

A Message to our Church Leaders and the Anglican Consultative Council

In October 2015, the International Anglican Women's Network (IAWN) held a consultation in Hyderabad, India, for the Network's Provincial Links in the Anglican and United Churches in Sri Lanka, North India, South India and Bangladesh, and a number of other women in the region with ministries among, and for women and girls. We were sad that our sisters from the Church of Pakistan and the Anglican Church of Myanmar were unable to be with us because of visa difficulties.

Together we prayed and studied the Bible. We shared our experience, our positive stories of change, and the challenges that need to be addressed in order to improve the status and leadership of women in our Churches and in our communities.

It is clear to us that the Church has a sacred duty to challenge cultural attitudes and traditions that value girls less than boys and marginalise the voices and contributions of women, and to model positive and just relationships between women and men.

We give thanks to God for progress that has already been made in our Churches but recognise that our programmes for women and girls and policies such as quota systems for the inclusion of women in church bodies, need to be matched by a Gospel-centred openness to serving together as women and men, equally created in the Divine image.

We respectfully ask our Church leaders to stand in solidarity with us, and work with us, by:

- promoting just gender relationships in congregations, in families and communities, and in all Church synods, committees and programmes
- encouraging study of the Bible and theology with a view to challenging the scriptural and theological 'legitimisation' of male domination over women and revealing a liberative hermeneutic for women and girls, and all marginalised peoples
- investing in training, theological formation and capacity-building for women's leadership and participation in decision-making bodies within and beyond the Church
- drawing the work, experience and wisdom of Women's Fellowship for Christian Service and similar groups into the mainstream of the mission and ministry of the Church
- supporting work with men and boys to empower them to embrace the masculinity modelled by Jesus Christ
- including gender work as an element in Church budgets
- using the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence and other opportunities to speak out against violence against women and girls in all its forms, and to encourage local initiatives to end and prevent sexual and gender-based violence and care for survivors
- challenging the Dowry system wherever it is practised to the detriment of the well-being and potential of women and girls
- introducing positive liturgies, rites and rituals to replace cultural practices or attitudes that harm women and girls, for example, a liturgy to celebrate the birth of a girl
- seeking to engage with 'Side by Side', the global Faith Movement for Gender Justice, bringing gender issues into inter faith dialogue and joint commitments
- in the Sri Lankan context, advocating for women affected by war, families of the disappeared especially female headed households, speaking truth to power.
- advocating for gender justice nationally and internationally.

As we go forward together in faith, may the grace of God enfold us, the love of Christ uphold us, and the Spirit of truth set us free. Amen