

The Waiapu Journey

The Diocese of Waiapu has been living with, and debating, questions of sexuality for decades. Faithful gay and lesbian people have served, and continue to serve, our parishes as priests, deacons, wardens and vestry members. They have held, and continue to hold, positions of responsibility within the diocese. Despite a relatively tolerant Church environment, not every LGBT person has felt comfortable declaring their sexual orientation or gender identity openly. In 2004 Bishops John Bluck and George Connor wrote a pastoral letter to the Diocese summarising the debates and outlining the key approaches which needed to be considered as we sought to progress (Appendix 1). It was a very helpful document at the time, although almost a decade later it is disheartening to realise that nationally and internationally the Anglican Church has become less willing to discern vocations of people in same-gender partnerships, and has tried to impose moratoria on bishops who wished to do so.

As a diocese, Waiapu began collectively exploring issues around sexuality in 1995 with a parish study series providing a framework to facilitate personal storytelling and group discussion. It was widely used and a report compiled which offers an overview of the impact of these discussions.(Appendix 2). Other processes have included public modelling of respectful conversations, discussions at clergy conferences, and synod debates. These engagements have required trust, honesty, risk-taking, and often forgiveness on behalf of participants. There have been times where people have been hurt and where our commitment to be together as the body of Christ has been tested. Despite being a predominantly provincial and rural diocese, without an identifiable gay and lesbian constituency in most of our communities or parishes, there has been a growing acceptance of sexual diversity and alternative family arrangements. This is reflected in our most recent formal debate at diocesan synod in 2011, where we were able to affirm, by a resounding majority, the following motion:

Given that Waiapu has followed a policy of sexual orientation not being a barrier to ordination; and given that there is not and has not been an agreed "moratorium" on ordinations of those in same sex relationships;

a) this Synod affirms that sexual orientation is not a barrier to ordination, and

b) this Synod asks General Synod to move forward with the provision of an authorised liturgy for the blessing of same sex relationships to be adopted by dioceses who wish to do so.

On this basis we formulated the two motions which went to GSTHW 2012 (Appendix 3). By the time GSTHW gathered in Fiji in July 2012, the Ma Whea? Commission process had been put in place and Waiapu representatives felt that it was important to respect that process and to engage as fully as possible. To that end our motion on the blessing of same sex relationships was withdrawn and the motion on Episcopal autonomy was tabled until 2014 when GSTHW next meets.

Many people in the diocese were disappointed with that choice, and there is a strong sense that delaying these decisions continues to perpetuate the injustice being visited on those whose lives are directly affected and who, in some instances, have been waiting for years to be fully affirmed in their vocation to ordained ministry.

Finding ways forward

For Waiapu Diocese this is much more than an academic discussion. The current situation in the Anglican Church denies a significant group of faithful Christians the experience of living authentically and openly as the people that they were created to be, of celebrating their partnerships and of fulfilling a call to ordained ministry. Our collective theological reflection and lived experience has brought us to a point where gay or lesbian couples feel welcome within most of our parishes, and clergy in same-gender relationships would be acceptable in many places. We also recognise, however, that these debates will continue and that there are people for whom issues of sexual orientation and partnerships remain challenging. The ways we honour our diversity and our various theological viewpoints is crucial if we are to create space which allows all people to live out their faith with integrity.

There are some who would say that Waiapu is a “liberal” or “progressive” diocese. We would certainly hope that is true in so far as it means that everyone is welcome, and that this is regarded as a safe and affirming place to live and share ministry. However, the danger of attributing labels of any kind to either individuals or groups is that we risk alienating those who would not describe themselves in that way. Labelling assumes that we, individually or collectively, fit into neat categories and that we have a common understanding of what is meant by those terms. This also reinforces differences and leads us to focus on the things that divide us. Galatians 3:28 reminds us that “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.” Our differences are simply part of the tapestry into which we are woven, and they enrich our life.

There is always a danger for us as a Church when we allow our focus to become too narrow. In the debates over same gender relationships and ordination we have become obsessed by the nature of our one-to-one relationships and we have often neglected our call to be in community. However “right” and well ordered our partnerships are in themselves, we can only truly live out our vocations as couples or as individuals when we are also in a variety of relationships across our communities.

The ways we develop and maintain relationships will depend on factors like personality, culture and context. In the Anglican Church we have a shared understanding, developed over many centuries, of the ways that we can be together in healthy relationship despite differences. These understandings have been painfully tested at times, but those challenges have been the catalyst for ongoing development of the framework within which we live collectively. Rev. Dr. Jenny Dawson has offered a reflection on this ecclesiological perspective (Appendix 4)

Another mechanism for determining how we should live together is canon law. The danger of narrow focus is even greater here where every word and principle is considered in great detail. Debates come down to individual words and phrases, with speculation about possible interpretations and applications. For example, in our debates around ordination, Waiapu are aware that there are differing canonical interpretations. One of the views we have seen is that of Evan Turbott, Waiapu diocesan chancellor, who has offered some observations about issues of sexuality and ordination in relation to the canons. His opinion is included here as appendix 5. We are thankful to have experts in these matters, and our hope is that they will find a way forward which enhances our collective ministry and celebrates our diversity. To be helpful, our canons must reflect who we are, with all of our differences, and there must be recognition that God is always at work in our midst. This means we will be called to new ways of being as a Church in mission, and our canons must allow room for these new ways to be explored.

