

Terms of Reference for Marriage Theology Working Group

The GSTHW 2012 motion text:

Nature of Marriage

That this General Synod/ te Hinota Whanui resolves:

That given the long-held mission of our Church to challenge and support couples to publicly commit themselves to each other,

Asks Episcopal Units to hold conversations *in our Church and with the wider community* about the nature of marriage,

And to explore how the Church might theologically and liturgically respond to gay and lesbian Anglican couples who request this rite.

Further, it asks General Synod Standing Committee to support and resource the Episcopal Units in this endeavour ;

And for Episcopal Units to demonstrate progress to General Synod Standing Committee and, where appropriate, the Commission 'Ma Whea', in advance of the next General Synod / te Hinota Whanui in 2014.

Comments:

Since this motion was agreed to at GSTHW 2012 there has been an unexpected development with the debates and eventual passing of parliamentary legislation which legalises same gender marriage.

These debates have meant that we as a Church need to take stock of what we currently understand about marriage, and how that fits with a secular understanding of a legal contract. It has raised questions for us about what kinds of relationships we believe are blessed by God, what expectations we have of leaders in terms of their personal relationships, and how we affirm and celebrate relationships where partners are making a lifelong commitment to each other.

For example, we need to work out what it means for us if Christians choose to live in de facto relationships, or to have a civil union, or to be married by a celebrant who is not part of the church. And we need to work out where church and state understandings of marriage connect/disconnect.

It is important that we engage with these questions theologically, and that we reflect on a wide variety of perspectives. To that end a diocesan theological working group will gather to discuss these, and other related issues.

The dioceses have been asked by GSSC to develop their own processes for doing this work and encouraged to share resources for the discussions via the General Synod office.

The Ma Whea? Commission were clear in their reporting to the Hermeneutics Hui that they were not addressing issues around marriage.

Process:

Rev. Jenny Dawson will convene the group who will:

- Review possible resource material for people across the diocese to use as background reading for ongoing discussions. It would be helpful to have a shortlist of "essential reading" that we can recommend to everyone and to offer to other dioceses via GSSC
- Provide some reflection material that can be used to initiate broad discussion about the nature of marriage at three regional hui in October/November
- Draw together the feedback from the regional hui and incorporate those discussions into further theological reflection by the working group
- Provide a summary of the work that has been done to Waiapu Standing Committee by March 2014 with recommendations about next steps, and whether there is anything we can say together as a diocese about our understanding of marriage.