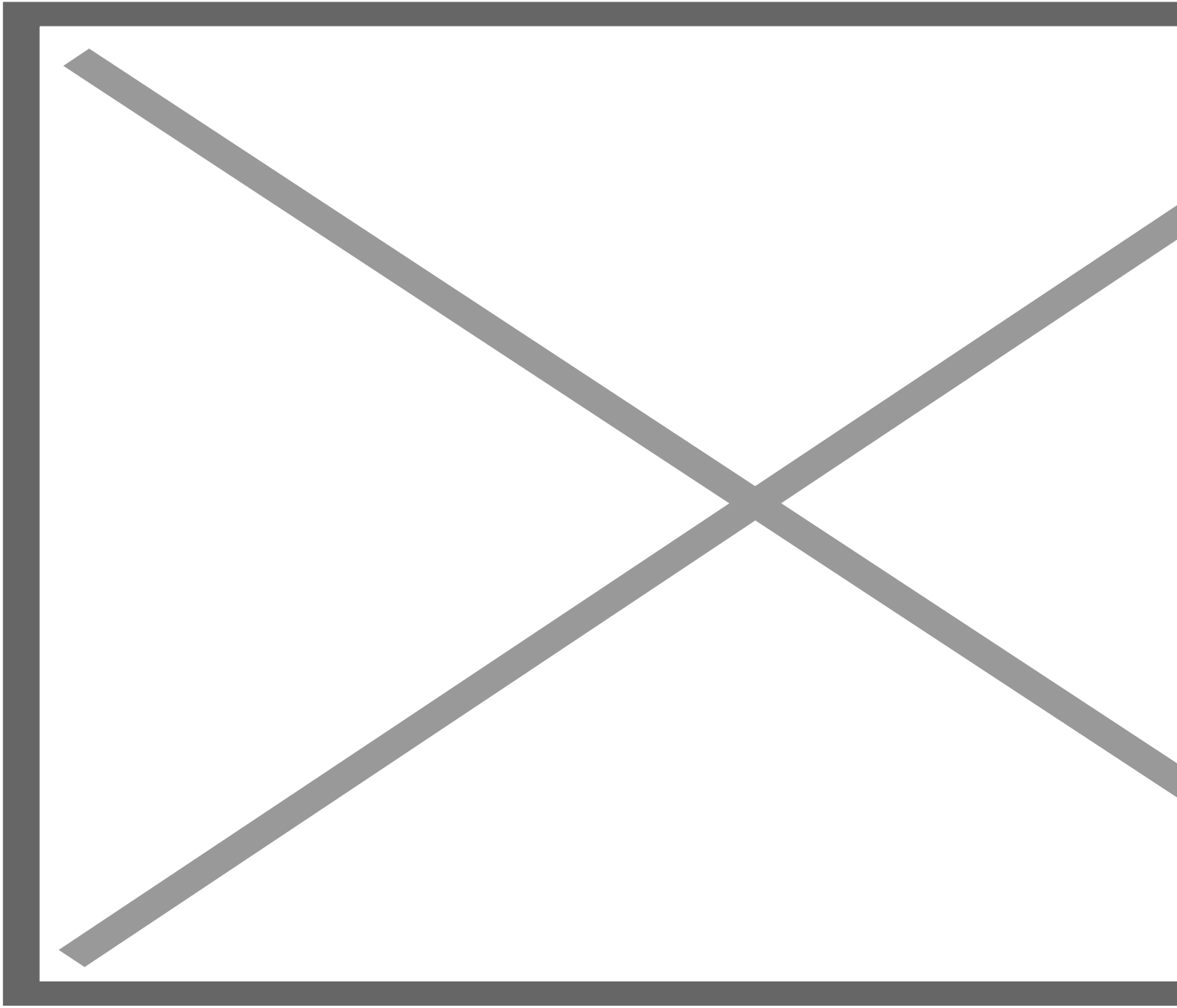


Conservative Anglican bishops seek 'disengagement' from Canterbury without naming rival leader

by [Fredrick Nzwili](#)

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Anglican leaders attend a church service on the sidelines of the Global Anglican Communion meeting in Abuja, Nigeria, March 4. (AP Photo/Olamikan Gbemiga)

Weeks before Sarah Mullally is officially installed as the first female archbishop of Canterbury, a group of conservative Anglican prelates known as GAFCON renamed their body the Global Anglican Communion and elected a set of leaders to exercise “principled disengagement” from the archbishop and the historic center of

Anglicanism in England.