However, Waiapu does not believe that our way ahead is dependent on legal pathways. In our experience the most important factor in determining our future is the quality of our relationships. When we develop healthy relationships we build trust and we diminish our sense of otherness and difference. When we have trusting relationships we are able to speak honestly and to hear other points of view. When we honour our relationships then we are able to enjoy and affirm the importance of diversity.

Over recent years Waiapu has encouraged and supported initiatives which enhance our collective relationships. These have been as simple as encouraging parishes to work together more and to see their boundaries as fluid rather than rigid. Similarly, the diocesan structure of having three regions means that smaller groupings of parishes happen naturally and are encouraged. Regional gatherings have a unique quality which is not experienced when the diocese gathers as a whole, because the relationships are focussed on areas of commonality such as geography and local contexts.

A series of pilgrimages held around the diocese in 2006 had a significant impact in terms of forming relationships across diverse communities. Travelling together, being present with people, sharing food, singing, and praying together were hallmarks of the pilgrimages and they modelled a different way of being Church for many. It has been said in a number of places that “Anglicans travel together” and our experience tells us that this travelling can be transformational.

But the best contemporary example of commitment to ongoing relationship in the Church is our faithful LGBT community. They have stayed as faithful Anglicans within a Church that often ignores or objectifies them as ‘a problem to be solved’, passes judgement on lives and relationships, and officially refuses to acknowledge their vocation to ordained ministry unless they are either celibate or dishonest. This is testimony to their faith and faithfulness, and to the hope that in time we can all journey together as is the culture of our diocese.

We all need to step out with the same kind of faith, trusting that God will be there alongside us as we build a more inclusive and loving Christian community, and acknowledging that not everyone is at the same place. Sexual orientation, gender identity, and an obsession with the nature of people’s relationships need to be put into perspective alongside the salvation we all gain through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Let this be our collective hope as members of the Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia.

The human sexuality debate

- an incarnational approach

a resource booklet from the Waiapu bishops +John

+ George (written in 2004)

INTRODUCTION

Why does the diocese need to give special attention to the debate on human sexuality? Many people believe the subject is already receiving too much attention. Given our public silence as a church on the subject that reluctance is understandable. But with legislation now before parliament on same sex unions, and an international debate in both Anglican and sister churches on the ordination of gay and lesbian people, many are calling for more information and direction. Our newly elected Archbishop's personal views, reported in the media after this booklet was written, have also provoked new curiosity about the Anglican Church's corporate understanding.

Recently returned from a month of visiting the Episcopal Church in the US, Bishop John is disturbed by the anxiety our American counterparts are experiencing as the sexuality debate in their church becomes more polarised. The formation of the Anglican American Council to drive an alternative Anglican Church, well supported by massive funding from conservative right wing foundations, serves to make divisions deeper.

The special Lambeth Commission chaired by Archbishop Robin Eames has been mandated by the Archbishop of Canterbury to find a way of holding the Anglican Communion together through this debate. We are ably represented on that Commission by Bishop John Paterson and Dr Jenny Plane Te Paa, but it would be foolish to expect too much guidance from this international body for our own situation. The General Synod in Rotorua in May this year mandated a study from an Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia perspective on "issues relating to homosexuality, notably the ordination of gay and lesbian candidates, and the blessing of unions of those in same sexual relationships", precisely because of "the inability of the Anglican Communion to reach a common mind" on these issues.

Such study is no new thing in this Church. Controversy over homosexual clergy features in the earliest years of the CMS mission and is featured in novels and plays. But at that time, homosexuality was not identified or understood as we know it. The condition wasn't medically identified till the mid nineteenth century and the word didn't enter the English language till 1891. It didn't become illegal till 1908 in New Zealand and has never been illegal for women. It is only in the last 30 years that different dioceses have been conducting a carefully considered debate on the topic, mostly favouring, however cautiously, a recognition of gay and lesbian people in the life and ministry of this church.

The other reason for writing at this time is to address so many of the quite unrelated fears that public discussion of homosexuality still evokes. Unwarranted linkage of homosexual orientation with child abuse and paedophilia still persists in despite there being no clinical evidence, just as the linkages with the worldwide HIV/Aids epidemic still continue, despite the fact that the heterosexual community is by far the major driver of this disease. Quite bizarre accusations are levelled at the gay community, encouraged by homophobic talkback radio callers, and even by bishops who should know better. One English bishop delights in writing about homosexuality as an abhorration that demands divine deliverance. He also

believes people who wear black and drive black cars are in need of the same intervention. None of this is to belittle those who find homosexuality difficult to accept, but there is a scary fringe to this debate that plays on deep seated fear and prejudice.

Perhaps the most important reason to address this topic at this time is to try and restore some sort of balance to the whole range of issues that Christians are called on to take seriously. What Bishop John witnessed in the USA was a church fixated on this issue, yet largely silent about the war that their government was engaged in in the Middle East.

Bishop John Gladwin, an evangelical churchman and now Bishop of Guilford, writes “our society abounds in self deception dillusioned and sheer humbug on matters of sex ... with an extraordinary, even prurient preoccupation with what people do in their bedrooms” ... to drag a human being’s personal life into the public forum in this way is outrageous.

To quote James Nelson, the basic issue is not really about “them”, but about all of us. How can we live lives less fearfully and more securely in the grace of God.

