



CNI

NEWS FOCUS -

Same-sex couples “full members” of church say Anglican bishops of South Africa but no other changes

The bishops of the [Anglican Church of Southern Africa](#) (1) have issued [this statement](#) (2) Also available [here](#).

The bishops again discussed and worked over their draft Pastoral Guidelines in response to Civil Unions within the wider contexts of Marriage and Human Sexuality in readiness for decision at Provincial Synod. These reaffirm our assurance that all baptised, believing and faithful persons, regardless of sexual orientation, are full members of the Body of Christ.

However, they they do not change our current policy, which is that the Province ‘cannot advise
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the legitimising or blessing of same sex unions nor ordaining those involved in same gender unions' (Resolution 1:10 of the Lambeth Conference of 1998).

The Prayer Book affirms 'that marriage by divine institution is a lifelong and exclusive union partnership between one man and one woman'; therefore the draft guidelines affirm for now that 'partnership between two persons of the same sex cannot be regarded as a marriage... accordingly our clergy are not permitted to bless such unions... nor are they permitted to enter into such unions while they remain in licensed ministry'...

Additionally the primate of this province, Archbishop Thabo Makgoba of Cape Town has published [this pastoral letter](#). (3) Also available [here](#). (4)

...We have issued a joint statement from the Synod, but I want to report to you in more detail to give you the full context of one of the more challenging matters we discussed. One of the key tasks before us was to fulfil the mandate given to us by Provincial Standing Committee and to finalise pastoral guidelines for couples in

South Africa who are in same-sex civil unions. Against the backdrop of the international debate on this issue in the worldwide Anglican Communion, our discussions were frank, open and robust. We sensitively considered our role as the Anglican Church in Southern Africa within the broader family of the Communion, cognisant of the divergent strands of theological thinking within the Province of Southern Africa and of the different pastoral challenges that the different dioceses and the different countries of our Province are facing.

The document we have agreed upon will go to Provincial Synod for adoption in September, and will be published a few months ahead of Synod in the First Agenda Book. I believe that its adoption by Provincial Synod would be an important first step in signalling to the LGBT community that we in the Anglican Church of Southern Africa, through our top deliberative and legislative body, see them as welcome members of our body as sisters and brothers in Christ. In the words of the guidelines:

“We reaffirm our assurance to 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. Many of these are baptised and confirmed 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."

In another section, the bishops declared that: "We are of one mind that gay, lesbian and transgendered members of our church share in full membership as baptised members of the Body of Christ..."

This has important implications in parishes where, for example, same-sex couples who are living in civil unions under South African law bring their children for baptism and confirmation. No child brought for baptism should be refused merely because of the sexual orientation of the parents, and particular care should be taken against stigmatising not only parents but their children too.

We also tried at the Synod of Bishops to draw up guidelines for clergy wanting to bless couples in same-sex unions, or who want to enter same-sex unions themselves. We constituted a group of bishops reflecting a cross-section of our views to

discuss such guidelines. On this issue, I had to report back to the Synod, the only agreement we reached is that we were not of one mind.

Our differences do not only revolve around the theology of marriage, but are also a result of different pastoral realities in different dioceses. For example, most of our dioceses across Southern Africa are predominantly rural, and for many the urgent priorities of food security, shelter, healthcare and education crowd out debate on the issue of human sexuality. In some rural dioceses, responding to challenges to the Church's restrictions on polygamous marriages is a much higher pastoral priority.

As a consequence, the Synod of Bishops has agreed that we will continue to regard ourselves bound by the broad consensus in the Anglican Communion, expressed by the Lambeth Conference in 1998, which is that we "cannot advise the legitimising or blessing of same-sex unions nor ordaining those involved in same gender unions". Having said that, we did address the questions of whether that decision is immutable, whether it has replaced scripture, and when a Province of the Communion, or a diocese within a Province may deviate from it...

This province encompasses St. Helena and Tristan da Cunha, Mozambique (Lebombo and Niassa), the Republic of Namibia, the Kingdom of Lesotho, the Kingdom of Swaziland and Angola in addition to the Republic of South Africa itself.

Links -

1. <http://www.anglicanchurchsa.org/>
2. <http://archbishop.anglicanchurchsa.org/2016/02/statement-from-synod-of-bishops-of.html>
3. <http://archbishop.anglicanchurchsa.org/2016/02/to-laos-to-people-of-god-lent-2016.html>
4. <http://www.anglicanchurchsa.org/view.asp?ItemID=708&tname=tblComponent1&oname=News&pg=front>

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