing integration and proximity of diverse human cultures, societies, and religions, the Church is obligated to exercise a lived faith.

16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
characterized by the love of God revealed in Creation and in Jesus. This lived faith characterized by love must be more creative, receptive, and open as the Church seeks to engage in dialogue and relations with those of other faiths. *Nostra Aetate*, whether referred to or not, becomes a starting place for modern Anglican consideration of interfaith relations and dialogue.
Chapter 3

A New Threshold

In 1976, an advisory group from the British Council of Churches and the Council of the Conference of Missionary Societies in Great Britain and Ireland published *A New Threshold: Guidelines for the Churches in their relations with Muslim Communities* (NTG). In the Preface of this small booklet, the Council stated, “The Churches and missionary societies in Great Britain and Ireland are growingly aware of the presence among us of communities belonging to other world faiths. The largest group of these is Muslims, and their strongly expressed resolve to affirm their separate religious and cultural identity poses questions both to Christians and to those institutions in our society which have grown out of our Christian heritage.”

Early on BCC and CCMSGBI recognized the need for a small monograph outlining the Muslim identity as well as related theological and sociocultural differences. Smartly, the advisory group recognized the uniqueness of Christianity and Islam as religions and the uniqueness of each Christian and Muslim person. Consequently, NTG starts with a full appreciation of the possibilities arising out of interreligious dialogue and relations.

NTG describes a variety of permutations of relationship possible for a Christian-Muslim dialogue:

A. “Factors which Unite”

--our common humanity--the advisory group acknowledged the growing interdependence of humanity regardless of the geographic, cultural, or national

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22. Ibid., 1.
differences. As “citizens of one planet,” Muslims and Christians have a mutual obligation to engage and solve the “common predicaments” we humans share.

--written in the specific context of the growing religious integration of Great Britain, NTG challenges Christians and Muslims who share a common geography and a common citizenship to find ways to be in constructive relationships to achieve a society that is just, humane, secure, and peaceful.

--NTG acknowledges that Islam and Christianity share a common heritage through Judaism. The advisory group provides eight points of belief held in common:

1) God—the ground of being, the creator and sustainer of creation
2) A coherent and ordered universe filled with God’s purpose
3) God controls history; God will execute the end of history
4) God reveals through prophets and sacred scriptures
5) Humans are created called to worship God
6) Humans are called to moral and social responsibility in community and as a duty to God
7) Humans depend upon the grace, mercy, and compassion of God
8) Humans make intercessions to God knowing God is responsive to our petitions

B. “Factors which Divide”

When NTG was written, the Muslim community in Britain was largely composed of first and second-generation immigrants from the former British Empire. In addition to obvious religious differences assumed here, first generation immigrants and the indigenous population struggled over issues of race, language, cultural expectations/norms/standards, economic issues, etc. NTG suggested time would

24. Ibid., 12.
25. Ibid., 12.
27. Ibid., 13.
28. Ibid., 14-17.
diminish some of these divisive issues. Underneath all of these potentially transitory dividing issues for the Islamic community, assimilation of their religious/cultural identity was of the greatest concern to them. Quoting Khurshid Ahmad, Director General of the Islamic Foundation, Leicester, from an article titled ‘Islam and Muslims in Europe today,’ “Muslims face a number of problems. The most important of them is the threat of losing their religious and cultural identity. They are unhappy over efforts at such assimilation and integrations as may destroy their personality. They want to live in Europe as Muslims, and not as culturally uprooted people . . .”

It is their desire to remain religiously authentic to their heritage in juxtaposition to the historic drive to evangelism and conversion of Western Christianity that is the focal point of interfaith dialogue and relations as considered by NTG.

NTG describes three principle areas of theological difference as continuing challenges to interfaith dialogue and relations:

1. God and Incarnation--While Christianity conceives of an integration of the transcendence of God with the immanence of God incarnated in the person of Jesus, Islam places emphasis almost exclusively upon the transcendence of God and includes an outright rejection of certain Christian doctrines associated with the doctrine of God.

2. God and evil (suffering)—While Christianity suggests the triumph of God over evil through the crucifixion, overcoming evil by the ultimate expression of love as suffering/sacrifice, Islam cannot imagine the transcendent sovereignty of God to be

29. Ibid., 14.
30. Ibid., 15.
31. Ibid., 17.
diminished in any way. While Christianity may see God’s ultimate triumph through suffering, Islam affirms the triumph of God by domination in the world.

3. God and humanity—aside from an unwillingness of Christianity to acknowledge Muhammad in any way, Islam critiques Christianity for the excessive honor it bestows upon clergy and for the sectarianism which, from an Islamic perspective, diminishes the sovereignty of God.

Beyond these significant areas, NTG acknowledges a variety of serious differences of greater or lesser significance that will vex interfaith dialogue or relations. For instance, differences and discrepancies concerning Islam’s claims about Muhammad/Christianity’s claims about Jesus, the revelations of the Koran/ the revelations of the Bible, duties which people owe God/Allah, prayer, worship, the Day of Judgment. In the growing diversification of Britain at the time, NTG acknowledged the Christian community could neither minimize differences with the Muslim community nor could it abandon efforts at dialogue and relationship. The challenge for the Christian community is to develop a theology of religions useful and practical in its time.32

Specifically, NTG stated, “The great acts of God to which Christian theology bears witness are, of course, unchangeable and eternally effective. But theologians in every age have a responsibility to make those acts intelligible to the people of their age . . .”33

NTG outlined several areas that theologians must specifically address in order to seek a 20th century understanding of the challenges of modern pluralism.

According to NTG, God’s revelation in Christ may be engaged through models of ‘exclusiveness’ or ‘inclusiveness.’ The revelation is, for Christians, exclusive in the

32. Ibid., 18.
33. Ibid., 18.
sense of “a unique event which alone has ultimate significance; everything else is of secondary importance.”34 In contrast, it is inclusive as an “event of such unique significance that it is of relevance to everything in the universe.”35 NTG acknowledges the prevailing emphasis upon the exclusive aspects of revelation, recognizing both the biblical support of this model (e.g. “There is no salvation in anyone else at all, for there is no other name under heaven granted to men, by which we may receive salvation”—Acts 4.12) as well as a Western cultural Christian hegemony that has maintained, for centuries, an intentional ignorance and distance from the beliefs and theologies of other faiths and a rejection of secularism and non-belief.36 The challenge to this exclusiveness is the reality of religious and cultural pluralism expanding in the world now. Unlike a former time in the West when religion was homogeneously Christian, albeit denominationalized, NTG acknowledges the new reality in the West of a growing population of peoples with deep, abiding, and differing religious convictions.37 This transformation challenges the church to revisit exclusiveness and consider some more generous inclusiveness in our dialogue and relations with those people.

NTG recognizes a need to respond to biblical exclusiveness with some sort of biblical inclusiveness warrants. NTG suggests a strategy of recognizing the distinction between the singular emphasis in the Old Testament of the nation of Israel and the catholicity of the New Testament.38 Using this paradigm, NTG suggests a hermeneutic that sees exclusiveness and inclusiveness as simultaneously present throughout the

34. Ibid., 18.
35. Ibid., 18.
36. Ibid., 18.
37. Ibid., 18-19.
38. Ibid., 19.
revelation of God. Consequently, while God is the God of the Israel, God can be gracious, forgiving, and present to the Ninevites who repent of their evil (Jonah 3.10) and a light to the nations (Isaiah 49.6). God becomes not just the God of Israel, but also the source of all creation and the King of all creation (e.g. Amos, Isaiah, etc). Likewise, while Jesus started as a particular and singular revelation to the people of God, very quickly the message of Jesus expanded the concept of the chosen to include the broken, the outcast, the unclean, and the non-Jew (e.g. the woman at the well, the Good Samaritan, the tax collector, etc). While in some instances the stories result in conversion (Cornelius, Book of Acts), in others, the reference to the presence, will, or goodness of God present in a pericope is not necessarily related to conversion (Good Samaritan, Luke). The conclusion offered through this hermeneutic is a “universal relationship of God with the created universe.”

NTG carries this hermeneutic further, suggesting an inclusive, universal teleology contained in the revelation of God. Instead of the End being singularly and exclusively focused upon a limited and circumscribed Church, NTG argues the language of this revelation is focused on the world and humankind. NTG contrasts the prevailing hermeneutic of exclusiveness with a modern hermeneutic of inclusiveness based upon these broader interpretations of scripture. Modern interfaith dialogue and relation between Christian and those of other faiths can be more constructively and successfully engaged and conducted based upon this inclusive hermeneutic.

NTG also addresses Christology, considering both narrow and broad interpretations of God’s revelation in Jesus. Clearly, Christ as Savior is a focal point of

39. Ibid., 19.
40. Ibid., 20.
Christianity with a high degree of particularity in Christian revelation. The soteriology of Christianity is closely linked to God’s revelation in Jesus. Hearing, believing, being baptized is formulaic in this matter (cf Mark 16.15-16). This conventional interpretive methodology is consistent with the exclusiveness noted above. NTG suggests the language of the Prologue of the Gospel of John and its identification of Jesus as the “dynamic and effective Agent of God, the Word of the Hebraic tradition, and also with the immanent Reason of the Hellenistic philosophy” provides a linkage between classic Christology and the inclusive notion described above. NTG outlines two consequences of this more inclusive interpretation of Jesus the Christ: 1) “to identify whatever is of truth with the heavenly Lord who became incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth,” and 2) “to declare that the incarnate Christ disclosed the truth of God in such a way as to make it possible to discern and to identify God’s gracious activity throughout the universe.”

NTG accomplishes both an affirmation of the unique singularity of God as experienced by the Christian tradition as the source of all truth while suggesting, at the same time, the unique revelation of this God in the person of Jesus makes it possible to recognize evidence of God’s truth lived in all persons. “Because he (Jesus) thus revealed the love, the power, and the holiness of God in his human life, we now understand more clearly what the love, the power, and the holiness of God are like. So Christians are able to recognize the presence of God in people’s lives, even when they belong to other

41. Ibid., 20.
42. Ibid., 21.
43. Ibid., 21.
44. Ibid., 21.
religions.” NTG ends this section by affirming both the uniqueness and exclusiveness of the Christian revelation yet suggesting there resides in this same revelation a universal inclusiveness that allows us to recognize the truth of God revealed in other faiths as well.

NTG describes the challenges of modernity and interfaith dialogue and relations by reminding the church of the first Christian movement from Judaism to the Gentiles in Antioch. It required the faithful to “cross a threshold of new understanding.” The difficulties of imagining God’s revelation in Jesus the Christ being extended to ‘non-believers’ is an important part of the story of the New Testament. NTG sees the Protestant churches in Britain (circa 1976) at a similar threshold in their relations with other faiths from other, non-Western cultures. “In earlier times, most Christians had no occasion to cross this threshold because societies were largely homogeneous, and one major religion was usually dominant in any particular region . . . But in today’s pluralist world, adherents of different religions share together in common enterprises and as fellow-citizens of the nations and cities where they live.” While NTG recognizes the monumental nature of this challenge and the fear of a diminishment of Christian commitment to God’s revelation in Jesus the Messiah by this kind of openness, it suggests there may be certain gains to be realized by this more open engagement:

1. A greater awareness of the universality in creation of God’s divine love and grace, present in the diversity of religious traditions and experiences of faith.

2. A more modest and nuanced assessment of the magisterial authority of ecclesiastical institutions and persons. NTG suggests this open engagement may help the

45. Ibid., 21.
46. Ibid., 22.
47. Ibid., 22.
churches clarify what is of the true revelation of God and what is accretion of ecclesial authority unrelated to God’s revelation. It is a suggestion of a benefit of a more grassroots, less hierarchical religious experience, a point of view many non-Christians would share with Christians.

3. A deeper and more informed understanding of the unique character and content of the Christian faith, most uniquely the divine incarnation of God in Jesus.  

Borrowing from Martin Luther King, NTG concludes, “Every nation must now develop an overriding loyalty to mankind as a whole in order to preserve the best of their individual societies. This call for a worldwide fellowship that lifts neighborly concern beyond one’s tribe, race, class, and nation is in reality a call for an all-embracing and unconditional love for all men. This often misunderstood and misinterpreted concept has now become an absolute necessity for the survival of man.” NTG thus challenges the Church to become the ‘salt to the world’ in opening the religious community to a sympathetic understanding of other faiths. However challenging this new movement toward interfaith dialogue and relation may be, it is necessary for the Church to engage this challenge and move forward in faith.

49. Ibid., 24.
Chapter 4

The Lambeth Conference

Missionary zeal was a significant part of the 1897 Lambeth Conference. While Resolution 14 of the Conference recognized and thanked God “for the missionary zeal which he has kindled in our Communion, and for the abundant blessing bestowed on such work as has been done,” the resolution continued by challenging the bishops to return home and make “prompt and continuous efforts . . . to arouse the Church to recognize as a necessary and constant element in the spiritual life of the Body, and of each member of it, the fulfilment of our Lord's great commission to evangelise all nations.” 50

Challenging this “necessary and constant element” in the life of the church, the bishops passed Resolution 15 that noted the “exaggerated opinion of the excellences of Hinduism and Buddhism,” held by “many English-speaking Christians” who seemed “to ignore the fact that Jesus Christ alone has been constituted Saviour and King of mankind.”51

Moreover, the Lambeth Conference resolved to assign “a more prominent position . . . to the evangelisation of the Jews in the intercessions and almsgiving of the Church” and “particularly to see that care be taken for the due training of the missionary agents to be employed in the work” (Resolution 16).52 Resolution 17 went on to note the successes of work among the “Mohammedans” especially in India and northeast Africa in the area generally thought of as modern Sudan. According to this resolution, it was important to the Anglican bishops to maintain “strong centres for work amongst Mohammedans, as,

51. Ibid.
52. Ibid.
for instance, in the cities of Delhi, Lucknow, and Hyderabad (Deccan), and elsewhere.”  
In all of this, the bishops of the 1897 Lambeth Conference acknowledged the importance that “so far as possible, the Church should be adapted to local circumstances, and the people brought to feel in all ways that no burdens in the way of foreign customs are laid upon them, and nothing is required of them but what is of the essence of the faith, and belongs to the due order of the Catholic Church.” These resolutions mark what might be considered the beginnings of church mission on the cusp of the Twentieth Century, when the bishops of the Lambeth Conference, an international gathering of the Anglican Church then only thirty years old, gathered in part to define the missionary purpose of the church.

In the Encyclical letter released by this 1897 conference, the bishops summarized their purpose, intent, and expectations regarding foreign mission:

Lastly, we come to the subject of Foreign Missions, the work that at the present time stands in the first rank of all the tasks we have to fulfill. We have especial reasons to be thankful to God for the awakened and increasing zeal of our whole Communion for this primary work of the Church, the work for which our Lord commissioned the Church. For some centuries it may be said we have slumbered. The duty has not been quite forgotten, but it has been remembered only by individuals and Societies; the body as a whole has taken no part.

The Encyclical sees a turn in this circumstance stating, “We are beginning, though only beginning, to see what the Lord would have us do. He is opening the whole world to our easy access, and as He opens the way He is opening our eyes to see it, and to see His beckoning hand.” The Encyclical goes on to note special circumstances existing between

53. Ibid.
54. Ibid.
Christianity, Judaism, and Islam: “In preaching His Gospel to the world we have to deal with one great religious body, which holds the truth in part but not in its fullness, the Jews; with another which holds fragments of the truth embedded in a mass of falsehood, the Mohammedans . . . In dealing with all these it is certainly right to recognize whatsoever good they may contain.” 56 They are quick to warn against exaggerating the good of these non-Christian religions for they are no substitute for the Gospel. 57 In the matter of evangelism to the Jews, the Encyclical noted they “deserve from us more attention than they have hitherto received. The difficulties of the work of converting the Jews are very great, but the greatest of all difficulties springs from the indifference of Christians to the duty of bringing them to Christ.” 58 The bishops of Anglicanism recognized the unique opportunity or obligation the English-speaking people (Anglicans) had toward the Jews in the matter of religious conversation. The goal of conversation, at this time, was clearly conversion. Regardless, the Jews, possessing truth in part, merited particular interest to Lambeth bishops.

Interestingly, in dealing with the Mohammedans, a group ‘that holds fragments of the truth embedded in a mass of falsehood,’ the bishops noted they “. . . must be approached with the greatest care to do them justice. What is good in their belief must be acknowledged to the full, and used as a foundation on which to build the structure of Christian truth.” 59 Observing openness to conversion among the Muslims, particularly in India, the bishops noted, “It seems as if the time for approaching them had come, and that

56. Ibid., 27-28.
57. Ibid., 28.
58. Ibid., 28.
59. Ibid., 29.
the call to approach them was made especially on ourselves.”\footnote{Ibid., 29.}

The bishops noted, “The toleration which follows in the wake of civilisation generally, and especially in the British Empire, has reduced very considerably the danger to the life and liberty of those who make efforts to convert Mohammedans to Christianity.”\footnote{Ibid., 81.} Yet, they also noted, “Until the present century very little systematic spiritual effort appears to have been made to convert Mohammedans.”\footnote{Ibid, 80.} Clearly, the bishops gathered at Lambeth anticipated great opportunity among the Mohammedans recognizing both “. . . a spirit of dissatisfaction with Islam is now showing itself among Mohammedans in parts of Europe and of Asia.”\footnote{Ibid., 81.} and “. . . special opportunities for such work (among the Mohammedans) at the present time in the Dioceses of Lahore, Lucknow, Eastern and Western Equatorial Africa, and Zanzibar; particularly in the cities of Delhi and Hyderabad, and among the Hausa people of the Central Sudan. It is very desirable that these districts and places should be effectively occupied.”\footnote{Ibid., 83.} The 1897 Lambeth gathering ended with great expectations of Anglican work among the Jews and the Mohammedans throughout Christendom and the Empire. However, the framing of interfaith relations was always in the context of mission with clear expectations of evangelism and conversion.\footnote{Ibid., 71-72.}

In the run up to and during World War I, little interest was taken in the matter of Jewish or Muslim relations at Lambeth until 1920. Once again, the bishops gathered at Lambeth highlighted the need for clerical and lay, men and women, to dedicate

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60. Ibid., 29.
61. Ibid., 81.
62. Ibid, 80.
63. Ibid., 81.
64. Ibid., 83.
65. Ibid., 71-72.
themselves to missionary work. In a report titled ‘Report on Missionary Problems’ attached to the documents of the 1920 Lambeth Conference, the bishops acknowledge some matters of concern in relation to the goals and objectives of the government and governmental officials and the work of the church:

On the subject of the relation of governments and government officials to Christianity and other faiths, the Conference gives its approval to the words used in paragraphs 2 and 3 on page 92* (*In dealing with the large number of persons in their colonies and dependencies who profess different faiths, the policy of the British and American governments has always been that of strict religious neutrality. We heartily endorse this policy, having no desire to see any kind of political influence brought to bear upon people to induce them to change their religion) and commends them to the careful consideration of all concerned.

