

# *LGB&T Anglican Coalition*

[www.lgbtac.org.uk](http://www.lgbtac.org.uk)



Please reply to: The Rev Benny Hazlehurst,  
Tel: 07788 426090 email: [benny@acceptingevangelicals.org](mailto:benny@acceptingevangelicals.org)

The Rt Rev Robert Paterson  
Bishop of Sodor and Man  
Thie Yn Aspick  
4 The Falls  
Tromode Road  
Douglas  
Isle of Man  
IM4 4PZ

18th January 2012

Dear Bishop Robert

Thank you for your letter of 20 December 2011 and for your invitation to submit written comments on the 2005 Pastoral Statement. Although the timescale has been somewhat tight, we are happy to supply the following comments and hope that they will prompt further conversation on the areas we identify as being significant.

We have taken you at your word about avoiding lengthy treatises and limited our response accordingly, but we continue to express the hope that it will be possible to meet with you and the review group in person to develop the arguments we put forward in summary form here.

## **1. Developments since 2005.**

We endorse the observations that the House of Bishops Statement from July 2011 made in relation to developments around Civil Partnerships since 2005, but would go further in identifying areas of development and tension.

### **a) Pastoral Response to Civil Partnerships in General.**

Not only have clergy entered into Civil Partnerships, but the number of Civil Partnerships as a whole has far exceeded the numbers predicted in 2005.

By the end of 2010, over 47,000 Civil Partnerships had been registered - more than double the upper limits of the 2005 estimate. This makes the issue of the Church's response to Civil Partnership all the more pressing. We believe that this increased take-up of Civil Partnerships only increases the importance of the CofE adopting a more affirmative stance towards CPs for the sake of pastoral mission.

Although the July 2011 Statement recognises that 'bishops and clergy have found ways of engaging pastorally with those in civil partnerships, both at the time of registration and subsequently' the present situation where services of blessing are proscribed and the creation of public liturgies deemed to be wrong, is creating pastoral tensions, ecclesiastical ambiguity, and a culture of double standards.

To continue in this way is simply unacceptable both to those in civil partnerships and to those who are charged with their pastoral care.

## **b) Religious Buildings and Civil Partnerships**

The amendment to allow religious buildings to host Civil Partnerships has made the present position of the Church of England untenable. The Church's own response to the Government on the proposed changes indicated that General Synod would need to approve applications to register civil partnerships in Anglican churches. Yet there has been no suggestion that the mind of General Synod would be sought on such a request. The only statement which has been published came from a nameless spokesperson who said (without any reference to General Synod) that the CofE has no intention of registering civil partnerships.

However, an initial and limited survey by the LGB&T Anglican Coalition has already heard from 95 churches in the Church of England who would want to consider applying to register civil partnerships, and we think that this is only the tip of the iceberg.

## **c) The Episcopacy and Civil Partnerships.**

The issue of nomination of clergy in civil partnerships to the episcopacy has been a cause of much unnecessary scandal for the church. While it is true that the 2005 Pastoral Statement did not specifically identify the episcopacy in its guidance, it is also true that it did not exclude the episcopacy from the guidelines.

While one might reasonably ask the question as to why it was not envisaged that a bishop might want to enter into a Civil Partnership, our main point of contention is the effective ban on the nomination of clergy in civil partnerships to the episcopacy. We along with others would assert that the effective ban (now publicly declared) even where the clergy concerned are abiding by the 2005 Pastoral Statement, constitutes active discrimination against clergy in civil partnerships. Whether this contravenes Equalities legislation is a matter for the courts, but frequent and consistent national newspaper articles have shown that public perception of such a ban (unspoken or declared) is that it is unjust and detrimental to the Church of England.

## **d) Same-sex Marriage**

Finally, the Government announcement of imminent consultation on same-sex marriage has further undermined the assumptions of the 2005 Pastoral Statement.

Although same-sex marriage clearly falls outside the scope of the review, we would contend that reliance on the Book of Common Prayer alone in the 2005 Pastoral Statement fails to take account of developments in our understanding and theology of marriage over the centuries since. For example, the preface to the Marriage Service in Common Worship orders the reasons for marriage very differently placing greater emphasis on the quality of the relationship between partners, yet such developments are not reflected in the 2005 Pastoral Statement.

