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Response to Bishop Keith Joseph's "The Challenge of Gafcon to the Unity of the Anglican Communion"

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Richard Condie¹

Anglican Diocese of Tasmania, Hobart, Australia
Email: bishop@anglicantas.org.au

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Abstract

This is a response by Bishop Richard Condie, the Bishop of Tasmania and Chairman of Gafcon Australia, to the article by Bishop Keith Joseph (the Bishop of North Queensland, Australia) published in the Journal of Anglican Studies in May 2022. It engages with the nature and limits of unity in the Anglican Church before discussing the unique context of the Jerusalem Declaration and recent developments in the Anglican Church of Australia.

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¹ The Right Revd Dr Richard Condie is Bishop of Tasmania and Chair, Gafcon Australia.

² 'The Challenge of Gafcon to the Unity of the Anglican Communion', Journal of Anglican Studies 20.1 (2022), pp. 3-21.

Response to Bishop Keith Joseph's "The Challenge of Gafcon to the Unity of the Anglican Communion"

Bishop Richard Condie

I am grateful to my colleague, Bishop Keith Joseph, for raising the issue of Gafcon's challenge to the Anglican Communion.¹ While Dr Joseph's article is far ranging in its analysis of the origins of Gafcon and his perception of its shortcomings, it is not my place to respond to all his claims as they relate to the global phenomenon of Gafcon. However, as chair of Gafcon Australia, it seems appropriate that I address his concerns as they directly affect the Church of which both of us are diocesan bishops, namely the Anglican Church of Australia. But before we turn to the Australian situation, I want to make a few observations about the nature of "unity" that Dr Joseph raises and respond to some of his critique of the Jerusalem Declaration.

The Basis of Unity

There has been a lot of talk about unity, and threats to unity, in the Anglican Communion over the last two decades. In some ways, this threat began in 2003 with the consecration of a practising homosexual man as Bishop of New Hampshire in The Episcopal Church of the United States and the approval of same-sex unions in the Diocese of New Westminster in the Anglican Church of Canada. The Primates' Meeting in 2003 said of these events:

These actions threaten the unity of our own communion as well as our relationships with other parts of Christ's church, our mission and witness, and our relations with other faiths, in a world already confused in areas of sexuality, morality and theology, and polarised Christian opinion.

...

This will tear the fabric of our communion at its deepest level, and may lead to further division on this and further issues.²

But the roots of these threats to unity are to be found much deeper and earlier in our history. For at least a decade prior to this, the Church was beginning to see the erosion of the plain reading of Scripture with respect to questions of human sexuality which culminated in the Lambeth Conference in 1998, and its now famous Resolution I.10.

Unity is important. It is after all the subject of much teaching in the New Testament, not least of which by our Lord himself in John 17. The long treatise of unity in Christ in Paul's letter to the Ephesians is another passage that entreats us to maintain the unity of the church that we have by virtue of Christ's work.

¹ "The Challenge of Gafcon to the Unity of the Anglican Communion", *Journal of Anglican Studies* (1/2022)

² Accessed on 25 August 2022 from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2003/oct/17/gayrights.religion>. Note: The Communique is no longer available on the Anglican Communion Website.

These passages are often appealed to against those who are responding to moves to revise the doctrines of our Church with regard to human sexuality, as if they are the ones threatening the unity of the church. For example, in a letter to the Australian Bishops on 26 July 2021, the Primate of the Anglican Church of Australia claimed that Gafcon's stated intent to establish an extra-provincial diocese was in direct contradiction of the appeal in Ephesians "to make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit".³

Yes, we are to protect and work at the unity of the Spirit in the Church, but Bishop Joseph's article begs the question about what kind of unity we are to make every effort to preserve. In Ephesians, Paul's argument is that Jesus' work on the cross, in moving us from death to life by making satisfaction for the sins of the world, provides the same pathway for entry into God's family for everyone. The basis of our unity, and the removal of the "dividing wall of hostility", is achieved by Jesus and is appropriated by each of us having faith in the finished work of the Son. Our unity is then common "access to the Father by the one Spirit".⁴ It is not just a unity of common mind or common feeling. Membership of the household of faith is "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone".⁵ There is substance to the basis of unity.

