

# **Research for the Living in Love and Faith project**

## **The impact on Churches of decision-making regarding questions of sexuality and marriage**

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## INTRODUCTION

### Context of the project

There are currently 32 countries where same-sex marriage is legally recognised, ranging from The Netherlands to South Africa, Mexico to New Zealand, and including the United Kingdom and Ireland (<https://www.hrc.org/resources/marriage-equality-around-the-world>). The issue of marriage equality, however, continues to divide Anglicans worldwide. The Scottish Episcopal Church became the first Anglican Church in the UK to permit same-sex marriage in 2017, joining the Episcopal Church (USA) and the Episcopal Anglican Church of Brazil in doing so. Other Anglican Provinces, while not approving same-sex marriage, have permitted their clergy to officiate blessing services for couples in same-sex civil unions. These Provinces include the Anglican Church of Canada, the Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia, the Anglican Church of Australia, and the Church in Wales. At the heart of the debate for the Anglican Communion is the challenge of whether the Anglican Church can avoid widespread fragmentation and contain both progressive and conservative views on marriage within the one church structure. For those who take a progressive stance, it is an issue in providing equality for those church members who are in same-sex relationships, alongside a wish to respond with pastoral sensitivity to requests to marry or to have a union blessed. They view the provision of marriage or services of blessing for same-sex couples as evolutionary for both the Church and Christianity. Those who take a conservative stance, on the other hand, want to hold to their biblical understanding of marriage, viewing provision of same-sex church blessings and same-sex marriage as the result of increasing secularisation in society and an unacceptable accommodation of contemporary culture and ideologies. As opponents of same-sex marriage and same-sex blessings, they warn that Churches moving in this direction risk dividing the Anglican Communion. This diversity of strongly held views also reflects widespread cultural divides, with many Anglican Provinces being in countries where same-sex relationships are illegal and/or same sex marriages are prohibited.

### Background to the project

This research was commissioned by the Church of England as part of its Living in Love and Faith (LLF) initiative. It was intended to help the Next Steps Group (NSG) of bishops as they deliberated on the issues of identity, sexuality, relationships, and marriage in order to discern the way forward for the Church. The aim was to gather information on the effects on Churches of the decision to allow the marriage (or blessing of civil marriages) between couples of the same sex. A request for assistance came from the director of LLF to the principal investigator (based in York St John University) in June 2022, who proposed a collaboration with the co-investigator (based at Bishop Grosseteste University). A research proposal was drawn up, which was approved by the NSG in late July. The NSG had planned a series of meetings during the autumn and winter, and the aim was to complete the research in time for this report to be presented before the end of those meetings. This meant there

was a tight deadline (1<sup>st</sup> December 2022), which constrained the type and extent of what research was feasible in a three-month period.

The request was to do a largely 'desk-based' study of published material, though in drawing up the proposal it was clear that this alone may not yield sufficient useful information. It was decided to attempt three main ways of data gathering:

- 1) **Academic literature searches.** This was intended to identify what peer-reviewed articles are available that may help the NSG in their deliberations.
- 2) **General internet searches.** These would include church website posts, synod papers, newspaper reports, social media posts etc. The aim was to produce as accurate an account as possible of the course of decision-making and reactions to it.
- 3) **Information from key informers.** Direct approaches to those in central positions in denominations would be made to ask for any information that exists on impacts, and to ask them for reflections on their experiences of the processes and decisions made in their context.

It was hoped that these three approaches would help to create a report that would outline the experiences of those Churches that have already moved ahead to change practice in this area.

The intended samples were Anglican Churches and those in other denominations that had approved either the blessing of same-sex couples in church (SSB) or the marriage of same-sex couples in church (SSM).<sup>1</sup> It was soon clear that we had to confine our scope to the seven provinces of the Anglican Communion who have decided to allow SSB and/or SSM. We did not survey the Church of England (which has not made such decisions), partly because a thorough survey of opinions would be a major undertaking and partly because the LLF project has surveyed those who took part in the LLF programme (Living in Love and Faith, 2022).<sup>2</sup> We have, as part of the report on published academic material, referred to the two *Church Times* surveys, which may be the best indication of how opinion in the Church of England changed in the first decade of this century (Village, 2018).

## Outline of the report

Following this introductory section there is an extensive summary of the key findings alongside some recommendations for further research. The bulk of the report consists of three sections, each based on the three different means of gathering information:

### *Academic literature searches*

It was not our aim to gather or assess the wealth of material that debates theological issues surrounding sexuality and marriage. This study was about assessing the possible impacts of

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<sup>1</sup> To save space, we have used 'Same-Sex Blessing' (SSB) to refer to the blessing in church of same-sex partners, usually after a civil partnership has been created or after a civil same-sex marriage. We use 'Same-Sex Marriage' (SSM) to refer to the marriage of couples of the same sex in church.

<sup>2</sup> This survey was of 6000 people who took part in the LLF programme. While this was a broad cross section of people, it may not include those who opposed the LLF process.

decisions to allow SSB or SSM, not the rights or wrongs of such matters. There are very few studies that have systematically reported on the outcome of decisions made. We have produced a short account of some relevant material but cannot be sure it reflects everything that is available, especially as literature on this subject is only just beginning to emerge for many Churches. Our aim was to outline what is known from surveys about opinion-change and from social-scientific studies about the relationships between religion and sexual minorities.

### **General internet searches**

The aim here was to examine province by province the chronology of events and reactions to them. The seven provinces studied all have unique experiences, so we have described each in turn. We have used country names as shorthand for the seven provinces we have studied:

- 1) ***The Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia***. This province consists of three partners, Tikanga Māori; Tikanga Pakeha; Tikanga Pasefika. It is the Tikanga Pakeha, which has seven dioceses, that has gone through the process of permitting SSB (but not SSM), and we have used 'New Zealand' in this report to refer to this partnership in the province.
- 2) ***The Anglican Church of Australia***. There are five regional provinces in Australia; Tasmania is extra-provincial. There are 23 dioceses, some of which have decided to allow SSB (but not SSM) after a ruling in 2020.
- 3) ***Igreja Episcopal Anglicana do Brasil***. The Anglican Episcopal Church of Brazil includes nine dioceses and a missionary district. It decided in 2018 to allow SSM, having not previously made a national decision on SSB.
- 4) ***The Anglican Church of Canada***. This includes four regional provinces plus the Nationwide Ministries. Dioceses have greater autonomy than is typical in other parts of the Anglican Communion, and decisions about SSB and SSM have a complex history.
- 5) ***The Scottish Episcopal Church***. This entity has seven dioceses that agreed to allow SSM from 2018, having not previously decided nationally on SSB.
- 6) ***The Episcopal Church, USA***. This province has nine regional provinces, some of which include dioceses that are outside the USA, and now refers to itself as The Episcopal Church (TEC). We sampled just the dioceses in the USA, and have used this to refer to this part of TEC.
- 7) ***The Church in Wales***. This province has six dioceses which decided to allow a five-year trial period of SSB from 2021.

The results of the general internet searches were used to produce a summary grid outlining the key decisions made and our estimate of the current situation in each province.

### **Information from key informers**

This section of the report has several subsections that report different facets of the data collected at both national provincial and diocesan level using an online survey sent to bishops and executive officers. The data included some quantitative material, based on structured questions with restricted answers, and some qualitative material, based on free-text responses to more open questions. The quantitative material in this sort of enquiry is necessarily limited, and without a 100% response rate (which we did not get) it cannot accurately quantify impacts across the whole of each province. What it can do is to allow some comparison of the experiences of those in key positions. The qualitative material in the survey gives a more discursive response, which again is partial and subjective. It is nonetheless helpful to hear respondents in their own words and, as the material is relatively limited, we have tried to produce it verbatim and in full where possible.

In most sub-sections of this part of the report we have treated responses from different provinces separately. This helps to bring out the different experiences in different parts of the Communion. The number of responses from some provinces was too few to draw any firm conclusions from the quantitative data, but we were able to combine across provinces to explore some aspects of internal and external impacts. The free-text reflections are useful for the variety of points they make; they tell us nothing about the general frequency of these ideas, experiences or opinions but are valuable in themselves for those who wish to hear from others who have wrestled with this issue already.

### **The three methods compared**

The three methods used in this research project offer slightly different perspectives on the same issue, each with their own advantages and disadvantages. It is worth bearing these in mind when evaluating the different sources.

The academic material generally follows the conventions of social-science research and is likely to have been peer-reviewed. As such, it may represent the most critical and rigorous assessment of how Christian Churches have responded to the issues raised by sexuality and gender identity. The data sources are likely to be interviews or questionnaire surveys of interested parties and will reflect the particular perspectives and interests of the participants who agree to take part. Researchers will usually study particular groups within denominations and the voices of others may not be heard as they are not canvassed as part of focused studies. The paucity of relevant academic studies of the specific effects on Christian communities that have changed policy means that there is little reliable evidence, especially for Anglican Churches, so we have included reference to other denominations where this is available, as well relevant material on attitude changes in the Church of England related to this issue.

General internet searches can uncover both 'official' documents and the opinions of groups or individuals who post on social media sites. We have used our searches to try and summarize both the chronology of events in various provinces and reactions to them. This material is vast, complex, and constantly changing. Making sense of it inevitably means

making choices about what to include and how to shape the narrative that emerges. The material available may not tell us much about what the impacts have been 'on the ground', but it does highlight the positions taken by different groups and the intensity surrounding decision-making in some provinces.

As is always the case, the survey data tell us about those who chose to take part, and not about those who did not respond. We had a response rate of about one third of those whom we approached, which is fairly typical for this kind of research. We had replies from dioceses who had either pioneered, supported, or opposed changes, so we think we have heard something of the spectrum of opinions on these matters. The survey data allowed some quantification of attitudes, which meant we could compare attitudes between those who supported or opposed change, but samples had to be combined across provinces. Open answers in surveys do not always capture useful data because they are often short and add little to the structured responses. In this case, however, we invited bishops and executive offices to give extended reflections, and many did so. Their answers give an important, current insight from those heavily involved in the debates. We decided to reproduce most of these in full so that their voices could be heard, and these data make useful reading.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This section summarizes the key findings and offers overall conclusions.

1. This research investigated evidence about the processes and impacts on Anglican Churches of decisions made to allow in church the blessing of same-sex partnerships (SSB) or same-sex marriage (SSM). It relied on searches of academic literature, searches of internet sources, and a survey of key informers in seven Anglican provinces that have allowed SSB, SSM, or both.

### Academic literature

2. The academic literature review was selective and reported on three areas:
  - a. Survey material from the UK or England examining changing attitudes about homosexuality among churchgoers and support for SSB and SSM in the Church of England in 2013
  - b. Survey studies from elsewhere and other social-scientific studies of the relationship of religion to beliefs about SSM or the experience of sexual minorities in churches
  - c. Studies directly related to the decisions to allow SSB or SSM in churches in the Anglican Communion or to the Church of England that may have implications for impact.
3. There are no detailed academic studies of the impact of allowing SSB or SSM on church growth or decline, either numerically or in terms of the quality of church life as perceived by clergy or lay people. Research does point to the likely scale and nature of impacts:
  - a. The rapidly changing views on same-sex issues in many UK churches, including the Church of England, suggest that allowing change is likely to be welcomed by many. Attitudes have changed among most age cohorts, though Evangelicals (especially younger Evangelicals) are likely still to be strongly opposed to SSB or SSM.
  - b. Surveys elsewhere in the USA and Europe mirror those in the UK. In the USA, where surveys are more frequent, there is some evidence to suggest that some declines in institutional religious affiliation are associated with those who have more liberal views leaving conservative churches.
  - c. Research on the effects of support for SSM on sexual minorities in churches suggest a complex picture. Churches generally offer a supportive environment for wellbeing and mental health, and some sexual minority churchgoers prefer to stay in traditional churches, even when there is little support for SSM or gay rights. However, where there is support, sexual minorities may show better wellbeing and mental health. Experience from the USA supports the need for 'intentional' church communities that help Christians in sexual minorities to develop both faith and sexual identity over their lifetimes.

- d. Several researchers writing from a Church of England context have pointed to the deficiencies in both theologies and liturgies of marriage as viewed from a same-sex perspective. Changing pastoral and liturgical practice would necessarily involve changes in theologies of partnerships and marriage.

## Internet searches

4. The internet searches allowed us to report in detail the processes of making decisions, and subsequent reactions, in seven Anglican provinces that had allowed either SSB or SSM or both. Information on webpages and linked documents was collected from August to November 2022 and used to create narratives for the three provinces that have allowed SSM and the four that have allowed SSB. The narratives reveal how the processes and reactions to change varied, partly in relation to when change was made and partly in relation to the size and governance of each national province.
5. The three provinces that have so far approved SSM are the USA, Scotland, and Brazil. The latter two have had similar experiences which were different from that of the USA:
  - a. The USA moved well ahead of the rest of the Anglican Communion, approving SSB in 2009 and SSM in 2015, within days of same-sex civil marriages being approved in all states by the Supreme Court. As a result, the Episcopal Church was sanctioned by the Communion but not expelled. Liturgies were approved nationally for SSM and their use was originally left to the discretion of diocesan bishops, of which 93 approved and eight did not. Later, individual priests were allowed to use the rites, even if their bishop disapproved. Most of the loss of congregations or clergy had happened long before 2015, largely as a result of the ordination of Gene Robinson in 2003, so reactions to the SSM decision from conservatives were less than might have been expected.
  - b. Scotland and Brazil voted for SSM at around the same time in 2018, having not previously made a national decision on SSB. This came after a great deal of discussion and reflection and, although there were some losses of clergy and congregations to alternative Anglican networks, the process seems generally to have been less divisive than elsewhere.
6. The four provinces that have so far allowed SSB but not SSM are Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and Wales. Here again, the experiences in each province have varied, which may reflect different structures of governance as well as overall size.
  - a. Canada approved civil same-sex marriage as early as 2005. As with the secular state, there is a strong sense of regional autonomy in the Anglican Church in Canada, and this partly explains why the process of moving towards SSB and SSM has been so tortuous at times. The Diocese of New Westminster began SSB in 2003, but the national synod (which meets only once every three years) failed to reach agreement on this in 2004 and 2007. Statements issued led to confusion and a 'local option', whereby some dioceses approved SSB and some did not. This

lack of consensus was associated with some clergy and congregations leaving for other Anglican networks. A similar thing happened in 2019, when the synod failed to agree on allowing SSM, but a legal memo suggested that there was nothing in the Marriage Canons to prevent SSM, so some dioceses have moved forward with this and others have not.

- b. In Australia, the Government legislated to allow civil same-sex marriages in 2017 following a national plebiscite. The Anglican Church is of a similar size to that in Canada but has, perhaps, a slightly more centralised governance structure. Nonetheless, there is considerable diocesan autonomy, with some being much more traditional than others. The more liberal dioceses have voted to approve SSB, but have sometimes been overruled by bishops or archbishops, who were anxious to maintain unity across the province. When some dioceses wished to proceed with SSB in 2019, the matter was referred to an Appellate Tribunal, which voted in favour. Attempts by conservative dioceses to uphold traditional views of marriage and reject SSM were thwarted in General Synod by bishops in 2022, so some dioceses now allow SSB and others do not.
- c. New Zealand legislated to allow civil same-sex partnerships in 2005 and same-sex marriages in 2013. The Anglican Church of New Zealand had a long period of discussion and debate, which pre-dated these changes in civil law. After a failure to reach agreement on SSB in 2016 there was a further round of listening and discussion, with a priority of maintaining unity. The General Synod voted to allow SSB in 2018, with the understanding that this would need diocesan-level approval and clergy would be allowed not to bless same-sex couples. Some clergy and congregations have left, and one diocese has not approved SSB, but there is a general sense that the process worked reasonably well.
- d. The Church in Wales decision to allow SSB came after a report by the Doctrinal Commission was discussed and voted on by the Governing Body in 2015. The required two-thirds majority was not reached, and discussions continued in the Church until 2021, when the Governing Body voted to approve a liturgy for SSB. Although the process of discussion has not been widespread across the Church, to date there do not seem to have been many dissenting voices or losses of clergy or congregations.

### Information from key informers

7. The survey data was based on five responses at provincial level and 57 of 183 dioceses approached. Of the dioceses, 40 responses were from bishops and 17 from 'executive officers'. Of the 62 responses, 46 (74%) were from places where SSB were allowed and 34 (55%) were from places where SSM was allowed.
8. A section of the survey asked for estimates of impacts such as the number of clergy resigning, congregations leaving, or churches not paying their parish share. The results did not add much to what we already know about what has happened in these seven

provinces where SSB and/or SSM has been allowed. There have been some losses of clergy and congregations, some congregations may have reduced financial commitments, but some dioceses did not experience these impacts. Some places that allowed SSB before SSM reported the main impacts were when the first decision was made, and there was little additional impact of SSM when it came. Some respondents noted that, when whole congregations left, some members found other congregations nearby in the parent denomination, so net losses were hard to estimate accurately. Some who had made the SSM decision some years ago reported a drift back where Marriage Canons allowed individual clergy or congregations to opt in or out of performing ceremonies.

9. Most respondents did not have any evidence of impacts on church attendance statistics. In many cases this was because other factors, especially the pandemic, made it hard to identify causes of change. The few who did think there had been impact felt that numbers had gone down, but mainly through whole congregations leaving. Although some had looked for growth as LGBTQ+ people felt more welcomed, there was little hard evidence to support such a change, and one bishop from the USA said this had not happened in their diocese. A few felt that deciding not to allow SSB or SSM (or failing to make any decision) may have reduced numbers as those wanting change distanced themselves from churches but, again, there was no numerical data to support this.
10. We asked about numbers of SSB and SSM where these were allowed. Most dioceses reported very few per annum, though a number of provinces had made decisions not long before the pandemic reduced opportunities for in-church services. Nonetheless, even in places that have been offering SSB or SSM for some years, the take up in any one diocese seems to be no more than 5-10 per annum.
11. Opinions about the process and its effects varied, which was unsurprising given the very different experiences across the seven provinces. Two measures were created from the survey items: one measured internal impact (within the Church) and the other external impact (on relationship with society). Respondents from dioceses that allowed SSB reported more positive external impact than those where SSB was not allowed. The decision to allow SSB but not SSM may not have resulted in much difference in terms of the effect within the Church, but it was associated with perceived better relationships with society at large. Where decisions had been made, especially where this was to allow SSM, bishops and executive offices reported less division within the Church and a better relationship with wider society.
12. The material reporting the free-text answers is difficult to summarise easily and is best read in full to get the sense of how the process of decision-making has been experienced in different parts of the Communion. A few points are worth noting, either because they seemed present in different provinces, or because they may point to some key underlying issues that should be considered when undertaking change:

- a. Places where the process worked best seemed to be small provinces that had invested time in listening at all levels. The 'cascade' process in Scotland and listening process in New Zealand seemed to be the best exemplars. Rushing decisions or making 'reactive' decisions was unhelpful. Communication was seen as important, not least because it caused anger and frustration when done badly.
- b. The independence and autonomy of dioceses in some provinces seems to have made it particularly hard to manage the process. This may be one reason why the process in the larger provinces has been more tortuous. Having dioceses make unilateral decisions to move ahead seems to have long-lasting effects and undoubtedly caused clergy and congregations to join alternative Anglican networks. Where whole provinces have moved together there have still been those who have left or decided not to change, but the prospects of 'unity in diversity' seem better.
- c. Having the overall goal of unity lengthens the process but can make progress possible. In New Zealand they had to have a second attempt with a revised goal of unity before they could move forward. Several respondents recognised that even with the best process, few people will change their minds. Having a theological and intellectual debate about the rights and wrongs of same-sex relationships was a poor starting point. Several respondents wished they had had the equivalent of LLF.
- d. Recognising early on that agreement on the core issue is not possible may help the process. Frank and open discussion between bishops was late in coming in one province but was a necessary and welcome move. Several respondents wished that there had been a more strategic approach for dealing with those who would not accept the change, and showing that all are valued, whatever their stance. Although a strong opt-out or opt-in policy creates a complex collage of diversity, it seemed to allow Churches to move on.
- e. There were voices from respondents with very different views that encapsulated the beliefs that underpin how the process has been understood and perceived.

For example:

It was helpful for our congregations to see the church leadership standing on, and being committed to, the authority of Scripture, especially in a society which has moved away from Scripture. (Australian bishop).

I thank God that most of the divisions over this issue seem to be behind us, and we can move forward in mission. I believe our position is in accord with that of the vast majority of society. And I believe that God comes down on the side of love and commitment. In any case, when I stand before God at the judgment day, I will be able to say that I stood for love and commitment for all God's people. (USA bishop).

## Conclusion

13. This project has brought together information from a wide range of resources which offers insight into the decision-making on SSB or SSM in Anglican provinces that have already moved on these issues. In terms of assessing what the impact of decision-making might be for the Church of England (the purpose for this project) it gives an impression but cannot offer firm predictions. What does emerge clearly is that none of the provinces we surveyed seems to have had a systematic way of assessing impact. The lack of research is a glaring gap in our knowledge. If we have a recommendation, it is that the Church of England sets in place robust ways to assess the impacts, positive and negative, that will undoubtedly come whether decisions are made or not made to allow SSB or SSM.

## SECTION 1: Academic literature

### Introduction

This section explores some relevant academic literature that can shed light on the research question: what might be the impacts of deciding to allow or not allow SSB or SSM? We have drawn on several different types of information but confined our reporting to articles from peer-reviewed journals or books from mainly academic publishers. There is a wealth of academic material written within either theological or theoretical social-science discourses which we have not reported here. We have also not used material that looks at the experiences of sexual minorities in society generally, but which is not related to religion. Our approach, given the limited scope of the project, was to select a few studies that touch on some core issues. We do not claim this to be an exhaustive literature review.

The material is examined under three headings:

1. Survey material from the UK or the Church of England examining changing attitudes about homosexuality among religious affiliates.
2. Survey studies from elsewhere and other social-scientific studies of the relationship of religion to beliefs about SSM or the experience of sexual minorities in churches.
3. Studies directly related to the decisions to allow SSB or SSM in churches in the Anglican Communion or to the Church of England that may have implications for impact.

### Surveys in the UK

There have been a number of long-term social surveys in the UK that have included questions that ask about attitudes towards homosexuality. The wording of some of these questions reflects the language and issues current at the time and are not necessarily issues we might ask about now. Nonetheless, there is value in asking the same questions over time to see how opinion changes. While these data do not tell how people would behave if SSB or SSM were allowed, they do give indications of the general attitudes towards these matters.

Probably the best analysis of opinion among religious groups using the available data from national surveys was by Ben Clements (Clements, 2017). Using data from the British Social Attitudes (BSA) and European Values Study (EVS) surveys, he highlights the stark change in attitudes since the 1980s among Anglican, Catholic, and 'Other Christian' affiliates. The change reflects that of society at large, but Christian affiliates tend to be less liberal than those of no religion. There has been a specific question about same-sex marriage in the BSA survey since 1989 and this showed that the percentage of Anglicans disagreeing with SSM fell from around 70% in 1989 to 35% in 2014. Over the same period, the figures for those of no religion changed from around 50% to around 10%.

The advantage of these surveys is that they are based on representative samples of the population. The disadvantage is that the label 'Anglican' probably includes many who affiliate with the Church but who otherwise have little to do with it. It also cannot

distinguish between different groups within Anglicanism. The best data we have for the Church of England are the two *Church Times* surveys taken in 2001 and 2013 (Francis et al., 2005; Village, 2018). These surveys included items that allowed respondents to be identified as Anglo-Catholics, Broad Church, or Evangelical. Among the many items measuring attitudes were some related to ordaining practising homosexuals as priests or bishops, issues that had been widely debated in Anglicanism from the 1980s.<sup>3</sup> An analysis using both sets of data showed how opinion varied between the different wings of the Church of England, but crucially how opinion had changed between the surveys in different age cohorts within each tradition. The key issue was whether opinions were liberalising across the whole Church or whether it was just younger people who were more liberal and replacing older cohorts whose opinions had not changed.

One of the important results is shown in Figure 1, which indicates the percentage who agreed or strongly agreed that they were in favour of the ordination of practicing homosexuals as priests. Three things are apparent from examining these graphs:

1. Evangelicals were much more opposed than those in the Broad Church or Anglo-Catholic traditions. This confirms what has been generally known for some time.
2. Among the Anglo-Catholics and Broad Church in 2001, younger people were much more in favour than were older people. Evangelicals were uniformly and strongly opposed.
3. By 2013, the age effect was much reduced, reflecting a significant liberalisation of opinion among older cohorts in the Anglo-Catholic and Broad-Church traditions. It was not just a change in the guard that was altering overall opinion, the old guard were changing as well. Among Evangelicals there was some liberalisation of opinion among older cohorts, but those born since the 1960s showed very little change and were almost wholly opposed.

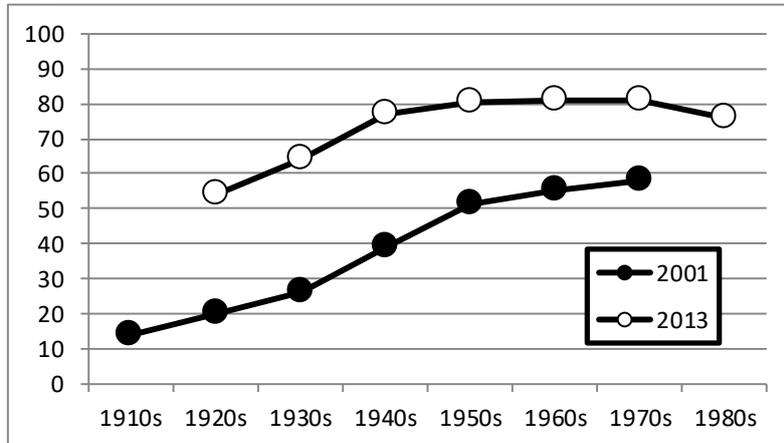
In the 2013 *Church Times* survey there were two items asking if respondents were in favour of 'homosexual couples receiving a blessing in church' and 'homosexual couples being married in church'. Figure 2 shows, for 2,490 laity and 1,532 clergy from the Church of England, the percentage who agreed or strongly agreed with these two items within each of the three traditions Anglo-Catholic (AC), Broad Church (BC), and Evangelical (EV).

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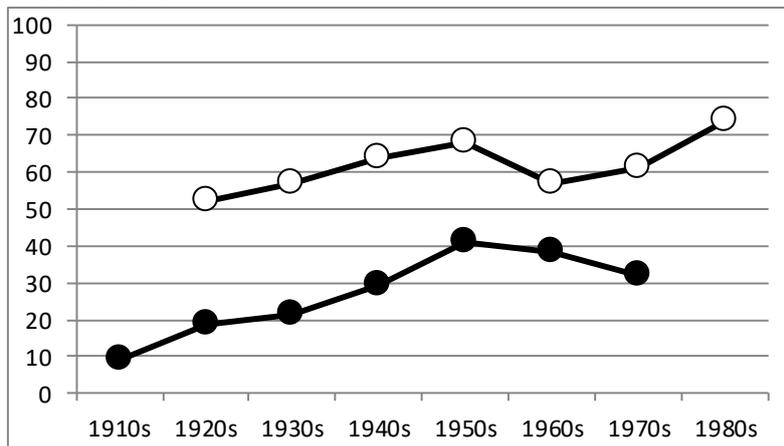
<sup>3</sup> There were no items on SSB or SSM in the first survey as these were not issues much discussed in 2001.

Figure 1 Percentage agreement with the statement 'I am in favour of the ordination of practicing homosexuals as priests' from the two *Church Times* surveys. The horizontal axis shows the birth decade of each cohort. After Village (2018, p. 131).

**Anglo-catholic**



**Broad church**



**Evangelical**

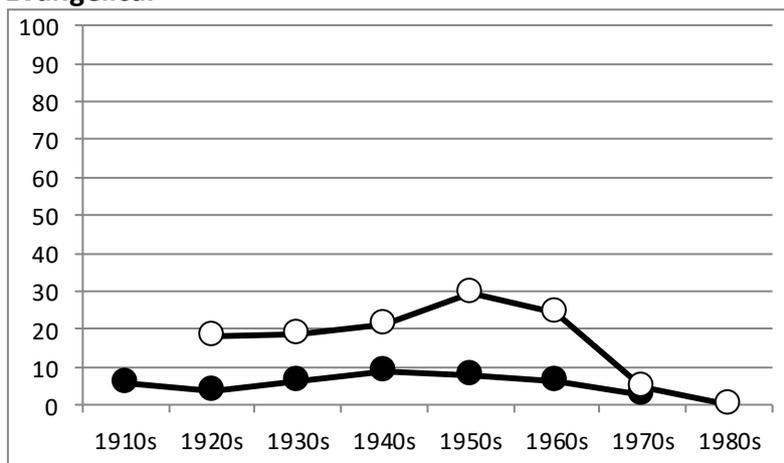
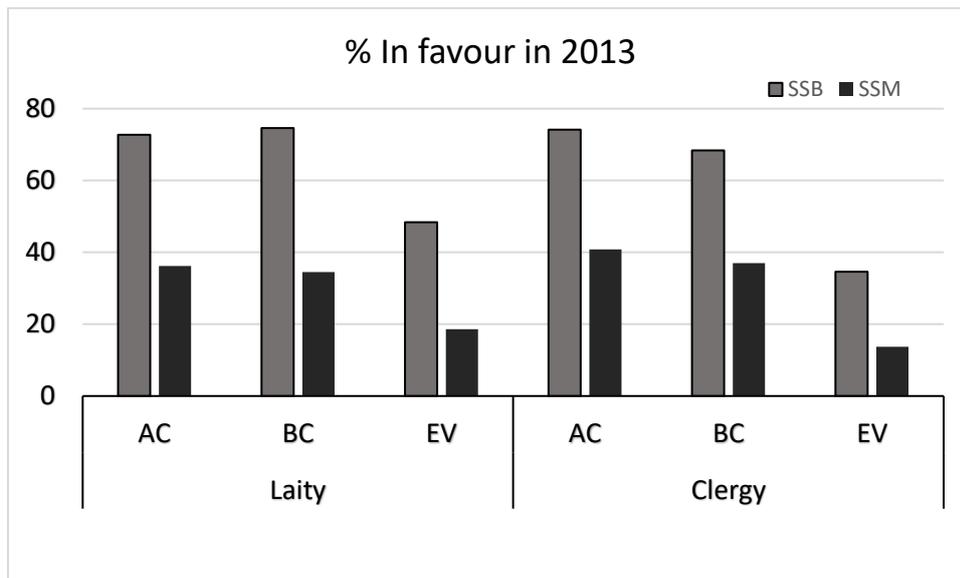


Figure 2 Percentage in favour of SSB or SSM from the 2013 *Church Times* survey



The trends in Figure 2 are clear:

1. The much higher support for SSB than SSM in all categories. Support for SSB ranged from 35-75%, whereas support for SSM ranged from 14% to 41%.
2. The much lower support for both SSB and SSM among Evangelicals compared to the other two traditions. Support for SSM was less than 20% among Evangelicals, but 30-40% among others.
3. The similar levels of support between laity and clergy in most categories, though support for SSM was slightly higher among clergy than laity in the Anglo-Catholic and Broad-Church traditions, but slightly lower in Evangelicals.

This is a snapshot of opinion almost a decade ago, and the level of support has almost certainly increased since then, but we do not have more recent survey data.

Overall, these kinds of survey data could help the Church not only to understand what the general level of support might be for any particular change but, crucially, how support varies across different groups within the Church. The data available suggest opinions in some groups changed considerably in the first decade of this century, but this was not true for everyone. It is worth noting that even studies done a few years ago may not reflect current opinion because the situation is clearly changing very rapidly. It has been nearly ten years since the last *Church Times* survey, and it would be good to repeat this now. Such a survey should also include questions more relevant to the current generation, such as attitudes towards same-sex parenting, and gender identity.

## Wider surveys and social-scientific studies

### Social surveys

There are numerous studies outside the UK that have explored the relationship of religion to attitude toward sexual minorities or SSM (for example, Cadge, 2002; Ketola & Helander, 2020; Lubbers et al., 2009; van den Berg, 2017). Although the broad picture that emerges is that conservative religious groups tend to be opposed, the picture is often complex, and simple generalisations are usually misleading. A review of the literature a decade ago highlighted the fact that broad categories of religiosity or denominational affiliation may not be sufficient to predict attitudes towards sexual minorities, and individual 'everyday theologies' may be more important. (Walls, 2010). In a more recent example, a study of the 2015 Irish referendum on same-sex marriage showed that within the Catholic Church, where there was strong opposition among the much of the hierarchy, there was sometimes support from local priests negotiating everyday life in their parishes (Browne & Nash, 2018).

Socials surveys similar to the BSA survey have been done in many countries, and many demonstrate the changes in opinion in relation SSM over the last few decades. In the USA, for example, a survey in 2014 showed how support for SSM had grown from 2003 to 2013, but also how opinion was divided geographically, politically, and religiously (Jones et al., 2014). As you might expect, it is Catholics and Mainline Protestants who are most in favour and other Protestant denominations who are most opposed. Similar trends emerge from more detailed studies of particular groups such as Latinos (Ellison et al., 2011). These sorts of studies show that while opinions about SSM change in Churches, including among Anglicans, they do not change uniformly. The differences of opinion reflect differences widely seen across different Christian churches and across society at large.

In the USA, where there have been the most surveys into the relationship between religion and attitudes towards SSM, it has been argued that some people have stopped going to church and no longer affiliate as religious because of the debates over SSM and the failure of churches to move with the rest of society. Evidence is sparse, but one study from 2014 examined the results of the *Portraits of American Life Study*, a two-wave panel survey that sampled the same people in 2006 and 2012 (Djupe & Neiheisel, 2022). The analyses were complex, but the authors concluded that there was some evidence that those who became more supportive of SSM over time also tended to show lower attendance and less strong affiliation in the second survey:

... our findings lend some support for the popular view that changing attitudes toward same-sex marriage and LGBTQ rights more generally are encouraging some Americans to re-evaluate their fit with organized religion. (no page number)

This is, as we mentioned in other parts of this report, something that is generally not reported or noticed when churches discuss the impacts of SSB or SSM policy, where the impacts are thought to come as conservatives leave when policy changes. An alternative

argument is that people may also leave because churches do *not* change policy, and there is some limited evidence in the literature to support this.

### *Impacts on the wellbeing of sexual minorities*

Another impact that is hard to assess are effects on LGBTQ+ people who attend churches that do not support SSM, or other issues related to their sexual or gender identity. There is ample evidence for higher rates of depression among sexual minorities, and some theorists suggest this may be because of the stigma that is part of being in hostile social environments. Such environments can be anywhere, including churches, though churches may also be places that offer protection against the sort of stigma that produces poor mental health. One study from the USA examined whether religious affiliation would affect the relationship between discrimination and depression among sexual minority and heterosexual young adults (Gattis et al., 2014). They used denominational stance on SSM as a proxy for discrimination and found that the harmful effects of discrimination among sexual minority youth affiliated with denominations that endorsed SSM were significantly less than those among peers who affiliated with denominations opposing SSM. This difference was not apparent among heterosexuals in the sample. It seemed that a church's stance on SSM (indicating the degree of acceptance of sexual minorities) might impact the mental health of LGBTQ+ young adults.

