

Gay clergy still hot topic - archbishop

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By Leila Samodien

Division over homosexuality and women bishops does exist "across the spectrum" within the Anglican Church, Archbishop Thabo Makgoba has said - but that is an indication of a church that is facing its challenges.

The archbishop, who returned from the Lambeth Conference in Canterbury, England, this month, said final decisions had not yet been made on contentious issues such as women clergy and the ordination of gay bishops, but they had been thoroughly discussed.

He acknowledged that there were divisions on these matters within all their dioceses across the world. However, it could not be seen as a split between liberals and conservatives as this was an "artificial divide".

"The reality across the spectrum, not just in South Africa, is that some parts of the communion are wrestling with issues such as ordaining women bishops, which we have done for 12 years already.

"I don't see this as a problem, but an indication of a church that is alive, and prepared to face the contextual realities and their challenges," he said.

Makgoba described the appointment of gay bishops as an emotive issue that has been discussed since 1998.

Lambeth Conference delegates were now considering the establishment of a pastoral forum, which would provide a platform for homosexuality to be openly discussed.

Makgoba believed the question "What would Jesus have said in this situation?" always lurked in their minds, but that there was also the matter of how people worked together in reading and interpreting the Bible in a current context.

The conference was held between July 16 and August 3. It is held only every 10 years.

This year, there was a strong focus on the rebuilding of relationships, the building of trust and the building of confidence in the Anglican identity.

Although it was attended by hundreds of Anglican bishops, it was also boycotted by a quarter of the world's bishops, opposed to the ordination of a gay bishop in England.

Makgoba played a vital role at the conference as a co-ordinator, where he encouraged interaction rather than speech-making.

Makgoba - who has been outspoken on the situation in Zimbabwe and the xenophobic violence that erupted in South Africa in May - also said some of the country's politicians,

community leaders and religious leaders were lacking in seriti - a Tswana phrase meaning dignity and respect - and needed to focus more towards promoting the values enshrined in the constitution.

He called on the government, civil society and religious institutions to work together in tackling key issues such as unemployment, HIV/ Aids and poverty.

University of Stellenbosch sociology lecturer Rashid Begg, who specialises in religion, said the division in the church was a result of a culture clash between different societies.

African countries, which had developed a huge Christian following, were less secular and were generally unwelcoming of matters such as same-sex unions, while dioceses in Western countries were more liberal about them.

"South Africa is a country of two or three worlds, where some parts are highly secular and others are not, so I would say it lies somewhere in between," said Begg.

<http://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/gay-clergy-still-hot-topic-archbishop-1.414378?ot=inmsa.ArticlePrintPageLayout.ot>