

# **CHURCH OF THE PROVINCE OF SOUTHERN AFRICA (ANGLICAN)**



## **ANGLICANS AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION**

This Report is intended to be a study guide for ongoing discussion and as a companion booklet to the CPSA report on "The Church and Human Sexuality". Prepared by the Southern African Anglican Theological Commission, and endorsed for study by the Synod of Bishops.

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Authorized for study by the Synod of Bishops.

## **ANGLICANS AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION**

### Introduction to the Homosexuality Study Document

This document is intended to be a study guide for ongoing discussion and as a companion booklet to the CPSA report on "The Church and Human Sexuality". It is intended to open up a subject which is both sensitive and sometimes extremely controversial, with widely differing views being held.

Some people believe that this issue may cause division within the Church; others would say that this issue, as with many others, is not a primary matter essential to the faith but is at a 'second level' where people can hold different views with integrity.

The CPSA has found over the years a method in handling difficult questions, which has been very useful and maturing. We have studied the question through a document such as this; there have been consultations and conferences to try and inform ourselves; the bishops have debated the question, as have local meetings and diocesan synods; finally the issue has come to Provincial Synod where the mind of the Church is tested and decided on.

On the issue discussed in this booklet we are on a journey, and it is far from certain that we shall reach either full agreement or consensus. What we trust we will reach is a mature ability to respect differing positions without judging each other.

The prayer of the Bishops and of the Theological Commission is that this document may help, together with the books mentioned in the bibliography, to inform the Church for the debate and decisions which lie ahead.

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SOUTH AFRICAN ANGLICAN THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION:  
ANGLICANS AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION

A report for ongoing discussion as a companion paper to the CPSA's report for study:  
THE CHURCH AND HUMAN SEXUALITY (1995)

In The church and human sexuality The S A Anglican Theological Commission said in section 7 that the issue of homosexuality needed further study and discussion. This report seeks to take the discussion further.

Throughout this report we use the term homosexual to include men and women homosexual persons (gay and lesbian people).

1.INTRODUCTION

1.1 This is not a new issue for the church in Southern Africa. The issue was considered in a report to the Bishops of the Province in 1977. There have always been lay people and clergy with a homosexual orientation. Some lay people and Clergy have been involved in homosexual relationships while still active members of the church. However, this has never been approved or openly condoned. We have tended to follow a "don't ask, don't tell" policy.

1.2 Now, however, there is pressure, both in South Africa and internationally, to reconsider this. There is pressure to allow church people, including clergy, to enter openly into homosexual relationships. There is also pressure to ordain persons who are involved in a homosexual relationship.

1.3 The new South African Bill of Rights declares that "The state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against any one on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age disability, relation, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth." (Bill of Rights 9(3)). Continued church refusal to accept homosexual relationships or to ordain or licence openly homosexual clergy may well seem to some to be a breach of human rights.

1.4 There is no Anglican consensus on this matter, nor consensus in most other Churches, either in South Africa or internationally.

1.5 Nevertheless the Church needs to respond to the issue of homosexual relationships. especially in the light of a profound sense of rejection and alienation from the church felt by many gay people (cf. Appendix 1).

2.

## AREAS OF AGREEMENT IN THE DISCUSSION

There are some things we can probably already agree on.

2.1 Hatred of homosexual people is in itself a sin and we confess with penitence that homosexual person have often experienced prejudice and hostility from the Church over the ages (Church and Human Sexuality 7.2). God loves all people (John 3:16) and Christians are called to extend that love to all whom they meet.

2.2 Hatred of homosexual persons may reflect fears of homosexuality within the hater, or a projection of something within ourselves.

2.3 Sexual orientation is a deeply embedded aspect of personality rooted in many factors. The origin of heterosexual or homosexual orientation and the extent of personal choice involved in such orientation is still uncertain. Insofar as sexual orientation is genetically inherited or results from early socialisation it cannot be regarded as culpable. To this extent no-one should be condemned on the basis of sexual orientation alone. Moral responsibility only becomes an issue when there are choices to be made about behaviour.

