

# Gafcon Task Force on Women in the Episcopate

## *INTERIM REPORT (2019)*

*NOTE [June 2019]: The Task Force on Women in the Episcopate (TFWE) presented an Interim Report on its work to the Gafcon Primates Meeting in April 2019. The Primates received the Interim Report with thanks, and in accordance with the recommendation of continued prayer, consultation and continued study, the Primates authorised the Task Force to continue its work, sharing the Interim Report with church and theological leaders in the Gafcon fellowship. As part of this deliberation, we are posting the introductory Parts of the Interim Report below.*

### **CHAIRMAN'S PREFACE**

Greetings in Christ to All!

I am happy to commend this *Interim Report* for reflection and further discussion within the Gafcon fraternity.

The subject of women in the episcopate is beginning to appear in the discussions even in the regions of the Church where the subject has not been so central or controversial as it has been in the West. It has therefore been of great value to meet together with brothers and sisters from Africa, North and South America, UK, Australia, and Asia. We have seen the value of careful study of Scripture and asking how far the historic episcopate can be “locally adapted,” as the Lambeth Quadrilateral states. As Gafcon seeks to uphold the faith once for all delivered to the saints, we are committed to continuing study and consultation until such a time as we can say together, “It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us.”

I want to thank the Gafcon Primates Council for entrusting us with this task and the convener, Professor Stephen Noll, for his work in organizing our meetings and producing this Interim Report. I also want to thank members of the Task Force for their involvement in time, fellowship and prayer.

May God guide us as we seek to order our common life to proclaim Christ to the nations.

The Rt. Rev. Dr. Samson Mwaluda  
Chairman, Task Force on Women in the Episcopate

## **CONVENER'S PREFACE**

This *Interim Report* collects the various materials studied and written by the Task Force on Women in the Episcopate, established by the Gafcon Primates Council in May 2015.

The Global Anglican Future Conference met in 2008 because of what it perceived was a “false gospel” relating to sexuality that was being promoted by some Anglican churches and condoned by the “Instruments of Communion.” In the Jerusalem Declaration, Gafcon articulated fourteen fundamental principles of Christian and Anglican identity. Several of these principles undergird our study.

Fundamental to our study is the authority of the Bible:

2. We believe the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God written and to contain all things necessary for salvation. The Bible is to be translated, read, preached, taught and obeyed in its plain and canonical sense, respectful of the church’s historic and consensual reading.

A second principle involves the right ordering of the church:

7. We recognise that God has called and gifted bishops, priests and deacons in historic succession to equip all the people of God for their ministry in the world. We uphold the classic Anglican Ordinal as an authoritative standard of clerical orders.

A third principle concerns the right order of the sexes and family:

8. We acknowledge God’s creation of humankind as male and female and the unchangeable standard of Christian marriage between one man and one woman as the proper place for sexual intimacy and the basis of the family.

A fourth principle has to do with the ecumenical unity of Christ’s church, the Body of Christ:

11. We are committed to the unity of all those who know and love Christ and to building authentic ecumenical relationships.

While there is a variety of practices among churches, the vast majority of “episcopally-ordered” churches recognize male bishops only, as has been clear in various Anglican dialogues.

One final principle has to do with how the church confers on questions of unity and diversity:

12. We celebrate the God-given diversity among us which enriches our global fellowship, and we acknowledge freedom in secondary matters. We pledge to work together to seek the mind of Christ on issues that divide us.

The Task Force has been committed to seeking the mind of Christ within the God-given diversity of members who hold the common faith. Members were appointed who hold diverse views on the matter at hand; in many cases, their views only emerged and even changed as we met. Several women members were added to the Task Force in 2016, not because they held a predictable view (they don't) but because they brought new perspectives of women's life and ministry in the Church.

There has been no fore-ordained conclusion to our work. The Task Force's prime recommendation to "retain the historic practice of the consecration of men only as bishops" is conditional: "until and unless a strong consensus to change emerges after prayer, consultation and continued study of Scripture among the GAFCON fellowship." Some may conclude that arriving at such a consensus is impossible. I would challenge such skepticism. If we believe that God's Word is truth and that the Holy Spirit leads the Church into all truth, we must not give up on coming to one mind, which includes the possibility that diverse practices may be acceptable under the sovereignty of God.

