

Statement on Human Dignity and Marriage
Synod of Bishops of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa (ACSA)
March 2023

Addendum to the Communiqué of the Synod of Bishops, 27th February-3rd March, 2023

The Synod of Bishops of ACSA had extensive discussions on a proposal by the Archbishop's Commission on Human Sexuality that our clergy should be permitted to bless couples in same-sex civil unions. In essence, the proposal – motivated by Bishop Raphael Hess, who chairs the Southern African Anglican Theological Commission – would have permitted individual Dioceses of the Church which chose to do so, to allow same-sex blessings to be performed in parishes in those Dioceses where both the priest and the congregation agreed. The proposal thus provided in effect for a “conscience clause” which would have exempted any Diocese, parish and priest from having to perform such blessings if they did not wish to do so.

The Commission's proposal was made in response to a request made to the Bishops for pastoral guidelines for ministry to couples in South Africa and other countries who are in same-sex civil unions provided for under national law. There are deep divisions on this issue among the 42 independent and autonomous churches of the world-wide Anglican Communion and those divisions have been reflected in our own church over the nine years we have been debating the issue.

At this Synod, we engaged over four sessions in quietly impassioned, but respectful debate with one another over the Commission's proposal. We were agreed on three issues:

1. That, as we have previously declared, “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...” All Anglicans, of whatever sexual orientation, are equally deserving of our pastoral care;
2. That whatever our views on the sacrament of marriage under church law for LGBTQI persons, we accepted that we were not debating any change to our Canon on Holy Matrimony, endorsed in our Prayer Book, which declares “that marriage by divine institution is a lifelong and exclusive union and partnership between one man and one woman”; and
3. That whatever our different interpretations of Scripture and understandings of where the Holy Spirit is leading us, we fully accept one another's integrity in our debates on the matter.

At issue, therefore, was how to provide pastoral care to LGBTQI members of our church, while at the same time respecting the consciences of those opposed to the blessing of same-sex unions.

On one side of the debate were those of us who are deeply unhappy that faithful Anglicans, who are members of our parishes, are denied the church's blessing of their loving, faithful, monogamous, committed same-sex partnerships, when such

recognition in the face of societal prejudice would give them the assurance that they are truly part of the Body of Christ. Those of us who hold this view believe that such Anglicans have suffered for too long.

On the other side of the debate were those of us who believe that all, irrespective of sexual orientation, are made in the image of God and that we are called to extend God's love and grace to all, but who nevertheless also believe that we must hold true to Scripture and uphold tradition as it has been received down the ages. Those of us who hold this view believe that our calling is not to conform to the world, but to be salt and light to the world.

At the end of the debate, we accepted that we are not of one mind on this matter. The divisions within the Synod of Bishops reflect the divisions in the Church as a whole, and we are not at peace with one another on this issue.

However, responding to the debate, Archbishop Thabo Makgoba returned to the task we were given nine years ago, namely to spell out guidelines for providing pastoral ministry to those in same-sex relationships. Noting that we are baptising the children of same-sex couples and confirming LGBTQI Anglicans, he appealed for guidelines on the form of prayers we are to use when ministering to them, for example, when we bless their houses or meals in their homes.

He challenged us to develop prayers of affirmation and acknowledgement for all faithful Anglicans with which all of us can agree, and to present such prayers to Provincial Standing Committee (PSC) and Provincial Synod. Synod agreed to his proposal and resolved to appoint a sub-group of Bishops to draw up proposed prayers for submission to, and decision by, the Bishops before tabling them at PSC. The sub-group comprises Bishop Raphael Hess of Saldanha Bay, Bishop Nkosinathi Ndwandwe of Natal, Bishop Moses Madywabe of Khahlamba and Bishop Luke Pretorius of the Diocese of St Mark the Evangelist.

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