If we are going to preserve the unity of the church, it has to be a unity which is in line with the teaching of the apostles and the prophets and Christ Jesus himself. Any other unity is not unity at all, but a figment of our imagination. The Bible has plenty of examples of this as well. Remember the unity of the people as they tried to make a name for themselves in building the tower of Babel? United they were, but completely out of step with the mind and will of God. Sometimes speaking against the common mind of human beings, is the most unifying thing we can do, if it draws us back to biblical unity of "one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all"⁶ that is founded in the right place.

It is common to charge Gafcon with undermining the unity of the church, because it seems to be promoting division. But Gafcon since its inception has been trying (even in its own weakness and fallibility) to bring back the true unity of the church based on the foundation of the apostles, prophets and Christ himself. The "man-made unity" of decisions of individuals and the councils of the church, that reject the foundations and cornerstone, are best disrupted and overturned if true unity is to be found. Rather than undermining unity, as Bishop Joseph contends, the Jerusalem Declaration is an attempt to do re-express the foundation in the 21st century.

The Jerusalem Declaration

Dr Joseph has much to say by way of critique of the Jerusalem Declaration. In particular he takes issue with statements around the nature of the Scriptures, the place of the Thirty-Nine Articles, human sexuality, and the environment.⁷

³ Ephesians 4:3

⁴ Ephesians 2:18

⁵ Ephesians 2:20.

⁶ Ephesians 4:4–6.

⁷ Joseph, 12-14

It may help clarify if we return to the original wording of the Statement that was made at the first Global Anglican Future Conference in Jerusalem in 2008, in which the Jerusalem Declaration sits. In part it reads:

We, the participants in the Global Anglican Future Conference, are a fellowship of confessing Anglicans for the benefit of the Church and the furtherance of its mission. We are a fellowship of people united in the communion (*koinonia*) of the one Spirit and committed to work and pray together in the common mission of Christ. It is a confessing fellowship in that its members confess the faith of Christ crucified, stand firm for the gospel in the global and Anglican context, and affirm **a contemporary rule**, the Jerusalem Declaration, **to guide the movement for the future**.

and

The doctrine of the Church is grounded in the Holy Scriptures and in such teachings of the ancient Fathers and Councils of the Church as are agreeable to the said Scriptures. In particular, such doctrine is to be found in the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, the Book of Common Prayer and the Ordinal. ... Building on the above doctrinal foundation of Anglican identity, we hereby publish the Jerusalem Declaration **as the basis of our fellowship**.⁸

The point is of course, that the Jerusalem Declaration does not purport to be a creed, but “a contemporary rule”, “a guide for the movement” and a “basis of our fellowship”. With these purposes it does express doctrinal truths and it does identify matters of doctrine and teaching that need clarification.

One of Dr Joseph’s criticisms of the Jerusalem Declaration is that it concerns itself with moral matters, which he claims is unique among statements of faith. He writes:

In short, the Creeds don’t do ethics. The absence of moral issues from traditional understanding of doctrine, and especially from credal statements is of great interest, but unfortunately the documents from Gafcon fail to develop this issue and state why moral issues are now to be considered doctrinal issues.⁹

I concede that Dr Joseph is essentially correct in this assertion. The creeds don’t have statements about moral and ethical questions. However, it is worth pointing out the 39 Articles do contain some moral issues. Article VII reminds us of the enduring nature of the moral law of the Old Testament: “no Christian man whatsoever is free from the obedience of the Commandments which are called Moral”.¹⁰

It is also worthy of note that Article XXXVIII *Of Christian men’s Goods, which are not in common* and Article XXXIX *Of a Christian man’s oath*, are both entirely devoted to moral issues of the day. The matters were obviously of such importance in the sixteenth century,

⁸ <https://www.gafcon.org/about/jerusalem-statement> (emphasis added)

⁹ Joseph p 14.

