The Living Church Annual reported 7858 congregations in 1985 and 7378 in 2009. In these 24 years of rapidly increasing population and growing secular departure from Christianity we lost 480 congregations. We urgently need the vision of Bishop "Chuck" Murphy and others of a missionary society unencumbered by the necessary baggage of a merely ecclesial mode for the church. Examples of our Celtic heritage and the great missionary societies of our history cry out for a similar mission oriented church planting society. This vision is no longer a mere vision but an actuality. The Anglican Mission in America has planted 265 congregations in its short history incarnating an urgently needed complimentary arm of the church.

The Rt. Rev. C. FitzSimons Allison

I am honored by Bishop Murphy to be asked to write a paragraph of commendation for the vision that is expressed in his "Apologia". Surely there is room among us for the more traditional structures, suitably amended and transformed by a passion to evangelize and reach the lost as they are in ACNA, and the older Celtic pattern embraced by AMIA, which proved so effective and blessed by the Lord in the past and is proving effective in a number of places in the world today. Why not embrace one another, learn from one another, encourage one another and work together. Being so united will surely please the Lord and prove effective in the mission to which He has called us all.

The Rt. Rev. John Rodgers
The Anglican Mission
A Society of Mission and Apostolic Works
[An “Apologia”]
The Rt. Rev. Charles H. Murphy, III

As we approach our Inaugural Assembly in Atlanta [August 1, 2012], and the formal establishment of the Anglican Mission as “A Society of Mission and Apostolic Works,” Bishop John Rodgers suggested that I write a short paper to the clergy explaining our decision to now officially order and structure our life together as a missionary society. The vision of adopting this particular model for mission has captured my imagination for many years as I have taken additional inspiration from the Celtic Mission of the Church that laid the earliest foundation of our Anglican heritage. The extended process of considering, exploring, and finally taking this step, has now involved our leaders (both lay and ordained) for over fifteen months. It is the thesis of this paper that shaping and ordering our life as a Society of Mission and Apostolic Works will enable us to intentionally build upon our past and upon our heritage in a way that will fundamentally strengthen our work and our mission as we move into the future.

Believing as I do that change inevitably brings with it certain questions and anxieties, as well as real and hopeful expectations, I have structured this paper around five (5) rather understandable and predictable questions:

1) What, exactly, is a missionary society?
2) How is this different from the institutional church?
3) What makes us unique?
4) Why do I care?
5) How will this affect me?

By structuring this paper around these five questions, I will be able to present my primary arguments for ordering our life as a mission society, and the reader will be able to hone in on the questions that they find most interesting.

1) What, exactly, is a Missionary Society?

By definition a missionary society is a religious organization dedicated to the support of Christian mission work. Missionary societies are voluntary associations committed to the work of evangelistic outreach, church planting, and other forms of Christian mission. They can clearly trace their biblical origins back to the 13th chapter of the Acts of the Apostles when Paul and Barnabas were identified by the Holy Spirit, and sent out by the church in Antioch, on what would become St. Paul’s first missionary journey. We may trace the continuation of this model of evangelistic outreach, undertaken by Christian missionary teams who voluntarily affiliated themselves for the furtherance of this essential work, from the time of the original Apostles throughout the history of the Church.

The approach to mission modeled by St. Patrick in Ireland in the 5th century, and that taking place in the Celtic tradition in the British Isles and beyond, operated in and through monasteries, and with a certain freedom, without ever attempting to form dioceses or provinces to hold or to “order” the fruits of their work. They are two early examples of this ongoing pattern of evangelist outreach within our “Anglican” tradition. This distinct approach to Anglican mission work continued, and gained further momentum, especially during the 18th century. In the words of Bishop Lesslie Newbigin, “The New Testament knows of only one missionary society – the Church. The 18th century, however, saw the birth of ‘missionary societies’ which made no claim to be churches.”

Examples of these missionary societies formed within our Anglican tradition specifically to advance Christian mission, church planting, and evangelistic outreach include:

- The English Society for the Propagation of the Gospel [1701]
- The Church Missionary Society [1799]
- The Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the U.S.A. 1820]
- The American Church Missionary Society [1859]
- The North American Missionary Society [1996]

Not one of these missionary societies was ever formed to be a Church. Each “society” was formed simply to further the work and the mission of the Church. Although organized to exist and operate as separate structures from those of an institutional church, members of missionary societies remain fully members of a local church. Their personal calling or “vocation” (Latin vocatio – a call, summons), however, involves a second decision, apart from that of becoming a Christian and a member of the Church. For those so called, there is a desire to become a member of a “missionary society” of the church that is dedicated to the work of evangelistic outreach, church planting, or other specific forms of Christian mission, local and global.

