

Parish of Wanstead Comes Out For 'Same-Sex Marriage' in Church

The Response From The PCC of St. Mary The Virgin with Christ Church, Wanstead to the January 2017 report of the House of Bishops Entitled 'Marriage and Same Sex Relationships After the Shared Conversations.'

For in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptised into Christ have clothed yourself with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

The Epistle to the Galatians, III. 26-28

'I will not let you go, unless you bless me'

Genesis 32.26

'The love of God is broader, than the measure of man's mind'

F.W. Faber

Preamble

The PCC of the Parish of Wanstead has prayerfully considered the report of the House of Bishops entitled 'Marriage and Same Sex Relationships After the Shared Conversations' issued by the Church of England on 23 January 2017.

Members of the PCC, along with members of the congregation, have also taken the opportunity to meet with Bishop Stephen, the Bishop of Chelmsford on 19th February 2017 to hear his views concerning the report and the possible ways forward following the failure of the Church of England's National Synod to 'Take Note' of the report on 15th February 2017; to ask their Bishop a series of clarifying questions; and to share their concerns and hopes with him for the future.

Members of the PCC have also discussed this report with members of the congregation after the Bishops' report had been circulated and read widely within the parish. They have also read a number of documents relating to the issues discussed in this report written both by scholars and by Anglican Bishops with opposing views.

Members of our congregations were also kept informed of the fact that this matter was coming before the PCC and were invited to give their views to the

Rector, the Church Wardens or to members of the PCC prior to the PCC discussion. The views given by members of the congregation on this matter were then raised and discussed at both the Standing Committee and at the PCC meeting.

On 15th March a statement in response to the report was adopted unanimously by the Standing committee of the PCC.

On 21st March 2017 this statement formally came before the PCC for discussion. The discussion and debate centred upon the inclusion, or not, of the call for 'same sex marriages' to be solemnized in Church in the statement. Consensus for the other elements of the statement was readily agreed.

After discussion at the PCC, a vote was held to adopt the statement as extant with the call for same sex marriage included. The result of that vote was: 10 members voted for and three members voted against the motion to keep 'same sex marriage' in church in the statement. As such, the statement was adopted by more than a two-thirds majority of those present from the PCC with the addition of the following two statements to be included in the preamble:

- A. That the Rector, Churchwardens and PCC remain fully committed to upholding the existing canons of the Church of England on marriage until such time as they have been legally amended.
- B. That the Rector, Churchwardens and PCC recognize that there are members of our parish who adopt differing and opposing views on the matter of the solemnization of 'same sex marriages' in church. The Rector, Churchwardens and PCC wish to publicly state that they remain deeply committed to the full inclusion and flourishing within the life of the parish of those who hold differing and opposing views on this matter, as sections 10, 31, 37 and 38 of the statement below seek to make clear.

The four other members of the PCC who were absent from the PCC meeting when this matter was tabled were also asked, in writing, if they would be willing to indicate how they would vote on the resolution to keep the solemnization of 'same sex marriage' in church in the statement or to remove it. All four members indicated, in writing, that they would vote to support the inclusion of the solemnization of 'same sex marriage' in church in the statement.

In the spirit of full transparency and openness, the PCC's statement in response to the report was then put out for consultation to all members on the electoral roll of the parish starting on 6th April, 2017 with a closing date set of noon on 19th April, 2017 – in time for the elections to Deanery Synod. Responses were requested, in writing, to be addressed to the Lay Vice Chair. A total of Sixteen responses were received to the consultation during the designated time. Those responses contained a number of very helpful suggestions of proposed amendments to the PCC's response. 12 of the responses were in favour of solemnizing 'same-sex' marriages in Church and four were against. In addition,

three responses were received out of time, two were in favor of solemnizing 'same-sex marriage' in church and one called for more time.

The Standing Committee considered the responses carefully and proposed a number of alterations to the document on 20 April . The PCC met on Sunday 23rd April to consider the responses received and also to vote on the revised document. After careful consideration, the PCC voted by 10 votes to accept the amended document with one abstention. Of the remaining six members of the PCC who could not be present at the meeting, four subsequently indicated in writing that they wished to support the amended document including calling for the solemnization of 'same-sex marriage' in church and two indicated that they wished to vote against it. The result of these PCC deliberations was then communicated to the parish before the Annual General Meeting on 23rd April 2017.