The situation is not straightforward, however, because churches generally offer support for those in need, and some people who are part of sexual minorities choose to stay in churches that are opposed to SSM or gay rights. A recent analysis of a range of studies on sexual minorities, depression, and church affiliations seems to confirm that, although for sexual minorities being religious is generally associated with better mental health than not being religious, this does depend on how much support they get from their religious environment (Lefevor et al., 2021).

Alongside such quantitative study there is a plethora of qualitative or small quantitative studies based on in-depth interviews with sexual-minority Christians. These studies shed light on the complex ways in which churches can shape the lives of those who are not heterosexual yet identify as Christians. This literature may not be directly relevant to the research question posed for this project, but it is worth noting that LGBTQ+ people can be found in both liberal and conservative faith traditions and may negotiate their religious and sexual identities in complex ways. Although much of the research literature has tended to focus on the ways that conservative religion creates a hostile environment for sexual minorities there is a growing body of research that shows both the ambivalence of sexual minorities towards conservative churches and the diversity in what are usually considered uniformly unsupportive environments for sexual minorities. Much of the research has been in the USA among Black or Mormon Churches (for recent examples, see Skidmore et al., 2022; White et al., 2020; Young, 2021).

### **Churches supporting sexual minorities**

A paper published in 2020 drew on long-term studies of sexual minority religious students at Christian colleges and universities in the USA (Dean et al., 2020). The authors make the case of ‘intentional church communities’ as places that ‘... [create] the conditions for identity formation and meaning-making.....a church-based holding environment is a discipling community that is intentionally designed to be relational, secure, and formational.’ (p. 239). From this perspective, many churches need a change in mind-set and practice in order to create congregations in which:

... [sexual minority disciples] over time, develop a complex self-narrative that integrates their sexual and faith identities into the “whole person” ... development of this complex self-narrative will involve multiple periods of being settled and unsettled with their identity status, but always, hopefully, embedded in intentionally secure holding environments. This discipleship strategy engages people where they are in their spiritual journey by addressing faith, sexuality, and personhood both explicitly and implicitly. (p.244)

### **Impact on Anglican churches of decisions on SSB or SSM**

Most of the material in academic sources that is related specifically to decisions on SSB or SSM in Anglican Churches tends to look at the history or process of change (Coelho Filho, 2020; Hill & Watson, 2006; Perry, 2017, 2020) theologies or other arguments that shape decisions (Goldingay et al., 2011; Good et al., 2011; Kettell, 2013; Tse, 2016; Wirenius, 2014; Wondra, 2016), or legal issues around decisions (Ahdar, 2014; Blake, 2022). We have not looked at these in detail as they largely repeat the outlines in the next section of this report.

We have not been able to locate academic material based on empirical research of the numerical impacts of decisions to allow SSB or SSM in churches (Anglican or other denominations). Most studies tend to be qualitative studies of particular groups of people who support SSM, or personal reflections from those affected in one way or another. The paucity of information was highlighted in a review of the literature on perspectives of clergy who support SSM (Kirby et al., 2017). There are accounts of how decisions have impacted particular provinces, such as Caroline Addington Hall’s *A thorn in the flesh: How gay sexuality is changing the Episcopal church* (Hall, 2013) but these do not give detailed empirical data and are usually based on personal experiences of those within churches.

Perhaps the most useful material for consideration are some papers that reflect on the implications of SSB or SSM for liturgy and theology. This is partly because of the ways in which Anglicans tend to do theology through their liturgy, so these authors explore the ways that the need for SSB or SSM liturgies would require thinking about the theology of marriage and other sorts of unions. This would be necessary work if SSB or SSM were to be possible, so this should be considered as a possible impact of any decisions.

Some years ago, Clare Amos reviewed Anglican understandings of marriage as reflected in the liturgies of *The Book Common Prayer, Common Worship, and A New Zealand Prayer Book* (Amos, 2006). She suggested that, as understandings of marriage change, it may be necessary to create better theologies of ‘alternative states’ such as intentional

singleness, cohabitation, and same-sex relationships. This was some time before the possibility of SSM became realistic in England, but the point remains that allowing SSM would mean a wider and more thorough revision of the theology of various kinds of partnerships.

Two more recent papers reflecting on liturgy in the Church of England come after some other Anglicans have had experience with SSB or SSM. Rémy Bethmont (2019) argued that the Church of England's theological rationale of marriage is based on a creation ordinance with no specifically Christian meaning. This contrasts with eschatological or trinitarian theologies that underpin marriage in the episcopal churches in the USA and Scotland, and which allowed easier transition to gender-neutral marriage liturgies. Bethmont's paper is based on interviews with four male Church of England priests in 2016 who discussed issues related to the adequacy of traditional marriage liturgies and the development of SSB liturgies. He notes that:

The present atmosphere in the Church of England resulting from the ban on the liturgical blessing of same-sex relationships and the uncertainty about how much in breach of Church discipline priests are when they celebrate any form of same-sex ceremony make it very difficult for those who see same-sex couples as truly married to share their insights and their attempts to revisit the Christian liturgical tradition on a non-homophobic line. (p.167)

Around the same time, Gill Henwood (2020) was researching espoused and operant theologies of marriage among 12 churchgoers in some form of same-sex partnership. She concludes that:

By recovering and reinterpreting relationships of marriage and vowed friendship as unions of Christian harmony and peace, this research offers the Church of England a way forward for further theological reflection. I argue that the overlap between lived realities of married and civil partnered people offers potential for revision of normative theology, to celebrate loving unions of Christian harmony and peace. (p.106)

This is another research-based study that highlights the fact that allowing SSB or SSM would require more than minor changes to existing liturgies.

## Conclusion from searches of academic literature

As far as we can tell, there are no detailed academic studies of the impact of allowing SSB or SSM on church growth or decline, either numerically or in terms of the quality of church life as perceived by clergy or lay people. This does not mean that academic research has nothing to say about what might be the possible impacts of change. There are several areas of research that point to the likely scale and nature of impacts.

1. The rapidly changing views on same-sex issues in many UK churches, including the Church of England, suggest that allowing change is likely to be welcomed by many. Attitudes have changed among most age cohorts, though Evangelicals (especially younger Evangelicals) are likely to still be strongly opposed to SSB or SSM.
2. Surveys elsewhere in the USA and Europe mirror those in the UK. In the USA, where surveys are more frequent, there is some evidence to suggest that some declines in institutional religious affiliation are associated with those who have more liberal views leaving conservative churches.
3. Research on the effects of support for SSM on sexual minorities in churches suggest a complex picture. Churches generally offer a supportive environment for wellbeing and mental health, and some sexual minority churchgoers prefer to stay in traditional churches, even when there is little support of SSM or gay rights. However, where there is support, sexual minorities may show better wellbeing and mental health. Experience from the USA supports the need for 'intentional' church communities that help Christians in sexual minorities to develop both faith and sexual identity over their lifetimes.
4. Several researchers writing from a Church of England context have pointed to the deficiencies in both theologies and liturgies of marriage as viewed from a same-sex perspective. Changing pastoral and liturgical practice would necessarily involve changes in theologies of partnerships and marriage.

## SECTION 2: General internet searches

### Research question

This qualitative strand of research set out to explore what could be learnt from the English-language material available in the public domain, as found through a website search, about the seven Provinces of the Anglican Communion that had either approved same-sex marriage or had allowed for same-sex blessings. Material related to three key areas was gathered: the facts and statistics concerning decisions made by the seven Provinces in relation to same-sex marriage or same-sex blessings; controversies reported at the time those decisions were made; and church breakaways evidenced.

### Methodology

The qualitative strand of this project focused on seven Provinces within the Anglican Communion. Three of these had approved same-sex marriage: the Episcopal Church (USA), the Scottish Episcopal Church, and the Anglican Episcopal Church of Brazil. Four had allowed same-sex blessings: the Anglican Church of Canada, the Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia, the Anglican Church of Australia, and the Church in Wales.

Data were collected during autumn 2022. The information from each website was saved into a separate text document using the cut and paste facility. This information consisted of: the website uniform resource locator (URL) along with the date it was accessed; the article title; the publication name; the date of publication; the author (if one was given); and the text itself. This document ran to 273 pages of collected data. The material for each Province was grouped together and then placed in chronological order (sometimes it transpired that early material reported had been superseded), additional evidence was followed up, and different sources cross-checked (occasionally 'same-sex blessing' and 'same-sex marriage' were used interchangeably in some online reports), before a narrative for each Province was produced.

Analysis of the content of websites is a research method that has previously been employed within the field of education (Wilkinson, 2019, 2021), and within church-related studies (ap Siôn & Edwards, 2012; Edwards & ap Siôn, 2015; McKenna, Francis, & Stewart, 2022). Most definitions refer to content analysis as a form of data reduction. Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2018) describe it as 'the process of summarizing and reporting written data' (p. 674). For Robson (1993, p. 272) it is an appropriate method when exploring documents, 'primarily the written document .... a book, newspaper, magazine, letter or whatever.' In the present study the 'whatever' was taken to be the written text located on either the websites of the seven Anglican Provinces explored, or on websites generated from a 'google' search of key terms such as, 'Anglican', 'same-sex marriage', 'same-sex blessings', 'Anglican Church breakaways', in relation to each of those Provinces.

According to Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2018) one of the benefits of content analysis is that because 'data are in a permanent form (texts), verification through re-analysis and replication is possible' (p.674). This may be true when dealing with the written

text of a book, magazine, print newspaper, or with pictures and photographs. However, when applying this to data captured from websites it is not strictly true. Website information is not permanent and can change on a frequent basis. Despite this, the information available at any one time can be captured and analysed to good effect. Hence, it was the 273 page text document containing the information captured between August and November 2022 which was subjected to the content analysis and is retained as the permanent record of data. Robson (1993, p. 374) also identified the problem of ‘information availability’ where ‘information which is difficult to get hold of gets less attention than that which is easier to obtain’ (p. 374). It is possible that material was not identified because only a limited number of key words were searched, or because material had since been removed from the web so that the current research will not have captured it. In the case of Brazil only material accessible in English was captured. While the text document provided a permanent form of textual data, it is a partial record of what might have been available. It was, however, accurate when the research was carried out between August and November 2022.

### **Background – UK Statistics on marriage**

In England and Wales<sup>4</sup>, the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013 was passed on 17 July 2013 (Government Equalities Office, 2014) and the first marriages of same-sex couples took place on Saturday 29 March 2014 (The Guardian, 2014). Government statistics provided by Mohammad, Mill and Ghosh (2022), report that in England and Wales, in 2019, there were 213,122 marriages between opposite-sex couples, and 6,728 (3.1%) marriages between same-sex couples. Of these same-sex marriages, 57.4% were between female couples. Every year since the introduction of same-sex marriages in 2014, there have been more female than male same-sex marriages. Moreover, since 1992, the percentage of civil ceremonies have increasingly outnumbered religious ceremonies. In 2019, religious ceremonies accounted for less than one in five (18.7%) of opposite-sex marriages, the lowest percentage on record, continuing the overall trend of declining religious marriages; for same-sex marriages, 0.7% of marriages were religious ceremonies.

In Scotland same-sex marriage has been legal since 16 December 2014 when the Marriage and Civil Partnership (Scotland) Act 2014 extended marriage to same-sex couples (The National Archives, 2014). The first same-sex marriages took place on 31 December 2014 (BBC News, 2014). Since the Act was passed, there have been 5,909 same-sex marriages in Scotland, including 1,737 civil partnerships which were changed to marriages. The peak was in 2015 when there were 1,671 same-sex marriages, followed by a slow decline year on year since then. There were 26,007 marriages in Scotland in 2019. Of these, 912 (3.5%) were same-sex marriages involving 347 male couples and 565 female couples

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<sup>4</sup> In England and Wales statistics are currently only available for the calendar year 2019. Figures for 2020 will not be reported on until 2023 when the impact of the pandemic on the number of marriages and marriage rates will be released. However, the expectation is that the number of marriages will drop dramatically due to restrictions resulting from the COVID-19 crisis.

(NRS, 2019). As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic the overall number of marriages declined considerably in 2020 when there were 11,986 marriages, of which 423 were same-sex marriages (3.5%). The number of marriages increased in 2021, although still reflecting previous general decline, with a total of 24,284 marriages of which 819 (3.4%) were among same-sex couples (NRS, 2022).

In contrast to England and Wales, in Scotland a greater number of marriages were religious ceremonies. While in England and Wales nearly 80% of marriages were civil ceremonies, of all marriages conducted in Scotland in 2019, just under half were civil ceremonies (NRS, 2019). While the Acts in both England and Wales, and in Scotland extended marriage to same-sex couples they also enshrined each Government's commitment that no religious organisation or representative would be forced to conduct or participate in same sex-marriage ceremonies. Religious organisations and celebrants which wished to do so could choose to opt in to marry same-sex couples according to their rites.

### **Details from the seven Provinces**

The following section give details of the processes, decisions, and outcomes of decisions on SSB and SSM in seven Anglican provinces, preceded by a summary of the chronology in each Province.

**Summary of same-sex marriage/blessings in the Anglican Church**

<b>Anglican Church/ Country</b>	<b>Same-sex civil marriage approved</b>	<b>Informal same-sex church blessings</b>	<b>Same-sex church blessings approved</b>	<b>Same-sex church marriage approved</b>	<b>New liturgies approved</b>
Episcopal Church (USA)	2004 Massachusetts  26/6/15 all states	Had been taking place in some dioceses	Yes. 14/7/09 Individual bishops could decide for their diocese	Yes. 1/9/2012 in Episcopal Diocese of New York 1/7/15 Marriage Canon change (8 dioceses opted out) 13/7/18 (all dioceses 'local option' – but 3 still against – Albany NY, Dallas, Central Florida)	10/7/12 for blessings 'The Witnessing and Blessing of a Lifelong Covenant'  1/7/2015 for marriage – 2 new rites for same-sex or opposite sex (gender neutral or similar to 2012 blessing but with marriage vows)  Existing liturgy in prayerbook remains unchanged for now (while these other rites are trialled)
Scottish Episcopal Church (SEC)	16/12/14 (Act) 31/12/14 (first marriage)			Yes. 8/6/17 Marriage Canon change	No church-wide liturgy. St Mary's Cathedral, Glasgow uses the Scottish Liturgy (2007) which has several options that allow couples to personalise the service
Anglican Episcopal Church of Brazil (IEAB)	14/5/13			Yes. 1/6/18 Marriage Canon change	Liturgical changes not required, because gender neutral language had already been introduced into its service for the solemnization of marriage in the 2015 Book of Common Prayer.
Anglican Church of Canada	20/7/05  BUT 10/6/2003 in Ontario and 8/7/2003 in British Columbia	From 2002 in some dioceses	Yes. 2010 devolved to local dioceses	12/7/16 general synod 'yes' vote BUT 2019 general synod 'no' vote (bishops against). Individual churches have been undertaking same-sex marriages through the 'local option' of the 'A Word to the Church'	No church-wide liturgy/rites 23/5/2003 Diocese of New Westminster (in British Columbia) Vancouver rite of blessing, 'Rite for the Celebration of Gay and Lesbian Covenants'. Niagara (2009), Ottawa (2009), Montreal (2010), Quebec (2012) adaption of existing or new gender-neutral liturgies/rites. Toronto – Guidelines (not rites) (2010)

Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand & Polynesia	17/4/13 Act (with first marriages from August 2013)  BUT same-sex relationships not legally recognised in the Cook Islands, Fiji, Samoa, and Tonga (served by Diocese of Polynesia)	Individual dioceses had been 'recognising in worship' same-sex relationships before 2018	12/5/16 'A Way Forward' report (received but tabled until 2018)  Yes. 9/5/18 'Working Group 29' report Local bishops decide whether to permit blessings ('a non-formulary' service) – no change to Marriage Canon	No	2014 blessing liturgy/rites were being developed.  2018 no formal liturgy/rite developed, rather use of a non-formulary service.
Anglican Church of Australia	9/12/17	Differs across different dioceses (Sydney strongly against). Of 23 dioceses 2 (Wangarrata/ Newcastle) have done blessings since 2018. Perth did one in 2016 Also supported in Brisbane/Ballarat	Yes. 11/11/2020 dioceses can authorise - the church can pass local rules to permit church blessings	No	Wangarrata and Newcastle have each set up a liturgy for blessings
Church in Wales	17/7/2013 Act 29/3/14 (first marriage)		Yes. 6/9/21 Blessings are being trialled for 5 yrs	No	A 'Liturgy for the Blessing of a Same-sex Civil Marriage or Civil Partnership' authorised for use from 1/10/21

## Anglican churches that have approved same-sex marriage

The Episcopal Church (USA), the Scottish Episcopal Church (SEC), and the Anglican Episcopal Church of Brazil (IEAB) are the three Anglican provinces to have fully endorsed same-sex marriage.

### *The Episcopal Church (USA)*

On 26 June 2015 the United States (US) Supreme Court granted same-sex couples, across all 50 states of the USA, the right to marry (Human Rights Watch, 2015). Prior to this ruling, 36 US states and the District of Columbia had already recognised the legal right to same-sex marriage, while fourteen states had held to same-sex marriage bans which were deemed unconstitutional (Human Rights Watch, 2015). It was twelve years earlier that the state of Massachusetts, on November 18, 2003, became the first state to allow same-sex marriage, issuing the first marriage licences to same-sex couples six months later, on May 17, 2004 (Marshall, 2020).

On 1 September 2022 the USA had a population of approximately 333 million (<https://www.census.gov/popclock/>). According to the website of the World Council of Churches, the Episcopal Church of the USA has 1,712,563 worldwide members (<https://www.oikoumene.org/member-churches/the-episcopal-church>). In 2020 the Episcopal Church's own congregational data noted its US membership (excluding membership in the Caribbean and Latin America) as 1,576,702 active baptised members (<https://extranet.generalconvention.org/staff/files/download/30786>), thus, making up approximately 0.5% of the overall US population. Its active membership has been declining for several years. Each year from 2012 to 2020, 'Ten Year % Change in Active Members' data, have seen figures falling by between 18% and 19% (see <https://extranet.generalconvention.org/staff/files/download/26480> facts trends 2012-2016, and <https://extranet.generalconvention.org/staff/files/download/30786> facts trends 2016-2020). However, as pointed out by Hunter (1999), many Americans self-identify as Episcopalian even though they are not affiliated officially with the Episcopal Church, and consequently not included in Episcopal Church membership counts. The actual figure could be as high as 3 million.

On its website the Episcopal Church provides a history of its commitment to LGBTQ+ inclusion dating back to 1974. It provides examples of the General Convention and Executive Council adopting and reaffirming resolutions that recognise the rights of same-sex couples and the need for equality, as well as calling for the Church to have greater understanding, awareness, and inclusion of LGBTQ+ persons in the life of the Church. In particular, the General Convention 1976 resolution that, 'homosexual persons are children of God who have a full and equal claim with all other persons upon the love, acceptance, and pastoral concern and care of the church' is highlighted (<https://www.episcopalchurch.org/who-we-are/lgbtq/history/>).

In 2009, the Episcopal Church (USA) General Convention acknowledged and affirmed same-sex couples in the life of the Church when it allowed individual bishops to choose

whether to allow the blessing of same-sex unions within their dioceses (Colbert, 2009; Sisk, 2012). The General Convention resolution recommended 'generous pastoral oversight' with respect to offering blessings for same-sex couples (Sisk, 2012). According to the Revd Susan Russell of All Saints Church in Pasadena, California, the blessing resolution provided 'an official, very broad local option for bishops to allow blessing for civil marriage, for civil unions, and for domestic partnerships' (cited in Colbert, 2009). The resolution also called on the Church to work together toward finding a liturgy for the conduct of such blessings with bishops asked to 'collect and develop theological and liturgical resources', and to report back at the 2012 General Convention (Colbert, 2009). The need for a liturgy, the words exchanged between a couple and a priest during a marriage ceremony, was of pressing importance. As (Kaleem, 2012) noted, some Episcopal bishops did allow same-sex blessings in their dioceses, but there were many that would not agree to allow them unless the Church had an official liturgy.

Subsequently, on 10 July 2012, the General Convention of the Episcopal Church became the largest US denomination officially to approve same-sex relationships when it recommended a liturgy, 'The Witnessing and Blessing of a Lifelong Covenant', for blessing the relationships of same-sex couples (CNN, 2021; Kaleem, 2012). The liturgy was to be used during a three-year trial period before the Church would meet again in 2015 and decide if such a liturgy should be made permanent. The resolution was approved by the majority of those voting, with 73% of bishops, 76% of clergy, and 78% of lay members in favour of the decision (Kaleem, 2012). At this stage, the Episcopal Church continued to define marriage as between a man and a woman. The new trial liturgy was for blessings only and was not mandatory. Bishops who did not approve of same-sex relationships were allowed to bar its use in their dioceses, and priests who did not wish to perform same-sex blessings did not face discipline. Kaleem (2012) cited two opposing views expressed about the decision. The Rt Revd Michael Curry, Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of North Carolina, voiced backing for the decision when he stated that it would provide, 'a way to support and care for people who have shown lifelong care and love for each other'. On the other hand, the Revd David Thurlow of South Carolina, opposed the proposal and was quoted as saying that the motion would, 'result in the Episcopal Church of the United States marching not simply out of step with but completely out of line with the faith'.

While the new liturgy for the blessing of same-sex relationships was to be trialled for three years, in New York The Rt Revd Mark S. Sisk gave permission for clergy to sign marriage licenses and officiate at the civil and sacramental marriages of same sex couples, commencing September 1, 2012 (Sisk, 2012). In a letter to clergy, a full explanation was given of his reasons for proposing a unilateral change in policy. He drew attention to previous General Convention debates in 2009 and 2012, specifically explaining his understanding of the 2012 General Convention resolution for blessings that advocated 'generous pastoral oversight'. He concluded that it was the mind of the General Convention to extend the meaning of 'generous pastoral oversight' to include circumstances of requests for same-sex marriage:

We are left with a situation in which the mind of this recent Convention appears to be to allow such services.... Those of us who are ordained have, each and all, taken a vow to abide by the Doctrine, Discipline and Worship of the Episcopal Church. But we have also taken a vow to care for the people committed to our care.... I believe that the best that we can do ... is to embrace the promise of full marriage equality between same and opposite sex couples, while recognizing, candidly, that the Constitution of our Church has yet to formally reach that conclusion. It is my interpretation that the actions of this 2012 General Convention permit, perhaps even encourage, those of us who live in jurisdictions such as New York, to act on that conviction. (Sisk, 2012; see: <https://dioceseny.org/clergy-may-conduct-same-sex-marriages-from-91/>)

Clergy were assured that neither they or any parish which in conscience did not believe they could offer marriage to same-sex couples would be required to do so, nor would they be penalized. Further, clergy were commended to use the blessing liturgy, 'The Witnessing and Blessing of a Lifelong Covenant', just approved by General Convention, which they were told could be easily adapted to serve the purposes of marriage.

On the 1 July 2015, days after the Supreme Court of the United States ruled that same-sex couples had the legal right to marry, the General Convention of the Episcopal Church voted to amend their canons on marriage, eliminating language that had previously defined marriage as between a man and a woman, and permitting any couple the rite of marriage. They also voted to adopt two new wedding rites that could be used by both opposite-sex and same-sex couples: 'The Witnessing and Blessing of a Marriage', and 'The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage 2'. The new rites used the gender-neutral language of 'these persons' or 'the couple' and were made available alongside the existing marriage liturgy in the Book of Common Prayer, which was left unchanged (Grundy & Winston, 2015; Meyers, 2015; Rouch, 2015). The deep importance of these two new liturgies to church members was noted by Kevin Eckstrom, spokesman for Washington National Cathedral, an Episcopal church when he stated, 'Liturgy is part of the Episcopal DNA, so that if something does not have its own liturgy, it does not exist.... Liturgy defines Episcopal life together' (cited in Grundy & Winston, 2015). Grundy and Winston (2015) and Meyers (2015) both point out that clergy were free to decline to perform same-sex marriages without incurring a penalty or punishment, and bishops could refuse to allow same-sex marriages in their dioceses. However, while bishops could decide not to authorize use of the liturgy in their diocese, it was stated that they must 'make provision for all couples asking to be married in this Church to have access to these liturgies' (cited in Meyers, 2015). Hence, as Grundy and Winston (2015) noted, 'same-sex Episcopal couples seeking a church wedding could find themselves having to go somewhere other than their home church or even their home diocese'.

The approval granted by the Episcopal Church of liturgies for marrying same-sex couples caused concern in the Anglican Communion with the response of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, reported by Rouch (2015) and Grundy and Winston (2015). Archbishop Welby, although recognising 'the prerogative of The Episcopal Church to address issues appropriate to its own context' (Rouch, 2015), also said that the decision would

'...cause distress for some and have ramifications for the Anglican Communion as a whole' (Grundy and Winston, 2015). Subsequently, in January 2016, Archbishop Welby called a meeting of the 38 primates of the Anglican Communion specifically to address disagreements over marriage. The outcome of this meeting and the sanctions imposed on the Episcopal Church (USA) over its acceptance of same-sex marriage have been widely reported (Burke, 2016; Domonoske, 2016; Evangelical Focus London, 2016; Sherwood, 2016; CNN, 2021). The Episcopal Church was not removed from the Anglican Communion, but for three years it was suspended from participating in many of the Communion's internal decision-making processes and was barred from representing Anglicans in meetings with Christians and other faith groups. A public statement was made defending the biblical view of marriage:

Recent developments in the Episcopal Church (USA) with respect to a change in their Canon on marriage represent a fundamental departure from the faith and teaching held by the majority of our provinces on the doctrine of marriage.... The traditional doctrine of the church in view of the teaching of Scripture, upholds marriage as between a man and a woman in faithful, lifelong union. (Evangelical Focus London, 2016)

According to Sherwood (2016), Archbishop Welby and his supporters presented the agreement as one of reconciliation in which the Anglican Communion could 'refashion itself as a loose confederation of churches rather than adherents to a common doctrine'. Hence, according to Sherwood, by imposing sanctions and issuing the statement in support of the traditional view of marriage, a permanent split in the Anglican Communion over gay rights was averted. However, Sherwood (2016) also reported the dismay expressed by liberal Anglicans, quoting the presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church in the USA, Michael Curry, as saying, 'For many who have felt and been rejected by the Church because of who they are, for many who have felt and been rejected by families and communities, our Church opening itself in love was a sign of hope. And this will add pain on top of pain'.

Despite the resolution passed by the General Convention, in 2015, to approve the trial-use of liturgies allowing same-sex couples to marry in the Episcopal Church, it was also left to each individual bishop to decide whether the liturgies could be used in their diocese. As a result, after the decision, 93 Episcopal diocesan bishops authorized same-sex weddings, but eight chose not to authorize the gender-neutral liturgies: Albany, New York; Dallas; two in Florida; North Dakota; Springfield, Illinois; Tennessee; and the Virgin Islands (The Christian Century, 2018). Meyer (2018) reported how, in addition to not authorizing the use of the approved liturgies, the bishop in the Episcopal Diocese of Tennessee declined to allow clergy within his diocese to officiate same-sex religious ceremonies or to permit same-sex weddings on church property. Same-sex couples wanting to marry were referred to the Diocese of Kentucky.

This discordant situation was addressed on 13 July 2018 when the General Convention approved a resolution granting full churchwide access to the gender-neutral marriage liturgies so that all couples could marry in their local church under the direction of their priest, instead of their bishop (Meyer, 2018; Schjonberg, 2018; The Christian Century,

2018). Clergy were now able to officiate at same-sex marriages even if their bishop objected, although the right of individual clergy to decline to bless or marry same-sex couples was also protected. Furthermore, as Schjonberg (2018) detailed, the resolution required that if a bishop held a position that did 'not embrace marriage for same-sex couples,' he or she could invite another bishop to provide 'pastoral support' to any couple wanting to use the rites, as well as to the clergy member and congregation involved. Davies Penley (a member of All Sacraments for All People, a local grassroots group that advocated for equal access to marriage within the Episcopal Diocese of Tennessee) was cited in Meyer (2018) as saying that the resolution was, 'a wonderful compromise, which respects the dignity of the bishop and his position, but still allows marriage for all in their home congregations'. However, as Meyer (2018) also pointed out, the resolution made in 2018 did not change the Episcopal Church's Book of Common Prayer by making the trial-use liturgies permanent. Instead, the resolution extended their trial use until the next comprehensive revision of the prayer book.

In practice some same-sex couples found these new rights hard to claim. The challenge of translating resolutions and statements into visible action at diocesan and congregational level being documented by Millard (2021a). According to Millard (2021a), LGBTQ Episcopalians have revealed, in evidence gathered from discussions and interviews, that the official stance of acceptance is not practised on the ground in some areas of the Church. For instance, three years post the 2018 resolution, the constitutions and canons of some dioceses still officially ban same-sex marriages, including Albany in New York, Dallas, and Central Florida. He further revealed that:

According to The Episcopal Church's canon law, churches in such dioceses that wish to perform same-sex marriages may seek pastoral oversight from another bishop, although even that was still prohibited in the Diocese of Albany as recently as January 2021. And some parishes explicitly state that they only marry heterosexual couples, including The Episcopal Church's largest parish, St. Martin's Episcopal Church in Houston. (Millard, 2021a)

This variation in belief and practice was also acknowledged on the Episcopal Church website (<https://www.episcopalchurch.org/who-we-are/lgbtq/history/>) which stated:

The Episcopal Church warmly welcomes our LGBTQ siblings, but it would be disingenuous to say that the entire Church is in the same place on this journey. As with all spiritual journeys, everyone walks at their own pace. Some Episcopal congregations are actively involved in LGBTQ ministry and their arms are open wide; others are more reserved, but their doors are still open to all; some are still wrestling with their beliefs and feelings. But we're on this journey together, and The Episcopal Church is dedicated to full inclusion and equality in the Church as well as in society as a whole.

Church breakaways resulting from the 2015 decision to permit same-sex marriage are difficult to quantify. There appear to be fewer online media reports of Episcopal Church (USA) breakaways post the 2015 decision to allow same-sex marriage. This may be because several dioceses and churches, already unhappy with the liberal direction the Episcopal

Church was heading, had decided to defect prior to 2015. It was not just the decisions taken in 2009 and 2012 to approve the blessing of, and a liturgy for, same-sex couples but also an earlier decision on 5 August 2003 to elect an openly gay man, Gene Robinson, to the post of bishop in New Hampshire that had fuelled discontent (Kaleem, 2012; Grundy & Winston, 2015; Burke, 2016; CNN, 2021). CNN (2021) detailed how in December 2006, eight conservative congregations in Virginia announced plans to leave the Episcopal Church in the USA. Following this in 2008, some bishops left the Episcopal Church to form a new province with a new constitution, creating the Anglican Communion of North America (ACNA). By April 2009 the conservative congregations officially separated from the Episcopal Church and had joined the ACNA which was now fully recognized as part of the global Anglican community. It was claimed that the new Church had about 100,000 members.

Some of the other breakaways occurring prior to or around the time of discussions about same-sex blessings and same-sex marriage, along with the legal battles that ensued over property rights and funds held by breakaway congregations are detailed by Cooperman and Salmon (2007), Church Times (2015), O'Loughlin (2015), Shimron (2020), Millard (2021b), and (Brack, 2022).

Cooperman and Salmon (2007) report how in December 2006, The Falls Church and neighbouring Truro Church voted overwhelmingly to break from the Episcopal Church (USA). These churches, they noted, were two of the Washington areas most wealthy, historic, and prestigious congregations. Along with seven other Northern Virginia congregations, they initially joined a new missionary branch of the Anglican Province of Nigeria before joining the ACNA in 2013. The new church was named The Falls Church (Anglican). A legal battle followed with the Episcopal Diocese of Virginia for control of the two congregations land and buildings, conservatively valued at \$25 million (Cooperman and Salmon, 2007). In 2012 a Virginia court ruled that buildings and funds claimed by the Northern Virginia congregation belonged to the Episcopal Church (USA). The Falls Church (Anglican) congregation of 4,000 then had to find a new home and place of worship (Yates, 2012). According to Cooperman and Salmon (2007), the new churches became a magnet for conservatives. At Truro Church the percentage of 'cradle' Episcopalians among its 2,000 regular worshippers dropped steadily so that by 2007 fewer than 40% had grown up in the Episcopal Church. And at The Falls Church (Anglican) at least two-thirds of its 2,500 worshippers were Methodists, Presbyterians, or Baptists. The Revd Rick Wright, associate rector at the Falls Church was cited as stating that, 'the divisions between denominations are far less important today than the divisions within denominations'. Cooperman and Salmon (2007) also reported that:

few members of Truro Church or The Falls Church say the division is, fundamentally, about whether to bless sex-same couples or whether to ordain gay ministers ... they say the rift involves something deeper - whether the Bible is the word of God, Jesus is the only way to heaven and tolerance is more important than truth.

Other breakaways are noted by Shimron (2020) who lists four other dioceses that broke with the national Church, including the dioceses of Pittsburgh (Pennsylvania); Quincy (Illinois); San Joaquin (California); and in 2012, Charleston (South Carolina). In most cases, courts ruled that property titled to the diocese was to remain under the control of the Episcopal Church (USA). The ongoing legal dispute in the case of the South Carolina diocese, which left the Episcopal Church in 2012 after years of disagreements over issues of human sexuality, was also reported by the Church Times (2015) and Brack (2022). Initially, it was ruled that the breakaway group in South Carolina could keep church property worth \$500 million, and retain its name (Church Times, 2015). However, this decision was then overturned by the state's high court. The legal dispute continued until, as detailed by Brack (2022), 'after years of legal wrangling, the South Carolina Supreme Court ordered 14 of the 29 parishes that broke away must return its property to the Episcopal Church and its affiliated South Carolina diocese'.

In another dispute also reported on by Shimron (2020), the Texas Supreme Court in May 2020 awarded a Fort Worth breakaway group affiliated with the ACNA the right to \$100 million in church property. The ownership of the property had been in dispute since the ACNA-affiliated group broke away from the Episcopal Church (USA) in 2008. In 2008, a majority of clergy and lay leaders in the Episcopal Diocese of Fort Worth had voted to leave the Episcopal Church (USA), although both groups continued to call themselves the Episcopal Diocese of Fort Worth. The breakaway group voted to amend its governing documents to change all provisions referring to the Episcopal Church (USA) and requiring compliance with its canons and constitution. According to Shimron (2020), the Texas ruling was possibly the first time that a breakaway diocese had prevailed. As detailed by Shimron (2020), the Episcopal Church in the USA had passed a rule in 1979 that the property of each local congregation was to be held in trust for the national Church and the congregation's diocese. Individual churches controlled their properties so long as the congregation remained a part of the national Church. The Fort Worth diocese affiliated with ACNA took over an estimated 50 properties, including churches, a camp, and several rectories, when it left the national denomination. The breakaway diocese claimed to have 56 congregations in 2020. The historic Episcopal Diocese of Fort Worth being left with 15 congregations which if the ruling was to stand would have resulted in the loss of an additional five buildings. The historic diocese appealed the state ruling to the US Supreme Court. The outcome reported by Millard (2021b) was that the US Supreme Court declined to hear the appeal. Hence, six congregations in what became known as the Episcopal Church in North Texas were given until 19 April 2021 to vacate their buildings after being evicted by the breakaway group affiliated with the ACNA and thus leaving more than \$100 million of diocesan property in the hands of the ACNA's Diocese of Fort Worth. The court's decision not to hear the case settled what had been a 12-year legal battle. A spokesperson for the historic diocese was quoted as saying that the remaining congregations had welcomed new parishioners who did not feel welcome in the breakaway parishes, such as gay couples with children, 'We've

made welcome people who've been wounded by other churches. So, is it worth it? Yeah' (cited in Millard, 2021b).