In a letter to our New Zealand representatives on the Lambeth Commission, Bishop John wrote, “The church I know and work within in Aotearoa, that keeps the faith and keeps me faithful, for as long as I can remember, has been well peopled with gay and lesbian members and leaders. At theological college, in parishes, church schools and offices I’ve worked in, on marches and vigils and retreats and pilgrimages, at parties and high days and festivals that have shaped my life as a layman, priest and now bishop, gay and lesbian people have been part of the Anglican landscape. To edit them out of the church’s story is to be left with a story I don’t recognise as our Anglican story. Now I don’t think many critics really want to make gay and lesbian Anglicans disappear. Instead they provide a hundred conditions on how they might stay – providing they don’t take up this office or that role, appear too visible in this but not that venue, or stay away from relationships that only heterosexuals are allowed to enjoy.

All these conditions seem to me to compromise the basic truth of incarnation which is that God meets us and accepts us as we are and works through whatever we happen to be.

There are some issues of course, around our failure to be the people God intended us to be and our ability to relate to each other with justice and love. But whether the failures come from hetero or homosexual people has never had much to do with it, in my experience. Sexual orientation is a pretty silly measure of human adequacy.

At the heart of the Christian gospel is the conviction that God meets us and accepts us as we are. What you see is what you get - is a very Christian slogan. What’s more, it’s all right here. We don’t need to be restructured, more successful, photogenic or healthier in order to be valued as the sons and daughters of God, made in the divine image.”

James Nelson again. “Sexuality is our self understanding and way of being in the world as male and female .. Sexuality is a sign, a symbol, and a means of our call to communication and communion. This is the most apparent in regard to other human beings, other body-selves. The mystery of our sexuality is the mystery of our need to reach out to embrace others both physically and spiritually. Sexuality thus expresses God’s intention that we find our authentic humanness in relationship. But such humanizing relationship cannot occur on the human dimension alone. Sexuality, we must also say, is intrinsic to our relationship with God”.

AN INCARNATIONAL APPROACH

The great Anglican starting point to fall back on when you can't find anywhere else to begin is the doctrine of Incarnation. We've chosen it, implicitly, in our three Tikanga structure which says something like this: "Well, this church began with missionaries from England and later on a colonial culture built around being a Better Britain. Anglicans started out as a Maori church and then a settler church took over, with a Pacific church in the background that moved ever closer. In trying to ensure the Gospel meets people and accepts them as they are, rather than trying to turn them into somebody else, we've built our Anglican life and mission around three Tikanga or cultural pathways. They have been very separate for a decade but are now learning to work more closely together. Through all this, we've learnt that church has the people and the spiritual and cultural resources it needs to be an indigenous, credible vehicle for the Gospel in this place."

All of that has happened because we've tried to take seriously what Incarnation means for Aotearoa, through building community between Maori and Pakeha, women and men and now heterosexual and homosexual people. The latter challenge is an extension of the earlier ones. And in structural and ecclesiastical terms, we have made some real progress. Whatever the challenge, the incarnational principle requires that we trust the church we've got and the people who make it what it is.

The Incarnation tells us that God meets us at the deepest level of our humanity, regardless of sexual orientation, race, culture or anything else. The 1998 Lambeth report was very clear on this point. "There can be no description of human reality, in general or in particular, outside the reality of Christ. We must be on guard, therefore, against constructing any other ground for our identities than the redeemed humanity given us in him. Those who understand themselves as homosexuals, no more and no less than those who do not, are liable to false understandings based on personal or family histories, emotional dispositions, social settings and solidarities formed by common experiences or ambitions. Our sexual affections can no more define who we are than can our class, race or nationality. At the deepest ontological level, therefore, there is no such thing as "a" homosexual or "a" heterosexual; there are human beings, male and female, called to redeemed humanity in Christ, endowed with a complex variety of emotional potentialities and threatened by a complex variety of forms of alienation."

Incarnation requires us to take culture seriously as the ground that shapes our engagement, both individually and corporately, with God. We try to do that in a three Tikanga church. Internationally across the Anglican Communion the African church in particular, finds the homosexual reality debate especially difficult. And given that half of the world's 80 million Anglicans live in Africa, their voice needs to be heard carefully. As we listen, we need to remember that issues of sexuality and the state of marriage are experienced very differently. Two thirds of marriages in Nigeria are polygamous. The HIV/Aids epidemic across Africa makes all discussions of sexual expression a life and death issue. Kevin Ward, writing in the Church Times recently, says that "in much of Africa the Christian voice has a struggle to be heard among many competing views, particularly Islam with its very different understandings of marriage.. The African church feels a strong obligation to speak clearly and precisely on issues of personal morality ... the perceived promiscuity of modern society – the breakdown of traditional restraints, the increase in casual sex, the exploitation of women, the need to combat HIV/aids – all seem to militate against any relaxation of this policy."

In New Zealand we face some of the same issues, but with a radically different experience of same sex relationships. How we hear and speak to each other across cultures in this international debate promises to make or break our communion. Issues of cultural identity promise to determine the outcome rather more than theological conviction or shared faith.

At the heart of the incarnational approach is that human relationships are channels for our relationship with God. The greatest privilege of all is to enjoy a loving relationship of mutual trust and respect with someone else, defined in Christian terms, not by biology, race, gender or any physical, genetic or psychological factor but rather by the quality, depth and faithfulness of that relationship.

The huge expansion of heterosexual couples living together outside marriage has tested our willingness as a church to respect and bless such relationships. We're slowly coming to recognise that marriage, while primary, is not the only measure of relational quality or holiness.