As we observe the work of the Holy Spirit guiding and ordering His church over these past 2,000 years, we cannot help but notice that He has chosen to organize the work and mission of the Church across the centuries around two complimentary, but very different, kinds of structures. One has been the jurisdictional and geographical structure (usually involving the creation of dioceses and provinces), while the other has been this very different “vocational” structure found in organizations such as recognized “religious orders” and specific “missionary societies” which are not involved in the establishment of dioceses or provinces. While these two differing structures have often had to co-exist with a certain noticeable “tension,” or perhaps even rivalry, history has repeatedly demonstrated that it is this second “vocational” structure that has actually been used by God to inspire, strengthen, build up, and otherwise renew the more familiar “jurisdictional” structure of the Church.

Indeed, during the brief twelve year run of the Anglican Mission as a “Mission – nothing more and nothing less,” we have already seen our work inspire, build up, and renew the church in very real and concrete ways. The specifics of our original vision have now begun to shape the present Anglican footprint in North America as other bodies have embraced our once controversial “vision,” and joined us in our noted strategy of:

1) unapologetically overstepping established jurisdictional boundaries for the sake of the gospel
2) making “mission” the primary focus of our life and work
3) undertaking “evangelism” specifically through church planting
4) embracing the richness of all “3 streams” of church life [evangelical, catholic, charismatic]
5) maintaining a clear and intentional connection with the wider “Global South” church

By God’s grace, we can now expect our influence to continue to bless and strengthen the surrounding jurisdictional model of the church as we now order our life together as a formal “Society of Mission and Apostolic Works.” Such is our intention and commitment.

In summary then, in answer to the question of what, exactly, is a “missionary society,” we may say that it is not a church, but rather a complimentary structure within the church. This different kind of structure has a long and rich heritage dating back to at least the Celtic tradition. With specific reference to the emerging “shape” of the Anglican Mission, 75% of what we have always been and done will remain exactly as it has been before. The remaining 25% reflecting the changes that we will be making, will largely be centered around the new structures that we will be necessarily putting in place in order to organize and order our life together as a formal “mission society.” Among these “new structures” will be the governing Constitution and Statutes, and the overseeing “College of Consultors.”

Perhaps in now describing, “ordering,” and structuring our life together as a “mission society,” it may be useful to think of Mission as what we do, and as Society as how we organize.

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2 Dr. Ralph D. Winter, The Two Structures of God’s Redemptive Mission (Presbyterian Center for Mission Studies, p.7)
2) **How is this different from the institutional church?**

The most immediate “differences” experienced by those choosing to operate and live out their lives and ministries in the “vocational” structures of a missionary society as opposed to those choosing to do so in the “jurisdictional” structures of a denomination or a province or diocese, are not necessarily to be found in matters of belief, theology, liturgy, or even in a passion for mission and evangelism. The immediate differences will be found in:

- a) the **structures**
- b) the roles of **bishops**
- c) the overall “cultures” created in these two different models.

While these differences in the ordering of church life and mission ultimately both complement one another and strengthen the work and mission of the church, they have also created a certain ongoing tension in church history that is still with us today. Before addressing the specifics of how this tension is most often experienced, I would like to first address the three differences noted above.

The different **structures** inevitably both express and “shape” the differences found in the roles of bishops and in the overall “cultures” of the two complementary patterns for ordering the church’s life. Both patterns provide “order,” as they are both clearly structured fellowships. Both patterns can claim a long and rich heritage in church history, as they can trace their roots back to roughly the 4th century A.D. However, the two structures approach church life and mission in very different ways, and with very different perspectives.

The “jurisdictional” model for ordering the church approaches church life and mission by first setting up the desired geographical and canonical structures for a given area, and then evangelize. This approach in Anglican systems involves the creation of geographical provinces, dioceses, deaneries, and parishes governed and ordered by bishops, synods, conventions, canons, and committees. This particular structure requires an enormous amount of time and money regardless of whether or not it ever actually produces the desired “fruits” of effective outreach and mission. In his book *Dancing with Dinosaurs*, Bill Easum prophetically voiced his concerns about the challenges now being faced by these more traditional structures for church life in this 21st century, by comparing them to the plight of the dinosaur. He argued that both do have great heritages. Both once influenced their world tremendously. Both require an enormous amount of food. And both became endangered species. Sadly, no one can deny the alarming decline of this once fabled “jurisdictional” model for ordering church life in our Anglican context and in our western world.

