

Report of the Listening Process on Human Sexuality

The Anglican Consultative Council XIII Nottingham 2005

Resolution 12 - Listening Process

In response to the request of the bishops attending the Lambeth Conference in 1998 in Resolution 1.10 to establish "a means of monitoring the work done on the subject of human sexuality in the Communion" and to honour the process of *mutual* listening, including "listening to the experience of homosexual persons" and the experience of local churches around the world in reflecting on these matters in the light of Scripture, Tradition and Reason, the Anglican Consultative Council encourages such listening in each Province and requests the Secretary General:

1. to collate relevant research studies, statements, resolutions and other material on these matters from the various Provinces and other interested bodies within those Provinces
2. to make such material available for study, discussion and reflection within each member Church of the Communion
3. to identify and allocate adequate resources for this work, and to report progress on it to the Archbishop of Canterbury, to the next Lambeth Conference and the next meeting of this Council, and to copy such reports to the Provinces.

Revd Canon Phil Groves was appointed Facilitator from January 2006.

1. Collation of Materials

Each province was requested to send any materials relating to human sexuality and specifically to Lambeth Conference resolutions concerning homosexuality. Materials were collated and summarised and the draft summary for each province was given to the primate for them to amend and endorse. These draft summaries were presented to the Joint Standing Committee (JSC) and to the Primates at their respective meetings in 2007. A further process of editing resulted in the publication of the summaries on the Anglican Communion website.

They are available at:

<http://www.anglicancommunion.org/listening/reports/provinces.cfm>

Many articles and books published by interested bodies have been presented to the office. They have been of great use, especially in developing materials for study, discussion and reflection.

2. Making Material Available

The publication of the Summaries was one way of making material available. Anglicans are able to better understand the thought and engagement of the provinces of the Communion on human sexuality.

Shorter submissions from provinces, interested bodies and individuals on human sexuality and mutual listening have been published separately on the Anglican Communion website.

The publication of ***The Anglican Communion and Homosexuality*** and its distribution to every bishop in the Communion has been the major achievement in this area. Thought, prayer and energy went into the method behind the writing of the book. The JSC and the Primates Meeting were asked to consider the method proposed and the Archbishop of Canterbury gave his approval. The Primates emphasised their desire for the work to take seriously the results of scientific research called for by the 1978 and 1988 Lambeth Conferences. The resulting work initially focuses on the mission context for listening and sets patterns of mutual listening. There are then three foundational chapters. These focus on a commitment to the authority of the Scriptures and the biblical witness, the traditions of the church

and the handling of reason and to the relationship between culture and Christianity. Space is then given to 'listen to the experience of homosexual persons' directly both in a chapter on identity and in a chapter on spirituality. The book ends with the scientific study – which should not be seen as a conclusion – but rather as additional information. The scientists concerned were keen to stress that science in this matter is open to interpretation. The writers involved in the book are men and women, gay and straight, lay and ordained, from the diversity of cultures and theological traditions of the Communion. Articles submitted and utilised in the publication are available on the website and form an extensive source of resources.

In addition, the Facilitator has also assisted as a consultant others in developing resources for listening. For example, he has worked closely with The Mothers' Union in the publication of *We are Created By God*. He was consulted concerning the formation of the House of Bishops theological Commission on the blessing of same sex relationships in TEC (USA) and has advised some dioceses and provinces as they contemplate formal and informal listening processes.

3. Identifying Resources and Reporting

Anglicans from around the world, who have offered their time and talents to listening processes, are the most significant resource for process throughout the Communion. Many are participating in processes of listening in formal and informal settings. Many have written articles and contributed to the book. Some have offered gifts of money to the task of the process. No strings have been attached to any of the donations.

The Facilitator report to the JSC. In addition, a report was distributed to bishops on request at the Lambeth Conference and the bishops were offered a variety of self-select sessions on human sexuality.