Resolution 41 went on to note "We hold it to be the duty of missionaries to look at their work from the government point of view, as well as from their own, and to adapt their methods, as far as is consistent with Christian morality and justice and with the faith and order of the Church, to the policy which the government is following in dealing with such peoples . . ." In contrast to the 1897 Lambeth gathering which anticipated and encouraged very aggressive interaction with Jewish and Muslim people, the 1920 Lambeth Conference suggests a more circumspect and dialogic interaction between Christians and members of non-Christian faiths. While clearly encouraging continued proclamation of the Gospel, what is evident in Resolution 41 is the bishops of the Lambeth Conference acknowledging the primacy of the governmental approach of neutrality in matters of religion and advising missionaries they should “. . . look at their

67. Ibid.
68. Ibid.
69. Ibid.
work from the government point of view, as well as from their own . . ." 70 While not abandoning completely the more ardent evangelism of 1897, the language of this 1920 resolution acknowledges a change between Christianity and other faiths. The resolution ends by stating, “Further, we feel it is necessary to urge that the religious sentiments of Christians are entitled to be treated with the same consideration that is so markedly, and rightly, shown to those of men professing other faiths.” 71 A transition from Christian missionary hegemony to a more balanced relationship seems to be in its nascent state at least as expressed by the leaders of the Anglican Communion meeting at Lambeth in 1920.

The next relevant meeting of Lambeth occurred in 1978. Resolutions 1, 2, and 3 are focused on the issues facing the world at the time of the Lambeth gathering. Resolution 1, titled ‘Today’s World,’ finds the bishops, in their recognition of the church’s obligation to “proclaim a total Gospel,” recognizing a “new dimension of unity” which encourages them to invite all governments, world leaders, and people to join with them and the Anglican Communion in moving humanity forward, avoiding possible catastrophic disaster, and instead solving significant problems of all societies and people. 72 Eleven specific areas of concern were developed in Resolution 1, ranging from the consumerisation of society to ecological concerns for the planet to the world’s excessive arms deposits. Each area suggested the need for an egalitarian conversation among human partners in the endeavor to solve the human problems facing our world.

70. Ibid.
71. Ibid.
The conversation will require competencies of every sort, including voices of morality and faith. Resolution 1 ends,

We do not pretend to a knowledge of the practical solutions for these problems. But we do affirm that God intends all of us to enjoy this planet and not to ruin it; he intends all of us, as his children, to live together peaceably and creatively; to use our skills and knowledge not to destroy but to fulfill human potentialities. We believe that time is running out. Beneath all the choices lies the ultimate choice of life or death. We join with all men of goodwill in appealing that we shall choose life. We know that tasks and situations which to human view seem hopeless can, with the boundless resources of God's grace, be transformed.  

Resolution 2 provided guidance in responding to Resolution 1, particularly challenging the Anglican Communion to prepare itself for active agency worldwide in achieving the goals of change described by Resolution 1.

Finally, Resolution 3 describes their convictions regarding the human dimension as they are stated in Resolutions 1 and 2. Recognizing human rights and dignity as of ultimate and universal importance, the bishops, proclaiming from a Christology of justice, “deplore and condemn the evils of racism and tribalism, economic exploitation and social injustices, torture, detention without trial and the taking of human lives, as contrary to the teaching and example of our Lord in the Gospel. Man is made in the image of God and must not be exploited.” They go on to embrace human rights as codified in the 1948 United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, including freedom of religion and belief. The final paragraph of Resolution 3 invites Anglican Christians “to lend their support to those who struggle for human freedom and who press forward in

73. Ibid.
74. Ibid.
75. Ibid.
some places at great personal and corporate risk; we should not abandon them even if the struggle becomes violent. We are reminded that the ministry of the Church is to reveal the love of God by faithful proclamation of his Word, by sacrificial service, and by fervent prayers for his rule on earth.”

It is worth noting the contrast between Resolution 14 of 1897 and Resolution 3 of 1978 as each declares the role of the church in the world. In 1897, with Western Christendom moving toward a sunset and the hegemony of Western empire nearing the beginning of the end, the bishops declared the urgency “to arouse the Church to recognize as a necessary and constant element in the spiritual life of the Body, and of each member of it, the fulfillment of our Lord's great commission to evangelise all nations” in order to reverse these trends of decline. The Church in 1978, seeking to be a partner in a more complex world of change on the eastern horizon, notes “We are reminded that the ministry of the Church is to reveal the love of God by faithful proclamation of his Word, by sacrificial service, and by fervent prayers for his rule on earth.” While a subtle shift, the language of Lambeth 1978 clearly provides the Anglican Communion with an opportunity to move toward interfaith dialogue while being consistent with its own sense of vocation and ministry in the world.

Lambeth 1978 addresses the matter of interfaith relations directly in Resolution 37. In this resolution, the bishops provided language necessary to allow Anglicanism to move from a ‘Great Commission’ model of evangelism in the world with conversion the

77. Ibid.
ultimate outcome to a different model of evangelism, a model based upon dialogue and mutuality. Titled ‘Other Faiths: Gospel and Dialogue,’ the bishops provide prophetic leadership for the church as it moves toward the 21st Century:

Within the Church's trust of the Gospel, we recognize and welcome the obligation to open exchange of thought and experience with people of other faiths. Sensitivity to the work of the Holy Spirit among them means a positive response to their meaning as inwardly lived and understood. It means also a quality of life on our part that expresses the truth and love of God as we have known them in Christ, Lord and Saviour. We realize the lively vocation to theological interpretation, community involvement, social responsibility, and evangelisation which is carried by the Churches in areas where Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, and Islam are dominant, and ask that the whole Anglican Communion support them by understanding, by prayer, and where appropriate, by partnership with them. We continue to seek opportunities for dialogue with Judaism.  

While still imagining traditional Christian expressions of evangelism leading to conversion, this resolution provides the possibility of a new direction, the direction of interfaith dialogue.

Lambeth 1988 continues the focus on interfaith dialogue with Resolution 20 that “commends dialogue with people of other faiths as part of Christian discipleship and mission . . .” In this resolution, Lambeth 1988 incorporates several new aspects to the notion of interfaith dialogue. First, a working document is commended for exploring interfaith relations (The Way of Dialogue-explored later). Second, it encourages the ACC to establish a permanent committee to consider a more structured approach to interfaith dialogue including Jewish-Christian-Muslim tripartite interaction whenever possible (NIFCON). This action suggests interfaith dialogue is beginning to take on a

80. Ibid.
81. The Lambeth Conference, “Resolutions from 1988,”
82. NIFCON, founded in 1993, and other reports of Lambeth 1988 will be discussed separately.
place in the Anglican conversation distinct from classical evangelism. Finally, Resolution 21 challenges the Church to support institutions that provide a more informed understanding of Judaism and Islam. In this way, Lambeth 1988 takes dramatic steps to re-imagine the ‘Great Commission’ as the ‘Great Conversation.’ Not wanting to totally abandon any sense of evangelism and the more conventional notion of the ‘Great Commission’, Resolution 22 asserts “God’s love extends to people of every culture” and that “every culture (is judged) according to the Gospel’s own criteria of truth . . .” Thus, the Church continues to be responsible for “expressing the unchanging Gospel of Christ in words, actions, names, customs, liturgies, which communicate relevantly in each contemporary society.”

Evangelism, the proclamation of the unchanging Gospel of Christ, in retained, but now it is held in tension with a challenge to interfaith dialogue as an important endeavor of the Church in the modern world.

Lambeth 1998 presents a more complex relation between evangelism and interfaith dialogue. Resolution II.1, ‘The Theological Foundation of Mission’ appears to offer a more traditional declaration of missionary evangelism. The bishops declared, “. . . believing that all our mission springs from the action and self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ and that without this foundation, we can give no form or content to our proclamation and can expect no transforming effect from it.” They went on to resolves to “i. reaffirm our faith in the doctrines of the Nicene Creed as the basis of what is to be believed, lived and proclaimed by the churches of the Anglican Communion; ii. accept the imperative character of our call to mission and evangelism as grounded in the very

84. Ibid.
nature of the God who is revealed to us.” Clearly, a reaffirmation of traditional evangelism in the sense of the biblical Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) is on the minds of the bishops gathered in 1998. Further, in Resolution II.6, ‘Future Priorities In Mission,’ the bishops make very clear and specific confessions and declarations for the new millennium transition:

As it moves towards the third millennium of Christian Witness, this conference: a) repents of our failures in mission and evangelism; b) . . . The primary task of every bishop, diocese and congregation in the Anglican Communion is to share in and show the love of God in Jesus Christ - by worship, by the proclamation to everyone of the gospel of salvation through Christ, through the announcing of good news to the poor and the continuing effort to witness to God's Kingdom and God's justice in act and word and to do so in partnership with Christians of all traditions; c) urges that priority should be given at every level in our Communion to reaching out to those who have never heard, or never responded to the gospel of Christ . . .

There can be no doubt that following the movement of Lambeth 1988 toward interfaith dialogue, Lambeth 1998 made something of a strategic rapprochement with those more committed to classic evangelism. Yet, the bishops could not simply ignore the growing reality of world religions’ asserting their own identity or their increasing presence in traditionally Christian nations. No longer was Christianity the common partner of Western colonial domination or evangelism and conversion the necessary outcome when people of other religions came into proximity with Christianity. The bishops of Lambeth 1998, in Resolution V.17 ‘Religions/World Faiths Desk,’ noted,

a) . . . recognising the complexities and challenges of religion, the role that religions have played in the lives of people and civilizations throughout human history and foreseeing, as we enter the third Christian millennium, that religious pluralism will bring many new challenges and dilemmas; b) recognizes that in this milieu faith should be the source of reconciliation and hope; and c) urges

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86. Ibid.
our Anglican Communion to give high priority to this challenge and invites the ACC to consider setting up a Religions/World Faiths desk at the earliest opportunity.  

Recognizing the dynamic circumstances influencing Anglicanism’s relations with other world religions, Lambeth 1998 suggested a specific set of approaches and recommendations for the Anglican Church to take in Resolution V.36, ‘On Relations with People of Other Faiths.’

Resolution V.36 provides a clear framework upon which to build a new direction in interfaith relations. The bishops include in section a.v. and a.vi. language that links interfaith dialogue to continuing classic evangelism as well. The bishops integrated our need to “. . . express our own deepest Christian beliefs” and “. . . sharing and witnessing to all we know the good news of Christ as our debt of love to all people whatever their religious affiliation” with the recognition of the “virtue of . . . engagement with people of other faiths in situations all over the world . . .”. In this regard, the bishops of Lambeth 1998 also recognize Anglican Christians to be in a “special position to explore and develop genuinely Christian responses to these faiths.”

Lambeth 1998, building on the work of Lambeth 1988, furthered the realization of modern religious pluralism and the need for Anglicans to be a constructive component of the interfaith dialogue that will re-define the religious context of the 21st Century. It also affirmed the need to be true to the Christian narrative as proclaimed in the revelation of God in the person of Jesus the Christ.


88. See more details of 1998 resolution V.36 in the Appendix.

Lambeth 2008, the most recent Lambeth Conference, continues to refine the relationship between classic notions of Christian evangelism and interfaith dialogue. In Section F, ‘Relations with other World Religions,’ the bishops make specific observations and declarations regarding the nature of our relations with other faiths from both a posture of evangelistic proclamation and authentic interfaith dialogue. “We recognize that we live today in a world where many faiths live side by side. We encounter each other on a daily basis and as neighbours are drawn into dialogue together. Such dialogue, in truth, arises from our love and concern for all humanity, who like us are created in the image and likeness of God.”\(^{90}\) The bishops recognize the reality of modern cultural circumstances that inevitably put Christians and non-Christian in proximity and relationship with one another. The resulting dialogue, from the Christian point of view, according to the bishops, is informed by “our love and concern for all humanity.”\(^{91}\) This love and concern is required because we share a common source of our creation; that is, we share identity as the image and likeness of God. The bishops go on to declare we are, in our relations with those of non-Christian faiths, “. . . to honour other people’s humanity, to serve them and to show them Christ.”\(^{92}\) In this context, the bishops understand “. . . dialogue is not compromise, but growth in trust and understanding of each other’s faith and traditions.”\(^{93}\) The bishops are clear about the two-fold purpose of dialogue: to share the story of “. . . God who loves all, who invites them into the fellowship of his Spirit and the grace-filled embrace of his Son Jesus


\(^{91}\) Ibid., paragraph 85.

\(^{92}\) Ibid., paragraph 88.

\(^{93}\) Ibid., paragraph 88.
Christ”\textsuperscript{94} and, using a Benedictine notion of hospitality, to make “. . . space in our hearts for one another.”\textsuperscript{95} Qualities of “gentleness, honesty and integrity” are essential to the dialogue and the Christianity to be affirmed in these dialogues is a faith that represents “a way of life, rather than a static set of beliefs.”\textsuperscript{96} They also urged the church “. . . to contextualize (its) faith in such a way that Christianity is no longer seen as a western faith.”\textsuperscript{97} Lambeth 2008 encouraged dialogue to be connected to shared action for “. . . the promotion of the wider common good.”\textsuperscript{98} Faced with a wide variety of problems from HIV, AIDS, poverty, malaria, war on terror, etc., the bishops linkage of interfaith dialogue with action promoting the common good provided a context in which interfaith dialogue could take place constructively, focused upon common appreciation of challenges and opportunities with shared intent of justice, mercy, and hope. Otherwise, interfaith dialogue would descend into a debate on matters of dogmatics and doctrines. The bishops were aware of the complexity of interfaith dialogue, a complexity related to the multiplicity of cultural contexts as well as elements of our own brokenness.\textsuperscript{99} Lambeth 2008 affirmed ‘Generous Love: the truth of the Gospel and the call to dialogue,’ a report of NIFCON prepared for Lambeth 2008 (to be discussed later in this paper). Lambeth 2008 repeated the challenge to NIFCON to continue telling the story of interfaith dialogue and more widely distribute best practices in interfaith relations.\textsuperscript{100}

\textsuperscript{94} Ibid., paragraph 88. \\
\textsuperscript{95} Ibid., paragraph 90. \\
\textsuperscript{96} Ibid., paragraph 90. \\
\textsuperscript{97} Ibid., paragraph 94. \\
\textsuperscript{98} Ibid., paragraph 92 \\
\textsuperscript{99} Ibid., paragraph 93. \\
\textsuperscript{100} Ibid., Section F Initiatives & Resources. 

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Interestingly, Lambeth 2008 Report contained Section B ‘Mission and Evangelism’ that continued to offer extensive instruction to the Anglican Communion in the areas of mission and evangelism. The bishops declared, “In Christ Jesus, God has revealed himself as the self-giving Lord of Creation, full of compassion and mercy. That same Son who was sent by the Father into the world, in turn sent forth his disciples, instructing them to proclaim the good news, making disciples . . .” 101 Consequently, they continue

Mission belongs to God and we are called to engage in this mission so that God’s will of salvation for all may be fulfilled. In this sense, mission is not primarily an activity of the church, but an attribute of God. The Church exists as an instrument for that mission. There is church because there is mission, and not vice versa. To participate in mission is to participate in the movement of God’s love toward people, since God is the fountain of sending love. 102

The report goes on to declare evangelism to be

. . . a personal encounter with the risen Christ and a commitment to discipleship. Evangelism is the cutting edge of mission in the proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour by word and deed. The Gospel is the lifeblood of the Church and involves mediating by proclamation, by word, and by action the good news of God’s love in Christ, which transforms the whole of life. There must also be a compassionate community, the enabling of others by the leadership of the Church, and the marginalized must be kept in focus. 103

Consequently, while on the one hand encouraging a dramatic engagement with world religions so that “In our relations with those of other faiths we are committed to honour other people’s humanity, to serve them and to show them Christ,” 104 Lambeth 2008 continues to hold out a model of evangelism and mission seeking to effect conversion. It appears Lambeth is considering two different communities of people addressed by each

101. Ibid., paragraph 21.
102. Ibid., paragraph 22.
103. Ibid., paragraph 25.
104. Ibid., paragraph 88.
aspect of our identity—‘Mission and Evangelism’ to those who are living a non-religious or ambiguously religious existence and ‘Relations with other World Religions’ to those who are living clearly defined religious traditions. Referencing an essay presented to Lambeth by Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks, Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregation of the Commonwealth, the bishops provide a possible description of this second type of relationship, “If we can honour a covenant of fate together, we make space for God and each other and move forward together towards a covenant of faith.” It is this image of moving together towards a covenant of faith that seems to describe best the trajectory of the Anglican Communion as we embark upon a journey of interfaith dialogue with the religions of the world.

The Lambeth Conferences appear to have contributed significantly to the evolution of a theology of interfaith dialogue and relationship. While some aspects of this will be explored in some of the specific reports of Lambeth to be discussed later, it is worth noting here several conceptual contributions to this developing theology. Lambeth 1892 was able to at least acknowledge other faiths (specifically here Islam and Judaism) contained some ‘truths’ of God’s revelation. Lambeth 1920 offers nascent notions of possible ‘relationship’ between differing religions. Lambeth 1978 encouraged open exchange of thoughts and experiences between differing religious traditions as a mark of authentic dialogue. Lambeth 1988 encouraged interfaith dialogue to include multiple faiths (especially Abrahamic: Jewish-Christian-Muslim dialogue) to enhance open sharing in dialogue. Lambeth 1998 encouraged interfaith dialogue to be a source of hope and reconciliation between humans while, at the same time, becoming the cohesive

105. Ibid., paragraph 91.
source of mutual cooperation in addressing common problems of justice, peace, violence, reconciliation, etc., vexing all humanity. Finally, Lambeth 2008 articulated a doctrine of humanity focused on our common creator as the fulcrum upon which interfaith dialogue and relation becomes an outward expression of divine love and concern. Consequently, such love and concern, finding traction in interfaith interactions becomes the context in which we work together for the common good. These contributions begin to offer a vision of this emerging theology of interfaith dialogue and relations.
Chapter 5

General Convention

In 1886, the General Convention of the Episcopal Church, meeting in Chicago, accepted the Chicago Quadrilateral as the basis for reunion with other Christian churches. This interest in Christian unity was affirmed in 1888 by the Lambeth Conference. The Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral remains the primary focal point of Christian unity for the Anglican Communion in its relationship with Christians of all traditions. Following the development of this outline of Christian unity, the Episcopal Church seemed fixed on the idea of expanding the unification of Christianity. In 1895, the Commission on Christian Unity, in its report to General Convention described the Episcopal Church as God’s “instrument for moving the mind and heart of Christendom; (and) we believe that by His Blessed Spirit, this Church may be made His agency for vitalizing with catholicity, and bringing into organic unity, all our fellow Christians who love the Lord Jesus Christ . . .” 106 Consequently, aside from a keen interest in an extension of Christendom into China, 107 the Episcopal Church, in the concluding years of the nineteenth century, seemed far more interested in unity among Christians than with interfaith interaction even through missionary work. Regarding interaction with Muslims, in the 1895 Journal Appendix X ‘Report on the Commission of Ecclesiastical Relations,’ it is noted, “the work of Christianizing the Mohammedans seems to many almost hopeless.” 108 Bishop A.N. Littlejohn laments the four hundred years of rule of Constantinople by the Mohammedans and hopes that east and west may soon restore the cross atop Santa

107. Ibid., 377-378.
108. Ibid., 88.
The expectation of Christian hegemony is clear, “The Christian Church is not merely a voluntary society. The Christian Gospel is not preferred to all other gospels, but it is the only Gospel that can help and save the world . . . that which is not definitely Christian is not Christian at all.” Moreover, a latent xenophobia which would preclude any interest in constructive interaction between Western Christendom and the non-Christian world (save the Far East) is well represented in a report on higher education from the 1895 General Convention. In the report, the writers declared “Her (the Church’s) educational work in the highest domain of scholarship has been the glory of the Church of our fathers in the up-building of the civilization of the Anglo-Saxon race, and this American Church should not be unworthy of her great inheritance.” The General Convention of 1898 makes further comment on evangelism as social and cultural expansionism. The Board of Mission reports:

The time has come at last when missionary work among heathen people must be recognized as a tremendous and real factor in the world’s progress and when the men in Christian countries, who decry Foreign Missions, must confess that they are lagging behind the thought and spirit of the age. American civilization and American ideals and institutions, with American power to uphold and extend them, have moved on, in the Providence of God . . . and soon we shall have no talk of Foreign Missions, for every Christian man, in every land, will realize humanity is one, as Christ is one; that the one Gospel is the only Gospel of Salvation for mankind.