The debate about blessing relationships, regardless of sexual orientation, is a work in progress. But to attempt in the midst of this work, to start measuring relationships by physical peculiarities of who does what to whom, where, when and how often, would be rather mechanical. We wouldn't dream of applying such an approach to heterosexual couples. There'd be an outcry if we launched a code of bedroom best practice for them. So why invoke one for homosexuals? And if you do attempt such physical prescriptions of what's OK and what's not; how, whether, where and when to touch each other, applicable to both women and men, in all situations, you'd end up with an anatomical encyclopaedia, a kind of Kama Sutra in reverse. The mind boggles.

A BIBLICAL APPROACH

It is in this approach that Christians talk past each other with the greatest of ease. The problem is more often one of biblical interpretation rather than biblical authority, as sincere and well intended Christians sight scripture that they take with equal seriousness but radically different understandings. Australian Primate Peter Carnley doubts whether the Bible can ever settle this question "Whether these ancient texts could be lifted out of their original cultural contexts (which assume an undifferentiated heterosexuality" so as to apply to the essentially modern question about faithfully committed heterosexuality.

We can all agree with Nigerian Bishop Peter Akinola when he says that "adherence to scripture is non-negotiable". But it still begs the question of how we define the negotiation.

We don't intend to attempt an exegesis of the several biblical texts that seem to refer to homosexuality. There are several passages in the Old Testament and in the Epistles, though none in the Gospels. Jesus doesn't seem to address the issue. St. Paul is the most quoted biblical writer, but our own church's 1998 report on sexuality "encouraging the dialogue" says "Paul apparently knew of no homosexual Christians. We do. What we can affirm with Paul is his condemnation of exploitive forms of homoeroticism, which are the consequence of human sinfulness in refusing to acknowledge God as God. What we cannot and must not do is anachronistically to condemn gay and lesbian Christians in our age and with our understandings on the basis of what Paul says about non-Christian homoerotic activity in his age with his understandings."

That is precisely the problem for 21st century readers of the biblical texts. None of the passages address homosexuality per se, let alone homosexuality as we know it today.

For example, the Old Testament references address the wider issue of order and disorder rather than any question of sexual behaviour in itself. That is true of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 18,19 where the issue is pride, ingratitude, lack of hospitality and one specific reference to homosexuality as gang rape. The references in the holiness code in Leviticus 17-26 focus on God's relationship with us at every level and especially in the way we relate to our community, family, friends, animals, possessions. The penalties requiring death for homosexuality as then understood have to be matched by the equally severe penalties for adultery.

In the New Testament, the question of homosexuality as a human condition expressed in faithful relationship is simply not addressed. The context for the Epistles is rather that of a wide spread practice in classical Greek and Roman Society where older men use younger ones for pleasure, often in a relationship of slavery, and in return for education or military advantage. That sort of culturally sanctioned, and freely chosen rather than inherited, homosexuality was seen to be a more masculine and natural condition than heterosexuality.

Our English word for "homosexuality" is translated in the Epistles as a blanket term for several Greek references that cover the

Sodom and Gomorrah story and its rape references (Jude and Peter)

Prostitution, kidnapping for sex and male homosexuality (Timothy)

Promiscuity and venereal disease (Romans)

Perversion by heterosexuals including incest (Corinthians)

There are other texts that don't refer directly to homosexuality but which nonetheless can be used to frame the debate. All those references to living between law and grace, the letter and the spirit of the law are cases in point. And the challenge in all such texts is whether we are able to see the law, along with St. Paul, as a temporary measure, a kind of school master who we could leave behind when faith comes and grace abounds.

Taking any of the negative texts literally invites a huge problem when we come to apply other biblical texts that speak equally strongly. Do we line up references of homosexuality along with admonitions about the importance of wives obeying their husbands in marriage, or wearing hats in church, or admonitions of remarriage of divorced people, to say nothing about the Jewish prohibitions on eating oysters, trimming hair and beards etc. Taking the Bible seriously always involves making choices between what is more and less important and favouring one piece of advice over another within the covers of the same book. Jesus himself was constantly doing that by comparing his words with what Moses and others said and teaching this commandment was greater than that. That's what makes biblical study a constantly evolving discipline as we struggle to hear each text in its context, both then and now.

Barbara Brown Taylor, the well known American preacher and theologian, describes her understanding of what it means to follow the Word of God. "The phrase has become a double entendre for me, meaning not only the Word on the page but also (and more crucially) the Word made flesh. If Jesus' own example is to be trusted, then following the Word of God may not always mean doing what is in the book. Instead, it may mean deviating from what is in the book in order to risk bringing the Word to life, and then facing the dreadful consequences of loving the wrong people even after you have been warned time and again to stop.

These days I guess everything sounds like a position, even a confession like this one. I do not know what is right. All I know is whom I love, and how far I have to go before there is no one left whom I do not love. If I am wrong, then I figure that the Word of God will know what to do with me. I am betting my life on that.”

WHAT DOES THE CHURCH SAY?

– AN ECCLESIAL APPROACH

The bishops of our three Tikanga Anglican Church at their October 2003 meeting affirmed that “Anglicans embrace a diversity of practice and understanding about sexual orientation and respect the presence of homosexual persons who contribute to the life and leadership of the church and receive pastoral care and support”. That respect was reaffirmed at the recent General Synod in a motion that “acknowledged and honoured the contribution that gay and lesbian Anglicans make to the life and ministry of our Church”.

That diversity we embrace is wide ranging internationally and nationally, from bishops who have long encouraged the blessing of same sex unions to those who would hesitate to licence a gay or lesbian person for ministry.