2.4 The Christian approach to the question of sexual orientation should be one of sensitivity, seeking understanding rather than reinforcing prejudice.

2.5 Sexual attraction to people of the same sex appears to be universal to all cultures, although it is often denied or suppressed. For that reason it is difficult to ascertain the actual proportion of such people within the community as a whole. The perception that homosexuality only affects the white community is false.

2.6 Different cultures define homosexuality differently. In some cultures a man who has a wife, or has sexual relationships with women, is not regarded as homosexual even if he also has sexual relations with men. Thus in discussing homosexuality we are not always talking about the same thing, and people who deny that homosexuality exists within their own community may be using the word differently. Sex and gender roles are constructed in part by particular societies and what appears unnatural in one society will not always appear so in another.

2.7 Sexuality is not confined to genital activity. All of us are sexual beings. Our sexuality is part of our personality and is therefore always an element in our relationships with other people. We can acknowledge that this is natural and good without necessarily committing ourselves to approve of genital activity between unmarried persons or persons of the same gender. Love, and the physical (though not necessarily genital) expression of love and affection, is human and entirely Christian between people of the same or different genders (Jn 13:25, Lk 22:47, Acts 20:37, etc).

2.8 Nevertheless, the Old and New Testaments and the tradition of the Church have usually been understood to forbid homosexual genital sex.

2.9 Homosexual relations are sometimes the result of living conditions, eg in hostels, prisons, prisoner of war camps and even same-sex boarding schools. Thus homosexuality may need to be discussed in the context of other social issues.

2.10 Whatever views may be held about their sexual orientation, there are many homosexually active persons in the world and in the Church whose lives are deeply loving, caring, sometimes heroic, manifestly expressing the grace of God's Holy Spirit.

### 3. AREAS OF DEBATE

Some would argue that the Church should modify its traditional stance on homosexuality; others would argue that it cannot. The issues of debate include the following:

3.1 The reasons for homosexual orientation are disputed, and may be genetic (essentialist position), social (constructionist position) or both. There may also be an element of choice about the extent to which an individual allows an orientation to become fixed. The existence of a bi-sexual orientation suggests an element of ambiguity about this. The broad but not unanimous consensus amongst medical and psychological experts is that the orientation is not usually reversible. The American Psychological Association and the standard American textbook on psychiatric disorders (DSM IV) no longer regard homosexuality as a pathological condition, and many people in secular society regard homosexual behaviour as a matter of proper personal freedom.

3.2 Some Christians, heterosexual or homosexual, live celibate lives, sometimes out of circumstances, sometimes from choice, sometimes on principle. As far as heterosexual persons are concerned, Christians generally agree that not all are thus called, or suited to a celibate life. We then need to discuss whether it is fair to say that all homosexual persons are called to celibacy, or whether it is legitimate for them as Christians to have a fulfilled sexual relationship with another person. Perhaps those who are irreversibly of homosexual orientation are called to be "eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake." (Matthew 19:11-12). Or perhaps this is unjust. If we believe that God has made us sexual beings with a natural longing and need for physical closeness with a beloved other, and if homosexuality is irreversible, we must consider whether it is moral for us to deny to homosexual people the fulfilment, joy and love in faithful sexual relationships which we believe is part of God's desire for most people.

3.3 The traditional consensus of Christian teaching has been that in nature, and in the perspective of Scripture, men and women are physically and psychologically complementary, so that the "natural" pairing is between a man and a woman. Thus in this view:

A marriage is regarded as a coming together of two halves of a whole, normally intended to result in children as an extension of the relationship.

Even though in many cases, because of infertility or age, a couple may have no children, the "norm" for a sexual relationship is a man and a woman pledged to

lifelong mutual faithfulness as the core of a family (The Church and Human Sexuality E2, E3 (p.15)).

