

Introducing... The Evangelical Fellowship in the Anglican Communion

By Revd [Richard Crocker](#), General Secretary, EFAC

It is generally accepted that John Stott's post war teaching ministry was accepted widely internationally, and not only in the Anglican world. His passion was to build up the church through teaching the Bible and upholding it as God's Word written, training leaders with this conviction as their central motivation. In 1961, Stott brought together a group of international leaders to found an organization that would have a profound influence in these areas: The Evangelical Fellowship in the Anglican Communion (EFAC). Evangelical publishing, and scholarship support of promising international students followed, together with local church teaching and witness that could reach the world's farthest corner. Many Anglican leaders readily [acknowledge](#) how they and their Provinces have benefitted from the extraordinary impact EFAC has developed. But that legacy has been overshadowed in recent years by Anglican turmoil, uncertainty and division.

Late last year, a group of leaders realized that the time had come to reassert these principles, and revitalize EFAC as a resource for the continuing health of the church. I was appointed as General secretary, we acquired a small staff, put in some money, and we began. Over the past eight months, EFAC has increased its global reach from 9 to 31 countries, is forming an International Council with a training conference in October, has acquired a [website](#), a [Facebook](#) page, and an [email](#) list, and is genuinely "on the move." But, why EFAC? What is the purpose? And how can it help?

To start, it seems important to explain how we understand the terms in the title of the organization. Therefore, in this article, I will attempt to define what EFAC means by "Evangelical", "Fellowship", and "The Anglican Communion".

Evangelical

Some have suggested the EFAC should abandon the word, "evangelical". They hold that it is too toxic due its entanglement with some contemporary political movements. However, it is difficult to find an alternative that will serve adequately. Others suggest hyphenating it, so that they may be distinguished from others who claim the word, "evangelical". But this itself indicates that the word is in demand, while its exact content is subject to differing appropriation by an assortment of constituencies.

I was present at the National Evangelical Anglican Congress (NEAC) in England in 1977, when such undercurrents of varied evangelical identity emerged. "What is the irreducible minimum of Anglican evangelicalism?" was the question raised. John Stott, in the final address, gave his Chairman's response. "Minimally, we are Bible people, and we are Gospel people," he declared, but then he added, "but who wants irreducible minima? We want the fullness of the Gospel, and all that God in Jesus has given us!"

Historian David Bebbington has attempted a definition of "evangelical", [identifying](#) four primary characteristics of evangelicalism:

- "Biblicism: obedience to the Bible as the supreme authority.
- Crucicentrism: a focus on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross for the salvation of mankind.
- Conversionism: the belief that lives need to be transformed in a life long process of following Jesus which may involve a "born-again" experience.

- Activism: the practical living out of the gospel in missionary and social reform efforts.”

Similarly, the 2003 NEAC in Blackpool was subtitled and organized around these three headings: Bible, Cross, Mission. It is these themes that get at the heart of evangelical distinctives. EFAC founder John Stott put forward a [rationale](#) for this approach, offering a trinitarian frame:

“We have considered ... the three essentials to which evangelical people are determined to bear witness. They concern the gracious initiative of God the Father in revealing himself to us, in redeeming us through Christ crucified and in transforming us through the indwelling Spirit. For the evangelical faith is the trinitarian faith. This is why evangelical Christians place such emphasis on the Word, the cross, and the Spirit.”

We understand that God is one who speaks, and that his words are intentionally recorded so that we may understand His actions by the work of his Spirit. This activity reaches its pinnacle in the life and ministry of Jesus, by whose death on the cross we are saved. His resurrection victory, and the growth of the disciples’ witness to the world, is through the work of the Spirit. Note the combination of triumph and invitation in these words from the Gospel of John:

“Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” (John 20:30-31)

An evangelical is one who takes God at his word in the scriptures, has received salvation at the foot of the cross of Jesus, and with other disciples is about the mission of Spirit in the world the Father has made and loves. I believe the world needs a church inspired by these distinctives.

The role of EFAC is to serve the increase of this biblical vision worldwide.

Fellowship

The 1962 charter for EFAC specifies that it will:

- 1) Foster fellowship between Anglican evangelicals throughout the world, to encourage the isolated, reminding them of the larger body to which they belong.
- 2) Support regional Anglican evangelical fellowships and encourage the formation of such where none exists.

This is what EFAC has been doing and will be doing into the future: encouraging *koinonia* on a local and international scale. We are making friends in Christ across borders. We are forming partnerships with other groups who share our faith commitment. We are seeking and encouraging those who can continue the work of biblical leadership in their region.