The Government consultation on same-sex marriage does, however, strengthen the argument that civil partnership is fundamentally different to that of marriage - otherwise there would be no need to consider opening civil marriage up to people of the same gender.

We believe that this distinction strengthens the argument for civil partnerships to be recognised more fully by the church with appropriate provision made for those who wish to enter into such partnerships in the context of their faith.

## 2. Areas where change is needed

### a) Development of an experimental liturgy for Thanksgiving after Civil Partnership

Regular requests are received for the affirmation in church of a new civil partnership. We are aware that at present moratoria on blessings for same sex relationships apply. However we are advised by lawyers that under Canon B5 pastorally appropriate responses can be made to such requests.

Using the model of the service of thanksgiving and dedication following a civil marriage, it would be appropriate to develop a service of thanksgiving and dedication following a civil partnership. This should be introduced as an experiment for a 5 year period by the House of Bishops, to be used in parishes having passed a PCC resolution authorising its use.

It is worth pointing out that there is a clear precedent for moving to this as a pastoral response, despite there being 'no consensus'- that precedent is in the case of marriage after divorce.

During the process of adapting to the increasing numbers of marriages after divorce, services of thanksgiving and dedication were permitted after a civil marriage ceremony even before the church adapted its understanding of marriage to allow marriage after divorce and before such marriages were authorised in churches. Even then, the vote in General Synod which authorised marriage in church after divorce was not unanimous, (therefore there was no consensus) and did not 'force' clergy to conduct these services – it was left to individual conscience. This remains the case today without difficulty or fears of legal action.

As a minimum step, therefore, the Church should permit services of thanksgiving and dedication to take place in pastoral response to the large number of civil partnerships. To refuse to respond in such a way would confirm fears that the present ban is motivated by prejudice rather than theology or religious belief.

This can be done even within the terms of reference of the review group. Thanksgiving after Civil Partnership does not need to include the sexual expectation of marriage. We recommend that the review group commends this to the House of Bishops and an experimental liturgy is devised.

### b) Inclusion of the episcopacy and an end to the moratorium on appointment of bishops in civil partnerships.

One of the most pressing needs is to see an end to the moratorium on appointment of bishops in civil partnerships even if celibate. There is nothing in the 2005 statement on civil partnerships that would require the exclusion of priests in civil partnerships who are willing to make a declaration of celibacy from being considered as bishops, nor does *Issues in human sexuality* rule out committed but sexually abstinent same-sex partnerships. Thus there is no justification for the current moratorium and it should be repealed immediately.

This is within the remit of the review group as it is not contrary to the Church of England's existing teaching of the church in relation to sexually active same-sex relationships. It is important that any appearance of discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity against those who have

made considerable sacrifices (which some might regard as excessive) to comply with current church teaching be avoided.

The document dated December 2010, and released as GS Misc 992 in June 2011, has given rise to a great deal of criticism. The principal concern is that it appears to argue that it is lawful for the Church of England to discriminate in appointments against clergy who are in a civil partnership but who are celibate.

This was reinforced by the statement of 1 July 2001 (GS Misc 997) which stated, without apology, that an unqualified moratorium would be imposed immediately:

*“The House has concluded that it would be wrong to pre-empt the outcome of the review and that clergy in civil partnerships should not at present, therefore, be nominated for episcopal appointment.”*

We strongly urge the group to undertake a thorough review of the legal advice on which these decisions were based. If the decision is not voluntarily reversed, there is a risk of expensive litigation that will, regardless of the outcome, be hugely damaging to the reputation of the Church.

Furthermore, any attempt to deter or exclude such candidates by singling them out for intrusive questions, or because their views on the theology of sexuality differ from the current Church of England position when in fact bishops have a wide range of opinions on all manner of theological issues, is not only unjust and hurtful to the individuals concerned but also damaging to mission and ministry.

### **c) Registration of Civil Partnerships in Church of England Churches.**

It is clear that for many, the fact that there has been no possibility of discussion within the Church about whether individual churches should be allowed to register their premises for Civil Partnership ceremonies is in itself a retrograde position for the Church of England to be in. This is seen as stifling the possibility for debate and discussion on this issue.