To weaken that ideal is to weaken the role of the family in society.

A sexual relationship between two men or women, however loving, is not a reflection of that ideal and cannot be seen as equivalent to a marriage. Such a relationship would be unnatural and contrary to the proper human norm. This is how passages such as Genesis 2:24, Mark 10: 6-8 and Ephesians 5.31 have been understood.

3.4 However, others would argue that what seems natural to us is largely a product of the society in which we have been brought up (see section 2.6)

#### 4. THE BIBLE AND HOMOSEXUALITY

4.1 Some biblical injunctions against homosexuality may, if looked at in context, be about other issues. They may reflect cultural norms of another time; or may have to be revisited in the light of present knowledge that a homosexual orientation is usually irreversible (see section 3.1) Some will hold that the Bible is quite explicit in its rejection of homosexual behaviour, and that since this is a matter of faith and morals, to question the Bible on this point is to undermine its authority. Others will hold that, as in the discussions on divorce, women in positions of leadership over men, etc., apparent biblical principles are often rooted in a different social context and need to be reinterpreted in our own context and in the light of other and greater biblical principles.

4.2 In some respects our present understanding of ethical issues goes beyond what was conceived of in biblical times. We now understand some texts of the Bible about, eg, the conquest of Canaan, or slavery, or women, to be oppressive. The same may apply to texts about homosexuality.

4.3 In Genesis 19: 1-29 and Judges 19:22-30 the sin for which the men are punished is not homosexual relations by consent but homosexual rape, violence and (in the Genesis passage) in hospitality to the stranger, cruelty to the vulnerable. The commentary of the Genesis text in Ezekiel 16:49-50 makes this clear. The fact that the cruelty to the concubine in the Judges story is quite unremarked upon by the biblical passage in any case makes it a difficult text to use.

4.4 Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 do forbid homosexual behaviour, and suggestions that what is being forbidden here is not homosexual behaviour per se but homosexual behaviour in the context of pagan worship are not convincing. However, these prohibitions are set in the context of purity laws concerning the special status of Israel, i.e. that the boundaries between Israelites and Gentiles, men and women, humans and animals, must not be confused. The same passages lay down rules about kosher food practices, not cutting ones earlocks, the ritual uncleanness of menstruating women, etc. Purity laws, while important for Israelites, were not perceived as identical to the ethical laws of the decalogue, which were seen to be applicable to the whole human race.

Some would therefore argue that the prohibition of homosexual behaviour in these passages is no more binding than the laws committing us to live in all other respects like orthodox Jews.

Others would argue that the requirements embodied in Leviticus are part of the skein of moral teaching of the Torah as a whole and should not be too quickly reduced in weight.

4.5 Jesus challenges the importance of the laws on purity and holiness (Mark 7:1-23) and emphasises the law of love (Mark 12:28-31). Paul also teaches that all commandments are fulfilled in the law of love (Romans 13:8-10). In all relationships, faithfulness, honesty, commitment and concern for the other are integral.

4.6 In the light of this law of love we may consider that the Leviticus passages forbidding homosexual behaviour are not binding on Christians, but that nevertheless if homosexual relationships are to be permitted, such relationships should be loving, faithful, reflective of God's constant care, etc. Thus we could still not condone self-centred or promiscuous sexual activity, whether hetero- or homosexual.

4.7 We have no record of any explicit teaching of Jesus on the question of homosexuality. He teaches about marriage and the ideal of a man and a woman forming a lifelong faithful union, basing his teaching on Genesis (Mark 10:1-12). Paul, following the same teaching in Genesis, extends this further. He regards marriage as natural and homosexuality as unnatural (Romans 1:26-27), and in Rom. 2:14 seems to lay the foundations for a notion of "natural law", i.e. that by nature, or by inbuilt conscience, men and women know what is right and wrong. But since in 1 Cor. 11:14 Paul also says that it is unnatural for men to wear long hair or women short, by "nature" he may sometimes mean little more than what is customary.

