

SCOTTISH EPISCOPAL CHURCH

College of Bishops Response to Anglican Primates' Letter of February 2009

The Anglican Primates met in Alexandria in February 2009. At the conclusion of their meeting, they issued a communiqué in the form a letter addressed to the Churches of the Anglican Communion, entitled *Deeper Communion; Gracious Restraint*. The College of Bishops has since had the opportunity of a first hand report of the Primates' meeting from the Primus and considered that it would be appropriate to issue a short response to the Primates' letter, including comment on the so-called "Anglican Moratoria".

The College welcomes the fact that the Primates were able to talk honestly and openly together and that despite the alienation and pain felt by many parts of the Communion, there was nevertheless a spirit of graciousness in evidence in the meeting. It shares the desire expressed by the Primates for the Communion to flourish and remain united and it equally desires the flourishing and unity of the Scottish Episcopal Church. The College notes and shares the conviction of the Primates that God is calling Anglican Churches to deeper communion, which may be significantly furthered through our adoption of a period of gracious restraint. That restraint is to be exercised in the three areas covered by the Moratoria, namely the ordination of those in same-gender unions to the episcopate, the authorisation of rites for same-sex blessings and cross-border interventions.

The College of Bishops recognises that, whilst the "Lambeth Indaba" document records that "there is widespread support for the moratoria across the Communion" and that they "can be taken as a sign of the Bishops' affection, trust and goodwill towards the Archbishop of Canterbury and one another", it also agrees that, in practice, there are likely to be difficulties in the moratoria being upheld across the Communion. The concept of a moratorium also gives rise to some difficulty for the College in that it is not clear when, or in what circumstances, a moratorium would end. Indeed, the terminology of "moratoria" is itself unhelpful insofar as it suggests the temporary suspension of activity which had previously been current. With those reservations, and endeavouring to act within a spirit of "gracious restraint" and in the interests of the unity of the Scottish Episcopal Church, the College of Bishops intends to observe the moratoria and comments further as follows:-

1. Ordinations of persons living in a same gender union to the Episcopate: ordinarily, the election of a Diocesan Bishop would be expected to have a significant effect on the life of the diocese (and perhaps a less significant impact in the wider church). However, it can be observed from the repercussions of the consecration of Bishop Gene Robinson that the ordination to the episcopate of a person living in a same gender union, at the current time, could reasonably be expected to have a very significant impact on the life and position of the Province within the Anglican Communion. The College is aware that there are many members of the Scottish Episcopal Church who will find this particular moratorium difficult to accept. It is also aware that there are significant numbers of Scottish Episcopalians who find the ordination of a person living in a same gender union equally difficult to accept. The Bishops recognise that we live in a Province within a Communion where we have not yet reached agreement on these issues. Having regard to the terms of the Primates' letter, the recommendations of the Windsor Report, the terms of the "Lambeth Indaba" document and the fact that the ordination to the Episcopate of a person living

in a same gender union would, in the opinion of the College, conflict with the strongly held convictions of significant numbers of Scottish Episcopalians and other Anglicans within the worldwide Communion, the College of Bishops believes that, for the time being, all who have responsibility within the process of the election of any new diocesan bishop should seek to act within the spirit of this requested moratorium.

2. The blessing of same-sex unions: in its Statement dated 4th March 2005, the College noted that the Scottish Episcopal Church had, even before the 1998 Lambeth Conference, sought to be welcoming and open to persons of homosexual orientation in its congregations and to listen to their experiences. The College recognised that on occasion this led clergy to respond to requests to give a blessing to persons who were struggling with elements of their relationship and who asked for such a prayer. The College expressed its gladness to note that the concern of the Windsor Report and of the Primates' Commiqué issued in February 2005 had not been with such informal pastoral responses to individual situations but was rather about the official authorisation of a liturgical text for the blessing of such unions. The College further expressed the view in 2005 that given that there was still much fluidity in the debate of such matters, it would certainly be premature to move formally to authorise such a liturgy. The College of Bishops interprets the moratorium on the blessing of same-sex unions as a moratorium on the authorisation by the General Synod of the Scottish Episcopal Church, or by individual Bishops, of a formal rite of blessing for same-sex unions. At the current time, members of the College remain of view that it would, certainly be premature, and some would say wrong, to authorise a rite for such blessings.

The College also recognises that very different views exist within the Scottish Episcopal Church as to the appropriateness of informal blessings by clergy of same-sex unions. It is the practice of the individual Bishops neither to give official sanction to such informal blessings, nor to attend them personally.

3. Cross-border incursions by Bishops: no member of the College of Bishops has engaged in a cross-border incursion and the view of the College is that the existing geographical boundaries of Provinces and Dioceses within the Anglican Communion should be observed.

The Most Rev Dr Idris Jones, Primus, Scottish Episcopal Church
for the College of Bishops

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