

A Study Guide for use at the Lambeth Conference 2008 on: The Process of Listening to Gay and Lesbian people and Mutual Listening on Human Sexuality

Introduction

In their recent meeting in Dar Es Salaam, the Primates of the Anglican Communion were informed of the monitoring process of work done by each of the Provinces of the Communion on the subject of human sexuality. They said:

“We look forward to this material being made more fully available across the Communion for study and reflection, and to the preparation of material to assist the bishops at 2008 Lambeth Conference.”

In accordance with the wish of the Primates, the summaries are published on [Webpage]. They are accompanied by a request for materials from groups, dioceses and individuals which will form the basis of a Study Guide to assist the bishops at the 2008 Lambeth Conference.

Discussions at meetings of the St Augustine’s Seminar and at the Primates meeting, have been developed by the Facilitator assisted by educational consultants and SPCK.

These have been affirmed by the Archbishop of Canterbury.

In his affirmation, the Archbishop of Canterbury is asking for material to be sent to the [Facilitator of the Listening Process](#) by individuals, groups or dioceses so their voices can be added to the official responses received from each Province.

The Study Guide will be structured in a way which, we hope, will encourage dialogue.

The collection of the resources and their publication is intended to be guided by Anglican principles, based on a Biblical model in accordance with Anglican tradition in a reasoned manner.

All are encouraged to participate.

Theological Basis for the Study Guide

The 1976 meeting of ACC 3 said this about the Communion:

“As in the first century, we can expect the Holy Spirit to press us to listen to each other, to state new insights frankly, and to accept implications of the Gospel new to us, whether painful or exhilarating.”¹

Since then, we in the Anglican Communion have often found new insights to be both painful and exhilarating. Through the 1980s and 1990s the Churches where Anglican Christianity was comfortably part of the culture were greatly challenged by the call from the dynamic churches of Africa and Asia, to move from ministry to mission. Churches which had based their ministry around pastoral care of a fixed community found it hard to accept the call for a Decade of Evangelism. It was painful to accept their failure to see the mission imperative in their own location. However, wherever they responded and took mission in their own context seriously, these churches have been rejuvenated.

Such developments as “Fresh Expressions of Church” and the desire to break the bonds of extreme poverty, now represented in the church’s support for the Millennium Development Goals, have enabled churches in Europe and America to reconnect with the Mission of God.

Ways of responding to new understandings of human sexuality in some cultures have given us a fresh challenge. They have led some to believe they have new insights and others to see those insights as contrary to the way of Christ. The prime task for each of us is to hear what God is saying. We can only do this by listening to each other. As the Archbishop of Canterbury has quoted “Only the whole church knows the whole truth.”²

The Church of Uganda has asked to be listened to in this manner. In its Position Paper published for ACC 13 it says: “We (also) believe the Church of Uganda has a mission to the Anglican Communion to share the treasure of the Scriptures and to call other parts of the Communion to recognize and to submit to the Authority of Scripture as the place of transformation into abundant life.”³ This is an uncomfortable message for some. It is a reminder from the church which faced political violence and oppression with love and forgiveness, as well as bearing the brunt of the AIDS/HIV pandemic with loving service, that its witness is founded on an uncompromising commitment to Jesus as seen through the Bible.

The Episcopal Church of the USA has also called for the kind of uncomfortable listening envisioned at ACC 3. In response to the call of the Windsor Report,⁴ they offered the report *To Set Our Hope on Christ* also to ACC 13.⁵ In this report they sought to explain why “in good faith and in loving obedience to the saving Word of God, many Christians in the Episcopal Church have come to a new mind about same-sex affection, and of how this has led us to affirm the eligibility for ordination of those in covenanted same-sex unions.”⁶ They

¹ ACC 3 page 55

² <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/acns/articles/41/50/acns4161.cfm>

³ <http://www.aco.org/listening/world/docs/doc6.cfm>

⁴ Paragraph 135 <http://www.aco.org/windsor2004/downloads/windsor2004b.pdf>

⁵ http://www.episcopalchurch.org/53785_71881_ENG_HTM.htm

⁶ Ibid. page 6

too believe that their insight is “in loving obedience to the saving Word of God”. This is painful for many to hear.

ACC 3 in 1976 reflected on partnership in the Church of the New Testament. They said: “Christian partnership did not then mean that the partners, although united in their missionary goals, were always in accord on how they were to carry out this mission – witness the disagreement between Peter and Paul in Galatians 2. Rather they were asked to face each other, and the roots of their disagreement and agreement, so openly that both could go forward in mutual love and respect into further creative activity.”⁷

The Anglican Communion has an agreed statement of its mission - The Five Marks of Mission.⁸ We need to begin on this common ground of our mission purpose. We then need to face one another, as Peter and Paul did, and admit our differences as to how we carry out those goals. We are asked to face one another and the roots of our disagreements and agreements. We need to do this openly so that, as a Communion, we can go forward in mutual love and respect for further creative activity in building up the Kingdom of God.