This is not a book aimed at academic scholars, although the contributors are scholars and church leaders. Most of the writers have full-time jobs, and we asked them to provide insights from their knowledge without extensive notes. We have added a select bibliography, including some important works on the subjects covered.

This is an interim report. Our work is not complete. We concluded, however, that it would be useful to make these findings available, in hard or soft copy format. Depending on the reception of this report, the Task Force on Women in the Episcopate, at the direction of the Primates, will continue the task of seeking God's mind under the guidance of the Spirit.

Stephen Noll  
Lent 2019

# PART 1: THE REPORT

## **Introduction**

The Task Force on Women in the Episcopate completed the first phase of its work in January 2017 and submitted its [Report to the Primates](#) at its meeting the following April. At that time, the Task Force's recommendation became problematic because the Archbishop of South Sudan announced that he had consecrated a woman as assistant bishop (see the February 2018 [Statement](#) from the General Secretary). Hence the Primates issued the following Resolution:

That the Primates Council thanks the Task Force for all the work involved in producing this Report, (and) while recognising that there are different view in the consecration of women to the episcopate, encourages the provinces of GAFCON to continue to study the Scriptures, to consult with one another and to pray that God will lead us to a common mind on this issue, and ask the Task Force to provide us with the theological resources to assist us.

At the same meeting, the Primates authorised the formation of a “Panel of Assistors,” now titled “Panel of Advisors” – a bishop, clergy, and lay representative from each Gafcon Province or Branch. In February and March 2018, Dr. Noll on behalf of the TFWWE attended the formative meetings of the Panels – in Chile (the Americas), Sydney (Oceania), Kenya (Africa) and England (UK, Ireland) – and presented the Report for their consideration. The Panels, which included varied views on the question of women in the episcopate, unanimously recommended approval of the Report to the Primates when they met again in April 2018 in Entebbe, Uganda.

The Primates received the Report and approved the primary recommendation

**that the provinces of GAFCON should retain the historic practice of the consecration only of men as bishops until and unless a strong consensus to change emerges after prayer, consultation and continued study of Scripture among the GAFCON fellowship.**

The present *Interim Report* is intended to forward the process of consultation as commended in this recommendation.

# Task Force on Women in the Episcopate

## Final Report to the GAFCON Primates

27<sup>th</sup> January 2017

The Task Force on Women in the Episcopate was authorized by the Primates in April 2015 “to consider the subject of the consecration of women bishops.” It held a preliminary meeting in October 2015 (Mukono, Uganda) and a subsequent plenary meeting in January 2016 (Charleston, USA). The latest meeting was held at Uganda Christian University in Mukono from 25-27 January of this year. We thank the University for its gracious hospitality.

Following the direction of the Primates in April 2016, the Task Force added two female members: Dr. Ruth Senyonyi, a lay woman, professional counselor, and head of Mother’s Union in Uganda; and the Venerable Kara Hartley, an ordained deacon and Archdeacon of the Diocese of Sydney. Hence the Task Force represented women from all orders: laity, diaconate, and presbyterate, as well as a bishop’s wife. A list of members is attached. We note with regret the untimely death, shortly before our meeting, of one of our members, the Rev. Dr. Mike Ovey. We thank God for Mike’s valuable contribution to the Task Force before his death.

Task Force members have read relevant books and articles, and it has produced a number of documents of its own. It sought the advice of its Consultant, Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali, in person and via skype. It requested a separate paper on biblical interpretation from Dr. Grant LeMarquand, Bishop of the Horn of Africa. An index of materials written and reviewed is available on request.

The Task Force circulated an extensive questionnaire to its members, seeking the views of the various GAFCON Provinces on the question of women in the episcopate. While the responses to the questionnaires were necessarily “snapshots,” they revealed the diversity present in our movement and the need for further teaching and sharing across our borders.