The “vocational” model of the missionary society approaches ministry very differently. It tackles the mission first, and sets up the adaptive and flexible structures then required as it goes along. Its structures are intentionally minimalist, more relaxed, and more fluid. While there is a clear and recognizable “order” that is defined by its Constitution, the structures of the mission society are kept to a minimum as the “jurisdictional” language of synods, conventions, canons, standing committees, diocesan councils and voting delegates representing each congregation is simply not a part of the lexicon of a “missionary society.” Bishop John Rodgers has described this very different structure as being, by design, “stripped down for mission, and not wearing Saul’s armor!”

The next major difference between life in the “missionary society” and life in the institutional church is found in the roles of **bishops**. In the “jurisdictional” model the bishops’ main task and work is the oversight of their diocese. The focus of their work is pastoral and administrative. In the missionary society model the roles of bishops are not centered around administering a diocese or even a small network of churches. Instead, bishops are expected to perform and fulfill the duties and sacramental actions peculiar to their order, and to exercise their specific spiritual gifts in the work of evangelistic outreach, church planting, and the recruiting, resourcing, and releasing of new leaders to accomplish the work of the Mission. While this understanding of the role of a bishop may sound to some as both impractical and unrealistic, this is a vision for the roles of bishops that is, frankly, both ancient and future.

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This is, in fact, the early role for bishops that we find in the Celtic tradition of the 4th century and beyond in the British Isles. This is also the kind of new thinking regarding the role for bishops that has been recommended by the Church of England’s Mission and Public Affairs Council. Their working group wrote in 2004 that the role of bishop as leader in mission is crucial, and that they need to be sufficiently free from administrative overload to be able to invest time in a more apostolic role, developing mission strategy and taking the lead in mission initiatives.

Nevertheless, this is a role for bishops that is simply nowhere to be found in the church today according to Dr. George Hunter. He writes “Celtic bishops were primarily evangelists rather than administrators; I know of no denomination with a missional job description for its bishops.” Although the Anglican Mission has no interest in functioning as a denomination, by ordering our lives as a “missionary society,” we will indeed embrace this role for bishops, and thereby avoid many of the distractions and pitfalls of the jurisdictional model of the episcopacy.

Bishop Fitz Allison expressed his appreciation for, and his confidence in, this vision of a missionary society with missional bishops recently when he wrote in a personal letter to a friend:

“+Chuck's vision of a mission to the English speaking non-Christians in North America is that it can be best approached by a missionary society unencumbered by the necessary machinery of a diocese...This working vision appeals to me in my experience as a bishop saddled with a large number of weak non-growing missions requiring pastoral attention and nurture plus, in my case,12 institutions on which the bishop automatically serves. They range from colleges, prep schools, retirement facilities, etc. and often need the bishop to help with fund raising. This does not include the oversight of 72 parishes.

These legitimate duties and responsibilities leave little room for planting congregations or making sure the doctrine and theology of the clergy are truly orthodox. To have a missionary society unencumbered to plant churches - a most ambitious task that weeds out non-committed and inept clergy very rapidly - is badly needed.”

Under the new Constitution for the Anglican Mission as a “missionary society,” the Office of the Apostolic Vicar will be able to carry out most of the operational and administrative duties and responsibilities that are inevitably found in the “jurisdictional” model of the roles of bishops. This will make it possible for each bishop to be personally and individually assigned a specific “portfolio” of work and ministry that both fits his spiritual gifting and passion, and engages each bishop in the essential work of mission. It is for this reason they will be called “missionary bishops.”

The final major difference between the vocational and jurisdictional approaches to ordering and structuring the life and work of the church is found in the overall culture that is both created and found in these two different models. With very different structures, and with very different roles of bishops, it is inevitable that the culture that is created and experienced in these two systems will be very different. The culture of the Anglican Mission is now very well set and very well known. Some of the cultural “distinctives” presently found in the Anglican Mission are:

- a willingness to take risks and pioneer new ways of being the church
- a single-minded focus on evangelistic outreach and church-planting
- the unapologetic embrace of all “3 streams” of church life [evangelical, catholic, charismatic]
- a minimalist approach to “structures” [“stripped down for mission –not wearing Saul’s armor”]
- an environment of freedom with a minimum of “permission-giving” [“freedom with fences”]
- a bias for action, creativity, and individual initiative
- intentional about attracting, resourcing, and releasing leaders into the work of mission

