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Editorial

In recent weeks our General Synod met in the Bay of Islands. We have heard of the great sense of listening and respect that was present, and many of us have read Motion 30 – passed unanimously by the Synod. That motion (available on the Latimer website) has been the subject of many pastoral letters to dioceses and parishes, and has caused no small amount of concern for evangelical Anglicans. I want to make two reflections, a commitment, and a request.

First Reflection: Nothing has changed

General Synod has recognized that in order to bless same-sex relationships change to our canons or constitution is required. On the one hand, should our church wish to change its canons, this would require General Synod to vote to adopt such changes, then over the following two years those changes must go back to all the local dioceses around the country. If a majority of those dioceses vote to accept such changes then they come back to the next General Synod where they must be adopted again. Membership of General Synod is only for a two-year term, so the people who adopt it the first time are not necessarily the same who adopt it the next time. The minimum time frame for this to happen is two years. And given that it's General Synod in 2016 that could start that process, any formal or official change in what our church believes or allows is at least four years away. On the other hand, should the constitution require change, it has to go to Parliament as well.

It is important to remember therefore that our constitution, our prayer book, and our canons remain, at this stage, exactly the same. Our mission, our ministry, our clear and loving proclamation of the gospel of Jesus died and risen can, and must continue. The evangelical basis of the Anglican church still stands.

The Motion clearly articulates that the church upholds marriage between one man and one woman. However, some local churches will be allowed to 'recognize' people in same-sex civil unions or state marriages (which happens only at the request of the Vestry and with the permission of the Bishop). The Motion clearly states that these 'recognitions are not marriages and are not blessings'. Therefore whatever they might be, or whatever they might look like, or whatever an individual minister or bishop might say or imply,

we know exactly what they are not. The Anglican Church does not bless any form of same-sex relationship. We are not calling good what God has called sin. We therefore can and will continue to call on all people to turn from sin in repentance and trust in Jesus Christ. We will continue to welcome all people, of whatever sexuality, who wish to investigate the claims of Jesus, and will walk with all people, whatever their desires and struggles, calling them and ourselves to holiness and obedience to God in Christ.

It is important to remember therefore that our constitution, our prayer book, and our canons remain, at this stage, exactly the same. Our mission, our ministry, our clear and loving proclamation of the gospel of Jesus died and risen can, and must continue.

Second Reflection: Much has changed

Despite the fact that our national church has not changed its official belief or practice, the Motion clearly indicates that it wants to. This is deeply and terribly sad, although not unexpected. Throughout the Bible we are warned that false teachers will spring up within the church (Acts 20:30), seeking to turn grace into a license for immorality (Jude 4), and will draw away many people (2 Tim 4:3). We are called upon to contend for the truth entrusted once and for all to the saints (Jude 3) and to preach the word in season and out of season (2 Tim 4:2).

At one level, we should be thankful that General Synod has been honest and upfront about declaring what it wants to do. We also need to

remember that this Synod (the one which has passed this resolution) cannot tell future Synods what they must do. Future synods may very well choose to reject such changes to our canons or constitution. That will be their decision – a decision that will be influenced by the membership of those synods and by the voice of the wider church in the months and years leading up to those synods. However, let us not be ignorant – this Motion has clearly stated that there is a desire for the Anglican church in these islands to move in the direction of redefining what constitutes sin, and what God declares to be good. The fact that there is recognition in the Motion that a constitutional change may very well be required shows us how enormous this change in direction really is.

The Motion states that a working party will be formed to progress the structural changes required to allow for such blessings and will also develop ‘a process and structure’ so that those who disagree with such blessings might ‘continue to have integrity within the church’. Please be praying for that working party, particularly as they consider what that ‘process and structure’ might look like.

A Commitment: We will speak and resource

However, that integrity presumably means we have the right to speak the truth of the Scriptures as the church has always understood them. Latimer’s intention is to exercise that integrity now and during the two years before General Synod makes any vote. The recognition of ‘diversity’ both enables and requires us to speak clearly, lovingly, boldly and faithfully into our church in the coming months and years. We as an Executive will be helping the church and individuals to carefully think through the issues before them. We hope to encourage our members (and those beyond) that it is both loving and right to hold to the traditional teaching of the Scriptures, and to equip and enable you to be able to speak to this end.

A Request: Speak

While we as the Executive will be doing this, we cannot do it alone. Evangelicals have always been parish people because we believe theologically

that the local church is the engine-room of what God is doing in the world.

Vicars and ministry leaders, you need to be speaking about these matters. We will resource and encourage you, but you need to be doing this. In sermons, through small group discussion, in parish letters and magazines, you need to be educating and teaching your people, so that they might be able to both understand and speak about these matters. We need to speak words that are full of grace and love, and we need to speak in a way that is gracious and loving, warm and welcoming. We need to speak in a way that recognizes that all of us wrestle, in different ways and at different times, with our sexuality. We need to speak not of ‘them’, but of us, for there will be people in our congregations who have, or do, struggle with same-sex attraction, or know someone who does. But if we believe that God’s word is trustworthy and true, and that God does love us and want what is best for us, we must do this. We must declare that God’s wisdom and authority in the area of our sexuality is given to us by a God who overflows with love and grace towards us. It will be incredibly difficult. We are fearful of the negative reactions. We are worried we will be called bigoted, narrow, or unloving. We may lose people. We may cause conflict. But we must discharge our duty and fulfil the ministry we were called to. And we must be supported as we do this.

Lay people, vestry members, wardens, you normal people who love Jesus and come to church – please, please encourage your Vicar and ministers to speak about these issues. Ask them to do it and encourage them exuberantly when they do. They need to know that you want them to speak, and that you will support them when they do. You might not agree with everything they say, but we must be talking. And speak with each other about these matters, about how you can be a church that welcomes all people and calls all to take up our cross and follow Jesus daily.

Lastly, speak to God. Call upon him in prayer to save his church and renew us in love and obedience to his Son, so that we might proclaim his glorious gospel to all.