Significant Developments

1. Mission Focus

A key focus of the work has been to emphasise on the need for us all to discover the good news we share with gay and lesbian people as an articulation of the good news for all people. Good news is both the open inclusive welcome of all and the call to discipleship and obedience. This has offered a common ground basis on which we can examine difference and created safe space for conversations to develop.

2. Relationship Building

The developing of good relationships with people from the full diversity of the Communion has been the absolute priority. Opportunities to meet with significant people visiting the UK have enabled relationships to develop. Limited budgets have allowed for visits to East Africa, the USA and Canada and meetings with LGBT¹ advocacy groups, post-gay groups² and advocates for the diversity of theological and pastoral responses. The Facilitator has not only developed good relationships with people but also fostered building relationships between individuals and groups.

3. *Don't Throw Stones*

One positive result of the building of relationships between diverse groups, including gay and lesbian people of widely differing theological perspectives, is the ***Don't Throw Stones*** initiative. A consensus approach has led to the publication of joint declaration in support of the statement from the 2005 Primates meeting that 'the victimisation or diminishment of human beings whose affections happen to be ordered towards people of the same sex is anathema to us'. The aim is to provide a

¹ LGBT – a recognised shorthand way of saying Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender

² Post gay includes those who might define themselves as having same sex attraction and living in singleness and those who once had same sex attraction, but are now ex-gay.

means of encouraging and equipping individual believers and Christian communities to be faithful in bearing practical witness to the truth of the Primates' statement. Don't Throw Stones was presented to the Primates Meeting in 2007, adopted at the JSC and presented to the bishops at the Lambeth Conference 2008.

Currently there is a website with the declaration and some resources available at <http://www.dontthrowstones.info/>

The ***Don't Throw Stones*** statement is a secure basis on which to build safe space for assertive, but not aggressive, dialogue.

Mutual Listening – Continuing Indaba

The Windsor Continuation Group made the following observations and recommendations:

C(i). The Listening Process

21. The 1998 Lambeth Resolution 1.10 remains fundamental as the standard of teaching on matters of sexuality in the life of the Communion; but the Windsor Report also offered an acknowledgement that while there are divergent views on this, the discussion has to go on (TWR §146). Indeed, Lambeth 1.10 recognised this in the very terms of the resolution, echoing earlier resolutions at the 1978 and 1988 Conferences.

22. To enable this conversation to happen, space has to be created in which all sides can listen for the voice and leading of God; can listen to gay and lesbian Christians and learn of their experience; can listen to one another and the insights we bring to discernment on this issue. This was the end to which the moratoria recommended in the Windsor Report were shaped. They were conceived as a way of halting development in the situation while a conversation, together with an articulation of the purpose and ends of that conversation, could be undertaken.

23. The Listening Process has so far produced a significant amount of resources - an overview of the reflection on this issue taking place in each of the Provinces, which is set out on the Anglican Communion website, and a book of resources to encourage and inform the discussion. Yet the listening process has not been totally embraced consistently across the Communion.

Recommendation:

24. Only if the dialogue is seen to continue, and if there is an all-round readiness to engage in conversation and discernment on this issue, is there a hope of persuading the advocates of revision in the teaching of the Anglican Churches on this matter to remain committed to the period of "gracious restraint", in which mutual conversation can take place. On both sides, we need to move from intransigence and the conviction that "our" interpretation is the right one to a shared waiting upon God. There is something profoundly important about the Anglican way here - a readiness to acknowledge that Christian disciples discern God's truth by learning to wait upon one another, and that it takes the whole Church to know the whole truth.

25. We request that the Instruments of Communion commit themselves to a renewal of the Listening Process, and a real seeking of a common mind upon the issues which threaten to divide us.

An emphasis over the coming three years will need to be on mutual listening and listening to God. This may be achieved by continuing the Indaba process begun at the Lambeth Conference and extending Indaba with both lay and clergy participation. The aim of seeking a common mind goes beyond the desire to enforce a majority decision and requires consideration of methodologies that are both biblical and that reflect the diverse cultures of the peoples of the Communion - not just western cultural models.

Revd Canon Phil Groves

Facilitator for the Listening Process