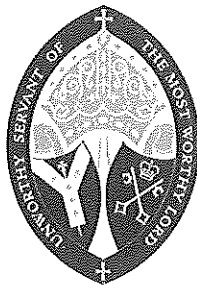


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Dear Jayne,

Thank you for your letter written before the meeting of the Primates of the Anglican Communion. I am sorry it has taken some time for you to receive this reply. I am answering for both the Archbishop of Canterbury and myself.

Your letter called for acknowledgement of the Church's failure in a 'duty of care' to LGBTI members of the body of Christ around the world, and for repentance for accepting and promoting discrimination on the grounds of sexuality.

You will remember that at the concluding News Conference when the Primates' Communiqué was first publicised, the Archbishop of Canterbury emphasised that LGBTI people had been very badly treated by churches; for that he offered a personal, heartfelt and unequivocal apology. This is echoed in the communiqué, in which the Primates express their sorrow.

However there needs to be clarity as to what such an expression of repentance does and does not mean. It should not be misconstrued as to include an implicit rejection of the Church's doctrine of marriage as we have received it. As you know the Church of England's understanding of these matters is a matter for discussion at the present time in our 'Shared Conversations'. The outcome of these conversations is not yet known.

We should not forget all that has been said and done since the Lambeth Conference of 1998 to overcome what Lambeth 1:10 described as the "irrational fear of homosexuals". In fact this is what we have sought to do for over 50 years:

In 1957 the then Archbishop of York, Dr Michael Ramsey, strongly supported the recommendations of the Wolfenden Report for the decriminalisation of sexual activity between consenting adults. The report was endorsed (albeit narrowly) by the General Assembly on the 14th November that year. It was not until 1967 that the proposals were accepted by Parliament in the Sexual Offences Act.

The 1979 the General Synod examined a '*Report of the Commission of on Theology – Christian Pastoral Care for the Homosexual.*' The report said:

"The church should acknowledge its sins against the homosexual. The church is obliged to reflect her Lord's openness to all persons.....Homophobia must be replaced by a sense of common humanity, the desire to understand, and the determination to put away the sins commonly committed against the homosexual.

The denial of human and civil rights to homosexuals is inconsistent with the biblical witness and Reformed theology."

In the November of 1987 General Synod there was a debate on The Rev Tony Higton's private member's motion which sought to persuade the Church to take a stronger line against homosexuality. During the debate Archbishop Robert Runcie said,

"In the face of much cruel prejudice, I want to insist that to be homosexual by nature is to be a full human being, that homosexuals have human rights like the rest of us. We need to listen to what such homosexuals say about their situation."

The General Synod accepted the then Bishop of Chester, The Rt Revd Michael Baughen's amendment to Higton's motion, which emphasised that the call to holiness of life applied to 'all Christians', whether heterosexual or homosexual. A Church Times article by the late Professor Henry Chadwick was quoted in the debate: he wrote that the Church "*has a responsibility somehow both to affirm moral standards and to ensure that its rules do not seem rigorous to the point of inhumanity*".

In 1991 The House of Bishops' statement, '*Issues in Human Sexuality*' included the following call to penitence:

"The story of the Church's attitude to homosexuals has all too often been one of prejudice, ignorance and oppression. All of us need to acknowledge that, and to repent for any part we may have had in it... If we are faithful to Our Lord, then disagreement over the proper expression of homosexual love will never become rejection of the homosexual person." (p.48)

At General Synod in July 1997 a Private Members Motion commending 'Issues in Human Sexuality' for discussion in dioceses was carried by General Synod, with all the bishops voting in favour. An amendment rejecting further discussion was lost in all three houses, the vote in the House of Bishops being unanimous.

In 1998 at the Lambeth Conference, whilst affirming the Church's traditional understanding, the Bishops' statement affirmed that:

"This conference:

- e) 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;" Lambeth 1.10 (1998)*

In 2003 the House of Bishops commended an extensive document, 'Some Issues in Human Sexuality, A Guide to the Debate', for study. The then Bishop of Oxford, The Rt Revd Richard Harries, introducing the report, recognised the potential for hurt on all sides, and for the need for sensitivity in debate:

'When Christians argue for their position in a forthright manner, which of course they are entitled to do, this can be painful to others, especially to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual Christians. For them this debate is about their personal sexual identity and practice, and all too often they experience rejection by other members of the Church.