While these qualities have created a very distinct and very effective culture for mission and church planting in the life of the Anglican Mission, this culture is not always appreciated or valued by those firmly committed to the more

5 Finney, Recovering The Past, p.111-13
6 Bishop Graham Cray (Chair), Mission-shaped Church (Church House Publishing, 2004, p.135
8 Bishop C. FitzSimons Allison, Personal letter, May 5, 2012
jurisdictional model for structuring church life. There is an anxiety about the very “cultural distinctives” that we identified and listed above in describing our life together in the Anglican Mission. There is a strong bias against this vocational model and structure for ordering church life that can be traced back to the period of the Celtic tradition. The same tensions and struggles that we find recorded in church history between the “Roman” and the “Celtic” models for ordering and structuring the church that more or less culminated in the Synod of Whitby in 664 A.D., remain very much with us to this day.

George Hunter draws the parallel between those struggles for control leading up to the Synod of Whitby, and the present-day struggles for control found in most North American denominations. He writes:

I have reported at length on the ancient Roman ecclesiastical campaign to control the growing Celtic movement because we observe a parallel case today in most of the mainline denominations of the United States, especially those denominations once born in Europe and historically exported to North America. In most American denominations, including mine, the people who control the denomination are the same people who assume that they know best, who put in the most overtime to gain and retain influence...and who are certain that a European way of doing church is best for all churches. Their special obsession is to control the growing wing of the church and “correct” it in a European direction.

Steve Addison, a lifelong student and observer of movements that have tremendously renewed and expanded the faith, also notes and describes some of this tension between those who embrace the jurisdictional model, and those who do not, as he writes:

God takes the initiative and chooses unlikely people, far from the center of ecclesiastical power...He inspires innovative insights regarding His mission and how it is to be carried out. Despite opposition from powerful forces within society and the existing church, the gospel spreads into unreached fields. The existing church is renewed...

And finally, Ralph Winter draws similar conclusions as he writes of the tensions between the Church Missionary Society [CMS] in England and the ever-present centralizing perspective of denominational leaders. He describes how “mission societies” that began as semi-autonomous or very nearly independent organizations began to have their legitimacy openly questioned as a result of their very effective, but very different (vocational) structures.

There are then, real differences between the vocational structures of the church found in “mission societies”, and the jurisdictional structures found in the institutional church. These differences have historically resulted not only in the creation of very different and distinct cultures, but the creation of very real tensions between the advocates of the two models and structures. The question is always whether they should be viewed as “competing” structures, or as “complimentary” structures. I believe that the correct and God-honoring answer must always be that these are “complimentary” structures within the life of the Church and can serve the Church’s life and mission and enrich each other in doing so.

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9 Hunter, The Celtic Way of Evangelism, p.33
11 Winter, The Two Structures of God’s Redemptive Mission, pp.10-12
3) What makes us unique?

While there is nothing exactly “unique” about choosing to structure our life together as a formal missionary society, there are now, and there will continue to be, things about the Anglican Mission that will, in some ways, set us apart from other groups and religious organizations committed to the work of mission and evangelistic outreach. A few of those things that may now be worth noting and briefly commenting on are:

a) The College of Consultors
b) The Apostolic Vicar
c) The Office of the Apostolic Vicar
d) The Conference of Missionary Bishops
e) The multi-jurisdictional canonical relationships of the Mission
f) Our pioneering and visionary “charism”

a) The overseeing body of the Anglican Mission will be our “College of Consultors.” The members of this college will initially include the founding Primates of the Anglican Mission, plus other Archbishops and bishops that will be identified and elected by the College to serve with them in this body. Their specific work will be:

- to provide oversight and accountability for the Anglican Mission
- to guard and preserve the vision and the direction of the Mission
- to provide a venue of adjudication if and when this may be necessary

b) The Apostolic Vicar is the bishop elected by the College of Consultors to serve as the presiding ecclesiastical authority charged with both leading and governing the Mission. The Apostolic Vicar will:

- run and govern the Mission on behalf of the College of Consultors
- appoint persons to the Office of the Apostolic Vicar to assist in carrying out his responsibilities

c) The Office of the Apostolic Vicar will consist of both clergy and lay leaders, appointed by the Apostolic Vicar, to serve as a team to assist in the work, the overall governance, and the day to day administration of the Mission. This “Office of the Apostolic Vicar” will include:

- A Chief of Staff who will serve as the chief assistant to the Apostolic Vicar
- A Rector General responsible for the supervision of key staff and day to day operations
- Episcopal Vicars (bishops or priests) responsible for overseeing specific regions and/or work
- Canons appointed to attend to specific and particular areas of life and ministry in the Mission

d) The Conference of Missionary Bishops will include both active and retired bishops who will:

