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NEWS FOCUS -

Senior Anglicans warning that apology to LGBT community must be followed by action

Senior Anglicans who [wrote to the Archbishop of Canterbury](#) on the eve of last week's [Primates Meeting](#) have thanked him for his apology for the way the Church has treated the gay community, but warned that his words must be followed by action, writes Rith Gledhill in “Christian Today”.

Eighty-five senior Anglicans who originally signed a letter to Archbishop Justin Welby have written again to thank him for the apology he made to LGBT Christians at the end of the Primates Meeting, but added that words alone are not enough.

They warned that words without action will further undermine trust and cause "yet more pain".

At the end of their week-long meeting, during which the conservative Archbishop of Uganda left early, the remaining Primates of the Anglican Communion agreed by a substantial majority that The Episcopal Church should face "consequences" for consecrating gay bishops and approving same-sex marriage.

About the lesbian and gay community, Archbishop Welby said: "I want to say how sorry I am for the hurt and pain in the past and present that the Church has caused and that the love we have at times completely failed to show." This followed the publication of [an open letter to Welby](#) calling for repentance for the way the Church had behaved towards the LGBTI communities.

The latest letter, signed by more than 80 people including cathedral deans, retired bishops and senior clergy and laity, says that failure to carry into action the commitments on equality and opposing criminal sanctions would seriously undermine trust and lead to further pain for LGBTI Christians.

They say the stance taken in the Primates' Communique is a welcome first step: "These are significant and important words, which will engender hope that the Church might finally start to alter the way in which it conducts this debate. That said, we believe that words alone are not enough."

The letter draws attention to the lack of action on commitments first given in 1998, when similar words were used in Resolution 1.10 from the 1998 Lambeth Conference, which laid down a conservative, Biblically-orthodox line on sexuality.

The 85 signatories tell the Archbishop: "You will therefore understand that we will want to hold the Primates to account for their commitments. We are deeply aware that words without action will undermine further the trust of our LGBTI brothers and sisters, and sadly cause yet more pain."

The letter goes on to urge all the Primates who agreed to the communique "to remain true to your word and resolute in your determination to implement these statements swiftly."

Jayne Ozanne, co-ordinator of the two letters and a member of General Synod, told Christian Today: "Our initial letter asked in essence two

things – the acknowledgement that the Church had failed in its duty of care to LGBTI members of the Body of Christ, and repentance for pain and rejection that it has caused. The Primates' communiqué following the 2016 Primates Meeting has done both, added to which they have reaffirmed their rejection of criminal sanctions against gay people.

"Archbishop Justin has gone one step further and personally apologised for the pain that the Church has caused. We therefore need to recognise these positive statements for what they are, and take them as a sign of hope that the Primates will work with us to fight injustice. To do otherwise would of course involve a betrayal of trust."

The communiqué and personal apology are the strongest statements made yet by the Anglican Primates against criminal sanctions, which still exist in many parts of Africa.

One signatory, the Ven David Newman, a leading evangelical and Archdeacon of Loughborough, said: "I know that many across the Church will want to welcome, as I do, the lead the Archbishop has given in making such a full and heartfelt apology for the hurt and pain the Church has caused our LGBTI brothers and

sisters in Christ. My prayer is that his lead will shape the tone of how we talk about this issue and instigate a renewed determination across the communion to confront homophobic prejudice wherever it infects our attitudes to others.

"I hope that significant steps will be taken to stand against the criminalisation of people purely on the grounds of their sexuality. As followers of Christ I believe we can do so much more to model his welcoming love to people in all their potential and vulnerability."

Other signatories include Vicky Beeching, a theologian and LGBT campaigner, the Very Rev Mark Bonney, Dean of Ely, Canon Chris Chivers, Principal of Westcott House, Cambridge, Canon Jeremy Davies, former Precentor of Salisbury Cathedral, Dr David Ison, Dean of St Paul's, Dr Jeffrey John, Dean of St Albans and Prof Diarmaid MacCulloch, specialist in church history at the University of Oxford.

Lambeth Palace has not yet commented on the letter, but in response to other people who have written regarding the Primates Meeting, his office said: "Archbishop Justin has asked me to write thanking you for your message following the recent Anglican Primates' gathering in

Canterbury. You will not be surprised to learn that we have received an enormous number of messages and letters, some angry and distressed at the outcome, while others were supportive of it.

"Archbishop Justin fully recognises the strength of feeling that attends any discussion which touches on human sexuality. The communiqué that was issued at the end of the meeting seeks to respect that... As you will see, the Primates condemn homophobic prejudice and violence, and resolve to work together to offer pastoral care and loving service irrespective of sexual orientation. This conviction arises out their discipleship of Jesus Christ. Importantly they also reaffirm their rejection of criminal sanctions against same-sex attracted people.

"The communique states the Primates' intention to develop a newly agreed process so that it can be applied to any unilateral decision which threatens unity. It is their hope and expectation that the conversation will develop and continue in the months ahead.

"As a global Anglican family each Primate represents but one voice in a Communion where the majority are from the Global South. That is also true for the Archbishop of Canterbury,

although he chairs the meetings. It is important to know that the Primates made the unanimous decision to remain walking together in the Communion, however painful it might be, as a deep expression of their unity in the body of Christ."

The response also pointed towards the Archbishop's [latest blog](#) on the subject, in which he says: "As I said in the press conference on the final day of the meeting, I am deeply sorry for the pain that the church has caused LGBTI people in the past – and the present – and for the love that too often we have completely failed to show in many parts of the world, including England. The worst thing about that is that it causes people to doubt that they are loved by God. We have to see that changed."

He also admits he feared the Primates Meeting would end in schism: "It's no secret to say that before the meeting, the signs were not good. It really was possible that we would reach a decision to walk apart – in effect, to split the Anglican Communion."

He concludes: "If Christ's flock can more or less stay together, it's hope for a world that tears itself apart – a sign of what can happen with the love and mercy of God through Jesus Christ."

Ruth Gledhill in Christian Today.

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<http://www.christiantoday.com/article/apology.to.lgbt.community.must.be.followed.by.action.senior.anglicans.warn.archbishop.of.canterbury/77330.htm>