



Women and the Church
Affirming ✦ Campaigning ✦ Transforming

A Gender Justice Policy for the Church of England

A Theology of Gender Justice

The concept of gender justice is rooted in the Biblical vision that women and men are created in the image of God (Genesis 1.27), made one in Christ (Galatians 3.28) and baptised into one body by the one Spirit (1 Corinthians 12.13).

Within that new identity, the whole body of Christ is called to seek the righteousness of the kingdom (Matthew 6.33), with a particular emphasis on 'the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith' (Matthew 23.23). Matthew interprets Jesus' mission in the light of Isaiah 42.1-4 as one that both proclaims and enacts justice:

This was to fulfil what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah:

*'Here is my servant, whom I have chosen,
my beloved, with whom my soul is well pleased.*

*I will put my Spirit upon him,
and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles.*

*He will not wrangle or cry aloud,
nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets.*

*He will not break a bruised reed
or quench a smouldering wick
until he brings justice to victory.*

And in his name the Gentiles will hope.'

Matthew 12.17-21

The prophets' vision of justice was rooted in the divine *mispat*, the justice of God. This is far broader than the Hellenistic concept of blind justice bringing uneven scales back into alignment. It is more of a relational concept than a forensic one, in which people are called to bring the essence of their covenantal relationship with God into their relationships with one another:

*What does the LORD require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?*

Micah 6.8

Within this Judaeo - Christian framework of justice, gender justice specifically aims to build fair, healthy, creative and interdependent communities in the church and in the world in which every individual, female and male, can enjoy the fullness of life that Jesus came to bring (John 10.10).

It aims to redress the imbalance of power between women and men, to heal the scars of centuries of discrimination and oppression, and to create more equitable ways of living and working together that will enable future generations to live in peace, freedom and stability.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu underlines the relevance of gender justice to broader issues: 'Ending sexism and including women fully in every aspect of society not only ends its own great evil – the oppression of women – but also is part of the solution to the rest of the world's problems.'¹

¹ God has a dream – A vision of hope for our times (2005)

Gender justice is an important aspect of the Five Marks of Mission developed by the Anglican Consultative Council in the 1980s and 90s, which the General Synod formally adopted in 1996:

- ◆ To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
- ◆ To teach, baptise and nurture new believers
- ◆ To respond to human need by loving service
- ◆ To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation
- ◆ To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth²

It is fully in keeping with its fourth Mark of Mission that the Church of England should seek to transform its own structures as well as those of the world it serves.

The Context for Gender Justice

The need for gender justice is a growing concern within and beyond the church. In 2014 two of the organisations the Church of England belongs to took important steps forward. The World Council of Churches appointed a gender advisory group to develop 'procedures and policies to help the WCC in accomplishing gender justice in institutions, communities and societies.'³ In the same year Christian Aid produced a gender justice strategy, acknowledging that it was a crucial issue in their work to tackle poverty:

*'Gender inequality is primarily an issue of unequal power relations – of inequitable relationships between men and women. It violates human rights, constrains choice and agency, and negatively impacts upon people's ability to participate in, contribute to and benefit from development. Unless we can help create just and equitable relationships between women and men, we'll be unable to achieve equitable, sustainable, resilient and thriving societies.'*⁴

In December 2014 the then Bishop of Sheffield addressed the House of Lords, supporting the case for establishing new global development goals in 2015 that would build on the achievements of the Millennium Development Goals that the Anglican Church had supported enthusiastically:

'The vision for the new global development goals needs to be and is of one world that is interdependent, developing and searching for pathways to sustainable, equitable growth and the flourishing of all.'

Gender justice was the second of four priorities the Bishop highlighted:

*'I would urge that gender justice must be a stand-alone goal. There must be targets to end violence against women and girls, increase participation and ensure economic justice for women.'*⁵

2 Bonds of Affection-1984 ACC-6 p.49, Mission in a Broken World-1990 ACC-8 p.101

3 <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/wcc-advisory-group-to-promote-gender-justice>

4 Gender Justice for All - 2014 Christian Aid p.4

5 <http://churchinparliament.org/2014/12/11/bishop-of-sheffield-calls-for-creative-communication-of-post-2015-development-goals/>

In 2015 gender equality duly appeared at the heart of the new Sustainable Development Goals adopted by the UN General Assembly in October.

Throughout 2015 the Anglican Consultative Office and Christian Aid helped shape the Faith Movement for Gender Justice. The Anglican Communion was one of the first signatories to the Movement's 'Side by Side' initiative:

*'Side by Side is a growing global movement of people of faith who want to see gender justice become a reality across the world. We draw together faith communities in many different countries, and in each country we work together wherever possible to meet local challenges in bringing about justice and equality for all people, irrespective of gender.'*⁶

'How can you say to your neighbour, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' while the log is in your own eye?' (Matthew 7.4) In the light of the Side by Side declaration, it is important that the Church of England should now address its own 'local challenges.'

The Church of England therefore resolves intentionally and strategically to embody and promote gender justice both in its internal structures and in its external engagement with the world.

Commitments

To that end, we make the following commitments:

- ◆ To promote the full inclusion of all women in church life, regardless of age, race, sexuality, disability or social and economic background
- ◆ To work for justice, inclusiveness, mutual accountability and transparency to ensure the full participation of women and men in all aspects of the life of the church.
- ◆ To encourage the recognition and use of every person's diverse gifts, regardless of gender
- ◆ To reform the systemic and structural practices that create barriers to the appointment of women to leadership and decision-making positions at every level.
- ◆ To seek the equal representation of women and men in all church bodies, and ensure gender balance across all roles and kinds of work
- ◆ To ensure that our organizational policies, systems, practices, budgets, appointment practices, appraisals, training and management include and reflect the principles and best practice of gender justice
- ◆ To ensure that the theological study of gender and gender justice informs our doctrinal, liturgical, ministerial and devotional practice
- ◆ To play a distinct and prophetic role, speaking and working actively to secure gender justice and the equal rights of both women and men socially, politically and economically
- ◆ To seek to transform the society we serve, speaking prophetically and standing alongside women advocating for change
- ◆ To monitor adherence to these commitments, and report transparently on the progress made

⁶ <http://sidebysidegender.org/>

The next step

Following the pattern of our sister churches, the Church in Wales (2008) and the Scottish Episcopal Church (2009), we recommend that the following Synod motion be proposed:

That this Synod, affirming its commitment to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, invites the undertaking of a Gender Audit at every level of the Church of England in time to report back to the General Synod in 2019

Terms of Reference for the Gender Audit:

To appoint a Working Party that will:

- ◆ devise the Audit Tools that will collect the data to identify any under-representation of either gender in the Church of England's ordained and authorised ministries; its deanery, diocesan and General Synods; and its diocesan and national staff;
- ◆ analyse this data, exploring possible hindrances to the broader participation of gender minorities and ways to resolve them; and setting goals or measures for their greater involvement;
- ◆ report its findings to General Synod and suggest future audit patterns that will continue to monitor and evaluate the Church of England's achievements in this area.



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