All this work is made possible by the shared relationship that is ours “in Christ Jesus”. As we promote scriptural authority and witness, we are finding the delight of encounters with brothers and sisters in Christ who are new to us, but have met the same Jesus who is revealed in the scriptures and who, like us, are called to serve Him.

One particular delight for me is to recognize, across different cultures and nations, the same Jesus who is formed in His disciples worldwide. Although the dress and language may be different, the Gospel message has brought unity in Jesus to the peoples of the world. It is part of the work of EFAC to enable and grow that Gospel fruit as we act as a resource to bring people together under the scriptures throughout the Anglican world. Fellowship is our middle name.

Anglican Communion

Christianity in England dates from the earliest days of the Church. Pope Gregory sent his missionary Augustine to the “Angles” in 597, evangelizing the local tribe and establishing Canterbury Cathedral. But there had been Christians in England even before this time, dating from the Roman occupation. Indeed, three English bishops, including a bishop from York, attended a synod at Arles in 314.

The English church was deeply affected by the 16th century Reformation. It changed its doctrine, adopted a liturgy in English and provided Bibles to be read by the people. This was in line with the continental developments of Luther and then Calvin. However, unlike other Protestant churches, it retained its episcopate, orders of ministry, and the network of parish churches. This “top down” Reformation, by order of the monarch and reforming Archbishop, is still in evidence in the structures and formularies of the Church of England. The formularies – The Book of Common Prayer, the Ordinal and the Thirty Nine Articles of Religion - were exported with the King James Bible to British colonies around the world. These enabled the distinctively Anglican “Reformed Catholic” approach to church life.

The Anglican Communion became a worldwide church when the Church of England was obliged to recognize bishops beyond the English shores, first in the USA (1784), then Canada (1787), and then Calcutta (1814), Barbados (1824), Jamaica (1824), Madras (1835) Australia (1836), New Zealand (1841) Jerusalem (1841) and Cape Town (1847). Indeed, in 1863 the Bishop of Cape Town was dealing with a local dispute that developed into an international controversy. The phrase “Anglican Communion” seems to have been used first in a Canadian suggestion to the Archbishop of Canterbury to convene a gathering of the bishops. Archbishop Longley called the first Lambeth Conference of Bishops in 1867, with the proviso that it would not address the South African dispute, a proviso the conference quickly abandoned!

This family of churches has shown remarkable growth due to their strong missionary impulse. Starting with the more “high church” agencies, the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (1699) and the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (1701), mission has been a consistent feature, as the colonial expatriate bases have made the emergence of indigenous churches possible. Since the evangelical revival, the voluntary societies, such as CMS (1799), have pioneered evangelistic outreach among great varieties of peoples. For instance, the first African bishop, Samuel Crowther of Nigeria, was consecrated bishop in 1864.

The case of Nigeria is instructive. By 1988 the Anglican Church there had grown to encompass 26 dioceses. The suggestion of a 90’s “Decade of Evangelism” was adopted with great zeal. Missionary dioceses were formed to plant churches in the relatively un-evangelized north and elsewhere, with substantial response. By 2004 there were 78 dioceses in 10 internal provinces; today there are 159 dioceses with a membership in the region of 20 million. Nigeria is by far the largest province of the Anglican Communion. EFAC Nigeria has had a large part to play in the evangelizing of this nation.

The Anglican Communion thus claims its identity as part of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church, deriving from the apostolic teaching of Jesus and his first disciples, from the earliest witness of the church. It claims its biblical heritage from the time of the Protestant Reformation, as seen in its historic formularies. Its mission history has many examples of heroic service and evangelistic advance.

EFAC Reinforces Anglican Identity

EFAC has as its purpose the reinforcing of each of the above points of identity. We promote the apostolic teaching, as seen in the biblical witness, concerning Jesus, his cross and resurrection. We maintain the Protestant and Reformed heritage of the Church of England, concerning the supremacy of Scripture, the preaching of the Gospel of grace and the scriptural ordering of the worship, witness and ministry of the church. We embrace the Great Commission of Christ, by which we are called to reach out in love, making disciples of Jesus from all peoples of the world.

The calling of EFAC – the Evangelical Fellowship in the Anglican Communion – is to stimulate and support **partnerships** between those who share this purpose and claim this **evangelical** identity throughout this worldwide **family** of churches. Since 1961, the impact of EFAC has been substantial, notably in the development of leaders and the published defense of evangelical principles. Today, as we increase the work of EFAC, more is possible. Whenever and however the Anglican Communion started in the past, its biblical identity will only continue into the future as we resolve to spread the biblical gospel in it and through it. EFAC is there as a resource to help.