



A Time to Build

*For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:
a time to break down, and a time to build up;
a time to scatter stones, and a time to gather stones together;
Ecclesiastes 3*

There is, says the Teacher, a time for every matter under heaven. There is a time for not taking note. That time is now, and **OneBodyOneFaith** hopes very much that there will be a sufficiently strong vote against the Report of the House of Bishops Working Party on Marriage and Same-sex Relationships (GS2055) that overall the General Synod will choose not to take note of it.

However, scattering stones is one thing. Gathering them together is something else. And those who are nervous of not taking note are entitled to ask those of us who are encouraging such a very unusual step what it is we would like to see in its place. What is the positive to replace this very negative and fearful and retrograde Report?

We are looking for the first signs that our national church is going to honour the gift that God has given it in the lives and witness of its LGBTI+ members, and to turn from being an organisation that cravenly holds on to its privilege of discrimination, and starts to embrace and embody the equality that is ours in Christ. It is only this equality and justice and diversity, fully welcomed and supported, that can show the nation again the worth of its Established Church as a home for all peoples. It is only this equality and justice and diversity that can commend again to English people the Jesus who welcomed the tax-collectors and sinners, who lived and dined and celebrated with common folk who never reached the standards of legal "righteousness".

Our nation is confused about many things at the moment. But the English have a nose for cant - and the message the Church of England gives out, talking of welcome while practising discrimination, stinks of hypocrisy. We have to do better.

OneBodyOneFaith is clear about what we are seeking. What we are asking for to begin to escape the dead end that GS 2055 represents is this:

- For an explicit acceptance of the integrity of theological diversity over matters of sexuality - that it is possible to be Biblically faithful and hold different positions - and the creation of systems to assure that this is honoured. The establishment of a Sexuality and Relationships Working Group which will be responsible for 'holding' the theological diversity of the Church of England. Pilling has already described the different positions -the reference group needs to be tasked with exploring how they live with each other, and how the church develops theologically, and how pastoral oversight is given in the context of the range of views present in the Church of England.

- In addition to the Sexuality and Relationships Working Group there needs to be a significant level of LGBTI+ representation on each of its boards, councils and divisions for which the Archbishops' council has oversight - the representatives should be chosen by members of all houses of Synod, not by the Archbishops' Council or bishops alone
- For the Church of England to appoint a National Lead for LGBTI+ matters based at Church House - LGBTI+ themselves, who works to the Sexuality and Relationships Working Group and liaises with boards, councils, divisions and dioceses, holds to the need for the kind of change that we propose, but also understands and accepts the need to support all sides
- For the publication and recommendation of an official liturgy for the blessing of same-sex couples after a Civil Partnership or Civil Marriage - this does not need to be complicated. The Service of Prayer and Thanksgiving after a civil marriage could be adjusted very simply
- To effect paragraph 13 (a) of *Annex 1: Sexuality Issues: what is and is not possible under the relevant legal positions*, so that being married to a person of the same sex is not of itself a breach of Canon C26.2

Some will ask, What about the Communion? I know that for some people this programme is not what they want to see. But even the Bishops' Report, muddled and cautious and compromising as it is, leaves the conservative voices in the Communion dissatisfied and suspicious. To put it bluntly, there is no pleasing Archbishop Okoh. We would have to return to a punitive, closeted, change therapy-seeking church to satisfy that source of opinion. There is no point in trying to appease those who take that position. Discovering what Good Disagreement looks like should probably be the task of the Anglican Communion. It is not the right thing to sacrifice the lives and relationships of the LGBTI+ faithful of the Church of England on the altar of a pretended unity within the Communion. Do the right thing and then work out how to embody that unity in diversity which is the reality of every church in every time. Anglicanism, almost above any other global expression of Christianity, has acknowledged for a very long time the importance of local inculturation of the faith. And the right thing to do in England is the right thing for the Church of which the bishops are its leaders and the Synod is its parliament.

OneBodyOneFaith, with its ecumenical concern for the life of the Christian Church across the nation, sees this coming week as a moment of real opportunity and hope. We will be praying for the Synod and all its members as they gather. But while the focus of activity will be on trying to persuade Synod members not to take note of GS 2055, God is calling us to a better and different future. So, this is our starting point. This is the way forward. This is gathering the stones together. This, as a minimum, will help start to build and grow a servant church for all the people, in which every person, be they ever so small or ordinary, can have a full and valued place. It is time to build.

*Founded in 1976 as the Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement,
OneBodyOneFaith work to enable individuals and communities
to integrate the Christian faith, gender and sexuality
in life-affirming and transforming ways*