



CEEC
CHURCH OF ENGLAND
EVANGELICAL COUNCIL

St Matthias Day Statement 2012

Introduction

The following short statement seeks to help Anglicans understand our church's teaching in the area of marriage and sexual relationships and its relevance today.

It does so by providing a five-fold summary of that teaching based in Scripture and Anglican tradition. This teaching should be our guide if we are to remain faithful in our pastoral, prophetic and missional responsibilities and in our inter-Anglican and ecumenical relationships.

The Church must, like Christ, welcome, love and respect all, particularly those who feel excluded and marginalised such as those who identify as sexual minorities. It must also, like Christ, bear witness to God's good purposes for humanity and call for repentance, assisting a return to God's will whenever we depart from these purposes.

Why is this statement of Anglican teaching necessary?

The Church of England's teaching about marriage and sexual relationships other than marriage currently faces a number of challenges:

- Within British society, attitudes to sexual relationships have changed in recent decades and there are plans to redefine marriage.
- Within the Anglican Communion, some dioceses and provinces are changing their teaching and practice.
- Ecumenically, some of our sister churches, notably among the Porvoo churches, are also revising their doctrine and marriage liturgies.

What is the basis of this statement of Anglican teaching?

In the words of the Declaration of Assent, "The Church of England is part of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, worshipping the one true God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It professes the faith uniquely revealed in the Holy Scriptures and set forth in the catholic creeds, which faith the Church is called upon to proclaim afresh in each generation. Led by the Holy Spirit, it has borne witness to Christian truth in its historic formularies, the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, The Book of Common Prayer and the Ordering of Bishops, Priests and Deacons". Therefore, basing itself on Scripture and these formularies, the statement draws out their significance in this area if in the Church of England we are to express our "loyalty to this inheritance of faith" as "our inspiration and guidance under God" and bring "the grace and truth of Christ to this generation" by making Him known.

What does this statement seek to achieve?

- those committed to that teaching will welcome it as a guide and reference as they seek to teach it and live it out,
- those uncertain about that teaching will find it informative and persuasive and
- those seeking to revise that teaching will be able to dialogue with it constructively in order to clarify the nature and depth of our differences.

1 – God's love and call to love

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.

(1 John 4.7)

O Lord, who hast taught us that all our doings without charity are nothing worth: Send thy Holy Ghost, and pour into our hearts that most excellent gift of charity, the very bond of peace and of all virtues, without which whosoever liveth is counted dead before thee. Grant this for thine only Son Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.
(Collect for Quinquagesima Sunday in the Book of Common Prayer)

1a. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, all Christians are called by God to practise Christian love (or 'charity'). Although God has called us to love all people everywhere, he has also given us certain key forms of relationship in which we can learn what it means to give and to receive love.

1b. These God-given forms of relationship include relationships between believers, marriage and other family relationships, and committed loving friendships.

1c. The Church is therefore called to affirm and support the value of all such God-given relationships. In a culture which overemphasises sexual relationships and wrongly implies that love and sexual activity necessarily belong together, we must particularly commend the importance of intimate, committed friendships that remain chaste.

2 – God's Word and Church

The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever. (Isa 40:8)

The Church hath power to decree rites or ceremonies and authority in controversies of faith; and yet it is not lawful for the Church to ordain anything contrary to God's word written, neither may it so expound one place of Scripture, that it be repugnant to another.
(Article XX)

2a. The authority of the Church to decide its own actions is limited by the word of God in Holy Scripture.

2b. The Church is not free to use certain parts of the Bible, such as the commandment to love our neighbours, as a justification for setting aside teaching contained in other parts of the Bible, such as the rejection of same-sex sexual activity.

2c. The Church therefore does not have the authority to introduce any form of marriage that differs from the form of marriage authorised and commended in Holy Scripture or to commend sexual behaviour forbidden by Holy Scripture.

3 - God's gift of marriage

"Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'?"
(Matt 19:4-5)

For be ye well assured, that so many as are coupled together otherwise than God's Word doth allow are not joined together by God; neither is their matrimony lawful.
(BCP Solemnization of Matrimony)

3a. Marriage as created by God is an exclusive relationship between one man and one woman that is entered into for life and that is intended in normal circumstances to result in the gift of children who are to be brought up to love and serve God. It is given to us by God both as a created institution which benefits all in society (Genesis 2.18-24) and as a relationship which images the relationship between Christ and His Church (Ephesians 5.21-32).

3b. Because marriage is instituted by God, neither the Church nor the state is authorised to re-define it.

3c. A relationship between two men or two women cannot therefore be a marriage and neither the state nor the Church should describe it as such.

4 - God's grace and call to holiness

As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.
(James 2:26)

Albeit that good works, which are the fruits of faith and follow after justification, cannot put away our sins and endure the severity of God's judgement, yet are they pleasing and acceptable to God in Christ, and do spring out necessarily of a true and lively faith, insomuch that by them a lively faith may be as evidently known as a tree discerned by the fruit.
(Article XII)

4a. The Church is not only called to proclaim the justifying grace of God in Jesus Christ, but also to teach clearly that true faith expresses itself in holy behaviour.

4b. This holiness includes holiness in the area of sexual behaviour: faithfulness within marriage between a man and a woman and abstinence outside marriage.

4c. The Church is therefore not free to affirm or bless any form of sexual activity or sexual relationship outside marriage but should welcome those in such relationships with pastoral care, a call to repentance, and the good news that God gives us the gift of the Holy Spirit to enable us to flourish by living lives that are in accordance with His call to holiness.

5 - God's people united in and by God's word

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.
(Acts 2:42)

The visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, in which the pure word of God is preached and the sacraments be duly ministered according to Christ's ordinance in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same.
(Article XIX)

5a. The visible Church of Christ is a place where the life-giving and life-changing word of God is faithfully proclaimed.

5b. Redefining marriage to include same-sex relationships or affirming or blessing sexual activity outside marriage is contrary to God's word.

5c. When a church does either of these things it therefore becomes difficult to recognise it as part of the visible Church of Christ. Consequently such matters fall outside the scope of acceptable ecumenical diversity and are a legitimate ground for division between churches.

Conclusion

Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.
(Hebrews 12.14)

We offer this five part statement to Anglican Christians in the hope that, guided and nourished by Scripture and tradition, we may be led together into the way of peace and holiness as we seek to bear faithful witness to the grace and truth of Christ in society and the wider church.

We do so aware that as individuals and as a church we constantly fall short in our understanding and in our obedience.

In this and every area of our discipleship and mission we must, therefore, be constant in prayer, seeking the grace of God -

O God the strength of all them that put their trust in thee, mercifully accept our prayers; and because through the weakness of our mortal nature we can do no good thing without thee, grant us the help of thy grace, that in keeping thy commandments we may please thee both in will and deed; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

(Collect for the First Sunday after Trinity BCP)