



Background briefing **Anglican Primates' Meeting 2017**

A Primates' Meeting is being held in Canterbury from [2-6 October 2017](#). The most senior bishop or moderator in each church in the Anglican Communion has been invited by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby. While several important topics are due to be discussed, including climate change, the most controversial is human sexuality. This raises particular problems for the Church of England, which is hosting the meeting.

International Anglican gatherings advise, rather than direct, member churches. Key principles agreed over the years include:

- not trying to take over parts of [other provinces](#);
- learning from new findings in [biblical studies](#) and [science](#), including on [sexuality](#);
- [human rights](#) for all, including [lesbian and gay people](#);
- opposing [homophobic prejudice, violence and criminalisation](#).

These are widely ignored. However Primates' Meetings have sometimes [punished](#) provinces which have been led by such principles to welcome lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people more fully. The Scottish Episcopal Church this year agreed to allow (but not require) clergy to [marry same-sex couples in church](#) if they choose. With the Episcopal Church and Anglican Church of Canada, it may face negative consequences.

Nevertheless three of the primates - Nicholas Okoh of Nigeria, Onesphore Rwaje of Rwanda and Stanley Ntagali of Uganda – have indicated that they [will not attend](#) the meeting because welcoming churches too will be represented. In countries where LGBTI people already often risk jail, archbishops [Okoh](#) and [Ntagali](#) have campaigned for even harsher laws.

However a growing number of Anglican and other churches are considering a more inclusive stance towards LGBTI people, including in [Brazil](#) and [South Africa](#). Many theologians throughout the world, including in [Africa](#), believe that the Bible does not rule out committed same-sex partnerships and some have explored gender diversity.

In Britain, where Christians have debated this issue for decades, only [16% of Anglicans](#) still think that same-sex partnerships are always wrong. Repeatedly over half a century, Church of England working party reports have described the theological case for a more positive attitude. Afraid of upsetting the

overseas leaders and local activists most opposed to change, senior clergy have continued to insist that sex between same-sex partners is always sinful.

Yet a shift may at last be taking place, perhaps in part because of concerns for church survival. [Only 3%](#) of those aged 18-24 described themselves as Anglican, compared to 40% of those aged 75 and over. While the church's views on sexuality and gender are not the only cause, these may be an obstacle. As Justin Welby [said in 2013](#), 'Young people say "I don't want to hear about a faith that is homophobic."'

A [letter from the General Synod Human Sexuality Group](#) to the primates describes a 'direction of travel' in the Church of England towards a more accepting stance. Whatever the outcome of this meeting, in several other Anglican churches too, many now believe that inclusion is in keeping with God's will.

*The LGBTI Mission is working towards acceptance and affirmation
of LGBTI people within the Church of England*

Email: lgbtmission@gmail.com

Phone: 07906 445695