Above all, the Task Force has sought to be faithful to Scripture, God’s Word written. We recognize that some things in Scripture are hard to understand and require the spiritual virtue of *patience*, “bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:2; 2 Peter 3:15-17).

In this spirit, we humbly submit this Report to the Primates’ Council.

Sincerely yours in His Name,

The Rt. Rev. Samson Mwaluda  
Chairman

The Rev. Prof. Stephen Noll  
Convener

11 February 2017

## **GAFCON Task Force on Women in the Episcopate - Report to Primates**

**SUMMARY: It is our prime recommendation that the provinces of GAFCON should retain the historic practice of the consecration only of men as bishops until and unless a strong consensus to change emerges after prayer, consultation and continued study of Scripture among the GAFCON fellowship.**

1. It is clear that several provinces would be alienated by the consecration of women to the episcopate and one would find it difficult if women were permanently precluded from consecration. Other provinces have a variety of views and are content to wait until a consensus is reached.<sup>1</sup>
2. Various understandings emerged in our discussion, but we were one in our commitment to the authority and unity of Scripture and the centrality of Christ and the gospel. This common ground was also reflected in the scholarly contributions we had requested on the interpretation of Scripture and how to read Scripture when there is disagreement.
3. In particular, we considered the balance between general principles (for example, Galatians 3:28 about equality in Christ) and specific instructions for church order (for example, 1 Timothy 2:12). The Anglican principle of Scripture interpreting Scripture (Article XX) would lead us to expect a harmonious reading of Scripture.
4. We received a number of reports from Nigeria, Uganda and Sydney about the work of lay women's organisations with structured ministry roles. We praised God for the variety of women's ministry in the Anglican Communion and recognized our often shallow knowledge of such ministry beyond our own provinces. We were encouraged to think that further discussion might lead us to find new and creative forms of ministries by women beyond the traditional orders of bishop, priest and deacon.
5. The household of the Bishop has a defining public role and brings into focus the close relationship between leadership in the human family and leadership in the family of the Church (see Ephesians 5:21-33, 1 Timothy 3:1-5). We heard testimony of the way that the ministry of bishops' wives enriches the Church, in particular the leadership of the Mothers Union, and maintaining this order will strengthen church and family.
6. It also seems appropriate therefore to re-examine the assumption that ordination is a ladder leading from the diaconate through the presbyterate to the episcopate. For instance, we noted the existence of a permanent diaconate where a candidate understood that he or she was being called to one office of ministry. With regard to the episcopate, Bishop Michael Nazir Ali, for instance, has demonstrated

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<sup>1</sup> The Task Force circulated comprehensive questionnaires to all of its provincial members and evaluated their responses.

that the bishops of the early church were not simply seen as promoted presbyters, but uniquely represented apostolic continuity.

7. The concern for unity arises because a bishop, as the chief minister of the diocese, unlike a presbyter, specifically represents the Church both to the world and also to other Churches. Mutual recognition has been possible within the GAFCON movement so far because all the bishops have been male, despite different 'integrities' at the presbyteral level. And in this context, we note the particular difficulty for those of the Anglo-Catholic tradition who cannot recognise a consecrated woman as a bishop, nor any priests or deacons ordained by her.
8. Having studied the theological positions set out in the Church of England's Rochester Report of 2004, we were distressed to realise that the consecration of women bishops in England had gone forward without proper regard for the biblical and theological views of Conservative Evangelicals and Anglo-Catholics, repeating a pattern already evident in The Episcopal Church of the United States. Much of the debate has been dominated by the language of secular rights rather than a theological understanding of Holy Orders as found in the classic Ordinal.
9. The wider context is that the 1988 Lambeth Conference legitimised a flawed process of "open reception" in which the demand for recognition of pre-emptive actions outweighed the authority of Scripture. As one of our number observed, "Yesterday's solutions are today's problems." We now have an opportunity to revisit this too hasty 'reception' process. We recommend that the GAFCON Churches should focus on strengthening ministries by women before pressing forward to consecrate women as bishops.
10. We therefore propose that specific action be taken to help the GAFCON movement to come to a common mind:
  - a) Increased cross-provincial consultation and awareness facilitated by the Task Force
  - b) Collation of the documents we have used as an online resource
  - c) Synodal consideration by the assembled bishops at Jerusalem 2018, including input from the various ministries of women, such as bishops' wives, Mothers Union and ordained women.