In a different development, Webster (2012) and O'Loughlin (2015) discussed efforts made by the Roman Catholic Church to create a church home for disaffected Anglicans and Episcopalians. The 'Ordinariate', was an initiative originally approved by Pope Benedict XVI in 2009, and is the equivalent of a Catholic diocese. As explained by O'Loughlin (2015), the Personal Ordinariate of the Chair of St Peter, was created in 2012 to allow Episcopal priests and entire congregations once associated with the US branch of the Anglican Church to become Roman Catholic. In 2015, Pope Francis gave a group of breakaway North American Anglicans who joined the Catholic Church a new leader, naming a San Francisco priest the first bishop to lead the approximately 70 priests and deacons serving 42 parishes spread throughout the United States and Canada that belonged to the Ordinariate. According to O'Loughlin (2015), some in the Anglican Communion have accused the Vatican of taking advantage of another Church's internal struggles and trying to poach whole congregations. But others say it simply gave a home to former Anglicans who never had any interest in returning to full communion with Canterbury. As Webster (2012) reported, St Luke's parish in Bladensburg, Maryland, in the Episcopal Diocese of Washington, and Baltimore's Mount Calvary Church in the Episcopal Diocese of Maryland both joined the Ordinariate. In 2014, St Luke's had to relinquish its church building back to the Episcopal Diocese (<https://stlukesordinariate.com/history>). The impact of the Ordinariate should not be over-estimated. Drawing on national survey data from the Episcopal Church, Webster noted that:

this movement can happen in reverse ... 12 percent of Episcopalians are former Roman Catholics. The figures are higher in areas of the Episcopal Church where the predominant faith is Roman Catholic. A very small percentage of our 7,000 Episcopal parishes have witnessed a majority of their members leaving for other expressions of the Anglican tradition. Far fewer have sought a return to Rome. (Webster, 2012)

### ***The Scottish Episcopal Church (SEC)***

In mid-2021 Scotland had a population of 5,479,900 (NRS, 2022) with the Scottish Episcopal Church (SEC) reporting a membership of 24,039 (SEC, 2021), making up approximately 0.4% of the total population, and served by over 300 Scottish Episcopal churches. The Synod of the SEC formally altered its Canon on Marriage (Canon 31), removing the definition that marriage was between a man and a woman, to approve same-sex unions on 8 June 2017 (SEC, 2017a; Morton, 2017). The change enabled those who wished to offer marriage to same-sex couples the ability to do so while ensuring no member of clergy was compelled to conduct any marriage against their conscience. Thus, as detailed by Alexander (2018), when the SEC voted to allow gay couples to marry in church, it meant that clergy who wished to officiate at gay marriages would have to 'opt-in'. The church said this meant that those who disagreed with gay marriage would be protected and would not have to act against their

conscience. As a result, the SEC became the first major Christian Church in the UK to allow same-sex marriage. To pass the vote each house of General Synod (the bishops, clergy, and laity) required a two-thirds majority. Laity were in favour by 81%, bishops by 80%, and clergy by 68% (SEC, 2017a). The SEC have not produced a new liturgy for same-sex marriage. Instead, Scottish Episcopal churches use the *Marriage Liturgy 2007* published on 6 January 2007 (SEC, 2007). According to St Mary's Cathedral in Glasgow this liturgy, which incorporates multiple wording options, allows each couple to personalise their marriage service to match who they are and say what they want to say. The first public same-sex blessing at St Mary's was conducted in 2008. However, the Cathedral website noted that, 'clergy here have been supportive of gay couples for decades and it would be surprising if a blessing of some kind or another had not been offered before then' (St Mary's Cathedral, 2022).

In reporting on the SEC vote to change the Canon on Marriage, Alexander (2018) cited The Most Revd Mark Strange, Primus of the Scottish Episcopal Church, as saying, 'This decision was ours to take as a self-governing province of the Anglican Communion'. Alexander also points out that Archbishop Strange explained that the process had been inclusive in gathering the views of different groups within the Church, including those of the youth, the elderly, those with personal experience as same-sex couples within the Church, and from those who held to a traditional understanding of marriage. According to the Primus (cited in Alexander, 2018), the nature of the decision was to allow those of different views (each church, each congregation, each minister) to follow their own conscience, to continue to 'walk together' while recognising that different understandings of marriage could exist.

Six months later the SEC in its 35<sup>th</sup> Annual Report recognised that not everyone agreed with their decision, noting that the 'substantive decision of Synod has ... produced reactions in other places, some supportive, others perplexed' (SEC, 2017b, p. 11). The move was seen to have created tension within the Anglican Communion. The response expressed by the Secretary General of the Anglican Communion, Archbishop Josiah Idowu-Fearon, while accepting that different views about same-sex marriage might exist within the Anglican Communion, regretted that the decision made by the SEC, 'puts the Scottish Episcopal Church at odds with the majority stance that marriage is the lifelong union of a man and a woman' (cited in Morton, 2017). The SEC's decision to permit same-sex marriage led to sanctions being imposed on it by the leaders of the Anglican Communion. The SEC was restricted for a period of three years from participating in certain leadership structures of the Anglican Communion, including from debate on doctrine and from chairing Anglican Communion committees (SEC, 2017b, p. 11; Alexander, 2018). Despite this, while acknowledging that the decision made by the SEC had caused some hurt and anger in parts of the Anglican Communion, the Primus remained resolute that the SEC would 'continue to play our part in the Anglican Communion we helped to establish ... but that will be done from the position our Church has now reached in accordance with its synodical processes and in the belief that love means love' (cited in Alexander, 2018).

Following the vote, several individual churches and congregations decided to depart from the SEC. In 2018 the SEC noted in its annual report that at the local level the Church was 'experiencing and sharing hurt and sorrow as a couple of congregations feel they must leave our fellowship over changes to our life (SEC, 2018, p. 1), and further in 2019 stated that they, 'greatly regretted departures from SEC, actual or prospective, of three large congregations (St Silas, St Thomas, and Westhill Community Church) over the decision in 2017 regarding equal marriage' (SEC, 2019, p.10). These three congregations were amongst the largest in the SEC, thus representing a high proportion of members and worshippers. These churches joined the Scottish Anglican Network (SAN) through which they released a press statement declaring themselves to be in 'impaired communion' with the wider province (SAN, 2017).

According to the SAN website, to date, six churches have broken away from the SEC and have joined their organisation which is committed 'to support in prayer and action the many who believe it is essential to reassert a biblical understanding of marriage' (<https://scottishanglican.net/about-us>). SAN and the churches themselves are firm in their belief that they remain part of the Anglican Communion. The six churches are: the Anglican Congregation in Harris (formerly part of Christ Church, Harris) in the Western Isles; Westhill Community Church, Aberdeen in the North East; St Thomas' Church, Edinburgh in the East; All Saints, Glasgow and St Silas, Glasgow in the West; and St Bride's, Dumfries in the South. Episcopal oversight is diverse with the church in Harris overseen by the Anglican Network in Canada, and St Bride's overseen by the Anglican Catholic Church of Canada (<https://scottishanglican.net/churches>).

A number of these church breakaways have been reported on. Alexander (2018) reports on the decision taken by one of the largest churches, St Thomas' in Edinburgh to split from the SEC. He cites the Bishop of Brechin, The Very Revd Andrew Swift, lamenting the decision taken at St Thomas', 'it makes me sad if we do split over issues like that.... There is a danger that others in conscience may feel that they can't carry on'. At the same time, the rector at St Thomas', Revd David McCarthy, is cited as explaining the decision to leave as a 'very painful one ...We have not done it easily. We have had many tears and many sleepless nights. It is a tragic necessity. But it is the Episcopal Church who are leaving us. They are leaving orthodoxy'.

The breakaway by Westhill Community Church in Westhill, Aberdeenshire has been detailed by ACNS (2019) and Duffy (2019). Members of Westhill Community Church voted on 17 January 2019, with 87 per cent in favour, to leave the Anglican Communion's province in Scotland. The ACNS (2019) reports the Rector of Westhill, Canon Ian Ferguson as saying:

We have been on a journey for many years – when I say 'we', I mean a group of evangelical Episcopal rectors - in talking to bishops about the trajectory the Scottish Episcopal Church has set itself on going. This culminated in a number of decisions that the SEC took which some of us found that we could not accept. Our church wanted to maintain their sense of biblical authority and their fellowship with the wider Anglican Communion which is being torn apart by decisions of some provinces.

In response the Primus of the Episcopal Church of Scotland, Bishop Mark Strange, is quoted as expressing 'great sadness ... that Westhill Community Church, Aberdeen has voted to prepare to leave the Scottish Episcopal Church, and therefore the Anglican Communion'. At the same time, while acknowledging the uncertainty that lay ahead, Canon Ferguson was clear that 'what we are strong on is that we will remain Anglican' (ACNS, 2019), and that 'we'll continue to be Orthodox Anglicans and we will not be creating another denomination' (Duffy, 2019).

The departure of churches and the establishment of new congregations can give rise not only to emotional responses, but also to practical issues. For example, the Anglican Congregation in Harris, has had to leave their buildings and funds behind, with the SEC retaining all assets ([www.scottishanglican.net/profile-the-new-anglican-congregation-in-harris](http://www.scottishanglican.net/profile-the-new-anglican-congregation-in-harris)). Others, such as St Thomas', Edinburgh have remained in their church building, but changed their status to become an independent Anglican congregation ([www.saintthomas.org.uk/Groups/344701/History.aspx](http://www.saintthomas.org.uk/Groups/344701/History.aspx)). The SEC too acknowledged the financial implications of the departure of congregations from the SEC and:

recognised the need to provide some transitional financial assistance to mitigate the impact on dioceses - both those losing congregations and others affected by changes in block grant and quota calculations. There are, therefore, likely to be many demands on the reserves generated in recent years. (SEC 2018, p. 9)

A further impact of the decision to approve same-sex marriage has been the growth in new and existing evangelical and conservative Anglican organisations providing support to those churches that disagree with the more liberal direction in which some Anglican Churches are moving. In addition to SAN and GAFCON, the Anglican Network in Europe (ANiE) was launched in 2020. ANiE comprised two groups: the Anglican Convocation in Europe (ACE), and the Anglican Mission in England (AMiE). According to the SAN website 'each has its own constitution, canons and synod and both work in partnership in guarding and heralding biblical truth', while combined ANiE is:

a partnership of biblically faithful Anglicans united around a shared commitment to the Jerusalem Declaration 2008 (a widely recognised statement of Anglican orthodoxy) ... formed as a positive response to a spiritual crisis in Europe and the Western world. In mainline protestant denominations, many Bishops, theologians, clergy, and other leaders have accommodated the Christian faith to ideologies of contemporary culture. (<https://scottishanglican.net/>)

### ***The Anglican Episcopal Church of Brazil (Igreja Episcopal Anglicana do Brasil, IEAB)***

Same-sex marriage has been legal in Brazil since 14 May 2013 (Masci, Sciupac & Lipka, 2019). In 2021 Brazil had a population of approximately 214 million ([www.statisticstimes.com](http://www.statisticstimes.com)). According to the website of the World Council of Churches the Anglican Episcopal Church of Brazil (IEAB) has 120,000 members ([www.oikoumene.org/member-churches/episcopal-anglican-church-of-brazil](http://www.oikoumene.org/member-churches/episcopal-anglican-church-of-brazil)), thus making up approximately 0.06% of the population. According to the website of the IEAB, the Church

comprises nine Dioceses and a Missionary District. The Dioceses and District are distributed in provincial areas: Area 1, formed by the Dioceses of Meridional, Sul Ocidental and Pelotas; Area 2, formed by the Dioceses of Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, and Paraná; and Area 3, formed by the Dioceses of Recife, Brasília, Amazônia, and the Missionary District ([www.ieab.org.br/dioceses-e-distrito-missionario/](http://www.ieab.org.br/dioceses-e-distrito-missionario/)). On 1 June 2018 the General Synod of the IEAB voted to change their marriage canon to allow same-sex couples to get married (ACNS, 2018; Williams, 2018). According to ACNS (2018), the move was overwhelmingly carried by the Synod with 57 members voting in favour, three against, and two abstentions. It also noted that liturgical changes would not be required, because gender neutral language had already been introduced into its service for the solemnization of marriage in the 2015 Book of Common Prayer. In a statement released by the province it was announced that, 'Canonical changes were approved in an environment filled by the Holy Spirit and with mutual love and respect. It was preceded by long, deep, and spiritual dialogue'. The outgoing Primate of Brazil, the Most Revd Francisco de Assis da Silva, was quoted as saying that he 'felt the decision was a result of the Holy Spirit's presence and work. This widens our boundaries, allowing us to be more welcoming to the diversity of people in our country' (Williams, 2018).

The response of the Anglican Communion to the decision taken by the IEAB was reported by the ACNS (2018) and Williams (2018), both of whom detailed the response made by the Secretary General of the Anglican Communion, Dr Josiah Idowu-Fearon. While noting his 'deep desire to see the Churches of the Anglican Communion remain committed to walking together in the love of Christ in spite of deeply-held differences', and stressing 'the Communion's strong opposition to the criminalisation of LGBTIQ+ people', he also stated that while the Churches of the Anglican Communion were 'autonomous and free to make their own decisions' on canon law, the decision:

puts the Episcopal Church of Brazil at odds with the majority position that marriage is the lifelong union of a man and a woman. This is a move away from the faith and teaching upheld by the overwhelming majority of Anglican provinces on the doctrine of marriage. The Anglican Communion's position on human sexuality is set out in Resolution I.10 agreed at the Lambeth conference of 1998 and will remain so unless it is revoked. (ACNS, 2018; Williams, 2018)

According to Wikipedia ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anglican\\_Church\\_of\\_Brazil](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anglican_Church_of_Brazil) viewed 18/8/22) the IEAB's 'stance as an inclusive church has caused both schisms and the arrival of former Roman Catholics and Evangelicals in search of acceptance'. Access to much of the material on discussion of the impact of the decision made by the IEAB, with respect to possible church breakaways or church growth, is limited by the fact that media reporting is primarily in Brazilian or Portuguese which the authors of this report do not speak. What follows is a summary compiled from evidence gathered from English publishing mediums (Church Times, 2013; Davies, 2018; Williams, 2018; GAFCON, n.d.; Jensen, n.d.)

On the 12th May 2018, in the immediate aftermath of the vote by the Synod of the IEAB to allow same-sex marriage, clergy and congregations that disagreed with this decision attended the Paróquia Anglicana do Espírito Santo (Anglican Church of the Holy Spirit) in

Recife to celebrate the launch of a new Church, the Anglican Church in Brazil (Gafcon, n.d.). The history of this new Church, however, precedes the decision taken by the IEAB on same-sex marriage. The breakaway diocese of Recife was established by the Bishop of Recife, the Rt Revd Robinson Cavalcanti, in 2003, after the consecration of Bishop Gene Robinson, a gay man, in the Episcopal Church (USA). In 2005 Bishop Cavalcanti was excommunicated by the IEAB, on the grounds that he had broken communion with it. On leaving he took 32 clergy and their congregations with him, including several church properties (Davies, 2018; Williams, 2018). What followed was a decade-long judicial battle over the creation of this breakaway diocese of Recife. In 2013 a judge ruled that all property, including five churches and all their belongings, would be returned to the Anglican diocese of Recife, and that the actions of Bishop Cavalcanti were nullified (Church Times, 2013).

According to a press release on the GAFCON website (GAFCON, n.d.) the diocese of Recife, though it lost some of its buildings, ‘carried on with a robust program of social action, evangelism, church planting, and discipleship’. According to Davies (2018), in 2017, ‘the Membership Development Secretary, Charles Raven, reported that the diocese had more than 60 pastors and 45 congregations, and that it had planted 33 new churches in the past five years’. Such growth GAFCON claimed had:

led to the formation of a new biblically orthodox province which has been recognized by the GAFCON Primates Council not only as part of GAFCON, but also as a province of the Anglican Communion. The Anglican Church in Brazil is the 41st province of the Anglican Communion. (Gafcon, n.d.)

In response, the Secretary-General of the Anglican Communion, the Rt Revd Dr Josiah Idowu-Fearon, writing in the Church Times, stated that it was ‘inaccurate to refer to the Anglican Church in Brazil as being part of the Episcopal Anglican Communion. To be part of the Anglican Communion requires being in communion with the see of Canterbury, which this Church is not’ (Davies, 2018). This argument over the status of the new Church, its relationship within the Anglican Communion and the see of Canterbury continued when the general secretary of GAFCON, Archbishop Peter Jensen, strongly disputed the view, expressed by Dr Idowu-Fearon, that GAFCON was wrong to call the Anglican Church in Brazil a province of the Anglican Communion (Jensen, n.d.; Williams, 2018). In response Archbishop Jensen maintained:

Here lies the difference between mere institutionalism and spiritual reality. The basic reason why there is a division amongst the Anglicans of Brazil is because the Episcopal Church of Brazil has departed from the teaching of Scripture, and hence from Anglican teaching, concerning sex and marriage. The division is not over a matter of church politics or personal ambition. It is a matter of the fundamentals of the faith, of what makes a true church, of the authority of God’s word. (Jensen, n.d.)

Continuing further, Archbishop Jensen questioned the leadership of the Anglican Communion on the issue of same-sex marriage and refused to accept that the Anglican identity of the new Church should be determined by the see of Canterbury.

Communion with the see of Canterbury used to be a welcome, useful and easily understood way of describing the Anglican Communion. But with leadership comes responsibility. So far, the recent Archbishops of Canterbury have not used the power of their office either to discipline those who have created disorder and threatened the basis of our faith, or to reach out the right hand of fellowship to those who have stood firm.... Of course, the new Anglican Church in Brazil is an authentic part of the Anglican Communion. It is not a matter of recognition by Canterbury.... Brazilians invite Canterbury to recognise spiritual reality, and to use its influence to help align the old instrument of the Anglican Communion with the spiritual reality and new growth of the Communion. Will this happen? (Jensen (n.d.)

### **Anglican churches that have approved same-sex blessings**

The Anglican Church of Canada, the Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia (ACANZP), the Anglican Church of Australia, and the Church in Wales are the four Anglican provinces that have endorsed same-sex blessings.

#### ***The Anglican Church of Canada***

The Civil Marriage Act came into effect in Canada on 20 July 2005. This Act extended the traditional understanding of civil marriage as an exclusively heterosexual union to one defined as ‘the lawful union of two persons to the exclusion of all others’. It was the reference to ‘two persons’, replacing ‘one man and one woman’ that extended civil marriage to couples of the same sex (Government of Canada, 2005; Hogg, 2006). While the federal Civil Marriage Act made same-sex marriage legal across Canada, it had in fact been legalised earlier than this in many Canadian provinces. Ontario was the first on 10 June 2003, with others such as British Columbia doing so on 8 July 2003 and Quebec on 19 March 2004 (Eichler, 2016). According to the 2016 Canadian Census, there were 72,880 same-sex couples in Canada in 2016, representing 0.9% of all couples. Of these one-third (33.4%) were married. The number of married same-sex couples had more than tripled since the census of 2006, just after same-sex marriage became legal in Canada, while the number of same-sex common-law couples rose by 28.0% (Statistics Canada, 2017a). In the 2021 Census there were 95,435 same-gender couples (consisting of either two women or two men, and both members being cisgender) representing 1.1% of all couples (Statistics Canada, 2022a). Corresponding marriage statistics for these couples were not available.

In the 2021 census, Canada’s population was reported as 36,991,981 (Statistics Canada, 2022b). This was an increase of 5.2% on the population of 35,151,728 recorded in the census of 2016 (Statistics Canada, 2017b). According to data published by the Anglican Church of Canada (latest available figures relate to 2017), the Church had 359,030 members on parish rolls, 1,571 parishes, and 2,206 congregations (<https://www.anglican.ca/ask/faq/number-of-anglicans/>), thus making up approximately 1% of the 2017 Canadian population. This figure may be under-reported considering that

1,134,310 Canadians (3.1% of the population) self-identified as Anglican in the census of 2021 (Statistics Canada, 2022c).

According to Michael (2021) it was the Diocese of New Westminster that opened within the Anglican Church of Canada conflict over same-sex marriage with its 2003 decision to authorize a blessing for same-sex unions. However, the debate about whether the Church should permit same-sex blessings goes back much further. According to Coren (2021) the Anglican Church of Canada has debated the issue of same-sex relationships for 50 years, and it now operates what is known as the 'local option,' whereby some churches can and do perform same-sex marriages, while others do not. A detailed timeline of significant events was provided by the Diocese of New Westminster (2004). It was on 15 June 2002 that the Diocese voted to approve a ritual that blessed same-sex relationships. More than 400 clergy and lay people from 80 parishes in the diocese voted during their annual diocesan synod (CBC News, 2002). The vote permitted priests to perform the ceremony if the priest and congregation agreed. A conscience clause ensured that no cleric or parish would have to participate if they opposed such blessings. Two previous motions backing recognition for same-sex relationships had been passed in 1998 (51% in favour) and in 2001 (57% in favour), but the margins were not deemed high enough for the bishop to consent to the motions. As detailed by the Diocese of New Westminster (2004), preceding the 2001 motion, a Legal and Canonical Commission ruled that a diocesan bishop had the authority to authorize a rite of blessing of same-sex unions if they so wished. When on 15 June 2002 the Diocese of New Westminster voted for the third time, a majority of 63% was achieved. Following this, on 23 May 2003, the bishop issued a 'Rite for the Celebration of Gay and Lesbian Covenants' to the six parishes in the diocese that had voted to carry out same-sex blessings (ACNS, 2003). In a letter accompanying the new rite, the bishop distinguished between the new blessing prepared for same-sex couples and marriage, which the church continued to reserve for opposite-sex couples:

This is not a marriage ceremony, but a blessing of permanent and faithful commitments between persons of the same sex in order that they may have the support and encouragement of the Church in their lives together under God.  
(cited in ACNS, 2003).

The bishop also advised that couples who sought the blessing had to have received preparation and instruction and would need to be supported and sustained by the parish throughout their lives together. The first blessing ceremony took place on 28 May 2003 at a church in Vancouver, between two male members of the parish who had been together for 21 years (Diocese of Westminster, 2004).

In response to the 2002 diocesan motion, conservative elements in the Church threatened to split away with some parishes putting forward resolutions that would allow them to leave the diocese but remain part of the Anglican Church if the motion was approved. Anglican Churches in Africa, Asia and South America also threatened to break communion with the Anglican Church of Canada (CBC News, 2002). When the new blessing rite was issued, the Diocese of New Westminster (2004) acknowledged that a group of

dissenting parishes had decided to withhold diocesan assessments and to accept the Bishop of Yukon's offer of alternative episcopal oversight.

Within the national Church the debate on same-sex blessings continued at the General Synods held in 2004 and 2007. In 2004, the General Synod deferred for three years a decision about whether blessing same-sex unions was part of the Church's doctrine. However, as reported by Coward (2004), the following day it voted to, 'affirm the integrity and sanctity of committed adult same-sex relationships'. Nine of the 37 bishops at the Synod were unhappy about this statement and in particular its affirmation of the 'sanctity' of same-sex relationships, language one of the bishops argued 'is reserved for marriage alone' (cited in Coward, 2004). The motion, the bishops claimed, was pre-empting the work of the diocesan and provincial synods who had been tasked with exploring the issue over the following three years. According to Coward (2004), the Primate of Canada noted that the General Synod's vote to defer deciding who had jurisdiction over blessing same-sex unions had left the door open for dioceses to go ahead with such blessings. The Bishop of New Westminster, whose Vancouver diocese had already approved same-sex blessings, backed this view when he stated that the General Synod had, 'not prevented any diocese from considering the matter as they wish to do at a local level' (cited in Coward, 2004).

Confusion as to whether the Anglican Church of Canada permitted same-sex blessings, or whether the decision could be left to a local church or diocese, continued with decisions taken at General Synod in 2007 (Anglican Journal, 2008; Christian Today, 2007; Harden, 2007; Sarmiento, 2007). The 2007 General Synod rejected a resolution that would have allowed dioceses to decide for themselves whether to bless same-sex unions. However, it also carried a motion that read, 'that the blessing of same-sex unions is not in conflict with the core doctrine (in the sense of being credal) of the Anglican Church of Canada' (cited in Sarmiento, 2007). Canadian Anglicans found the two decisions confusing, with both supporters and opponents of same-sex blessings unsure as to whether clergy could conduct same-sex blessings. In a pastoral letter, the Bishop of British Columbia opined against allowing individual dioceses to decide on the blessing of same-sex relationships:

There are those who argue that because General Synod did not pass a motion claiming its authority on the matter, it may be left to a local church (diocese, parish, or parish priest) to make decisions about moving forward with same-sex union blessings. I am not of that opinion, nor will I authorise such action or concur with it. (cited in Christian Today, 2007)

In contrast, in the same Christian Today (2007) article, a priest (also an expert on canon law) from the Diocese of Montreal claimed that there was nothing in the Church's canons or constitution that prevented a diocese from going forward with same-sex blessings, with General Synod having said it would not be against core doctrine. In the month following the Synod's resolutions two parishes proceeded to offer same-sex blessing ceremonies with the priest at one of the churches holding a service for four couples noting that, 'he did not believe that he had violated any church law, as the Synod had ruled that such blessings were not in conflict with core doctrine' (cited in Harden, 2007).

Increasingly disappointed with what they viewed as the liberalisation of the Church, and with the abandonment of traditional Anglicanism to fit in with popular culture, several churches decided to leave the Anglican Church of Canada (Anglican Journal, 2008; Christian Today, 2008; CBC News, 2008; Williams, 2009). Parishioners at an Anglican church in Windsor, Ontario voted unanimously by 109 to 0 to leave the national Church and to join the Anglican Network in Canada (ANiC) a group aligned theologically with the Church in Africa. A statement by the church said they acted because they were 'determined to remain biblically faithful, true to historic Christian orthodoxy and long-standing Anglican teaching' (Christian Today, 2008). The ANiC comprised at the time 19 parishes under the jurisdiction of the conservative South American Anglican Province of the Southern Cone, one of 38 provinces that made up the Anglican Communion (Christian Today, 2008). A few months later the network claimed to be garnering increasing support. The moderator of the ANiC was quoted as claiming:

This time last year, we had two parishes. When we launched we had two bishops, two parishes, two priests, two deacons. Now, less than a year later, we have 23 parishes, we have over 60 clergy' (cited in CBC News, 2008).

Subsequently the ANiC was approved as one of 28 dioceses and dioceses-in-information in the Anglican Church in North America (ACNA), which comprised 12 church organisations that had broken with the Anglican Church of Canada and The Episcopal Church in the USA over theological differences on issues such as human sexuality (Williams, 2009). However, in 2011, Lewis put the relative numbers into perspective when he revealed that the ANiC had approximately '50 parishes, a tiny minority compared with the 2,000 parishes of the national Church' (Lewis, 2011).

The Diocese of the Arctic was particularly critical of those dioceses that had asked for or had given their clergy permission to bless same-sex couples, viewing such actions as a threat to church unity. At the Arctic diocesan synod in June 2008 a motion was passed expressing support for those who, in protest at the direction the Church was taking, had decided to join the Diocese of the Southern Cone. The diocesan bishop of the Arctic was keen to stress, 'that doesn't say that they're separated from the Anglican Church as a whole; they're still part of the Communion', adding further that while the 2007 General Synod had defeated the motion affirming the authority of dioceses to offer same-sex blessings, 'there was no message saying that we could all go our own way' (cited in Anglican Journal, 2008).

Despite reported opposition to the blessing of same-sex relationships, a number of dioceses continued to debate and take action on the issue. In the Diocese of Niagara, the decision to offer blessings to same-sex couples was implemented on 1 September 2009 making it the second diocese to do so after New Westminster (Ashworth, 2009; Sison, 2009). According to Ashworth (2009), Niagara's diocesan synod approved a motion requesting a rite in 2004, but the bishop at the time would not agree to its implementation. The motion came back to the diocesan synod in January 2008 when the bishop gave his approval, but then reserved the right to determine when such a blessing might go ahead, with no commitment to any timeframe outlined. When he retired his successor, in Autumn

2008, announced that he intended to develop the rite, 'for the voluntary use of priests who wish to offer a sacrament of blessing regardless of the gender of the civilly married persons' (cited in Ashworth, 2009). He was also quoted as saying that in doing so he believed that 'we are among those who have been called by God to speak with a prophetic voice on this subject' (cited in Sison, 2009). As detailed by Sison (2009), a list of protocols was outlined by the bishop in relation to conversations that needed to take place between the bishop and the priest offering the Niagara rite before a date for the blessing could be confirmed with the couple. This included provision of details on the couple wishing to be blessed and the response of the parish to such blessings.

The decision-making process in Ottawa regarding the provision of same-sex blessings was reported by Sison (2007) and Storey (2009). Storey noted that, although Ottawa's diocesan synod had voted with a clear majority in 2007 to proceed with the blessing of same sex couples, permission was not granted until November 2009. According to the Bishop of Ottawa, the 2007 decision left the diocese with an 'obligation' to move forward, and the decision taken was to start by limiting blessings to just one church while dialogue on the issue continued. This one church was granted permission by the diocese in November 2009 to bless couples who had been civilly married. According to Storey (2009), no new rite was developed and at least one member of the couple had to be baptized.

The decision by some more traditional parishes to break away from the Anglican Church of Canada at this time led to some long drawn out and expensive legal fights (CTV News, 2008; Symons, 2010; Lewis, 2011). As reported by CTV News (2008), in February 2008, the Anglican Diocese of Niagara went to court to seek joint custody, in terms of building ownership, of two parishes which had chosen to leave the national Church. The diocese wanted to share the church buildings on Sundays, arguing that it made 'no sense for a breakaway congregation to maintain exclusive access to the facility when parishioners have been worshipping there for 160 years under the banner of the Anglican Diocese of Canada'. In opposition, the ANiC network, to which the breakaway parishes had aligned, argued awarding joint custody would ultimately be unfair to the majority of parishioners who had voted in favour of the split. The judge rejected the diocese's argument and sided instead with the breakaway parishes. A decision on the use of the churches and administration of funds was postponed to a later date.

Another legal battle took place in the Diocese of New Westminster when four breakaway Vancouver congregations tried to retain their buildings, having also left the national Church to join the ANiC. As reported by Symons (2010), several clergy had already resigned from the diocese and voluntarily left church buildings after the 2002 New Westminster Synod had asked its bishop to issue a rite of blessing for same-sex unions. Both the British Columbia Supreme Court decision of 2009 and British Columbia Court of Appeal ruling of 2010 decided that the breakaway Vancouver congregations could not keep the disputed buildings, but that they must be used for ministry within the diocese, as part of the Anglican Church of Canada. The four breakaway congregations, one of which was the largest Anglican congregation in Canada, had continued to use the church buildings. The four

breakaway churches then appealed to the Supreme Court of Canada but were dismayed when it decided not to hear the appeal (Lewis, 2011). According to Lewis (2011), it was expected that almost all parishioners in the four churches would follow their clergy to new locations. In the case of one of the churches that had nearly 1,000 parishioners this would not be easy. The Bishop of New Westminster was quoted as saying that no parishioner would be forced out:

no member of any congregation in this Diocese need leave the buildings in which they worship. However, the clergy who have left the Anglican Church of Canada must now leave their pulpits. I will work with these congregations to find suitable and mutually acceptable leaders, so that the mission of the Church may continue in these places. (cited in Lewis, 2011)

A spokesperson for the ANiC maintained that the decision was, 'especially troubling because it means that any religious denomination can change theological direction and the individual parishes have no choice but to go along or leave' (cited in Lewis, 2011).

The issue of whether dioceses could offer same-sex blessings was revisited at the General Synod in June 2010. However, according to the Church Times (2010), the Synod stepped back from making any legislative decision on same-sex blessings, encouraging instead an ongoing discernment process. The Synod released a statement, *Discernment on Sexuality*. The text of this document, while acknowledging the lack of 'common mind' on the issue, and 'the pain that our diversity in this matter causes', also stated that:

We acknowledge diverse pastoral practices as dioceses respond to their own missional contexts. We accept the continuing commitment to develop generous pastoral responses.... accepting that different local contexts call at times for different local discernment, decision and action.... This is not just an 'issue' but is about people's daily lives and deeply held faith commitments. For some, even this statement represents a risk. For some the statement does not go nearly far enough. (cited in

<http://justus.anglican.org/~edmondto/resources/Discernment%20on%20Sexuality.pdf>

In response, the Canadian Primate acknowledged that the 'local option', which had already been practised by some dioceses to permit same-sex blessings would possibly continue. He noted, however, that it was not a local option approved by the national Church because the national Church was not ready to say, 'we're building this into our doctrine that we approve of same-sex unions' (cited in Church Times, 2010).

Although the 2010 General Synod made no decision on same-sex blessings, some dioceses continued to move ahead in approving liturgies to do so. In Montreal the process was debated in diocesan synods between 2008 and 2010 (Valpy, 2008; Shepherd, 2008; Anglican Essentials Canada, 2010). As Shepherd (2008) noted, in Autumn 2007, Montreal Synod adopted a resolution that called on their bishop to grant permission for clergy to bless civil marriages, including same-sex marriages. The bishop, like those in Niagara and Ottawa at that time, chose not to implement the resolution to authorise such blessings. Subsequently, at the diocesan synod in 2008 two resolutions presented by those opposed to

same-sex blessings were defeated. While the issue was not debated, in his opening statement, the bishop confirmed that he would proceed with establishing a commission with responsibility to work out a rite for such blessings, along with guidelines for implementation. The bishop was quoted explaining his reason for doing so:

For reasons, perhaps known only to God, I believe we, in the Diocese of Montreal, are among those who have been called by God to speak with a prophetic voice. It is our voice that is called to affirm that all people are loved, valued and precious before God and the Church. It is our voice that is called to affirm that all unions of faithful love and life-long commitment are worthy of God's blessing and a means of God's grace. In time our voice will either be affirmed by the body or stand corrected. (cited in Shepherd, 2008)

He further clarified that:

Let me make it absolutely clear that in this process, no cleric and no congregation will be required to participate in any future blessing of same-sex civil marriages. (cited in Shepherd, 2008)

According to Anglican Essentials Canada (2010), trying to move forward on the issue the bishop presented copies of the proposed liturgy at the May 2010 diocesan synod. The liturgy had been adapted from the Book of Occasional Celebrations produced by the General Synod of the national Church in 1992. While the General Synod in 2010 had made no decision on the local option either for or against same-sex blessings, the view of Anglican Essentials Canada (2010) was that the bishop's promotion of the liturgy was evidence that General Synod's indecision had effectively given the go ahead for dioceses that wished to proceed with same-sex blessings to do so: 'in effect, the decision has been delegated down in an attempt to circumvent disagreeable sanctions from Canterbury' (Anglican Essentials Canada, 2010).

