

Pastoral Letter on Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) Communities

19 October 2017

Introduction: Greetings to the entire ecumenical movement, communities of the province of KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) Communities. The KwaZulu-Natal Christian Council (KZNCC) recognises the dignity of all humans created in the image of God. KZNCC respects the sanctity of life and the dignity bestowed on all human beings. This pastoral letter is to all of us who cherish social justice and uphold of human rights. The KZNCC calls communities to treat one another in a way that does not degrade the dignity of all human beings. The KZNCC further calls for humankind to protect one another in a society which is homophobic.

This pastoral letter is informed by the motivation, the recommendations and the continued commitment of the KwaZulu-Natal Christian Council (KZNCC) to conscientise faith communities on the plight of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Intersex (LGBTI) programme. This pastoral letter is calling for safe spaces where constructive discussion on the church and homophobia can take place.

Platform for constructive Discussion: In one instance one of our facilitators found himself in a situation which turned hostile to the discussion on homophobia. He records that the participants caused a rowdy unconstructive discussion. He has this to say:

“No, they had started their own discussion. Even the establishment of context (of Romans 15: 7) for the stated reading did not help. Nobody picked on any of the points presented in the reading. One prominent member, again, dominated the discussion and become almost the co-facilitator, dwelling on the first chapter of the Romans, which he deemed to be stipulating clearly that we should not even be talking about such people (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Intersex (LGBTI) community, as Christians, since they are already condemned and deserve no acceptance in the Christian community” (Dlamini B D 2016). But then a question arises that what if the LGBTI are Christian themselves. It is known that many LGBTI communities are not repugnant to religion. We suggest that the subject of homophobia itself must be treated with respect.

So at the end of such disruption the facilitator said: “We ended up discussing the acceptance of gays, and I mean, not lesbians or any other queers, but just men. The discussion again shifted to focus on culture, customs and mores of the society around, which do not permit love relationships between two men, let alone the Christian community which should know what an abomination this is in the sight of God. No text was used in discussing this abomination” (Dlamini B D 2016)”. The difference that can be made by the constructive

discussion of homophobia is to shift the ‘focus on culture, customs and mores of the society around’ to social justice and human rights. As we grow and mature, and have affirmed the rights on all human beings we can then begin to look at the intricate matters of belief systems, philosophies of life, theologies, interpretations, and diverse cultural issues where we can learn from each other and accept our differences without degrading one another. Remember that human sexuality is a gift from God.

Human Sexuality as a Gift from God: Approaching the subject of human sexuality in the context of the abhorrence of LGBTIs for some and in the context of Gender Based Violence (GBV) unleashed to LGBTIs in the form of ‘corrective rape must take into cognisance that the subject may be discussed for a negative or positive premise. In this pastoral letter we suggest that those who want to enter this discourse must have done self-inspection or introspection of their latent perception on the subject. Human sexuality and the experiences of LGBTIs is perceived reality as we cognitively assume and wrestle with it. One among other realities is that it is estimated that 10% of the people of God on earth are LGBTIs. LGBTIs from time immemorial have never threatened the extinction of the human race. Sexual orientation in itself is not an abomination to God. The abuse of sexual conjugation can be looked at as something to frown on.

In the perceived reality we realize that the whole of the human being, body, experience, perception, spirituality and all that constitute it is intrinsically and inextricably sexual. Sexual emotions and feelings are experienced both in the spirit and the body of a human being whether so called straight or LGBTI person. The gift from God that is human sexuality is indestructible in humans. Human beings are holistically sexual beings.

Theologisation and Theological Training: Theological trainings, contextual bible studies and reflections remains as crucial and critical tools on transforming minds and attitudes of clergy and communities towards LGBTI and sexual minorities. Theological trainings can assist much more clergy and communities in addressing LGBTI and theology of sexuality from an informed position. Therefore, the KZNCC is encourages clergy and communities to do such informative theological educational sessions.

Recommendations: Faith communities (Church leaders, congregants) are encouraged to establish church support groups within church structure for LGBTI TO:

- o Offer solidarity to survivors and victims of GBV, LGBTI and Victims and Survivors of Rape.
- o To roll-out educational awareness campaigns to sensitize communities with the issues of GBV, Inequality, Gender injustices, LGBTI etc.
- o To encourage the church to provide safe secure environments and,

o To emphasize to church leaders to advocate for vulnerable people (LGBTI, Women and Children's rights), and educate victims of crimes through workshops hosted in churches other concerned and interested organisations

Conclusion: This pastoral letter made a contribution towards how we can address the subject of LGBTI, within the topic of the church and homophobia. The letter is suggesting that the subject can be addressed through 'constructive discussions. The question of human sexuality as a gift from God was addressed to remind us that a human being is a sexual being. This pastoral letter encourages us to do theological reflections and contextual bible studies so we can discuss the subject from an informed position.

Dr L M Ngoetjana

Deputy CEO: Theology (KZNCC)