



PRIMATE OF AUSTRALIA

11 April 2012

Malcolm McPherson
BY EMAIL

Dear Malcolm,

Thank you for your email dated 14 March 2012 and, in particular, for the booklet “Moving Forward Together: Homosexuality and the Church of Ireland.”

The current position of the Anglican Church of Australia on sexuality and gender relations can be found in numerous resolutions of the General Synod of 2004 (33,59,61-64) (attached). With respect to marriage, it was resolved that:

“This General Synod welcomes the initiative of the Federal Parliament in clarifying that marriage, at law in this country, is the union of a man and a woman to the exclusion of all others, voluntarily entered into for life.” (64/04)

The General Synod of 2004 adopted the code of practice *Faithfulness in Service* for clergy and lay Church workers (33/04) as well as for bishops (59/04). *Faithfulness in Service* includes the expectation that “you are to be chaste and not engage in sex outside of marriage.” Furthermore, a resolution in 2007 commended this standard to dioceses for inclusion in their own codes of behaviour (Day 3/2007 Code of Behaviour) (attached).

The General Synod of 2004 recommended ongoing study of human sexuality by way of the Doctrine Commission’s publications *Faithfulness in Fellowship* and *Lost in Translation* and requested dioceses “to listen as the Church develops a Christian response to the contemporary experience of human sexuality.” (Resolution 61/2004)

The General Synod did not approve of the liturgical blessing of same-sex relationships (62/2004) or the ordination of persons in same-sex relationships (63/2004). Yet it recognized that these are matters of ongoing debate and conversation in the Church and that we are obliged to listen to each other with respect. There will be a diversity of views among Anglicans on this as on other issues.

To a considerable extent, debate in the Australian Church is coloured by Resolution 1.10 of the 1998 Lambeth Conference (attached). While Lambeth resolutions have no legislative force, many have argued that Resolution 1.10 has an authoritative character, as expressing the mind of the international Anglican Communion.

In Resolution 1.10, the Conference “upholds faithfulness in marriage between a man and a woman in lifelong union, and believes that abstinence is right for those who are not called to marriage.” It also, among other things, “cannot advise the legitimizing or blessing of same sex unions nor ordaining those involved in same gender unions”.

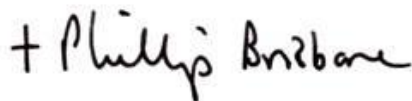
The bishops at Lambeth committed themselves “to listen to the experience of homosexual persons” and said that “we wish to assure them that they are loved by God and that all baptised, believing and faithful persons, regardless of sexual orientation, are full members of the Body of Christ”. The Conference “calls on our people to minister pastorally and sensitively to all irrespective of sexual orientation and to condemn irrational fear of homosexuals...”.

In the context of these resolutions, I am advised that the *Marriage Act 1961*, as it stands, contains adequate protection for religious freedom. In particular, section 47 of the Act provides that a minister of religion is not obliged to solemnize any marriage, and the amendments proposed in the three Bills now before Parliament do not affect this protection.

I am concerned to promote respectful dialogue among people of diverse views, and I would, of course, eschew any defamatory comments made against supporters of same-sex marriage.

Please accept my prayers and good wishes during this Easter season.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Phillip Aspinall". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

The Most Reverend Dr Phillip Aspinall
Primate

Attachments

Anglican Church of Australia—General Synod Resolutions

33/04 CHILD PROTECTION – 1

The General Synod:

(a) receives the report of the Child Protection Committee;

(b) adopts as the Church's *Safe Ministry Policy Statement*:

“The Anglican Church of Australia is committed to the physical, emotional and spiritual welfare and safety of all people, particularly within its own community.”

The Church will:

- carefully recruit and train its clergy and church workers;
- adopt and encourage safe ministry practices by its clergy and lay church workers;
- respond promptly to each concern raised about the behaviour of its clergy and lay church workers;
- offer pastoral support to any person who has suffered abuse; and
- provide pastoral support to and supervision of any person known to have abused a child or another vulnerable person.