In Toronto guidelines for clergy considering requests for blessings by same-sex couples were issued by the diocese in November 2010 (Church Times, 2010). According to the diocesan website, the 'Pastoral Guidelines for the Blessing of Same-Gender Commitments' followed 'two decades of discussion in the diocese and take into account the theological, biblical and political discussions across the wider Church' (<https://www.toronto.anglican.ca/diocesan-life/marriage/?lang=en>). By May 2020, 21 parishes had been authorized to bless same-gender commitments. The guidelines stated that they offered 'a generous pastoral response to stable committed same gender relationships in our diocesan family seeking a blessing of their commitment (p. 1)', but also cautioned that the guidelines were 'not to be understood as an authorized rite of the Anglican Diocese of Toronto' (p. 3). According to the Church Times (2010), this distinction between 'guidelines' and 'rite' was important, 'since the introduction of a rite would invite censure from the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Anglican Communion Office'. The guidelines also permitted that a blessing 'may be made available to couples who are not civilly married as the blessing is not considered to reflect, or to be understood as, marriage' (p.2). The blessing was expected to be part of an existing relationship between the priest and the local congregation with at least one of the couple a baptised Christian. To be

distinguishable from a marriage liturgy there were instructions on what could, and could not, be included in the service: for example, no prayers of nuptial blessing from any marriage liturgy used in any other province of the Anglican Communion should be said over the couple. The Archbishop of Toronto was quoted as saying:

Not all will welcome this development: some because it goes too far, some because it is not nearly enough. You will note that there are strong affirmations in these guidelines assuring a continued and honoured place in all aspects of diocesan life for those who do not agree with this response. (cited in Church Times, 2010)

Others argued that the guidelines were much more than just a pastoral response. The Archbishop of Canterbury was quoted as expressing unease with this specific term:

'Pastoral response' has been interpreted very differently, and there are those in the USA who would say: 'Well, pastoral response means rites of blessing,' and I'm not very happy about that. (cited in Church Times, 2010)

By November 2012 Quebec had become the tenth diocese to offer same-sex blessings, following the dioceses of New Westminster, Ottawa, Huron, Niagara, Toronto, Montreal, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, Edmonton, and Rupert's Land (Anglican Journal, 2012). Quebec's diocesan synod passed a motion supporting the bishop's wish to permit the blessing of same-gender unions, with less than 10 of the 70 synod members voting against the motion on the grounds that, 'the blessing of homosexual couples contradicts biblical teaching' (Anglican Journal, 2012). The bishop expressed his intention to provide a rite of blessing and pastoral support for persons living in 'committed, same-gender relationships'. There was to be the creation of a working group to advise on how a 'pastoral response' could be implemented. He was quoted as emphasising that the blessing would not be a marriage but rather, 'the blessing of civil union that has already taken place', and that it would 'simply be an option ... which is being offered in an increasing number of parts of the Anglican Church of Canada' (cited in Anglican Journal, 2012). No cleric or congregation in Quebec would be obligated to perform same-gender blessings.

At the General Synod in 2013 a resolution that would have directed 'the Council of General Synod to prepare and present a motion at General Synod 2016 to change Canon XXI on Marriage in the Church to allow the marriage of same-sex couples in the same way as opposite sex couples' was debated and passed

(<https://www.vancouver.anglican.ca/news/joint-assembly-general-synod-2013-summary>).

Following on from this at the General Synod in 2016 a motion backing same-sex marriage was passed, although only after some voting confusion that had initially led the Synod to believe the resolution had failed by one vote. In fact, after a recount, it was discovered that it had passed with the required two-thirds support from each of the laity, clergy, and bishops (The Guardian, 2016). For the Marriage Canon to be changed the motion would have to be approved at two successive sessions of the General Synod, the second vote taking place at the next meeting in 2019.

According to a report in *The Guardian* (2016), the debate had been bitter and divisive. Before the outcome of the recount, Toronto's archbishop had joined several other prominent clergymen who said they would bless same-sex marriages in defiance of the vote. Many used a memorandum produced by Jones (2016) to justify their position. Prior to the Synod vote David Jones, Q.C. Chancellor of General Synod provided to members of the Synod a memorandum on 'Issues in dealing with Resolution A051' (the motion to amend the Marriage Canon) (Jones, 2016). Two paragraphs within this document (including citations taken from the Church's Declaration of Principles) were used by many bishops to justify permitting same-sex marriage by claiming that the marriage canon was sufficiently ambiguous to allow for a 'local option' on the practice, specifically paragraphs stating that Canon XXI: 'does not contain either a definition of "marriage", or a specific prohibition against solemnizing same-sex marriages' (Jones, 2016, p. 6 para 32b), and that:

in the absence of a prohibition by General Synod against same-sex marriages, Provincial Synods have authority and jurisdiction with respect to "... the authorization of special forms of prayers, services and ceremonies for use within the province, for which no provisions have been made under the authority of the General Synod or of the House of Bishops of The Anglican Church of Canada". (Jones, 2016, p.7 para 32e)

As explained by Michael (2021) this memorandum has been controversial and has been disputed by other legal experts. Two British Anglican canon lawyers were cited as saying that the memorandum was:

inaccurate and misleading in a number of respects, but particularly in its assertion that Canon XXI does not contain a definition of marriage. It clearly does.... Same-sex marriage remains contrary to the doctrine of the Anglican Church of Canada... Neither a Provincial Synod nor a diocesan bishop has power to authorize a liturgy to be used for the solemnization of same-sex marriage unless and until the church changes its doctrine through proper process as prescribed in its governing instruments. (cited in Michael, 2021)

The Anglican Communion Alliance sought this legal opinion because in their view, 'the Chancellor's 2016 memo was being relied on as authoritative for the life of the Church'. According to the bishop of the Diocese of the Arctic the legal opinion commissioned by the Anglican Communion Alliance 'confirms for us that those bishops who have proceeded with same-sex marriage are in violation of the marriage canon (Canon XXI)' (cited in Michael, 2021).

In 2019 the approval of same-sex marriage failed to pass its second reading, meaning that the Anglican Church of Canada retained its traditional definition of marriage (Puddister, 2019a, 2019b; Zeidler, 2019). The resolution would have amended the Church's marriage canon to remove references to 'man and woman' and 'husband and wife' and would have replaced these with 'parties to the marriage' and 'the partners', effectively making official the sanctioning of same-sex marriage (Puddister, 2019a). It would also have required that a marriage between those of the same sex could only be carried out by a church minister if authorised by the diocesan bishop. Lay voters (81%) and members of the clergy (73%) were

more than two-thirds in favour of the motion, but it did not meet the threshold among the bishops (62%) (Puddister, 2019b). In closing the day's business, the Archbishop and Primate acknowledged that he was 'conscious of pain in this place'. He added that, 'if there are proposals for revisiting the matter, there are provisions for how to deal with that. If there are proposals for other resolutions on the same matter, there are provisions for how to deal with that. But it needs to be at another moment in this Synod' (cited Puddister, 2019a).

Although the second reading of the motion to change the canon had failed, the General Synod passed a motion adopting five affirmations that were contained in a communication from the bishops titled 'A Word to the Church' and which concerned the proposed amendments to Canon XXI on marriage (Anglican Church of Canada, 2019). The first affirmed the right of indigenous people and communities to self-determination in their decisions regarding same-sex marriage. The second affirmed that while bishops and synods in the Anglican Church of Canada might hold to different understandings of the existing marriage canon, those who had authorised such blessings understood that the existing canon did not prohibit same-sex marriage. The third affirmed that there was a diversity of understandings and teachings about marriage within the Church, and that this diversity was held with prayerful integrity. The fourth affirmed a commitment to presume good faith and the fifth offered a commitment to stand together.

The content of 'A Word for the Church' was viewed as encouraging diocesan-based decisions on the issue and led to several responses within the Church. According to Puddister (2019b) the most consequential was a declaration by the House of Bishops reiterating that different levels of the Church might make their own decisions on the matter of same-sex marriage.

We are walking together in a way which leaves room for individual dioceses and jurisdictions of our Church to proceed with same-sex marriage according to their contexts and convictions, sometimes described as 'local option'. (cited in Puddister, 2019b)

In statements released after the vote, many dioceses (including Toronto, New Westminster, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, Ottawa, and Huron) declared their intention to exercise the 'local option' and perform same-sex marriages regardless of the failed marriage canon vote, something some of them had already been doing since the previous affirmative vote in 2016 (Puddister, 2019b; Zeidler, 2019). They were basing their decision on General Synod's 2019 approval of 'A Word to the Church', and specifically affirmation 2 which avowed 'diverse understandings of the existing marriage canon', and that 'the existing canon does not prohibit same-sex marriage'. For the Bishop of Niagara, the operation of the local option 'made real people, with real lives and with real commitment to the Church, really happy.... It has opened up the possibility that the life-sustaining joy of the marriage covenant can be shared by all' (cited in Coren, 2021). Each diocese had its own conditions and stipulations for permitting same-sex marriage, including: getting approval from parish councils or permission from the bishop; no parish being required to perform same-sex

marriage if it did not wish to do so; and that clergy could refuse to perform a marriage due to reason of conscience.

That the resolution to change the marriage canon had failed gave rise to strong reaction. Clergy and lay delegates at the General Synod, who had voted in favour of the marriage canon amendment, said in a statement that they were 'saddened and dismayed' that the change had been blocked by the bishops. They apologized for the 'hurt and harm that has been caused by the actions of this Synod and by our church to LGBTQ2S+ people', affirmed 'the full inclusion of LGBTQ2S+ people in the life, leadership, liturgies and sacraments, including marriage, of the Anglican Church of Canada' and noted that, 'same sex marriage can and will proceed by local option' (cited in Puddister, 2019b). Likewise, the Association of Anglican Deacons in Canada released a statement lamenting that, 'This "no" to same sex marriage seems devastating to our work as deacons' (cited in Puddister, 2019b). As also reported by Zeidler (2019), many dioceses posted messages on social media acknowledging how devastating the results of the vote were to many members. One strongly worded message reproduced in Zeidler (2019) stated, 'In light of their failure to vote in favour of amendments to their Marriage Canon that would allow for same-sex marriage, I hereby renounce the Anglican Church. Were it possible, I'd ask that my name be stricken from their baptismal records'.

However, as also pointed out by Puddister (2019b) and Michael (2021), the vote continued to reveal deep divisions within the Anglican Church of Canada on the issue of same-sex marriage. They reference the Arctic House of Bishops, some of whom were the most outspoken opponents of the failed marriage canon amendment, who released a statement declaring itself to be in 'impaired communion' with those dioceses of the Church whose bishops had decided to proceed with same-sex marriages based on the 'local option' implicitly permitted by the 2016 Jones memorandum. They maintained that General Synod 'has given us permission to decide for ourselves what direction we should take. We choose now to walk as the self-determining Anglican Church of Canada in the Arctic'. They then clarified this statement by asserting that:

The Diocese of the Arctic remains a diocese within the Anglican Church of Canada but must distance itself from those who violate the marriage canon. The implication of this is a state of 'impaired communion.' By using the phrase 'self-determining,' we are reserving the right not to affirm or submit to decisions that violate the doctrine of the Church on marriage.

According to Michael (2021) the suffragan bishop of the Diocese of the Arctic elaborated on what was meant by 'impaired communion' stressing that 'impaired' communion isn't broken communion; communion that is impaired is wounded, hindered, imperfect'. Another bishop was recorded as saying:

The Anglican General Synod has given us permission as an Indigenous Church to determine what we'll do, and we are exercising that right.... I would be very sad to hear if the Anglican Church of Canada, because we are now exercising that right, did anything to try to kick us out. The problem is, we're not leaving. But we're not following false teachings. (cited in Puddister, 2019b)

While debate on same-sex marriage within the Anglican Church of Canada still engenders vocally the views of both supporters and opponents, most of the controversy surrounding the debate, illustrated by breakaway churches and by legal property challenges, date from before 2010. Since then, blessings and marriages appear to have occurred without large-scale controversy and division. More recently, as reported by Puddister (2022), the Anglican Church of Canada has prepared a set of gender-themed liturgies for trial use, including a blessing on gender transition, that the Church says could be the first of their kind for a national Church in the Anglican Communion. On 6 November 2021 the Council of General Synod (CoGS) voted to commend 'Pastoral Liturgies for Journeys of Gender Transition and Affirmation' for a trial one-year period, where permitted by bishops. Once the liturgies have been trialled and evaluated, they must be presented with a motion at General Synod for authorisation.

### *The Anglican Church in New Zealand*

Although same-sex civil unions had been legal in New Zealand since 2005, it was on 17 April 2013 that the New Zealand government amended the 1955 Marriage Act to legalise same-sex marriage. They were the first country in the Asia-Pacific region to do so and the bill was passed with a 77 to 44 margin (BBC News, 2013). The new law took effect in August 2013 (Citizens Advice Bureau, 2018). For the year ended December 2019, 19,071 marriages and civil unions were registered to New Zealand residents. Of these, 423 (2.2%) were same-sex marriages or civil unions (<https://www.stats.govt.nz/information-releases/marriages-civil-unions-and-divorces-year-ended-december-2019>). For the year ended December 2021, 15,657 marriages and civil unions were registered to New Zealand residents. Of these, 312 (2%) were same-sex marriages or civil unions (<https://www.stats.govt.nz/information-releases/marriages-civil-unions-and-divorces-year-ended-december-2021>). These figures reflect a downward trend in marriages and civil unions within New Zealand since they peaked in 1971.

At the time of the last census, on 30 June 2018, New Zealand's resident population was estimated at 4,900,600 (<https://www.stats.govt.nz/information-releases/estimated-resident-population-2018-base-at-30-june-2018#new>), when approximately 37% of the population identified with Christianity (Nachowitz, 2019). Within the 'Christian' category there were 314,913 self-identified Anglicans (<https://www.stats.govt.nz/news/losing-our-religion/>), making up approximately 6.4% of the country's population. The Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia has three parts: Tikanga Pakeha with seven dioceses making up the European section of the Church; Tikanga Māori with five dioceses; and Tikanga Pasefika which encompasses Fiji, Tonga, Samoa, and the Cook Islands (<https://www.anglican.org.nz/About>). According to ACNS (2018a) the tikangas are cultural and membership is not based on race with individuals able to join churches in whichever tikanga they choose. While unable to locate any records or data detailing membership figures for the Church, it is likely that the number of active Anglican members may be considerably lower than the figures revealed by the census. In a small survey of 1,007 New

Zealanders, that took place around the same time as the census and which explored faith and belief in the country, one in three (33%) identified with Christianity (Catholic or Protestant). Of these just 16% were active churchgoers (attending at least monthly), and only 9% assessed themselves as actively involved in their religion (extremely/significantly involved in practising their religion) (Wilberforce Foundation/McCrandle, 2018).

According to the website of the Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia, the decision to allow blessings for couples in same-gender relationships, made on 9 May 2018, occurred after 'almost 50 years of earnest debate about human sexuality' within the Church (Taonga News, 2018a). While the Church does not permit clergy to conduct a marriage service for same-sex couples, a pathway for blessings has been created. Prior to 2018, several dioceses had shown support for same-sex relationships and clergy involvement in such services was not unknown. According to Davidson (2011) a civil union of a same-sex couple took place in the Diocese of Auckland at the Anglican church of St Matthew-in-the-City in 2005. As Davidson clarified, Anglican clergy were not officially permitted to perform a civil union, but they could do so if they were registered as civil celebrants, and if they acted in a private capacity. Similarly, Sweet (2013) cited the bishop's chaplain in the Anglican Diocese of Waiapu stating that she had, 'started the millennium by blessing a couple of young lesbians on the beach at Camp Bay near Christchurch, because that's how I wanted to start the millennium'. She also revealed that her diocese had 'asked the Church to provide a service, a liturgy, for the blessing of same-sex relationships' (cited in Sweet, 2013).

In November 2011 the Church set up a doctrinal commission (the Ma Whea Commission) to look at the 'biblical and theological work done by our Church on the issues surrounding Christian ethics, human sexuality and the blessing and ordination of people in same sex relationships, including missiological, doctrinal, canonical, cultural and pastoral issues' (<https://www.anglican.org.nz/News/Ma-Whea-Commission-on-Same-Gender-Relationships-Ordination-and-Blessing>). The commission reported to General Synod in 2014 (Fisher, 2014; New Zealand Herald, 2014; Taonga News, 2014). In a resolution (Motion 30) on the issue a further working group was appointed to report to General Synod in 2016. According to Taonga News (2014), the working group would report on 'a process and structure' that would allow those clergy who wished to bless same-sex relationships to do so. This 'process and structure' would include proposals for a liturgy and would also have to ensure that clergy who believed that same-sex blessings were contrary to 'scripture, doctrine, tikanga or civil law' would be free to dissent. The resolution also apologised to the LGBT community, saying the Church had 'too often ... been complicit in homophobic thinking' and had 'failed to speak out against hatred and violence against those with same-gender attraction' (cited in Fisher, 2014). It further noted that the Church was 'acutely aware of the desire of some clergy to make further response pastorally and prayerfully to LGBT people in their faith communities' (cited in Taonga News, 2014). In recognition of this, and aware that the working group would not be reporting for a further two years, the General Synod resolution advised that clergy should be permitted, with approval of their

bishop and vestry, 'to recognise in public worship' same-sex civil unions though such could not 'be marriage or a rite of blessing of a same-gender relationship' (cited in Taonga News, 2014). Thus, civil same-sex marriages could be acknowledged, celebrated, and prayed for but not blessed within churches. An Archbishop, cited in the New Zealand Herald (2014), maintained that the decisions made by the General Synod had been committed to protecting diversity in the Church. He noted that there needed to be recognition of two divergent views including those who held deeply to the view that marriage could only be between a man and a woman, 'we wish to move towards the ability to bless committed same-sex relationships but that we need to find a way in the context of our Church to hold two completely divergent views with their own integrity' (cited in New Zealand Herald, 2014).

In response, the Anglican vicar at St Michael's, Henderson, in the Diocese of Auckland quit the Anglican Church, taking half of his staff and two thirds of the church wardens, in protest over the May 2014 General Synod vote to move ahead with plans to bless same-sex civil unions and in protest over his observation that there were clergy in the diocese already performing same-sex blessings (Anglican Ink, 2014; Fisher, 2014). According to Fisher (2014), the vicar at St Michael's could not reconcile the decision of the Church to recognise same sex relationships with his ordination vows. In his view there was an inconsistency between same-sex relationships and membership of a Christian Church with the Bible explicit in its opposition to sexual acts between people of the same gender. He maintained that this was, 'not because we have a problem with people who are in a same-sex relationship but because of the commitment we have to shaping our lives around the teachings of the Bible' (cited in Fisher, 2014). He chose to join an existing non-episcopal congregation, sharing leadership with the current pastor and with those who left with him amalgamating with the new congregation (Anglican Ink, 2014). The Bishop of Auckland was quoted as acknowledging that there had been 'confusion and even anger' over the Synod vote, but that he respected the vicar's decision and 'accepted the inevitable consequence that his license as vicar must lapse as a result' (cited in Anglican Ink, 2014).

The working group set up in 2014 to explore ways to respond to those couples in same-sex relationships presented its final report, 'A Way Forward', at the General Synod in May 2016. However, at this Synod hopes were dashed that progress would be made on approval for same-sex blessings for couples who had already married, with the decision postponed for a further two years (Collins, 2016). The Synod decided not to adopt a new liturgy for blessing same-sex unions that had been developed over the preceding two years. Instead, it voted to send the issue back to another working group to report back to the next Synod in 2018. While the Synod agreed a motion (Motion 30) to receive with thanksgiving the report and its recommendations and affirmed that at the next meeting of General Synod in 2018 there would be 'a firm expectation that a decision to move forward will be made' (cited in Clarke-Morris, 2016). The 2016 proposals would have authorised new rites of blessing as 'additional formularies' rather than doctrinal changes (ACNS, 2018b). According to Clarke-Morris (2016) it meant that the two proposed formularies (services of blessing)

could not be considered across the wider Church on their first step towards entering canon law. The Synod (Motion 29) recommended a further working group be established and appointed by the three Primates to consider possible structural arrangements within the wider Church that would safeguard different theological convictions concerning the blessing of same-gender relationships (Clarke-Morris, 2016; Collins, 2016; GayNZ, 2016; Wyatt, 2016). It was hoped that such a structure would allow those who held differing convictions about same-sex relationships to remain together in the Church. In a joint statement the three Primates were cited as saying that they were, 'aware of the considerable pain that this decision will cause to those most affected. But we are confident that our determination to work together across our differences will bring us to a place of dignity and justice for everyone' (cited in Clarke-Morris, 2016). As noted by Collins (2016), the motion to take extra time before decision-making was moved jointly by a bishop from the Diocese of Waiapu, which supported the blessing of same-sex relationships, and a theologian from the Diocese of Nelson, which was opposed.

According to Wyatt (2016), between February 2016, when its draft proposals were published, until the Synod decision in May 2016, the report had been 'the subject of fierce debate within the Church'. While the Tikanga Māori and the Tikanga Pasifika of the Church were willing to allow the proposals to go forward, the seven dioceses that made up the Tikanga Pakeha asked for amendments. Two diocesan synods, Christchurch and Nelson, proposed motions that urged the Church to hold back from endorsing any change until it had undertaken a significant period of theological reflection and consultation (Wyatt, 2016). Some in the Church were disappointed that a decision on same-sex blessings had been delayed for a further two years. The minister at St-Matthew-in-the-City in Auckland lamented that the Church had chosen unity over justice, that 'the Synod has allowed the views of 'conservatives' to rule, rather than working for the just inclusion of all faithful people in the life of the Church (cited in Collins, 2016).

However, others were appreciative of the extra time that Motion 29 would give to the debate. A conservative Anglican from Christchurch diocese was quoted as saying that they were 'grateful for the time we now have to put structures in place. And we are grateful that you didn't put us in a position where we felt we had to leave this General Synod' (cited in Clarke-Morris, 2016). An Archdeacon from Nelson diocese commented that for conservatives:

the A Way Forward report left us feeling unprotected in our theological position. The new working group needs to constantly come back to the conservatives, to be sure that the recommendations are acceptable to them, before they bring it back to the next General Synod.... But there is a definite will from the conservatives to look for a way that will protect our integrity and allow us to stay together. (cited in Clarke-Morris, 2016)

According to Anglican Mainstream (2016), it was in response to the passing of Motion 30 at the General Synod in 2014 and the February 2016 release of the 'A Way Forward' report, that proposed the blessing of same-sex civil marriages, that led to nearly 500 Anglicans from around New Zealand, including the vicars of many large churches, to meet in April 2016 (a

month before the 2016 General Synod meeting) to launch the Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans New Zealand (FCANZ) a local expression of the GAFCON movement. According to McKenzie (2020), this conservative evangelical group provided a foundation for a schismatic Church. The Revd Jay Behan, Chair of FCANZ and one of the Fellowships founders urged the General Synod to ‘pull back from making a decision which will tear the fabric of the communion, undermining the allegiance to General Synod for many Anglicans in New Zealand’, and asserted that the Fellowship would, for those unhappy with the trajectory the Church was taking, provide ‘a place for all orthodox Anglicans in New Zealand, whether they are inside or outside the current Anglican structures’ (cited in Anglican Mainstream, 2016).

In due course, on 9 May 2018, the General Synod of the Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia passed a resolution to allow the blessing of same-sex marriages or civil unions (ACANZP, 2018; ACNS, 2018a, 2018b; Taonga News, 2018a, 2018b; Church Times, 2018). The meeting of the General Synod accepted the final report (Motion 29) of the working group set up after the 2016 General Synod and supported in principle the proposed constitutional and canonical changes needed before blessings could be offered, as set out in the report. Motion 29 recommended no change to the Church's official definition of marriage as a union between one man and one woman, but said that individual bishops should be able to use existing canonical provisions to hold ‘a non-formulary service’ allowing for the blessing of same-sex relationships. Specifically, the report recommended that bishops should be able to decide whether to authorise a service of blessing for ‘two people regardless of their sex or sexual orientation’, using provisions already within the province’s canons for ‘a non-formulary service’, while it also reiterated ‘that the Church’s teaching on the nature of marriage is to affirm marriage as between a man and a woman’ (ACANZP, 2018, p.3). Further, the bishops may authorise the use of a blessing in circumstances where the ‘minister has satisfied him or herself that the relationship is loving, monogamous, faithful and the couple are committed to a life-long relationship’ (ACANZP, 2018, p. 21). The resolution also stated that the existing canon should be amended to ensure that members of the clergy would have immunity from complaint either for agreeing to bless such relationships, or for refusing to do so:

if you are a clergy person who is unable to support the blessings of same gender couples, then the canonical changes will ensure that you are not required to participate in such blessings and there will be no disciplinary nor adverse consequences for you declining to be involved. Similarly, if you are a clergy person who is supportive of such blessings or you see this as a social justice issue, then there will be a structure by which such blessings can occur and there will be no disciplinary nor adverse consequences for you conducting a service. (ACANZP, 2018, p. 7)

As detailed by ACNS (2018b) the report also recognised that there might be clergy or ministry units who would wish ‘to leave this Church as a result of the recommendations made in this report’ and urged ‘respectful conversations’ with them.

According to ACNS (2018a) the motion to accept the report from the working group passed by a large majority. In a separate resolution the General Synod noted that churches

in the Diocese of Polynesia would not have to change their practice regarding same-sex blessings (ACNS, 2018a; Taonga News, 2018b). As reported by ACNS (2018a), this separate motion acknowledged that the Pacific Island countries within the diocese, Samoa, Tonga and Fiji did not recognise unions between people of the same gender and accepted that a debate at the Polynesia diocesan synod had shown its members were opposed to the blessing of same-sex relationships. However, although there was opposition to the blessing of same-gender relationships within the Diocese of Polynesia, its members did not wish to 'be an obstacle in the journey of Tikanga Māori and Tikanga Pakeha towards the blessing of same-gender relations in Aotearoa New Zealand' (cited in ACNS, 2018a). Hence, the Diocese of Polynesia abstained from the vote on blessings. The preamble to the resolution noted the 'deep interweaving of cultural and religious values at the core of our Pacific societies that place a profound respect, and reverence for the belief in God and the belief in the traditional understanding of marriage' (cited in Taonga News, 2018b).

In response to the General Synod vote approving the blessing of same-gender relationships, the Secretary General of the Anglican Communion, Dr Josiah Idowu-Fearon was quoted as saying:

The Anglican Communion is a family of autonomous but interdependent Churches. It is the formal view in the Communion that marriage is the lifelong union of a man and a woman, and I am heartened that this resolution means there is no change in the central teaching on marriage in the province of Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia. There has been a long, prayerful process in the province in reaching this point with deeply held convictions on both sides of the debate. I hope and believe that this resolution recognised that difference without division is possible. (cited in ACNS, 2018a)

While the General Synod of the Church had voted to allow blessings for same-sex couples, it was made clear that clergy could not officiate at same-sex wedding services in church. Davison (2019) cited the vicar at St Matthews-in-the-City drawing attention to the fact that Anglican leaders had warned that anyone breaking the Church's rules would lose their marriage licence and possibly their job, 'the bishops have been relatively clear that is what would happen if they were made aware of it,' she was quoted as saying.

The vote to approve same-sex blessings, while retaining marriage for opposite-sex couples, was an attempt to reach compromise on a divisive issue. For those Anglicans in New Zealand who disapproved of the move within the wider province to allow same-sex blessings, however, the action had failed. They disagreed with the outcome and were not prepared to compromise on the issue, even though ministers could choose whether to conduct same sex blessings. According to ACNS (2018a), after the vote to approve same-sex blessings, the Church itself noted sadness, 'that despite the best efforts of the Motion 29 working group, some have said they can no longer stay in the Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia'. As reported by the Church Times (2018), after the Synod vote, two members of the Synod including the Revd Jay Behan announced their immediate resignations in a letter stating that the passing of the report 'finds us left behind and unable to move forward with you in good conscience. We leave with no anger or bitterness in our

hearts, and we wish you the best as you seek to serve the Lord Jesus Christ' (cited in Church Times, 2018). Subsequently, the parish in Christchurch led by the Revd Jay Behan, together with three other parishes in the diocese, decided to disaffiliate from the Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia, along with eight ministers who resigned their posts (Gates, 2018; McKenzie, 2020). As reported by Gates (2018), it was estimated that the new church would have a congregation of about 1000 people. He cited Behan disputing that the new Church was 'an angry group of conservatives', but was rather, the outcome of an issue of conscience based on the authority of the Bible, stating that the decision, 'has changed the teaching of our Church and the practice of our Church. Some people are fine with that, but for some there is a real issue of conscience'. In contrast, however, the vicar at St Matthew-in-the-City in Auckland rejected the strict interpretation of the Bible held by those opposing the blessing of same-sex relationships, maintaining that references to homosexual activity in the Bible were written in a different time and place, with no relation to modern understandings of sexuality. She stated that she would, 'argue that there is nothing in the Bible that we in our modern understanding would think of as same-sex relationships. The scriptures don't give us guidance on that. But they do give lots of guidance on inclusion, love and understanding' (cited in Gates, 2018). According to the report by Gates (2018), as well as finding a new space in which to worship, the new church was to be funded by the congregation, and there were plans to appoint a bishop, although the difficult decision of choosing a new name had not been addressed. Gates reported Behan as claiming that the schism had been civilised and polite in contrast to what had occurred in North America where it had been chaos with legal disputes and arguments. However, according to McKenzie (2020), consciously or not, Behan had been preparing for the split for years as evidenced by his actions after the General Synod decision in 2014 to consider same-sex blessings when he helped to found Aotearoa's branch of the Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans. Moreover, according to Douglass (2022), while Behan had intimated that the new church would 'voluntarily' walk away from their current buildings without entering into legal disputes or battles, Professor Peter Lineham, a historian of the New Zealand Church, had brought to light that the New Zealand Church's legal structure was already clear on this matter when he disclosed that Anglican church buildings did not belong to local congregations, but were held in trust for the diocese.

Another church split, this time when a parish in the Diocese of Dunedin voted by a majority to leave the Anglican Church over the decision to allow blessings of same-sex relationships, was reported in the New Zealand Herald (2019). According to the vicar, the decision to bless gay marriage had set a path he could not follow. His new church, the Hope Church, described itself as a 'biblical, vibrant and missional expression of Christianity. We are Anglican in character and align with the majority of Anglicans around the globe' (cited in New Zealand Herald, 2019).

In due course, and after months of unsuccessful negotiations between Behan and the Anglican Church over alternatives, the Anglican Church in New Zealand officially fractured when a new independent diocese was created and 12 conservative Anglican

parishes across New Zealand seceded and formed a new GAFCON affiliated Church (Christian Today, 2019; Gates, 2018; McKenzie, 2020). The new Church named the Church of Confessing Anglicans (CCA) proclaimed that, ‘...we are a new Anglican diocese in these Islands, standing firmly in Anglican faith and practice, and structurally distinct from the Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia’ (cited in Christian today, 2019). The new Church elected the Revd Jay Behan as their first bishop.

According to McKenzie (2020), in the two years following the 2018 vote, the dispute had ‘polarised hundreds of thousands of Anglicans’ and ‘broken apart congregations’. However, he maintained that schism was not inevitable noting how the debate had been most tempestuous in 2016 when the dioceses of Nelson and Christchurch had both threatened schism in response to the proposals being considered. At that time, the Archbishop of the Tikanga Pakeha had believed they were facing ‘the breakaway of tens of thousands of Anglicans’. However, according to McKenzie (2020), compromises and consultation had soothed the fractiousness. Moreover, the 2018 reforms only allowed local bishops to decide whether to permit blessings in their area. In view of the concessions made, he posited, that the belief of some in the Church was that schism only occurred because of Australian interference and meddling, in particular the influence of the conservative Diocese of Sydney. As evidence of this, he drew attention to the influence of the Diocese of Sydney within the Church of Confessing Anglicans, noting how many of its clergy lived, were educated, or worked in Sydney. After appraising the views of church leaders and academics on this argument, he concluded that it was ‘an open question whether the Church of Confessing Anglicans would have chosen to schism without the influential conservative evangelicals across the Tasman urging them to do so’. According to McKenzie (2020), the schism’s most significant impact:

was the raw pain it caused for grassroots congregations. Local churches were thrown into stinging debates over whether to schism. As they emerged from these discussions, few congregations were unanimous. Churches which broke away often had to leave behind substantial minorities of parishioners; churches which remained, particularly at the schism’s epicentre in Christchurch, faced exoduses.

However, expressing a sense of realism, McKenzie (2020) also cited the view of James Harding (an Anglican priest in Dunedin and senior lecturer in theology at Otago University) and his reflection that:

If there is one saving grace about the situation, it is that ACANZP on the one hand, and the Church of Confessing Anglicans on the other, no longer have to put such an enormous amount of effort into dealing with the issue of same-sex blessings. Synod has made its decision and it had the consequences it did.

More recently, in an alternative perspective, Douglass (2022) questioned the extent of the Anglican division in New Zealand. He noted how the most affected area was the Diocese of Christchurch, where the Revd Jay Behan was a parish priest and where three parishes associated with the Church of Confessing Anglicans had been established. He too cited Professor Peter Lineham (a historian of the New Zealand church, a member of both Anglican

and Baptist churches, and a gay man), who claimed that the decision to bless same sex-relationships had had little effect on the wider community and that such blessings were rare, 'the LGBT community is not that impressed by the ... very, very cautious tiptoeing into the water. And how many blessings have been conducted of same sex marriages? I would say virtually none'. While Douglass (2022), acknowledged that the Church of Confessing Anglicans had gathered 17 congregations, Professor Lineham was cited as describing this as 'a very limited impact' when New Zealand is considered as a nation of 5 million people and about 500 Anglican congregations.