In conclusion, we are aware that GAFCON, as 'not just a moment in time, but a movement in the Spirit'<sup>2</sup>, is called to deal with historically unprecedented cultural changes, particularly with regard to human sexuality. There is therefore wisdom and humility in caution about changing practices established for nearly two millennia and it was noted that the Nicene Creed was the product of many years of debate in the Early Church.

It is our prayer that the GAFCON member provinces and dioceses will bear with one another and maintain our God-given unity. We trust that as we come together humbly and patiently to the inspired Scriptures we shall not be conformed to this world but transformed by the renewal of our minds and truly discern what is the will of God (Romans 12:1).

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<sup>2</sup> GAFCON Jerusalem Statement 2008

## **TASK FORCE ON WOMEN IN THE EPISCOPATE (TFWE)**

### **KENYA**

**The Rt. Rev. Dr. Samson Mwaluda**

**Chairman**

Bishop Emeritus of Diocese of Taita Taveta  
Voi, KENYA

### **NIGERIA**

**The Most Rev. Ikechi Nwachukwu Nwosu**

Archbishop of Abia Ecclesiastical Province and Bishop of Umuahia Diocese  
Umuahia, Abia State, NIGERIA

**Dr. Mrs. Ngozi Okeke**

Former member, GAFCON Theological Working Group  
Onitsha, Anambra State. NIGERIA

### **RWANDA**

**The Rev. Canon Dr. Antoine Rutayisire**

Principal, Kigali Anglican Theological College  
Kigali, RWANDA

### **TANZANIA**

**The Rt. Rev. Stanley Hotay**

Bishop of Mount Kilimanjaro  
Arusha, TANZANIA

### **UGANDA**

**The Rev. Canon Dr. Alfred Olwa**

Dean, Bishop Tucker School of Divinity and Theology, Uganda Christian University  
Mukono, UGANDA

**The Rev. Dr. Rebecca Nyegenye**

University Chaplain, Uganda Christian University  
Mukono, UGANDA

**Dr. Ruth M. Senyonyi<sup>3</sup>**

Provincial President, Mother's Union Uganda

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<sup>3</sup> Dr. Ruth Senyonyi was ably represented at the January 2017 meeting by Mrs. Kedrace Turyagyenda, Commissioner of Education Standards in the Republic of Uganda. Mrs. Turyagyenda is a lay preacher in the Church of Uganda and represented the Church at several GAFCON meetings.



Counsellor, Bank of Uganda  
Mukono, Uganda

## **SUDAN**

**The Most Rev. Alapayo Manyang Kuctiel Nhiera**  
Archbishop and Bishop of Rumbek Diocese  
Episcopal Church of South Sudan and Sudan (Anglican)  
Rumbek, Lakes State, SOUTH SUDAN

## **NORTH AMERICA**

**The Rev. Dr. Stephen Noll (ACNA)**  
Professor Emeritus, Trinity School for Ministry  
Sewickley, Pennsylvania, USA

**Convener**

## **SOUTH AMERICA**

**The Ven. Sammy Morrison**  
Archdeacon of Valparaíso. Diocese of Chile  
Viña del Mar, Chile

## **MYANMAR**

**The Rev. Dr. Paul Myint Htet Htin Ya**  
General Secretary, Church of the Province of Myanmar  
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## **SYDNEY (AUSTRALIA)**

**The Rev. Canon Dr. Mark Thompson**  
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**The Ven. Kara Hartley**  
Archdeacon for Women's Ministry, Diocese of Sydney  
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## **UNITED KINGDOM**

**The Rev. Dr. Mike Ovey [deceased 7 January 2017]**  
Principal, Oak Hill Theological College  
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**Consultant**