Again, the focal point of this mission work is primarily the Far East, though Africa merits some passing mention.

109. Ibid., 589-590
110. Ibid., 628.
111. Ibid., 629.
General Conventions, during this period, regarded interaction with Judaism with a singular goal toward conversion. Recognizing certain unique cultural circumstances affecting Jewish converts, the 1901 General Convention encouraged evangelism to the Jews in Boston, Baltimore, Chicago, and Cincinnati and, realizing the rejection these converts would experience from their families and communities, suggested the church build a “home for Jewish converts.”\footnote{General Convention. Journal of the Proceeding of the Bishops, Clergy, and Laity of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America, 1901, (Boston: Alfred Mudge & Sons, 1902), 356.} The 1907 General Convention, in a significant concession to customs and traditions differing from Western Christianity, determined that “Hebrew Christians (Jewish converts) are not required to adopt the social manners and customs of the Gentiles, but may continue, in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free, to observe the festival and rites and ceremonies of their forefathers, as historical and racial traditions; provided, that such customs and observances are not invested with solemn religious significance . . .”\footnote{General Convention. Journal of the Proceeding of the Bishops, Clergy, and Laity of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America, 1907, (New York City: Winthrop Press, 1907), 136.} The 1910 General Convention revisited this idea and affirmed the notion of allowing converts, Jewish and others, to retain cultural or local customs and traditions provided they are not “inconsistent with the teachings of Christ.” Missionaries, though determined to convert the Jews, did not want their actions to appear to divide or separate converts from their families and traditions.\footnote{General Convention. Journal of the Proceeding of the Bishops, Clergy, and Laity of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America, 1910, (New York City: Winthrop Press, 1910), 605.} While subtle and not successful, the willingness of the General Convention to consider a more constructive interaction fitted to the circumstances of non-Christians as they enter into relationship with Christians is significant as an early suggestion of a growing willingness to consider alternative ways of interacting with those of other faith traditions. However, any interest
in constructive and open dialogue with non-Christian religions distant or perceived as distant from the main narrative of the Christian tradition must wait another time.

General Convention 1913 remained consistent with its predecessors on the matter of evangelism. The Pastoral Letter of that Convention asserted the need of the Church to serve as “the custodian, the guardian, the administrator of that truth [that God so loved the world].”\textsuperscript{116} The bishops were confident in the vocation of the Church as the singular repository of the only truth. Yet, they were also aware of a new phenomenon that was growing in the United States. They wrote,

Be not disturbed or discouraged if the mingling of the peoples of all the earth on this American Continent brings with it strange and weird theories and speculations as to the meaning of religion and the standards of society and the ideals of government . . . The solidarity of humanity is realized today as never before and all nations and races and tribes of men are coming into familiar and intimate intercourse, one with another.\textsuperscript{117}

Clearly, General Convention of 1913 was aware of a growing cultural diversity appearing on the American landscape. Of even greater concern, this diversity was bringing non-Christians into the country in growing numbers:

That heathenism of which we had once only a vague conception, in which we were aroused to a languid interest now and then by appeals of missionaries returned from the front, is now at our very doors, and the Church’s warfare is the inherited opportunity and privilege, in a new and real sense, of every baptized child . . . Like men and women of the apostolic age, we are in the very thick of battle; and our advantage is that the Christian line has been flung so far that every captured fortress of unbelief is a visible and tangible evidence of the surrender of the whole world to Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{118}


\textsuperscript{117} Ibid., 396.

\textsuperscript{118} Ibid., 396.
The frontline of the mission field had moved from far-flung foreign lands to the doorsteps of the church and it would be necessary for the Episcopal Church to deal with this new reality.

The General Convention of 1916 had an expanded interest in mission work in Central Africa and Liberia. An October 17 sermon during the Convention was titled “Shall Christ lose Africa to Mahomet?” By resolution, the Convention declared “that a Joint Committee, consisting of three Bishops, three Presbyters, and three laymen be appointed to give consideration to the furtherance of Christianity in Africa . . .” Curiously, the Board of Missions noting the number of missionaries sent abroad in the prior triennium, reported sixty-two missionaries had been sent to China, thirteen to Japan, two to Brazil, five to Cuba, one to Mexico, eighteen to Alaska, eight to Hawaii, six to Puerto Rico, and nine to the Philippines. The realization of a need to go to Africa was late arriving to the Episcopal Church.

The 1919 Pastoral Letter from the bishops of the General Convention focused much on the transition out of the Great War. In an interesting note of openness to the growing diversity in the United States at this time, the bishops stated, “America hitherto has been a nation generous in receiving aliens to her shores. We owe the high character of our citizenship, of which we are justly proud, to the fine quality of manhood contributed to us by many countries.” This is in contrast to the Pastoral of 1913 that

120. Ibid., 236.
121. Ibid., 236.
122. Ibid., 427
123. Ibid., 508-509.
worried about those who were coming into our country bringing “strange and weird theories” to the country. Equally interesting, the General Convention of 1919 determined it was “inexpedient to pursue work in Central Africa at this time.” The interest of General Convention 1916 of saving Central Africa from Mahomet was dropped without fanfare.124

The bishops’ Pastoral Letter of 1925 noted,

. . . whenever alien cultures are brought into intimate contact with each other, the clash of interests means also the conflict of moral standards [again note the 1913 and 1919 comments on this matter]. A period of confusion inevitably results and continues until the groups coalesce and an adjustment has been reached . . . In this modern age, the interpretation of peoples has progressed so rapidly that moral standards everywhere have been thrown into confusion and the sanctions which enforced them have been challenged and sometimes discredited. Nowhere is this more evident than in the United States where we have a cross section of the earth’s population and where there is little homogeneity as in any part of the world . . .125

General Convention acknowledged the complexities consequent to the growing integration of broadly divergent cultures and religions in the modern era of the United States. Moreover, the presumed authorities and moral standards historically clear and unquestioned were realized to be evolving as new paradigms and customs are established. The 1925 General Convention at least acknowledged the unique model of diversity represented in the American experiment.126

General Conventions then and following continued to assert the primary focus of evangelism, resulting in conversion, as a primary mission of the Church. General

124. Ibid., 131, 144.


126. General Convention. It should be noted that during this period, the United States had significantly restrictive immigration policies limiting immigration almost exclusively to Western Europeans, excluding almost entirely African, Eastern European, Asian, and Middle Eastern Immigration.
Convention 1928 asserted “The Body of Christ has no other mission that to make all men part of Christ.” General Convention 1934 proclaimed, “Certainly the Church of Jesus Christ is international and interracial. Its flag rises above the flag of every nation. It offers the world the one and only hope of universal brotherhood.” General Convention 1937 reaffirmed its belief that the Christian Church is “the sole remedy for the world’s sin, as the one hope for humanity, and as the only solution of the world’s social and economic problems.” The 1937 Bishops’ Pastoral Letter does offer, intentionally or unintentionally, a small window of openness when it states “God is the broad unity among men,” allowing some space between Christocentric language and theocentric language. Moreover, they continued, “The Christian conception of God’s purpose is man’s hope of understanding among nations and races.” This Pastoral offers some consideration of interfaith dialogue around this broad idea of unity and understanding. Despite the growing diversity by every measure, especially religious; the expectation of non-Christians’ conversion to a deeply Western Christian tradition as the norm; and a broad sense of Western Christian hegemony continued to hamper significant consideration of more dramatic movements in the direction of interfaith dialogue that imagined anything short of conversion.


130. Ibid., 43.

131. Ibid., 43.
General Convention 1940 continued the struggle between appreciation of the diversity of humanity and the continued sense that the only religion through which true faith could be expressed is Christian. On one hand, they would proclaim, “The Church must stand boldly for freedom of conscience, of speech, and of worship.”132 On the other, the Presiding Bishop was quoted as saying he wanted the Church “to work even harder to achieve a more thoroughly Christian America”; moreover, the bishops still acknowledged a world “in need of a church that is of one heart and mind in the Faith of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”133 To this end, the bishops were highly critical of those who attempted “to declare null and void our Lord’s command that we go into all the world and spread the Gospel to every creature”134 General Conventions of 1943, 1946, and 1949 made no concessions to interreligious dialogue, continuing in the war and post-war periods with an emphasis on the conversion of non-Christians. In the Pastoral letter of 1949 the bishops wrote “. . . we ask for vigorous evangelism as we recognize that any human being who does not know or believe the Gospel of Jesus Christ is one whom God wants in His Church.”135

Beginning in the 1950’s, the General Conventions were faced with changing human environments in the world that required changed responses from the Church. In 1952, the House of Bishops provided a ‘sense of the House’ statement expressing concern over the unjust removal of Christians and Muslims from Palestine. They

133. Ibid., 33
134. Ibid., 33.
requested the UN seek just compensation for these Arab and Palestinians, whether Muslim or Christian. There was clear concern about the treatment of Muslims and what would happen as they were removed from their homeland. This concern was not connected to any statement of evangelism. In 1955, the Pastoral letter of the Convention acknowledged the areas of the world that were considered formerly the fertile mission territories for the Christian Church were now in full revolt against Western political and economic control; “they are in revolt against Western, white man’s assumption of his permanent superiority.” The bishops went on to note “Ancient religions which we were inclined to write off as decadent are showing many signs of vigorous revival in association with the nationalism of Asia: Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism.” Most importantly, the bishops wrote “In all of this, we are summoned as Christians to recognize the judgments of God, which are the disclosures of the contradiction between our human ways and His design for His people . . . Before God and men, we can make no case for contempt and assumptions of racial superiority. These are the deepest roots of our alienation from Asia. For these there is no answer but repentance . . . ”

Still, the bishops spoke of evangelism, though now focusing upon indigenous and self-directed evangelism. They went on to describe this new strategy as planting “Christ’s Church” not “Our Church.” While still concerned about conversion evangelism, General Convention 1955 recognized the emerging revival of non-Christian religions as real and

138. Ibid.
139. Ibid.
140. Ibid., 43.
animated religious traditions that must be engaged in different ways by the Christian community. Finally, in this decade of the 1950’s, General Conventions began to set the stage for real interreligious dialogue and relation. In the Bishops’ Pastoral Letter of General Convention 1958 they wrote, “In our world’s travail toward unity we would remind you that there is nothing that can take the place of face to face meetings . . . It is tragically easy to treat others as ‘things’ and without personal acquaintance to forget that all mankind desires, needs, hopes, and fears the same things . . . The meeting of others is a creative experience, giving to each the knowledge of our common humanity.”  

‘Others,’ in this context, is pointing toward non-Christians, and the bishops are allowing some recognition of a common union of the human experience no matter the diversity represented by these others.

General Convention of 1961 made one startling admission. “In Africa,” they wrote, “after 110 years of missionary effort, the Episcopal Church has one missionary district, with one bishop and 8087 members.”  

The Committee of Overseas Missions reported to General Convention that Muslims were being actively evangelistic in Africa. Quoting from Bishop Stephen Neill’s book, Christian Mission Today, the report stated, “. . . we do not say, like our ancestors, that all those who have not accepted Christ are going to hell. We do say that it is the birthright of every single human being born in the world today to know that he has been redeemed by Christ, and to have the opportunity to freely

accept or to reject that salvation.””\textsuperscript{143} Again, while still upholding Christian evangelism as a primary mission of the Church, the General Convention of 1961 is making a distinction between the evangelism strategies of our ancestors and a modern, more accepting style of evangelism. By these small steps, the General Convention is creating an environment for interreligious dialogue and relation to evolve gradually into a constructive context for interreligious relationships to form and grow. Still, General Convention continues to be cautious.

In 1970, the General Convention began to ask probing questions. “How does this Church do mission overseas in a post-colonial age?” “What practices do we employ that do not contribute to its sense of dignity and worth?” “What is needed to make the relationship truly mutual, truly responsible, and increasingly interdependent?”\textsuperscript{144} The Episcopal Church, through General Convention, is facing up to some of the challenging consequences of a world of growing complexity and growing diversity. At General Convention 1973, these questions were further explored as the bishops declared in the Pastoral Letter, “. . . the Church has an even heavier obligation to involve itself in the reordering of the broken life of God’s world . . . remember that our Lord commanded that we be His witnesses . . . unto the uttermost parts of the earth.”\textsuperscript{145} The bishops are postulating that there is a higher calling than evangelism as understood as simple

\textsuperscript{143} Ibid., 767
conversion and church growth. This higher calling is to be responsive to the needs of God’s people.146

In 1979, the General Convention began to act in recognition of the growing diversification of the American landscape as well as the recognition of the growing autonomous, post-colonial reality in the world. In a resolution (D133) passed to expand and encourage dialogue between Christian and Islamic communities, General Convention recognized “the vitality and often impressive resurgence of the communities of faithful Islam, . . . (acknowledged) the impact of the Islamic community on the religious, cultural, political, and sociological aspects of the lives of many people . . . .”147 Almost condemning the tardiness of the Church in responding to this situation, the resolution observes “an awareness of this need (dialogue with Muslims) has existed for some time, but no means has been devised to pursue this dialogue in the Episcopal Church . . . .”148

The resolution required the Standing Commission on Ecumenical Relations to accomplish the following goals:

1) identify existing conversations between the Christian community and Islam in our country and in countries where this Church has jurisdiction;
2) devise and formulate, in consultations with the Presiding Bishop, a means of initiating such conversations on a formal level involving the Episcopal Church; and
3) commend and encourage the present dialogues of the National and World Council of Churches with the Islamic communities.149

General Convention 1982, discovering during the triennium the Episcopal Church was already involved in such a dialogue process through the National Council of

146. Ibid.
148. Ibid.
149. Ibid.
Churches, encouraged the extension of the 1979 action through the National Council of Churches’ Task Force on Christian-Muslim Relations. In this way, the Standing Commission on Ecumenical Relations was discharged from further responsibility for the 1979 resolution\(^{150}\) and the Episcopal Church was again left with no internal structure to advocate for interfaith dialogue or relations. Thus, after 1982, the matter of interfaith relations and dialogue were absent for a while. At General Convention 1991 the Standing Commission of World Mission noted its obligation to “. . . working ecumenically and with people of other faiths in a transforming way. This will mean working together through our differences as we attempt to be signs of Christ in the world.”\(^{151}\) The Standing Commission on World Mission noted the “responsibility for interfaith dialogue does not seem to be clearly lodged anywhere in the structure of General Convention. This is an increasingly essential dimension of mission concern . . . .”\(^{152}\) The Commission on World Mission presented resolution A237\(^{153}\) requesting the Standing Commission on Structure present a policy recommendation to the 1994 General Convention for the oversight of interfaith dialogue.\(^{154}\) With this act of the 1991 General Convention, the action is taken to move interfaith dialogue forward in the Episcopal Church, catching up with the more decisive actions in this matter taken by the broader Anglican Communion at Lambeth in 1978 and 1988.


\(^{152}\) Ibid., 527.

\(^{153}\) Ibid., 758.

\(^{154}\) Ibid., 527.
The Standing Commission on Structure addressed their charge during the triennium and determined oversight of interfaith dialogue requested by the 1991 General Convention would best be accomplished by assigning this task to a newly created Presiding Bishop’s Advisory Committee on Interfaith Relations. This committee was formed between 1991 and 1994. It formed in response to several circumstances:

(a) The growth of Islamic and other faith communities across the country . . . challenging the Episcopal Church to look beyond its normal ecumenical partners to a larger religious context.
(b) While the Presiding Bishop’s Committee on Christian-Jewish Relations . . . provided a basis for interfaith work, the changing North American context requires a broader scope.
(c) The already heavy agenda of the Standing Commission on Ecumenical Relations was too full to include interfaith work.
(d) The Lambeth Conference encouraged ‘the Churches of the Anglican Communion to engage in dialogue with Jews and Muslims on the basis of understanding, affirmation, and sharing.

The work of the Committee during the triennium period consisted mostly of exploring existing ecumenical resources committed to interfaith dialogue and relations. The decision was made to focus initially on relations with Jewish and Muslim traditions, with the possibility of including other traditions in time. In June 1993, the Committee approved the document Principles for Interfaith Dialogue (to be discussed more fully later). This document encouraged parishes and congregations to initiate and engage in interfaith dialogue and relations with persons and groups of other faith traditions.

In addition to this document, 1994 General Convention passed two resolutions, A102 and D130, urging congregations to enter into conversations with Jews and Muslims.

157. Ibid., 187.
158. Ibid., 187.
Resolution A102 urged interfaith dialogue in order to develop “mutual understanding and respect, to discuss their respective concerns with regard to peace and justice in the Middle East . . . .”\textsuperscript{159} Resolution D130 was less focused upon a unique situation (i.e. the Middle East) and more interested in the broader consequences of interfaith relations. Congregations were encouraged to enter “. . . into regular dialogue with Muslims and Jews on issues of peace, prayer, justice, and to find common concerns in our local communities, including hunger, homelessness, teenage pregnancy, and prison ministry.”\textsuperscript{160} While the church’s interest in conventional evangelism is not lessened by this encouragement of interfaith dialogue and relationship, D130 does represent a new way of imagining relations between those of differing faiths independent of conversion. This encouragement of ‘regular’ interfaith dialogue is a direct response to Lambeth’s call to interfaith relations structured upon a “basis of understanding, affirmation, and sharing.”\textsuperscript{161} In effect, these actions by the Episcopal Church created a category of interfaith dialogue as a matter independent from, but compatible with, classic Christian evangelism. Consequently, the Church is liberated to explore interfaith dialogue and relations in an open and honest context without the overlay of evangelism for conversion.

The Presiding Bishop’s Advisory Committee on Interfaith Relations, now functioning as a subsidiary of The Standing Committee on Ecumenical Relations, reported to the General Convention 1997 that most of its work had involved interaction with the Buddhist and Jewish communities. The Committee went on to note that “The


\textsuperscript{160} ibid., 812.

Islamic community is more difficult to meet at the national level.”\textsuperscript{162 163} No matter this discovery of difficulty in engaging the Islamic community, the Committee presented a very aggressive agenda to the Episcopal Church. Their thesis:

“By the year 2001 Interfaith relations will be far more important to the Episcopal Church than they appear to be today. In both the pluralistic society of the United States and on the international scene, the interfaith dimension is rapidly growing with major peace and justice implications as well as the spiritual level of apparent religions in conflict. With due recognition of the significance of this changing scene, this church can take relatively simple steps during the next triennium to be better prepared for this development than it will be if the present approach continues unchanged.”\textsuperscript{164}

To further this thesis, the Committee put forward two resolutions for 1997 General Convention to consider: 1) A022, Dioceses to Promote Interfaith Dialogues, and 2) A023, Seminaries to Prepare Graduates on Interfaith Issues. A022 passed and was intended to encourage every diocese to identify “existing faith groups within its boundaries and to open channels for dialogue . . .”\textsuperscript{165} Planning forward, A023 passed and was designed to incorporate preparation for seminarians to include instruction “. . . on what it means theologically to live in a permanently interfaith and religiously pluralistic world.”\textsuperscript{166} By these actions, the General Convention appears to be looking forward to engaging more aggressively matters of interfaith relations both nationally and locally. Additionally, D069, a deputy resolution, was approved by General Convention. D069


\textsuperscript{163} Unlike Christian and Jewish faith groups, the Islamic tradition does not have an official structure of national judicatories to which a Diocese, TEC, or committee of General Convention could contact to discuss official interfaith dialogues. The Islamic tradition is much more locally directed.