- provide ongoing wisdom and counsel for the Mission as a part of the work and of the Office of the Apostolic Vicar
- provide episcopal leadership in the specific areas of ministry assigned to each bishop by the Apostolic Vicar based on the spiritual gifts, passions, and skills of each bishop
- serve the founding purpose of the Mission by recognizing, recruiting, resourcing and releasing leaders for planting and serving churches in the Anglican tradition
- perform those sacramental actions and duties that are peculiar to the office of bishop

Just as bishops served as leaders of evangelistic mission in the Celtic tradition, their work and role was also essential in the Anglican missionary societies listed on the first page of this paper. These missionary societies included and engaged missionary bishops in their work of mission and evangelistic outreach. The Anglican Mission has chosen to continue with this established model, and follow this rich heritage.

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12 Finney, Recovering the Past, pp. 54-55
13 Addison, The Episcopal Church in the United States, pp. 133-4; pp. 238-9, p. 350
e) The original pattern of *multi-jurisdictional* canonical relationships embraced by the Anglican Mission with its establishment in Amsterdam in 2000 will continue as we order our lives as a missionary society. Accordingly, different clergy will continue to have canonical residence in different dioceses and provinces who will then license and release these clergy to service and ministry in the Anglican Mission.

Anglican Mission congregations will not themselves be multi-jurisdictional, for they will continue to affiliate solely with this “mission society” without ever affiliating with either a diocese or a provincial territory.

f) The Anglican Mission will continue to offer its *pioneering and visionary “charism”* to the Church. God has, from our very beginnings, called us to step out in the service of mission and church planting in unexpected, unfamiliar, and creatively pioneering ways. We will, by God’s grace, continue to offer this visionary charism in the service of the gospel, and to the larger Church, as the vision-bearers, voices, and “morning stars” of those new and exciting things that God is presently doing, and that He purposes to do next.

4) Why do I care?

As Christians deeply committed to evangelistic outreach and church planting, the decision to order our lives as a “missionary society” matters enormously because it is exactly this model for mission that has, quite frankly, been demonstrated to be by far the more effective model for this work.\(^\text{14}\) The experience of the Anglican Mission is a case in point. During the twelve years of our existence, the Mission has been able to raise and invest over $46 million dollars in the planting of, on average, one new church every three weeks! While scores of the churches planted have now moved out of the Mission to become a part of the other “jurisdictional” model of Church life (with its dioceses and missionary districts), we care because our unencumbered, laser focus on simply being a Mission – nothing more, nothing less, has produced a modern-day miracle in North American Anglicanism.

We also care about continuing our work as a “missionary society” because, for many of us, this model is simply a better “fit.” We prefer the less demanding structures of this model, we enjoy the “freedom with fences” that we experience in the culture of this model, and we believe ourselves to have been personally “called” to this model.

Finally, we recognize the clear move of the Holy Spirit in the ongoing shaping of the Anglican Mission. We see the Holy Spirit’s movement in the world about us. We have witnessed and experienced His powerful outpouring upon us and through us in this Anglican Mission. We recognize that He now purposes to do even *more* with and through us in the years ahead as he moves to shapes us into a “Society of Mission and Apostolic Works.” We care because we seek to continue to ride the “wave of the Holy Spirit” that has carried us through our first twelve years.

5) How will this affect me?

Experientially, our membership in this new “Society of Mission” will offer an important element of continuity for all of us. With the same purpose, the same values, the same focus, and culture, and leadership, and oversight by the same founding Archbishops, our immediate experience will be one of continuity. Over the long haul, however, the decision to formally order our lives around this “vocational” model, defined and described by a Constitution and through Statutes, will insure that all that God has already established and embedded in our hearts as members of this Anglican Mission will now be guarded and preserved through the inevitable changes that time will bring. As members of this “Society of Mission,” however, our day to day experience will primarily be one of continuity.

The same may be said for our congregations. They too will experience this decision to order our lives as a “missionary society” as involving little or no change. The ways in which the daily rhythms of congregational life, and work, and worship, and fellowship, and strategies for evangelistic outreach are all presently lived out will simply not change with this development. By the power and grace of God, we will remain a Mission – nothing more, nothing less for the present, and for generations yet to come.

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\(^{14}\) Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, p.x-xi, p.33  
Finney, *Recovering The Past*, p. 70-71, p. 141-44