

The following is the report from a conversation of international Anglican Bishops called together in 1999 by the Archbishop of Canterbury to meet over a three-year period.

A final report from the International Anglican Conversations on Human Sexuality

Foreword

In 1999, the year following the Lambeth Conference of Anglican Bishops, the Archbishop of Canterbury convened an international conversation of bishops to consider the topic of sexuality in general and homosexuality in particular. He asked me to chair the group, which included twelve bishops and primates. Aided by experienced and skilled facilitators, we continued the conversation, with some changes in membership, meeting annually for several days in retreat settings over the next three years.

The purposes of the meetings were to deepen our understanding of each others' views, as well as the theological perspectives and personal/cultural experiences in which these views are grounded.

Some of the participants had never met. Some knew others only by name, and came with preconceptions about where others stood on the substance of the conversations. Engaging in the disciplines of prayer, worship, agreed covenants and structured conversation, we together created a sacred space in which our differences became sources of mutual enlightenment and new insights.

Honouring one another by refusing to impute ill motives and by valuing the opinions of those with whom we disagreed, we became a kind of laboratory in which to grapple with our topic. The ensuing conversations were challenging, moving, and always honest, direct and conducted with charity and mutual respect.

We all felt ourselves enormously privileged to have had the opportunity to engage in this conversation, and we offer the following report on our learnings, hoping that it might be a gift to the Anglican Communion.

We are deeply grateful to the Archbishop of Canterbury for his vision of how our work might be of value in these times when a community that can honor and learn from difference can be a

sign of hope to a fractured world.

**The Most Rev. Frank T. Griswold
Presiding Bishop and Primate The Episcopal Church
in the United States**

[Commendation for Report on Human Sexuality](#)

The document before you is the result of a huge effort to bring Anglicans together to listen to each other and share their own views on human sexuality. It arose out of the 1998 Lambeth Conference, and I am very grateful to the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church in the United States for chairing the Working Party which has produced this summary of its discussion.

It will no doubt disappoint the vast majority of Anglicans who believe the practise of homosexuality to be inherently wrong. It will no doubt disappoint homosexuals in the Communion who continue to feel marginalised, misunderstood and maligned, and those who with them argue for a change of belief and of policy.

However, the Working Party was not set up with the intention necessarily of resolving the disagreements among us; but to deepen the dialogue and to find ways of bringing theology, experience and pastoral care together. The result of the Conversation demonstrates what dialogue involves an encounter with people with real feelings, real principles, real hopes and fears. It has demonstrated that another way is possible, a method of working together through difficult issues we face as churches. I really do like this face-to-face method, and want simply to commend it to all leaders of the Communion. Dialogue is not something we simply urge upon others. We use dialogue in order to clarify where misunderstandings may lie; to probe deeper into the motives for adopting this or that position in regard to certain issues; and to appreciate better (even though we may not agree with) the reasons why some people's views differ so radically from our own. In this way, our deepest search for truth will not be divorced from the fellowship we need for truth to emerge.

**The Most Rev. & Rt. Hon. George L. Carey
Archbishop of Canterbury The Anglican
Communion**

[A final report from the International Anglican Conversations on Human Sexuality](#)

Following the Lambeth Conference of 1998 we, bishops from different Provinces of the Anglican Communion, were called together at the invitation of the Archbishop of Canterbury for a series of Conversations regarding issues of human sexuality. According to the Archbishop's mandate our purpose was to "help move the whole Communion forward from the Lambeth resolution." We have brought to our Conversations a wide range of cultural and personal experiences, as well as theological convictions. We have met annually over the past three years for a period of four days. Those who were present for each meeting are noted below.