Both Waiapu bishops were involved in producing the experimental liturgy for the Blessing of a Relationship produced by the Anglican Liturgical Commission back in 1992.

That liturgy has been widely circulated and used ecumenically both in New Zealand and overseas for partners in committed relationships, whatever their sexual orientation. Our own Commission on Sexuality noted that 80 to 90% of the heterosexual couples presenting for marriage are already living together so the blessing liturgy has potential for ever wider use.

And while the legislation before Parliament on same sex unions will invariably raise the question of civil marriage for same sex couples, this is not the issue that the General Synod asks us to pursue. That debate is only beginning, but in our view, the institution of marriage and its associated symbolism is best kept to the covenant between men and women.

Forms of blessing that are appropriate to the experience and context of homosexuality are best developed with their own distinctiveness. And for a church that has been happy to bless everything from battleships to ski fields, pet animals to school reunions, to refuse same sex couples seeking God’s grace for their commitment to grow in love and trust seems inconsistent, to say the least.

Our national meeting of bishops noted that there is no reference to sexual orientation in any of the present canons and statutes of our church, nor has the General Synod ever legislated on the issue of sexual orientation in relation to church leadership. Such matters have, and still remain, the bishop’s decision in each place. Our 1998 Tikanga Pakeha commission reinforced that. “The Commission affirms the wisdom and historic precedent for leaving the decisions about acceptance for ordination with the bishop of each episcopal unit and her or his advisers. We believe that there are already sufficient processes and procedures in place for each local episcopal unit to make wise and faithful choices about ordination applications with full integrity regardless of whether a candidate is married, remarried, divorced, single, lesbian or gay.”

There is both freedom and protection in such a policy. No bishop or diocese has to accept a candidate for ordination, anymore than any parish in this diocese has to accept a priest or licenced lay minister. But equally, no one is barred from being considered for leadership on the grounds of their sexual orientation, race, background or any other condition.

And how long might we expect this debate to continue? The bishops' October 2003 statement expects this dialogue on human sexuality to be ongoing and is not expecting the Anglican Church in this part of the world to finalise the matter within a particular time frame. Indeed by inviting all three Tikanga to bring their cross cultural wisdom to the debate, we need to settle in for a long journey together. And to make that journey as graceful as possible, the Bishops reaffirmed their commitment to the 1998 Lambeth call to "listen to the experience of homosexual persons, and to assure them that they are loved by God and that all baptised, believing and faithful persons, regardless of sexual orientation, are full members of the Body of Christ".

Of course, the new Lambeth Commission has to find something more formal to say on the matter. Their track record over such difficult issues has been uneven. For example, would it be unfair to remind ourselves that back in 1948 the Lambeth conference pronounced that "women priests would be an experiment against tradition and order, and would gravely affect the internal and external relations of the Anglican Communion"?

It might be some comfort to remember that Pan Anglican statements have always been so. 140 years ago, the first General Synod of the whole Anglican Church at the time gathered to debate the "heretical" beliefs of John Colenso, Bishop of Natal. He was a Zulu language scholar and Bible translator who was convinced all humans were equal and graceful in God's eyes. He would have understood our Tikanga church very well.

The Lambeth initiative did more to continue than close the controversy and the media had a field day, with W. S. Gilbert of Gilbert and Sullivan fame wrote this about the gathering:

From east and west the holy clan

Of bishops gathered, to a man:

To Synod, called Pan-Anglican

In flocking crowds they came

The result was inconclusive. No agreement could be found. The outcome of our current debate promises to be just as confusing as it was in the 1860's, not only because there are more voices to be heard now, but more importantly because the incarnational encounter of Gospel and culture is just as impossible to legislate now, by Lambeth or anyone else, and just as unAnglican.

Appendix 2

(some of the formatting is unusual due to the file being converted from scanned documents)

THE RIGHT REVEREND
MURRAY MILLS THE
BISHOP OF WAIAPU

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Dear Friends,

WAIAPU DIOCESAN-WIDE HOMOSEXUALITY STUDY 1995

Please find enclosed a Master Copy for the use of your Parish for the study of "The Church's Attitude to Homosexuality". Please feel free to copy. You are welcome to make a charge if you wish to cover parish costs.

PLEASE NOTE-----

It is important that the LEADERS of groups receive ALL the material. ALL Group MEMBERS should also have ALL the material. The READING material is an integral part of the studies for ALL PARTICIPANTS.

Recommended Programme

Ideally all participants should have the material before their group meetings, i.e. from Easter 1995 on.

SESSIONS ONE AND TWO to be held between Easter and mid-May.

A break for READING AND REFLECTION.

SESSIONS THREE AND FOUR to be held in July.

THE QUESTIONNAIRES should be handed out at the final session to ALL PARTICIPANTS and forwarded to Bishop M. Mills, Diocesan Office, Box 227, Napier as requested.

Murray J. Mills
BISHOP OF WAIAPU

George H.D. Connor
BISHOP IN THE BAY OF PLENTY



WAIAPU DIOCESAN-WIDE STUDY 1995

The 1994 Waiapu Synod at Whakatane commended

"A diocesan-wide study in 1995

on the issue of THE CHURCH'S ATTITUDE TO HOMOSEXUALITY

including how it relates to membership,

the holding of office,

and ordination in our church,

and to the liturgical blessing of a committed

homosexual relationship"

These four studies have been prepared by Bishop Murray Mills with the support of the Social Justice Group in the Hawke's Bay Region: also with the help of studies prepared by the U.S. Episcopal Church and the Anglican Diocese of Wellington.

