

ST ALBANS DIOCESAN SYNOD

15 OCTOBER 2016

QUESTIONS – FIRST NOTICE PAPER

- 1) The Reverend Dean Henley (Amphill and Shefford Deanery) to ask the Revd Darren Collins – Chair, Diocesan Caribbean Links Group: -

“At the June 2016 synod I asked about the homophobia in our Caribbean link dioceses (the Diocese of the Windward Islands, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Grenada and St. Lucia; Guyana and Belize), and specifically their support for the criminalization of the LGBTQ people in those countries. You responded that the matter was to be discussed by the Group on the 19th July.

What was the outcome of your discussions at that meeting?”

The Revd Darren Collins will respond.

“The Rev Dean Henley has raised at Diocesan Synod the issue of the role of the Church in the criminalisation of LGBT+ people in the various dioceses with which we are linked. Following the last Synod, it was agreed that the Caribbean Links Group would consider this issue at its July meeting.

Since our July meeting, the laws in Belize prohibiting same-sex sexual activity have been deemed unconstitutional by the Supreme Court and the laws have been overturned.¹

Same-sex sexual activity is still illegal, therefore, in three of our Link Dioceses in the Province of the West Indies. Guyana is in a different position to NECA and the Windward Islands because these latter two dioceses are multi-national and so incorporate a number of different jurisdictions.

For a general survey of what daily life is like for members of the LGBT+ communities of the Caribbean, see the report by the Equality Network on the Caribbean.² A Provincial Statement was issued in April 2015 reaffirming the Province’s position on marriage, and the bishops of our four link dioceses were present.³

In advance of this meeting, the report by the Institute of Public Affairs to which Dean Henley alludes in his question was circulated, as was a brief report outlining the legal position of LGBT+ people in the countries of our Link Dioceses and recent statements by the Bishops of those Dioceses.

There are attempts across the Caribbean to repeal the discriminatory laws which are, on the whole, part of the British Colonial legacy. The Anglican church in these countries is largely reluctant to challenge the status quo, but are keen to condemn homophobia.

*The criminalisation of same-sex activity is something which the Church of England has condemned, and indeed worked for, as the recent report *Anglicans and Sexuality: a way forward?* has shown.⁴ There are clearly complex political factors surrounding this issue,*

¹ <http://www.pinknews.co.uk/2016/08/10/belize-supreme-court-strikes-down-law-criminalising-homosexuality/>

² <http://www.equality-network.org/caribbean-and-americas/>

³ <https://www.lifesitenews.com/news/anglican-bishops-in-west-indies-denounce-obama-blackmail-over-gay-marriage>

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and the pressure from the American religious right on these countries should not be underestimated. Furthermore, the question of criminalisation is not just an issue for the Caribbean, but it is something that the Anglican Communion is working on throughout Africa and Asia. Clearly the call in this report for a commission to be set up would be desirable, and this is something for the wider church.

In relation to the work and commitment of the CLG, it is clear that severing our links would only damage the relationships that we have worked hard to build over many years. Dr Childs' report notes that 'the view of the Anglican Communion on how to advance this issue remains one of dialogue and listening... the goal is long-term, the process necessarily slow. Ongoing conversations are hugely important in bringing people to a greater understanding of each other.'

At our July meeting, we decided to add to our new MAP the following goal: 'Facilitate conversations to discuss the role of the church and its voice in society, particularly in relation to issues of social justice.' This, of course, includes the treatment of LGBT+ people as well as other significant social issues such as the fragmentation of families, slavery, corruption, drug use and the death penalty. We envisage this happening in the context of our relationships and our conversations, particularly at a time when we are working to encourage links between parishes and PCCs.

The hierarchical nature of the church and society in our four Link Dioceses means that any institutional change will only take place with the authority of the Diocesan Bishop. The CLG has worked to encourage closer cooperation between bishops and senior staff, and so our engagement is on both a local and diocesan level.

It has long been the intention of the Caribbean Links Group to bring our dioceses together to better understand our partners in the Gospel, and it is something to which we reaffirm our commitment. Our Link Prayer encapsulates this aim:

*God our Father, we thank you for the worldwide Anglican Communion
and for our partnership with Dioceses in the Province of the West Indies.
Enable us to grow together with them in mission and ministry,
in mutual understanding and fellowship, so that we may be built up together
in love and enriched by our contact with one another, to your honour and glory,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen."*

- 2) The Reverend Dean Henley (Amphill and Shefford Deanery) to ask the Bishop of St Albans: -

"The bishops of the Church of England allow lesbian, gay and bisexual bishops, clergy and ordinands to form civil partnerships on the understanding that those clergy in such relationships are celibate; and give an assurance to their bishop to that effect. Given their support for civil partnerships, the bishops must surely envisage that such couples will nonetheless demonstrate at some level their affection for each other.

What level of physical intimacy meets with the Bishop's approval for bishops, clergy and ordinands in civil partnerships?"

The Bishop of St Albans will respond:

"As far as I am aware the House of Bishops had not expressed any opinions on the appropriate or desirable levels of affection that people demonstrate to each other and I think the House is unlikely to do so."