

A COVENANT

between

THE ANGLICAN CHURCH OF THE CENTRAL REGION OF AMERICA (IARCA)

and

THE PROTESTANT EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA (ECUSA)

Preface

The origins of the Episcopal Churches in Central America and Panama, which date back to 18th century, are based fundamentally on the Church of England and the Episcopal Church in the United States of America, developed as follows:

England administered two colonies in Central America: Belize (1783-1982), and the Miskitia (1740-1894), which were mainly located in the region of Nicaragua and Honduras.

The natives of these islands were first evangelized by the Church of England through the missionary societies, specially the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG). By 1742 the SPG sent the first lay missionary to the Nicaraguan Miskitia. However, the Church of England was unable to comprehend the difference between evangelization and cultural imposition. Thus, it failed to evangelize the Miskitia culture. By 1848, due to the commercialization of wood and bananas, cheap Afro-Antillean labor was brought to the region primarily from Jamaica. In 1896, the Bishop of Belize laid the cornerstone of the first Anglican Church, St. Mark's Church, in Bluefields, Nicaragua.

During the XIX century and into the beginning of the XX century, as the principal lender to the Central American countries, England exerted strong economic influence in the region. Consequently, many English businessmen came to Central America and chaplaincies were established to serve the spiritual lives of the entrepreneurs and diplomats. In 1867 the Iglesia de Cristo was established in Guatemala in the British Consulate and its chaplain was even part of the diplomatic staff. In Costa Rica a treaty between the government and England allowed for jurisdiction of the chaplaincies in Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador was transferred from the Church of England to the Episcopal Church USA. In this way, in 1957 the Missionary District of the Episcopal Church in Central America was created with the Churches in Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica. David E. Richards was its first Bishop. He resided in Costa Rica.

Until this point in time, the Anglican/Episcopal presence in Central America resided in the chaplaincies that served the immigrants and their descendents from the West Indies. These churches were strong in Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama. No evangelization emphasis to the natives in Central America existed, and there was no interest to create national and local churches which took into consideration the cultural factor.

Supported by Lambeth 1958 and 1968, serious efforts were made in Central America to change from the system of chaplaincy (foreigner in a foreign land) to that of an indigenous, national, autochthonous church. Consequently, in 1967 the missionary dioceses of Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Costa Rica were created with the purpose of spreading the Kingdom of God in each nation and revealing the Anglican spirit in the local culture, as well as forming an autochthonous Anglicanism.

From that moment on the Episcopal Church in Central America tried to become incarnate into the local situation, to inculturate itself into each Central American country. It did not want to continue being the U.S. Episcopal Church in Central America, but the Episcopal Church of El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama.

In 1964, by action of the General Convention, Province IX of the Episcopal Church was created, and the dioceses of Central America became part of it. The Provincial Synod of Panama, in 1981, brought forward the autonomy theme as the goal for Province IX so that the component churches would become self-ruling, self-sustaining and self-propagating. Subsequently, a formal request for autonomy was made to the 1982 General Convention.

The Diocese of Costa Rica became an (autonomous) Extra-Provincial Diocese in 1970, by action of the 1969 General Convention. After a review process by ECUSA in 1975, metropolitan authority for the Diocese of Costa Rica was transferred to the House of Bishops of Province IX in 1977. The Diocese of Costa Rica has remained autonomous since that time.

The 1982 General Convention approved autonomy for the entire Province IX, 1985, and gave a grace period of three more years, if it were not prepared by that date. The Provincial Synod of Bogota, Colombia in, 1984, agreed that Province IX should become autonomous by regions, which was accepted by the 1985 General Convention in Anaheim. Nevertheless, the deadlines so set arrived, and neither the province nor the dioceses were able to become autonomous.

We compose the Central Region of America of Province IX, and the autonomy and self-sufficiency projects remain as an historical challenge to us. Therefore, the Episcopal Church in the Central Region of America, as heirs of the teaching, doctrine, history and tradition of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, as has been handed over to us by the Anglican Communion through the Episcopal Church in the United States of America, and having arrived at the time at which by our own will, would like to affirm that inheritance in the diverse cultural, linguistic and ethnic richness of the region to which we belong. We propose to our brothers and sisters of the Episcopal Church in the United States of America (ECUSA) the following.