They include:

- a] Background Reading
- b] Notes for group leaders and participants
- c] Group Studies I and II to be used after Easter 1995
- d] Group Studies III and IV to be used in July 1995
- e] A Questionnaire to be forwarded to the Diocesan Office by all participants in the studies
- f] Booklists, study materials for further individual/group study.

Parishes are encouraged to copy ALL or ANY of these materials to facilitate their widest possible use.

**1995 WAIAPU DIOCESAN QUESTIONNAIRE
ON THE CHURCH AND HOMOSEXUALITY OVERALL STUDY**

1. Homosexuality is a genuine sexual orientation for some people.

Agree	Disagree	Other comments
342	73	(13)

2. Church membership should be open to people of homosexual orientation

Agree	Disagree	Other comments
379	51	(5)

3. The Church should support committed relationships between gay and lesbian people

Agree	Disagree	Other comments
219	190	(10)

4. The Church should offer a liturgical blessing of committed gay or lesbian relationships

Agree	Disagree	Other comments
159	213	(11)

5.
 - a) People of gay or lesbian orientation, who are committed to celibacy, are eligible to hold lay office in the church

Agree	Disagree	Other comments
290	109	(11)

 - b) People of gay/lesbian orientation are eligible to hold any lay office in the Church

Agree	Disagree	Other comments
241	189	(8)

 - c) People of gay or lesbian orientation, so long as they do not openly declare it, are eligible to hold any office in the church

Agree	Disagree	Other Comments
83	150	(31)

 - d) People living in committed gay or lesbian relationships are eligible to hold any lay office in the church

Agree	Disagree	Other comments
191	216	(9)

6.

a) People of gay or lesbian orientation, who are committed to celibacy, are eligible to be ordained in the church

Agree	Disagree	Other comments
240	178	(11)

b) People of gay or lesbian orientation are eligible to be ordained in the Church

Agree	Disagree	Other comments
156	244	(11)

c) People of gay or lesbian orientation, so long as they do not openly declare it, are eligible to be ordained in the church

Agree	Disagree	Other comments
100	271	(29)

d) People living in committed gay or lesbian relationships are eligible to be ordained in the church

Agree	Disagree	Other comments
138	251	(18)

WAIAPU DIOCESAN HOMOSEXUAL STUDY- 1995
Comments on the Analysis of the Questionnaires

There were 438 questionnaires returned by 13 September. The numbers in each question do not add up because people chose not to answer all the questions. In some cases, they were left blank, in other cases, they offered an alternative comment.

The OVERALL figures lack balance in that most parishes only had a small number of participants- while a couple of parishes ensured a stronger weighting.

All replies are included, even though one or two came in before the studies were under way, some answered who did not take part in any group sessions, or in only one session, some in sessions that followed alternative formats to that suggested.

In the end, the questions regarding age, sex, ordained status of the participants were not recorded: in fact some objected to providing that information any way.

Many people clearly find ticking boxes and questionnaires difficult

- a) especially where the questions and discussion have been complex;
- b) where there has been movement in one's thinking, or deep questioning (e.g. several people spoke of being on a journey in their thinking, yet, in fact, ticked quite conservative positions).

The written comments were frequent alongside the questionnaire, and some provided quite a long commentary. It is clear from the comments, that people vote for boxes for quite conflicting reasons.

Some examples :

- a) Question 2

This received the highest vote that church membership be open to those of homosexual orientation. Most were unqualified on this, but some added "so that these people can be loved into changing their orientation" "so that healing/ conversion may take place".

- b) S(d) & 6(d)

Some voted against people in committed gay or lesbian relationships holding office or being ordained, not because they were personally against it, but because they felt the church or society has to be ready for such a step, and it would at this point cause disharmony.

c) 5(c) & 6(c)

Concerning the eligibility for office or ordination by homosexuals "so long as they do not openly declare it", these questions got the highest anti votes, and the highest refusals to answer the question by both those strongly supporting homosexuals, and those strongly opposing them, on the grounds of the "hypocrisy" - "deceit" of such a stance. Both sides were equally strong on this.

Interestingly enough, this is the traditional pastoral status quo that the Church has adopted.

d) S(a) & 6(a)

Some on both sides opposed celibacy on the grounds that this should not be demanded of homosexuals any more than heterosexuals. There was a clear "Anglican" suspicion of celibacy.

QUESTIONS 1-4 ON MEMBERSHIP

A strong balance in favour of opening church membership to people of homosexual orientation (2) . With a small balance in favour of supporting those in committed gay or lesbian relationships (3) and a division over the formal blessing of such by the church (4).

QUESTION 5 ON LAY OFFICE BEARERS

Similarly a majority support gay and lesbian people holding office in the church 5(a) & (b). There is the opposition to hiddenness, deceit, hypocrisy that I have referred to above S(c), and there is a clear division over lay people in committed gay/lesbian holding lay office in the church 5(d).

QUESTION 6 ON ORDAINED CLERGY

There is overall support for celibate homosexuals being ordained, though note the quite large majority that is against even this traditional status quo position. But the tide swings against the non-celibate 6(b), strongly against the undeclared homosexual 6(c), and against those living in committed relationships 6(d).

But even here, 1 in 3 are in favour of it. Given the radical departure that this would be from tradition, this reflects a clear movement in Waiapu attitudes.