¹⁰ Article VII

that they were included in this document outlining essential matters for the Church of England at the time.

But perhaps even more important than these observations is the necessity for the Jerusalem Declaration to be explicit about the moral issues of human sexuality and marriage in the “contemporary rule” written in 2008. Until comparatively recently, the notion that marriage is between a man and a woman as the proper place for sexual intimacy, had not been in question. In fact, it is hard to think of a time when there has been widespread approval of any moral issue that the Bible calls “sin”.

Take the list of sins in 1 Corinthians 6: 9-10. No-one to my knowledge has ever seriously advocated that we should bless and endorse idolatry, adultery, stealing, greed, drunkenness or the like and pass it off as an orthodoxy that promotes unity. However, it was important in 2008 and remains so, to clarify that blessing sexual immorality and homosexual sexual activity, also listed in that text, is not to be blessed or endorsed.

While it is unusual to have moral issues in a statement of faith, it seems that the particularity of our time, and the unprecedented move in some parts of the Communion to bless and endorse what the Bible calls “sin”, requires a departure from the norm. It also seems entirely appropriate that it is included in a document that is a guide and a basis for fellowship in the 21st Century.

I also note that Bishop Joseph takes issue with the Jerusalem Declaration appealing to the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion. He makes the following claim, as he critiques Section 4 of the Jerusalem Declaration.¹¹

Section 4 ... states that the Thirty-Nine Articles are authoritative for Anglicans today. It claims an authority not to be found in the Articles themselves; and an authority that is not recognized by many orthodox Anglicans. Not every province of the Anglican Communion or of Gafcon accepts them as currently authoritative.¹²

That Bishop Joseph can claim that some Provinces of the Anglican Communion no longer consider the Thirty-nine Articles as authoritative merely demonstrates how far away they have moved from the roots of Anglicanism in the Reformation. However, the Church of England continues to hold the Thirty-nine Articles as authoritative,¹³ as does the Anglican Church of Australia, which continues to require its clergy, including Bishop Joseph, to make the following declaration at their ordination.

I..... firmly and sincerely believe the Catholic Faith and I give my assent to the doctrine of The Anglican Church of Australia as expressed in the Book of Common Prayer and the Ordering of Bishops, Priests and Deacons and the Articles of Religion, as acknowledged in section 4 of the Constitution, and I believe that doctrine to be agreeable to the word of God.¹⁴

¹¹ “We uphold the Thirty-Nine Articles as containing the true doctrine of the Church agreeing with God’s Word and as authoritative for Anglicans today” (Section 4 of the Jerusalem Declaration).

¹² Joseph, p 12

¹³ Canons A3, A5 and C15

¹⁴ *Oaths, Affirmations, Declarations and Assents Canon 1992*

Section 4 of the Jerusalem Declaration is entirely consistent with the law of the Anglican Church of Australia, and it is a false argument to claim that assent to the Thirty-nine Articles is a “novelty” when it is the historic position of Anglican Church – especially when it is the current position of the Anglican Church of Australia.

The Australian Situation

Gafcon Australia was set up in 2015 (originally under the name of Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans (Australia)) as a response to the growing frustration with the demise of biblical orthodoxy in the Australian Church, which was affecting both the clear proclamation of the gospel and the Church’s witness to the Australian society. The seeds of progressive liberalism had been sadly bearing fruit in the national Church over many decades, sadly endorsed and promoted by a number of bishops of the Church. Yet, the growing desire to overturn or set aside the teaching of the Bible on same-sex unions became a bridge too far for faithful, authentic Anglicans, for whom the Bible was uniquely authoritative.

As was seen in the establishment of the first Global Anglican Future Conference (GAFCON) of 2008, the issue of sexuality was symptomatic of a disregard for the authoritative teaching of Scripture in a number of areas. While disagreements among Anglicans have been contained over the past, the critical nature of the issue, as identified in 2008, was that the presenting issue concerned one’s salvation, not just a matter of church order (such as women’s ordination). As we have already noted from 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, those who engage in homosexual relations, along with other practices, such as adultery and idolatry, are excluded from the kingdom of God. The matter could not be more serious.