COVENANT

I. TRANSFER OF METROPOLITICAL AUTHORITY

The Dioceses of El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua and Panama, together with the (autonomous) Extra-Provincial Diocese of Costa Rica, having complied with the requirements for autonomy established by the General Convention, including the writing and approving of a provincial Constitution and Canons in the forms recommended by the Anglican Consultative Council, and with the approval of the General Convention and the support of ECUSA, constitute themselves into an autonomous Province within the Anglican Communion, accepting the privileges and responsibilities of such status

Metropolitan authority for the Dioceses of the Central Region of America will be transferred from the General Convention to the General Synod of the Anglican Church of the Central Region of America (IARCA) upon action of General Convention.

In like fashion, any titles of real properties not already transferred will be transferred by this action from the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society (DFMS) of ECUSA to the respective Constituent Dioceses of IARCA.

II. PARTNERSHIP IN MISSION

In the spirit of partnership in mission, IARCA and ECUSA agree to:

- a) Establish the means to continue their partnership in mission and ministry in a wide variety of fields, including evangelism, christian education, theological and liturgical studies, training in stewardship, programs for social action and specific programs by and for women, minorities, youth and children.
- b) Collaborate to strengthen ecumenical participation and witness in their respective countries in the region and in the world. IARCA adopts all the Agreements, Covenants, Concordats and Common Declarations on Unity reached as of the signing of this Covenant.
- c) Encourage and nourish companion diocese relationships and other means for grassroots sharing of human, spiritual and material resources.
- d) Continue participation in the United Thank Offering and the Presiding Bishop's Fund for World Relief.
- e) Welcome and seat bishops of the two churches as collegial members in their respective Houses of Bishops.

Requests for major resources in the form of grants, loans and mission personnel originating in the dioceses of IARCA and directed to ECUSA should first have the authorization of the General Synod or provincial council of IARCA.

III. TOWARD ECONOMIC SELF-SUFFICIENCY

A Church is authentically autonomous when it is self-governing, self-propagating and self-supporting financially. In order to achieve such self-sufficiency, IARCA and ECUSA agree that:

- a) ECUSA will continue to contribute to the general budget of IARCA through its national program budget for a period of forty (40) years based on a progressive reduction of 1% to 5% annually of the present 1994 appropriation of \$1,050,185.00. The reduction is to begin three years after the effective date of autonomy, that is January 1, 2001. This contribution is subject to adoption by the General Convention on a triennial basis and to review by the ECUSA Executive Council and the IARCA Provincial Council as circumstances dictate.
- b) ECUSA and IARCA, with the advice and cooperation of the Church Pension Fund (CPF), will devise and IARCA will implement a national pension plan for the clerical and lay employees of IARCA, based upon and comparable, if possible, to the present plan now enjoyed by the clergy of the region. The Church Pension Fund will be asked to maintain IARCA's clergy that are presently in the Fund for a period of five (5) years following the transfer of metropolitan authority to the Synod of IARCA.
- c) ECUSA will return to IARCA the proportional funds and interest earned from the sale of property of the Episcopal Seminary of the Caribbean, as well as of the books of its library which is preserved at the Episcopal Seminary of the Southwest in Austin, Texas.

- d) ECUSA will provide technical assistance to IARCA and its constituent dioceses in the development of stewardship programs and the raising of capital funds for missionary expansion.
- e) The Anglican Church of the Central Region of America will establish in each diocese norms for financial management, formulate budgets, audits, controls and reports that comply with the requirements of the accounting systems of the Province.
- f) The Anglican Church of the Central Region of America will make annual financial reports to ECUSA as long as 50% of its appropriation is provided by ECUSA.

IV. IMPLEMENTATION

This covenant will be in effect from the first of January of the year immediately following the approval by General Convention for the dioceses of the Central Region of America to form the Anglican Church of the Central Region of America and will continue for as long as is mutually agreed.

The Pastoral Plan, the Constitution and Canons, and the Financial Plan of IARCA, all previously approved by the respective authorities, will be part of this Covenant.

There shall be a Joint Evaluation Committee composed of members from IARCA and ECUSA (appointed by the two Primates). The task of this committee shall be to evaluate, periodically, and at least every triennium (prior to General Convention), the faithful compliance of both parties of this Covenant, and to make their report and recommendations to the Executive Council and Provincial Council, respectively, of ECUSA and IARCA.

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