4.8 The passage in 1 Cor. 6:9-10 is difficult to exegete. Different translations use different words for the Greek *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai*. Thus, depending on the translation, it appears that Paul is condemning "sodomites", "male prostitutes", "sexual perverts", "homosexual offenders". But since Paul is the first written source of the Greek word *arsenokotai*, we do not know exactly what he meant or what he was condemning. The English translations often make the meaning of Paul here sound much clearer than is justified on the basis of the Greek original. It is possible that by *malakoi* Paul meant effeminate men, and by *arsenokotai* those who use them. Thus it might be argued that Paul is talking about exploitative homosexual behaviour rather than about consensual relations. In any case this passage is certainly not about lesbians. Paul's views are therefore difficult to disentangle from his disapproval of the idolatry of Greco-Roman culture, and the application of his views to our context is correspondingly difficult to determine. At all events, he does not see homosexually active people as more sinful than slanderers, petty thieves, etc., and he does still link all of this closely with the practice of idolatry which for Paul is the really serious sin.

4.9 1 Corinthians 6:20, "Glorify God with your bodies" reminds us of how our sexual behaviour is to be regulated. As limbs of the body of Christ, or, to change the metaphor, part of the temple of the Holy Spirit, we are responsible to the whole Church for our behaviour. Thus "You have been bought with a price, therefore

glorify God with your bodies" reminds us that we are, as people baptised into Christ, committed to a new way of life. Our bodies are to manifest the love of God in Christ, and if we defile them either sexually or in any other way we affect the whole Church. What is often understood as private sin actually injures the whole Christian Community, since we are bound together in one body of Christ under him as head. Our bodies are themselves instruments of God's presence in the world.

4.10 Paul is thus rejecting any form of promiscuity, which is not only self-indulgent and self-serving, but also defiles the Christian Community. In promiscuous sex and adultery there is a false unity which denies our unity with Christ and with our partner in Christ. Jesus urges us to a commitment which goes beyond ourselves to the sacrifice in Christ which helps us to new relationships, where love, faithfulness and concern for others most completely reflects the love of God.

4.11 This teaching does not resolve the question of the permissibility of same sex relations, but it does clearly imply that faithful, caring, committed relationships between two people more closely reflects the requirements of Christian living than promiscuity, which should be condemned in any context, homosexual or heterosexual.

## 5. NEXT STEPS

5.1 To say at this point that the church as a whole no longer condemns homosexual intercourse would be untrue. There is no consensus on the matter, indeed many clergy and lay people in the CPSA disapprove of homosexual behaviour. On the other hand, homosexuals in the Church feel alienated and excluded. The matter is therefore difficult and sensitive, and we are not yet in a position to resolve it.

5.2 The traditional "don't ask don't tell" option for practising homosexuals in the church is however, impractical, dishonest, and harmful for individuals and for the church as a whole. What is needed is an open discussion on the matter; the dissemination of more information about homosexuality; a re-examination of the biblical texts; and if possible an open-ended discussion within the church including both homosexually and heterosexually oriented persons. We must find some way of encouraging the participation of homosexuals in this discussion, who may not wish to participate because they fear that openness may lead to exclusion or discrimination because they have been hurt. Few outside the homosexual community have an adequate understanding of their experience. The church needs to be an accepting community in which people may honestly express their feelings and their needs.

5.3 We need to recognise that if the conventional view on homosexuality were modified there would be consequences. While we do not necessarily have to agree that homosexual relationships are the same as marriage, if the church should come to agree that homosexual love may be a channel for God's grace, then it should permit homosexual partnerships to be blessed, permit homosexual men or women to be ordained, permit their partners to take a public role in the church.

## Appendix

### RESPONSES TO THE S. A. ANGLICAN THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION'S STUDY DOCUMENT ON HOMOSEXUALITY

Since the Bishops of the Church of the Province published their statement on homosexuality in April 1997, the S.A. Anglican Theological Commission has had several submissions from Gay men on the subject. We have wanted them to speak for themselves and so we are publishing extracts from the submissions.