For that reason, by an overwhelming majority, at the 1998 Lambeth Conference the bishops of the Anglican Communion rejected “homosexual practice as incompatible with Scripture” and reaffirmed the teaching of Scripture that “faithfulness in marriage between a man and a woman in lifelong union, and believes that abstinence is right for those who are not called to marriage” (Resolution I.10.)

Sadly, Resolution I.10 did not seem to figure in the thinking of the majority of members of the House of Bishops in the Australian Church, who at the General Synod in May this year voted against a Statement of Faith which sought to affirm the following:

The solemnisation of a marriage between a same-sex couple is contrary to the teaching of Christ and the faith, ritual, ceremonial and/or discipline of this Church.

Any rite or ceremony that purports to bless a same-sex marriage is not in accordance with the teaching of Christ and the faith, ritual, ceremonial and/or discipline of this Church.¹⁵

Despite each of the houses of clergy and laity voting by a large majority in favour of this motion, the diocesan bishops of the Church could only gather 10 votes out of 24 to support this statement. It is hard for many to understand that those who are charged to be guardians of the Faith could vote against (or abstain from) such a proposition. In Australia,

¹⁵ General Synod 18 Business Paper Motion 20.3

the consecration vows of a bishop include their assent to the Scripture as “the ultimate rule and standard of faith given by inspiration of God and containing all things necessary for salvation”.¹⁶

The Archbishop of Brisbane suggested that there were perhaps good reasons for the bishops who did not vote for the statement to do so. In his 2022 Presidential Address he said:

I think it likely that some Bishops objected to the final clause in the proposed statement that ‘Any rite that purports to bless a same sex marriage is not in accordance with the teaching of Christ and the faith, ritual, ceremonial and/or discipline of this Church.’ That assertion relies on a disputed interpretation of Matthew 19.4-5 cited earlier in the statement and appears to be tantamount to contradicting the authoritative determination of the Appellate Tribunal, and even attempting to overturn it. It is likely, in my view, that a significant number of Bishops would have been deeply troubled by the prospect of perceptions of disrespecting the Constitutional authority of the Appellate Tribunal in this way.¹⁷

But the Appellate Tribunal, on which the Archbishop sat, had expressly said that making a judgement on these matters WAS the responsibility of the Synod. The majority opinion states:

The application of that teaching on salvation to the matter at hand is a task for the discernment of the General Synod, diocesan synods and Bishops. The call for this Tribunal to discover in the Scriptures and to apply a direct constitutional preclusion must be declined, consistently with the past jurisprudence of this Tribunal.¹⁸

and

General Synod is the place to draw disciplinary or liturgical lines if it is the will of the Church to have uniformity in this particular matter or in the matter of what may or may not be blessed in worship.¹⁹

The explanation for why the bishops didn’t support the statement is probably found not in their constitutional sensitivity but in their commitment to a different view of marriage. If the voting patterns at General Synod over the matters of human sexuality, marriage and same-sex marriage were consistent, then it quite possible that 9 or 10 members of the House of Bishops voted in favour of a motion that endorsed same-sex marriage.²⁰ That motion in part read:

¹⁶ Citing Section 2 of the Constitution of the Anglican Church of Australia, to which all bishops must declare their assent at their consecration.

¹⁷ President’s Address to Synod 25th June 2022, pp11-12

¹⁸ The Majority Opinion, Paragraph 214

¹⁹ The Majority Opinion, paragraph 226.

²⁰ Statement 1 affirming biblical marriage was supported by 143 votes in favour to 98 against, passing in both Houses of Laity and Clergy, but losing 10:12 in the House of Bishops. Statement 2 on Chastity was also supported 143 votes to 98, and was passed 12:11 in the House of Bishops. The motion affirming same-sex marriage was lost 95 votes to 145 which represents a consistent voting pattern, suggesting that up to 10 bishops almost certainly supported this motion.