The Statement Agreed By The PCC on 23 April, 2017 now follows:

1. The PCC of the Parish of Wanstead unequivocally believes that **all** people are made in the image of God.
2. We believe that **all** people fall short of the glory of God through sin (Romans 3).
3. We believe that through the everlasting mercy of God, we have been given the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ who came into the world to save **all** sinners and who died on the cross for **all**.
4. We call upon **all** to repent, to turn to and to follow Christ.
5. We believe that **all** who place their faith in Jesus Christ as the way, the truth and the life will find salvation.
6. We do not believe that the 'issue' of consenting same-sex sexual relationships is a salvation issue.
7. We believe that Holy Scripture contains all things that are necessary to salvation.
8. We pray always to be guided by the Holy Spirit as we seek to interpret the scriptures in our daily lives both together and apart remembering at all times that it is the Spirit that guides us into all truth.
9. We continue to seek to interpret the Holy Scriptures in the light of tradition and reason.
10. We give thanks for the fact that people read and interpret the Holy Scriptures differently and we celebrate the diversity of perspectives and insight that these different readings bring.

11. We respectfully and humbly hold that the references in the Bible to sexual relations between members of the same sex may not relate to the faithful, stable same sex relationships that are evidenced in our modern context today. We believe that these relationships may be both rooted and grounded in Christ's love. In this we have been guided in our reading and thinking by the Roman Catholic Theologian, James Alison, amongst others. We have also taken note of the opposing arguments of Robert A.J. Gagnon, amongst others. **Please See End Note.**
12. When we think and pray about the evolution of thinking in the Church about this matter, we recall our Lord Jesus Christ's words, as found in the Gospel of John: 'I still have many things to say to you but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth' [John 16.12].
13. We also remember and take comfort from the fact that Jesus himself was willing to move and to evolve in his own understanding of inclusion. For example, we bring to mind the grace filled interaction which took place between Jesus and the Canaanite woman as related in the Gospel of Matthew:

'[She] started shouting "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a Demon" ... He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." He answered, "it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters table." Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish!" And her daughter was healed instantly!'
- We also recall Peter's own evolution towards greater inclusion guided as he was, by the Holy Spirit [see Acts 10].
14. We believe that those historically cast aside by the Church, such as our LGBTI+ brothers and sisters down the ages, belong to Christ.
15. We believe that through our common baptism we are **all** children of God and that we are **all** one in Christ Jesus.
16. We believe that **all** those who are one in Christ Jesus should strive to eliminate discrimination at every level wherever it is encountered both inside and outside of the Church and that discrimination based on economic power, gender, mental health, physical ability, race or sexuality contribute to some of the greatest evils of our age. We also believe that within the Church such discrimination may amount to a form of spiritual abuse.

17. We deeply regret and lament that for too long our LGBTI+ brothers and sisters have been treated as those who are 'begging for the scraps,' being seen by the Church as 'problems not people'. We therefore welcome Archbishop Justin's statement in February 2017 that 'there are no problems there are only people.'
18. We affirm and celebrate the dignity, the Christian witness and the great contribution to the life of society and the Church down the ages of our LGBTI+ brothers and sisters.
19. We call upon all of the houses that make up the Church's Synodical body [the House of Bishops, the House of Clergy and the House of Laity] to act decisively for the full inclusion of all of Christ's faithful people, gay and straight alike.
20. We recall the minds and hearts of our brothers and sisters in Synod to Jesus Christ's own words that those who believe in Him will do the works that he does and in fact will do greater works than these [John 14.12].
21. Specifically, we call upon all three Synodical Houses to legislate for the solemnization of marriages between members of the same sex in church **according to the conscience of the officiating priest.**
22. We do not describe this as 'equal marriage' but as marriage. We do not think in terms of Heterosexual and Homosexual love but of love.
23. We call upon Synod to act with appropriate pace in legislating for the move described in section 21 above, remembering that those who are likely to bear the cost and pain of discrimination across the Anglican communion most acutely in this area must be safeguarded at all times.
24. In the interim we call upon the House of Bishops and Synod to authorize liturgies for the blessing of same sex partnerships in churches following civil weddings.
25. We call upon the House of Bishops to lift its moratorium on LGBTI+ clergy from entering into 'same sex marriages.'
26. We call upon the House of Bishops to adopt not just a new tone but a new way of relating in this important area of human flourishing. A way of relating which truly welcomes, safeguards and protects all LGBTI+ members of the Church of God and, importantly, which seeks to include the voices of LGBTI+ people in all discussions and deliberations on this subject.
27. We particularly lament the absence of openly LGBTI+ voices in the House of Bishops' discussions on this issue before now. We note, with considerable regret, that the culture of the House of Bishops up to now

has been such that the Bishops who themselves may identify as LGBTI+ have not felt safe to be 'out' to their brother and sister bishops.