The Rt. Rev. Simon Chiwanga, Bishop of Mpwapwa Present: 1st, 2nd years

The Rt. Rev. Terence Finlay, Bishop of Toronto Present: 1st, 2nd years

The Most Rev. Frank Griswold, Presiding Bishop and Primate, Episcopal Church, USA Present: 1st, 2nd, 3rd years

The Rt. Rev. Roger Herft, Bishop of Newcastle Present: 2nd year

The Rt. Rev. Josiah Idowu-Fearon, Bishop of Kaduna Present: 1st, 2nd, 3rd years

The Rt. Rev. Chilton Knudsen, Bishop of Maine Present: 1st, 2nd, 3rd years

The Most Rev. Peter Kwong, Archbishop of Hong Kong Present: 1st, 2nd years

The Most Rev. Glauco Soares de Lima, Primate of Brazil and Bishop of Sao Paulo Present: 1st, 2nd, 3rd years

The Rt. Rev. John Lipscomb, Bishop of Southwest Florida Present: 1st, 2nd, 3rd years

The Rt. Rev. Michael Scott-Joynt, Bishop of Winchester Present: 1st, 2nd, 3rd years

The Rt. Rev. Peter Watson, Archbishop of Melbourne Present: 1st, 2nd, 3rd years

The Most Rev. Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Wales Present: 2nd year

As we arrive at the conclusion of our third and final consultation we have come more profoundly to treasure and respect, through

one another's presence, the Anglican Communion as God's gift. We recognize that our communion with one another is grounded in our shared creedal faith, in word and sacrament and in our common prayer. With humility we have come to acknowledge that as well as being a Communion we are also in the process of becoming a Communion in a deeper and fuller way, even as we struggle with difficult questions.

We have come to understand that our diversity of culture, language, history and ecclesiology enriches our common life. We also acknowledge that our diversity demands a high degree of forbearance with one another as we live within the multiple contexts in which we practice our faith as members of the Anglican Communion.

We do not underestimate the gravity for the Communion of the challenge on the part of some to change our traditional teaching regarding human sexuality. During our Conversations we have noted the fear of some within our Communion that any departure from the received teaching might in time become mandatory, and therefore compromise the conscience of many.

We rejoice that the critical issue regarding homosexual behavior that has brought us together for these three Conversations provided an impetus toward a deepening of our relationships with one another. We have discovered that we share many points of convergence, while we recognize that there are still critical points of disagreement in our common life and ministries as bishops of the Church.

As we have reflected on the Lambeth Conference of 1993 we have come to believe that the "legislative" process is often an inadequate way to discern the mind of Christ in some of the sensitive issues that face us as we continue to grow as a Communion of churches.

Truth can never be the private possession of one person or group within the Communion. It is only as we continue in conversation together within the whole Body of Christ that we are able to hear and test the Spirit speaking.

We believe that communion with one another will grow as we learn to speak the truth in love. We regret that we have often participated in and responded to half-truths about others. Our conversations have led us to long for more open and honest communication that will help us build up the life of our worldwide faith community.

We have committed ourselves to the hard work of seeking to be open to one another, listening in a spirit of hospitality and charity. We believe that respect for our Communion is fostered when we as bishops engage in face-to-face conversation across provincial lines. We encourage the development of similar conversations between other lay and ordained provincial leadership around issues vital to our common life. This discipline of seeking the truth and speaking the truth is especially important when information flows freely around the world due to contemporary technology. Our experience has reaffirmed our conviction regarding the importance of face-to-face communication. No amount of e-mail can take the place of it.

Our Conversations have led us to **agree on the following points:**

1. The Scriptures are foundational for all aspects of our work.
2. The questions at issue centre on homosexual behaviour, not on homosexual people. We are called to love homosexual people as we are called to love any other people.
3. Homosexuality is a much more varied phenomenon than the singular noun suggests; there are no "assured results" available to us from medical and other research into origins, causations, etc. Even if there were, Christians would not be relieved of the responsibility of making theological and ethical judgments.
4. The issue of homosexual behavior, and the divisions to which it leads, are a burden and a distraction from pressing needs for attention to mission, as well as to other issues of high priority for our Provinces.
5. There is urgent work to be done in provinces, to strengthen commitment to marriage and to fidelity within it. Our failures on this front weaken our ability to speak with credibility with homosexual people or about homosexual sexual behavior.
6. We reaffirmed Section 5 of the Lambeth Conference Report (1998), on human sexuality which noted some of the expressions of sexuality - beginning with promiscuity and every kind of abusive sexual behavior - which are plainly contrary to the Christian way
7. Because the role and authority of the Bishop and understandings of collegiality differ from Province to Province there is an increased potential for misunderstandings amongst us.
8. Recognizing our Anglican Communion as a gift, we do not want to see it fragmented. For it to be further divided by the issue of homosexual behavior would be the ultimate sexualization of the Church, making sexuality more powerful, or more claiming of our attention, than God.

