



# ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY

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8<sup>th</sup> July 2020

## **A Letter to the Bishops and Spouses of the Anglican Communion about the Lambeth Conference**

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith—being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed. (1 Peter 1:3-7)*

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, your Graces, my Lords,

We are all living in unprecedented times and every day, I am heartened to see how Anglicans around the world are rallying to respond in such practical and creative ways to the impact of this pandemic. I give thanks to God for each one of you and the essential leadership roles you are playing, as you serve and support your church communities through this crisis.

It is clear that the global situation remains critical. Even those very few countries that have not had cases of Coronavirus are profoundly impacted by the economic effects. Poverty, hunger, war and disease challenge almost all of us. Truly we are being tested and the whole Church of Christ, including the Anglican Communion, is rising to the challenge.

We are also aware that the current circumstances are leading us into a world shaped differently. This must have an impact on the shaping of the Lambeth Conference.

As with most large scale events and international gatherings of this nature - planning and preparations for events in such an unstable climate is difficult. Since my announcement in March, of a delay until 2021 the Lambeth Conference Company and organising teams have continued to monitor the pandemic crisis and consider the likely implications for the conference. Together, we have consulted with Primates and bishops from the Anglican Communion about the impact of COVID-19 in their countries and followed relevant advice from public health authorities as it has become available. I have spoken personally to all the serving Primates during the last three weeks.

The advice is unanimous from those Primates of Provinces planning to attend the 2020 conference if it had taken place.

First, 2021 is too risky. The pandemic is likely to be still widespread. The economies of the world will be suffering. Travel restrictions and quarantines are likely still to be in force. We do not expect a vaccine to be widely available.

Secondly, we must meet to pray together and seek the guidance of the Spirit and a common understanding through the study of scripture so as to be God's church for God's world. We must meet before too long.

Thirdly the whole Anglican family, to the extent they wish and is possible, must be involved.

I have therefore after much prayer and extensive advice decided as follows:

- To delay the physical meeting of Bishops and spouses until 2022, for about 12 days or so during July and/or August. The dates will be firmed up soon.
- In the next two years to develop and carry out a series of virtual meetings, having aided capacity building in areas where communications are difficult to the extent we can. These meetings will be interregional, intra-regional subject based and include bishops, spouses, priests and laity in different ways and different combinations. In this way we reflect our catholicity with the historic episcopacy locally adapted and our reformed tradition affirming the priesthood of all believers and the call to serve one another.
- The subjects covered will be those planned for the conference this year and more, there will also be discussions on those issues that divide us. The aim of this period is for Bishops and Spouses to arrive in 2022 very well prepared with much work done.
- After the 2022 conference we will spend time in following up our sense of God's call with two more years on a similar pattern to the pre-conference gathering.

The vision is to renew our sense of mutual belonging and to seek the energy of the Holy Spirit for the challenge of the post COVID world, to make Christ known and give Him all the glory.

My wife Caroline and I send our greetings to all the bishops' spouses that are also attending the conference. Together, we pray may God keep you and bless you.

To keep up to date with information about the Lambeth Conference visit the conference web site ([www.lambethconference.org](http://www.lambethconference.org)). Should you have any other questions please do first check the conference website and the 'frequently asked questions' section or email: [info@lambethconference.org](mailto:info@lambethconference.org)

In the peace of Christ, risen and glorified Lord and Saviour

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Justin Welby". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a cross at the beginning.

**The Most Reverend and Right Honourable Justin Welby  
Archbishop of Canterbury, Primate of All England and Metropolitan**