(c) adopts the *Safe Ministry Check* in the Report of the Child Protection Committee as the national applicant and referee questionnaires for the selection of ordination candidates and for the screening of clergy and church workers who have contact with children in their ministry;

(d) authorises the revision of the *Safe Ministry Check* by the Standing Committee;

(e) adopts *Faithfulness in Service* in the Report of the Child Protection Committee as the national code for personal behaviour and the practice of pastoral ministry by clergy and lay church workers; and

(f) authorises the revision of *Faithfulness in Service* by the Standing Committee.

Garth Blake – 4 Oct 04

59/04 FAITHFULNESS IN SERVICE

That the General Synod hereby approves “Faithfulness in Service” as the code of conduct for observance by Bishops.

Dane Courtney - 7 Oct 04

61/04 SEXUALITY & GENDER RELATIONSHIPS – 1

That this General Synod

1 notes the Lambeth Conference resolution 1.10 of 1998 on human sexuality and subsequent developments in various parts of the Anglican Communion;

2 welcomes the publication of the study guide to *Faithfulness in Fellowship*;

3 urges Dioceses to promote the use of the study guide and also commends to the Dioceses the Doctrine Commission’s recently published essays *Lost in Translation* as they explore the importance of Scripture in our understanding of this issue; and

4 requests Dioceses to commit themselves to listen as the Church develops a Christian response to the contemporary experience of human sexuality.

Chris Jones - 7 Oct 04

62/04 SEXUALITY & GENDER RELATIONSHIPS – 2

Recognising that this is a matter of ongoing debate and conversation in this church and that we all have an obligation to listen to each other with respect, this General Synod does not condone the liturgical blessing of same sex relationships.

Bruce Kaye - 7 Oct 04

63/04 SEXUALITY & GENDER RELATIONSHIPS – 3

Recognising that this is a matter of ongoing debate and conversation in this church and that we all have an obligation to listen to each other with respect, this General Synod does not condone the ordination of people in open committed same sex relationships.

Bruce Kaye - 7 Oct 04

64/04 SEXUALITY & GENDER RELATIONSHIPS – 4

This General Synod welcomes the initiative of the Federal Parliament in clarifying that marriage, at law in this country, is the union of a man and a woman to the exclusion of all others, voluntarily entered into for life.

Bruce Kaye - 7 Oct 04

Day 3/2007 CODE OF BEHAVIOUR

Canon Sandy Grant moved, Bp Alan Stewart seconding,

That this General Synod

(i) notes resolution 33/04 of the 13th general Synod which received the 2004 Report of the Child Protection Committee and adopted Faithfulness in Service in that Report as the national code for personal behaviour and the practice of pastoral ministry by clergy and lay church workers, and

(ii) in line with resolution 35/04 of the 13th General Synod, again recommends that each diocese adopts a code for personal behaviour and the practice of pastoral ministry by its clergy and church workers that includes Faithfulness in Service and any revisions, in particular, its standard expressed for clergy and church workers in the section on sexual conduct that "you are to be chaste and not engage in sex outside of marriage."

Resolution I.10 of the 1998 Lambeth Conference

This Conference:

- a. commends to the Church the subsection report on human sexuality [\[1\]](#);
- b. in view of the teaching of Scripture, upholds faithfulness in marriage between a man and a woman in lifelong union, and believes that abstinence is right for those who are not called to marriage;
- c. recognises that there are among us persons who experience themselves as having a homosexual orientation. Many of these are members of the Church and are seeking the pastoral care, moral direction of the Church, and God's transforming power for the living of their lives and the ordering of relationships. We commit ourselves to listen to the experience of homosexual persons and we wish to assure them that they are loved by God and that all baptised, believing and faithful persons, regardless of sexual orientation, are full members of the Body of Christ;
- d. while rejecting homosexual practice as incompatible with Scripture, calls on all our people to minister pastorally and sensitively to all irrespective of sexual orientation and to condemn irrational fear of homosexuals, violence within marriage and any trivialisation and commercialisation of sex;
- e. cannot advise the legitimising or blessing of same sex unions nor ordaining those involved in same gender unions;
- f. requests the Primates and the ACC to establish a means of monitoring the work done on the subject of human sexuality in the Communion and to share statements and resources among us;
- g. notes the significance of the Kuala Lumpur Statement on Human Sexuality and the concerns expressed in resolutions IV.26, V.1, V.10, V.23 and V.35 on the authority of Scripture in matters of marriage and sexuality and asks the Primates and the ACC to include them in their monitoring process.