At the 2018 General Synod the passing of another motion (Motion 7) had offered a compromise to parishes that opposed same-sex blessings by facilitating provision to establish a 'Christian Community' within the Church (Douglass, 2022; Taonga News, 2020). The Anglican Community of St Mark (ACM) was officially launched on 6 November 2020 'to support, nurture and protect conservative Anglican parishes' (Taonga News, 2020). Parishes were permitted to join this community if two-thirds of the congregation had voted to do so. At a parish in Christchurch 88% had voted to join (Taonga News, 2020). Such parishes could refrain from same-sex blessings. According to Douglass (2022), the website of the Anglican Community of St Mark claimed to represent '1,300 individual Anglican Christians and nine parishes across New Zealand, from Auckland to Dunedin'. The Chair of the Community (who was also a vicar at a parish in Auckland) explained his hope that fellow Anglicans would come to understand how the new Community contributes positively to the goal of 'unity with integrity' in the Church:

Our desire is to hold the Church together, because with it we are stronger. We are expressing our different way of being the Church, which always has Christ at the centre. (cited in Taonga News, 2020)

Douglass (2022) suggested that the reach of the Anglican Community of St Mark, like breakaway churches joining the Church of Confessing Anglicans, might not be as significant as first thought. He illustrated this again with evidence from Professor Lineham and his observation that some strongly evangelical parishes that might have been expected to join this Community had declined to do so because they had LGBT members. Lineham suggested that this might be linked to evangelicalism becoming more mainstream in the ACANZP and referencing the evangelical leadership of the archbishop overseeing the Tikanga Māori. No churches in that tikanga had affiliated with the either the Confessing Church or the Community of St Mark.

The debate on the issue of same-sex marriage may continue within the Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia, but the church in 2018 expressed its wish that this would, for the foreseeable future, take place informally:

We submit this report in the hope that the structural changes proposed will allow the opportunity for faithful Anglicans to remain engaged in an ongoing fair and robust debate on human sexuality in this Church, without that debate occupying formal time at Synods and GSTHW for some years, and at the same time accomplish a balance along the theological spectrum, between those who wish

to conduct the blessings of relationships and those who do not. (ACANZP, 2018, p. 16)

### *The Anglican Church of Australia*

On 9 December 2017, the Australian government granted same-sex couples the right to marry when the Marriage Act 1961 was updated to allow for marriage equality. By redefining marriage as 'the union of 2 people to the exclusion of all others, voluntarily entered into for life', the right to marry in Australia would no longer be determined by sex or gender (<https://www.ag.gov.au/families-and-marriage/marriage/marriage-equality-australia>). The change in Australian law came after a national postal survey in which over 60% of the electorate voted in favour of marriage equality. In the government vote that followed, all but three MPs voted to legalise same-sex marriage although some, including the then current prime minister, abstained from the vote (Taylor, 2020). From 2018 to 2020, 14,947 same-sex couples in Australia had married, with the proportion of same-sex marriages recorded as 5.5% in 2018, 4.8% in 2019, and 3.7% in 2020 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2020).

On 31 March 2022, Australia's population was estimated at 25,890,773 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022a). According to the website of the World Council of Churches, the Anglican Church of Australia has 3,881,000 members (<https://www.oikoumene.org/member-churches/anglican-church-of-australia>). However, this would appear to be an outdated estimate. According to the 2021 Australian Census, from 2016 to 2021, exploration of the changes in reported religion showed that Anglican affiliation had the largest drop in number of all religious denominations, from 3.1 million to 2.5 million people. This was a decrease of nearly one in five Anglicans (19.5%), from 13.3% to 9.8% of the population. The average age of people with an Anglican affiliation in 2021 was 56 years, compared with 47 years for Christians overall (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022b). Previously, Muñoz (2015, p. 88), drawing on data reported in 2001 within both the National Church Life Survey and the National Census, claimed that only one-tenth of the 4,865,328 self-identifying Anglicans in Australia were also active churchgoers (437,880).<sup>5</sup> However, the not insignificant size of the Church can be discerned from the *Anglican Church of Australia Directory 2020 -2021* which details the 4300 clergy, 1200 parishes, 23 dioceses and 300 organisations associated with the Anglican Church in Australia (Reilly, 2021).

Marriage in the Anglican Church of Australia, to date, remains restricted to that between a man and a woman. The National Church has not yet voted to allow same-sex marriage with the Church's General Synod voting repeatedly to hold to a traditional view of

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<sup>5</sup> On 6 October 2022, an online contact form was submitted to The Anglican Church of Australia, National Church Information (<https://anglican.org.au/contact-us/>), requesting a more up to date figure for active Anglican church membership. The response was that this information would have to be obtained individually from each of the 23 dioceses (this was outside of the scope of the current data collection and analysis).

marriage. The question as to whether civil same-sex marriages should be permitted to be blessed in an Anglican church service has generated much disagreement within the Church over many years.

Pre-dating the 2017 Australian government decision to approve civil same-sex marriage, in 2013, the Synod of the Diocese of Perth voted to recognise same-sex relationships. The clergy and laity of the Synod voted by a two-thirds majority in favour of legal acknowledgement of the civil unions of same-sex couples (ABC News, 2013). The motion needed the support of the Archbishop of Perth before it could be officially adopted. However, as reported by O’Keefe (2013), the archbishop dissented from that vote and rejected the motion passed by the Synod to recognise formally same-sex relationships. Explaining why he did so, he drew attention to the fact that civil same-sex marriage had not yet been sanctioned within Australia. He was quoted as saying that ‘at the moment in Australia, at the Commonwealth and at the State level, we do not have a legal recognition of committed same-sex relationships’ (O’Keefe, 2013). Despite this, there was evidence that in Perth a blessing of a same-sex couple had taken place even before civil same-sex marriage was approved. Moodie (2016) reports on an Anglican priest who in April 2016, in a parish in Subiaco, Perth, blessed a lesbian couples union at a church ceremony. They were officially married two days later at the British consulate in Perth, which they were able to do because one of the couple had dual citizenship. Their marriage was not recognised within Australia. According to Sandeman (2021), such practice was not unusual with ‘unofficial blessings’ having occurred in the Diocese of Perth for some years.

On 7 September 2017 the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Australia reiterated its traditional view of marriage when it adopted a resolution, *Marriage, Same-Sex Marriage and the Blessing of Same-Sex Relationships*, that stated, ‘the doctrine of our Church, in line with traditional Christian teaching, is that marriage is an exclusive and lifelong union of a man and a woman’ (p.10). The 2017 General Synod also passed a resolution that admonished the decision of the Scottish Episcopal Church to amend their Canon on Marriage by adding a new section that allowed clergy to solemnise marriage between same-sex couples, noting with regret that the step was contrary to the doctrine of the Church, expressing support for those Anglicans who might leave the Scottish Episcopal Church, and praying that the Scottish Episcopal Church would return to the doctrine of Christ in the matter and that impaired relationships would be restored (p. 4) (see: <https://anglican.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Resolutions-of-GS17-For-Dioceses-with-SP.pdf>).

In March 2018 the Anglican Church of Australia’s response to the passing of civil same-sex marriage legislation in Australia was decided at the bishops’ annual meeting in Canberra. Here the bishops declared that it was not ‘appropriate’ for same-sex weddings to take place on Anglican church property, given the Church’s doctrine of marriage as being between a man and a woman. (Porter, 2018a). As outlined by Porter (2018a), the resolution effectively barred Anglican clergy from any involvement with same-sex weddings, although there was agreement to give ‘further consideration’ to three concerns: the appropriate

content of informal prayer for same-sex couples outside a public service; exploration of the difference between blessing and solemnising a marriage; and to issues involved in Anglican officials' being present at a same-sex marriage or blessing.

While the Church's General Synod may have repeatedly held to the traditional view of marriage, some individual church synods were expressing support for same-sex marriage blessings. In October 2018 the Synod of the Diocese of Ballarat passed a motion supporting same-sex marriage. According to Ould (2018a), the motion: affirmed that all people be accorded equal dignity regardless of their sexuality or gender; acknowledged the reality of the change in Australian marriage law to include same-sex couples; commended the pastoral value of a Form of Blessing of a Marriage for optional use within the Diocese of Ballarat; and asked the Bishop of Ballarat to authorise such a liturgy as soon as practicable. In response, the Bishop of Ballarat decided not to authorise such a liturgy while qualifying that it was:

important to understand that this proposal is not a change in our Church's doctrine of marriage, but rather a pastoral response to same gender attracted people in our churches who choose to contract a civil marriage. No doubt there will be further discussion about this and other matters concerning human sexuality in the years ahead. (cited in Ould, 2018b).

According to Ould (2018a), authorisation of a same-sex marriage blessing would have set the bishop against the vast majority of the Anglican Church of Australia, and his fellow bishops.

Following the Diocese of Ballarat, in 2019, the Diocese of Wangaratta and the Diocese of Newcastle voted in favour of blessing couples married in civil ceremonies. The vote in the Diocese of Wangaratta in Victoria permitted priests officially to bless same-sex couples who had already married, making it the first Australian diocese to do so (Jacobs, 2020; Ortolan, 2019; Porter, 2018b; Porter, 2019). The vote taken among the laity and clergy was passed by a majority of 78% (67 in favour to 18 against) (Ortolan, 2019; Porter, 2019). As explained by Porter (2019), the regulation did not specifically refer to same-sex marriages. Instead, it provided for 'persons married according to the Marriage Act 1961' the Australian government marriage act that was amended in 2017 to provide for same-sex marriage. The regulation included a prescribed liturgy for the service, but ministers were not compelled to conduct a marriage blessing 'if to do so would offend their conscience'. If they refused, they were also not compelled to refer couples to another minister. According to Ould (2022), the proposed service did not bless the marriage, but the individuals in it.

The response of the Bishop of Wangaratta, the Rt Revd John Parkes, who proposed the motion was reported by Ortolan (2019) and Porter (2019). According to Ortolan (2019), Bishop Parkes described the moment the vote was revealed as one of 'restrained joy', further adding that it was, 'a long overdue recognition that if God is love, and faithful persons are living together in love, then the Church ought to bless those persons in the name of God'. Porter (2019) expanded further the bishop's justification for his position when he advised the Synod that there was, 'no legal or theological reason for our not

proceeding ... the Bible, properly and critically read ... formative factors in theology . . . leads inextricably to the conclusion that loving monogamous faithful Christian persons ought to receive the blessing of God in their church to strengthen them for their lives as disciples’.

In contrast there were those who condemned the decision taken in the Diocese of Wangaratta. The Archbishop of Sydney said that the move would:

fracture the Anglican Church of Australia.... The doctrine of our Church is not determined by 67 members of a regional synod in Victoria, nor is it changed by what they may purport to authorise. (cited in Porter, 2019)

Similarly, evangelical Christians in the Anglican Church League stated that the vote would cause a national ‘crisis’ in the church (Ortolan, 2019).

It was planned that the first same-sex blessing service in Wangaratta would take place a couple of weeks after the Synod vote. However, this was postponed when the Archbishop of Melbourne referred the matter to the Australian Church’s highest court, the Appellate Tribunal. The archbishop wanted to see if the proposed blessing conformed to the basic principles of the national Church’s constitution and asked that the liturgy not be used while the tribunal deliberated (Ortolan, 2019; Porter, 2019, 2020). According to Jacobs (2020), the Bishop of Wangaratta, the Rt Revd John Parkes conducted a service of prayer and thanksgiving for the couple (two priests in a civil marriage) instead.

Following the decision in Wangaratta, in October 2019, the Synod of the Diocese of Newcastle voted in favour of two bills: one permitting the blessing of same-sex couples by allowing ministers to bless those married according to the Marriage Act, and the other preventing a cleric from being disciplined for choosing to participate or not participate in a same-sex marriage blessing. The same form of service for the blessing as approved by Wangaratta was to be used and no minister was to be forced to conduct such a service if it went against their conscience (McNab, 2019; Porter, 2020). As in Wangaratta, the bills passed by the Newcastle Synod were to be considered by the Appellate Tribunal and no changes were to be made until its ruling.

The outcome of the Appellate Tribunal decision was made on 11 November 2020 and was widely reported (Jacobs, 2020; Koziol, 2020; Lee & Porter, 2020; Porter, 2020; Sandeman, 2020; Taylor, 2020). The tribunal voted five-to-one in favour of the blessing of same-sex marriages. While priests would still not be allowed to officiate at same-sex marriages, they would be able to bless couples already married under civil law. It was to be left to each diocese as to whether they would pass local rules to permit such blessings (Koziol, 2020). According to Jacobs (2020), the decision was made on the grounds that there was nothing in scriptural teachings preventing clergy from blessing those married under civil law. The Appellate Tribunal ruled that:

Wangaratta Diocese’s proposed service for the blessing of persons married in accordance with the Marriage Act does not entail the solemnisation of marriage; is authorised by the Canon Concerning Services 1992; and is not inconsistent with the Fundamental Declarations and Ruling Principles of the Constitution of the Church. (Sandeman, 2020)

Further, in reference to the bill proposed by the Diocese of Newcastle and to whether it could protect its clergy from any discipline for performing same-sex blessings, the tribunal stated that the diocese had:

authority to amend its own diocesan clergy discipline regime in relation to clergy who bless or are party to a same-sex marriage.... this would not affect the constitutional jurisdiction of diocesan tribunals to determine charges for offences created by the Constitution of the Anglican Church of Australia or by any Canon of the General Synod that is in force in the Diocese. (cited in Porter, 2020)

Reporting on the landmark decision, Davies (2020) noted the tribunal's view that the blessing of same-sex marriages did 'not necessarily involve denial of God', and that marriage equality in Australia showed the 'evolving social and legal environment within Australian society where the Church exercises its mission'.

According to Lee and Porter (2020), the bishops of all the Australian dioceses then held rapid virtual meetings to review the tribunal decision, and it was expected, in the interests of church unity, that they would decree no blessings should go ahead. However, they report that the bishops urged clergy to consider carefully, 'whether or how to bless those married according to the Marriage Act'. According to Lee and Porter (2020), the Australian bishops had officially recognised that blessings could now go ahead. As stated by Sandeman (2021), the tribunal's ruling that dioceses could authorise same-sex blessings gave rise to the possibility that the national Anglican Church might have one doctrine (one-man-one-woman marriage as expressed in its prayerbook), and its regional expressions might adopt another. For Sandeman (2021) this would not be incongruous with him writing that 'Australian Anglicans are different from every other Anglican Church in the world. Its dioceses have a lot of freedom to be different – the national Church has little power. That's why we have conservative Sydney and progressive Perth'.

Subsequent to the tribunal ruling, the Dean of Brisbane announced that same-sex blessings would be allowed at St John's Cathedral in Brisbane (Ould, 2022). The former bishop in Wangaratta, The Rt Revd John Parkes, while recognising that the Church's position on the marriage of same-sex couples was unlikely to change, acknowledged that blessings were a step in the right direction and was quoted as saying:

I am highly delighted for same-sex couples who love each other and are faithful to each other and who, for a long time, have been on the fringes of the Church. This, I hope, is a sign that God loves you and we welcome you... there are many dioceses that want to look behind the words and consider the circumstances in which scriptures were written. The contemporary theological perspective says God's love and God's acceptance is the paramount virtue. (cited in Jacobs, 2020)

Not all reactions to the tribunal decision were favourable (Davies, 2020; Foster, 2022; Koziol, 2020; and Tong, Smith & Leite, 2022). The Anglican Archbishop of Sydney criticised the tribunal vote to allow the blessing of same-sex marriages, calling it 'the blessing of sin':

the teaching of the Bible, and therefore of the Anglican Church, was that the sexual union of two persons of the same gender was sin ... is contrary to the

teaching of the Bible ... undermines the clear teaching of Scripture and thereby dishonours God. (Davies, 2020)

In a further statement, the same archbishop was quoted as stating that it was untenable to have some clergy providing blessings to same-sex couples while others did not. He said that 'it would be naive to think that mutually contradictory views on same-sex marriage can co-exist within our national Church.... To pursue this course will not bring healing but will only lead to a collapse in the fellowship that binds us together' (cited in Koziol, 2020).

Another bishop highlighted inconsistency with the issue of clergy discipline, maintaining that it was not feasible that clergy in one diocese might be permitted to bless same-sex marriages while clergy in another diocese could be disciplined for doing so:

there will be different versions of the Anglican Church of Australia, which have nothing in common except the name.... While some might applaud the judicial innovation of the Appellate Tribunal for finding a way to enable an already fractured church to remain together, they have in fact entrenched separation and division. This decision has destroyed the rationale for a national Church. (cited in Koziol, 2020)

According to Lee and Porter (2020), the Appellate Tribunal decision, for some, provided a grave threat to Anglican Australians, 'it could mean at the least sharp disagreement and at worst, damaging disunity'. In a legally focused response to the decision of the tribunal to approve the Wangaratta blessing service, Foster (2022) concluded:

that as a matter of internal Anglican doctrine, the decision is contrary to the 'doctrine of the Church', which finds its ultimate source in the Bible. The Majority Opinion takes a too narrow view of the word 'doctrine'. I suggest that this may have consequences outside the Church: unfortunately the narrow view taken by the Majority Opinion of the Appellate Tribunal may encourage a narrow view of the word to be taken by [secular] courts in the future, with the result that clauses protecting religious freedom may be unduly read down.

Likewise, Tong, Smith, and Leite (2022), in a publication titled *The Line in the Sand: The Appellate Tribunal opinion and the future of the Anglican Church in Australia*, present analyses and opinion on the legal decision related to canon law and the blessing of same sex marriages. Though this book gives space to writers expressing both the majority and minority position on biblical, legal, theological, pastoral and international considerations, its marketing material is prefaced with the statement that the volume of essays 'is published in the hope that all Australian Anglicans and especially members of General Synod will be equipped and encouraged to hold fast to the historic Christian teaching about marriage and to hold out the pure gospel of God's grace in Christ to all people' (<https://acl.asn.au/lits/>).

The opposing member of the six-person Appellate Tribunal who voted against the majority view was a Sydney lawyer and Sydney representative on the General Synod (Lee & Porter, 2020; Porter, 2020). The influence of the Diocese of Sydney in the same-sex marriage debate warrants further discussion with its strong and influential conservative position outlined by several writers. During the same-sex civil marriage debate in 2017, the Diocese of Sydney contributed one million Australian dollars to the 'no' campaign.

According to Lee and Porter (2020) this was because 'Sydney and its conservative allies condemn same-sex relationships as sinful and bound for hell-fire'. After the Diocese of Wangaratta voted to approve a service for same-sex blessings, the Archbishop of Sydney, in an address to the Sydney Diocesan Synod in October 2019, told Anglican supporters of same-sex marriage they should leave the Church. According to McNab (2019), he argued that those who wished to change the doctrine of the Church, should start a new Church or join a Church more aligned to their views, rather than 'ruin' the Anglican Church by abandoning the teaching of scripture. Discussing the Archbishop's criticism, the former Bishop of Wangaratta who pushed through the initial vote was quoted as saying that some dioceses, 'Sydney among them', take a 'very literal view' of Scripture (cited in Davies, 2020).

After the Appellate Tribunal ruling, it was reported that the decision would be likely to 'ignite controversy in conservative sections of the Anglican Church of Australia, principally the Diocese of Sydney, which is vehement in its opposition to same-sex relationships' (Porter, 2020). According to Koziol (2020), after the ruling, the Diocese of Sydney told its leadership that the Church was, 'on a trajectory towards disintegration' over the decision to allow the blessing of same-sex unions. As stated by Porter (2020), the majority members of the Appellate Tribunal alluded to this when they noted that, 'the Tribunal has been confronted with deciding on behalf of a divided Church strictly legal matters that will affect authoritatively the future choices for prayerful further action by synods, bishops, clergy and lay people'. There was a fear that, once some clergy went ahead and blessed same-sex marriages, a major rift in the national Church might be opened, with the Diocese of Sydney, in particular, pushing for some form of division. In expressing an element of forewarning, Lee and Porter (2020) note that Sydney, as the largest diocese in Australia:

would not countenance being part of an offshoot Church. It would want to establish itself as the 'true' Anglican Church in this country, laying claim to the name and status. It would draw other conservative dioceses into its boundaries, and possibly even parishes and individuals from within progressive dioceses. Progressive dioceses might be forced to abandon the national church structure and be left impoverished. The battle over this issue, and who owns the name and church property, could well tie up lawyers and civil courts for years to come. Such a split would also further diminish Anglicanism as a voice for justice and equality in Australian society.

However, in also expressing cautious optimism, Lee and Porter (2020) maintained that such a split might not be inevitable, suggesting that church leaders would have to work hard to find a way to prevent it, 'while allowing conservative and progressive forms of Anglicanism to flourish side-by-side, with mutual respect', and pointing out that:

an amicable agreement might yet be possible across the Australian Church, because there is already considerable diversity among the dioceses on numerous issues, such as women as priests and bishops, the submission of wives to husbands, and the remarriage of divorced persons. (Lee & Porter, 2020)

In contrast, Sandeman (2021) pointed out that, after the tribunal ruling, the local branch of GAFCON, a worldwide network of conservative Anglicans, started to prepare a structure to

receive Australian Anglicans who would want to leave dioceses that chose to bless same-sex marriages. According to Sandeman (2021), Archbishop Geoffrey Smith, Primate of the Anglican Church of Australia, tried to contain the dispute within the official Church by writing to bishops a letter that appeared to be an appeal to conservatives. In his letter to bishops, he stated that, 'there has not been a flood of same-sex blessings following the Appellate Tribunal opinion. Not a flood, not a trickle. Not a drip' and went on to argue that 'we need to be clear that the opinion of the Appellate Tribunal has not changed the doctrine of the Anglican Church of Australia. The Appellate Tribunal can't change the doctrine of anything' (cited in Sandeman, 2021). Porter (2022b) also reported that only two public blessings of same-sex marriages had occurred since the Appellate Tribunal had ruled that such services were acceptable in terms of the church constitution. She quoted the Bishop of Ballarat, at the General Synod in May 2022, noting that, 'it's hardly been a tsunami'.

Growing disunity in the Church was, however, exposed at the May 2022 General Synod when the Diocese of Sydney tried to impose its opposing same-sex marriage agenda nationally, but was thwarted when the bishops refused to endorse the Sydney position against same-sex marriage (Porter, 2022b). As detailed by Millard (2022), on 11 May 2022, General Synod considered a resolution introduced by the Archbishop of Sydney asserting that 'the solemnization 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'. The laity and the clergy approved the statement, but the bishops voted against, hence the motion failed. According to Davies (2022), for some this showed that the bishops were out of touch with grassroots Anglicans. Despite this, all was not entirely moving in a progressive direction. The following day, delegates also rejected a resolution that would have approved same-sex marriage. However, as reported by Porter (2022c), the motion praising same-sex marriage as 'a moral good and a gift to be celebrated' had attracted an unexpected 40% level of support despite not being carried (it was lost by 145 votes to 95).

With the General Synod not having carried the motion put forward by the Diocese of Sydney, that same-sex marriage and same-sex blessings were contrary to the teachings of the Church, in September 2022 the Synod of the Diocese of Sydney carried several motions urging changes to the way in which the diocese would interact with the national Church. The Diocese of Sydney declared a 'breach of fellowship' with the Australian Church because it was at odds with the Church on matters of doctrine and human sexuality (Porter, 2022d). The debate around the doctrine of marriage and its potential to cause a split in the Anglican Church of Australia has also been discussed by Ould (2022), who pointed out that, while officially there may have been no change to the doctrine of marriage, the *de facto* effect of the various 2022 debates and votes in General Synod was that those who wished to extend the blessing of marriages to include same-sex couples now deemed them permissible, and, hence, were proceeding as though that were the case. As evidence for this, Ould cites the Bishop of Gippsland who is quoted as stating that there was now 'nothing to stop them'. Likewise, according to Porter (2022b), until General Synod 2022 progressive dioceses may have held back on same-sex marriage blessings in the interest of national Church unity, but

with that looking increasingly impossible, some dioceses might ‘step out confidently to embrace same-sex blessings and other progressive causes, just as they embraced women clergy 30 years ago’. Indeed, in January 2022 the blessing rite authorised by the Diocese of Wangaratta in 2019 was used to bless a same-sex marriage in the Diocese of Armidale in New South Wales (Porter, 2022a). The result, according to Ould (2022), may be ‘that more and more faithful Anglicans who hold to true unchanging doctrine will seek a new home’.

While unhappiness among conservative Anglicans had been expressed for several years, discontent grew further after the Appellate Tribunal ruling in November 2020, and the decision of the General Synod in May 2022 when a majority of bishops vetoed the Diocese of Sydney’s motion affirming that marriage was between a man and a woman. It was in August 2022 that the Anglican Church of Australia formally split. Conservatives who opposed same-sex marriage and same-sex marriage blessings launched a breakaway movement, the Diocese of the Southern Cross in Canberra, led by former Archbishop of Sydney, Glenn Davies (Baker, 2022; Millard, 2022; Porter, 2022d). As outlined by Baker (2022), prior to launching the new diocese, Australian Anglicans opposed to same-sex blessings had to move to another diocese if they disagreed with their bishop. The new Church, it was claimed by Archbishop Davies, would have ‘significant impact’, with him further adding that it would, ‘send shivers down the spines of some bishops in the Anglican Church of Australia’ (cited in Baker, 2022). As explained by Baker (2022), the new Church would not be ‘in communion’ with the Archbishop of Canterbury but instead be aligned with GAFCON. The Australian Primate and Archbishop of Adelaide, the Most Revd Geoffrey Smith, described the diocese as ‘effectively a new denomination’ with ‘no formal or informal relationship or connection with the Anglican Church of Australia’ (cited in Porter, 2022d). To date, the size of the split and how many might join the new Church is unknown. However, as cautioned by Baker (2022), the new Church will have no claim to any existing assets, because within the Anglican Church of Australia such are legally owned by individual dioceses, although there may be tensions over property if entire parishes decide to join the new Church.

### *The Church in Wales*

According to census data taken in March 2021, Wales had a population of 3,107,500 (Roskams, 2022). The latest available Church in Wales data, taken from its 2018 Membership and Finance return, stated that electoral roll membership of the Church was 42,441, thus comprising approximately 1.4% of the total Welsh population (<https://www.churchinwales.org.uk/en/clergy-and-members/membership-and-finance/>). The Church in Wales comprises of six dioceses (St Asaph; Bangor; St Davids; Llandaff; Monmouth; Swansea and Brecon) and over 380 parishes which may contain one or more churches (<https://www.churchinwales.org.uk/en/about-us/structure/>).

Between 2013 and 2014, around the same time as the government of England and Wales was legislating to allow marriage between same-sex couples, the Standing Doctrinal Commission of the Church in Wales undertook to examine the issue of same-sex

relationships. The final report was designed to enable discussion by the Governing Body (Sedgwick, 2014). The report set out the history of marriage in the West from Roman times until the civil legalisation of same-sex marriage in England and Wales in 2013. It included a section on the issues concerning same-sex partnerships raised by science, and then offered three options for the Church in Wales to discuss and consider: a restatement of the traditional position, that marriage is only between a man and a woman (paragraphs 56-77); the blessing of same-sex partnerships (paragraphs 78-102); and the provision for marriage between a couple irrespective of sexual difference (paragraphs 103-136). The report ended with an emphasis on what a pastoral response would look like and there was emphasis on 'pastoral accommodation' proposing that the Church 'offer an unconditional hospitality to those with whose practice or prohibition we might instinctively disagree' (paragraph 149).

Following the report, in 2015, a secret ballot among the Church in Wales Governing Body revealed that 61 out of 120 members were in favour of allowing clergy to celebrate same-sex marriage in their churches, while 50 voted for no change and nine voted to allow blessings (BBC News, 2015; Gledhill, 2015). For such a change to have taken effect, a formal bill would have been presented to the governing body and a two-thirds majority would have been needed to change the marriage canon. Nonetheless, this was an important show of support for same-sex marriage. In response the Archbishop of Wales at that time, Dr Barry Morgan, cautioned that, 'it would be a very brave or perhaps a very foolish Bench of Bishops who were to bring the bill before the Governing Body at this stage.... Because that might just rip the church apart and lead to the acrimony that has been absent from this debate' (cited in BBC News, 2015). The Bench of Bishops did, however, approve two forms of 'Prayers that may be said with a couple following the Celebration of a Civil Partnership or Civil Marriage' (The text for these can be located on the Church in Wales website using the search facility <https://www.churchinwales.org.uk/en/search/>).

Discussion of same-sex marriage within the Church in Wales continued to progress. On 7 September 2021, following approval by the Governing Body, a 'Liturgy for the Blessing of a Same-sex Civil Marriage or Civil Partnership' was authorised by the bishops for use in each diocese from 1 October 2021 (<https://www.churchinwales.org.uk/en/faith/what-we-believe/same-sex-marriage/>). The vote was passed by a two-thirds majority in each of the three orders (bishops, clergy, and laity). The bishops passed the Bill unanimously, the clergy by 28 to 12 with two abstentions, and the laity by 49 to 10 with one abstention (Ashworth, 2021; Morrell, 2021). The blessing of same-sex relationships would be experimental for a five-year period, and a conscience clause would allow individual clergy to decide whether to offer such blessings or to choose not to do so. It would remain that same-sex marriages could not be solemnised by the Church in Wales. The liturgical text for the approved services of blessing gave couples two options: at the discretion of the minister, a repeat of promises made at a marriage/civil partnership ceremony, or a new Act of Commitment inviting couples to renew their commitment to one another before God and the Church (<https://www.churchinwales.org.uk/en/publications/liturgy/same-sex-civil-marriage-or-civil-partnership-blessing/>).

According to Sherwood (2021), the historic move by the Church in Wales put it at odds with the Church of England, which continued to forbid the practice. Sherwood quoted the response of Jayne Ozanne, a campaigner for LGBT+ equality in the Church of England who said:

I yearn for the day when the Church of England has the courage to make the same step. If we want all in our care to flourish and thrive, and for our churches to grow, we must learn to embrace diversity and be known as people who practise what we preach. Love is love, and where this is found between two adults it is something that should be celebrated and blessed. (cited in Sherwood, 2021)

The details of the main debate on the Bill (that took three-and-a-half hours with 31 speakers) were reported by Ashworth (2021). Some speakers were in support of the Bill, and some were opposed. Among those opposed were some who felt the Bill did not go far enough and who felt it was merely avoiding the issue of same-sex marriage, with one speaker suggesting that a blessing was rather like ‘a consolation prize rather than full marriage in church’. Several clergy acknowledged the struggles they had experienced on the issue.

Responding to the positive outcome of the vote, the Bishop of St Asaph, Gregory Cameron, who introduced the Bill, was quoted as saying that he came, ‘out of this debate with no sense of triumph but believing that the Church in Wales has done the right thing under God for the LGBTQIA+ community’ (cited in Morrell, 2021). In another report Gregory Cameron was quoted as saying that he hoped the decision would lead the Welsh Church to embrace sex-same marriage within five years, ‘I think it’s the hope of the bishops that within those five years, we’ll be able to come to a consensus on [same-sex] marriage’ (cited in Sherwood, 2021). Following this approval of same-sex blessings, the civil partnership of a priest, Father Lee Taylor, and his partner was blessed in a service in Llangollen, Denbighshire, led by Bishop Cameron on 13 November 2021. It was believed to be the first such service in the Church in Wales and Father Taylor was quoted as saying that it was, ‘a landmark and a really big step – a time to rejoice’ (cited in Farley, 2021).

A positive stance towards same-sex marriage continued with the appointment of the Rt Revd Andrew John as Wales new archbishop in December 2021 (Church Times, 2021; Ali, 2022). The archbishop was quoted as saying that the Church in Wales should ‘welcome people, where they are, who they are’. Reflecting the same view as Bishop Cameron, the archbishop stated that he ‘wouldn't be surprised if, within the five-year experimental period, ‘we were once again talking about the marriage of same-sex couples’ (Ali, 2022). As the Church Times (2021) pointed out, although coming from an Evangelical background, the archbishop had embraced elements of other church traditions including supporting the move to allow same-sex couples to have their civil marriages and partnerships blessed in church. Here the archbishop was quoted as saying, ‘I think this will make us . . . a Church that provides space for people who demonstrate by their lives that they can be wonderful disciples of Jesus Christ when they want to live in love with a person of the same sex’ (Church Times, 2021).

As blessings for same-sex couples were only introduced by the Church in Wales in September 2021, reports on any individual churches choosing to split from the Church could not be located. The only critical reaction found was the response of the Evangelical Fellowship in the Church in Wales (EFCW) detailed on its website (<https://eng.efcw.org.uk/gb-meeting-6th-sept-full-response/>) and supported by GAFCON (see Lines, 2018), who stated that it was absolutely correct of the EFCW to warn of the serious implications of the Welsh Bishops' plan to push ahead with sanctioning services of blessing for same-sex relationships. In its statement the EFCW said that it deeply regretted the decision of the Governing Body of the Church in Wales to authorise a liturgy to bless same-sex civil marriages and partnerships, claiming that it was the wrong step for the Church to take for several reasons: that the Church in Wales has departed from the apostolic faith as revealed in Scripture; that the decision had damaged the Church in Wales' relationship with the majority of the provinces in the Anglican Communion, which remained committed to an orthodox understanding of human sexuality; that it had impaired relationships with EFCW bishops and EFCW relationships with those clerics who choose to perform such blessings; and that the decision dishonoured those who, persuaded that Scripture teaches that sexual activity is restricted to heterosexual marriage, had chosen to remain celibate, often at personal cost (see <https://eng.efcw.org.uk/gb-meeting-6th-sept-full-response/> for a full explanation of these concerns). According to the EFCW statement:

There have been and will be resignations from clergy, lay readers, worship leaders, church wardens, Sunday school teachers and parishioners. A number have withdrawn their regular giving to their churches. Others are determined to remain in the Church in Wales structure. A significant number are seeking help and guidance on deciding their future in the Church in Wales ... EFCW is committed to helping in this discernment process, including conversations with those offering alternative Anglican structures, and will continue to offer fellowship for all Evangelical Anglicans regardless of whether they stay in the Church in Wales or leave it. (<https://eng.efcw.org.uk/gb-meeting-6th-sept-full-response/>)

An important issue raised by the EFCW statement was its request for clarity on the conscience clause. The statement pointed out that the clause was being interpreted differently by different bishops with 'some clergy being told that dissenting clergy will not have to surrender their church buildings for a blessing service. Other bishops believe they can exercise their prerogative to insist that a same-sex blessing service take place in any building in their diocese, regardless of the conscience of the local cleric', and asking how dissenting PCCs, lay officers, congregations (as well as ministers) were to be protected and cared for should they not wish their church buildings to be available for such services.

## SECTION 3: Information from key informers

### The survey

Responses were collected using an online questionnaire survey delivered by the Qualtrics XM platform. The survey was developed in dialogue with the LLF team and included the following components:<sup>6</sup>

#### *Location*

Respondents were required to select one of the seven provinces in the survey and then indicate if they were answering at a provincial or diocesan level. Those answering at diocesan level were then asked for the name of the diocese, which was optional, but none refused to give it. An open answer then asked for their role, which was also optional and all but two responded.

#### *Decisions*

The next section included a series of questions about what decisions had been made about SSB or SSM. We asked separately for each and, in each case, it was necessary to ask about provincial-level decisions and diocesan-level decisions. Whatever the decisions, there were follow-up questions to determine either why no decision had been made or what the decision had been. Although we had the overall picture from the web-based survey, the complexity of the decision-making process, and the possibility of some dioceses acting with or without a provincial decision, made it important to determine the exact status in each case if possible.