When it comes to Parishes, there are interesting differences. Clearly, different parishes have different ethos and different experiences. The weighting of the ticks show that some units are more conservative, some parishes more liberal. The written comments show there is a major underlying divide over the source of authority in working through ethical issues, and the nature of Biblical authority.

From the comments on the questionnaires, clearly the leadership of the small groups was important in setting the tone. Many were even surprised at the four sessions shown, at the compassion shown, at the pain that could be expressed, and also the liberation. Members of a few groups, however, felt weighed down by either traditional or liberal leadership and people felt pressured, rather than free to express their point of view.

For some parishes, the issue will be a real point of tension. Other parishes are fairly one-sided and expressed a clearer mind. As a result, it is apparent that some parishes would never accept a lay leader, let alone a priest in a committed homosexual relationship. Other parishes would find this a minor difficulty, a few would welcome the possibility.

It is important to note that even the most strongly liberal or the most strongly conservative parish on this question is not without a minority of members who feel just as strongly the other way.

And this has an important message for our parish communities and the way we journey together as a Church.

HOMOSEXUAL STUDY

{excerpt from President's Address to 1995 Synod}

Last Synod commended a Diocesan-wide Study on the issues of the church's attitude to homosexuality.

I am able to report that by the 13th September, there had been 438 responses to the questionnaire that individuals who had taken part in the group process have returned. Thanks to all those who have taken part.

It is difficult to give a short summary to the study. Nearly all our parish units were involved - though in some cases, they chose to handle the study in different ways from what was suggested. The process was not easy for many parishes, so I thank those who accepted leadership roles. Some who approached the topic with caution found the honesty and openness of the discussion, the opportunity to share sometimes painful experiences, the willingness to listen and grow in appreciation of the issues facing the church, made it one of the best studies at parish level they had experienced. In contrast, others were impatient with focusing on such a topic, felt the study material biased and pandering to the liberal views of the world, and welcomed the study as an opportunity to reiterate "traditional Biblical teachings".

There has been pressure within both my regions for the Diocese now to treat that questionnaire as a referendum, and for the Synod to declare its mind on the issues raised, thus establishing a clear diocesan policy. This was not the intention of the process. To do that could drag us all into painful and divisive public debate which would not further the mission and unity of the diocese. The intention of the study was to go about the matter in an altogether more helpful way - to give our membership the opportunity more thoughtfully to enter into a consideration of the issues, and of course, more compassionately to reflect on what the church is saying and doing to the people involved.

I see this very much as part of the wider New Zealand Anglican Church's Commission on Human Sexuality, which is now in place, as the Christian tradition continues to work through the complex learnings and experiences of today's world. Just as previous generations of Anglicans took time to work through the issues of contraception and birth control, remarriage of divorced persons, ordination of women, use of nuclear weapons, to name a few - so it would be unfortunate if the church, on the issue of homosexuality, tried to freeze its views at one point of the journey. I, once again, quote the Primates of the Anglican Communion, when they met earlier this year at Windsor in Britain.

"Around the world, serious questions relating to human sexuality are being faced by the Church. The traditional response to these questions is to affirm the moral precepts which have come down to us through the tradition of the church. Nevertheless, we are conscious that within the church itself, there are those whose pattern of sexual expression is at variance with the received Christian moral tradition, that whose lives in other respects demonstrate the marks of genuine Christian character. The issues are deep and complex.

They do not always admit of easy instant answers. A careful process of reflecting on contemporary forms of behaviour in the light of the Scriptures and the Christian moral tradition is required. We have to recognise that there are different understandings at present among Christians of equal commitment and faith. We invite every part of the church to face the questions about sexuality with - honesty and integrity, avoiding unnecessary confrontation and polarisation, inner spirit of faithful seeking to understand more clearly the will of God for our lives."

In all humility, I suggest that those thirty-six Primates expressed a sound Anglican position. I trust that we, as a diocese, will listen carefully to them.

Waiapu Motions to GSTHW 2012

Motion 20

Episcopal Autonomy in Discernment for Ordination

Preamble:

The Diocese of Waiapu strongly believes that sexual orientation should present no barrier to ordination. As a diocese, like others, we have experienced first-hand the ministry of gay and lesbian clergy, some of whom have been in faithful, loving, committed same-gender relationships, and believe them to have enriched the life of our Church. We are therefore grateful that successive bishops have discerned within the lives of these people a call to ordination, and acknowledge that the work of discernment is a serious and significant aspect of episcopal ministry.

We have become concerned in recent years that bishops of this and other dioceses appear to have come under pressure to withhold discernment for ordination because of a person's sexual orientation and their living out of that orientation within a loving, faithful relationship. As a diocese we believe such pressure runs contrary to the traditional understanding that the responsibility for discerning and acting upon the call of the Holy Spirit on an individual to a life within the holy order of priests or deacons rests firmly in the hands of the bishop of the diocese/hui Amorangi.

We therefore ask:

THAT this General Synod/te Hinota Whanui affirms the long tradition and practice of episcopal autonomy in the discernment of a person's call to ordination.

Motion 21

Provision of an Authorised Liturgy for Same-Gender Blessings

Preamble:

The Diocese of Waiapu, recognising the invaluable contribution of those in same-gender relationships to our Church and society, and acknowledging the desire of many of those in such relationships to commit themselves to lives of fidelity, love and commitment within an appropriate liturgical celebration, asks that:

This General Synod/ te Hinota Whanui agrees to move forward with the provision of an authorised liturgy for the blessing of same-gender relationships to be adopted for use by those dioceses which wish so to do.