\textsuperscript{165} Ibid., 117.

\textsuperscript{166} Ibid., 117.
called for “substantive dialogue between Christian and Muslim communities, dialogue that maintains the theological integrity of both faith communities and commitment to genuine human rights and religious freedom.” While the actions of General Convention 1997 were commendable, as is often the case, there was no funding for these three resolutions and they were devoid of any consequences for inaction or triggers to promote action. Thus, while instructive to the evolution of thought as expressed by actions of General Convention, these resolutions did little to further the effort toward real and meaningful expansion of interfaith dialogue and relations.

General Convention 2000 was silent on interfaith relations and dialogue as an explicit endeavor of the church. The Presiding Bishop’s Advisory Committee on Interfaith Relations was not appointed during the 1997-2000 triennium. In its place, a task force of the Executive Committee and the Standing Commission on Ecumenical Relations considered: 1) interfaith relations as a component of the Episcopal Church, 2) the structure of such relations, and 3) the goals of interfaith relations. Their report suggested the work of interfaith relations be assigned permanently to the Standing Commission on Ecumenical Relations. In part, this recommendation was based upon the National Council of Churches of Christ’s conclusion that interfaith relations are a component of Christian Unity. The report went on to suggest explicating this question of connectivity between interfaith relations and Christian Unity would be one of the Committee’s first challenges. Beyond that, only the Executive Committee,

169. Ibid.
commenting on the church’s ministry to refugees and immigrants, made a passing comment regarding interfaith relations when it noted “the profound commitment of our church to care for all in need, even those beyond our political, communal, and faith boundaries; in honoring our commandment to be a hospitable people. Our hospitality is available equally to the Kosovar Muslim or the Sudanese Christian.”\textsuperscript{170} This attitude of humanitarian hospitality toward those in need affirmed a basis for interfaith relationship and dialogue as describe in 1994 General Convention Resolution D130 (discussed above) which suggested interfaith relations should be based “on issues of peace, prayer, justice, and to find common concerns in our local communities, including hunger, homelessness, teenage pregnancy, and prison ministry.”\textsuperscript{171}

General Convention 2003 proposed and passed Resolution D010 making interfaith relations, soon to be more generally termed \textit{interreligious}, an integral component of the Standing Commission on Ecumenical Relations (SCER), changing the title of the Commission to the Standing Commission on Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations (SCEIR).\textsuperscript{172} Among the duties of the Commission are “… to recommend to the General Convention a comprehensive and coordinated policy and strategy on relations between this Church . . . and other religions . . . to make recommendations to General Convention concerning . . . interreligious dialogue and action . . . to carry out such instruction . . . on interreligious matters as may be given it from time to time by


In addition to this resolution, other actions taken during the triennium leading up to General Convention 2003 included: 1) Episcopal Relief and Development and the Office of Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations organized to create the Interfaith Education Initiative (IEI). The goal of IEI was to provide resources for interfaith education in order to strengthen local parishes, religious networks, and other groups to facilitate interfaith dialogue. 2) A website, www.interfaitheducationinitiative.org, was created to accomplish the distribution of this project. However, funding for this project was only extended to 2004. SCER, in 2003, was already planning to request budgeting for a staff position dedicated to interreligious relations at the 2006 General Convention for the newly formed SCEIR.

In the post 9/11 world, the SCER also recognized the need for the 2003 General Convention to make a declaration of the Church’s commitment to sustained and consequential dialogue and relations with the Muslim tradition. In an act of courage reflecting the evolving sense of the Episcopal Church in matters of interfaith relations as well as a growing appreciation for the complexities of a pluralistic world, SCER presented Resolution A090 to General Convention:

Resolved, That the 74th General Convention reaffirm Resolution 1997-D069 on ‘Substantive Dialogue Between Christian and Muslim Communities’, which calls for a dialogue that maintains the theological integrity of both faith communities and commitment to genuine human rights and religious freedom as affirmed by the 71st General Convention (1994-D015); and be it further

173. Ibid.
174. IEI is no longer active.
175. This website is no longer active.
177. Ibid.
Resolved, That the General Convention direct current and future ECUSA efforts at Christian-Muslim dialogue and education to embody and strengthen that resolution's commitments to dialogue, in cooperation with other Christian bodies, founded on "genuine human rights and religious freedom," as embodied in the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights (1948), Article 18, which states that 'everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship, and observance’; and be it further

Resolved, That the General Convention direct that such efforts strengthen the peaceful and secure religious witness of other Christians around the world in their ministry among Muslim neighbors, particularly in areas of experienced religious oppression.  

While providing no content for a theology of interfaith dialogue or relations, taken with D130 and A033 of General Convention 1994(see above), A090 of General Convention 2003 provided a first effort at a modern foundation upon which interreligious/interfaith dialogue and relations could be developed more fully in the Episcopal Church and its congregations.

In the 2003-2006 triennium, SCEIR explored interreligious relations in cooperation with the National Council of Churches and other ecumenical partners. However, while the SCEIR wanted to work as ecumenically as possible in the area of interreligious relations, SCEIR asserted, “the Episcopal Church has a particular perspective to offer interreligious relations,” continuing to be uncertain of NCC’s attachment of interfaith dialogue and relations to the notion of Christian unity. To this end, SCEIR conducted inquiry into the similarities and dissimilarities between ecumenical and interreligious dialogues and conversations by the Episcopal Church/Anglican efforts. SCEIR concluded “While the Episcopal Church has been


guided for more than 100 years by the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral (in ecumenical
dialogue), no similar rationale or grounding exists for interreligious dialogue.”
SCEIR created a task force to create an original statement similar to the Quadrilateral for the use
of the Episcopal Church as a guide in interreligious dialogue and relations. The task
force created a document for this purpose and SCEIR presented it to General Convention
as Resolution A056. The House of Bishops debated A056, made some amendments, and
then passed the resolution as the primary guide for interreligious dialogue and relations
for the Episcopal Church. The resolution coming from the House of Bishops had been
significantly amended from the document proposed by SCEIR. The House of Deputies,
perhaps at the request of SCEIR, never considered the amended resolution.
Consequently, the resolution “died with adjournment.” As a result of the peculiar
methods of General Convention and the limited time allowed every three years for
legislative action, this document, essential for further organized development of the
uniquely Episcopal perspective for interreligious dialogue and relations, would have to
wait another triennium for definitive action.

The SCEIR presented their interreligious report to General Convention 2009.
Noting the failure of Resolution A056-2006 to be considered by the House of Deputies,
SCEIR appointed a subcommittee during the 2006-2009 triennium to create “a more
substantive theological statement to clarify the theological and historical rationale for The

180. Ibid.
181. Ibid.
182. See A056 as proposed by SCEIR in the Appendix below.
Interreligious Dialogue-A056” http://www.episcopalarchives.org/cgi-bin/acts/acts_resolution-
Episcopal Church’s engagement with other religious traditions.\textsuperscript{184} The result was Resolution A074, ‘Endorse Theological Statement on Interreligious Relations’. A074 was approved by General Convention 2009 with significant amendments.\textsuperscript{185} Resolution A074, as amended and concurred by 2009 General Convention as a policy statement of the Episcopal Church is currently the most significant official document for the Episcopal Church’s engagement of interreligious dialogue and relations and currently stands as the foundational document for guiding all interreligious actions by the Episcopal Church. Consequently, it must be explored in some detail.

The original resolution as reported in the Report to the 76\textsuperscript{th} General Convention began with the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral as a specific basis for ecumenical conversation and suggested A074 would provide a comparable document for interfaith dialogue.\textsuperscript{186} The original resolution stated, “The Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion have had a long interest and involvement in interreligious matters” and notes the context of this interest and involvement historically “has been addressed in the context of mission.”\textsuperscript{187} This was an important caveat because the theological statement attempted by this resolution would create an alternative context for interreligious dialogue and relationships in order for it to be a more acceptable context of exchange for potential interreligious partners. Continuing from the 2006 efforts to replicate a Chicago-Lambeth style comprehensive theological statement, the original resolution sought to


\textsuperscript{186} “Report of the Standing Commission on Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations.” Report to the 2009 General Convention (New York: General Convention, 2009): 155

\textsuperscript{187} Ibid.
articulate a reasonable rationale for The Episcopal Church’s engagement in interfaith dialogue: “As we engage other religious traditions, our work must be grounded in thoughtful exploration of and reflection on the appropriate ways to profess Christianity in the context of other faith traditions. This document is an initial reflection on why we are participating in multi-religious relationships. It explores the contexts for doing so and seeks to discern the unique contribution of The Episcopal Church to such relationships . . .”

The original resolution prepared prior to General Convention was not satisfactory to General Convention in session. Resolution A074 as passed by General Convention had a significantly altered opening. The House of Bishops Committee on Ecumenical Relations provided a substitute that contained two areas of significant change to be discussed below.

First, the ‘Introduction’ in the resolution approved by General Convention was amended significantly. Beginning with an affirmation of the fundamental Christian proclamation ‘Jesus is Lord,’ the amended A074 moved immediately to Jesus’ summary of the Law ‘love the Lord your God with all your hearts, with all your souls, and with all your minds, and to love your neighbor as yourself’. The opening remarks concluded, “For this reason we reach out in love and genuine openness to know and to understand those of other religions.” Not unexpectedly, any effort to declare a theology of interfaith dialogue not containing at least an allusion to Christian hegemony cannot pass muster. Arguably, the attempt to weave the foundational proclamation ‘Jesus is Lord’ and the Summary of the Law as the fabric for interfaith dialogue is forced and formulaic.

188. Ibid.
Nonetheless, having created a serial *non sequitur*, the amended Introduction proceeds to commend interfaith dialogue for “building relationships, the sharing of information, religious education and celebration with people of other religions”\(^\text{190}\). In an odd grammatical construction, the sentence then goes on to list four qualities of interfaith dialogue: 1) “begins when people meet each other,” 2) “depends upon mutual understanding, mutual respect and mutual trust,” 3) “makes it possible to share in service to the community,” and 4) “a medium of authentic witness by all parties and not an opportunity for proselytizing.”\(^\text{191}\) Finally, the new Introduction declares, “We believe that such dialogue may be a contribution toward helping people of different religions grow in mutual understanding and making common cause in peacemaking, social justice, and religious liberty.”\(^\text{192}\) Instead, the new Introduction appears designed to insure a clear declaration of Christian primacy from which any consideration of interfaith dialogue would precede. The segue from the confession through the summary of the law to interreligious relationship is unsatisfactory and artificial, a patchwork of poor construction. While the four qualities of interfaith dialogue and relations with which this amended Introduction continues are consistent with much that is written about the benefits of interfaith dialogue and relations, the Introduction just drops them in without

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\(^{191}\) Ibid.

\(^{192}\) Ibid.
any foundation or development. Overall, the new Introduction seems designed to make some specific and/or influential interest group happy.193

Section I.2 of A074, as passed by General Convention is the same as in the original resolution.194 The basis for interfaith dialogue and relations as described by this section is a “. . . thoughtful exploration of and reflection on the appropriate ways to profess Christianity in the context of other religious traditions. This document . . . explores the contexts for doing so and seeks to discern the unique contribution of The Episcopal Church to such relationships.”195 A074 recalls the actions of Lambeth and the Anglican Communion in the area if interfaith relations. The resolution noted the challenge of “dialogue with people of other faiths as a part of Christian discipleship and mission”196 of Lambeth 1988 and its publication of ‘Jews, Christians, and Muslims: The Way of Dialogue,’ which the resolution commended for study.197 A074 recalls the 2008 Anglican document ‘Generous Love: the Truth of the Gospel and the Call to Dialogue’ issued by the Network for Interfaith Concerns (NIFCON) of the Anglican Communion; the Archbishop of Canterbury’s 2007 reply to “A Common Word,” an overture from Muslim scholars for dialogue with Christians; and “Relations with Other World

193. This is not unusual for General Convention legislation that is amended significantly during GC. It is usually reactive and poorly thought out, seeking to satisfy one faction or another without regard of the hard work done by the interim body during the triennium.

194. The original and amended A074 are the same except for sections I.1 and V.22-28. However, the changes are significant in those two sections are significant.


197. Ibid.
Religions,” Section F of the 2008 Lambeth Conference Indaba Reflections\(^{198}\) as important documents for this topic.

A074 describes the Episcopal Church’s past participation in interreligious dialogue in the following categories: 1) Ecumenical efforts with other Christians, 2) International efforts through the Anglican Communion Office, 3) Particular initiatives taken by the Presiding Bishop, 4) Task force initiatives, first the Presiding Bishop’s Advisory Committee on Interfaith Relations (through 1997) and then the Standing Commission on Ecumenical Relations (from 1997-2003), 5) Diocesan, congregational and individual efforts in peace making and interreligious dialogue.\(^{199}\) Looking forward into the post-9/11 world, A074 included several descriptions of circumstances and contexts influencing the Episcopal Church’s engagement of interreligious relations. Recognizing the dynamic inter-relatedness of the modern world enabled by mobility, communication, and technology, “peoples of the earth will either survive together or perish together . . . Crises and conflicts that were once local matters and seemed to be none of our concern are now global. Social strife, political upheaval and violence predominantly fueled by greed and/or religious fanaticism—are not distant from us.”\(^{200}\) Yet, in the US, the broad diversity of our own population was made even clearer following September 11, 2001. In its report, SCEIR stated,

Those killed in the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York came from many lands, prayed in many languages, called God by many names. They are a true microcosm of the shifting reality of who lives in the United States today, citizens and foreign nationals alike . . . As Episcopalians, we recognize that our

\(^{198}\) Ibid., 155-156.
\(^{199}\) Ibid., 156.
\(^{200}\) Ibid., 156-157.
neighbors come from a variety of different beliefs and backgrounds, and we are unfamiliar with many of if not most of them. Christians continue to struggle to find common ground and mutual respect with Jews and Muslims who are fellow children of Abraham. Whether we intend to or not, we affect and are affected in return--powerfully and profoundly--by each other’s lives, cultures and beliefs. For each of us, the neighbor often seems to be the stranger, the traveler, the Other—no longer just the person living next door or down the street, but the one who Christ calls us to receive as a gift and to love as we would be loved ourselves . . . [Consequently] The Episcopal Church faces crucial opportunities and challenges for developing new creative relationships with people of other religious heritages. Throughout the world, people of different faiths can be seen searching for compatible if not common ways toward justice, peace, and sustainable life. Our theological and ecclesial heritage offers significant resources for participating in this global quest.201

The details of these forward-looking contextual descriptions suggest a profound appreciation of the necessity of re-imaging the more pedestrian contexts of former attempts at interreligious dialogue and relationship. A074 is moving the Church boldly forward. Still, SCEIR had to address the question of the historic mission and conversion motivations of Christian Mission.

In a section IV of A074 titled ‘Scripture and Reason,’ the resolution declared,

In the Scriptures, we discover the nature of God, by their witness to Jesus Christ, in their record of his teaching, and through their proclamation of the Good News of God’s Reign for all people. We believe the Holy Spirit continues to guide us in our growing understanding of the Scriptures, which are always to be interpreted in the widest possible context of God’s redeeming love for all people. Throughout our history, Episcopalians have wrestled with varying interpretations of the Scriptures. Such differences are to be expected and appreciated as a direct consequence of our dynamic relationship with the Word of God and our experience of faith over time.202

Consequently,

. . . respect for the diversity of understandings (re: scripture) that authentic, truth-seeking human beings have is essential for communal reasoning and faithful living. The revelation of God in Christ calls us therefore to participate in our relationship with God and one another in a manner that is at once faithful, loving,

201. Ibid., 156-157.
202. Ibid., 157.
lively, and reasonable . . . It is not a unity of opinion or a sameness of vision that holds us together. Rather, it is the belief that we are called to walk together in Jesus’ path of reconciliation not only through our love for the other, but also through our respect for the legitimacy of the reasoning of the other. Respect for reason empowers us to meet God’s unfolding world as active participants in the building of the Kingdom and to greet God’s diverse people with appropriate welcome and gracious hospitality.203

The resolution further asserts,

Christianity’s Holy Scriptures reveal to us both the invitation and the direction to engage with people of other faiths. In Genesis 1:26 we meet the loving God who created all people and all nations, and the awesome majesty of creation bids us humbly acknowledge that the fullness of God’s intention is beyond the scope of our limited understanding; God’s gracious love is not confined to the Christian community alone. Because of our faith in the Incarnation of God in Jesus Christ, we expect to meet God in our neighbor, whom God commands us to love as we love ourselves (Mark 12:29-31).204

This portion of the resolution provides a hermeneutic of creation, love, and reasoning as a basis for the Episcopal Church’s movement toward an alternative context supporting interreligious dialogue in an other than missional/conversion context. Yet, in the complexities of seeming conflicted religious beliefs and competing soteriological constructs, how do we do this?

In section V (the other portion altered and amended at General Convention), originally titled ‘Soteriology and Interreligious Relations’ and re-titled, amended and passed as ‘Salvation in Christ and Interreligious Relations’, A074 acknowledges the sensitivity of the church’s conventional position on soteriology. The original resolution states, every “faith tradition addresses the human search for meaning and for an answer to our shortcomings.”205 The amended and approved resolution eliminated the more inviting and universal statement of the human quest for meaning and understanding, a

203. Ibid., 158.
204. Ibid., 157.
205. Ibid., 159.
statement providing a common basis for any person of faith to agree as a common and shared starting place. In its place, amended A074 launches into Trinitarian and Christocentric soteriologic formulas concluding in section V.22, the opening paragraph of the soteriological section stating: “We also recognize that our efforts toward the goal (salvation) are futile without the assistance of God in Christ through the Holy Spirit . . . Christians believe salvation comes through Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”206 Whatever sense of open and inviting dialogue and engagement the original writers hoped to achieve for interfaith dialogue and relations in the soteriology section of the original draft of A074 is thwarted by a dogmatic/doctrinal and off-putting rewrite of this opening section. However accurate and understood as a part of the Christians faith narrative, this revision of the original can in no way be understood as an invitation to open and hospitable dialogue and relationship.

Sections V.23 and V.24 are only slightly amended as these two sections were, in the original, statements of Christian understandings of the soteriological claims of Christianity (Section V.25 in the amended version is actually apart of section V.24 in the original and continues an affirmation of Christian understandings).

