



## **Building towards the future**

### **A statement from the Nairobi conference on theological education held within the GAFCON meeting, October 2013**

The first aim of the GFCA is the proclamation and defence of the gospel, especially in and through Anglican churches.

In order to fulfil this aim the single most strategic thing we can do is to strengthen theological education. We must do this at every level, from theological faculties to ordained pastors and evangelists to new Christians in local churches and family groups in their homes. It is the most strategic thing because only if it is done well will every other part of the work be done well, from parish ministry to mission to community development. We will have succeeded wherever Anglican Christians have acquired a thirst for sound doctrine and systematic Bible exposition, and where the fruits of this are borne out in biblically-shaped patterns of Christian living and witness in the world.

In this endeavour we enter a battle-ground, with various groups within the Anglican Communion seeking to determine the long-term shape of theological education, because they recognise that where theological colleges lead, the church will eventually follow. We need a global approach to help equip Anglican theological colleges to promote and defend historical Christianity. Building up the quality of the theological education we offer is a huge task, and many will be involved in it, of whom the GFCA is one partner. The main players must of course be the theological colleges themselves, with the involvement of diocesan organisations, missionary agencies, accrediting bodies and so forth.

Naturally the goal of strengthening theological education—that is to say, helping believers deepen their knowledge of God in Scripture, and equipping them to make him known—extends beyond the walls of theological colleges, and the question of how better to educate all our people in the knowledge and love of the Lord must be high on any agenda. Nevertheless the focus of this conference has been theological educators first and foremost, and the students and curriculum of the colleges in which they serve.

### **Resolutions of the conference**

#### **1. The importance of theological education**

Theological education is vitally important for the survival of a faithful church into the next generation – but it must be theological education built on the knowledge of God as found in the inspired Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. There is no place in God's church for academic study of the Bible which does not produce lives transformed by the God of the Bible.

#### **2. Graduate attributes**

First we must ask what sort of persons are needed to grow and guard God's church. From this we can determine what sort of an education is needed, under God, to shape these persons. The attributes we seek in our graduates must be seen all the more in their teachers.

We seek to raise up men and women who:

- 2.1 having come to a new life in Christ, are deeply committed to the truth, coherence, relevance and authority of Scripture;
- 2.2 read the Bible as one divinely-authored account by which God reveals himself to us in Christ through the inspiration of the Spirit;
- 2.3 bring biblical and theological reflection to bear upon all forms of ministry practice;
- 2.4 demonstrate, by their manner of life, that the word of God has filled them with love for him, a mature and robust trust in him, and a heart to disciple and shepherd others in joyful sacrifice;
- 2.5 powerfully proclaim the word of God through clear and faithful exposition of the Bible's message;
- 2.6 make faithful disciples wherever they are, and defend and advance the Christian faith in every situation;
- 2.7 can bring Scripture to bear on the complexities of the cultural and intellectual context in which Christian ministry is conducted;
- 2.8 grow as life-long learners and teachers, until they are equipped to raise up the next generation of pastor-teachers for God's church.

### **3. Reading the inspired Scriptures**

Reading Scripture is no mere intellectual exercise, for by its words God speaks to us and makes himself present to us in judgment and salvation. The Bible demands to be read as a single Christ-shaped narrative. By reading it this way, we not only hear the message it was written to convey, but secure that message against claims that the Bible has different meanings for different times and cultures.

### **4. Building a theological programme on the Bible**

Every element of a theological programme must grow out of the faithful and obedient reading of Scripture. True doctrine must be constantly conformed to the norm of Scripture; faithful preaching must work to translate the unchanging message of the Scriptures into the language of every culture and context. If we do not build everything we do intentionally on Scripture, we will raise pastors whose faith and practice comes to rest on something else. Faculty in every subject area – doctrine, ethics, pastoral ministry, mission – must systematically bring the Bible to bear on their discipline. The Bible must be the focus of our common life. We cannot afford to shrink from the costs in time and money of a biblically-based curriculum, because we are convinced that theological education is foundationally biblical.

### **5. Prioritising of theological education by provinces and dioceses**

The first responsibility for addressing the challenge of theological education lies at home, and we encourage every province and diocese within the GFCA to place the future of theological education high on its agenda. We believe this should involve voting out of their income something for the support of students and faculty. It is important that bishops and others should seek out and

encourage the very best candidates to enter theological training. As for faculty, it takes not only money but time and patience to find servant-hearted, ministry-minded people, train them to serve on faculties, and then support and nurture them in their task. Healthy colleges require a healthy partnership between college, diocese and the churches, and once lay people acquire a thirst for good teaching through the help of lay education, TEE, and – above all – the ministry of excellent graduates, theological colleges can begin to take their deserved place at the heart of the churches' life.

## **6. Commitment to theological education by the Global Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans (GFCA)**

We grappled with some of the problems besetting theological education in different parts of the world, and considered how we may come together in partnerships to address them. What might a theological college network look like? Some possibilities we would encourage the GFCA to explore include:

- 6.1 Hosting a site for exchange of information and intercommunication between individual theological educators, including Anglicans teaching in non-Anglican institutions;
- 6.2 Facilitating formal relationships between GFCA-affiliated institutions;
- 6.3 Setting and monitoring standards for colleges to meet in order to affiliate with the GFCA;
- 6.4 Initiating occasional conferences for theological educators;
- 6.5 Providing special support for 'college planters' and newly-formed colleges;
- 6.6 Facilitating faculty exchange, both for short intensives and for visiting lectureships;
- 6.7 Helping to secure scholarships and other sources of funds for the training of faculty;
- 6.8 Raising up research scholars and promoting a culture of research;
- 6.9 Assisting with curriculum and syllabus development;
- 6.10 Making teaching and coursework resources available to smaller colleges;
- 6.11 Hosting or connecting to free, web-based resources;
- 6.12 Commissioning translations of important texts into local languages;
- 6.13 Encouraging the production of new material, especially by local scholars;
- 6.14 Encouraging the provision of suitable TEE programmes both for under-trained clergy as well as for lay people in general;
- 6.15 Pursuing partnerships with like-minded agencies.

To realise some or all of these possibilities we would encourage the GFCA to consider forming a committee or group in which a number of college representatives come together to further the aims of the network, e.g. by initiating and coordinating its activities. In addition the GFCA should consider employing one or more people to keep networks operating smoothly, communicate regularly with members, maintain a website and social media sites, produce a periodical online magazine, expand the membership base, keep theological education high on the agenda of GFCA bishops and other leaders, track down or commission resource materials, convene meetings, liaise with sister organisations, pursue funding, go to relevant conferences and meetings, make field visits, and so on.

**The theological education conference group**

**October 25, 2013**