#### *Impact*

The next section asked about impacts of decisions on SSB and SSM. The introduction to questions explained that we were asking repeat questions for SSB and SSM because places that allow SSM may have experienced impacts when they first allowed SSB. We asked all respondents to complete both sections, pointing out that where decisions had *not* been made there may have been some impact. The two blocks each has seven items asking for the approximate numbers, or a response indicating that the respondent had no information. The end of the section had a text box that allowed a free text response to the question ‘Is there anything you need to add to qualify your responses on impacts of decisions?’

#### *Numerical statistics*

Another indication of impact might be changes in numbers as reflected in national or diocesan statistics for attendance, membership, baptisms, or weddings. We recognized that it is highly unlikely that there would be clear evidence of cause and effect in these sorts of data, but we wanted to give respondents the chance to indicate what they thought about

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<sup>6</sup> For a full list of questions, see Appendix 1

this. Those answering at provincial level were asked about national church statistics, others were asked about diocesan statistics. In each case there were three responses:

- There is evidence of some changes related to these decisions
- There is no evidence to suggest any changes related to these decisions
- We have no way of knowing if numbers changed as a result of these decisions

If respondents ticked the first answer, they were then asked to provide details in an open text response.

Two further questions asked about the numbers of SSB and/or SSM, either annually or since decisions were made.

### *Overall assessment*

This section asked respondents for their overall impression of the impacts of decisions made (or not made) using 14 Likert-style items. These were statements that had a five-point response scale ranging from 'Strongly agree' to 'Strongly disagree'. Likert scales are widely used in social science to assess attitudes and opinions. Most of the items referred to internal church impacts, but three referred to external relationships (e.g. 'Improved our standing in society'). Items were couched in positive or negative impact terms.

### *In your own words*

The final section of the survey asked respondents for their personal reflections on matters related to how decisions were made, communicated, and implemented, along with what might have been done differently in the light of experience. There were six boxes:

- Preparing for decisions
- Making decisions
- Communicating decisions
- Implementing decisions
- Lessons learnt
- Anything else?

### *Contact details*

Before finishing, respondents were invited optionally to identify themselves and give an email if they were willing to be contacted about their responses.

### *Ethical approval*

The survey aims, procedures and methods were vetted by the Humanities Research Ethics Committee at York St John University to ensure it complied with best ethical practice. The approval code is: HUM-RS-AV-09-22-03. All respondents were given a four-page information sheet which explained the project and were required to tick a box to say they were 18 or over and consented to their data being used for research purposes.

### *Distribution of the survey*

From 10-12 October 2022 emails were sent by the research team directly to both bishops and 'executive officers'<sup>7</sup> in each of the dioceses in the seven provinces under study. We added Archbishops / Primates and provincial secretaries if these were not also in diocesan posts. We stressed that, although we had sent to two people in each diocese, we required only one response. For the Episcopal Church in the USA, most diocesan contact routes were via webpage forms, making it hard to target the right people. We asked the national provincial office to send out requests using their emailing list, and they kindly obliged. These emails may not have gone directly to both executive officers and bishops. Emails were accompanied by a letter from the Rt Revd Sarah Mullally, Bishop of London, who headed the NSG of bishops, requesting dioceses and provinces to take part in the survey. The tight timescale of the project meant that replies were requested by the 31 October 2022, just three weeks from distribution. In the event, a few were returned up to a week later.

### *The sample*

In all, there were 72 respondents to the survey but ten of these had started but not completed sufficient items to be included in the final sample. We estimated that there were 183 dioceses (and provincial offices) contacted, so the final sample of 62 represented a return rate of just under a third (Table 1). Of these, 5 were answered at provincial level and 57 at diocesan level. We had returns from all seven provinces, with the highest return rates coming from the smaller provinces. The Episcopal Church (TEC) was the largest province, with 100 dioceses in the USA, but returned only 12 responses. This may have been related to the indirect means of distribution, but possibly also because this is no longer a current issue for many in the province.

Table 1 Return rates by province

	Number of Dioceses	Provincial-level returns	Diocesan-level returns	Return rate
New Zealand	7	0	6	86%
Australia	27	0	13	48%
Brazil	9	0	5	56%
Canada	28	3	14	50%
Scotland	6	1	5	83%
USA	100	0	12	12%
Wales	6	1	2	33%
Total	183	5	57	31%

<sup>7</sup> We have used this term to refer to a wide range of roles that are roughly equivalent to diocesan secretaries in the Church of England.

Provinces varied in the extent to which bishops rather than executive officers made the return (Table 2). In a few cases we had both episcopal and executive returns from the same location. Although these generally matched, it is worth bearing in mind the source when reviewing the open text answers, so we have indicated the role of the source in each case.

Table 2 Role categories of respondents by province

	Unknown	Archbishop	Bishop	Executive Officer	%EOs
New Zealand	0	0	3	3	50%
Australia	0	1	10	2	15%
Brazil	0	0	5	0	0%
Canada	2	1	5	9	60%
Scotland	0	0	3	3	50%
USA	0	0	12	0	0%
Wales	0	1	2	0	0%
	2	3	40	17	28%

## Survey results

### Decisions

The responses to the questions on decisions were complicated by the fact that some provinces had moved directly to allowing SSM and had not made formal decisions on SSB. In addition, some dioceses had decided before any provincial decisions, and some had taken provincial decisions as operating at diocesan level without local ratification. For this reason, open text responses were used to adjust data if necessary to ensure the best estimate of the current situation in each context (Table 3). Those categorised as 'Not allowed' included places where a definite decision had been made at diocesan level to not allow and places where no decision had been made and the practice had not changed. Of the 62 responses, nearly three-quarters were from places where SSB was allowed, and just over half were places where SSM was allowed.

Table 3 Current state of permission for SSB and SSM by province.

	SSB		SSM	
	Not allowed	Allowed by decision	Not allowed	Allowed by decision
New Zealand	1	5	6	0
Australia	8	5	13	0
Brazil	0	5	0	5
Canada	7	10	6	11
Scotland	0	6	0	6
USA	0	12	0	12
Wales	0	3	3	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>34</b>
	26%	74%	45%	55%

### Impact

The figures on impacts (see Table 4 for the full results) need cautious interpretation: they are from a sample of respondents from different provinces. In the case of some provinces, such as New Zealand and Scotland, nearly all dioceses had responded but for provinces such as Canada or the USA many did not. The accuracy of the figures is unknown, and some may be more informed respondents than others, especially in places like the USA when impacts may have happened before respondents were in post.

In **New Zealand**, where six of seven dioceses responded, four dioceses reported clergy had resigned, in two cases this was more than ten in each diocese. Two dioceses reported congregations had left the diocese, in one case more than ten may have done so.

In **Australia**, where 13 of 27 dioceses responded, four reported that 1-5 clergy had resigned and three reported that congregations had joined a breakaway network or left the denomination altogether. One reported that over 10 may have reduced their parish share, but none had any that had ceased altogether. Reasons for reducing share may be complex and hard to relate directly to decisions on SSB. The narrative responses suggested that, in general, a few congregations and their clergy left because of national debate and decision on SSB. One response was based on a reflection across the province and the diocese:

We are in a very fluid situation in Australia and in [our diocese] at present. Nationally 2 clergy have joined a new entity begun by GAFCON Australia called the Diocese of the Southern Cross. Neither is from [our diocese]. Following a recent Diocesan Synod it is possible that a few clergy may decide to leave, however it seems more likely that some will align more closely with GAFCON Australia. No services of blessing of marriages of same sex couples have taken place [in our diocese], however some people (lay and ordained) have taken exception to the appointment and ordaining of two men in civil partnerships. It is also the case that some faithful Anglicans have felt the debates here abusive to them as members of the LGBTQIA+ community and have distanced themselves from the Church as a result. (Diocesan bishop)

In **Brazil**, where five of nine dioceses responded, two dioceses reported 1-5 clergy resigning and one reported 6-10 resigning as a result of the decision to allow SSM. Four dioceses reported that congregations had joined a breakaway network or left the denomination altogether. One narrative response suggested some reversal of initial impact:

Due to approval, 8 clerics and 4 communities, including the cathedral, left the diocese. Today, only 1 works independently. The other communities continued normally and today, all clergy and communities approve of same-sex marriage. (Diocesan bishop)

Another suggested little overall impact:

Within the diocese, only a group from one parish followed their priest to join another continuing Anglican church. In terms of lay leaders, only 1 left the church and 1 postulant did the same. (Diocesan bishop)

In **Canada**, where 14 of 28 dioceses responded, eight dioceses reported clergy resignations as a result of SSB and six as a result of SSM. Eight reported that congregations had joined a breakaway network or left the denomination altogether as a result of SSB decisions, but the figure was only two for SSM decisions. Open answers suggested that the SSB decisions were when most impacts were apparent.

Most clergy and lay people who left did so over the blessings of same sex relationships and prior to the votes on the marriage canon and decisions by bishops to individually authorise marriages. (Executive officer)

The great tension in our diocese came after the decision to bless same sex couples and not with the marriage of same sex couples. There were law suits and attempts to take control of some buildings (which were unsuccessful). (Diocesan bishop)

Most of the discord was felt in the early days of our discernment related to the blessing of civil unions (2005-2010), when same-sex marriage was still highly controversial within society at large, having been made legal in Canada in 2005. (Executive officer)

Although there has been some threat to reduce shares, this was not generally a widespread problem.

In 2002, when the decision to bless same-sex couples was taken, some clergy and parishes left the diocese, some entered into a protracted legal battle over land and buildings and consequently those clergy and many of the parishioners joined other breakaway churches. I am not aware of parishes withholding their assessment to the diocese or individual clergy resigning. (Executive officer)

There has been some conversations about congregations not paying their apportionment to the diocese and one church that makes it very difficult for oversight to be given - but no church has flat out refused. (Executive officer)

One open answer suggested that clergy that leave might occasionally return:

Interestingly, one of the clerics who resigned over the Blessing of Same-Sex Marriages (in 2017) recently returned (2022) because the expansiveness of our new Marriage Policy (2020) allows for a theological breadth of position on marriage, without prejudice. (Executive officer)

In **Scotland**, where five of seven dioceses responded, two reported 1-5 clergy resigning after the SSM decision, and five reported 1-5 congregations had joined a breakaway network or left the denomination altogether. One open response noted that the national impact may have been the loss of some of the larger congregations:

Churches leaving the denomination is the issue above - of 150 clergy in the whole country, maybe 5 left (bigger churches, though). In my own diocese, zero impact. (Diocesan bishop)

When whole congregations left, some found homes in other SEC congregations nearby, so calculating net numbers of people leaving may be very difficult:

One congregation [named] left the SEC/ [our diocese] however many members of that congregation have since joined other SEC congregations in [our diocese]. (Diocesan bishop)

One respondent was expecting a stronger reaction:

We had one evangelical congregation leave the Diocese and Province because of Canonical revision to allow same-sex marriage. The reaction was not as great as I expected. (Diocesan bishop)

In the **USA**, where 12 of 100 dioceses responded, seven reported clergy resignations as a result of SSB decisions and five reported clergy resignations as a result of SSM decisions. Nine reported congregations had joined a breakaway network or left the denomination altogether as a result of SSB decisions and ten for SSM decisions. Several narrative responses gave more details, but they all referred to past losses.

I became the bishop in 2019, so this all pre-dates my episcopate. We had one congregation close because so many people left; and one congregation split. I believe there were a few priests who also departed. (Diocesan bishop)

In the [our diocese], one congregation parted ways with the diocese many years ago, before same-sex marriage was legal in the United States. Since that time, and since same-sex marriage became legal, I'm not aware of any congregations having left the diocese or the church. (Diocesan bishop)

Parts of 9 congregations (including clergy) left to join ACNA or other churches. They sued to retain property, but lost those suits in court, and the buildings and portions of all the congregations remain within TEC. (Diocesan bishop)

In [our diocese], 2 congregations sought supplemental episcopal oversight as a result of the General Convention decisions. One chose to leave and join the Anglican Church of North America. (Diocesan bishop)

In **Wales**, where two of six dioceses responded, neither reported any impacts, though the provincial response suggest 1-5 congregations had left the denomination. The two narratives highlight the difficulty of assessing the impacts, especially impacts of not making decisions:

I'm not sure if you will ask about the positive impacts but these were far greater than any resistance to change. Indeed, it could be argued that our greatest resistance/impact was from those who wished we had gone straight to equal marriage and saw blessing of same sex couples as an unwelcome compromise. (Diocesan bishop)

... While no cleric has resigned specifically on this matter, one who had reservations has sought and found a post in England, but this was one among a number of personal issues. A couple of individual congregation members have withdrawn their financial support, or indicated that they intend to move churches, but no congregation as a whole has moved in that direction. (Diocesan bishop)

These data probably do not add much to what we already know about what has happened in these seven provinces where SSB and/or SSM has been allowed. There have been some losses of clergy and congregations, some congregations may have reduced financial commitments, but some dioceses did not experience these impacts.

Table 4 Estimates of impacts from responding dioceses by province

	SSB					SSM				
	0	1-5	6-10	>10	?	0	1-5	6-10	>10	?
<b>New Zealand (<i>n</i> = 6)</b>	0	1-5	6-10	>10	?	0	1-5	6-10	>10	?
Clergy resigning	2	2	0	2	0					
Licensed lay workers resigning	0	4	0	0	2					
Cong. reduced share	5	0	0	0	1					
Cong. ceased to pay share	5	0	0	1	0					
Cong. refused oversight	5	0	0	0	1					
Cong. breakaway network	5	0	0	0	1					
Cong. left denomination	4	0	1	1	0					
<b>Australia (<i>n</i> =13)</b>	0	1-5	6-10	>10	?	0	1-5	6-10	>10	?
Clergy resigning	9	4	0	0	0					
Licensed lay workers resigning	10	1	0	0	2					
Cong. reduced share	9	1	0	1	2					
Cong. ceased to pay share	10	0	0	0	3					
Cong. refused oversight	10	2	0	0	1					
Cong. breakaway network	11	1	0	0	1					
Cong. left denomination	11	2	0	0	0					
<b>Brazil (<i>n</i> =5)</b>	0	1-5	6-10	>10	?	0	1-5	6-10	>10	?
Clergy resigning	1	1	1	0	1	1	2	1	0	0
Licensed lay workers resigning	0	2	1	0	1	0	3	0	1	0
Cong. reduced share	2	1	0	0	1	3	1	0	0	0
Cong. ceased to pay share	3	0	0	0	1	4	0	0	0	0
Cong. refused oversight	3	0	0	0	1	4	0	0	0	0
Cong. breakaway network	1	2	0	0	1	2	1	1	0	0
Cong. left denomination	1	2	0	0	1	2	1	1	0	0
<b>Canada (<i>n</i> =14)</b>	0	1-5	6-10	>10	?	0	1-5	6-10	>10	?
Clergy resigning	5	6	1	1	0	6	6	0	0	0
Licensed lay workers resigning	10	1	0	1	1	11	1	0	0	0
Cong. reduced share	10	2	0	0	1	10	2	0	0	0
Cong. ceased to pay share	11	1	0	0	1	12	0	0	0	0
Cong. refused oversight	10	3	0	0	0	12	0	0	0	0
Cong. breakaway network	9	4	0	0	0	11	1	0	0	0
Cong. left denomination	9	4	0	0	0	11	1	0	0	0

Scotland ( <i>n</i> = 5)	0	1-5	6-10	>10	?	0	1-5	6-10	>10	?
Clergy resigning						2	2	0	0	1
Licensed lay workers resigning						4	0	0	0	1
Cong. reduced share						3	1	0	0	1
Cong. ceased to pay share						2	2	0	0	1
Cong. refused oversight						2	2	0	0	1
Cong. breakaway network						3	1	0	0	1
Cong. left denomination						1	4	0	0	0
USA ( <i>n</i> =12)	0	1-5	6-10	>10	?	0	1-5	6-10	>10	?
Clergy resigning	3	6	0	1	2	5	4	0	1	2
Licensed lay workers resigning	3	2	1	1	4	4	1	1	1	4
Cong. reduced share	6	6	0	0	0	6	6	0	0	0
Cong. ceased to pay share	9	3	0	0	0	9	3	0	0	0
Cong. refused oversight	9	3	0	0	0	8	3	0	1	0
Cong. breakaway network	7	5	0	0	0	7	5	0	0	0
Cong. left denomination	8	3	1	0	0	7	4	1	0	0
Wales ( <i>n</i> =2)	0	1-5	6-10	>10	?	0	1-5	6-10	>10	?
Clergy resigning	2	0	0	0	0					
Licensed lay workers resigning	2	0	0	0	0					
Cong. reduced share	2	0	0	0	0					
Cong. ceased to pay share	2	0	0	0	0					
Cong. refused oversight	2	0	0	0	0					
Cong. breakaway network	2	0	0	0	0					
Cong. left denomination	2	0	0	0	0					

Note. *n* = number of diocesan-level responses; Cong. = congregation or parish; ? = no information. Respondents were asked to indicate approximate numbers in each category. Where there was no specific decision on SSB, or not decision yet on SSM, the table is left blank.

### National and diocesan statistics

Although it is reasonable to ask if attendance statistics have been affected in dioceses that have allowed SSB or SSM, finding answers is much more difficult. Across the 62 responses, only a quarter suggested there was evidence and, even then, this was mainly about whole congregations leaving, rather than a drift from remaining churches.

Of the five provincial-level respondents, one did not answer the question and two indicated 'We have no way of knowing if numbers changed as a result of these decisions'. The two that gave details both pointed out that the only evidence was where whole congregations had departed:

The departure of congregations from the denomination, referred to above, certainly means that the members of those churches are no longer included in our statistics. As to the impact on other congregations there is no way of knowing whether changes in numbers are a result of decisions made on same sex blessing/marriage. (Executive officer)

Those churches which have left [our province] have taken congregations with them. My understanding is that 2 such congregations have left with a total of approximately 80 worshippers. It is very likely but undocumented that others have left individually but we have no data to hand (Archbishop)

Of 54 diocesan-level responses, 39% indicated no evidence, and 35% that they had no way of knowing. Of the 14 who did suggest there was evidence, this was mostly anecdotal, but worth reproducing the open text responses.

### ***New Zealand***

Our estimate for [our diocese] is that we lost some 15% of all regular attenders at worship (via four congregations which left with about 95% of regulars and five congregations where somewhere between 10% and 80% of members left). We are the Diocese most affected by disaffiliation within the Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia. Of some 17 new churches formed within a new extra-provincial, GAFCON aligned diocese, 9 of those new churches have been formed within our Diocesan area. (Diocesan bishop)

[One] Parish in the diocese split approximately 50:50, with those opposed to same-sex marriage or blessing in church joining a breakaway grouping. A second Parish had a Priest in Charge leave, and about 5 people left with him. (Diocesan bishop)

There is minor evidence of a very slight decline in congregations as evidenced by correspondence to the Bishop's Office from individuals unhappy with the adoption of same-sex blessings. (Executive officer)

### ***Australia***

As noted above, one of our small branch congregations has seen some lay people leave over this issue. (Executive officer)

There is some anecdotal evidence of people leaving churches to seek wither more conservative churches that they perceive the Anglican Church to be or leaving because they do not experience the Church as a place of welcome. (Diocesan bishop)

A few parishioners in one Church (not more than 5) left and do not attend any of our services. (Diocesan bishop)

### ***Brazil***

As was reported, 6 communities left the diocese and there was a loss of the number of people and revenue from our diocese. (Diocesan bishop)

## USA

[Our diocese] was growing up until the pandemic began, so this was not something that held back the church as a whole (even if 1 congregation closed and one split). Those departures were made up for by increased attendance elsewhere. Parochial report data is on the TEC website. (Diocesan bishop)

Parts or all of 9 congregations left The Episcopal Church. However, our numbers of LGBT and LGBT-supportive members have grown rapidly. To date, the losses are greater than the gains, but I think those losses will continue to be mitigated over time. (Diocesan bishop)

It is impossible to attribute all decline to this decision alone as there are many other factors as well. Nonetheless, decline can be seen for almost all measurements, particularly marriages and baptisms. There have been no signs of growth due to this decision except in receptions from other churches. It has also resulted in 5 faith communities splitting from TEC in our diocese (15%) and another 8 new church plants from the breakaway group. Diocesan statistics from 2015-2019: Membership -10% Average Sunday Attendance -16% Baptisms -23% Easter attendance +3% Marriages -61% Funerals +2% Confirmations/Receptions +6% (Diocesan bishop)

As a whole, the Episcopal Church suffered many losses and schisms with the ordination of an openly gay, married bishop in 2003. That resulted in a significant drop in membership, while at the same time saw growth in the LGBTQIA+ populations and others seeking a more hospitable church. (Diocesan bishop)

ACNA with the support of other provinces was created as a parallel movement. It is now suffering greater splintering - some are reengaging conversations with TEC as they discover one can be evangelical and High Church and marry all people. (Diocesan bishop)

I cannot say what the overall impact is, numerically speaking, but [our diocese] has one of highest number of LGBTQ clergy in the country and nearly every congregation celebrates the presence and ministries of their LGBTQ members. (Diocesan bishop)

Certainly people left congregations as a result of the decisions made toward greater inclusion, but the overall impact has been positive. There has been one challenging consequence of these changes: we have a disproportionate number of people, lay and ordained, that have been deeply wounded by their experiences in other Christian communities, and those wounds are slow to heal. (Diocesan bishop)

## Wales

Anecdotally we hear of people who are attracted to the diocese e.g. applications to posts, participation in congregational life because of their approval of our stance on same sex relationships. In our new Resource Church [in our main city] which opened at the same time as same sex blessings became permissible, of those joining it who had previously worshipped elsewhere the vast majority gave as their reason for moving church the more 'liberal' approach of the diocese on matters of sexuality. We have a significant number of clergy who are in same sex

partnerships and their openness about their relationships has increased.  
(Diocesan bishop)

### **Numbers of SSB and SSM**

Where SSB or SSM was allowed, respondents were asked to estimate the numbers of such events, either since the decision was taken, or per year. For SSB, one of three provincial-level respondents indicated figures were available, and only 14 (29%) of 49 dioceses where this was allowed. For SSM, no provincial-level responses indicated figures were available, and only 10 (32%) of 31 dioceses where this was allowed did so. It should be noted that several provinces changed rules just prior to the pandemic, which may have disrupted the number of possible in-church services for at least a year.

The most useful data were from New Zealand, where six dioceses reported numbers since the decision to allow SSB in 2018: 0, 0, 1, 2, 3, 3 (average 1.5). One Brazilian diocese reported eight SSM since 2018, another 25 per year. A Canadian diocese that has both SSB and SSM estimated around five of each per year. Two dioceses in Scotland reported two and three SSM since this was allowed. One Welsh diocese reported no SSB and another less than ten since it was allowed. Only one USA diocese reported numbers, possibly because no data are available. It estimated 80 SSM since this was allowed. Overall, these numbers suggest that take-up has been generally low in most cases.

### **Overall opinions about impact**

This section was intended to assess respondents' general impression of the effects of the process and decisions in their context. The 14 statements were shaped into either positive or negative directions. Combining responses across provinces could be misleading, since each had a different journey, so Table 5 presents the data for each separately, even though samples in several are too small to allow any firm conclusions. What does emerge is that in the smaller provinces most respondents were generally positive about the impact of their decisions. In New Zealand, five of the six respondents agreed that allowing SSB had increased hope and allowed them to focus on more important issues. All agreed that it had reduced tensions, and half agreed it had improved their standing in society. There were similar generally positive views in Brazil, Scotland, and Wales. In Australia and Canada the opinion was more uncertain or divided, perhaps reflecting the wider range of respondent positions in these samples. The USA sample, answering from a more distanced perspective seemed generally positive, though a few items indicated that there were some negative effects.

Table 5 Overall assessment of impact by province

	AG	NC	DA
	%	%	%
<b>New Zealand (n = 6)</b>			
Been unimportant to most churches	33	0	67
Brought joy to most churches	67	33	0
Reduced tensions and conflict	100	0	0
Increased divisions	17	0	83
Increased hope	84	17	0
Increased despair	0	17	84
Allowed us to move on	50	50	0
Left us in limbo	0	17	84
Allowed us to focus on more important issues	84	17	0
Brought us together	67	33	0
Split us apart	17	0	84
Improved our standing in society	50	33	17
Damaged our public image	0	0	100
Kept us in touch with ordinary people	50	33	17
	AG	NC	DA
	%	%	%
<b>Australia (n = 13)</b>			
Been unimportant to most churches	30	8	61
Brought joy to most churches	46	38	15
Reduced tensions and conflict	39	31	30
Increased divisions	23	8	69
Increased hope	62	23	16
Increased despair	31	15	53
Allowed us to move on	54	15	31
Left us in limbo	38	8	54
Allowed us to focus on more important issues	62	15	23
Brought us together	46	15	38
Split us apart	15	31	53
Improved our standing in society	39	23	38
Damaged our public image	31	23	46
Kept us in touch with ordinary people	62	23	16

	AG	NC	DA
	%	%	%
<b>Brazil (n = 4)</b>			
Been unimportant to most churches	25	0	75
Brought joy to most churches	100	0	0
Reduced tensions and conflict	75	25	0
Increased divisions	0	0	100
Increased hope	75	0	25
Increased despair	0	0	100
Allowed us to move on	100	0	0
Left us in limbo	0	0	100
Allowed us to focus on more important issues	75	25	0
Brought us together	100	0	0
Split us apart	25	0	75
Improved our standing in society	50	50	0
Damaged our public image	25	0	75
Kept us in touch with ordinary people	100	0	0
<b>Canada (n = 14)</b>			
Been unimportant to most churches	28	0	71
Brought joy to most churches	69	8	23
Reduced tensions and conflict	50	7	43
Increased divisions	14	29	57
Increased hope	71	21	7
Increased despair	7	36	57
Allowed us to move on	79	14	7
Left us in limbo	14	14	72
Allowed us to focus on more important issues	79	21	0
Brought us together	50	14	36
Split us apart	29	7	64
Improved our standing in society	50	14	36
Damaged our public image	7	14	79
Kept us in touch with ordinary people	78	14	7

	AG	NC	DA
	%	%	%
<b>Scotland (n = 6)</b>			
Been unimportant to most churches	33	0	67
Brought joy to most churches	84	0	17
Reduced tensions and conflict	50	17	33
Increased divisions	0	50	50
Increased hope	66	33	0
Increased despair	0	33	66
Allowed us to move on	100	0	0
Left us in limbo	0	0	100
Allowed us to focus on more important issues	67	33	0
Brought us together	50	33	17
Split us apart	0	17	83
Improved our standing in society	83	17	0
Damaged our public image	0	0	100
Kept us in touch with ordinary people	83	17	0
	AG	NC	DA
	%	%	%
<b>USA (n =12)</b>			
Been unimportant to most churches	33	0	67
Brought joy to most churches	75	8	17
Reduced tensions and conflict	50	17	33
Increased divisions	8	0	92
Increased hope	84	17	0
Increased despair	0	8	91
Allowed us to move on	83	8	8
Left us in limbo	0	0	100
Allowed us to focus on more important issues	83	0	17
Brought us together	66	17	17
Split us apart	17	0	83
Improved our standing in society	84	8	8
Damaged our public image	0	0	100
Kept us in touch with ordinary people	75	25	0

	AG	NC	DA
<b>Wales (n =3)</b>	%	%	%
Been unimportant to most churches	33	0	67
Brought joy to most churches	67	33	0
Reduced tensions and conflict	33	33	33
Increased divisions	33	0	66
Increased hope	66	0	33
Increased despair	0	33	66
Allowed us to move on	67	33	0
Left us in limbo	0	0	100
Allowed us to focus on more important issues	67	33	0
Brought us together	33	33	33
Split us apart	33	33	33
Improved our standing in society	100	0	0
Damaged our public image	0	0	100
Kept us in touch with ordinary people	100	0	0

Note. The responses have been collapsed to save space: DA =Disagree and Strongly Disagree; NC = Not certain; AG = Agree and Strongly Agree.

A better way of analysing these data is to use responses to produce scale scores that indicated opinion about impact averaged over various items. This allows more concise measurement of how opinion varied between groups. Using standard social-science techniques,<sup>8</sup> we produced two scales, which assessed the status of relationships within the Church (internal impact), and the status of relationships with society (external impact). Not all the items were useful for these scales, and Table 6 shows the items selected in each case and the agreement or disagreement across the whole sample.

<sup>8</sup> Summated scale development using factor and reliability analyses.

Table 6. Items in the internal and external impact scales.

	AG	NC	DA
Internal impact (alpha = .91)	%	%	%
Reduced tensions and conflict	54	17	29
Increased divisions*	14	14	73
Increased despair*	9	21	70
Allowed us to move on	74	16	10
Left us in limbo*	12	7	81
Allowed us to focus on more important issues	75	17	8
Brought us together	57	19	24
Split us apart*	19	12	69
<hr/>			
	AG	NC	DA
External impact (alpha = .82)	%	%	%
Improved our standing in society	61	19	21
Damaged our public image*	10	9	81
Kept us in touch with ordinary people	74	19	7

Note. Based on 58 responses. The responses have been collapsed to save space: DA =Disagree and Strongly Disagree; NC = Not certain; AG = Agree and Strongly Agree.  $\alpha$  = Cronbach's alpha, a measure of the internal reliability of scales: values about .65 indicate acceptable reliability. \* These items were reverse coded to create the scale but not the percentages.

Each item scored 1 to 5, meaning the eight-item internal effects scale could range from 8 to 40 and the external effects three-item scale could range from 3 to 15. In each case higher scores indicated a more positive view of the effects of the process and decisions, and a lower score a more negative view.

Scores were compared in two ways. The first was between respondents in provinces that have permitted only SSB (New Zealand, Australia, and Wales) and those who have also permitted SSM (Brazil, Scotland, and the USA).<sup>9</sup> The second was between those dioceses that allowed SSB (or SSM) and those that did not.

Comparing 'SSB' provinces with 'SSM' provinces, both internal impact scores and external impact scores were higher (more positive) in SSM provinces, though the difference in internal impact scores was not quite statistically significant and may have been due to chance (Table 7).

<sup>9</sup> The situation in Canada as a whole is uncertain in terms of national provincial agreement, so Canadian responses were excluded from this analysis.

Table 7 Mean internal and external impact scores compared between SSB only and SSM provinces.

		<i>N</i>	Mean	SEM	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Internal impact	SSB only	22	28.2	1.6		
	SSM	22	32.0	1.2	-1.92	.062
External impact	SSB only	22	10.4	0.6		
	SSM	22	12.9	0.4	-3.55	.001

Note. SEM = Standard error of the mean; *t* = Student's *t* statistic. *p* = probability that the difference in means is due to chance (< .05 is usually taken as indicating the difference is unlikely to be due to chance).

Comparing across provinces places where SSB or SSM were allowed by decision with places where they were not, there was no difference for SSB internal scores, but external scores were significantly higher where SSB was allowed (Table 8a). For SSM, both internal and external scores were higher where SSM was allowed (Table 8b).

Table 8 Mean internal and external impact scores compared between places where (a) SSB (b) SSM are allowed or not allowed. (for explanation, see Table 7)

a) SSB		<i>N</i>	Mean	SEM	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Internal impact	Not allowed	14	28.4	2.0		
	Allowed	44	30.3	0.9	-0.93	.354
External impact	Not allowed	14	8.7	0.8		
	Allowed	44	12.4	0.3	-5.46	<.001
b) SSM		<i>N</i>	Mean	SEM	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Internal impact	Not allowed	26	27.6	1.4		
	Allowed	32	31.6	1.0	-2.35	.022
External impact	Not allowed	26	10.0	0.5		
	Allowed	32	12.8	0.3	-4.62	<.001

Taken together these results suggest that:

- a) The decision to allow SSB but not SSM may not have resulted in much difference in terms of the effect within the Church, but it was associated with perceived better relationships with society at large.
- b) Where provinces and/or dioceses had permitted SSM, respondents generally reported better effects within the Church and much better relationships with society at large.

### **Open answers: Preparation, Process, Communication & Implementation**

Towards the end of the survey there were a series of text boxes which invited respondents to reflect on various aspects of their experience of the SSB or SSM issue in their context. The first four of these were introduced by:

#### **Preparing for decisions**

At your level (national or regional), how were bishops/leaders; clergy/ministers; lay people) prepared for decision-making?

#### **Making decisions**

At your level (national or regional), how were decisions arrived at? Who was involved, how were discussions facilitated or fed back, and what was the timeframe?

#### **Communicating decisions**

At your level (national or regional), how were decisions communicated and received across the Church?

#### **Implementing decisions**

At your level (national or regional), how were decisions implemented? Were liturgies or procedures produced and, if so, by whom?

A number of respondents tended to merge these aspects, so they are combined in this analysis. This analysis combines the views across those responding at provincial and diocesan levels.

### ***New Zealand***

All respondents stressed the long process of preparation that took place over a decade or more. This was seen to be a purposeful process of inviting discussion and debate at provincial, diocesan, and local level. One person referred to “consultation /education /workshops”, another to “conversations”. A working group was set up provincially which deliberately comprised mixtures of clergy and lay people from diverse backgrounds, and which reflected the diversity of opinion on the matter. It gathered opinions and made recommendations to General Synod in 2016, which were not accepted. A second working group was formed which made different recommendations in 2018, which were accepted. A common theme was that there was a conscious decision made to maintain unity by respecting diversity:

At a national level we spent some twenty years, off and on, debating homosexual matters at General Synod and local synods; the final period was 2014-2018 with a recommendation for 2016 not being agreed to and a new working group set up.