The balance of Section V must be compared more generally as the numbering between the two versions changes significantly. In the original version prepared during the triennium, V.25 made a dramatic and challenging declaration:

How might we deal with these faith claims (Christian soteriological claims) as we engage with other faith traditions in dialogue? Our claim about Jesus as the Way need not discount the authentic nature of the claims of other faiths as ways to find

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salvation\textsuperscript{207} as Christians are not confined to saying Jesus is the Way only for those who believe. We are also willing to learn from other faith traditions such insights and understandings as can enrich our own salvation story. Learning such insight is a major purpose of dialogue.\textsuperscript{208}

This original language of A074 attempts to expand dramatically the range and possibilities of interfaith dialogue. A074/V.25(original) attempts to value other faith traditions pursuit of salvation in relationship to the Creator of all while at the same time affirming Jesus as a particular representative narrative of the universal salvation story, no matter the faith tradition (see the original A074 V.24\textsuperscript{209}). While perhaps not fully appreciated by non-Christian dialogue partners, this universalizing of the particular Jesus story is mainly for inter-Christian consumption, offering Christians a dramatic way of imagining a universal soteriology consistent with a re-imagining of Christian soteriology. Nowhere in Section V of the amended version is this kind of open dialogue, based upon a universal notion of the human pursuit of salvation, whether Christian or non-Christian, offered. Instead, V.27 in the amended version states, “Professing salvation in Christ is not a matter of competing with other religious traditions with the imperative of converting one another. Each tradition brings its own understanding of the goal of human life to the interreligious conversation.”\textsuperscript{210} V.27 amended goes on to quote a passage from 2008 Lambeth citing the purpose of dialogue not to be compromise, but

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{207} Remember—the original V.22 defined salvation as relating to “our achieving the full humanity intended by the Creator, and to our recognizing that our efforts toward this goal fail without the assistance of God.” —a non-Christological definition.
\item \textsuperscript{208} “Report of the Standing Commission on Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations.” Report to the 2009 General Convention (New York: General Convention, 2009): 159.
\item \textsuperscript{209} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
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growth in understandings and trust of differing traditions. Christianity, the amended V.27 asserts, is a faith that must be lived dynamically as a way of life and not as a fixed set of static beliefs. The amended version of Section V ends in V.28 by offering a methodology for this way of life based upon a particular epistemology of ‘Jesus is the Way’ and citing a portion of the baptismal covenant, ‘respect the dignity of every human being’ (BCP p 305) as the foundational basis for interfaith dialogue and relations. While original Section V is trying to create an environment for interreligious conversation and relationship based upon shared pursuit of the meanings of life and salvation, amended Section V is interested only in asserting a rigidly orthodox soteriology based upon salvation in Christ strictly for internal consumption. Consequently, salvation is unique to the Christian tradition and expectations of interreligious dialogue has little to do with an interfaith dialogue seeking insights and understandings in the pursuit of “achieving our full humanity intended by the Creator.” Instead, as the amended V.28 states, our expectation of interreligious relations, based upon the baptismal covenant language of respecting the dignity of every human being, is that we might gain some new insights into other religions and gain new relationships with other religions through interreligious dialogue. It finishes “In mutual encounters and shared ascetic, devotional, ethical, and prophetic witness, we dare to hope that God will reveal new and enriching glimpses of a

211. Ibid.
212. Ibid.
reconciled humanity." The amended version seems satisfied if we merely get along better.

Perhaps the most dramatic and original component of the original Section V is dropped entirely from the version approved by General Convention. V.27 of the original states,

Christians bring to the conversation Jesus on and beyond the Cross. We see the Cross as transformative for every faith tradition including Christianity itself. We present the Cross as the Christian symbol and act of self-emptying, humility, redemptive suffering, sacrificial self-giving, and unvanquished love. Jesus’ death and resurrection frame the dialogue for us. Values such as reconciliation, peace-making, and forgiveness are what we bring to the discussion of salvation.

Original V.28 goes on:

Our invitation in dialogue is to ask all religions to tell us where they embody such values and how they experience and understand what we call salvation. In identifying the Crucifixion as a foundation for dialogue on salvation, Christians must be the first to allow themselves to be engaged by the symbols of salvation and the values they express, so that we can all see in one another’s salvation stories the full intention of God to save.

As we bring the profound and deeply mysterious questions of God’s desire of full humanity for all humanity (as God is the Creator of all humanity) into the conversation, the original writers recognized in interfaith dialogue and relations that we must be willing to offer radical and non-anxious openness to the deeply held narratives of the other faith traditions in order to realize the fullness of God’s saving intent. The original A074 Section V, especially in the concluding elements (V.27 & 28) offers new and creative

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217. Ibid., 160.
theological thinking for the Episcopal Church. Sadly, General Convention withdrew this bold and imaginative component from A074 and replaced it with the same old stuff.

In the matter of conversational mission and evangelism, A074 acknowledges in ‘Section VI. Mission and Evangelism,’ “Christianity (including Anglicanism) is an actively evangelical religion” 218 (unchanged in the approved version). It is clearly a part of the fabric of the Christian Church, reflected in our scripture, our history, and our actions. Interestingly, A074 chooses two passages of scripture to illuminate this issue, the Great Commission passage of Matthew 28.16-20, ‘go, make disciples of all nations’ and John 10.10, ‘I (Jesus) came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.’ Considering these passages in relation to the second portion of Jesus’ summary of the law, ‘love your neighbor as yourself,’ A074 considers the requirements of love as the proper context for considering evangelism and mission. For some, this love will take the form of living a life of commitment to justice and mutual respect for all as an embodiment to the evangelical proclamation of the Gospel. For others, it will be a more formulaic verbal proclamation of the Gospel with an invitation to conversion through the person of the Christ. For some, it will mean participation in God’s transformation of all creation to reflect God’s compassion, reconciliation, and justice, that is, to bring the hope of Jesus’ reconciling love to all. 219 However, regardless of how mission and evangelism is interpreted and exercised, knowing we live in a more pluralistic, diverse, and global world, A074 holds the Episcopal Church accountable to a standard of doing no harm or violence “to the integrity of human persons and communities” in our response to God’s

219. Ibid., v.30.
call to love in the world. In a 2003 General Convention report by the Standing Committee on World Mission entitled ‘Companions in Transformation,’ the Episcopal Church acknowledged, “In the 20th century many churches in the Global North painfully came to acknowledge that their (historical) missionary endeavors had sometimes been carried out under the banner of colonialism. Allied with movements of national imperialism, and often with the face of racism, the name of Christ was made a stumbling block.” Consequently, in the Church’s 21st Century mission efforts, as we worship God, proclaim the gospel, and promote justice, peace and love, we do so in community. . . . Dialogue and collaboration with other churches and with other faiths is a powerful witness in itself. . . . With ecumenical and interfaith groups, initiatives to encourage contact and dialogue are imperative for reconciliation amid today’s heightened tensions among religions, especially between Islam and Christianity. With all, God is calling us to join hands and speak out when religious freedom is curtailed and when the social, environmental, economic, or political welfare of communities is damaged.

SCEIR, drawing on this 2003 report’s encouragement of interfaith dialogue and relationship and a commitment to do no harm, borrowed the report’s paradigms for being in companionship in an effort to suggest a theology of companionship to replace theologies of mission, evangelism, and soteriology as the only ways for being in relations with non-Christians. Ways of being a companion in relation include:

1) Witness—we must share “the story of what God has done with us in light of the story of what God has done in Christ Jesus.” Yet “Sharing our


222. Ibid., 22.

story with others must be part of a dialogue in which we listen to the stories others share with us, whether from places of little faith or from other, deeply religious paths.\textsuperscript{224}

2) Pilgrim—“Pilgrims grow in their knowledge of God, learning as much as they share, receiving as much as they give. The humility of this orientation and the eagerness to learn from companions nurtures deep and lasting relationships. The pilgrim motif opens the door to true mutuality. . .”\textsuperscript{225}

3) Servant—“Servanthood means that we listen to the stated needs of our companions and look for signs of God’s work in them.”\textsuperscript{226}

4) Prophet—“In companionship we often find our views of political, racial and economic relationships in the world challenged and transformed. Episcopalians in the 21st century are called to prophesy both to our own church and to the world church that the Body of Christ may be a mustard seed of God’s Jubilee in the world, working justice for the whole human family from all faiths.”\textsuperscript{227}

5) Ambassador—“In addition to witnessing in word and deed as ambassadors of Christ, in companionship with interfaith partners we are ambassadors of our own church. As Episcopalians in dialogue, we must be aware always that companions are experiencing the vision, faithfulness, and integrity of The Episcopal Church through our conversation, conduct, and life. The role . . . also entails a commitment to represent fairly the life of The Episcopal Church. We should not be hesitant in being Episcopal Christians, just as our interreligious partners are not hesitant in being faithful Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, Jains, Sikhs, Bahai, or other faiths, as we are in dialogue with each other.”\textsuperscript{228}

6) Host—“God is not forcible but invites a response of hospitality. As we engage in interreligious dialogue, hospitality must be central in our response. Hospitality means that we listen to what our companions say; offer them opportunities to experience the breadth of our church; and care for one another. We are likewise called to be generous and hospitable with those whom God brings to us, always respecting the practices and customs of our partners.”\textsuperscript{229}

7) Sacrament—“As the body of Christ, the church is a sacrament of Christ, an outward and visible sign of Christ’s inward and spiritual grace. We are called to be signs of God’s mission to reconcile all people with one another and with God in Christ. The people and communities we meet are likewise sacramental signs of God’s global presence. This sacramental emphasis helps us to retain an
incarnational focus on people, relationships, and community, where God truly lives and where the most lasting impacts are made.”

The theology of companionship provides a context in which the Episcopal Church can maintain its obligation to be a living proclamation of the Good News of God as we have received it in Jesus the Christ and, without compromise, consider a new way of being in interreligious dialogue and relationship that is open and accommodating to the dialogue/relationship partner. A074 is able to declare,

We are called and committed to be in companionship and partnership in interreligious dialogue in these different ways. We believe that religions must stand together in solidarity with all who are suffering and witness to the dignity of every human being. In these ways, presence in mission becomes a courageous mode of peace-making in a violent world. With ecumenical and interfaith groups, initiatives to encourage contact and dialogue and to advocate for religious freedom are imperative for reconciliation amid today’s heightened tensions among religions. God is calling us to join hands with all, and to speak out when religious freedom is curtailed and when the social, environmental, economic, or political welfare of communities is damaged. We believe that authentic Christian witness and evangelism that serve God’s mission are compatible with authentic interreligious dialogue.

SCEIR, in writing A074, knew the Episcopal Church was moving away from the circumstances of the late 19th Century reflected in the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral. The 21st Century requires a new formula that adds interreligious dimensions to the ecumenical realities of the former time. Offering a premise for moving forward in this endeavor, SCEIR stated,

In seeking to articulate for this century the principles to be considered for authentic interreligious relations and dialogue, we offer three gifts from The Episcopal Church and the Anglican way:
--Our comprehensive way of thinking by which we balance Scripture, reason, and tradition in relationship building;
--Our belief system that centers on the Incarnation of God in Christ, and on the Crucified One who leads us to self-emptying, forgiveness, and reconciliation; and

230. Ibid.
231. Ibid., VI. 32.
With the submission A074 by General Convention 2009, SCEIR is accurate when it asserts, “Interreligious relations are no longer about competing faiths, but about mutual demonstrations of Love Incarnate.”

Borrowing from Martin Luther King’s ‘Chaos or Community,’ SCEIR concludes its report by suggesting a new biblical basis for this new way of interreligious dialogue and relationship, “Let us love one another; for love is of God; and everyone that loves is born of God and knows God. The one who loves not does not know God, for God is love… If we love one another God dwells in us, and God’s love is perfected in us (I John 4.7-21).”

The Episcopal Church, moving forward in a new century, was offered the beginning of a new, comprehensive theology of companionship, a new scriptural warrant, and a new mission imperative that embraces and celebrates interreligious dialogue and relationship as an integral part of the life of the Church. Sadly, The House of Bishops’ Committee on Ecumenical Relations, afflicted with fear and anxiety that somehow this resolution went too far, attached to sections I and V significant amendments and rewrites to the resolution as written by SCEIR and, while not doing irreparable damage to the resolution, reduced it creative and imaginative capacity for dramatic movement forward in the area of interfaith dialogue and relations.

In this instance, as we continue to move toward a new theology of interfaith dialogue and relation, the Church must consider both the resolution passed by the General Convention and the resolution as presented originally to the General Convention as it considers it

232. Ibid., VI. 33.
233. Ibid., VI. 34.
234. Ibid., VI. 33.
leadership in the whole human community, as broad and diverse as it may be. After all, it is God’s Creation and God’s humanity.

In sum, the actions of General Convention over the last 125 years offer a clear revelation of a Church evolving in its critical consideration of questions of interfaith interactions with those of other faith traditions. It reveals a Church understanding the need to hold fast to its foundations of belief while at the same time seeking space for those of other traditions and faith to feel invited into honest and open dialogue and relations. It also reveals a Church not quite sure if it is completely committed to this endeavor. Aside from the lingering challenges of A074/2009, none of the General Convention mandates for action approved over the years is in place or funded. Resolution A074/2009, both as originally submitted by SCEIR and as approved by the General Convention, represents the best declaration of the consolidated mind of the Church at this time and merits continued attention and reflection by the Church as a theological document for moving forward in the continuing search for a theology of interfaith dialogue and relations. Interestingly, only General Convention of 1994 spoke with any specificity to this interfaith dialogue and relation as a uniquely local challenge for the parishes and congregations of the Church. It remains for the Church to encourage and enable the local parishes and congregations of the Church to engage this important aspect of the faith community in an ever-diversifying American culture.
Chapter 6

Approaches to the Practice of Interfaith Dialogue

A. Towards a Theology for Inter-Faith Dialogue

The 1984 document ‘Towards a Theology for Inter-Faith Dialogue’ (TTIFD) (most broadly distributed as a part of the material for Lambeth Conference 1988) suggests if interfaith relations are to be more than “merely peaceful coexistence or being nice to one another it must be based upon a theological understanding of the activity of God in the world.”

TTIFD describes three broad and distinct theological foundations that would influence a consideration of interfaith dialogue

Exclusivism, in extreme:

“counts all religions other than Christianity as the product of blindness or even sinful unbelief . . . they are either wholly in error, or simply inadequate for salvation, and reflect nothing of the real saving grace of God . . . Christ alone is the Saviour who has revealed perfectly the heart and mind of the Father . . . relation with those of other faiths is primarily for the purpose of witnessing to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ . . .

Inclusivism, on the other hand, is willing to allow some

. . . spiritual depth is found in many of the religious traditions of the world . . . while holding firmly to the belief that God was supremely manifest in Jesus, inclusivist theories also affirm the universal presence of God’s Spirit through the whole creation. God’s saving power and presence is defined in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, but it is not confined to him . . . God is operative beyond Christian culture, bringing salvation to other peoples and cultures who may not even know the name of Jesus . . . The supremacy of the Christian way is retained by . . . Christ is the indisputable author of salvation because this is a given part of Christian identity . . . the normativeness of Jesus and the Christian way when this is compared with other ways. Jesus is supremely the standard or correct measure by which other religious experiences must be judged . . . Inclusivist theory stresses how Christianity does in fact complete other forms of religion.


236. Ibid., 7-8.

237. Ibid., 8, 9.
Pluralism argues

. . . the different religions present different images of God which represent different experiences of the divine life spread abroad in history and culture . . . This theory . . . states that the differences between religions arise from the different human interpretations of the revelation of the one God according to cultural limitations . . . Christianity is absolute in so far as it calls for a full commitment to the way of Jesus, a commitment which has universal relevance, but does not claim to exhaust the mystery of the divine truth. Thus Pluralism leaves open the question whether any one religion can claim the supremacy of religious truth prior to the dialogue between religions proper.238

TTIFD suggests the movement toward a workable Anglican theology for interfaith dialogue is in the general direction of pluralism, heavily dependent upon inclusivism.

TTIFD asserts certain biblical warrants for a workable theology of interfaith dialogue.

1) God is the God of Creation and, at the very least, a relationship through createdness by God is shared by all peoples. No matter, subsequent religious evolution, God is the creator of all peoples.239

2) TTIFD suggests a reconsideration of the Mosaic Covenant as the primary covenant of God with humanity. While the Mosaic Covenant is fairly considered a specific covenant of relationship between God and the people of Israel narrowly construed in the post-exilic context, TTIFD notes the covenants with Adam, Noah, and Abraham are more broadly directed to the entirety of the human community. TTIFD suggests the primacy of the Mosaic covenant is overturned by the New Testament expansion of the new covenant to all people. Exclusivism is replaced by inclusivism

238. Ibid., 8, 9.
239. Ibid., 15.
based upon God’s status as Creator and affirmed by the Good News of Jesus. Thus, the
goal of God’s soteriology is a restored relationship with all God creates.  

3) Election as a biblical construct is revisioned similarly to ‘covenant’, allowingTTIFD to make a similar assertion of God’s intent to enter into a unique relation with all humanity.  

4) While maintaining certain aspects of orthodoxy in application (e.g. Son of God) are upheld by TTIFD, the report considers some expansion even of the classical idea of the Incarnation. TTIFD references the possible accessibility of God’s Incarnation through Logos theology (i.e. Gospel of John preface). This ideas suggests the availability of God’s Incarnation in other times, places, and manifestations (TTIFD references William Temple’s argument that the Second Person of the Trinity was not restricted in its activity only to Jesus). TTIFD considers the Incarnation as an expression of God’s surrendering of self for the benefit of all humanity. Thus, all humanity might rightly expect to encounter God’s self, sometimes in ways quite different from the Christian way.  

5) TTIFD in discussing the Holy Spirit of God strongly emphasizes an orthodox understanding to the universal activity of the Holy Spirit. Reminding us of the debate regarding the Filioque clause in the Nicene Creed and without choosing a side in that

240. Ibid., 15, 16.
241. Ibid., 17.
242. Ibid., 18.
243. Ibid., 19.
debate, TTIFD states, “there is no reason to conclude that the Spirit is impotent except where Jesus is named.”

6) The final biblical concept discussed in TTIFD is the salvific disposition of God in the revelation of scripture. Clearly, this is the most complex challenge and requires the Christian community to remain true and honest to its faith tradition in order to consider interfaith dialogue and relations with integrity and honesty. The saving intent of God in Jesus the Christ is a central truth of the Christian tradition. Not only is the biblical narrative specific in the unfolding of salvation through the Jesus story, elements of exclusivity are clear (e.g. Acts 4.12 or John 14.6), suggesting salvation is available only through Jesus and only within the Church (as the mediator of the truth). It should be noted the exclusivity is as to God’s method, not a limitation of accessibility (e.g. the Cornelius story in Acts 10 and 11). TTIFD leaves this matter of salvation somewhat unresolved as far as providing a ‘new’ interpretation or explanation. However, throughout the Anglican/Episcopal struggle with faith/church issues possibly restrictive to interfaith dialogue and relations, the unknowable and transcendent expanse of God’s truth is referenced. A theology for interfaith dialogue and relation must manage a certain ambiguity in this area for non-Christians, acknowledging a willingness to consider a truth of God beyond the truth revealed to the Christian community in its narrative of faith. Nonetheless, the Christian community would have to share its Jesus Christ narrative honestly and openly.