[The Synod] considers same-sex marriage as a moral good and a gift to be celebrated, providing an enrichment of the Christian understanding of marriage and a witness to God's grace and love, consistent with the testimony of Scripture and Anglican tradition as expressed in the historic Creeds.²¹

If this analysis is correct, the bishops didn't vote in favour of the statement on marriage, because they wanted to affirm the moral good and biblical basis of same-sex marriage.

To be fair to Bishop Joseph, his article was published prior to the General Synod in May. However, the outcome of this episcopal abandonment of the teaching of Scripture merely confirms the decisions of Gafcon Australia to present their challenge to the national Church, in light of the publication of the Majority Opinion of the Appellate Tribunal in 2020, which claimed that same-sex marriage blessings were consistent with the doctrine of our Church.

Bishop Joseph draws attention to the Majority Opinion of the Appellate Tribunal with respect to the blessing of same-sex unions, which declared that such a liturgical innovation was consistent with the Constitution of the national Church.²² However, readers will be interested to know that under the Constitution, the Tribunal (comprising two diocesan bishops²³ and four lawyers), is required to consult the House of Bishops (excluding the bishops on the Tribunal) and a Board of Assessors, a panel of clergy (including theological lecturers) elected by the General Synod. Yet, despite the unanimous agreement of the House of Bishops and the Board of Assessors, which endorsed the teaching of the apostle Paul, that homosexual behaviour excluded one from the kingdom of God, five members of the Tribunal disregarded that advice.²⁴

²¹ General Synod 18 Business Paper - Motion 24.3

²² For a comprehensive explanation and rebuttal of the reasoning of the Majority Opinion, see *The Line in the Sand. The Appellate Tribunal Opinion and the Future of the Anglican Church in Australia*, eds Robert Tong, Claire Smith and Mike Leite (Camperdown, NSW: Australian Church Record, 2022). The book also explores and endorses the Minority Opinion of the Appellate Tribunal.

²³ Although the composition is usually seven persons, including three bishops, one of the bishops recused himself, as he was the one who promoted the liturgy for same-sex blessings at his final Synod in the Diocese of Wangaratta, shortly before his retirement, which subsequently occasioned the reference to the Appellate Tribunal.

²⁴ In Answer to the Tribunal's questions: "Does the Anglican Church of Australia have a teaching on whether persistence in sexual immorality precludes a person from salvation in Christ Jesus? Where is this teaching set out?" The House of Bishops replied in part:

Specific teaching related to sexual immorality and salvation is found in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; Ephesians 5:3-5; 1 Timothy 1:8-11; Revelation 21:27; and 22:11.

Sexual immorality is as liable to the judgment of God as other sins (James 2:10). All sin requires repentance and forgiveness, with a view to following a life of obedience. Of course, one ought not to prioritise sins of immorality over and above other persistent sins, however, sexual sins have significant consequences, because they constitute a sin against the Christian's body, which is a gift from God and in which he has taken up residence by his Holy Spirit.

Shun immorality. Every other sin which a person commits is outside their body; but the immoral person sins against their own body. Did you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body. 1 Corinthians 6:18-20

However, for the Anglican Church of Australia, given the failure of the Bishops to uphold our Lord's exclusive definition of marriage (Matthew 19:3-12), the current situation remains as the Appellate Tribunal has determined, namely, that same-sex blessings are legal within any Diocese of Australia, unless the Diocesan Bishop declares them to be neither "edifying" nor "reverent"²⁵, or passes a regulation to the Canon Concerning Services preventing its use.²⁶ Such declarations have been made in the Dioceses of Tasmania and Sydney.