1. The reports on homosexuality from the bishops and the theological commission continue to treat homosexuality as the problem. The hatred, rejection, harshness and hostility towards lesbians and gays are condemned, but they make no attempt to deal with homophobia. What is the church going to do about dealing with that problem which is mammoth? at this stage it is not even being recognised.
2. I am gay. I am a priest in the Anglican church. For many years this meant choosing between the one or the other. Particularly during my more fundamentalist years I would often seek 'healing' from this affliction. I don't think it will be beneficial to mention the whole story, but only those relevant sections. I honestly can't say that I knew I was gay all my life. For many years I did not think I was gay. I felt different but I, at that time of my life, would not have called myself gay. I was unable to give myself. However, with the onset of aspirations to be ordained I started thinking about these things in far more detail.

Unfortunately I can't be what I am where I am. This is the biggest tension for me. It leads to feelings of helpless desperation at times and also to feelings of quiet determination to see this through to wherever it goes.

I feel my integrity is comprised by having to keep a part of my life secret. A part that is completely acceptable to have, even in the church, but is not allowed to be seen or practised. I also realise that there will be huge obstacles to overcome in terms of bringing the church as a whole on board. With reference to this I feel that it is time for the church to own this process of discussion and investigation. We can't keep a select group of clergy and academics behind closed doors discussing issues that will eventually affect all of us.

3. The command of Jesus is to love. He offered life: eternal life. No-one was excluded, but the condition was and remains repentance. Repentance involves turning away from sin. I believe that those who call on homosexual people to repent of their sexuality are in fact suggesting that sexual orientation is a matter of choice, and that sexuality is, of itself, a sin. It also suggests that they believe that they chose their heterosexuality, and that that is the right choice.

Scientific evidence is reportedly showing that there are genetic elements which determine sexual orientation. I know that I had no choice in the matter, and most of the homosexual

people I have discussed this with feel the same. The only choice we made was whether or not we should continue to pretend to be heterosexual. In the same way we cannot repent of our skin colour or left handedness.

We can and should repent of our misuse and abuse of our sexuality, and of our promiscuity. It is impossible to repent of something which is actually a gift of God. Those who call on homosexual people to be healed are suggesting that sexuality in any form, including heterosexuality, is akin to a disease.

I can only say that I have found tremendous comfort, happiness and fulfilment as a person, and that my appreciation of what relationships are all about has been enhanced. My partner, who is also a Christian, and I firmly believe that our relationship is God's will for us.

We have had no formal blessing of our relationship by a priest or anybody else, but it has been supremely blessed, we believe, by God, and, we have been assured, our long-term relationship has been a source of encouragement and hope for many people, both heterosexual and homosexual, who have come to know us and have been guests in our home.

We believe that God has used us to minister to many people, Christians and non-Christians, who have not felt free to approach the ministers of their churches (including Anglican clergy) or professional people, for fear of rejection, or having been rejected.

#### RESPONSES TO S.A. ANGLICAN THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION ON HOMOSEXUALITY

The Archbishop kindly approved that the SAATC invite responses to the study document on homosexuality. About 12 such responses have been received - admittedly not many, but they have enabled the SAATC, and through them the Bishops of the Province, to hear some voices from within the gay, Anglican priestly community.

The Bishop of Johannesburg has already reported on the first responses to be received. This brief overview goes to complete the picture.

Two responses have been received from heterosexual couples. Both couples describe themselves as elderly. Both letters expressed concern for the pain of homosexual people; but both were quite adamant, on traditional Biblical grounds such as the prohibitions of Paul, that it is quite impossible for the Anglican Church to "condone" homosexual genital acts. Although only two letters, the Commission is quite sure that they represent a strongly held view amongst traditional, conservative Anglicans, who are by no means homophobic or strident in their views, but would feel deeply bewildered should the church openly accept homosexual relationships. Thus, if the church were to move in that direction, enormous pains would have to be taken to provide reasons and to show how such acceptance is possible within the teaching of the Bible.