244. Ibid., 20-21.
245. Ibid., 21-26.
TTIFD concludes its exploration of a theology for interfaith dialogue by reviewing four guidelines approved by the General Synod (CofE) in 1981. According to these guidelines:

1) “Dialogue begins when people meet each other” In the matter of interfaith dialogue, the reality of people of differing faiths growing in proximity (discussed earlier in this paper) is a reality. Believing God to be the source of all people, each created as a unique expression of the image of God and living in with ongoing reality of God’s presence in creation; and believing we have obligations toward all others (Jesus’ summary—love God; love neighbor [others]), dialogue arises out of the reality of our encountering the other.246

2) This dialogue, to be fruitful, must develop a mutual context of understanding and trust. We must “. . . listen and speak and search together, believing that each has something to communicate and that no one person, no single system is the depository of the whole truth.”247 TTIFD goes on “Listening in inter-faith dialogue demands that we are prepared to grapple with the religious and cultural systems through which others express their faith and that we seek to avoid interpreting what they are saying in terms of concepts and words in our own Christian system.” Likewise, our contributions to the dialogue, what we say, must be with “. . . as much clarity as possible (from) our own inheritance and cultures (and) living more faithfully in the tradition we seek to explain and offer.”248 TTIFD also acknowledges this environment of mutual trust and understanding will occasionally have to grapple with

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246. Ibid., 27-28.
247. Ibid., 29.
248. Ibid., 30.
beliefs and positions that cannot be surrendered. Dialogue can never be seen as an easy way of overlooking the essential differences leading to a form of syncretism . . . we have certain beliefs that we have affirmed we may not surrender, so also those of other religions have beliefs they will not surrender and which cannot be reconciled with ours . . . In engaging with those of other faiths we must accept that no dialogue is possible unless we are actually prepared to acknowledge the magnitude of our differences. 249

3) Service to the Community becomes an expression of interfaith dialogue. While the theological motivations for seeking to serve our fellow humans may differ or the warrants for social action may be stated in different ways, the religious motivation to serve God by serving humanity, community, and creation is virtually universal. TTIFD acknowledges this as a potential outward expression of interfaith dialogue. While there may be some differences in strategy, methods, or emphasis, there are enough areas of mutual concern to allow joint service actions to express our shared engagement of justice, peace, and compassion. 250

4) The final guideline TTIFD offers is dialogue as a medium of authentic Christian witness. TTIFD imagines “A relationship of dialogue based upon mutual understanding and mutual trust which issues in shared service to the community is for the Christian an opportunity for authentic witness: that is, witness to what God has done in Jesus in reconciling the world to himself.” 251 While at least overtly revealing an ultimate evangelical conversion strategy in dialogue (Which TTIFD acknowledges on page 34 of TTIFD), the section goes on to assert, “. . . authentic witness (cannot) be given without proper respect for the other person and their right to be free.” 252 Thus, in interfaith

249. Ibid., 31.
250. Ibid., 31-32.
251. Ibid., 32.
252. Ibid., 32.
dialogue, while there is no place for “one-sided and harsh ways of proselytism . . . Christians may never surrender a commitment to mission (witness) though the monologue is a style which should be relegated to the colonial past.” Mission in the context of dialogue, without coercion, acknowledging fully the integrity of the other above all, creates the context in which the Holy Spirit can work. It is the Holy Spirit, the principal agent for mission, who alone can convert.” This guideline does include language that suggests the process of interfaith dialogue may change us and our understandings of our faith. Perhaps an acknowledgement of the ever unfolding mystery of God’s revelation to us, whether in the confines of our Christian community or, ironically, coming from some other tradition of God’s creation.

TTIFD concludes by acknowledging, “Theology is always provisional . . .” However, reflecting a specific point in time and process—1984—TTIFD defines the current state of interfaith dialogue theology as

. . . being inclusivist with an exclusivist loyalty to Jesus Christ. We expect that God will speak to us through the sensitivities and experiences of devout men and women of other faiths. We expect our own faith to be challenged, refined and at times judged, but we are firm in our loyalty to the revelation of God in and through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. What we have to offer is only a beginning. We ask understanding, encouragement and prayer for those whom God has called to this particular ministry of dialogue with those of other faiths.

While an important contribution to the continuing exploration of interfaith dialogue by the Anglican Communion, it leaves much work to be done.

253. Ibid., 32-33.
254. Ibid., 34.
255. Ibid., 35.
256. Ibid., 35.

The document ‘Jews, Christians and Muslims: The Way of Dialogue’ (JCM) is an additional product of Lambeth 1988 focused exclusively upon the question of relations among the Abrahamic community of faiths. While this document focuses specifically upon similarities and dissimilarities of the three Abrahamic traditions and suggests the importance of thorough understandings of each faith in order to benefit constructive interfaith dialogue, the focus here is upon what dialogue is and the context necessary for dialogue to occur. JCM opens with this declaration, “. . . these faiths . . . have a particular responsibility for bringing about a fresh, constructive relationship which can contribute to the well-being of the human family, and the peace of the world . . .”257 It goes on to state “Dialogue is the work of patient love and an expression of the ministry of reconciliation. It involves understanding, affirmation, and sharing.”258 Further, it recognizes the context necessary for interfaith dialogue “is a willingness to listen to the (dialogue) partner; to try to see with their eyes and feel with their heart . . . For understanding is more than intellectual apprehension. It involves the imagination and results in a sensitivity to the fears and hopes of the other. Understanding others means allowing them to define themselves in their terms rather than ours, and certainly not in terms of our inherited, distorted stereotypes.”259 JCM recognizes “If Christians wish their own faith to be affirmed by others, they themselves must be open to the full force of the attraction of the partner in the dialogue and be willing to affirm all they can affirm,


258. Ibid.

259. Ibid.
especially when it resonates with the Gospel.”

Moreover, in dialogue, not only must they seek to understand accurately the faith and convictions of others, Christians must understand accurately the convictions of their own faith.

In describing interfaith dialogue, JCM is careful to make clear “Dialogue does not require people to relinquish or alter their beliefs before entering into it; on the contrary, genuine dialogue demands that each partner brings to it the fullness of themselves and the tradition in which they stand. As they grow in mutual understanding, they will be able to share more and more of what they bring with the other. Inevitably, both partners to the dialogue will be affected and changed by this process, for it is a mutual sharing.”

JCM serves as a brief primer concerning historic misunderstandings in the Abrahamic community of faiths and as an introduction to the possibilities of interfaith dialogue for them. In the evolving of the Anglican position on interfaith dialogue, it serves as an important, tightly focused introductory primer on the variations in the Abrahamic traditions.

C. The Lambeth Report ‘The Truth Shall Make you Free’

In this 1988 report, the bishops of the Anglican Communion agreed to significant clarity on challenging issues faced by interreligious dialogue and relations. Developing a

260. Ibid.

261. JCM provides an extensive outline of similarities and contrasts between Christianity and Judaism/Islam. It challenges the Christian Church/Anglicanism to drop historic biases and prejudices and affirm the common thread of faith shared among the Abrahamic traditions.


263. Ibid.
paradigm of “being with.” Lambeth 1988 begins with the premise that the incarnate Jesus Christ is an “outpouring of divine life rejoicing in itself and seeking to share itself. . . The very life of God is a ‘being with’ . . . Creation itself is an act of ‘being with’ . . . The incarnation is itself the definitive expression of this longing on the part of God [to ‘be with’ all humanity].” Consequently, at least from the Christian perspective, “The intimate relationship between God and humanity which we know in the person of Jesus is the fundamental paradigm of God’s relationship with the world” and the ultimate challenge for all humans as inter-human/interreligious relationships are engaged. Lambeth is careful to disassociate this from any notion of universal salvation; instead of soteriology, Lambeth 1988 declares this to be a matter of Christology and a “corrective to an uncritical reading of certain ‘exclusivist’ passages in the Bible.” Clear in their challenge, the Anglican bishops declare that whatever appears most “exclusively true of the incarnate Lord is true of one who is precisely the most ‘inclusive’ reality, the divine life (God) rejoicing in itself and seeking to share itself.” The ‘being with’ that animates God in so many ways (e.g. creation, incarnation, etc.), becomes the challenge of all human relationship—how are we ‘being with’ one another as God is ‘being with’ all creation?


265. Ibid.

266. Ibid.

267. Ibid., 93.

268. Ibid., 93.
From the Christian perspective, the consequence of an encounter with persons of other faiths is to look and listen so as to discover things yet unknown about the God of all creation, all humanity. There is in the interreligious encounter opportunity for mutual discovery, corrective, and understanding that extends beyond the limits of each perspective.\(^{269}\) The bishops assert we should not be surprised “to find echoes of the Gospel in the deep convictions of our non-Christian brothers and sisters. It would be surprising if we did not.”\(^{270}\) Indeed, “We shall be poorer when Christians stop exploring the full meaning of Christ in the light of the experiences and languages of the many cultures and religions in which human life is lived to the full.”\(^{271}\) Yet, we must do this in an honest and non-judgmental way, open to the integrity and commitment of the people of other faiths. We can do this because if God is the God of all creation, all truth is God’s truth.\(^{272}\)

This section of the report did recognize the concern that such universal consideration of God’s truth may suggest a plethora of ‘saving truth.’ In response, the report affirmed “the only truth which has saving power is God.”\(^{273}\) As to the question of ultimate salvation of other non-Christians, the bishops were willing to concede such questions to be beyond human knowledge; they extended this to suggest questions of salvation may be beyond human capacity no matter the religious orientation.\(^{274}\) Consequently, the report suggests, persons of faith in pursuit of an understanding of the

\(^{269}\) Ibid., 93.
\(^{270}\) Ibid., 94.
\(^{271}\) Ibid., 94.
\(^{272}\) Ibid., 94.
\(^{273}\) Ibid., 94.
\(^{274}\) Ibid., 94.
transcendent reality of the human experience; though structures, views, and interpretations may differ and even be in conflict; should engage in a broad exploration and understanding of the human experience (including interfaith varieties) if they hope, in any way, to apprehend even a glimpse of God’s full purpose for humanity and revealed in humanity.\textsuperscript{275}

‘The Truth Shall Make You Free’ is concerned with defining and describing clearly the nature of this engagement of humanity. Interfaith dialogue, as understood by this report, “is a common and mutual exploration of the ultimate significance of the human condition. Understood in this way, it cannot preclude the proclamation of the Gospel. On the contrary, such open and honest discussion necessitates proclamation, for we come to dialogue already enriched by a particular understanding of the significance of our common humanity, an understanding which is both grounded in and defined by the reality of Christ.”\textsuperscript{276} The bishops recognized the complexities of this dialogue and acknowledged there will be difficulties in understanding one another’s languages, cultures, and commitments. They are clear it is hard work and should not be relieved by short cuts or avoiding the hard work of listening.\textsuperscript{277} Interfaith dialogue will require the hard work of knowing one another really. The report stated, “If the dialogue is to progress, someone must take the trouble to be sure that there is a common area of discourse.”\textsuperscript{278} The implication of this report for Anglicanism is the challenge to be the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{275} Ibid., 96.
\item \textsuperscript{276} Ibid., 96.
\item \textsuperscript{277} Ibid., 96.
\item \textsuperscript{278} Ibid., 96.
\end{itemize}
“someone” taking the trouble to construct a constructive and useful environment for this interfaith dialogue.

The report describes this environment as one of mutual understanding and trust. Such trust and understanding will not be created instantly; but, by gathering together in honest and open exchange of the deepest exploration of our humanity, our hopes and fears and dreams, and our commitments, we begin to develop the required environment for interfaith dialogue.279 It is in the exchange of our human narrative, the bishops acknowledge, “we realize how much we have in common with other human beings (no matter their faith affiliations).”280 Realizing what we share in common becomes a basis upon which to develop trust and understanding. Moreover, this sharing reveals aspects of our life together that have implications for the demands of justice and fairness so redolent of our faiths. This discovery itself provides an environment for dialogue to grow and develop as we work together to pursue common goals of justice and fairness.281 To their credit, the bishops in this report did not reserve this interfaith dialogue for authorities, specialists, and experts. Rather, “dialogue may begin whenever people meet each other . . . [when we meet] we share together much of what it means to be human and, perhaps, share new insights with each other.”282 In the end, the image of ‘being with’ that informs the report becomes a mandate of hospitality for Christians in relationship with those of other faiths and challenges Anglicanism to embrace interfaith dialogue as a pattern more characteristic of our challenge to ‘do’ our faith by our actions rather than constrain our

279. Ibid., 96.
280. Ibid., 96.
281. Ibid., 96.
282. Ibid., 96.
faith by a system of ideas, doctrines, or dogmas.\textsuperscript{283} ‘The Truth shall Make you Free,’ in suggesting a paradigm of ethical hospitality as a context for interfaith dialogue and relations to occur, is at least suggesting orthodoxy must sometimes give way to a generous accommodation to the complex exploration of the human experience as humans seek to be in relationship.

\textit{D. Interfaith Principles for Interfaith Dialogue}

In 1994, the Presiding Bishop’s Advisory Committee on Interfaith Relations provided an outline report to the 71\textsuperscript{st} General Convention titled “Principles for Interfaith Dialogue.”\textsuperscript{284} The Advisory Committee wrote, “Episcopal Churches across the country are finding themselves increasingly aware of religious diversity in their own communities. We now live side by side with organized groups representing many of the great religious traditions of the world who share our concern for peace, justice, and the common good.”\textsuperscript{285} The brief report then provided a series of steps designed to support interfaith dialogue:\textsuperscript{286}

\begin{itemize}
\item[A.] Dialogue as Mutual Understanding (DMU):
\begin{itemize}
\item[1)] Meet the people themselves and get to know their religious traditions
\item[2)] Whenever possible, engage in dialogue ecumenically
\item[3)] Allow others to speak for themselves
\item[4)] Be aware of other loyalties
\end{itemize}
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{283} Ibid., 98.


\textsuperscript{285} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{286} Ibid., 188-190.
5) Prepare carefully for dialogue

B. Dialogue as Common Action (DCA):

1) Deal with issues related to living together as part of the human community
2) Foster efforts at education and communication among people of different faiths.
3) Share spiritual insights and approaches to worship that respect the integrity of each tradition

In DMU item A.1, ‘Meet the people themselves and get to know their religious traditions,’ the Advisory Committee acknowledges growing opportunities at the local level for interfaith dialogue to occur. The presence of more non-Christian worshipping communities and the development of regional and national advocacy agencies for these groups make interfaith dialogue and cooperation more and more likely. Consequently, we can achieve the goal of DMU item A.3 by letting these non-Christians speak for themselves as we engage in more and more dialogue. Moreover, because of their growing presence in our communities, dialogue partners can plan interfaith dialogue together. In this context, we can accomplish DMU item A.4 by being open and clear about those loyalties that create differences in our religious experiences. DMU item A.5 suggests several qualities of preparation necessary for constructive interfaith dialogue. Included are:

a) respect religious differences as honest and authentic,
b) every religious tradition has good and bad adherents and successful and despicable periods of history. Dialogue must be designed to compare and contrast
the best of one with the best of another and, in contrast, the worst of one with the worst of the other. Best to worst comparisons destroy dialogue,
c) differences and disagreements must be engaged honestly and openly without an effort of one to gain superiority over the other. Interfaith dialogue requires honest acknowledgement of each party’s contribution to division, misunderstanding, and injury,
d) Interfaith dialogue does not expect an abandonment of one’s own faith traditions. However, such dialogue should not be a subtle or secret form of proselytizing. Rather, as the report declares, interfaith dialogue and relations is an occasion of mutual sharing and discovering.  

In the section titled ‘Dialogue as Common Action’ (DCA), the report suggests concrete environments and actions the church can take to facilitate and encourage interfaith dialogue and relations. These environments and actions arise out of our shared aspirations as human beings living in human community. Item B.1 of DCA notes the physical and social complexities of our planet are too profound for people to avoid dialogue and relationship premised upon religious differences. As people of faith, no matter differing theologies, spiritualities, ethics, structures, hermeneutics, etc., they must consider working together through relationship and understanding rather than division, misunderstanding, or isolationism. Whether engaging issues of the environment, economy, politics, culture, human rights, local concerns, or religious freedom, people can work together in dialogue and relationship for many common issues. Item B.2 affirms the power of education as a mechanism for furthering interfaith dialogue and relationship.

287. Ibid., 188-89.
Both learning and understanding will lead to contact, and contact will lead to further learning and understanding. According to the report, it is important that people of other faiths be involved in designing, creating, and implementing these educational opportunities. Further, it is important to incorporate an acknowledgement of the traditions, festivals, and heritages of non-Christian traditions. Moreover, inaccurate negative and inaccurate stereotypes and assumptions are vulnerable to education and communication arising out of interfaith dialogue and relations. The report suggests the Episcopal Church should not only enter into these kinds of dialogues and relationships with non-Christians, but that the Episcopal Church, through these dialogues and relations, should advocate for a fuller and more accurate interaction between these non-Christians and our culture and society generally. Finally, item B.3 of DCA challenges us to engage the spiritual and liturgical distinctiveness of the Christian tradition with honesty and openness. The Church should neither water down its own practices nor capriciously appropriate symbols or texts of other traditions. The Advisory Committee encourages the Episcopal Church, with preparation and planning, to engage in cross tradition worship opportunities and experiences, worshipping with the non-Christian communities and inviting them to worship. These should be occasions of learning and dialogue, which foster understanding, and appreciation of other religions.\textsuperscript{288}

Except for the 2009 General Convention resolution A074, the 1994 ‘Interfaith Principles for Interfaith Dialogue’ is the best interfaith resource offered by the Episcopal Church for exploring a basis for interfaith dialogue and relations. While still needing expansion and development, it focuses upon the local level as the appropriate level for

\textsuperscript{288} Ibid., 187.
initiation of interfaith dialogue and relationship. Given the unusual lack of national judicatory structures in the Islamic tradition, the local level is the primary entry into real interfaith dialogue and relations with this religious tradition. As the Episcopal Church more fully develops its theological understandings of interfaith dialogue and relations, the Church should add to the collection of resources like ‘Interfaith Principles for Interfaith Dialogue.’

E. Generous Love

‘Generous Love,’ was published in 2008 in anticipation of Lambeth 2009, is the most significant document available currently from the Church of England for interfaith dialogue and relations. In the Forward, Archbishop Rowan Williams notes,

Few subjects [interfaith dialogue and relations] have more obviously grown in urgency and significance in the last few years than the whole area of relations between the great historic faiths of the world . . . Many Christians are torn between wanting to affirm the importance of dialogue and not wanting to compromise their allegiance to the one Lord and Saviour whom they proclaim as the desire of all nations . . . [‘Generous Love’] is offered for study to the Anglican Communion in the hope that it will stimulate further theological thinking among Anglicans who share the double conviction that we must regard [interfaith] dialogue as an imperative from Our Lord, yet must also witness consistently to the unique gift we have been given in Christ . . . I hope and pray that [this document] will help us find ways of understanding other religious traditions that will be both fresh and faithful. 289

In this statement, the Archbishop of Canterbury issues a challenge to cross boldly the threshold of community and communication in a religiously pluralistic world, a challenge

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likewise issued thirty-three years earlier in the document ‘A New Threshold: Guidelines for the Churches in their relations with Muslim communities.’

Generous Love begins with certain clear declarations from a Christian perspective. Foremost, God is the God of all. “We cannot measure the infinity of God’s greatness nor exhaust the mystery of his being; the religions of humanity deceive themselves when they fail to acknowledge the limits of their knowledge.”