Our Conversations have **revealed and clarified the following points of disagreement:**

1. We were not able to reach a common mind regarding a single pattern of holy living for homosexual people.
2. We have different perceptions of the relationship of the authority of Scripture to that of Reason and Tradition, and contemporary experience.
3. We approach and interpret particular Scriptural passages in different ways.

Reflecting on our conversations **we discern the following fruit of our work together:**

1. While our differences remain, the relationships between us have been strengthened and deepened. We have gained in mutual respect, affection, and appreciation of one another as followers of Jesus and fellow- bishops.
2. Our Conversations have strengthened and clarified our differing convictions, not diluted them. They have helped us to understand others' views, and their roots, more fully.

The following conditions were among those that made our Conversations fruitful:

1. The central place made for Scripture in the Conversations, and the willingness of all participants to credit the integrity of others' interpretations.
2. Each meeting has been grounded in worship, and has been held in places devoted to prayer, reflection and hospitality.
3. The number of participants was small enough to support and sustain a sense of community.
4. There was a consistency of attendance.
5. At the outset we established an agreed covenant (see Appendix A) governing our meetings, which ensured an atmosphere of confidentiality and trust.
6. We have discovered again the importance of restraining our desire to persuade the other to agree with our position.
7. We discovered in our own experience the importance of "interpretive charity": imputing the best intentions to our colleagues and other members of our Communion, telling the better stories about them, checking (if possible at first hand) before drawing conclusions.
8. We have been free to discover points both of divergence and of agreement.

9. We have come to value both the respect that allows us to develop what we have to say without contradiction, and the love that questions clearly so that we can discover more together. We hope that this context can be more widely replicated when Bishops gather - including when they meet as Houses of Bishops.
10. Expert facilitation from outside the group has been essential.
11. Three meetings, with space between them, allowed us to digest and reflect upon what we heard and shared.
12. We have discovered for ourselves that this kind of Dialogue is not an effort to influence participants to agree to a particular position. (See "Thirty Theses on Christian Responses to People of Other Faiths" Lambeth 1998 Section II Report "Called to Live and Proclaim the Good News.")

We have noted the **following topics for further exploration:**

1. Does the Holiness, that we all understand ourselves bound through Christ to grow into, to encourage, and to teach, exclude or include homosexual behaviour within committed relationships?
2. What constitutes loving and responsible pastoral care of homosexual people? What may be the workings of God's grace in this context?

As a consequence of our Conversations we recommend the following:

3. There should be opportunities throughout the Communion for ongoing structured conversations regarding difficult issues. These should engage persons at all levels within and between Provinces and should be guided by agreed covenants similar to those that have assisted our Conversations.
4. Group visitations of bishops between provinces should be explored to enhance understanding within the Communion. Such exchanges should include attendance at Provincial Synods and Conventions.
5. Those proposing changes to the Church's traditional teaching on human sexuality or other significant issues should take account of both ecumenical and inter-faith implications, and the impact upon other Provinces of our Communion.
6. It is important that bishops have the opportunity to better understand other positions than their own.
7. Bishops across the Communion could be encouraged to develop a common "rule of life" as a way of strengthening our worldwide fellowship.

This paper is respectfully submitted by those participating in the final conversation in the hope that the fruit of our work together can be of use to the Anglican Communion we deeply treasure. We also pray that God will continue to use our Communion as a means of reconciling all things to himself in Christ.

Appendix A

Covenants

1. We will respect each other's faith journey.
2. We will listen respectfully.
3. We will ask inviting questions.
4. We will have flexible understanding, attempting to understand from the point of view of others.
5. We will seek to learn from all perspectives
6. We will keep the topic in mind when speaking
7. We will not speak as individuals for the group apart from our common statement
8. We will not repeat each other's comments after we leave. We are free to share learnings without attribution to individuals. Otherwise, we will respect the confidentiality of other's statements.
9. will clarify the nature of our speaking. We will request clarification in good faith.