

Knights of Saint Columba

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Sex should only take place within a heterosexual marriage, the Church of England has reaffirmed.

In a new document, the House of Bishops said marriage between one man and one woman has always been regarded as “central to the stability and health of human society”.

However, they added that a “major” Church of England study is currently underway which will “inform further deliberations”.

Ordained ministers

The House of Bishops made the comments in a “pastoral statement” on opposite-sex civil partnerships, which were legalised on New Year’s Eve.

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They claimed civil partnerships are not “predicated on the intention to engage in a sexual relationship” and so could be suitable for ordained ministers.

However they said such unions should not be blessed by clergy.

Creation

On marriage, the document outlines the Church’s long-held position “that marriage is a creation ordinance, a gift of God in creation and a means of his grace”.

“Marriage, defined as a faithful, committed, permanent and legally sanctioned relationship between a man and a woman making a public commitment to each other, is central to the stability and health of human society.”

“Sexual relationships outside heterosexual marriage are regarded as falling short of God’s purposes for human beings”, it added.

‘Counter-cultural’

But the document notes that the Living in Love and Faith project – which looks at the Church’s teaching on sexuality – will “inform further deliberations of the House of Bishops”.

It did however conclude with a strong statement in favour of marriage: “For Christians, marriage – that is the lifelong union between a man and a woman, contracted with the making of vows – remains the proper context for sexual activity.”

The evangelical Church Society broadly welcomed the “courageous and counter-cultural” statement, while expressing concerns about the “trajectory of the Church of England”.

It concluded with a prayer that “the House of Bishops will continue to provide the pastoral leadership that we need, in accordance with the revealed will of our Lord and Saviour”.

Church of England LGBT campaigner Jayne Ozanne criticised the comments.

Bernard Holden MBE JP

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