Using an implicit universalism of God contained in the creation narratives as well as Pauline attributions of God as God of all (e.g. Acts 17), interfaith dialogue and relations begins with a confession of God’s infinite capacity that transcends our limited human imagination. While the revelation of God in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus presents to Christianity a triune expression of God’s love and God’s desire for creation to be renewed and restored as Christian mission and ministry, they are challenged to live “. . . among our neighbours of different faiths as signs of God’s presence with us, and . . . to engage with our neighbours as agents of God’s mission to them.”

The consequences of these confessions and the mission the Christian community accepts are expressed in Generous Love as:

1) The God who has created our world is generous in grace and rejoices in diversity . . . (God) created all men and women in his image, and he wishes all to enjoy that fullness of life in his presence . . . God cares for each person with a parental love; called to be perfect as our Father is perfect, we know that we must show that same love and respect to all, 2) Jesus Christ the Son of God shows us “the radiance of God’s glory” . . . He opens for us the way to the Father and we wish others to walk that way with us; he teaches us the truth which sets us free,
and we wish to commend that truth to others . . . our witness to Jesus as Lord must be attested by Christ-like service and humility if it is to be heard and seen by our neighbours as the good news of the Kingdom. 3) It is not for us to set limits to the work of God, for the energy of the Holy Spirit cannot be confined. “The tree is known by its fruits,” and “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” When we meet these qualities in our encounter with people of other faiths, we must engage joyfully with the Spirit’s work in their lives and in their communities. 

As is true in other Anglican writings on interfaith dialogue and relations, this opening declaration attempts to thread the needle between a classical Christian evangelical theology and a modern attempt at relations based upon a modern sense of egalitarianism based upon the universalism of God the Creator of all creation. The rest of Generous Love attempts to balance the classical notion of evangelism and the realities of the diverse cultural and religious contexts and communities of the modern world.

In Chapter 2, ‘Our contemporary context and our Anglican heritage,’ Generous Love succinctly describes the present reality:

We are called to discipleship in very different contexts around the world today, but in every place we encounter religious diversity and complexity . . . Aggressive and intolerant forms of believing and belonging are growing in all the world’s religious traditions; at the same time, in some societies there is an increasingly influential form of secularism which is hostile to all religion . . . Through migration and mission, faiths once largely confined to one part of the world have become worldwide in their distribution, while formerly homogeneous societies and neighbourhoods have become marked by diversity of religions. 

The Anglican Communion has experienced these gradual changes, sometimes as a willing participant with the governmental agencies of change, whether beneficial or exploitative. “In parts of our Communion, mission work was historically associated with Western political and economic expansion, and memories of that can still shape current perceptions. In every context, whatever its historical background and current pressures,

293. Ibid., 2-3.
294. Ibid., 3
we face the challenge of discerning the loving purposes of God within the religious plurality of humankind.”

Generous Love suggests three responses of the Anglican Communion to the challenges of the evolving circumstances of an ever more integrated religiously and culturally plural world:

1) Nothing is outside the concern of God, the source of all Creation. Living in a diverse world, but believing in the ultimate coherence in God in creation, Anglicans can be creatively open to and benefit from interfaith dialogue and relations.

2) Acknowledging the contextual and historical particularity of God’s revelation in Jesus, Anglicans conceive of a limitless opportunity of God’s continuing participation as the resurrection extends the particularity of Jesus through the Body of Christ, the Church. In the timefullness of the moment, Anglicans, in dialogue and relations with non-Christians, are able to consider the broadest possible implications of the catholicity of God in human culture and society.

3) Acknowledging the operative work of the Holy Spirit to be both inward for the individual and outward for the creation of relationship and community, Anglicans are 

“determined to minister to the whole communities, to find ways of enabling people of robustly differing convictions to live together so that a public good may be formed. This

295. Ibid., 3.
296. Ibid., 4.
297. An idea Joe Monti shared with me in a summer class—‘timefull’: a numinous incursion into a moment of human reality.
understanding of the Spirit as the source of ground rules for productive social life is transferable to new situations of religious plurality.”

Generous Love, while encouraging an ecumenically cooperative effort in interfaith dialogue and relationship, recognizes Anglicans are capable of making “a significant contribution to the complex and contested world of religious plurality.” The challenge is to discern how the Church moves forward to make these contributions. Generous Love maps the way forward through scripture noting the primacy of the Bible in Anglican theological method with its devotion to “living in obedience to Jesus Christ, the eternal Word of God who is revealed through the words of Holy Scripture.”

Extending the metaphor of a three-legged stool, Generous Love goes on to explain, “In identifying the message of the Bible for the present, the Anglican method brings the insights of tradition and reason to the interpretation of the text in the light of experience,” experience being the current cultural context of multi-religious interactions. Out of this, Generous Love goes on to assert, the people of God have engaged and experienced religious plurality in many forms over the millennium and that “those experiences have shaped the formative texts of Scripture.” Moreover, Scripture speaks to plurality today. Using a concept developed for Jewish/Christian dialogue, ‘Scriptural Reasoning,’ Generous Love challenges Anglicanism to a practice of

299. Ibid., 4.
300. Ibid., 4.
301. Ibid., 5.
302. Ibid., 5.
303. Ibid., 5.
304. Ibid., 6.
scriptural engagement that encourages multi-faith reading of holy writings in a way that “seeks to build sociality among its practitioners and release sources of wisdom and compassion for healing our separate communities and for the repair of the world.” Generous Love contends this kind of scriptural engagement may be a way for God the Holy Spirit to speak to people of all faiths, creating a fresh context for motivating and challenging Anglicanism into interfaith dialogue and relations for the benefit of the God’s Creation and all God’s people.

Building carefully, from this platform of scriptural engagement, Generous Love asserts, “Anglicans hold that Scripture is to be interpreted in the light of tradition and reason, meaning by these an appeal respectively to the mind of the Church as that develops and to the mind of the cultures in which the Church participates.” Generous Love goes on to explain, “Tradition and reason are deployed in Anglicanism through the lived experience of Christian discipleship in a very wide range of different contexts, and this variety has contributed to the marked pluriformity of Anglican theological approaches to inter-faith issues.” Yet, no matter the context, Anglicanism is shaped by 1) prayer and worship (we are what we pray), 2) a general concern for the welfare of the whole of society expressed in pastoral sensitivity to all humans, and 3) a subsequent willingness to enter into “deep, strong and Christ-like friendship with people of other faiths.” From this, Generous Love recognizes the potential for renewal and

307. Ibid., 6
308. Ibid., 7.
309. Ibid., 7.
310. Ibid., 7.
rediscovery of the mission of the Church in the modern world when it commits itself to a discipleship of relationship and engagement with people of other faiths.

The essay describes three dynamic patterns that guide this renewal and rediscovery of mission and ministry in relationship: 1) “maintaining our presence among communities of other faiths, we are abiding as signs of the body of Christ” to all people, 2) sent by the power of God’s Holy Spirit, we are engaging with others of different faith traditions for the positive transformation of society, 3) by “offering embassy and hospitality to our neighbours, we are both giving and receiving the blessing of God our Father.” 311 Generous Love explores a progressive biblical hermeneutic, moving toward a challenging understanding of mission and ministry in the context of interfaith dialogue and relationship. What is essential for Anglicans is the realization and recognition of the challenge “to display open and gracious attitudes to those who share those places [geography] with us. Since a presence which cannot be manifested openly to others cannot serve these purposes, we strive to safeguard the principles of religious freedom for all . . .” 312

Generous Love appreciates the complexity and challenges of its position. Christians are not always the majority, nor will their offer of dialogue or relationship always be well received. Regardless, Anglican understandings and practices must be patterned by God’s teaching of generosity that transcends retaliation. 313 Remembering the self-emptying life of Jesus as an incarnate revelation of God to humanity, Anglicans see the presence of Jesus not only in the ministry or sacraments of the Church but also in

311. Ibid., 8.
312. Ibid., 9.
313. Ibid., 10.
persons on the margins, beyond the boundaries of acceptability, and even outside the Christian community. \(^{314}\) Consequently, “our presence among them must be one of service, advocacy and empowerment, whatever their faith. We believe that in Christ God has come among us as a human living among humans, and as one who, in his humanity, crossed the boundaries which separated people of different groups from one another.” \(^{315}\) The challenge of interfaith dialogue and relations compels the Church to struggle in this complexity and live its faith as it understands faith revealed in the revelation of God in Jesus. In the context of modern living, in cultures with complex mixtures of multiple faith traditions, Anglicanism is challenged to imagine crossing boundaries that might otherwise divide in order to bring the possibility of hospitable relationships and safe communities to humanity in all its faith permutations.

The irony of this challenge and the paradox of interfaith dialogue/relations (at least as seen from a purely historic perspective) is its potential as an antidote to the modern challenges of materialism, consumerism, narrow ideologies, isolationism, secularism etc. People of different faiths, in dialogue and relationship, exploring values and beliefs, shared, and differing, and being guided by the broadest imaginable expression of the Holy Spirit may realize a shared capacity to make the world a better place for all. It is this sovereign unpredictability of the Holy Spirit that empowers Anglicanism to be free of former constraints and enter into interfaith dialogue and relations seeking to discover God blessings for the common good. \(^{316}\)

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314. Ibid., 10.
315. Ibid., 10.
316. Ibid., 11.
Using a report to the 1998 Lambeth Conference, ‘Embassy, Hospitality, and Dialogue: Christians and People of other Faiths’ by Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali, *Generous Love* describes the qualities and expression of this activity. Nazir-Ali writes of being sent to and abiding in community and relations. “These two poles of embassy and hospitality, a movement ‘going out’ and a presence ‘welcoming in’, are both indivisible and mutually complementary . . .” As the Church considers its behavior in dialogue and relationship, “we have to learn to be guests, and the proclamation we make in our embassy (going out) is in the first place the blessing of peace, the announcement of the good news of the Kingdom, and the healing of the sick.” As ‘ambassadors’ of this embassy, the job of the Church “is to meet, to greet, and to acknowledge our dependence on other people and on God.” According to *Generous Love*, the greatest expression of this embassy is in reconciliation among those who are otherwise strangers. The practice of hospitality (welcoming in) is equally important and challenging. Hospitality, as an expression of relationship development, requires “the always time-consuming, often costly, and sometimes painful process of building trust.” Without trust, differences, false friendship, superficiality and misunderstanding makes hospitality hollow and useless. Through trust, it is possible for host and guest to develop a relation of hospitality and “to learn that the spaces in which we meet one another do not ultimately belong to either host or guest; they belong to God, as do the so-called neutral spaces of public life. None of the places, situations, or societies where we meet and greet is the exclusive

317. Ibid., 13.
318. Ibid., 13.
319. Ibid., 13
320. Ibid., 13.
321. Ibid., 14.
territory of any one group; they are entrusted by God to be shared by everyone, since all humans are made in God’s image.” Generous Love goes further suggesting the Holy Eucharist itself is a reflection of this idea of embassy and hospitality—God comes among us proclaiming God’s grace and love (embassy) and God invites us to be fed at the altar of life with the sacrificial offering (hospitality). In this embassy and hospitality of God, Anglicans are challenged to understand their vocation in the world to all strangers and pilgrims on earth, seeking full relationship and understanding, and realizing together God’s purpose for all humanity. (see footnote 321)

In this paradigm of embassy and hospitality, the Church realizes the ‘other’ is “no longer over against us, but present to us and us to them, human beings whose energy connects with ours and ours with theirs, those who are fellow guests in God’s house (creation) with us.” Our relations can now be characterized by dynamism and interactivity, filled with the capacity to change each other and the world. Neighbors, no matter the differences of faith, become fellow human beings seeking to orient their lives toward the source of life just as Anglicans seek to orient their lives toward the same source of all life/Creation. Mutuality informs the common experience as God’s presence

322. Ibid., 14.
323. Four years ago, after reading this section of Generous Love, I modified my words of invitation at the beginning of the Liturgy of the Table. No matter what Book of Common Prayer Offertory phrase is used, I precede it with “All who feel called by God this day to join us in receiving the Body and Blood of Jesus at the altar are welcome.” While canonically and rubrically incorrect, I feel obligated by Generous Love to invoke this as a timefull (see footnote 296) moment. Further, it suggests an additional reason to revisit the question of baptism as a prerequisite to reception during the Eucharist.
325. Ibid., 15.
is realized and recognized in new ways and for new purposes.\textsuperscript{326} \textit{Generous Love} concludes:

Our pressing need to renew our relationships with people of different faiths must be grounded theologically in our understanding of the reality of the God who is Trinity \ldots This is expressed in a sending and being sent by the Father and the Son, and the Spirit which is eternal, yet which also reaches out into our time and space to draw us into God’s life. In our meeting with people of different faiths, we are called to mirror, however imperfectly, this dynamic of sending and abiding. So our encounters lead us deeper into the very heart of God and strengthen our resolve for interfaith engagement \ldots We will channel our energies into connection, communication, and reconciliation with other faith groups as we open ourselves to the energy of the Spirit. We will build trust through giving and receiving hospitality and embassy as we respond to the Father’s gracious invitation \ldots we must not be deterred by the risk of failure or rejection. Even in our sin, weakness, fear, and timidity, we are constantly challenged by the God who calls us to abide with our neighbours as signs of his presence with them, and who sends us to engage as agents of his mission among them. Through prayer and worship the triune God forms us to be a people called into newness of life in our interfaith encounter.\textsuperscript{327}

\textit{Generous Love} fulfills one of the primary tenets of authenticity in interfaith dialogue and relationship. Using core doctrines of the Christian tradition--the Trinity, Creation, Love, and the Sacraments--\textit{Generous Love}, instead of using these ideas as rigid dogmas demanding orthodox application, uses these doctrines to move the Church to a more open, creative, and forward looking place for the consideration and engagement of interfaith dialogue and relations. In this application, \textit{Generous Love} embodies its thesis of the expansive incomprehensibility of God moving humanity toward new directions and dimensions of relationship. In the end, it is this re-imagining of God’s continuing revelation, a revelation beyond our imaging, which moves us, with passion and conviction, to consider the possibility of interfaith dialogue and relations.

\textsuperscript{326} Ibid., 15.
\textsuperscript{327} Ibid., 15-16.
Chapter 7

One model of local interfaith dialogue and relation

In 2006, upon arriving in Kansas City to serve St. Paul’s, I was invited to discuss the possibility of working with the local Habitat for Humanity affiliate on a home build. At the same time, I was seeking a model for bringing into reality my idea of local interfaith dialogue and relations. Remembering a conversation I had years earlier with Archbishop Desmond Tutu regarding racism in this country (Tutu: “You Americans are never going to solve your race problem until you hear one another’s stories. You need to work together and listen to each other.”), I was convinced my idea required a work project and not just an event sitting around a table. As the stars came into alignment, I realized Habitat provided the perfect model. Out of this moment of convergence “The House Abraham Builds” was born.

The House Abraham Builds is a special project of the Kansas City affiliate of Habitat for Humanity. Each Abraham House is built by a consortium of Christians, Jews, and Muslims and sponsored by local worshipping communities of each tradition. We schedule build days around the weekly calendar of each tradition and do not build when, for reason of religious devotion, any one tradition would be unable to participate. Through the course of the build, we eat together on site with food prepared by the faith communities. This requires the volunteers preparing meals to discuss food with representatives of the other traditions in order to learn dietary rules and regulations that affect food choices and food preparation. We pray on site together, being intentional about praying out of our individual traditions instead of attempting to create generically acceptable prayers. Over the course of a build, we schedule times to attend worship at
locations that represent all of the participating faith traditions. We include time at worship for a local leader to discuss the worship service with the House Abraham Builds visitors. In this way, we learn about worship traditions and customs. On workdays, we work together and discuss the things people discuss as they hammer nails, saw boards, and paint walls. We get to know each other as people, each a unique expression of God’s will in Creation. At the end of construction, we bless the house using prayer, scripture, and participation from all three Abrahamic traditions. In February of 2011, we completed our third house.

The House Abraham Builds works for several reasons. First, it is structured around a common concern of justice—affordable housing. All three of our traditions support the justice premise of an affordable home. As Habitat provides interest-free mortgages, our Muslim brothers and sisters were able to join us in this cooperative endeavor of providing homes for low-income families. Second, we are structured around a physical activity. It is not a mind endeavor, but a physical endeavor. However, it is amazing how much sharing of a religious nature takes place while hammering, sawing, and painting. While suspicion and distrust might be hard to overcome in a roundtable theological exercise, we have gotten to know each other as people and workers and discovered, as Maya Angelou would say, we are more alike than different. Now, when we engage more formally on matters of faith, we do so out of a pre-existing friendship developed around the building of a home. Third, it works because from the very beginning the leadership was open and transparent about what we were doing, why we were doing it, how our religious differences would be accounted for in this endeavor, and how we would cooperate to solve any problems. Fourth, the House Abraham Builds is
celebrating our diversity and rejoicing in our growing relationships. It is not about seeking to change one another or merge into some generic unity. Rather, we are discovering value and hope in learning about and appreciating more deeply our differences while at the same time learning more about our own traditions and beliefs as we hear reflections of ourselves in the other Abrahamic traditions.

Now on a pattern of every other year builds, we are now exploring what we might do together and how we might serve one another in the endeavor to further our understanding and appreciation of our differences and similarities in the non-build years. To the best of our knowledge, this is the only purposefully structured Jewish, Christian, Muslim Habitat project in the entirety of the Habitat organization. The House Abraham Builds, started by an Episcopal Parish embodies all I imagine in the unique offering of the Episcopal Church at the local level to furthering the challenges of interfaith dialogue and relations.
Chapter 8

Conclusion

In a 1998 article in *Christian Century*, Harvey Cox wrote, “The most nettlesome dilemma hindering interreligious dialogue is the very ancient one of how to balance the universal and the particular.”\(^328\) Cox goes on to note that every world faith struggles between these two polarities. Particularity celebrates and affirms a singular, orthodox vision of all the attributes of its own unique and particular religious identity. Conversely, Cox argues, these same faiths are generative of a universal vision of the human experience in relation to the Holy that is capable of intersection with those of other faiths. The crisis, according to Cox, of interfaith dialogue exists when

the universal and the particular poles have come unhinged. Faced with a world in which some form of encounter with other faiths can no longer be avoided, the ancient religious traditions are breaking into increasingly bitter wings. Those who glimpse the universal dimension advocate dialogue and mutuality; they search out what is common and that which unites. Those who emphasize the particular often shun dialogue and excoriate their fellow believers who engage in it more fiercely than they condemn outsiders.\(^329\)

This survey of actions of the General Convention and the Lambeth Conference suggests an internal struggle, similar to Cox’s description, taking place over the last one hundred and fifteen years of Anglican history as the Church wrestled with its own particular and universal considerations applicable to its identity and to interfaith dialogue and relations. However, Companions in Transformation, a report of the Standing Commission on World Mission to the 2003 General Convention, notes the necessity of engaging this complex challenge:

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\(^{329}\) Ibid.
humans are by nature communal. As we worship God, proclaim the gospel, and promote justice, peace and love, we do so in community. As we are one body with many parts, we are one community with many gifts to be shared. Authentic witness respects other communities, whether in conflict or harmony, and recognizes the gifts they bring. Dialogue and collaboration with other churches and with other faiths is a powerful witness in itself. All Episcopal mission activity must seek to work with our ecumenical companions, other faiths and the broader community. We must seek dialogue, at the very least, and, where possible, collaboration in ministry. Our doors should open inward to all who wish to enter, and should open outward so that those within can go out to share truly in ministry with others. With ecumenical and interfaith groups, initiatives to encourage contact and dialogue are imperative for reconciliation amid today’s heightened tensions among religions, especially between Islam and Christianity.