28. We welcome the statement made by the Archbishop of Canterbury that we now need 'a radical new Christian inclusion in the Church.'
29. We support the House of Bishops in their stated desire to draw up a modern teaching document for all people, not just LGBTI+ people, in the area of Human Sexuality and Marriage which seeks to faithfully grapple, in Archbishop Justin's words "with the reality of a 21st century understanding of what it is to be human and what it is to be a sexual being."
30. We also note that many recent reports of the House of Bishops have failed to respond adequately to people who identify themselves as Bisexual, Transgender or Asexual. This omission should be redressed.
31. We remain deeply committed to a Church that is able to maintain diversity in unity.
32. We do not see that this issue is a 'distraction from the Gospel' as it is frequently described. We believe that it lies at the heart of the Gospel and that this is not a matter of equality but of justice.
33. We call upon all Christians to pray and work towards the elimination of all homophobia throughout God's world. We deeply lament that throughout the Anglican communion God's children are still beaten, tortured and murdered because of their sexual orientation. We call upon the people of God throughout the world to put an end to such heinous violence and persecution.
34. We call our readers' attention to the fact that today, as you read these words, men and women and young people across God's world will self-harm, commit suicide and be put to death because of their sexual orientation. We remind all God's people that this is not an 'issue' but that people's very lives are at stake here.
35. We see the historic attitudes of the established Church in the areas of inclusion of women, LGBTI+ people and BME people as running directly contrary to the mission of God. We believe that this is especially a major barrier in our mission to young people.
36. We call upon the Established Church to offer mandatory Diversity Awareness training at theological training colleges before ordination; to all licensed lay ministers and children's, youth and family workers; to all Evangelists and Pastoral assistants; to all senior leaders in the Church; and to make online training available to all member of the church.

37. In our immediate context we commit ourselves afresh to welcoming all, to protecting all and to serving all whom we meet. Remembering always that we are each called to Love our God with all our hearts, with all our souls, with all our minds and with all our strength and that we are also each called to love our neighbours as ourselves (Luke 10).
38. We believe that everyone that we encounter, including those we profoundly disagree with, are our neighbours. We desire to walk alongside, to work and to share and worship with **all** in a spirit of gracious humility and love.
39. We pray for and will continue to advocate for the day when discrimination has no part to play in the Body of Christ and when **all** may have the power together to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge.
40. Until that day, we remember and give thanks to the one who, by the power at work within us, is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine. To him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.

24 April, 2017

End Note:

For further reading see, for example:

Marriage and Same Sex Relationships After The Shared Conversations; A Report From The House Of Bishops:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/media/3863472/gs-2055-marriage-and-same-sex-relationships-after-the-shared-conversations-report-from-the-house-of-bishops.pdf>

Statement from the Archbishop of Canterbury following the General Synod debate on the above report [15th February 2017]:

<http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/5841/statement-from-the-archbishop-of-canterbury-following-todays-general-synod>

The Bible and Homosexual Practice: An Overview of Some Issues by Robert Gagnon:

<http://www.orthodoxytoday.org/articles2/GagnonHomosexuality.php>

A Call To Evangelicals To Stand Firm by the Bishop of Maidstone:

<http://www.bishopofmaidstone.org/call-evangelicals-stand-firm/>

'But The Bible Says...'? A Catholic Reading of Romans 1 by James Alison:

<http://www.jamesalison.co.uk/pdf/eng15.pdf>

Pastoral Letter from the Bishop of Bradwell dated February 2017:

[http://www.chelmsford.anglican.org/uploads/ad%20clerum%20final%20version%20%20BJB%2021_2_17\(1\).pdf](http://www.chelmsford.anglican.org/uploads/ad%20clerum%20final%20version%20%20BJB%2021_2_17(1).pdf)

Report on Human Sexuality From The Theological Forum of the Church of Scotland (April 2017):

http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0020/39512/2017_Theological_Forum.pdf