1. Called to Full Humanity - Section 1 Report

Subsection 3 - Human Sexuality

Human sexuality is the gift of a loving God. It is to be honoured and cherished by all people. As a means for the expression of the deepest human love and intimacy, sexuality has great power.

The Holy Scriptures and Christian tradition teach that human sexuality is intended by God to find its rightful and full expression between a man and a woman in the covenant of marriage, established by God in creation, and affirmed by our Lord Jesus Christ. Holy Matrimony is, by intention and divine purpose, to be a life-long, monogamous and unconditional commitment between a woman and a man. The Lambeth Conference 1978 and 1998 both affirmed 'marriage to be sacred, instituted by God and blessed by our Lord Jesus Christ'.

The New Testament and Christian history identify singleness and dedicated celibacy as Christ-like ways of living. The Church needs to recognise the demands and pressures upon both single and married people. Human beings define themselves by relationships with God and other persons. Churches need to find effective ways of encouraging Christ-like living, as well as providing opportunities for the flourishing of friendship, and the building of supportive community life.

We also recognise that there are among us persons who experience themselves as having a homosexual orientation. Many of these are members of the Church and are seeking the pastoral care, moral direction of the Church, and God's transforming power for the living of their lives and the ordering of relationships. We wish to assure them that they are loved by God, and that all baptised, believing and faithful persons, regardless of sexual orientation, are full members of the Body of Christ. We call upon the Church and all its members to work to end any discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, and to oppose homophobia.

Clearly some expressions of sexuality are inherently contrary to the Christian way and are sinful. Such unacceptable expression of sexuality include promiscuity, prostitution, incest, pornography, paedophilia, predatory sexual behaviour, and sadomasochism (all of which may be heterosexual and homosexual), adultery, violence against wives, and female circumcision. From a Christian perspective these forms of sexual expression remain sinful in any context. We are particularly concerned about the pressures on young people to engage in sexual activity at an early age, and we urge our Churches to teach the virtue of abstinence.

All human relationships need the transforming power of Christ which is available to all, and particularly when we fall short of biblical norms.

We must confess that we are not of one mind about homosexuality. Our variety of understanding encompasses:

- those who believe that homosexuality is a disorder, but that through the grace of Christ people can be changed, although not without pain and struggle.
- those who believe that relationships between people of the same gender should not include genital expression, that this is the clear teaching of the Bible and of the Church universal, and that such activity (if unrepented of) is a barrier to the Kingdom of God.
- those who believe that committed homosexual relationships fall short of the biblical norm, but are to be preferred to relationships that are anonymous and transient.

- those who believe that the Church should accept and support or bless monogamous covenant relationships between homosexual people and that they may be ordained.

It appears that the opinion of the majority of bishops is not prepared to bless same sex unions or to ordain active homosexuals. Furthermore many believe that there should be a moratorium on such practices.

We have prayed, studied and discussed these issues, and we are unable to reach a common mind on the scriptural, theological, historical, and scientific questions which are raised. There is much that we do not yet understand. We request the Primates and the Anglican Consultative Council to establish a means of monitoring work done in the Communion on these issues and to share statements and resources among us.

The challenge to our Church is to maintain its unity while we seek, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to discern the way of Christ for the world today with respect to human sexuality. To do so will require sacrifice, trust and charity towards one another, remembering that ultimately the identity of each person is defined by Christ.

There can be no description of human reality, in general or in particular, outside the reality of Christ. We must be on guard, therefore, against constructing any other ground for our identities than the redeemed humanity given to use in him. Those who understand themselves as homosexuals, no more and no less than those who do not, are liable to false understandings based on personal or family histories, emotional dispositions, social settings and solidarities formed by common experiences or ambitions. Our sexual affections can no more define who we are than our class race or nationality. At the deepest ontological level, therefore, there is no such thing as "a" homosexual or "a" heterosexual; therefore there are human beings, male and female, called to redeemed humanity in Christ, endowed with a complex variety of emotional potentialities and threatened by a complex variety of forms of alienation.[12]

12. *An examination of the theological Principles Affecting the Homosexual Debate*, St Andrew's Day Statement 1995.