

Human Sexuality Statement

I think that, after today's presentation and yesterday's vote, it is right that I should share some of my current thinking about how we should respond to the context in which we now find ourselves in Scotland. I'm sharing with you my thinking - it's part of the leadership which I share with the members of the College of Bishops.

Firstly there is the matter of yesterday's vote in which there was not the majority necessary to enable the Rule 10 Motion to be debated. That decision arose from our Synodical process. That was our decision. But I think that those who brought the Rule 10 Motion can be forgiven if they feel disappointed that their Motion did not reach the Synod Agenda

It would be a mistake, I think, to conclude that there is not a significant feeling in this church that we should be moving on Human Sexuality issues. How far and in what timescale - that will be for this Synod to decide. But I think the changed context in which we find ourselves because of the passing of the Marriage and Civil Partnership Bill makes movement necessary and inevitable. We are also aware of the rapidly-changing social attitudes which are all around us and which are particularly visible among young people.

We have been talking for a long time - but not about what we needed to be talking about. We talked about the Anglican Covenant when we should have been talking about these issues themselves. What the Anglican Covenant debate did was to encourage us - mistakenly I believe - to think that conflict around human sexuality was primarily an inter-provincial matter within the Anglican Communion. This Synod firmly decided not to adopt the Anglican Covenant. What follows logically is what I said yesterday in my Charge - that our first focus should be on our own internal diversity and our second focus should be on the Anglican Communion's diversity.

So we have now heard a Report on the Cascade Conference. I believe that it was highly successful and is becoming a model for others. A church-wide process is already under way in our dioceses. This is entirely within the mainstream of Anglican Communion life - provinces are realising that these issues will not be resolved by win/lose votes - not without creating winners and losers. Similar movements were visible in the recent Church of Scotland Assembly where the Report of the Theological Forum urged the church to adopt a mixed economy. As I said yesterday, we carry in our life - and should honour - interwoven strands of faith and life. Those include different approaches to our understanding of the authority of scripture; a passion for justice and inclusion; understandings of holiness of life, a picture of Jesus whose ministry included rather than excluded.

It's important to remember that this is about more than Same-Sex Marriage and whether our clergy will celebrate such marriages in our churches. It's about the situation which arises when clergy who are in Civil Partnerships decide to enter into a same-sex marriage - and when a person who is in a same-sex marriage presents themselves in the process of vocational discernment for ministry.

You will want to know what I think should happen next.

Firstly the Cascade Process will run during the rest of 2014. At the end of it, I think it will be for the Mission and Ministry Board and the Faith and Order Board to discern what we can see of the 'mind of the church'

I have been suggesting for some time that, while the Cascade process runs, I and one or two others should be seeking some quiet consultation with particular individuals and groups to explore possible approaches for the future.

There is a need for some material for debate. I think we need to seek some work on the theology of marriage from our Doctrine Committee.

I would like to see a substantial discussion at General Synod 2015 in which we look at all these issues in a way which will inform action in following years.

And finally.... What churches should model to the world is not patterns of conflict but patterns in which we move forward together in relationship even when we do not agree. In other words, I am uncomfortable with mixed economies if they actually mean separate economies. As I said when I spoke in the Church of Scotland Assembly, I am happy with diversity but not happy with diversity without engagement. So if our church is to move on these issues, I hope that those who find it difficult to agree will be an honoured and respected part of that movement. Such an aspiration is clearly illogical. But then as I began by saying yesterday we are not members of an institution but the disciples of Jesus Christ.

The Most Rev David Chillingworth

Bishop of St Andrews, Dunkeld & Dunblane and Primus of the Scottish Episcopal Church