At certain points there were "hermeneutical hui" and "theological hui" (hui = gathering/conference) which enabled some study together, though often ended with each "side" being better informed about what the other side thought, and why. Ultimately few people changed their minds but a compromise was reached which satisfied most, but not those who then disaffiliated. (Also need to mention that our 2018 legislation created the possibility of a "community" - a network of individuals and parishes which wished to gather around a particular theology of sexuality; in our case the Community of St Mark has been established, with a conservative outlook, and parishes, about nine from across NZ, I think, have combined within this community to encourage one another and to assist in the finding of appropriate new vicars when a vacancy occurs.) (Diocesan bishop)

Prior to a General Synod vote on allowing same-sex relationships to be blessed there was a working group from across the province and representing many views that met and canvassed opinions and theological approaches and presented a motion to Synod. Described by some as a triumph, it was also condemned (by a minority) as an unacceptable compromise. (Diocesan bishop)

There has been many years of conversation about the issues surrounding the church's understanding of marriage. Perhaps the most pivotal was the refocus of our conversations around deep respect and seeking understanding of one another's views. There were several workshops that were available to clergy and laity where we gathered as a province, and while it is true that there was high tension in these settings over three years ultimately we came to a place where the theological, rational and scriptural integrity of different perspectives were upheld. That allowed us to move the conversation from points of view to making progress moving forward and providing structural allowances for differing points of view. (Diocesan bishop)

In summary, the preparation process carried out across the Diocese around the adoption of same-sex blessings at a Provincial level took place over several years and was robust. It involved a working group of lay and ordained from diverse perspectives who compiled a body of theological and ethical research, again from diverse perspectives, which was then presented and discussed at many levels across the Diocese - in parishes, small groups, regional meetings etc. Senior Diocesan leadership (Bishops, Archdeacons) were highly visible and available during this process, particularly at regional meetings. Strong principles were developed for how conversations were to take place, with the overarching goal to remain in relationship with one another, despite differences in theological interpretation on this issue. (Executive officer)

In terms of communicating decisions, this seemed to be by 'the usual channels', with some reports in the national media, but mainly by using newsletters, magazines and emailing. One response gave insight into how a particular bishop responded:

The vote taken by the 2018 General Synod was widely publicised to faith units across the Province. There was moderate general media interest - as a Diocesan Bishop I was invited to engage with local press about both the Synod Decision and the Diocesan response. In the Diocese of xxxxx I made it known via an ad clerum and by internet mailing that my response was to receive any request for a Same-Sex blessing be made by a Vicar/Priest in charge and to have the support of

the Vestry (PCC) and that I would deal with each case individually. (Diocesan bishop)

Another drew heavily on the Synod reports:

The reports of General Synod members to Diocesan Standing Committees were important, and they were then disseminated through the Diocese from the Bishop's office. The provincial media team also assisted in preparing articles that communicated process and decisions. (Diocesan bishop)

The decision on SSB allowed individual clergy to opt in to take such services. Dioceses were responsible for deciding local implementation. Implementing the decision on SSB was described usefully by one diocesan executive:

Following General Synod's decision in May 2018, a Diocesan working group, again made up of a diverse range of individuals, was gathered to work out what the decision might look like in [our diocese] at a structural / procedural level. This included working out a mechanism by which parishes (and clergy within those parishes) could decide whether or not they would be comfortable officiating a same-sex blessing. It also included a liturgy for a same-sex blessing service. (Executive officer)

Several respondents mentioned experimental liturgies produced during the decision process, and templates made available by the province:

During the preparation of various reports to General Synod in 2014-2018 there were some experimental liturgies for the blessing of same sex relationships included as templates. I think by and large that these have become the normative template for most blessing liturgies. (Diocesan bishop)

There were a number of informal liturgies circulating, none of them have been incorporated into the NZPB [New Zealand Prayer Book]. (Diocesan bishop)

In one diocese that has rejected the 2018 decision, the respondent simply reported 'No changes made'. It was not clear if all clergy were banned from SSB, or whether they could but received no support from their diocese.

### **Australia**

The process seems to have been different in Australia than in New Zealand, possibly for several reasons. First, there are some dioceses that have long drawn heavily on the Reformed tradition within Anglicanism, and where there was very unlikely to be any compromise around retained historic practice. This is summed up by one lengthy response:

The desire for the introduction of a liturgy for Same-Sex blessings came from two Dioceses (Wangaratta and Newcastle) acting unilaterally despite strong and consistent warnings from Evangelical bishops, over many years of discussion, that to do so would lead to division and disunity.

The matters were put to the Appellate Tribunal for a ruling, and the majority position was that there was nothing in the constitution to prevent this from happening given their definition of the word 'doctrine'. It is worth noting that this decision appears to go against the unanimous opinions of the House of Bishops and Board of Assessors, that same sex practice is contrary to the faith and

practice of the Church; persistent, unrepentant sin precludes a person from God's kingdom; and God cannot bless that which is named as sin.

A moratorium was called by the Primate on acting on this ruling until our General Synod. In the lead up to this the Australian Bishops met to share about what the introduction of a liturgy of Same-Sex blessing would mean for their local ministry. It was obvious that there was deep division over this issue which stemmed from differences in both hermeneutics and soteriology.

At the General Synod there was an opportunity to affirm the previous General Synod's understanding that marriage is a lifelong, mutual and exclusive commitment between a man and a woman. A significant majority in the house of clergy and laity agreed with this, but the house of bishops failed to do so.

While some may dispute the reasons behind the house of Bishops doing so (though signing the statement of support of the LGBT community in the lead up to Lambeth may give some indication), the action of the House of Bishops has led to a great deal of grief, pain and loss when it comes to the health and unity of the National Church. (Diocesan bishop)

Second, there may be a greater sense of diocesan autonomy and independence. This was evident in the move by some to produce a liturgy for SSB, but also in the way some dioceses made decisions unilaterally:

The annual national bishops meeting has been canvassing these issues for several years. In the lead-up to the national plebiscite regarding same-sex marriage, churches and Christian agencies took part in education processes about the issue. Our own diocesan synod made a 'pre-emptive strike' before the plebiscite took place, affirming traditional marriage. (Diocesan bishop)

Diocesan level only, it was felt that not allowing the blessing of same-sex marriage was essential to the unity of the diocese; but largely because it was a second-order issue when we had more important things to do. Discussed at regional consultations prior to 2021 Synod, then debated at Synod. (Diocesan bishop)

Third, as mentioned by one respondent, the process of preparation and open-ended exploration was curtailed, leading to debate and responses to individual diocesan actions.

[how has the process gone?] Not very well. We did not have the equivalent of Living in Love and Faith here and so we had not explored some of the deeper questions before getting into the debate which was and is very polarised.

The question (can SS Blessings be offered?) was referred to a legal body and they made the decision. GS has debated it and not affirmed that blessings should be allowed. (Diocesan bishop)

Several responses mentioned a collection of essays from those of opposing views, and this move to debate theological arguments, rather than to listen to the voices of gay people, may have set the tone for some of the process. One extended response gave a wider overview:

Lambeth 1:10 was not a starting point in our life at every level, but it galvanized people at either end of the theological and biblical spectrum and in Australia this has continued apace since then. The matter of the place of same sex attracted people in the life of the Church at every level has been on the agenda of General Synods since 2000 (the first after Lambeth '98). This has been to do with the reading and interpretation of scripture, hermeneutics, moral and ethical behaviour, place of LBTQIA+ people in the local Church, places of leadership, ordination, civil partnerships, blessings of couples, marriage, conversion therapies, the place of singleness, chastity, and celibacy. The Doctrine Commission has published 2 books of essays since 2000. A listening process was undertaken in 2007. (not so successful in my view) Attempts to prepare people for discussion, decision making has been influenced by matters taking place in the wider Communion, and the impact of what some have received as power plays by groups like ACNA and GAFCON. When people have not felt safe to speak, to be heard, to be welcomed the issue of shame has been writ large. We have not attempted anything like the LLF work done in England, and our geography and polity may not have allowed for it, however its hard to say how well people have been prepared given this is now perceived as an absolute 'deal breaker' here as we wait to see who next might take up the new break away entity. Language around biblical orthodoxy, publicly calling bishops to repent, has changed the way in which decisions might be approached and is ongoing and unfinished business. (Diocesan bishop)

The frustration with the process was evident in one response to the question on preparation for making decisions:

In Australia? Not able to take any decisions. (Diocesan bishop)

In terms of communication, this seems to have been 'usual methods', though largely by letters and emails:

The decision of the Appellate tribunal was communicated and commented on through various channels. The Archbishop also sent his thoughts via letter to all clergy. It was also discussed at our Diocesan Synod. The proceedings of the General Synod were, likewise, communicated via various channels, including media, and via communications from the Archbishop's office. (Diocesan bishop)

At a local level, decisions were communicated, in various ways:

I issued an ad clerum following the decision of the Appellate Tribunal, pointing out that the Canon Concerning Services gave the diocesan bishop authority to deem a liturgy not edifying and therefore ruling it out, and that I was deeming this and therefore ruling out the blessing of same-sex marriages in this diocese. We are a very small diocese and any feedback I received from clergy was positive. I received no negative feedback from laypeople, but I know some were unhappy with my decision. (Diocesan bishop)

The frustration expressed earlier was also apparent when it came to communication:

At Diocesan level, by e-mail to the diocese. No push-back. At the national level, it is a mess. (Diocesan bishop)

Implementation has, due to the nature of the process, been diocese by diocese, and rather piecemeal. One helpful response from a diocese that has refused SSB shed light on the rather confused state of the current situation:

At the national level, the reference was made to the Appellate Tribunal for their determination following the approval of a draft liturgy for the blessing of same-sex marriages in one diocese (I don't know who it was produced by) and the adjustment to the clergy discipline ordinance of another diocese that would have prevented prosecution of clergy for blessing (or refusing to bless) a same-sex marriage. Restraint (ie not conducting blessing of same-sex marriages) was urged by bishops in their dioceses until the General Synod met in May 2022, and with one or two exceptions this was managed. Following the General Synod's decision not to approve the Doctrinal Statement concerning marriage and blessing<sup>10</sup>, several diocesan bishops seemed to have indicated that there was no impediment to blessing same-sex marriages, although restraint or at least discussion with the bishop was still advised. (Diocesan bishop)

Those dioceses that rejected SSB generally responded 'n/a' or 'No change', but some explained how their local decision was implemented:

At Diocesan level, I sent an e-mail out to clergy and to the wider diocese confirming that same-sex marriages were not to be blessed, but that in all other respects same-sex couples were welcomed in the church, along with their families and were to take a full part in the church. (Diocesan bishop)

The implementation has been (of necessity) diocesan. One difficult but helpful point for me has been the engagement of the college of bishops on work to respond to questions by the Appellate tribunal, and to (in the wake of various diocesan decisions and commentary) met with the express objective of building interpersonal trust. (Diocesan bishop)

Those dioceses that have allowed SSB approached implementation in different ways:

Under the Canon Concerning Services (1992) clergy are able to construct a liturgy for use in a circumstance for which there is no authorised rite, provided it is not contrary to the doctrine of the church (a matter addressed by the Appellate Tribunal Opinion in November 2020) and is reverent and edifying, as determined by the bishop. In [our diocese] there is no 'diocesan' rite for the blessing of civil marriages; clergy are invited and encouraged to consult with the bishop regarding the proposed liturgy prior to conducting such a service. (Diocesan bishop)

Liturgies were prepared as per a previous Synod resolution before the decision was taken. The Liturgy was part of the final motion for the service of blessing. (Diocesan bishop)

There is no authorised liturgy for this Diocese. A couple of ACA dioceses have authorised a liturgy for their context but only one diocesan bishop in one of those dioceses has allowed blessings to take place. (Diocesan bishop)

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<sup>10</sup> NB The Diocesan Bishops of the Anglican Church of Australia voted against a statement that sought to affirm that marriage is only between a man and a woman and the blessing of same sex marriages was not in accordance with the teaching of Christ.

No further action has been taken. No services of blessing have taken place (that I know of) (Diocesan bishop)

### **Brazil**

In Brazil, some dioceses had been discussing and/or acting on the issue since at least 2010. This prompted the province to make the issue a priority in 2014, so a decision was reached relatively quickly to allow SSM from 2018. The provincial decision was then sent back to individual dioceses to decide locally. The process led to those opposed to the change leaving to form an alternative Anglican network before dioceses voted on the issue:

In the 2014 synod the province decided that all dioceses should have a dialogue on the matter and that at the 2018 synod we would be voting on approval or not. During the 2018 synod it was approved with almost all the votes. It was decided that with the approval of the province, each diocese should put it to a vote in its councils. The council of [ our diocese] took place shortly after the synod, without the communities and clergy that left the Church. It was unanimously approved and the following month the first wedding took place.... (Diocesan bishop)

The process before the provincial decision was seen by many respondents as being one of wide discussion at all levels (though, of course, these are responses for those who remained in the province):

In the Anglican Episcopal Church of Brazil, there were a lot of time of Reflections, studies and face-to-face meetings in all Dioceses, for 20 years, so that in 2018 we could vote at the Synod whether or not the provincial Church was prepared for this decision. It was a very responsible vote and the majority voted YES, but each diocese could in its local synod make its choice, too. (Diocesan bishop)

Encouraged to read, listen, discuss, and had many focused discussions about all of this. Some local [decisions] when given the latitude, and then slowly it came to the whole Church for a decision. (Diocesan bishop)

The process was built with the broad participation of the laity, clergy, and episcopate. Everyone was able to take decisions where it was demanded. All decisions were taken within the principle of synodality of the Church, from the provincial level to the diocesan level. And decisions were always made by a large and comfortable majority. (Diocesan bishop)

There was less material on communications from this province, a couple mentioning 'officially communicated' and 'Pretty well known, but mostly in writing, blogs, etc'. Implementation seems to have been relatively straightforward as the liturgies were already re-written in inclusive language, and no special rites were created:

Since 2015, when the BCP was revised, the liturgical provision statute has neutral language related to the Marriage Rite. This facilitate too much and whereas the reform of the BCP included extensive reform in terms of gender-neutral language, generally speaking, the need to produce new liturgies and forms for performing ceremonies was avoided. In Matrimony, the expression man and woman was replaced by people. (Diocesan bishop)

## Canada

Several respondents were keen to stress that the Anglican Church in Canada has a much more devolved governance structure than is the case in many other provinces of the Communion. The main difference is that the issues over SSB were faced in 2002 after debates going back to the 1970s. Although SSM has been legal across Canada since 2005, the Church has moved more slowly on this issue in some dioceses, and there was a greater sense of struggle than might be perceived from outside the province. From the provincial perspective, the process has involved a series of resolutions at the triennial General Synod:

After many years of dialogue and debate, a resolution was adopted at our triennial General Synod in 2004 affirming the dignity of same-sex couples. In 2007 another resolution was adopted determining that the blessing of same-sex unions is a matter of doctrine, but not core doctrine, and not a communion-breaking matter. In 2013 a resolution was adopted requesting that a proposal to amend our marriage canon be brought forward. This was followed by a three-year process of consulting the whole Church, encouraging local dialogue and presenting a report. The requested amendments were brought forward in 2016 and adopted at first reading. (The change required two readings at a 3-year interval). The amendments were narrowly defeated at second reading in 2019. (Executive officer)

We have had ongoing commissions, reports and dialogue and discussions over a period of at least 40 years including bishops and members of the General Synod. We attempted to circulate those reports and make discussion materials available but the degree to which these were accessed, used and considered is unknown. The willingness to engage the conversations depended heavily on the willingness of the diocesan bishop to allow the discussion. Some never did. This left the times of discernment at General Synod sometimes ill-prepared - very, very frustrating. (Archbishop)

The diocesan responses suggested a variety of actions and assessments at more local level:

We have been actively discussing the issue of human sexuality since the 1970's. Bible studies, group and regional discussions and consultations, synod debates and presentations, lenten studies, episcopal pastoral letters, listening circles, prayer and discernment was all part of the preparation on allowing for same-sex blessings and same-sex marriage. (Executive officer)

There was a lot of preparation prior to making to making the original decision (workshops, discussion groups and it came to synod three times). In terms of marriage of same sex couples not a lot of preparation was needed-- it had already been done (Diocesan bishop)

For decades, the people of the Diocese of xxxx prayerfully and faithfully engaged in an intentional process to discern the Holy Spirit's leaning with regard to both the blessing of same-sex unions and the marriage of same-sex persons, striving to uphold the dignity of every human being in this sacrament. This was primarily undertaken through a series of holy conversations at parish meetings and at our synods (facilitated by a conversation guide and resource), during the late 1990s and 2000s. Ultimately, resolutions were brought to our diocesan synod; initially

assent was withheld, but in 2008 the diocesan bishop granted assent to permit same-sex blessings.

Over ten years later, the Report of the Commission on the Marriage Canon, 'This Holy Estate', provided a solid foundation for an inclusive understanding for the Anglican Church of Canada of the sacrament of marriage, regardless of sexual orientation, in advance of General Synod 2016 to discuss revisions to the national Marriage Canon. (Executive officer)

A respondent from another diocese was less positive about their process:

There was no real preparation. There was a series of 'discussions' where all clergy and many Lay people were invited to have conversations about it. It was called "gracious listening". Speakers were brought in from both perspectives and space allowed for conversation. However, after many many conversations there was no clarity as to how the diocese would move forward, or how. There was no discussion, formally, with leaders in various places. It essentially just fizzled out and when the motion was brought to our Diocesan Synod to permit blessings - it was not assented to by the Bishop that day. He promised to write a letter within a few months and when he wrote the letter a year or so later - he vaguely stated that things would remain as they were which was to continue as we were - not conducting blessings.

I am not personally writing 'for' or 'against' any one decision. I am simply stating that the way the decision was reached was not at all thoughtful or deliberate. A bunch of conversations where people of differing opinions spent a bunch of time convincing the other why they were wrong. A few speakers on different sides, doing the same. Nothing formal after that. (Executive officer)

Another respondent (also an executive officer, rather than a bishop) wondered about the effectiveness of some of the preparation and process:

The decision making process offered several study guides and discussion documents as background over the course of several years. It is not clear how many parishes actively engaged in using the material. Decisions at Synods were made following parliamentary procedures with limited time for speakers (3 min) and limited time for debate. This was not conducive to some of the cultures which make up our church especially First Nations. It also set up a win-lose scenario. The General Synods of 2004, 2007 and 2016 and 2019 were particularly contentious. General Synod 2010 which produced a summary report of the synod members thoughts was much gentler. (Executive officer)

It seems that the process varied considerably from diocese to diocese and may have been perceived less favourably by some than others. Part of the issue for some in the Anglican Church in Canada has been the way that synodical decisions have tended to emphasise divisions and made it hard to reach consensus. The reflections of one diocesan-level respondent make this point:

Several facilitated discussions were initiated by our Congregational Development department. Resources were prepared and shared widely with Synod members and parishes. Despite our best efforts at encouraging respectful dialogue, bringing the question to a synodical yes/no vote was consistently divisive and

hurtful. Invariably, no matter how much time was allocated or how many resources were provided, people would ask for more.

After a series of Synodical votes meant to be decisive but were hurtful and divisive, the Bishop as chief pastor, with a group of trusted consultants and writers chosen to represent the breadth of position on the question, crafted and released policies for same-sex blessings (2010), then same-sex marriage (2016), then ultimately issuing a new Marriage Policy (2020).

Policies were shared via email to clergy and lay-leaders and published on our website. Reception was harshest for the original (2010) policy on same-sex blessings, with critics claiming it went too far, while proponents said it did not go far enough. Conservative voices felt that the bishop had "overstepped" his authority, and did not like being an outlier in the global Church. Some clergy worried that their orders would no longer be recognised in the wider Communion thereby affecting their transferability.

By 2020 and the introduction of the Marriage Policy, most felt that the expansiveness of the policy which allows each cleric to act according to conscience and theology, allowed for the Diocese to "move forward" and lay down the question. It is important to note that same-sex marriage was legalized in Canada in 2005, the fourth country in the world to do so, and the first in the Americas. (Executive officer)

Communications were also mixed, and may have contributed to some misunderstandings, especially in the early days:

Communications take place through different forms of media (diocesan newspaper, newsletters, social media, etc). Back in 2002 the result was a lot of division. That is not the case now. Priests and parishes know that they can opt out of being a place where same-sex marriage can take place. (Diocesan bishop)

Not well. [Diocese] has been isolated from other parts of the church. (Diocesan bishop)

There was one letter sent out from our Bishop to communicate that SS blessings would not be permitted. (Executive officer)

At provincial level, there was some concern that material sent out to dioceses may not be used as effectively as it might be:

Our Communications department publishes a newspaper (online and print) and we have social media outlets that disseminate key information, decisions, and articles about the church. During a General Synod there is communication about resolutions to the public and public media takes an interest in controversial topics such as this. Whether Anglicans in the pews actually read or hear the decisions is often dependent on their level of interest and the willingness of the clergy to share information widely. (Archbishop)

As in Australia, implementation in Canada was left to the dioceses as they are the main level of oversight. From the provincial perspective, there has been no national decision, so no national liturgies have been produced.

There have been no direct liturgies produced by the national level of the Church as we have not made direct decisions. Dioceses that have permitted same-sex blessings have issues liturgical expectations (sometimes using liturgies from other Provinces eg. TEC or producing their own). Dioceses that have made pastoral provision for same-sex marriages have also issued guidelines for liturgical practice. (Archbishop)

This lack of overall direction may have left some dioceses feeling somewhat abandoned:

There has been nothing done to implement or to discuss liturgies or procedures at all. (Executive officer)

Some dioceses have created new liturgies for SSB and/or used liturgies for SSM developed in the USA:

The College of Bishops issued the Marriage Policy in 2020. The Marriage Policy appended the rite from the Episcopal Church which eschews references to man/woman and husband/wife for gender-neutral terms. (Executive officer)

Liturgies were produced by a diocesan liturgical committee and approved by the diocesan bishop. (Executive officer)

At the diocesan level, the diocesan implemented the decision, giving permission to use liturgies that had been authorized in the TEC or using the current liturgy with a modification of pronouns. (Executive officer)

### **Scotland**

The SEC was the first Anglican Church to make a province-wide decision to allow SSM. This followed a long period of debate, but the process was given impetus by the decision of the Scottish Government to permit civil same-sex marriages in 2014. A respondent at provisional level outlined the process from that perspective:

Discussions about sexuality within the church, and in particular same-sex relationships, has been ongoing since the late 1990s. A study guide on sexuality (which put forward a number of viewpoints) was produced around 2000 and commended to congregations for their study. As mentioned above, decisions about informal same-sex blessings were, in effect, left for a local decision by the bishops in 2013.

The decision by the Scottish Government to legislate for same-sex marriage, and the legislative changes introduced in Scotland propelled the church into making a decision on the matter – though there was support for change from within the denomination. To enable the church to consider whether it wished to make a change, a conference was organised in 2014 which was attended by bishops and members from every diocese, selected so as to provide a range of views. The purpose of the exercise was, essentially, a listening one for people on all sides of the debate to hear from those with different views. That listening event was cascaded into dioceses which organised similar events to enable discussion locally.

In 2015 a paper commissioned from the church's Doctrine Committee was considered by the General Synod and the Synod was asked to choose, from a range of options, how it wished to proceed. It opted for a change to the church's Canon on marriage to remove the requirement that marriage be understood as a union between man and woman and instead to recognise that there were different views within the church as to what constituted marriage. Changes to Canons require a two-year reading process. A first reading took place in 2016, following which the changes were discussed by diocesan synods, before the Canon returned for a second and final reading at General Synod 2017. (Executive officer)

A diocesan perspective was similar, but noted the technicalities of the synod vote that allowed the Church to hold together those with opposing views:

There was a long period, a number of years, of consultation and discussion. It is important to note that, unlike some Anglican provinces, the Scottish decision was that clergy of the Church should be permitted to solemnise marriages lawful in Scotland. As such, it was not so much (though it clearly was) a decision for same-sex marriage as a decision to allow clergy to do what they had always done. It is a fact that some at the General Synod voted in favour of the change even if personally opposed to same-sex marriage as they recognised the decision as one about staying together. It is, in that regard, not dissimilar to an earlier decision to permit the remarriage of divorced persons - it is permitted within the Church, but some congregations and clergy remain opposed (and clergy have the right and responsibility to act according to their conscience). This process I would commend to the Church of England. (Diocesan bishop)

The notion of a 'Cascade Process' was mentioned more than once:

Sets of national 'cascade' conversations - engaging with the issues, theology, range of wider potential impacts. Local briefing at diocesan level on the specific canonical changes as the process was passed through canonical revision process. Free votes at all synodical levels. A lot of engaging with people of different views - in a small church without 'parties'. Work on 'disagreeing well'. Cascade discussions at national and diocesan level. Briefing notes to congregations and clergy. Canonical change process with papers for formal governance. All focused on 'staying in the room'. (Diocesan bishop)

In 2012 the SEC's Doctrine Committee published an Essay - Marriage and Human Intimacy - read/ used by clergy and laity both personally and within study groups, preaching/ teaching and open conversations (local and gathered congregations). There were many 'Cascade Conversations' at Provincial, Diocesan and Charge levels where stories were told, heard and held with respect and generosity in what were safe spaces/ places with trained and experienced facilitators. (Executive officer)

We had an extensive period of consultation - 2 years, There was the Cascade Process involving people across our church - the Doctrine Committee paper which explored whether a Christian understanding of marriage could extend to same sex couples. We have studied, thought and prayed. (Diocesan bishop)

This discussion of a document was similar to discussing documents in Australia, but the nature of the two documents may partly explain the different perceptions of the process.

Communication seemed to be a two-way process as local responses to the paper were fed back to the central body:

Information was received from Provincial offices to Diocesan offices and to individual churches. (Executive officer)

The local were fed into the Diocesan Synod and the Diocesan Synod fed into the Provincial Synod. (Diocesan bishop)

At every stage clergy communicated with their congregations. Wide and varied discussions at Diocesan and Provincial Synods. (Executive officer)

SEC is a small province, and the processes and communication may reflect the advantages of working on this scale. Implementation involved action at both a provincial and diocesan level:

.... the actual decision took the form of a change to the church's Code of Canons. The process of doing that was the same as for any change to a Canon, namely a two-year reading process at General Synod and consultation with dioceses between the first and second readings. Again, as mentioned above, because the Scottish legislation in effect provided that clergy who wished to solemnise same-sex marriage would need to "opt in" for authorisation – via a process of nomination by the Diocesan Bishop – the implementation of the church's canonical change was in effect done on a case-by-case basis depending on whether individual members of clergy wished to be able to solemnise same-sex marriage.

The church's existing marriage liturgy already included options which were undifferentiated as to gender and, consequently, no liturgical change was required. (Executive officer)

The 2007 Marriage Liturgy was already usable for same-sex weddings. The College of Bishops produced Guidance for Clergy and Charges about the process involved in a) for priest applying to become an Officiant for same-sex marriages & b) Charges deciding whether or not to host same-sex marriages and managing any disagreements. (Diocesan bishop)

Bishops led the process of handling registration of clergy. Clergy (who wished to opt in) applied, having had their local discussions. No changes were needed - we had an ungendered marriage liturgy from 2007. (Diocesan bishop)

As in Brazil, having gender-neutral liturgy to begin with made the implementation of SSM much easier.

### **USA**

The Episcopal Church in the USA (TEC) was the first to allow dioceses to decide on SSB, and some dioceses began SSM as early as 2012. In 2018 all dioceses asked to allow SSM. Some respondent bishops were not in post during the process, and some found it hard to imagine how contentious it had been:

I have pastoral letters from my predecessors about this; I think this had been under the radar for so long that the church institutions and clergy were able to adapt quickly--it was just making public what was already so. The theological

work from the Episcopal Church provided support, and there were opportunities for people who wanted to learn/understand to do so. That said, people who were adamantly opposed no matter what did tend to depart. Entering this diocese in 2019, I would never know how contentious it had been--I believe the bishop before me was quite the reconciler and healer in this. (Diocesan bishop)

There had been a prolonged and extensive series of discussions, debates and votes. As one bishop said, 'It took a while'. One bishop had been involved for many years:

Conversation about the participation of gay and lesbian persons in the life of the church has been going on in my experience since the early 1970s, at least in the Diocese of Rochester. There have been numerous biblical and other studies that I and many others have participated in over these many years. I think there has been an abundance of study and conversation. At the national level, there have been numerous resolutions and studies about how the church should proceed. Quantitatively, this has meant many opportunities across the church for study in conversation. (Diocesan bishop)

Respondents pointed to decisions agreed by voting arising out of prolonged discussion at diocesan and national level:

In the Episcopal Church, nearly everything is done by discussion and by voting. Again, over many years there have been resolutions, debates, time frames, reports back to dioceses, etc. (Diocesan bishop)

General Convention deputies voting with their own mind, having been elected by their dioceses to represent them. (Diocesan bishop)

Nationally there were endless committees, and we have a democratic system so it was voting on a new facet of the issue every three years at General Convention. Then reporting back what was going on. (Diocesan bishop)

Again, it was a very long process. Decisions were reached by vote in General Convention. All deputies (clergy and lay representatives of dioceses) and bishops took part in these discussions and votes. (Diocesan bishop)

Although experience differed considerably, in several cases the process was driven forward by bishops and senior leadership once the direction was decided:

The Bishop Diocesan was the primary decision-maker however the clergy and lay leaders had important influence on the manner in which discussions were undertaken. It is difficult to give a timeframe as the issue has been discussed to greater or lesser degrees for quite some time. The Bishops held vigorous discussions and debate on the issue. Diocesan conversations were shaped by the bishop. Standing Committees and Diocesan Councils were involved as was merited by their specific roles and responsibilities. (Diocesan bishop)

Bishop, standing committee, ad hoc committees and various conversations over a couple of years. (Diocesan bishop)

Communication was partly through the media and partly through regular means such as pastoral letters.

Overall, TEC is some distance beyond the decision-making process and there is a sense in some responses of leaving it behind:

In 2003, whether Gene Robinson would get consents to his election as bishop was a question. In 2022, whether a bishop who opposes gay marriage will get consents is the question. So a complete change in under 20 years. (Diocesan bishop)

Several of the bishops who responded had come into post after 2018 and generally seemed to be distanced from the process and focussed on other issues. The same bishop quoted above had made a change that might have been contentious a few years ago:

I'm not sure how it was done in \*\*\*\* since I wasn't here. When I arrived, we had a diocesan policy on "same sex marriage". I eliminated that policy when I arrived because we don't distinguish between same gender marriage and opposite gender marriage. But that policy was probably important at an earlier date. (Diocesan bishop)

Implementing SSB and SSM in TEC involved more centrally produced material than was evident in Canada:

Yes, the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music produced rites that were voted on by General Convention, first for same-sex blessings and then for same-sex marriage. (Diocesan bishop)

Nonetheless, one bishop pointed out the control was ultimately at the diocesan episcopal level:

As bishop, I retain the authority to approve liturgies used in the congregations. And I insist on the same standards for marriage for heterosexual and same-sex couples. (Diocesan bishop)

### *Wales*

The Church in Wales approved SSB (but not SSM) in 2021 for a five-year 'trial' period. There were three respondents from Wales, two at diocesan level and one at provincial level. The provincial respondent outlined the process:

Dioceses were invited to gather to discuss and confer in advance of the matter coming to our Governing Body. This involved the whole church. At the Governing Body the decision was made to enable legislation to pass with a two thirds majority in each house being necessary. (Archbishop)

Communication was through provincial bulletins. A diocesan respondent gave more detail from that perspective:

The decisions were made by the Governing Body so members of that body were quite engaged but there was no prolonged debate at diocesan level. Five years before there had been a major debate in the Governing Body which had produced no firm outcome - largely because those who wanted equal marriage would not settle for simply blessings. No-one had any appetite to repeat that exercise so it proved a fairly straightforward process. (Diocesan bishop)

Another diocesan pointed to the way that the change was processed by introducing changes to church legislation:

An experimental Rite for the blessing of civil unions of same-sex partners or married couples has been introduced for five years. This was by way of bill procedure, as it recognised that this was a change to the discipline of the Church. (Diocesan bishop)

In one diocese, the process seemed partly driven by the bishop ordaining and licensing clergy in same-sex relationships, with those opposed having to accept the bishop's position:

There was no diocesan debate, though I had ordained someone in a same sex marriage the year before and we have a number of clergy married to same sex partners who are licensed, so the diocese knew where I stood. Those who are not in agreement find themselves respected and included. (Diocesan bishop)

Implementation was by the central production of liturgy, which was approved by bishops before being put to each local governing body:

The authorised liturgy was passed by the GB (Archbishop)

The liturgy was produced by the Standing Liturgical Advisory Commission of the Church in Wales, approved by the bishops, and the Governing Body. Each bishop thereafter authorised the rite for use in their diocese and communicated agreed protocols by pastoral letters. (Diocesan bishop)

Yes, liturgical material was produced and the Bench of Bishops wrote to all clergy to ensure they understood their options. (Diocesan bishop)

Wales is of a similar size to Scotland, but the (limited) evidence from the survey suggests the process may have been more centred on the church hierarchy than was the case in SEC.

## Open answers: lessons learnt and general points

The final two text boxes asked respondents to reflect on what they had learnt and to offer any other comments. They were introduced by:

### Lessons learnt

Given your experiences in these matters, are there things you would do differently with the benefit of hindsight? What worked well and what was less successful?

### Anything else?

Is there anything else you wish to add about the impacts of the decisions on your Church?

These two boxes allowed respondents a final chance to reflect on how the issues of SSB and SSM had impacted them and their Church and have been combined in this section.

## New Zealand

The longest responses were from the dioceses that have accepted the decision to allow SSB. The one diocese that has not accepted it is in 'impaired communion' with the other dioceses, but this is not always understood elsewhere. The respondent from that diocese reflected that:

We should have worked harder on the wording of the statement from our regional synod to indicate the state of our inter-diocesan relationships.  
(Executive officer)

The majority of respondents expressed the wish that what divisions there are could be healed, and some wished they had done more:

I would like to have pushed a lot harder for the congregations which disaffiliated by a very high margin to have at least tried the Community of St Mark option.  
(Diocesan bishop)

I think the most important element of our time together was to focus on the relationship we hold as the Body of Christ and embrace our ability within Anglican polity to hold various views. We needed to have the deep listening experiences without judgment to be able to get a point of respect for various theological, scriptural and rational interpretations of the issues before us. We also needed that to be able to develop a sense of how we could create space within the church for Anglican Communities where identity could be framed around one perspective, to give identity within the Body of Christ so that they were able to remain in relationship. (Diocesan bishop)

As a Diocese we are grateful to God that we did not have any clergy or parishes that chose to break away in response to this decision. From a Diocesan level, the following principles seem to have led to a largely positive outcome in relation to same-sex blessings.

- the key focus that the aim was to remain in relationship despite theological difference, and to have conversations well

- allowing individual parishes / clergy vestries to outwork the Provincial / Diocesan decision as they best feel appropriate for their own context and congregations
- putting hard work in to preparing resources (from a range of perspectives), facilitating small group, parish and regional discussion meetings, strongly led and communicated from senior leadership.

In general (and arguably this is the case in any Diocese / group / situation) where parishes hadn't done the hard work around cultural and ecclesiological discussions - irrespective of issue - then it became harder for them to have conversations well that had the potential to be fraught or divisive. In this respect equipping leaders of all kinds well is critical. (Executive officer)

One respondent weighed the pain of the process against the eventual outcome, while another noted that issues still remain.

Splitting has been very painful and still stings. We are sad to have lost the people we have lost. Friendship and collegial networks have been affected. Our Diocese has been discombobulated in various ways, including financially, even though no properties were taken by those who left. On the other hand, it is very nice not to have the issue hovering over us, continually second guessing when a certain group of people, always threatening to leave, would actually leave. Further, it has highlighted the importance of being Anglican is being able to live with difference. (Diocesan bishop)

The province remains divided over the issue: one diocese claims "impaired communion" with the rest of the province, though the nature of the impairment is not defined, and is not evident in any outworking. The Diocese of Polynesia does not have the same legal system, and so in Polynesia there are still laws against same-sex engagement. (Diocesan bishop)

One bishop was helpfully honest about his own role once the decision was made:

There has been one request for a Same-sex blessing in [our] Diocese, and the request was granted. I would have been less fearful in hindsight. (Diocesan bishop)

### **Australia**

The final reflections from Australian respondents were mixed, which reflects the sharply divided opinions. They also convey something of the pain and difficulty of trying to maintain unity when options are sharply divided and strongly held. While some felt the formal decision-making process was helpful, others stressed the problems with deciding such matters in synods. For example, from two dioceses who both oppose SSB:

Synod was the appropriate body to deal with such matters, and I feel it worked well. It was helpful for our congregations to see the church leadership standing on, and being committed to, the authority of Scripture, especially in a society which has moved away from Scripture. (Executive officer)

The primary lesson is that matters which impact the identity of persons cannot be dealt with productively in abstract ways. Synods are by their nature ill formed to resolve 'questions' about relationship and sexuality because they will

unhelpfully polarize, simplify and objectify matters which require pastoral and personal attention. This means (in my view) that those who wish utter conservative clarity or freedom for progression need to temper their desires.

