

THE METHODIST CHURCH OF SOUTHERN AFRICA

TO ALL MINISTERS, SUPERNUMERARIES, PROBATIONERS AND DEACONS.

Dear colleagues in ministry,

A matter of *theological concern* which relates to every section of our church refers. By now we are all aware of the critical situation in the MCSA relative to the Church and same sex relationships. Conference, which meets in September, will be faced with a call to make a decision. Further delay should not be an option.

The one official document on this topic, the "Discussion Guide", was clearly biased in favour of the pro-gay stance. Our wish is to redress that imbalance by putting into your hands the enclosed unofficial but well supported Position Paper/Statement of Faith, which speaks for itself. It expresses the mind of more than 120 signatories, both ministerial and lay, who some time ago subscribed to its contents. Until now circulation has been limited. Given the current situation we believe it appropriate that it should now be before all leaders in our church. Hence this posting to you.

To keep faith with those who have already subscribed to its contents it comes to you with minimal revision of the original, revision being mainly by deletion of certain superfluous clauses. Such revision affects neither the theology nor the position originally advocated. Some may find shortcomings in style, literary expression, composition and length. We nevertheless ask you to read it carefully and to consider *the fundamental principles stated in it.*

An appeal: should you find that you agree with those fundamental beliefs and principles please say so. Send a simple **YES** response *with your name* (and with comment if you like) to the Rev. Dave Morgan at : e-mail davemorgan@lowveld.com ; SMS 0823718412 ; Fax 0137126273.

Why are we doing this? For love of Christ and the Church, and because very many in the accountable position of leader - perhaps you - have not yet spoken to the issue. We also believe that in any issue of grave import, as this is proving to be, it can only be helpful to both DEWCOM and Conference, and to the Church at large, to know the mind of those in positions of leadership.

Sincerely in Christ.

The Revs. Ray Alistoun, Edward Brown, Keith McLachlan and Dave Morgan
Co-sponsors of the 2006 Pretoria initiative.

POSITION PAPER REGARDING HOMOSEXUALITY AND THE CHURCH.

Preface

In these days of moral and spiritual uncertainty the Church must give clear direction to her people, not least in the area of sexual morality.

To that end a conference of like-minded ministers and lay people was held in Pretoria, January 31 and February 1 2006.

The Presiding and Limpopo District bishops were told of the consultation and both were invited to attend. Presiding Bishop Abrahams gave the meeting his blessing with the assurance that he prayed for a fruitful outcome. After prayer, study, discussion, and being united in heart, mind and spirit, those who met proposed the following declaration:

STATEMENT OF FAITH

WE BELIEVE THE FOLLOWING:

AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE

- 1. The Bible, consisting of the Old and New Testaments, is the inspired Word of God, as such it is our supreme authority in all matters of faith and practice. No other word, whether written or spoken, has or can have authority equal to or above that of the Bible.**

The Interpretive (hermeneutic) principles employed to "correctly handle the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15) are crucial to a proper understanding of Scripture. .

The Interpretive principles considered sound over many centuries by the mainstream of the evangelical church are as follows: Scripture must interpret scripture; scripture must be compared with scripture; scripture must inform scripture. These principles apply as follows:

- The New Testament interprets the Old.
- The Epistles interpret the Gospels.
- The clear interprets the obscure.
- The universal interprets the local and cultural.
- The systematic and teaching passages and books, such as Romans and Galatians, interpret the historic, narrative and incidental.
- While taking note of the historical context of any Scripture text in matters of faith and practice, in applying the text to current context the Scriptures remain the abiding measure of what is pleasing and acceptable to God. Existing societal norms and behaviour do not overrule the yardstick of Scripture.

- 2. The Church bears God's authority insofar as what she says and does is attested and approved by Scripture.**

THE PROBLEM OF SIN

3. All persons are born with a sinful nature and have need of redemption.

"For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" Romans 3:23

".... we were enemies of God" Romans 5:10

"Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds as shown by your evil behaviour" Col.1:21 (NIV footnote)

4. No one is beyond the reach of God's grace.

"But where sin increased grace increased all the more, so that just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" Romans 5:20,21

5. No one being saved by grace is justified in continuing in sin.

"What shall we say then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?" Romans 6:1,2

6. We have need of repentance for sometimes having merely condemnatory attitudes towards those who have sinned.

Confronted by legalists and the woman caught in the act of adultery, our Lord Himself gave both the church and the sexually fallen an everlasting model of the way to go. On the one hand He declared that it is only the sinless who can begin throwing stones. On the other hand He showed that offenders are called to receive forgiveness and go, but not to sin any more. (John 8:1-11).

"For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." John 3:17.

7. The church has need of repentance for having acquiesced with sin.

We are to "correct one another in a spirit of gentleness" Gal. 6:1

8. The church must be open to all sinners, forgiven and not yet forgiven.

Grace, mercy and pardon are always on offer to all, and await appropriation. "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which is lost and to give his life a ransom for many." Luke 19:10. Cf. Luke 15:1-10.

MARRIAGE, MORALITY AND BIBLICALLY ORDAINED SEXUALITY

9. Holy Matrimony is a création ordinance consonant with the creation of mankind.

The institution of marriage is inextricably linked with the creation of humans as male and female. The Creator's design and will translates into sexual intercourse reserved for one man and one woman within marriage. "For this reason a man will leave his father and his mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." Genesis 2:24. Matt. 19:5. Mark 10:7-8. 1 Cor. 6:16. Eph. 6:31.

10 One intention of sexual union within marriage is the begetting of children.

"God blessed them and said: Be fruitful and multiply." Genesis 1:28.

11 The relationship between a husband and wife is representative of the relationship that exists between Christ and the Church.

“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. This is a profound mystery – but I am talking about Christ and the church.” Eph. 5:31-32 Cf. Rev. 19:6b-8.

- 12. Celibacy is enjoined on all persons outside of the covenant of marriage. Christ is our example in this, he held himself celibate during his time on earth**

“Flee fornication.”

THE DISTORTION OF GOD’S PLAN FOR HUMAN SEXUALITY

- 13. Human sexuality has been deeply affected by the fall, but Christ does not love persons of any one consequent sexual inclination more than those of another.**

Scripture is clear that Christ’s saving love extends to all persons. “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.” John 3:17.

“Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners,” 1 Tim. 1:15

- 14. Sexual sin assumes different forms dependent on various factors which foster temptation, such as: fashionable ‘norms’; pressures from the media and entertainment cartel; false teaching; a persons inclinations, natural or cultivated; etc.**

The following forms of sexual union are specifically prohibited in scripture:

- Between a married person and someone who is not their marriage partner (Adultery)
- Between unmarried persons (Fornication)
- Between persons who are close relatives (Incest)
- Between a human and an animal (Bestiality)
- Between persons of the same sex (Same gender sexual acts)

Lev. 18:6-23 et al.

- 15. Specifically, all references to Homosexual acts, both in the Old and New Testaments are strongly negative.**

Genesis 19:4,5 (cf.; Jude 7). Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13. Romans 1:24-27. 1 Corinthians 6:9,10. 1 Timothy 1:9-11.

(The above texts lie firmly within the context, tenor and intention of the entire Bible regarding sexual expression. They may not be simply dismissed as ‘proof texts that are inapplicable to our present context’.)

- 16. We may have no choice as to who we find desirable, but we do choose our conduct.**

“...sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it.:Genesis 4.7b. “ No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.” 1 Corinthians 10.13

- 17. Any move to approve sexual unions that are contrary to God’s will as made known in Scripture is akin to lawlessness and cannot be condoned.**

“Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact sin is lawlessness.” 1 John 3;4.