

Dear signatories to the #ACCToo open letter, and to all those who have been harmed by these recent events unfolding in our church,

We have heard your call to the Primate, to the Council of General Synod, and to us as the Editorial Board of the Anglican Journal to observe a holy Lent by rectifying the scandalous offence described in the #ACCToo letter. We thank you for your moral courage in offering this call to us and to the wider church. We cannot imagine the pain that this continues to generate for the survivors. We cannot imagine the frustration this continues to bear for those who are helping their voices to be heard.

As a Board, we stand with the Council of General Synod in its expression of dismay and sorrow at the events that have unfolded. We are sorry for what you have endured and what you continue to endure. However, we also stand apart from General Synod, in that, unlike that governance body, our own agency as a board is limited—we have been constituted principally as an advisory committee for the Editor.

Furthermore, we make clear that this is not a statement from the entire Board. One member believes that our accountability is limited to addressing whether our journalistic behaviour can be deemed to have been appropriate and that any broader critique of the Church is beyond the Board's remit. We request readers to take this differing viewpoint into consideration.

We view our responsibilities, nonetheless, in the words of Council of General Synod (2019), to be “to advance input into the journalistic planning process and to review journalistic performance in light of the mandate and editorial policy. These responsibilities apply to all journalistic content, published in any medium, platform or format by GoGS.” And CoGS further states: “The Anglican Journal (whether in print and/or digital formats) is a journalistic enterprise, and as such is expected to adhere to the highest standards of journalistic responsibility, accuracy, fairness, accountability and transparency. Its journalism is fact-based, fact-checked and in-depth, tackling important issues, asking and answering difficult questions.”

Our principal role thus far has been to share words of advice when the Editor asks for them. However, the majority of members of the Board go further and state that it is not words of advice that the survivors need from us or from the institution. As the #ACCToo letter states quite well, what is needed is “a plan of action that is a worthy beginning of repentance.”

And so the advice the majority of us has to offer as an Editorial Board is for the wider institution of the Anglican Church of Canada, and for those who hold its seats of institutional power: You need to change the way you are telling this story. This is not a story about flawed procedures, miscommunications, best practices, or better ways of drawing up our organizational flowcharts. This is a story about people who have been deeply hurt and relationships that have been utterly broken. This is a story about the cultures within our church that have made these hurts and breaks possible. This is a story about the church's failure to be the church. In its attempt to tell that story, the Anglican Journal became that story. We need to learn from our mistakes and start telling the story differently.

We also acknowledge that the first part of any plan of action that is a worthy beginning of repentance is truth telling. Here are some truths we think we need to tell:

While all members of our Board acknowledge the great harm that has been done to the victims of these events, we acknowledge that not all of us have the same understanding of what transpired. But we stress this: There is common acknowledgement of the harm that has been caused.

Given our board's responsibility to "review journalistic performance in light of the mandate and editorial policy," we believe it is important to clearly state that the senior church official's action of circulating the draft prior to publication compromised the Journal's ability to fulfill the "highest standards of journalistic responsibility."

We have been given unredacted copies of the John Fraser report commissioned by the Primate. We have destroyed these copies. We have also received a redacted version of the John Fraser report, which most if not all of us believe contains potentially identifying information. We wish to note that the survivors have yet to receive this report.

The majority of us believe that the John Fraser report commissioned by the Primate is not sufficiently independent and that it bears some significant flaws. A review cannot be independent when it is commissioned, received, evaluated, and acted upon by the same office in which that review is taking place. That the sole reviewer cites his perspective in the report as being grounded not only in his extensive journalism experience, but also in his identity as "a lifetime and loyal congregant of the Anglican Church of Canada," also raises some concerns. We suggest that the perspective underlying an independent review should not be premised upon a lifetime of loyalty to the institution that is under review. There is also a problematic theological hermeneutic of forgiveness that frames the report's conclusion, one that describes forgiveness as a moral imperative commanded by Jesus, without also specifying the moral imperatives of confession, penance, and amendments of life that must predicate forgiveness—least it be made to serve the ends of injustice.

We believe that the culture of institutional protectionism runs very deep within the church.

We believe that everyone involved took the initial actions they did with good intentions—each sought the good from their own understanding of their respective roles and responsibilities. Yet good intentions do not insulate us from the problematic systems and cultures in which we are all embedded. One of the effects of sin is to distort our sense of what the good is in a given situation. Similarly, good intentions do not negate our responsibility for the sins in which we are nevertheless participating. That is why we need to make confessions and to engage in acts of penitence.

We believe that those responsible for the circulation of the draft and breach of trust ought to bear the reasonable consequences of their actions in proportion both to their role in that breach, and their subsequent response once they were made aware of it.

As members of the Editorial Board, the majority of us commit to telling this story differently ourselves in our role as advisors to the Editor by: 1) Communicating information (while safeguarding confidentiality) about editorial direction and story development more frequently and broadly across the board so that we can better offer advice. 2) Advocating for changes within how the Anglican Journal and its staff relate to the National Church and its management, so as to prevent such offences from happening again. We will begin this work by providing the Prolocutor and Chair of the Communications Committee with recommendations on the formation of a handbook of guidelines and principles governing The Journal's operations that would be required reading for all members of CoGS and General Synod Management.

One temptation we might be faced with as a church as we come to terms with the harm that has been done, and begin asking ourselves how we might repair these broken relationships, is to jump too quickly into speaking about grace, forgiveness, and redemption. We believe in the restorative justice God has made known to us through the resurrection of Jesus. However, we cannot move straight to the new life of Easter, until we have truthfully walked the path of suffering on Good Friday, and sat in silence and solidarity with those who mourn on Holy Saturday.

And so we would like to conclude by offering the institutional confession we wish we would have heard from the beginning from the institutional leaders of the Anglican Church of Canada:

*We confess to you, to one another,
And to the whole communion of saints
In heaven and on earth that we have sinned by our own fault
In thought, word, and deed; by what we have done,
And by what we have left undone. (BAS 285)*