We need to be careful that in the desire to protect a sense of faithful adherence to God's revealed will, or the full affirmation of deeply held and sincere progression regarding sexuality we fail to treat each other as co-heirs with Christ of God's Kingdom. (Diocesan bishop)

The importance of listening, as well as openness and communication at senior levels between dioceses, was stressed as important, perhaps because it has not always happened:

The inability to come to agreement on this issue should have been acknowledged and embraced earlier so more time could be spent on how we now interact with each other given the fractured nature of our fellowship. Discussions on the ways we can still work together and how we may or may not be able to provide alternative episcopal oversight or even discussions on church-planting outside of one's diocese are topics that could have been addressed earlier. (Diocesan bishop)

At the national level, we have still not had adequate conversation across the divide on this issue, in my opinion. A written resource presenting differing views was widely regarded as not engaging with differing opinions, ie different contributions talking past one another. There might be a way for this to be facilitated. (Diocesan bishop)

Open and frank discussions amongst the Australian bishops has been helpful for unity and keeping the lines of communication open; but this has really only happened in the last 18 months or so. Before that, we were not encouraged to, or allowed time to, discuss the matter. So starting these honest discussions sooner (like a decade ago) would have been helpful. Also, something like Living in Love and Faith would have been helpful. (Diocesan bishop)

More formal opportunities for discussion within and between Clergy and Laity. (Diocesan bishop)

A lot has changed since 1998 across the Communion and locally. If we had been able to help people be safe early on (very few gay Anglicans felt safe after Lambeth 1998, especially clergy) and had been able to listen well, to listen to scripture and the different approaches to living into the future as people given the ministry of proclaiming the good news of Jesus and living mission in a fast-changing world we might have done better. But perhaps not..... Working with schools and Church Agencies of Social service and community care has worked well. They are clear about their values and work. (Archbishop)

The sense that this is an issue that divides the Church is evident in several responses to the 'Anything else?' question:

Only that the Australian church is in the early stages of tearing itself apart over these issues. (Diocesan bishop)

Still a mess at the national level. (Diocesan bishop)

It is very demanding on the Diocesan Bishop, the House of Bishops, and the College of Bishops. It is another dimension of juggling competing views and insights in our Communion. (Diocesan bishop)

The introduction of same-sex blessings in our churches has been catastrophic for the unity of the national church, not because some Anglicans are obsessed with sexuality as some may claim, but because the blessing of that which God does not bless impacts one's very understanding of the nature of the gospel and the salvation Jesus offers.

The actions of some outside of our diocese, including bishops, in speaking publicly against Sydney's stance on this issue or providing journalists information to use against our ministries has also undermined unity and trust.

I have asked a number of bishops who wish to introduce same-sex blessing to their churches whether this will lead to more people in their churches or more people having an opportunity to get to know Jesus. At least one said he hoped so, especially the parents of children who are LGBTQI. One said that for him inclusion was the lens he viewed things through rather than salvation. Another said that it would make no difference, and we just needed to do this because society had already left this issue behind.

Our desire in [our diocese] is to see as many people as possible come to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ through meeting Jesus through the words of the bible, through the love of His people, and the power of His Holy Spirit. We want to see people saved from hell and to know the love of God the Father for the rest of eternity to the glory of Jesus. This is why we will not be introducing same-sex blessing. (Diocesan bishop)

There is still considerable pain, grief, uncertainty, and impaired fellowship at a national level over the blessing of same-sex marriage in some dioceses, and the range of responses to that decision having been taken. In [our diocese], for example, there appeared to be more interest in and reaction to how this unfolded at our synod from beyond the Diocese than there was within it. At the local level, we are at peace with the freedom our clergy have to bless and not to bless, and are moving forward with respect to other, equally important aspects of our share in God's mission to the world in Christ, conscious of the ongoing need for healing and the rebuilding of trust where there has and continues to be hurt and confusion over actions or inaction. (Diocesan bishop)

... National meetings of Bishops are a difficult space for me as the bishop of the Diocese as many still frowns upon us because of our decision. (Diocesan bishop)

### **Brazil**

In Brazil the process was preceded by a lot of discussion and dialogue. The respondents we heard from were very positive about the process and outcome, though they recognised that it had led to some leaving.

I think we had a lot of time to talk about it and the result was better than expected. Some people did not want to talk and preferred to leave the church. Those who spoke, approved or accepted naturally. Throughout the history of the church, changes have consequences, but the church needs to keep moving

towards meeting the needs of all people, regardless of gender, race, social class and sexual orientation. I wouldn't change a thing, because the process was very well done. (Diocesan bishop)

Made the decision faster, and earlier, but that was impossible. I think we took it as it came and we made it work. (Diocesan bishop)

For one respondent, the Church may have over-estimated the problems the issue would cause:

Considering that the demand for same-sex marriages has not been great, experience to date does not point to the need for any significant change in the pastoral practice related to the preparation and administration of the sacrament.

Honestly, my feeling is that after 4 years after the decision, the life of the Church was not received any new challenges in this field. It seems to me that the issue of resistance to change was more of a taboo issue than anything else. . (Diocesan bishop)

Another mentioned the positive impacts:

Today we have received many people who have come from other churches, because the Diocese welcomes, loves and ministers the sacraments and sacramental rites to all people, regardless of gender, race, social status and sexual orientation. (Diocesan bishop)

### *Canada*

As with some other provinces, there were some personal and honest responses from some of the Canadian respondents, often reflecting on the crucial place of dialogue, acceptance of difference, and on the inadequacy of deciding by synodical vote.

Important to allow for full discussion, allowing for safe spaces of conversation that are held respectfully and prayerfully. Everything done in the context of prayerful gatherings and allow for all voices to be heard. (Executive officer)

There needs to be trust. Both sides of the debate (those in favour of same-sex marriage and those not) need know that both voices are welcome. Just like what took place at Lambeth this year, there needs to be recognition and trust that both views are needed in the church of today. That level of trust was not present in our diocese in 2003. (Diocesan bishop)

It is difficult for me to say formally, having participated in the General Synod debates, but only latterly holding this office. Perhaps the one observation is that at times I feel that we have talked about people (perhaps risking forgetting their humanity) rather than with people. (Executive officer)

Parliamentary process does not lend itself to serious discussions when time for speakers and debate is limited nor does it generally bring about changes in opinions. (Executive officer)

Decision-making using parliamentary procedure with a binary yes/no vote cannot help but lead to hurt, dissention and division. For us, episcopal directives were less divisive, and allowing for individual choice for congregations, and latterly

individual clergy, seemed to provide the most space for harmony. (Executive officer)

From a provincial perspective:

Our most difficult moments were around the methods of voting. We had technical glitches with electronic clicker devices in 2016 that caused the exacerbation of divisions as the vote was declared initially lost on same-sex marriage (to the joy of some and the pain of others) and the next day discovered votes mis-recorded so that it was declared won (to the joy of some and the enormous pain of others).

In 2019 the result of the loss of the second vote on same-sex marriage - was received with a weighty silence that satisfied no one punctuated by the keening of a young trans person who felt abandoned by their church.

The pain of those two General Synods has been so profound for everyone in the church that no one wants to enter the discussion again at this time. We have talked and talked, discussed and discussed and we do not have consensus on what is right. Dioceses that could wait no longer have made pastoral provisions for blessings and marriages. Dioceses that believe this is unfaithful are unhappy but not desiring further fights. Our public image is not good in Canada as most of the other mainline Protestant denominations have made public affirmations of same-sex marriage, including our full communion partner, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada.

What has worked best - is to not vote but hold discussions that are grounded in good listening practices and that honour the diversity of our Church. Breakout groups - with rapporteurs who listen and gather up what has been said - then synthesize into a document that is reflected back to the plenary have been helpful. Our General Synod in 2010 did this and had a good result - not unanimity but respect of differing views and a sense of where we could stand together in our differences.

Pushing the church to make a final decision when it is clear that we are not ready - has divided us. We also have found that despite our gospel proclamation we do not fight well. (Archbishop)

Bringing matters of human dignity to a vote at synods was a fractious enterprise that strained the bonds of affection between faithful disciples who understood marriage differently. At the same time, creating space for holy conversations about such matters during synod was a worthwhile exercise. A more pastoral and theologically-centred approach, guided by the leadership of the bishop, to permit but not require clergy to preside at same-sex marriages may have helped bring people along the Spirit's leading in a less confrontational and divisive manner.

It is important, in all matters, to understand that these conversations involve real people with real lives; it is difficult for the Church not to objectify a community and/or polarize a community of faith unless intentional care and compassion is engendered in all matters. Holding this in mind and being less desiring of 'being right' may have better helped us find a via media that may have prevented costly legal battles with breakaway parishes and a polarized community. As our bishop

reflected recently, we needed not to find a way to win, but a path forward that found us bearing with one another with love. (Executive officer)

There was a mix of reflections on whether the Church was still divided or had moved on.

From a provincial perspective:

We remain in a state of limbo at the official level, but at a practical level - at the level of many dioceses - people are finally able to get on with their lives as same-sex weddings are celebrated with the same joy and dignity as opposite-sex weddings. (Executive officer)

We are still in a 'limbo' space but it is a space where we can focus on other more pressing issues. The same-sex blessings/marriage issue has been a distraction in some senses as the world around us in Canada thinks we are anachronisms anyways and this just proved it. We have lost the public space to have a voice about sexual intimacy and human thriving. We have been distracted from other serious questions that need the voice of the Church - climate change; racism; other aspects of human sexuality (transphobia; homophobia). I hope and pray we have learned something through our journey on this .... It has also taken a serious toll on the House of Bishops - as the divisions run deep there. However we have learned to find a place for respectful dialogue; and a humility about our understanding of God and God's ways that is inviting us to build healthier relationships. (Archbishop)

A response from diocese that moved early on the issue contained pain and hope:

I do think the process was as open as possible. I lost many friends and colleagues in the walkout in 2002 - people who refuse to speak to me today. At the same time, some who walked out could no longer stay apart and have returned. It was a stressful time, an emotional time. I do think that many had their faith deepened and the church is slowly being recognized as being relevant in our contemporary society.

I do know that what is appropriate in Canada may not be so everywhere. I also know that no one should ever be harmed in any because of those they love but supported, protected, and welcomed in the Church. (Executive officer)

One diocese offered an extended response to 'Anything else?'

The lawsuits generated from breakaway parishes arising from our discussions related to the blessing of same-sex unions were costly, even though the diocese ultimately prevailed. We invested resources in legal battles and were distracted from the mission God had imagined for the Church in our diocese. Human relationships were also severely strained at all levels of the Church and our wider witness to the society was impaired because of the division that was sowed, despite society increasingly being supportive of blessing same-sex unions.

These struggles did not materialize in the same way after the approval of a rite for the blessing of same-sex marriages, as our diocese has lost much of its evangelical wing to the Anglican Network in Canada and most people in our congregations - and society at large - were generally accepting of same-sex marriage, having lived with that reality for more than a decade civilly.

Given [our diocese's] context of several years of blessing same-sex unions and then the subsequent time of marrying same-gender couples, it seemed that the most powerful and authentic response from us to the proposed changes to the marriage canon was to capture stories of same-sex married couples and the priests who presided over their weddings. We invited several couples and priests to share their lived experiences of inclusivity in the sacrament of marriage on video, in the lead-up to our recent General Synod process on the marriage canon. (Executive officer)

Indecision, lack of clarity, and lack of communication was mentioned as things that some diocesan respondents would want to avoid if the process is repeated:

In my opinion once the original conversations happened it may have been helpful to gather a group of leaders in the diocese and beyond to discuss next steps. To discuss implementation or not implementing. To discuss how to communicate well the decision that was clearly being made. To establish a clear answer for people on either side of the issue the decision, why it was made and what, if any, chance there would be for revisiting the issue in future. Our biggest failure in our diocese has not been choosing one or the other side. It has been the utter lack of communication and clarity.

In terms of a by-product of this whole thing - I think the ability of people to have civil discourse with each other on topics within which they stand on opposite sides has been a huge disappointment. We had the opportunity not just to allow for conversation, but to teach/guide/encourage people to speak, respond and listen with the eyes/ears/heart of Jesus. We lost that opportunity.

Leadership matters. People who are willing to be clear and decisive but also are willing to help guide us all to listen, speak and treat one another with the mercy and grace we have all received from Christ is VITAL. Leaving things undecided leaves everything destabilized and relationships is tatters. (Executive officer)

I would have made the decision to move forward with same sex marriage much sooner. Questions are asked about how many people have left the church because of the decision to move ahead with same sex marriage. I know we have lost more families because we took so long to make the decision. (Diocesan bishop)

### **Scotland**

The final responses from SEC respondents showed understanding of both the benefits and dangers of being a small Church:

The cascaded listening process referred to above certainly helped enable the church to come to a decision in General Synod. We are a small denomination and in the context of debate of contentious matters in our Synod, those who might take opposing views on an issue tend to be known to one another. That may mean that disagreement is perhaps more respectful than might otherwise be the case.

The processes leading up to General Synod decision also meant that there had been plenty of opportunity before the formal debates for individuals to make their views known and have the opportunity for discussion with those with whom they disagreed. Discussions at General Synod in 2014 and 2015, which were

deliberately designed so as not at that point to require decision by the Synod, helpfully allowed discussion in a less pressured environment. (Executive officer)

Our church was broadly in a place where our small size and close relationships meant this was going to be either a) handled in the context of existing good relationships or b) toxic because of the closeness. The lack of a party structure in such a small church meant the small number who could not live with this had to leave. Those were courted hard by the GAFCON/ACNA structures, esp those in England - a proxy war for the issues there maybe. That is still live now, but on the fringes, just outside. Overall, we are just fine on the other side, 5 years on from the decision. (Diocesan bishop)

A number of useful lessons seemed to have been learnt:

Stronger messaging that those who did NOT wish to opt in were valued in the church. The sense that 'one side' had 'won' is not helpful. All must lose a little for this to work well. (Diocesan bishop)

While the whole process worked well the need for constant clarification of where we were in the process and how the final decision was to be implemented cannot be underestimated. (Diocesan bishop)

Giving people across the Province time and space to consider and discuss these issues led us to a debate then to an agreement. For clergy and congregations to have a choice in the matter made way for a positive outcome. This continues, nothing is forced from Provincial level. (Executive officer)

The SEC's decision did cause hurt and anger in parts of the Anglican Communion....With the Province, the Cascade Conversations were important. There was much prayer, discussion and theological debate. The whole Church participated in the process - including the youth in the Church. Those of different views continue to walk together, for the change to the Canon recognises that there are different understandings of marriage, and no member of the clergy is compelled to conduct any marriage against their conscience. (Executive officer)

There were also reflections on the importance of making a decision and moving on:

It has shown that the Church is in touch with our culture. As was made clear by the Archbishop of Canterbury at the recent Lambeth Conference, in reference to the Scottish Church and others, "They are not careless about scripture. They do not reject Christ. But they have come to a different view on sexuality after long prayer, deep study and reflection on understandings of human nature. For these churches not to change traditional teaching challenges their very existence." Our decision, alongside not dissimilar decisions in Brazil, Canada, the USA, and Wales, does seem to many in our Church as in stark contrast to the position in England - the impact is positive for us, but leaves the position in England appear extremely problematic. (Diocesan bishop)

While there was an amount of discontent it was outweighed by the positive response of many congregations, individuals and secular society. We are 5 years on, and we are not burdened by this issue sapping the church of energy and creating constant dispute. (Diocesan bishop)

## USA

The TEC final responses seemed to offer the reflection of those who had had some years to adjust to the change and move on from the pain of divisions. Nonetheless, those memories seem to remain, and there were some very divergent opinions expressed, perhaps reflecting different contexts across this large and sometimes divided country. In terms of lessons learnt, several mentioned the importance of preparation and open discussion.

Change is hard, and some folks were certainly unreconciled to the changes. On the whole, I believe extensive periods of conversation and reflection, in a variety of settings, provided the best opportunity for information sharing and for reflection. Early on, there were theological and biblical studies in the diocese that were very helpful. As the conversation became more political, it became more contentious, but the long periods of conversation made the difference. (Diocesan bishop)

More conversations at the parish level would have been more helpful. (Diocesan bishop)

Making reactive decisions does not work, doing the slow hard work first is best, leaders need to lead with Unity prayed for and redeemed by Christ for the sake of God's mission. (Diocesan bishop)

It is said that bishops should never surprise people. That does not mean you never do anything new. It just means that when you do something new, it is after a time of preparing people for the decision through a variety of communication outlets - preaching, blogs, pastoral statements. (Diocesan bishop)

One respondent felt a better strategy for dealing with those who disagreed would have helped:

It would have been better to have a clearer strategy on how to relate to those who disagreed and chose to leave The Episcopal Church, including property disputes. Incessant lawsuits by all sides, greatly damaged the work of the Gospel. Although there is overwhelming support for same-sex marriage within our diocese, it continues to be a sensitive topic (very negative reaction to Lambeth Call on Human dignity). (Diocesan bishop)

While some were proud of the changes made, there were also those who had found the long-term effects were perhaps not what was predicted.

I believe having liturgies drafted and tested over time was helpful; it was probably also helpful to have a period where there were different expectations in different dioceses so that we could test where the Spirit was sending us--but ultimately, I am extremely grateful that I am in a church that I can say concretely does not discriminate on the basis of gender or sexuality, and that there are no longer dioceses where my ordination is considered invalid, or where a couple is worried about whether they can get married. (Diocesan bishop)

I was consecrated bishop in 2012. In 2003, when Gene Robinson was consecrated bishop in New Hampshire, I was a parish priest in New York. A number of people in Western Massachusetts left the Church in 2003. When we gave permission for blessing same sex unions in 2012 and same sex marriage in 2015, no one left the

church and through the years others have joined the church because of same sex marriage. (Diocesan bishop)

We are now seeing 'deconstructed' evangelicals, who feel unsafe or unwanted in their respective churches, entering the Episcopal Church. In many areas of our diocese, The Episcopal Church, is the only church that welcomes LGBTQ+ individuals. This has not reversed our chronic decline overall, but it has provided a welcome for marginalized individuals. (Diocesan bishop)

Some said that doing this would open our doors to everyone, and everyone would come to The Episcopal Church...Not so. life goes on..... I'm afraid we continue to cease following the Good News, and only focus on what we think the world wants to hear. There is so much more that we have to speak about. (Diocesan bishop)

I wasn't here during the hardest years of conflict on issues of human sexuality. By the time I was consecrated, the tensions had mostly abated. I felt that there was room to be generous and accepting of those who, for theological reasons, could not support same sex marriage or the ordination of LGBTQ clergy. I still feel that way, but the climate is less tolerant now for those who do not support the diocesan position of inclusion. I find that challenging. (Diocesan bishop)

Several expressed thanks and pride for the way that TEC has moved on:

Proud of our church for this inclusive action. (Diocesan bishop)

I thank God that most of the divisions over this issue seem to be behind us, and we can move forward in mission. I believe our position is in accord with that of the vast majority of society. And I believe that God comes down on the side of love and commitment. In any case, when I stand before God at the judgment day, I will be able to say that I stood for love and commitment for all God's people. (Diocesan bishop)

It was one of the bravest things the Episcopal Church has done in my lifetime and I am grateful. (Diocesan bishop)

## *Wales*

The three respondents generally felt the process had worked well:

I think the process was good and worthwhile and the current, gradual and gentle discerning is wise. (Archbishop)

I believe it has worked well. The response in dioceses has varied according to the makeup of the clergy, and the proportion of conservative clergy unable to accept this development. It has also depended on the level of trust between the bishop and the clergy. It is realised that a move to same-sex marriage in Church will be more difficult if this is promoted as a change on completion of the five-year experimental period. (Diocesan bishop)

One respondent at the diocesan level also highlighted some factors that made the process better or more difficult:

It helped us enormously that almost the whole Bench of Bishops has been in favour of equal marriage. The Archbishop who was most ambivalent retired before this decision was made thus reducing the likely conflicts between us. Being in lockdown and other personal factors in the 18 months before our decision was enacted made interaction difficult. Pressure from the Archbishop of Canterbury did not help and was, at times, inappropriate. Within the diocese keeping good relations with those clergy and congregations who were less than enthusiastic reaped great rewards and resulted in us focusing our energy elsewhere rather than on disagreeing on this topic. (Diocesan bishop)

The same bishop foresaw a positive future outcome:

Moving on to a liturgical provision for those in same sex partnerships was not only the pastorally right thing to do but it opened a better place for the diocese and Province. We began a LGBTQ+ chaplaincy which included chaplains from across a wide spectrum of conviction, respecting the differences with which we live. We challenge those who use 'inclusive' to mean anything but, genuinely welcoming all, especially those living faithfully in lifelong partnerships. We are leaving behind the preoccupation with this subject and that feels healthy. Our destination is equal marriage and I do not anticipate it causing any great trauma. Our clergy who are married to same sex partners are great role models. (Diocesan bishop)

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## Appendix: The Survey Questions

### **Living in Love and Faith:**

#### **An enquiry initiated by the Church of England**

Thank you for agreeing to help us with this information-gathering exercise. We are asking people in key roles in various provinces of the Anglican Communion, and other denominations, about the impacts of any decisions their Church may have made to allow or prohibit the blessing of same-sex partnerships in church and/or the marriage of same-sex couples in church.

Assessing the impacts of making such decisions is difficult to do, and we realise that in some cases there may be little hard evidence. We are asking you to give your best assessment of impacts, but in places you may need to indicate that the information is not available. To help you with supplying information, and to reduce your time spent on this exercise to a minimum, this online questionnaire will direct you to only those questions that are relevant to your particular context. Near the start of the survey we require you to indicate the decisions that your province and/or diocese (or equivalent ecclesial bodies for non-Anglican Churches) have (or have not) made on these matters.

To make the exercise meaningful we need to know the name of your province (or national church) and, if relevant, your diocese (or regional body). If you are also willing to give us your role and a contact email it would allow us to follow up your answers if we need to clarify any points. In one section we ask for your considered opinion of the impacts, and these responses will be treated confidentially and anonymously. Please answer to the best of your knowledge.

The information you give will be held securely and the data will be visible only to the research team. In our report to the Church of England and any subsequent publications we will not identify dioceses or regional bodies, so you can report information that might not be in the public domain at present. If you wish to withdraw your information from the study after you have completed the form, please contact Andrew Village, giving your name and identifying your organisation.

Most of the questions ask you to tick boxes, but there are places where you can respond more fully in your own words if you would like. You can leave the survey and return to complete it within a week as long as you use the same browser.

Thank you for helping the Church of England to address this important question. The Revd Professor Andrew Village York St John University, UK The Revd Canon Professor

Leslie J. Francis University of Warwick and Bishop Grosseteste University, UK This survey has been approved by the Church of England and has ethical approval from York St John University. If you have any questions, please contact: Andrew Village a.village@yorks.j.ac.uk

I confirm that I am over 18 years of age and have the appropriate permission to complete this form on behalf of the organisation I represent.

- Yes
- No

End of Block: Opening Page

Start of Block: Context

### **Your Church**

This section asks you to identify your denomination and province (if you are an Anglican) or national church (for other denominations). We are also distributing to individual dioceses (or regional church equivalents for other denominations) so you will also be asked to identify that if appropriate.

What is your denomination?

- Anglican / Episcopalian
  - Methodist
  - Uniting Church
  - Lutheran
  - Presbyterian
  - Other (please specify)
- 

### **Your context**

Are you answering on behalf of a province or a diocese?

- I am answering on behalf of my Anglican Province
- I am answering on behalf of a diocese

**About your province**

What is your National Anglican province?

- Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia
- Anglican Church of Australia
- Anglican Episcopal Church of Brazil
- Anglican Church of Canada
- Scottish Episcopal Church
- The Episcopal Church (USA)
- Church in Wales

What is the name of your diocese?

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What is your role and/or position?

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End of Block: Context

Start of Block: SSB\_Decisions

### **Blessings of same-sex couples in church**

Decisions at provincial (national) and diocesan (regional) level

This section asks you to indicate what decisions have been made (and are currently in force) in relation to allowing the **blessing of same-sex couples in church**. We define this as the blessing of a couple that have either legally formed a civil partnership or are legally married through a civil ceremony. This is different from the marriage of same-sex couples in church.

In your context there may have been no decisions taken, or decisions may have been made at national level to devolve decisions to local dioceses or regional bodies. It will help us if you could indicate as concisely as possible what the situation is. We will offer you a series of choices to tick, but if these are not sufficient, you can give an answer in your own words at the end.

### **Blessing of same-sex couples in church: Provincial decisions**

(This may be after a civil ceremony that has created a legal partnership or a civil marriage)

Has a decision been made on the **blessing of same-sex couples** in church at **Provincial / National** level?

- No
- Yes



There has been no decision on the **blessing of same-sex couples** in church at provincial level because:

- This level of governance has no formal decision-making powers
- We are waiting on diocesan /regional decisions or feedback
- It has not been discussed formally at this level
- It is still being discussed
- It was decided that we would not make a decision on this matter yet

When was this decision made?

(please give the year if you know it)



What was the decision regarding the  **blessing of same-sex couples**  in church?

*(You may select more than one answer if necessary)*

- To devolve decision making to dioceses or bishops
- To refuse permission for this to happen in any churches
- To allow individual clergy to decide whether to do this
- To allow local congregations to decide whether this should happen in their church
- To insist this must be allowed in all churches

#### **Blessing of same-sex couples in church: Diocesan / Regional decisions**

*(This may be after a civil ceremony that has created a legal partnership or a civil marriage)*

Has a decision been made on the  **blessing of same-sex couples**  in church by your  **bishop, diocese or equivalent regional body** ?

- No
- Yes



There has been no decision on the  **blessing of same-sex couples**  in church at diocesan level because:

- We are awaiting a decision at provincial /national level
- The decision was made at national level for the whole Church
- It has not been discussed formally at this level
- It is still being discussed
- It was decided that we would not make a decision on this matter yet

When was this decision made?

*(please give the year if you know it)*

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What was the decision regarding the  **blessing of same-sex couples**  in church?

*(You may select more than one answer if necessary)*

- To refuse permission for this to happen in any churches
- To allow individual clergy to decide whether to do this
- To allow local congregations to decide whether this should happen in their church
- To insist this must be allowed in all churches

If you feel your answers have not satisfactorily described the decision making on the  **blessing of same-sex couples**  in church, you can explain here.

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End of Block: SSB\_Decisions

Start of Block: SSM\_Decisions

### **Marriage of same-sex couples in church**

Decisions at provincial (national) and diocesan (regional) level

This section asks you to indicate what decisions have been made (and are currently in force) in relation to allowing the **marriage of same-sex couples in church**.

In your context there may have been no decisions taken, or decisions may have been made nationally to devolve decisions to local dioceses or regional bodies. It will help us if you could indicate as concisely as possible what the situation is. We will offer you a series of choices to tick, but if these are not sufficient, you can give an answer in your own words at the end.

Marriage of same-sex couples in church: Provincial / National **decisions**

Has a decision been made on the **marriage of same-sex couples** in church at **provincial / national** level?

- No
- Yes



There has been no decision on the **marriage of same-sex couples** in church at provincial /national level because:

- This level of governance has no formal decision-making powers
- We are waiting on diocesan /regional decisions or feedback
- It has not been discussed formally at this level
- It is still being discussed
- It was decided that we would not make a decision on this matter yet

When was this decision made?

(please give the year if you know it)

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What was the decision regarding the **marriage of same-sex couples** in church?

*(You may select more than one answer if necessary)*

- To devolve decision making to dioceses or bishops
- To refuse permission for this to happen in any churches
- To allow individual clergy to decide whether to do this
- To allow local congregations to decide whether this should happen in their church
- To insist this must be allowed in all churches

Marriage of same-sex couples in church: Diocesan / Regional decisions

Has a decision been made on the marriage of same-sex couples in church by your diocese or equivalent local body?

- No
- Yes



There has been no decision on the **marriage of same-sex couples** in church at diocesan level because:

- We are awaiting a decision at provincial /national level
- The decision was made at provincial level for the whole Church
- It has not been discussed formally at this level
- It is still being discussed
- It was decided that we would not make a decision on this matter yet

When was this decision made?

(please give the year if you know it)

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What was the decision regarding the **marriage of same-sex couples** in church?

*(You may select more than one answer if necessary)*

- To refuse permission for this to happen in any churches

- To allow individual clergy to decide whether to do this
- To allow local congregations to decide whether this should happen in their church
- To insist this must be allowed in all churches

If you feel your answers have not satisfactorily described the decision making on the **marriage of same-sex couples** in church, you can explain here.

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Start of Block: Impacts

### **Impacts of the decisions**

This section asks you for any evidence that decisions made to change or retain rules led to clergy resigning or congregations withdrawing.

Again, we ask separately for same-sex blessings and same-sex marriage. This is because any impacts for some may have happened when blessings were allowed, and subsequently allowing marriage had little effect. Or perhaps allowing blessings were not as impactful as allowing marriage itself.

*If rules on these issues have not changed within your domain (national or regional) please base your answers on resignations or withdrawals by those who wanted rules to change. You can explain in your own words afterwards if your responses need some qualification.*

Page Break



### Blessing of same-sex couples in church

Are there any instances where the decisions at national or regional level to allow or not allow the **blessing of same-sex couples in church** has resulted in:

(Please tick ONE response for EACH case to indicate the approximate number of which you are aware.

**Please base your answer only on cases where the decision was definitely the cause of the change.**

If you have no information, tick '?')

	None	1 to 5	6 to 10	More than 10	?
Clergy resigning as an individual choice					
Licensed lay workers resigning as an individual choice					
Churches/congregations have reduced (but not ceased) their payments to central church bodies					
Churches/congregations have ceased completely their payments to central church bodies					
Churches/congregations have collectively refused oversight from the central church body					
Churches/congregations have collectively joined a breakaway network within the denomination					
Churches/congregations have collectively left the denomination altogether					

Page Break



**Marriage of same-sex couples in church**

Are there any instances where the decisions to allow or not allow the **marriage of same-sex couples in church** has resulted in:

(Please tick ONE response for EACH case to indicate the approximate number of which you are aware.

**Please base your answer only on cases where the decision was definitely the cause of the change.**

If you have no information, tick '?')

	None	1 to5	6 to 10	More than 10	?
Clergy resigning as an individual choice					
Licensed lay workers resigning as an individual choice					
Churches/congregations have reduced (but not ceased) their payments to central church bodies					
Churches/congregations have ceased completely their payments to central church bodies					
Churches/congregations have collectively refused oversight from the central church body					
Churches/congregations have collectively joined a breakaway network within the denomination					
Churches/congregations have collectively left the denomination altogether					

Is there anything you need to add to qualify your responses on impacts of decisions?

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End of Block: Impacts

Start of Block: Numbers

**Impacts on growth or decline: The national picture**

Most churches these days keep statistics related to attendance, membership, baptisms etc. Do you have any firm statistical evidence that the decisions made on same-sex blessings and/or same-sex marriages have impacted your Church numerically at a national level?

*Please select the best answer*

- There is evidence of some changes related to these decisions
- There is no evidence to suggest any changes related to these decisions
- We have no way of knowing if numbers changed as a result of these decisions

Please provide details of the changes or links to relevant sources

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**Impacts on growth or decline: The regional picture**

Most churches these days keep statistics related to attendance, membership, baptisms etc. Do you have any firm statistical evidence that the decisions made on same-sex blessings and/or same-sex marriages have impacted your Church numerically at diocesan or regional level?

*Please select the best answer*

- There is evidence of some changes related to these decisions
- There is no evidence to suggest any changes related to these decisions
- We have no way of knowing if numbers changed as a result of these decisions

Please provide details of the changes or links to relevant sources

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**Numbers of same-sex blessings**

Do you have any figures relating to the number of **same-sex blessings** that have happened in churches in your particular domain (province, diocese, etc.) since they were permitted?

*(Please tick a box and enter number if available)*

- Not allowed in my domain
- No figures are available

- Approximate numbers since the decision

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- Approximate number per year

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**Numbers of same-sex marriages**

Do you have any figures relating to the number of **same-sex marriages** that have happened in churches in your particular domain (province, diocese, etc.) since they were permitted?  
*(Please tick a box and enter number if available)*

- Not allowed in my domain
- No figures are available
- Approximate numbers since the decision

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- Approximate number per year

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End of Block: Numbers

**Your overall assessment of the impacts of decisions made or not made**

In this section we are asking you to indicate, by agreeing or disagreeing with the following statements, your best estimate of how these decisions (or lack of them) affected the life of the Church in your domain. This is an assessment based on the decisions made to date on both blessing and marrying same-sex couples in church.

You can tick ‘not certain’ if you feel you are not able to give an opinion on a particular issue.



Our decision (or indecision) on the issue of same-sex blessings and/or same-same marriage in church has:

*Please tick one option on EACH row*

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not certain	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Been unimportant to most churches	<input type="radio"/>				
Brought joy to most churches	<input type="radio"/>				
Reduced tensions and conflict	<input type="radio"/>				
Increased divisions	<input type="radio"/>				
Increased hope	<input type="radio"/>				
Increased despair	<input type="radio"/>				
Allowed us to move on	<input type="radio"/>				
Left us in limbo	<input type="radio"/>				
Improved our standing in society	<input type="radio"/>				
Damaged our public image	<input type="radio"/>				
Allowed us to focus on more important issues	<input type="radio"/>				
Kept us in touch with ordinary people	<input type="radio"/>				

Brought us together

Split us apart

### **In your own words**

Thank you for answering our structured questions.

We would also like to hear of your personal reflections on matters related to how decisions were made, communicated and implemented, and what might have been done differently in the light of your experiences. We have provided text boxes for these different aspects. You can continue to type beyond the box if necessary.

### **Preparing for decisions**

At your level (national, regional, or local), how were bishops/leaders; clergy/ministers; lay people) prepared for decision-making?

### **Making decisions**

At your level (national, regional, or local), how were decisions reached? Who was involved, how were discussions facilitated and fed back, and what was the timeframe?

### **Communicating decisions**

At your level (national, regional, or local), how were decisions communicated and received across the church?

### **Implementing decisions**

At your level (national, regional, or local), how were decisions implemented? Were liturgies or procedures produced and, if so, by whom?

### **Lessons learnt**

Given your experiences in these matters, are there things you would do differently with the benefit of hindsight? What worked well and what was less successful?

### **Anything else?**

Is there anything else you wish to add about the impacts of the decisions on your Church?

Start of Block: Contact

**Contact details**

It would be very helpful if you could give us your name and a contact email, which would allow us to contact you if we need to follow up any of the answers you have given. If you do this, we will keep your details separate from the rest of the data, using an encrypted link that will be accessible only by the research team. Thank you.