All other responses - 10 of them - were from clergy who are, or were, homosexual. All are male. Some of the clergy are now self-supporting, some were stipendiary. Some are in senior positions in the church, some are from young priests in their first three years of ordination, some are from priests ordained 30 or more years ago. Thus quite a wide spectrum is represented. Only one of the priests who responded has now withdrawn from a priestly ministry.

No responses, however, lay or clergy, were received from people in what might be called an Indian or a black African cultural group. Thus we have no views from some major sectors of the community.

All of the clergy except one have been, or are still, involved with a partner. Several of them have a stable partner with whom they live. All of the clergy responses except one were quite sure that homosexual relationships are permissible for people generally and for them individually. Most of them commented on what appear to be Biblical injunctions against homosexuality, but made much the same comments as the SAATC study guide. Only one of the clergy responded believes that homosexual relationships are forbidden by Jesus. Most of them commented on what they perceived as the ignorance of the official church about what it means to be gay; several commented resentfully that the official church seemed to hold a set view that to be gay is to be promiscuous. None of the respondents appear to have had more than one or two homosexual relationships; those with partners see themselves as being in stable and faithful relationships.

The respondents seem to have experienced different degrees of acceptance. None of them appear to have been able to be open with their congregations about their orientation. All of them appear to have been open with their bishop, and those with partners seem to believe that their bishop is aware of this. Yet all, bar one, still practice as priests, some of them as stipendiary priests.

Some respondents have known that they were homosexually oriented from youth, and have never had heterosexual relationships. Several, on the other hand, have been married, but are now divorced. They speak of the pain of this, and the hurt that their previous spouses experienced. One respondent, on the other hand, was homosexual in orientation but is now heterosexual and happily married.

Several respondents draw parallels between being black and being gay. Both black and gay people experience discrimination, both are seen as a "problem" for the church to deal with. Respondents believe that just as the church has had to struggle against race prejudice inside and outside the church, the same applies to prejudice against homosexuality.

One respondent draws parallels between the church's attitude to remarriage after divorce and to acceptance of homosexual unions. The New Testament, he claims, is clearly against the former, yet the church has found it possible to bless such unions. Why then does the church resist the latter, especially since (in his view) there is nothing in the New Testament or tradition to forbid it. Several speak of efforts made by well-meaning friends, at Theological College or subsequently, to change their orientation or to pray them out of their orientation. All, however, except one see their homosexuality not only as being unchangeable but as being a gift to them given by God, a gift they wish to share with the church

One respondent makes a quite different point, however. He refers to his awareness as a young man that he was attracted sexually to other men. But on his conversations he became convinced that homosexual practice was unacceptable to God. He wrestled with what he perceived as this problem for many years, seeking psychiatric help, but the homosexual orientation remained, in conflict with his Christian convictions. Eventually after a crisis of temptation a group of friends prayed for and laid hands on him, and after an intense period of personal prayer he was, as he believes, "healed" shortly after, becoming heterosexual in orientation, eventually falling in love and marrying.

The SAATC believes that all of these voices must be heard - those of "ordinary" church people who have always been taught that homosexuality is against God's will and who need to be cared for and shepherded; gay men who believe that God has made them homosexual, that God has led them into loving relationships, and that their orientation is a creative gift from God; previously gay people who did not believe that God wished them to be gay and who have changed in orientation. But there is another choice from which we have not heard but which we believe, exists, ie gay men, especially gay priests, who have battled against what they saw as temptation and have been, or tried to be celibate all their lives, who may now feel that if the church were to approve gay relationships their life's pain and struggle will have been in vain.

Finally, a few quotations.

"The Lord has healed me, and I am convinced both that homosexual orientation, while in no way being sin, is not what He wants for the individual, and also that there is a desire of love in His heart to heal all those who are homosexually oriented."