Nonetheless, the publication of Gafcon Australia's Commitment 2020, following the Appellate Tribunal's Majority Opinion effectively endorsing same-sex blessings, has proved to be prescient if not sadly prophetic. The establishment an extra provincial diocese, called the Diocese of the Southern Cross (DSC), has now taken place, to provide an Anglican ecclesial home for clergy and congregations around Australia in those dioceses where they believe their bishop has abandoned the faith once for all delivered to the saints, by refusing to affirm the Bible's teaching on the sacredness of marriage and the sinfulness of same-sex unions.

It is helpful to remember, that in 2003 when all this began, the Primates of the Anglican Communion encouraged the establishment of episcopal oversight for Anglicans who were troubled by these innovations. They said:

To this extent, therefore, we must make clear that recent actions in New Westminster and in the Episcopal Church (USA) do not express the mind of our communion as a whole, and these decisions jeopardise our sacramental fellowship with each other. We have a particular concern for those who in all conscience feel bound to dissent from the teaching and practice of their province in such matters. Whilst we reaffirm the teaching of successive Lambeth Conferences that bishops must respect the autonomy and territorial integrity of dioceses and provinces other than their own, *we call on the provinces concerned to make adequate provision for episcopal oversight of dissenting minorities within their own area of pastoral care in consultation with the Archbishop of Canterbury on behalf of the Primates.*²⁷

This kind of alternative oversight has never officially been provided and it has been left to groups like Gafcon and others to take some initiative. Gafcon Australia shares the Primates'

²⁵ The mechanism whereby same-sex blessings were proposed by the Diocese of Wangaratta and endorsed by the Appellate Tribunal was the application of the *Canon Concerning Services 1992*. The Canon allows ministers to vary authorised services or construct their own, where no authorised service exists. Yet, as section 5(3) and (4) indicate -

(3) All variations in forms of service and all forms of service used must be reverent and edifying and must not be contrary to or a departure from the doctrine of this Church.

(4) A question concerning the observance of the provisions of sub-section 5(3) may be determined by the bishop of the diocese.

²⁶ See the Diocese of Tasmania, <https://www.dropbox.com/s/jm31ea848j0qgsl/Regulation%20under%20the%20Canon%20Concerning%20Services%20%28Blessing%20of%20Marriages%29%20Ordinance%202021.pdf?dl=0>

²⁷ Primates Communique, 2003 accessed on 25/8/2022 <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2003/oct/17/gayrights.religion> emphasis added.

“particular concern for those who in all conscience feel bound to dissent from the teaching and practice of their province” and have set up the DSC to provide support. We explicitly rejected the idea of providing alternative episcopal oversight from another diocesan bishop, believing such cross border interventions to be counterproductive. Instead, the DSC will provide fellowship for those who have already departed.

Bishop Joseph repeated five questions that he originally addressed to me. For the sake of transparency, I publish my answers here.

1. Does Gafcon Australia accept that orthodox Bishops and Dioceses exist in the Anglican Church of Australia outside of Gafcon?

Of course Gafcon Australia accepts that bishops and dioceses can be orthodox without having explicitly joined Gafcon or subscribed to the Jerusalem Declaration. It is a voluntary association that has a relatively small membership compared with the membership of the Anglican Church of Australia. There are many fine leaders in the ACA who are not members of Gafcon. Orthodox bishops and dioceses are those who adhere to the Fundamental Declarations and Ruling Principles of the Constitution of Australia.

2. Will Gafcon accept into the Extra-Provincial Diocese parishes that have left orthodox Bishops and Dioceses?

Gafcon Australia is a separate entity from the Diocese of the Southern Cross (“DSC”) and has no say at all in who is a member of that organisation. At the current time, the Diocese is a company limited by guarantee (as a mechanism to create a legal entity) consisting initially of three members. Over time, it is expected the Diocese will gather in a Synod of its members, when a dozen or so church congregations have affiliated with it.

The DSC is open to those who by their own conscience can no longer accept the leadership of their bishop. I don’t imagine that any minister or congregation would have a troubled conscience following a bishop who upheld the ancient teaching of the Church as expressed in the Fundamental Declarations and Ruling Principles and therefore would not need to join the new Diocese. This is especially the case given the massive personal, financial and ministry cost of leaving employment, housing, and church buildings behind. No one will be entering into this lightly.

