

Dean's Letter, 27 January 2019

Dear Cathedral family, brothers and sisters in Christ

For some years, we as The Anglican Church in Southern Africa (ACSA) have been grappling to come to a common mind on the appropriate pastoral response to those in same-sex unions, who are part of our church. As part of the journey together with this, we were recently sent a case study, featuring a same-sex Christian couple, and we were asked to discuss this, and to give our response. Here is the case study:

This is a letter received by your Bishop from one of the clerics in the Diocese.

"Dear Bishop,

Greetings and peace to you. We look forward to seeing you later in the year at our confirmation service.

I write at this time, though, to request your guidance on a pastoral matter regarding a couple in our parish who are regular worshippers and involved in our outreach ministry. They are a gay couple who entered into a civil union some seven years ago.

Two years ago, as part of the quiet way they serve, they started volunteering at an orphanage – spending time with the babies in the nursery, and teaching music to some of the teenagers. That is where they met Elijah an 8 months old little boy, abandoned by an addict mother who has since died.

After a period of regular visits, Elijah was formally adopted by the couple and has now been living with them for 14 months. He is a happy little boy and they are convinced that God sent him to them.

Last week, Elijah's parents came to see me with the following requests:

1. They would like Elijah to be baptised in our parish and take his place as a full member of our church.
2. The couple would like to renew their vows taken seven years ago before a magistrate and have asked me to bless both their rings and their union.
3. They have recently done some renovations at their home and have asked that I do a home blessing at the time of Elijah's baptism, when their extended family will be in town.
4. One of the couple – who leads a home group in our parish – feels called to the lay ministry, and has approached me asking how he could test this calling. Our Parish Council has indicated it would welcome him as a lay minister in the parish.

Given the range of interpretations of our Canons at present, how would you advise me to respond pastorally to their requests."

How would we as the Cathedral respond to these requests? How would we want the Bishop to respond? Should we recognize – and bless – same-sex unions? Should people in same-sex unions be permitted to exercise public spiritual ministry in the life of the church, as lay ministers (and, in due course, perhaps, as clergy)? What do you think?

Hard copies of the case study are at the West door of the Cathedral, with a response form, if you would like to engage with the issue, or make further comments.

My love to you all