At the same time, those who believe that the Church's traditional teaching on sexual morality embodies the God-given teaching of Holy Scripture itself can also feel pained by those who interpret Scripture differently or who appear to set aside the teaching of Scripture entirely.' (p. ix)

Furthermore in 2005 the Primates of the Anglican Communion issued the Dromantine Communiqué, which included this affirmation:

"We also wish to make it quite clear that in our discussion and assessment of the moral appropriateness of specific human behaviours, we continue unreservedly to be committed to the pastoral support and care of homosexual people. The victimisation or diminishment of human beings whose affections happen to be ordered towards people of the same sex is anathema to us. We assure homosexual people that they are children of God, loved and valued by him, and deserving of the best we can give of pastoral care and friendship."

That same year whilst maintaining the Church's teaching on sexual ethics remained unchanged, the House of Bishops in its Pastoral Statement on Civil Partnerships also affirmed the need for a positive pastoral response to those who were living in Civil Partnerships. There must be the commitment *"to minister sensitively and pastorally to those Christians who conscientiously decide to order their lives differently."*

In 2013 the Pilling report, "The Report of the House of Bishops Working Group on human sexuality" affirmed amongst its recommendations that

"Homophobia – that is, hostility to homosexual people – is still as serious a matter as it was and the Church should repent for the homophobic attitudes it has sometimes failed to rebuke and should stand firmly against it whenever and wherever it is to be found." (p149)

It also affirmed:

"No one should be accused of homophobia solely for articulating traditional Christian teaching on same sex relationships." (p102)

Most recently in 2014 the House of Bishops Pastoral Guidance on Same Sex Marriage cited and extended the Dromantine Communiqué statement against homophobic prejudice, above, emphasising that members of the Church who entered same sex marriages should *"be welcomed into the life of the worshipping community and not be subjected to questioning about their lifestyle. Neither they nor any children they care for should be denied access to the sacraments."*

In your letter you refer to the 'duty of care' the church has for LGBTI people. The definition of "duty of care" is "the legal obligation to safeguard others from harm while they are in your care, using your services, or exposed to your activities". The object of a duty of care is essentially passive. The content of the duty is essentially not to harm. However, the nature of the church's pastoral concern for its members and potential members is active and demanding: it is to engage them as fully enabled and responsible members of a body of witness, and in doing this it necessarily involves them in a discourse about the word of God and our common calling to discipleship. This the churches of the Anglican Communion have resolutely tried to do through their "listening process" and in other ways.

There have been many invitations to repentance and to a more positive response to homosexual people. A culture has developed that favours repentance and apology in sweeping terms without clarity on what was done wrong. This risks devaluing the currency, turning repentance (especially on behalf of one's predecessors!) into little more than a rhetorical device. It is never wrong, of course, to admit definite false steps that can be identified and repudiated, but it would be wrong to invoke the language of repentance insincerely, without clarity on what is to be repented of.

The Christian doctrine of marriage continues to be a subject of discord, but the rejection of homophobic prejudice is undisputed. The Primates were also unanimous in their desire to continue walking together, despite their disagreements.


The temporary restriction on the participation of The (American) Episcopal Church in some subsidiary bodies has been wrongly reported as a 'sanction' or 'suspension'. As with other members of the Communion, The Episcopal Church is self-governing and that is readily acknowledged. Nevertheless, as the Statement from the Primates Meeting said, "*unilateral actions on a matter of doctrine without Catholic unity, is considered by many of us as a departure from the mutual accountability and interdependence implied through being in relationship with each other in the Anglican Communion.*" When a member church thus takes unilateral steps which cause deep pain to other member churches and threatens the unity of the Communion, there are inevitable consequences. What has been achieved is the ability to keep talking and listening to each other as we walk together, whilst holding different views.

We all hope the Task Group called together by the Archbishop of Canterbury will help to heal the pain and rebuild mutual trust.

I am sure that you will join with us in praying with others that, even if we cannot come to a common mind now, we may work together in the service of our common Lord.

The Archbishop of Canterbury and I are thankful to you and to your co-signatories for your care in writing, and for your prayer for Anglican Churches in their many and various contexts at this time. May God guide and bless you in his service.

With every blessing,



Jayne Ozanne
Director of Accepting Evangelicals