3. If Gafcon will accept parishes leaving orthodox Bishops and Dioceses, how is this not encouraging schism?

We have now seen multiple examples of Western Anglican Churches that have embraced the blessing of same-sex marriages. Wherever this has taken place, orthodox Anglicans have left their dioceses. In the USA some of those sought alternative episcopal oversight from another diocesan bishop while trying to remain in the TEC and were removed by the councils of their church. In New Zealand, orthodox Anglican clergy resigned their licences and began new congregations

elsewhere. People chose to leave the ACANZP and join them. The schism takes place when the doctrinal change makes it untenable for people to remain.

The Diocese of the Southern Cross is an ecclesial home for those who have already departed. Neither Gafcon Australia nor the DSC have encouraged anyone to leave the Anglican Church of Australia. I consider the DSC to be a pastoral measure for those are no longer part of the ACA and a response to the effects of schism brought about by the actions of others.

4. If Gafcon will not accept parishes leaving orthodox Bishops and Dioceses, how does Gafcon propose to determine the orthodoxy of those Bishops and Dioceses?

Gafcon has no role at all in determining either the orthodoxy of bishops or the credentials of congregations wishing to join the Diocese of the Southern Cross. As stated above, there is no need for parishes to leave a diocese where their bishop is orthodox, and particularly where their bishop voted in favour of the Statement approved by the House of Clergy and House of Laity at the recent General Synod. The recent actions of the majority of the House of Bishops has regrettably resulted in faithful Anglicans feeling they can no longer remain under that leadership.

5. If Gafcon will accept parishes leaving Bishops or Dioceses who have departed orthodoxy, how does Gafcon propose to determine the orthodoxy?

The answer to this question is inherent in the answers above.

Conclusion

The current crisis in the Anglican Church of Australia can be traced back to the decision of the Diocese of Wangaratta and its then Bishop, John Parkes. The Bishop and the Diocesan Synod decided not to wait for General Synod to determine if the ACA would bless same-sex marriages. Instead, they established a service of blessing same-sex marriages independent of the proper decision making process at General Synod. The Appellate Tribunal, despite the advice of the House of Bishops and the Panel of Assessors, ruled that the service of blessing was not inconsistent with the Constitution of the ACA.²⁸ The failure of the bishops to uphold the Statement on Marriage, further contributed to people's unease.

Gafcon Australia has responded to this crisis. From the very beginning its aims have been:

1. to promote orthodox Anglican faith and practice as set forth in the Jerusalem Declaration and in the Fundamental Declarations and Ruling Principles of the Constitution of the Anglican Church of Australia;
2. to help reform, heal and revitalise the Anglican Communion and expand its mission to the world; and

²⁸ See *The Line in the Sand* for a helpful examination of the Opinions.

3. to provide fellowship to orthodox Anglicans who find themselves in a minority position in their own Dioceses due to the actions of others who depart from orthodox faith and practice.

Gafcon's Commitment 2020 was published as a practical way forward in fulfilling these objectives and in response to the crisis caused by the decisions and actions of others.

The drift in the Anglican Communion towards the acceptance of same-sex union as a normative pathway of discipleship begins with the blessing of same-sex unions.²⁹ Same-sex blessing is merely the beginning. Yet if it is right in God's eyes to bless a same-sex union, why shouldn't the church solemnise such a union? Why shouldn't those in same-sex unions be able to be ordained?

Gafcon Australia does not retreat from its desire to see the Anglican Church of Australia reformed, healed and revitalised in accordance with its commitment to the Word of God.

The Right Revd Dr Richard Condie
Bishop of Tasmania
Chair, Gafcon Australia

²⁹ See Glenn Davies' survey of the various Provinces which have adopted the solemnisation of same-sex unions, having begun with same-sex blessings. "The Appellate Tribunal Opinion and Worldwide Anglicanism", *The Line in the Sand*, 103-110.