"I am convinced now that the Bible says nothing about being inherently gay. It appears to condemn some forms of homosexual activity. But exactly what these were is far from clear."

"If God did not create gay people or want them to develop in this way, then they are a living mistake, a standing rebuke to the Creator, a whole class of many millions of people forever condemned to exist as eunuchs in a state not of their own choosing."

"I have spoken openly with my bishop about my homosexuality and the fact that I do not feel called to celibacy. He chose to continue his general licence to me as a priest."

"I have felt that the church really struggles with Truth that is not "their" truth. Instead of helping me to deal openly and creatively with a pain that had been in my heart since childhood and with how that pain had almost destroyed everything and everyone close to me, I was encouraged to continue living in my deceit. One senior clergyman even said to me "Why don't you keep a male lover on the quiet and stay married to \*\*\*?"

"Priesthood feels authentic for me and I celebrate it. I still feel tolerated rather than included in the Community of Faith and I still cry over it sometimes and rage over it at other times."

"God has been so gracious all along, and I have...been made aware that being gay is part of God's gift to me in the church....There is a special charisma which we bring in part from having had to hide our true nature but also because we have had to struggle with our concept of God and of the church ....One is aware of how much we as a church need to provide the space where all are indeed welcome and where the wounded Christ can reach out to all who are broken."

**STATEMENT ON HOMOSEXUALITY BY THE ANGLICAN SYNOD OF BISHOPS  
CAPE TOWN - 7 MARCH 1997**

Our Church has recognised for some time that the expression of human sexuality is a matter of increasingly urgent pastoral concern.

Our Theological Commission issued a study document on the subject in 1995 and as a Church we have still a long way to go to come to terms with, and frequently even discuss, many aspects of human sexuality.

Homosexuality is such a concern. For many it is a matter of pastoral crisis. Others are scarcely aware of the urgency. Certainly as bishops we have no consensus on a number of the problems relating to homosexuality and we are aware that that same lack of consensus exists in our Church as a whole.

Where we do agree however is that as a Church we have been responsible over the centuries, for rejecting many people because of their sexual orientation. The harshness and hostility to homosexual people (gay and lesbian), still expressed by many within our Church, is neither acceptable nor is it in accord with our Lord's love of all people. We repent of this attitude and ask forgiveness of many homosexual people who have been hurt, rejected and marginalised because of this deep rooted prejudice.

We are also in agreement in our rejection of sexual promiscuity in all its forms. Promiscuity hinders the establishment of stable relationships and is usually an expression of selfishness and greed which is contrary to our faith, cheapening and even dehumanising many relationships. The fact that society tends to accept promiscuity does not, in our view, legitimise it.

The Church's position is that sex is for life-long marriage with a person of the opposite sex, for the purposes of companionship, sexual fulfilment and procreation. The reality is that divorce and remarriage, polygamy, same sex unions, single parent families, and persons living together outside marriage do exist. As a church we have to find loving, pastoral and creative ways of dealing with all these situations.

Many homosexual people worship in our Churches and participate in our corporate life. However, no authority exists within the CPSA for the blessing of same sex relationships, and this should remain the case unless the Church reaches a different mind on the subject.

Meanwhile we are aware that further study needs to be done within the Church on the subject of homosexuality and indeed of the whole range of human sexuality. In particular more work is required with regard to the Hebrew and Greek of the original biblical text, as well as the understanding of the issues involved in the witness of the Bible as a whole.

As bishops we are unhappy at the tendency in some quarters to attack homosexuals on the basis of simplistic interpretations of certain scriptural texts.

We commend the Studies prepared by our Theological Commission to debate, thought, prayer and listening to each other.

We undertake to continue to work towards a consensus on the subject of homosexuality. We are aware that whatever we say will please no one completely but we would be dishonest if we tried at this stage to force ourselves into an artificial consensus in order to satisfy public pressure.