

William Nye, Secretary General of the Archbishops' Council, has today sent the following letter to the Revd Canon Andy Lines, Chairman of GAFCON UK Task Force in response to the briefing paper, 'The Church of England and Lambeth 1:10'.

Dear Andy

I have seen a paper entitled, "The Church of England and Lambeth 1:10", produced by GAFCON UK and dated 13 November, which is described as a briefing to GAFCON Primates. It purports to be an account of "the situation in the Church of England regarding attitudes and teaching on sexual ethics."

The paper paints a significantly misleading picture both of the teaching and practice of the Church of England, and of Resolution 1:10 of the 1998 Lambeth Conference. I am writing to correct some of the erroneous assertions.

Resolution 1:10 of Lambeth 1998

Resolution 1:10 is one of over 90 Resolutions approved by the Lambeth Conference in 1998. It expressed the will of that Conference. Like all Lambeth Conference resolutions, it is not legally binding on all provinces of the Communion, including the Church of England, though it commends an essential and persuasive view of the attitude of the Communion.

Resolution 1:10 sets out teaching on marriage, as being between a man and a woman, and teaching on abstinence outside marriage. It sets out teaching on homosexual practice. It commits the Conference to listening to the experience of homosexual persons, assures them they are loved by God, and condemns irrational fear of homosexuals. It says nothing about discipline within provinces of the Anglican Communion; the Lambeth Conference has no jurisdiction to do so.

The Resolution is an important document in the history of the Anglican Communion. It is not the only important resolution, from that Conference or others. It does not have the force of Scripture, nor is it part of the deposit of faith. The key elements for the Communion are those within the Chicago Lambeth Quadrilateral.

Teaching and practice in the Church of England

The teaching of the Church of England on matters relating to same-sex practice and unions is, and remains, as set out in the document issued by the Church's House of Bishops in 1991, "Issues in Human Sexuality". That document pre-dates the Lambeth Conference of 1998, and is consistent with the resolution 1:10 of the Conference. Subsequent refinement of the teaching by the House of Bishops, as in guidance documents issued when the British State introduced civil partnerships and then (civil) same-sex marriage, has not changed the fundamental substance of that teaching.

When the Government proposed to introduce same-sex (civil) marriage the Church of England argued against it, including in Parliament.

Previously in 2004 the majority of our bishops had voted for legalising civil partnerships when that legislation made its way through parliament.

English law now provides for same-sex civil marriage, and for Christian denominations other than the Church of England or Church in Wales to opt into providing same-sex marriage if they wish to. There is no provision in English law for same-sex marriage in Church of England churches.

The Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013 - the Act of the UK Parliament which introduced same-sex marriage in England and other parts of the UK - expressly leaves intact the Church of England's Canon which defines marriage as "in its nature a union permanent and lifelong ... of one man with one woman". And although the Act changes the definition of marriage in English law generally, those changes do not apply to any ecclesiastical law of the Church of England (Canon B.30).

At present, the House of Bishops is reflecting on conversations across the Church on same-sex issues. But at this point no change has been made to teaching, nor has there been any formal proposal to do so.

The great majority of the clergy and laity of the Church of England have adhered to the teaching and guidance as taught by the House of Bishops, which is consistent with Lambeth 1:10.

You describe a number of issues as being "violations" of Lambeth 1:10. For many of these, I would venture to suggest that they are not "violations" - though, as noted above, Lambeth Conference Resolutions do not provide a binding discipline on member provinces of the Communion. For example:

- clergy in the Church of England are indeed permitted to enter into civil partnerships (which are legally not the same as marriage, and therefore have no bearing on the doctrine of marriage);
- clergy in the Church of England are permitted to offer prayers of support on a pastoral basis for people in same-sex relationships;
- churches are able to indicate that they welcome LGBTI people, just as they would welcome all people;
- clergy and laity alike are entitled to argue for changes to teaching and practice.

There have undoubtedly been cases of people in the Church of England who have not kept to the teaching as set out in "Issues in Human Sexuality". I will not comment on such individual cases. I do not believe it is appropriate to debate these publicly. What matters is not whether they are "violating Lambeth 1:10", which as noted above has no binding legal force. What matters is the position under the Canons (for the clergy) and the broader law and teaching of the Church of England for the laity. It is not the case that no discipline has been applied to clergy who, in violation of their duties under the Canons, have entered same-sex civil marriages. How discipline in the Church of England is applied is a

matter for the Bishops of the Church.

I hope that this will give you and readers of the paper a clearer picture of the state of teaching and practice in the Church of England.

Best wishes

William

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