The four-day Global Anglican Future Conference meeting in Abuja, the Nigerian capital, that ended March 6 was expected to elect a rival to the Archbishop of Canterbury—its own “first among equals” among its bishops to convene and guide them. Instead, it elected Archbishop Laurent Mbanda, the Anglican primate of Rwanda, as the chairman of the newly constituted Global Anglican Council, a body consisting of primates, advisers and “guarantors.”

Miguel Uchôa, the archbishop of the Anglican Church in Brazil, will be deputy chairman, and Paul Donison, a Canadian-born US bishop, the general secretary.

“We recognize that there is still much work to be done by the Global Anglican Council . . .,” said the communique issued by the group on Friday.

The meeting, dubbed the G26, had the theme, “Choose this day, whom you will serve,” a passage from the Book of Joshua in which the Israelites were challenged not to follow false gods. Leaders from the Global South, including 347 Anglican bishops and 121 lay and clerical Anglican leaders from 27 provinces, attended the meeting.

Back in October, Mbanda called the meeting to enable the re-ordering of the 85 million-member worldwide Anglican Communion and formally inaugurate the Global Anglican Communion.

Those gathered in Abuja insisted the Global Anglican Communion is not a breakaway communion nor an alternative one. They claimed they are not schismatic either, but are working to return to a historic sense of the Anglican Communion as “a fellowship of autonomous provinces bound together by the Formularies of the Reformation,” the Communion’s foundational documents establishing its theological and liturgical identity.

“The Church of England was reformed by Thomas Cranmer, leaving the errors of the Church of Rome behind. Like Cranmer, we are reforming the Communion from within and leaving the Canterbury Instruments behind,” said the communique.

But in calling for the disengagement, the leaders want the newly constituted leadership to shun future meetings called by the archbishop of Canterbury, including the Lambeth Conference, which gathers the Anglican world’s primates every 10 years, and the meetings of the Anglican Consultative Council and its commissions. They will not be permitted to personally approve financial contributions to the council, and they are not to receive financial assistance from the compromised sources.

“A full and public disengagement from these structures is necessary,” said Mbanda in the communique, quoting the biblical warnings against those who seek to lead the church astray.

The continued participation in Canterbury-led meetings, the group says, gives credence to the supposition that it is possible to “walk together despite deep disagreement” with those who have abandoned biblical teaching.

The statement warns that Global Anglican Communion officeholders who continue to participate in any Canterbury Instruments will not be able to continue in this role.

Not all Anglican bishops in Africa agree with GAFCON. Rose Okeno, bishop of the Diocese of Butere, Kenya, said that when GAFCON first began meeting in 2008, it was intended to be a fellowship of Anglicans who would gather to encourage one another, to pray together and to support faithfulness to the gospel within the existing life and structures of the Anglican Communion.

“It was not presented as an alternative leadership body or a separate administrative structure within the Communion,” Okeno said in a brief statement.

According to Okeno, the unity of the Anglican Communion has been sustained through what are known as the Instruments of Communion: The ministry of the archbishop of Canterbury, the Lambeth Conference, the Primates’ Meeting and the Anglican Consultative Council.

“These instruments have served as the relational pillars through which Anglicans across the world remain connected to one another while maintaining the autonomy of their provinces and dioceses. It is therefore concerning when movements within the Church begin to distance themselves from these shared structures that have historically held us together,” said the bishop.

Okeno said that while she held deep respect and love for her brothers and sisters in GAFCON, withdrawing from the wider Communion because of disagreements over the interpretation of scripture should not be the path.

“Rather, we are called to continue the difficult but holy work of walking together, listening to one another, and discerning God’s will in community,” she said, adding that GAFCON had moved away from its original purpose.

“One example is the question of the place of women in the leadership of the Church. As a woman called and elected to serve as bishop in my own diocese, I find it difficult to imagine belonging to a fellowship that does not recognize the leadership and ministry of women in the Church,” said Okeno. —Religion News Service