CIRCULAR LETTER

To: Diocesan Bishops and the Bishop of the Defence Force
Subject: Being Together
Date: 5 February 2013

Being Together

The General Synod by resolution 95/10(c)(iii) referred to the Professional Standards Commission the preparation of a statement of expectations regarding the behaviour of lay members of the Church for consideration by the next ordinary session of the General Synod.

The background to this resolution is contained the following passage of the Report of the Professional Standards Commission to the 15th General Synod:

"A significant issue brought to our attention in each consultation was the bullying of clergy and church workers by lay members of the Church, leading to the substantial impairment of their ministry. Because Faithfulness In Service only applies to clergy and church workers, there is no articulated expectation of behaviour for lay members of the church. We consider that the incidence of bullying of clergy and church workers would be more effectively addressed if the Church had a clear statement of expected behavioural standards."

Since the 15th General Synod there has been a significant change in Australia in the obligations of the voluntary sector such as churches with respect to bullying with the introduction of substantially uniform Occupational Health and Safety laws. The Work, Health and Safety Act 2011 (NSW) commenced in New South Wales on 1 January 2012. Virtually identical legislation came into force in the Australian Capital Territory, the Northern Territory and Queensland on the same date, and in South Australia and Tasmania on 1 January 2013. Victoria and Western Australia are yet to pass the legislation.

Under the New South Wales Act the duty under s 19(1) to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health and safety of workers will in many cases extend to voluntary organisations such as churches through the definition of “a person conducts a business or undertaking” in s 5. In particular, under s 19(3)(d) a person conducting a business or undertaking must ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the provision of any information, training, instruction or supervision that is necessary to protect all persons from risks to their health and safety arising from work carried out as part of the conduct of the business or undertaking. These duties extend to officers of an undertaking (s 27(1)). Failure to comply with health and safety duty can constitute a criminal offence by an officer of an undertaking (ss 32, 33 and 34(3)).
The implementation of policies in the Church aimed at the prevention of bullying will reduce the risk of a breach of these duties or similar duties in your State or Territory. Amendments to the provisions dealing with bullying in *Faithfulness in Service* aimed at satisfying these requirements were approved by the Standing Committee of the General Synod at its meetings in April and November 2011. The aim of a statement of expectations regarding the behaviour of lay members of the Church is to complement the provisions in *Faithfulness in Service* dealing with bullying. It is important to remember that *Being Together* is not a code of conduct, and will not impose a legal obligation on any lay person.

I enclose the revised draft statement of expected behaviour entitled *Being Together*. The first draft was circulated to you in May 2012 and has been revised in the light of the received comments. At its meeting held on 16-17 November 2013 the Standing Committee of the General Synod noted that the Professional Standards Commission would circulate the revised *Being Together* to the Dioceses for comment.

I request that you and representatives of your diocese give careful consideration to *Being Together*. The Professional Standards Commission wishes to take into account all comments about *Being Together* before finalising the text to be brought to the next General Synod which is to be held between 30 June and 4 July 2014.

I would appreciate it if you could forward any comments directly to me by Friday 2 August 2013 so that they can be collated with other comments prior to the meeting of the Professional Standards Commission in September 2012. The Professional Standards Commission would like to submit the final text of *Being Together* to the second meeting of the Standing Committee of the General Synod in 2013. I am happy to communicate with you or any representative of your diocese about *Being Together* on the telephone or by email. My contact details are:

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I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

[Signature]

GARTH BLAKE S.C.
Chairperson
For and on behalf of the Professional Standards Commission
Being Together

Jesus told us to love one another as he loves us. As Christians we know our life together is strengthened when our behaviour is consistent with our faith. However, our experience of being together can be difficult sometimes, particularly where there are differences. So it is important to be clear about what is loving behaviour towards each other.

Being a community:
• We will seek the common good of the church, not just our own interests.
• We will encourage each other to participate in the life of the church.
• We will be aware of how our behaviour affects others.

Relating to each other:
• We will treat each other with respect and dignity, irrespective of ability, gender, sexuality, race, age or contribution to the church.
• We will act with integrity and honesty in our interactions with each other.

Communicating with each other:
• We will communicate respectfully with others, and not in a way that threatens, belittles or humiliates.
• We will respect confidences, and refrain from speculation and gossip.

Acknowledging difference:
• We will respect those who are different from us and not isolate or ridicule them.
• We will listen to and seek to understand the beliefs, opinions and practices of others, even when we do not share their views.

Responding to conflict:
• We will accept responsibility for our part in a conflict.
• We will be willing to play our part in resolving a conflict.