The 1984 document, ‘Towards a Theology for Interfaith Dialogue,’ describes the church as “... being inclusivist with an exclusivist loyalty to Jesus Christ (see Chapter 6 above). We expect that God will speak to us through the sensitivities and experiences of devout men and women of other faiths.” While adequate to the state of thought in 1984, TTIFD also reminds us, “... theology is always provisional. It is out of our experience in dialogue with our Tradition, under the power of the Holy Spirit, that our theology flows. We are given to the Spirit who is with us and goes before us.” In the 21st Century, the language of inclusivism and exclusivism or universal and particular, guided by the Spirit, needs to allow for further exploration of ‘Pluralism’ (see Chapter 6 above). Pluralism, as defined by TTIFD, argues...
is not to say that all religions are ultimately the same, or equally true. . . .

[Rather] This theory . . . states that the differences between religions arise from
the different human interpretations of the revelation of the one God according to
cultural limitations. It acknowledges the historical observation that religions have
flourished in relative independence in the past. Also it claims to take more
seriously the incompleteness of any one revelation (The symbol for this in
Christianity is the Second Coming). . . . Christianity is absolute in so far as it
calls for a full commitment to the way of Jesus, a commitment which has
universal relevance, but does not claim to exhaust the mystery of the divine truth.
Thus Pluralism leaves open the question whether any one religion can claim the
supremacy of religious truth prior to the dialogue between religions proper.

[The Pluralist view] will be concerned with the way other religions might
be brought into some kind of larger ecumenical relationship where the truths of
each are seen as complementary to each other. Christianity’s witness to Jesus as
normative for all people is retained by some pluralists but it does not foreclose the
possibility that there might be other norms which contribute to a larger picture of
the work of God in the world. 333

The debate continues; yet, the trajectory of the actions of Lambeth and General
Convention suggests the Church is seeking to discover a passage illuminated by the
Spirit. While the “unhinged” quality Cox described in his 1998 article may be
insurmountable by those on the extremes, the actions of Lambeth and General
Convention provide others a path to move progressively in the direction of a pluralist
view, holding in creative tension the authenticity and truth of the Christian narrative
while inviting a genuine exploration, through dialogue and relations, of the divine truths
of other religious traditions.

The Church remains in the early stages of the endeavor to articulate a finished and
cohesive Anglican theology for interfaith dialogue and relations. Indeed, if the history of
Christian ecumenical dialogue and relationship is a barometer, the endeavor to develop a
theology of interfaith dialogue and relations may be never-ending in its evolution.
Consequently, the Church must put its heart, soul, and mind into the experiences of the

333. Ibid., 9-10.
journey, leaving to God the destination. Of course, this does not absolve the Church from the hard work of charting a course and setting sail.

A generative question for this paper is the unique role the Episcopal/Anglican tradition has to play in the journey of interfaith dialogue and relationship. Early on two particular matters pestered the consideration of interfaith dialogue generally, and specifically the Episcopal/Anglican character thereof: 1) intercultural relationships made solely for the purpose of evangelistic conversion to Christianity, and 2) the proper level at which interfaith dialogue and relationship might be most effective. The review of the historic work of the Lambeth Conference and the General Convention of the Episcopal Church clearly demonstrates the overwhelming motive in the late 19\textsuperscript{th} and early 20\textsuperscript{th} centuries for interfaith interaction was evangelism and conversion. While the cause might be equal parts colonialism and religious fervor, conversion was the effective goal of interfaith interaction during this period.

While the Church of England may have been more intentional and successful in this endeavor than the American Episcopal Church, there is little evidence that conversion of foreign populations lead to real intercultural dialogue or relations beyond what was absolutely essential for the administration of local governing activities regardless of the Anglican jurisdiction involved. Interfaith interaction and possible conversion appeared more for the benefit of imperial management than for a real discovery of the diverse complexion of religious or cultural diversity. The ‘other’ was geographically and emotionally remote from the homeland, necessitating an assiduous devotion to historic and biblical orthodoxies in matters of Christian mission, evangelism, and salvation. Cast in this way, the Church was able to camouflage the destructive harm
of colonial domination and abuse inflicted upon the ‘other,’ whether a Christian convert or not. Somehow, the destructive consequences during the colonial era were hidden from its eyes by the perceived benefits of sharing the saving narrative of Jesus. However, as non-Western, non-Christian people began to appear in the homeland (England following World War I and the US following 1965), the foreign missionary paradigm and its evangelize-and-convert methodology became less useful. These non-Christians lived in our world, worked alongside us, shopped where we shopped, and faced similar challenges of living. At the same time, they brought with them their non-Christian faith traditions and beliefs. The Church was compelled to re-imagine how it would be in relationship with non-Christian religious others. This would require a reconsideration of the mission/conversion paradigm if those efforts of interfaith dialogue and relations were to contribute constructively and creatively to social stability and harmony.

As the established Church in England, the Church of England was well positioned on its own authority to begin immediately exploring the implications for ecclesiology and society of this new non-Christian demographic in its midst. The Episcopal Church, as one of an ecclesial consortium of non-established churches in the American landscape, was dependent initially on the movement of the broad US Church community. The National Council of Churches early on linked interfaith dialogue and relations to Christian Unity. The Episcopal Church grappled with this and finally rejected the idea of connecting interfaith dialogue and relations too strictly to the Christian Unity movement. While both the Church of England and the Episcopal Church recognize the authentic nature of the call to unity as a core component of the Christian narrative, both are willing to explore the complexities of the existing theologies of evangelism and salvation as they
relate to interfaith dialogue and relations, considering unity more transcendentally and less ecclesiastically. This survey of the work of the General Convention and the Lambeth Conference suggests the Anglican tradition is willing to do this with an open mind, considering alternative implications, expressions, and interpretations of God’s revelation and the traditional and orthodox teachings of the Church.

As to the proper level for implementation of activities of interfaith dialogue and relations, since the beginnings of the exploration of interfaith dialogue and relations by the Anglican Communion, the level of engagement has been the international judicatory, academic, and primate/episcopate levels. Meetings are held, studies completed, reports written, and agreements signed. The news of these events and circulation of reports, etc usually remains at the highest international levels of ecclesial thin air. During the long years of the work of Lambeth and General Convention, few resources were generated for local, parish-level applications. The principle of subsidiarity suggests larger aspects of an organization should not exercise functions that can be carried out efficiently by lesser aspects of the organization. Instead, the larger structure should support the lesser structure, providing organization, planning, and coordination that is beneficial for the whole. Applying the principle of subsidiarity to the matter of interfaith dialogue and relations, it could be argued the most effective and beneficial level for the exercise of interfaith dialogue and relations is the local parish level. Using Kallen’s concepts of unison and harmony (see Introduction above), matters of the foundations and structures of interfaith dialogue and relations—the unison components—should be left to the highest levels of organizational structures for the various religious participants.

Consequently, creating theologies for interfaith dialogue or structuring parameters for interfaith relations may remain a judicatory leadership obligation and responsibility in dialogue with the leadership of the non-Christian traditions. However, the harmony—what Kallen suggests means “the perfection of cooperative harmonies, a multiplicity in a unity, an orchestration of mankind”\(^3\) should best be left to the people in the neighborhoods and communities they share and for whom dialogue and relations will be most beneficial and effective. The development of theologies of interfaith dialogue and relations should arise from the discoveries made at the local level of exchange. Nonetheless, it remains the work of judicatories, scholars, and associations to synthesize, from those local experiences and activities, the broader collective and reflective interpretation and consolidation between praxis and doctrine. This work becomes the work of articulating a theology for interfaith dialogue and relation.

The documentary trail of Lambeth and General Convention demonstrates an ever-evolving movement toward a more pluralistic engagement of the questions of interfaith dialogue and relations; though, the particular or exclusivist challenges of conventional evangelism, conversion, and salvation never quite disappear. The various documents considered in the body of this paper reflect the ongoing tension between the universal/inclusivist/pluralist trends and the particular/exclusivist counterpoints. Today, the Anglican Communion and the Episcopal Church has two documents from which to launch further exploration and evolution of the Anglican tradition’s participation in honest and open interfaith dialogue and relations. "Generous Love" and 2009 General Convention Resolution A074 (both the resolution as presented in the Bluebook report of

the Standing Commission on Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations and the resolution as amended by the House of Bishops Committee on Ecumenical Relations and passed by General Convention) offer the Anglican Communion and the Episcopal Church a timefull (see footnote #296) place to begin this continuing journey of exploration, adventure, and vulnerability in relation to the religious other. Premised first and foremost upon a deep and abiding belief that God is the God of the whole Creation and that God’s infinite transcendent capacity is well beyond our imagination, what the Anglican Communion and the Episcopal Church offer the world religious community as it explore interfaith dialogue and relations, is the courage to imagine beyond self-imposed ecclesial, theological, and scriptural limitations, imagine the ever-expanding possibilities of God’s intent beyond many restrictive Christian doctrines, and embrace the ultimate coherence of God’s own purpose in Creation. As the Church feels called by God, it may indeed discover the courage to be willing to take risks to discover more fully all God has to offer in the diverse community of people created in God’s image. Of course, the ultimate paradox is the Church may best discover all of this only by taking a leap of faith, embracing interfaith dialogue and relations even as it seeks to work out all of the various ecclesial details. While President Tyler may wonder why the Church is struggling so long in working out the details of this “great and noble experiment,” perhaps he would be satisfied it his Anglican/Episcopal tradition that is offering leadership in finding tangible expressions of religious diversity in secular unity as reflected in the de facto motto of United States E Pluribus Unum. 336

336. Despite the act of the 1956 Congress making “In God we Trust” the official motto, E Pluribus Unum (out of many, one) was included on the Great Seal of the United States in 1782 and was a popular Revolutionary War slogan from 1776.
Appendix A
NIFCON Lambeth 1988

The 1988 Lambeth Conference called for the establishment Anglican Interfaith Office. The Network for Inter Faith Concerns (NIFCON) was established in 1993 as the mechanism for encouraging, managing, and information sharing of all matters relating to interfaith dialogue and relations in the Anglican Communion.\textsuperscript{337} While NIFCON does not create program or activities, it serves as the primary mechanism for disseminating information and for bringing Anglicans and non-Anglicans into conversation through information sharing. Among its activities are: 1) reporting high level consultations in 2003 (2003 Bangalore, South India)/ (2007 Kanduna, Northern Nigeria), 2) providing information on declarations of understandings arising from meetings of the highest echelons of religious or academic leadership from around the world, and 3) providing reports on study meetings between Anglican scholars and scholars of other religious traditions (The ‘Building Bridges’ study series may be the most significant of these) where holy writings and theological questions are considered from differing religious perspectives\textsuperscript{338, 339} the ‘dialoguers’ about whom there is frequent reporting by NIFCON are always high level scholars, theologians, or judicatory officials. Consequently, a critic of interfaith dialogue and relations as they appear through NIFCON reporting is this soaring “into that realm of discourse one finds in an academic seminar on comparative


\textsuperscript{339} Ibid.
religions. Soon people are yawning and glancing at their watches.”

On the other side of the pond, the Episcopal Church has not established a separate office for interfaith concerns at all. Instead, this area is included in the Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations. The official web site of the Episcopal Church provides very little on this topic currently, not even pointing the viewer to the NIFCON site for further Anglican guidance on this matter. Currently, there exists no mechanism in the Episcopal Church for reporting and sharing efforts, local or national, in the area of interfaith dialogue or relations. What ‘official’ events are going on, like the Anglican Communion generally, appear to be taking place at high levels, far removed from the local congregations and local people. The most related document provided by the Episcopal Church, ‘Manual for Interfaith Dialogue” dates to a provision of General Convention 2003 and is mostly a review of previous actions with very little additional guidance. Interestingly, it is not available online and must be purchased for mail delivery. The online link to the site for purchasing the manual is no longer an operative site. A search of the web found neither other resources nor an online copy of this manual.

To its credit, NIFCON presents some resources and guidelines on its web page that offers guidance to local congregations seeking to engage in interfaith dialogue and relations. In keeping with its charge, NIFCON seeks to consolidate the resources for the benefit of the dispersed church. Below is a sampling of the resources to be found at NIFCON (http://nifcon.anglicancommunion.org):

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1) Anglican Diocese of Manchester, June 2002, ‘Why we need to develop our involvement with other faith communities’ The Manchester document begins

The peace of the world is no longer a matter of good relations between nations, but also of harmony between its great faiths. This is the great new fact of the 21st century. It involves every Christian. Our relationship with other faith communities is at a critical point. Violence nationally and internationally has resulted in widespread mistrust and recrimination . . . World peace and peace in our local communities depend on what we do next. How is our church to respond? How can we best work with those of other faiths to recognize a God-given imperative to restore hope and trust? The credibility and integrity of Faith itself is at stake: faith communities need to be persuaded that they have little alternative but to enter into a new, creative phase of relationship building.341

The document goes on to articulate five guiding principles:

a) “We acknowledge those prophetic concerns and ethical aspirations which the Church shares with many other faith communities (including non-violence and respect for life, economic justice, tolerance, truthfulness, and equal human rights shared by all).

b) We acknowledge that sharing, learning, and potential partnership with others does not mean forsaking a Christian identity or distinctiveness.

c) We acknowledge that, because grass-roots communication and practical co-operation between world faiths is still largely unexplored territory, an act of faith is required on everyone’s part (Such acts of faith often begin with small steps in the local area. We look for grassroots initiatives to develop from the bottom-up rather than to impose top-down solutions . . . It is for local congregations to act where they are).

d) We acknowledge that to be authentic we cannot think ‘local’ without thinking ‘global’( The global affects the local in that tensions between ethnic groups and religions in other parts of the world cause tension in British towns and cities . . . Both globally and locally, poverty and injustice are spiritual and moral issues before they are political.

e) We acknowledge the need to work together as Christians on developing a theology of the Church’s mission (We must explore together a theology of mission and evangelism based on both partnership and witness. The mission of the Church is to live out the Good News that redemption is possible, not in the abstract but in the particular, and especially in the way we relate to other faiths . . . Together we seek respect and tolerance alongside a sensitive witness to what we hold important . . . an openness to other faiths, with the realisation that they can

teach us something . . . cultural sensitivity and self-criticism in working with others . . . honest debate and an acceptance of difference).”

2) The Right Rev’d Kenneth Fernando, former President of NIFCON and Bishop of Colombo, Anglican Church of Ceylon provided ‘Anglican Principles Towards Better Inter Faith Relations in Our World’ (no date given):

   a. We confess our failures and lack of love, respect and sensitivity to people of other faiths in the past. We intend to forgive one another, seek the forgiveness of others and commit ourselves to a new beginning.
   b. We affirm that good inter faith relations can open the way to better inter ethnic relations and peace throughout the world.
   c. We recognize building true community [koinonia], both among persons and various ethnic and religious communities as our primary objective. We need to develop a global theology that will be appropriate for the unfolding sense of a globalized world.
   d. We affirm the importance of promoting a culture of dialogue within and among all religious communities, and indigenous traditions.
   e. We condemn violence and terrorism as being against the spirit of all true religion and we pledge ourselves to removing their causes.
   f. We shall respect the integrity of all religions and ensure that they have the freedom to follow their own beliefs and practices.
   g. We believe that the different religions are enriched by identifying agendas in which they can collaborate such as making peace, protecting the environment, eradicating poverty, and ensuring the human dignity of all.
   h. We affirm that it is important for us all to listen to and learn from other religions so that we can value religious plurality as a fact that enriches our communities.
   i. We endeavor to live out and explain the truths of our own religion in a manner that is intelligible and friendly to peoples of other faiths.
   j. Cultural diversity as well as religious diversity in our communities will be affirmed as a source of enrichment and challenge.”

342. Ibid.

Appendix B

1998 Lambeth Resolution V.36

a) . . . having heard about situations in different parts of the world where relations between people of different faiths vary from co-operation to conflict, (the Anglican Communion) believes that the approach of Christians to people of other faiths needs to be marked by: i. commitment to working towards genuinely open and loving human relationships, even in situations where co-existence seems impossible; ii. co-operation in addressing human concerns and working for justice, peace and reconciliation for the whole human community; iii. frank and honest exploration of both the common ground and the differences between the faiths; iv. prayerful and urgent action with all involved in tension and conflict, to understand their situation, so that everything possible may be done to tackle the causes of conflict; v. a desire both to listen to people of all faiths and to express our own deepest Christian beliefs, leaving the final outcome of our life and witness in the hands of God. vi. sharing and witnessing to all we know of the good news of Christ as our debt of love to all people whatever their religious affiliation.

b) recognises that by virtue of their engagement with people of other faiths in situations all over the world, Anglican Christians are in a special position to explore and develop genuinely Christian responses to these faiths;

c) also recognises that the Network for Inter-Faith Concerns (NIFCON) has been established by the ACC at the request of the last Lambeth Conference as a way for sharing news, information, ideas and resources relating to these concerns between provinces of the Anglican Communion;

d) recommends: i. that NIFCON be charged to monitor Muslim-Christian relations and report regularly to the Primates Meeting and the ACC; ii. that the ACC consider how to resource NIFCON adequately both in personnel and finance; iii. that all the other official Anglican networks should be encouraged to recognize the inter-faith dimensions to their work.”344


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Appendix C

2006 Resolution A056

Non-underlined and underlined original resolution. Underlined eliminated from amended version; italics added to amended version; non-underlined retained in the amended version.

“Resolved, the House of ____ concurring, that the 75th General Convention acknowledge our baptismal identity as essential to who we are as Christians, and that it commits us, among other things, “to serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbors as ourselves” (BCP page 305), and be it further

Resolved, That the 75th General Convention of the Episcopal Church endorse the following statement as a basis for engaging in interreligious dialogue: We affirm that the universe is the creation of a single loving God and is ours to care for in accordance with God’s purposes of respecting and honoring all who are created in the image of God (BCP, Catechism, page 846). We acknowledge that the human family is broken by the power of sin and that Jesus’ Good News was given to the Church so that, with the help of God, we may live in harmony with God, within ourselves, with our neighbors, and with all creation (BCP, Catechism, page 849). We affirm the foundational Gospel proclamation that “Jesus is Lord” (I Cor.12:3), and therefore we affirm the centrality of Jesus’ Summary of God’s Law which calls upon us to love the Lord our God with all our hearts, with all our souls, and with all our minds and to love our neighbor as ourselves (Mark 12:29-31; BCP, Catechism, page 851). For this reason we reach out in love and genuine openness to know and to understand those of other faiths. And that this first, great commandment leads to God’s command to love
our neighbors as ourselves (BCP, Catechism, page 851). Therefore we commend to all our members dialogue for building relationships, the sharing of information, religious education, and celebration with people of other religions as part of Christian life with the understanding that:

1. dialogue begins when people meet each other
2. dialogue depends upon mutual understanding, mutual respect and mutual trust
3. dialogue makes it possible to share in service to the community
4. dialogue is a medium of authentic witness by all parties and not an opportunity for proselytizing

We believe that such dialogue may be a contribution toward helping people of different religions grow in mutual understanding and make common cause in peacemaking, social justice, and religious liberty. We further commend that dioceses, parishes, and other organizations of the Episcopal Church initiate such dialogue in partnership with other Christian Churches and in consultation with other provinces of the Communion, where appropriate in all cases.”

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