



Affirming sexuality and gender in Christ

William Nye LVO
Secretary General to the Archbishops' Council
Church House
Great Smith street
LONDON SW1P 3NZ

23 April 2018

Dear Mr Nye,

You will be aware that your previously undisclosed letter to The Episcopal Church has been met with anger, frustration and disappointment by many across the Church of England, on whose behalf you presume to speak. We wish to add the voices of our members to those calling for a more courageous, just and Christ-like response to what has become – we wish it were not so – the issue on which many will judge our church, and find it sorely wanting.

Your letter raises a wide range of issues – about governance and accountability, about process, about how the Holy Spirit might move in the lives and structures of the Body of Christ across generations and nations, about simple pastoral care and concern for those who don't fit the received 'norms' we've imposed on people down the years. In particular, your focus on procreation seems to ride roughshod over all those who have ever known the anguish of unwanted childlessness, or the loss of a pregnancy. To them, and to all who bear the human costs of your carefully chosen words, we say: not in our name.

Perhaps we should share something of the response of LGBT people to the developments in TEC, since our voices so often seem absent in your pronouncements. We saw in ECUSA's brave and costly decision some hope that change might come for us too. We saw our brothers and sisters listening intently to the Spirit speaking through the Body – and having listened, acting with courage, integrity and the determination to keep walking with Christ and with one another. And if it should prove impossible, to know that walking with Christ is our highest calling.

Your suggestion that such a move represents a challenge to our mission could not be further from the truth; our experience is that the inertia and simple refusal to listen which has characterised the Church of England for decades continues to be the single biggest missional disaster of our generation. It should not need saying, but it bears repeating: no-one is attracted to a group of Christians who profess the love of Christ but seem incapable of recognising it in the loving, committed relationships of two people. These matters are not disconnected.

Nor are such matters disconnected from the shocking statistics and stories of poor mental health amongst LGBT young people – statistics which bear out what we have long known, that young

South Church House, 25 Market Place, NEWARK, Nottinghamshire NG24 1EA
Tel: 01636 673072 email: hello@OneBodyOneFaith.org.uk

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people in some Christian communities are especially impacted by the drip-drip of negativity and dismissal to which your words contribute.

If you are in any doubt about this, go and visit St James and Emmanuel in Manchester. They will talk to you about Lizzie Lowe, who was just 14 when she ended her life because she simply could not reconcile her faith and emerging sense of her identity as a gay young woman. Maybe the people of St James and Emmanuel would have a different sense of the impact of the steps ECUSA has taken; maybe, like us, it has given them hope. Or maybe, like so many others, the minutiae of Anglican Communion politics is no longer where their focus lies, and who could blame them? Maybe they are simply too caught up in seeking, finding, creating and sharing the good news of the kingdom with absolutely everyone, without exception, and in that are experiencing a renewed sense of the Spirit moving powerfully amongst and between them.

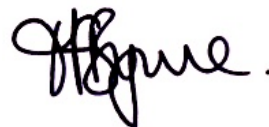
For decades we have watched the Communion used as an excuse for our failure to acknowledge the diversity of views in the Church of England, and to speak with integrity and courage the truth of our people. Now, as another province embarks on a different way of making gracious provision for diversity of integrities, it appears they are being blamed with impacting on the work of the working groups set up by the House of Bishops in the aftermath of the disastrous GS2055. The members of those groups with whom we've been able to engage are working courageously and prayerfully to hold in tension their various perspectives and to make room for meaningful change. It is disingenuous to seek to draw TEC into submission to the Church of England suggesting that this is for the sake of the Communion. TEC, the discernment and reception process are bigger than that, as is the provenance of the Holy Spirit.

We continue to look forward to a day when we are able to recognise love as just that. It is love which reveals the love of Christ, wherever we encounter it: in and between human beings, in all their diversity. We know we can't just watch and wait; we will continue to hope and pray – drawing strength from ECUSA and the Scottish Episcopal Church. We remain committed to action too, knowing that change cannot come without our active participation, and learnt with sadness how slow the Church of England is to listen to us; and, as your letter to TEC bears witness, how inconvenient it is to see the power of God active in our lives.

Yours sincerely,



The Reverend Canon Peter Leonard
Chair



Tracey Byrne
Chief Executive

cc The Most Reverend and Right Honourable Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury
 The Most Reverend and Right Honourable Dr. John Sentamu, Archbishop of York
 The Most Revd Dr Josiah Atkins Idowu-Fearon, Secretary General of the Anglican
 Communion
 The Reverend Canon Jordan Hylden, Task Force on the Study of Marriage, TEC