



Photo: Lambeth Palace

The Lambeth Conference Design Group takes a break from a planning session for the 2008 gathering of bishops of the Anglican Communion.



Seeing Jesus in the 2008 Lambeth Conference

Sixth of a nine-part series on the Lambeth Conference and the Anglican Communion.

By Ian T. Douglas

In his 2005 Advent Letter, Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams said: “The main focus I long to see at this [Lambeth] Conference is the better equipping of bishops to fulfill their task as agents and enablers of mission, as co-workers with God’s mission in Jesus Christ.”

For the last five years the Lambeth Conference Design Group, ably assisted by staff in the Anglican Communion Office in London, has been dedicated to designing a new kind of Lambeth Conference with the twin goals of equip-

ping bishops as leaders in God’s mission and thus strengthening the mutually responsible and interdependent life of the Anglican Communion in service to God’s mission.

From the very early stages of our planning for the 2008 Lambeth Conference, the Design Group was encouraged by Archbishop Williams to do a new thing. It was clear that the 2008 Lambeth Conference should not be focused on reports that nobody reads and resolutions that nobody pays attention to unless they are used to divide us one from another.

Basic to the new design was the imperative to

provide space where deep and meaningful conversations across differences could be engendered in a prayerful manner. At the very outset we decided that small Bible Study groups made up of eight bishops from radically different contexts would be the key community for the conference. Bible Study groups will thus meet every day of the conference and in these small groups the bishops will encounter God and each other in the study of the Gospel of John, and in the sharing of their own life stories. The hope and expectation for these groups is to create a safe, face-to-face Christian community where honest and deep conversation can develop.

The second significant new design element for the 2008 Lambeth Conference will be larger Indaba Groups made up of five Bible Study groups for a total of 40 bishops meeting together. Indaba is a Zulu word from South Africa that means “gathering for purposeful discussion in community.” In these groups, the bishops will engage common issues before the Anglican Communion.

The issues that all Indaba Groups will consider include: Anglican identity; evangelism; social justice and the Millennium Development Goals; ecumenism; safeguarding the integrity of creation; multi-faith issues; gender inequalities and violence; biblical authority; human sexuality; and the Anglican covenant and “Windsor processes.” On occasion these issues will be introduced by major international speakers in evening presentations.

The third major programmatic aspect will be afternoon Self-Select Sessions where bishops are free to choose among dozens of different workshops, panels, lectures, and other hands-on learning opportunities. These are designed to equip the bishops as leaders in God’s mission and will

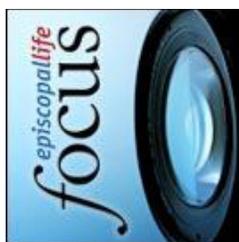
be loosely organized around the 10 topics/issues of the Indaba Groups.

These three daily programmatic aspects of the conference will be surrounded by regular daily worship and prayer beginning with morning Eucharist and continuing with midday and evening prayer. In addition, to set the whole conference in a context of deep prayer and presence before God, the first three days of the conference will be a retreat held in Canterbury Cathedral where Archbishop Williams will accompany the bishops in a reflection on the nature of God’s mission and the role of the bishop as a disciple of and leader in God’s mission.

The 2008 Lambeth Conference is thus taking a decidedly more missiological, conversational, and prayerful approach to engaging difficult issues in the Anglican Communion. Those who are looking to Lambeth as an arbitrator of all things Anglican or final decision point on matters such as the proposed Anglican covenant will not be pleased with the new design of the Lambeth Conference. There is no plan for large plenary sessions where resolutions are debated and voted upon using parliamentary procedures.

Let us hope and pray that the bishops gathered in Canterbury this July and August will indeed see Jesus anew as they engage more directly with each other. And let us pray that in seeing Jesus anew in each other the bishops will be better equipped to serve God’s mission in the world and thus strengthen the Anglican Communion.

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