

The Bishop of Durham
The Right Reverend **Justin Welby**
Auckland Castle, Bishop Auckland
County Durham DL14 7NR
Great Britain

Archbishop of Canterbury

Cologne, December 3, 2012

Dear Justin,

What a surprise to us, to you, to the Christian world – your appointment as Archbishop of Canterbury! For a long time in Germany we heard only the name of the Archbishop of York, John Sentamu, to follow Rowan Williams after the announcement of his terminating.

And now it is you! On behalf of all people from Cologne, who had the privilege of meeting you, including Anglican, Protestant, Roman-catholic and other committed Christians in Cologne, who are concerned with the relations to the Church of England, I should like to express our deep joy, our confidence, not to say our proudness of your election. I and others from Cologne had the chance to experience some of your skills like your quick listening, your way of joking, your ability of deciding, your looking beyond Liverpool, Durham, even the Church of England and the oil companies, also your enjoyment in barbecuing and, and, and... So I think you will need all these abilities and perhaps many other ones for your overwhelming task in Canterbury. Therefore I like to assure you of our good wishes, prayers and hopes for you personally, your service and your worldwide responsibility as Archbishop of Canterbury. We all wish you, as we say in German, a “lucky hand” – eine glückliche Hand – in handling the concerns of the Anglican Communion.

Coming back to the relations to Germany I should like to bring now to your attendance another perspective For you. it is no longer the road from Liverpool to Cologne rather than from Canterbury to Hannover, the headquarter of the Evangelical Church in Germany. It was one of your predecessors, Robert Runcie, with whom I prepared in Vancouver 1983 for the celebration of the Lima Liturgy under his presidency, who initiated the Meissen Common Statement of 1988: “On the Way to Visible Unity” between the Church of England and the Evangelical Church in Germany. It brought an enormous improvement in the relations between the two Churches: by now there exist a lot of partnerships between congregations, cities and cathedrals of our countries, including our partnership Liverpool – Cologne. Nevertheless there are also still unsolved problems between the Churches in England and Germany, which hinder so far to reach full communion. They concern, as you know of course, the questions of the historic episcopacy and accordingly of full recognition of the ordained ministry and even the recognition of confirmation in Germany.

I do not know, whether George Carey, whom I met 1998 at the 8th Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Harare, ever went to Germany for improving the relations. Rowan Williams came at least in 2004 to Bonn, in order to receive an honorary doctorate and to deliver an extraordinary presentation on “The Creed and the Eucharist in the Fourth and Fifth Centuries”. As we had been working together on the Apostolic Faith Study of the WCC’s Faith and Order Commission in Kottayam/India I asked him to continue his international ecumenical involvement also beyond his Anglican borders. But I am afraid, during his term of responsibility he was too much overburdened with problems within his own Church as to be able to do so.

And now it is your turn, dear Justin. When the persons responsible for partnerships came together last week, at the end of November, in the EKD headquarters, we heard about the “Mission-Shaped Church”-project within the Church of England, but also about the above mentioned problems between our Churches. You know that we in Germany are in the process of preparing for the commemoration of the beginning of the reformation in 2017, to which the Anglican Communion in a certain way also belongs to. Would it not be a wonderful idea and a purpose worthwhile aiming at, to do after Meissen 1988 in 2017 the second official step to reach full communion between our Churches: overcoming the still existing problems, signing again an official agreement, then focussing on full Church communion and celebrating it together publicly in Westminster Abbey as well as in the Dresden Frauenkirche? This were a public testimony after centuries, that churches are able to overcome their longterm differences and to proclaim commonly the Gospel both are serving to.

This perspective will certainly not be the first priority during your first year as Archbishop of Canterbury. But taking into account your ability of quickly discerning problems and perhaps also their solutions you may pick up this concern early enough before the year 2017. To give you some dates, which could help to improve the matter: in February 2014 the Meissen Commission, I do *not* belong to, will meet in Germany and deal with questions of recognition of ministries and church communion. For September 2016 the Anglican-Lutheran Society together with the German region of the International Ecumenical Fellowship plan a conference in the Augustinian monastery in Erfurt, focussing on spiritual aspects of our traditions. Finally the German region of the International Ecumenical Fellowship will invite from August 21 through 28 in 2017 for an international ecumenical gathering in Wittenberg, summing up the fruits of the ecumenical improvements until then. This were an appropriate event for a presentation or a sermon from you – in English language.

It is my hope to bring these perspectives to your attention, before you will begin your ministry in Canterbury next year. You will certainly now make up your mind about themes and priorities you will have to deal with. Therefore I thought it might be meaningful to bring these aspects now before you. On the continent it is not only me who looks for an active involvement of the Archbishop of Canterbury for bringing together “the spread sheep of the house of Israel”.

If it were possible to attend your installation on march 21, I would enjoy it very much; if not, I will understand.

With all good wishes for you, your ministry and your family

Yours in Christ

Hans-Georg Link