Outline of principles of Anglican ecclesiology with some comments on the ecclesial possibilities for ways forward for our Three Tikanga Church with regard to ordination/blessing of people in same-sex relationships

Beginning with the theology of the Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia as expressed in *A New Zealand Prayer Book/He Karakia Mihinare o Aotearoa*, a first principle makes it clear that the Church, the ecclesia, is the Body of Christ. “We are the Body of Christ” receives the response “By one Spirit we were baptised into one Body.” Being members of this Body assumes a life-long journey in faith. This is stated in the Liturgy of Baptism as: “From the beginning the Church has received believers by baptism. Believers' children have also been baptised so that with help and encouragement they should grow up in Christ and by the grace of God serve Christ all the days of their life.” Life in the Body thus involves growth, mutuality and grace.

Secondly, the Church’s worshipping life reflects and motivates its transformative mission, amongst all people and to be exercised by all. The final words of the congregation are often “Amen, we go in the name of Christ”, claiming apostolic authority as well as corporate purpose. The work and life of the Church is not limited to the church.

A third ecclesiological factor is that liturgy is the very life-blood of being Anglican and central to the purpose of liturgy is enabling the community to pray. Worshippers know themselves as those who are gathered by God, in the power of the Spirit, for strengthening in discipleship as followers Christ. Empowerment for this relationship is primarily through the sacraments, particularly baptism and eucharist.

These three principles express a Church that is profoundly relational and inclusive. The life of the Church articulates in many different ways that human beings were not created to live alone and that committed loving relationships of all kinds can be holy. This is perhaps seen most clearly, but certainly not exclusively, in marriage. The Church has a role to support diverse stable committed relationships, which is acknowledged within the *ANZPB* marriage liturgies by a prayer for all those committed to each other in love. The values of long-term loving mutuality and faithfulness are deeply Christian and there is an inextricable connection in much Anglican liturgy between the ethical life of individuals and the good of the community. All are to reflect God's faithfulness, grace and self-giving love.

Consideration of how Anglicans do theology must be part of the responsibility of the work of the Ma Whea commission. There is need for this Church to find wisdom not just about blessing and ordination, nor only about gay people, but about humanity and God’s relationship with all people, and so the “way ahead” must take an appropriately broad view.

Historically Anglican tools for theology have included the three-legged stool of tradition, reason and Scripture. While Anglicans have never adopted a “sola Scriptura” stance, it is true that the whole Bible matters and we disregard it to our great cost. But the vital question is about how to interpret it properly. There are also passages whose meaning seems to have been ignored or underplayed, perhaps in an attempt to affirm the cultural or social context. While commitment to family life is important, in Matthew 19:6, Luke 14:26 and Luke 9:60 Jesus seems to be saying that our most urgent of family obligations and social institutions including marriage are now subordinated to the commitment of discipleship. The

Christian home is a place of nurture where faith is encouraged and strengthened, as love turns a couple outward to the world in service, and so family life provides the context for this rather than as an end in itself. I Corinthians 7:9 makes it clear that discipleship is always paramount.

Paying attention to reason has meant that Anglican understandings have changed over time. The two key principles of marriage set out in *A NZ Prayer Book* are that marriage is a gift of God so that “husband and wife should be united in heart, body and soul...and [so] in their union fulfil their love for one another” and “marriage is given to provide the stability necessary for family life, so that children might be cared for lovingly and grow to full maturity.” Undeniably, the definition says “husband and wife”. But we should note that the Anglican definition of marriage has changed over the years. In the 1662 Prayer Book, for example, there were very different reasons stated for marriage. If the Church’s understanding of marriage has changed along the way, can we now modify it again to be inclusive of gay and lesbian couples? Can same-sex couples be “united in heart, body and soul...and in their union fulfil their love for each other”? Can same-sex couples “provide the stability necessary for family life, so that children might be cared for lovingly and grow to full maturity”? If this is true, is it not logical that same-sex couples be given the grace of blessing that is available to heterosexual couples in marriage and that such individuals also be acknowledged to have the potential of a call to ordination as deacon, priest or bishop?

A key ecclesiological aspect of Anglican tradition is that this is a church of orders. From the liturgy of Ordination of Priests we read “Christ is head of the Church; he alone is the source of all Christian ministry. Through the ages it is Christ who has called men and women to serve.” Such a call is discerned prayerfully by human beings but it originates with Christ. In the same liturgy, ministry and gifting is recognised as coming from the Holy Spirit. Those who are called and empowered to fulfil an ordained ministry and to enable the whole mission of the Church must be people of high ethical standards but for ordination, as in all of life, the ethical criterion is to do with the quality of the relationship, not the orientation of the partners.

It is the call of the whole Church, all who believe and are baptised, to bring redemption, to reconcile and to make whole. The whole Church is called to reflect God's faithfulness, grace and self-giving love. It has been the tragic experience of the Church in other times and places, such as Hitler’s Germany and apartheid South Africa, to experience division between Christians who persist in hearing the challenge of God’s boundless love and those participate in discrimination against certain groups of God’s people. The Holy Spirit does not speak with contradictory voices, but is a Spirit of love. If the Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia is to move from its current position of judgement and exclusion, especially in regard to the ordination and blessing of those in same-sex relationships, there will be need for repentance and reconciliation. Many thousands of Anglicans in these islands are confident that is possible, in God’s grace, as the only proper way ahead.

Jenny Dawson, January 2013