We would encourage Synod to provide appropriate opportunity for this discussion to be had in an open and transparent way. The Coalition has been able to demonstrate that there are a significant number of churches (representing a significant number of church members) who have indicated a desire to host Civil Partnership ceremonies within their premises. All of these churches would want to work with the Church on this issue.

We would recommend that Synod draws up a framework and timetable whereby a process of robust consultation, review and discussion is initiated by General Synod.

In the spirit of “the listening process” the consultation should include:

- An opportunity for some of those churches who would wish to register their church premises to share the reasons for their desiring to register their premises.
- A process whereby those in Civil Partnerships, and those who desire to be in Civil Partnerships, are enabled to contribute. The Coalition would be well-placed to facilitate this valuable contribution to the process.
- Feedback and reflections from denominations and faith groups that have given permission for Civil Partnership ceremonies to take place within their buildings.

### 3. Concluding Statements

The LGB&T Anglican Coalition believes that the 2005 Pastoral Statement needs to be readdressed and replaced with substantial changes as a result of the developments of the last 6 years.

As social attitudes towards those in same-sex relationships have become increasingly open and accepting, the Church of England is becoming increasingly isolated. This is in turn damaging both our mission and our ability to provide pastoral care to those in our parishes, congregations, and clergy.

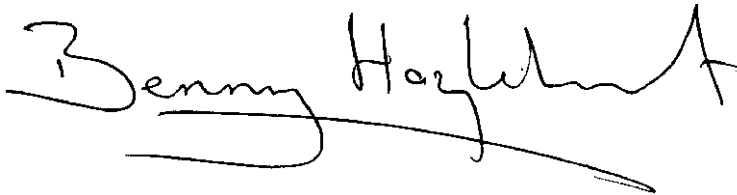
A recent evangelical survey in Australia (Olive Tree Media 2011) revealed that church doctrine on homosexuality was the biggest block to belief in the Christian gospel for the population at large. Whilst no equivalent research has been conducted here, we recognise the same patterns developing, particularly among young people where the church already struggles to engage effectively.

Thus a change in our approach to Civil Partnerships is essential and can be addressed in a way which is quite distinct from the growing debate on same-sex marriage.

The LGB&T Anglican Coalition remains ready and willing to engage with the review group, and is happy to develop all of the proposals we have put forward here.

You will be in our prayers as you set about your task on behalf of the House of Bishops.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Benny Hazlehurst". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line underneath the name.

Rev Benny Hazlehurst  
Chair  
LGB&T Anglican Coalition

## LGB&T Anglican Coalition

### Member Groups

The Anglican Coalition provides UK based Christian LGBT organisations with opportunities to create resources for the Anglican community and to develop a shared voice for the full acceptance of LGBT people in the Anglican Communion.

The Group Members are as follows:

**Accepting Evangelicals** is a open network of Evangelical Christians who believe the time has come to move towards the acceptance of faithful, loving same-sex partnerships at every level of church life.

<http://www.acceptingevangelicals.org>

**Changing Attitude** is a campaigning group drawn by God's love to work for the full inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in the Anglican Communion.

<http://www.changingattitude.org.uk>

**The Clergy Consultation** is a confidential support organisation for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) Ministers, Religious and Ordinands, Lay Readers, and their partners.

<http://www.clergyconsultation.org>

**Courage** is a UK charity offering a safe place of friendship for gay and lesbian Christians in which to reconcile their faith and sexuality and grow towards Christian maturity.

<http://www.courage.org.uk>

**The Evangelical Fellowship for Lesbian and Gay Christians (EFLGC)**, formed in 1979, is a group of women and men, most of whom are lesbian, gay or bisexual and come from an evangelical Christian background..

<http://www.eflgc.org.uk>

**Inclusive Church** is a network of individuals and organisations working to break down the barriers to full inclusion at all levels of the Church of England.

<http://www.inclusive-church.org.uk>

**The Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement** is a UK-based international Charity which challenges homophobia and transphobia, especially within the Church and faith based organisations.

<http://lgcm.org.uk>

**The Sibyls** is a UK-based confidential Christian spirituality group for transgender people, and their supporters.

<http://www.sibyls.co.uk>

**General Synod Human Sexuality Group** works in General Synod for deeper understanding on issues of sexuality.