In a debate which has become intensely polarised, the form of the materials we offer will attempt to follow Biblical patterns. We hope to listen to one another with love and mutual respect. This is our Anglican tradition and the only reasonable way forwards.

1. Common Ground

The foundation for our dialogue needs has to be common ground. ACC 3 talked of common ground as being our common mission. This remains the basis for our shared life today.

Our mission is to all people, including gay and lesbian people, their families, their friends and those with whom they work. Our mission is with gay and lesbian people as members of our churches and partners in the gospel. This has always been the case, even when we did not know it.

To accept this does not mean that we have to accept same sex partnerships or partnered gay clergy. Historically and in the present day many of the gay and lesbian people who have served the church in mission and ministry, both lay and ordained, have not accepted such partnerships for themselves nor seen them as valid expressions of a holy life for others.

In our present time more and more societies are accepting gay lifestyles as valid and morally acceptable. Many countries are committed by law to allowing gay rights and offering same sex unions. This means we are required to engage in these societies in a new way.

Agreeing to listen does not imply that we must accept the position of those to whom we are listening. However it does mean that we seek to hear God speaking to us and discover his will. It does require that we offer respect and, perhaps change the way in which we speak.

⁷ ACC 3 page 55

⁸ <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/mission/fivemarks.cfm>

All the Churches of our communion are agreed on the need to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom, to teach, baptise and nurture new believers, to respond to human need by loving service and to seek to transform unjust structures of society. It is on this ground we begin our conversations.

2. Creating Safe Space - Allowing All to be Heard

The monitoring process has enabled the Facilitator for the Listening Process to collate materials from the Provinces of the Communion. Several have submitted studies and papers. These will be used to inform the Study Guide. There are many books and articles written on the subjects and they will also be used to inform the Study Guide. Jesus respected religious leaders and scholars such as Nicodemus and the voices of such people are vital for the task. Their wisdom and learning are vital to us.

However, they are not the only voices which we need to hear. In 1998 The Lambeth Conference made a commitment to "listen to the experience of homosexual persons". Such people have a huge range of experiences and many have responded to the good news of God's Kingdom with joy and follow God with commitment.

Jesus valued the voices of those considered insignificant in the eyes of the world in which he lived: for him it was women, children, the disabled, the poor and those who were labelled "sinful". Our listening will need to be to those whose voices are not often heard, due to their ethnicity, their gender, their lack of education or because they are regarded as "sinful". We need to model our way of listening on the practice of Jesus.

For the experiences of these people to be heard we need a safe place where their voices and experiences will not be open to ridicule, abuse or even physical and emotional violence. Such violence is the experience of gay and lesbian people in every culture and country. We need to have a way of reporting which offers safety, security and freedom from censure.

The internet offers the possibility of response which was never available before and we hope to use this medium to allow as many to respond as possible. While millions of Anglicans do not have computers in their homes, most towns do have internet cafes.

This way of collecting materials is not perfect, but it offers access for more people than ever before. We will, of course, accept contributions in any form, but the internet and e-mail will give us new opportunities.

Some who would identify themselves as traditional or conservative feel they are silenced by powerful liberal voices. We are offering a safe place for all views and perspectives. The voices of conservatives from around the world are actively sought, even if it will mean pain for those who are liberal in their outlook. The voices of liberals are actively sought, even if that is likely to cause pain to those who are conservative. Those who feel they are attacked on both sides should also feel safe to contribute.

We are also seeking to hear from those who are uncertain and who are questioning. You do not have to be certain that you have discovered the voice God in order to contribute.

Some one who just sends in questions is welcome. All of us who have run groups know that it is the person who asks the “silly” question who enables the whole group to hear answers. No question is “silly” if you do not know the answer!

3. Vulnerability

The issues surrounding human sexuality have made us all feel vulnerable.

Some fear the ending of the faith as we know it.

Others fear not being accepted.

Some fear being split in two with conflicting loyalties.

Some fear to ask questions and some fear to answer them.

These fears can only be answered by trusting in God to care for our church and for all who come to Him. However we need to admit our own vulnerability and accept the vulnerability of others.

Again it is the Bible that gives us the ultimate model. Jesus accepted the vulnerability of being human. His fears in Gethsemane were answered by his trust in God who rescued him from despair and death. We need to accept that all are vulnerable and trust God who can bring reconciliation in any context.

When Jesus was afraid he prayed. Please turn to prayer. Pray if you are preparing to contribute and pray for the process. By praying you will be contributing.

Conclusion

It is on this Biblical basis, in line with Anglican tradition and from reasoned analysis that we begin the task of encouraging the acquisition of further materials that the bishops of the Communion in preparing for the Lambeth Conference.

Explaining The Structure Of The Study Guide

Listening occurs when:

- There is common ground where we meet to hear one another
- There is safe ground for people to speak
- There is an understanding that all are vulnerable and afraid

Listening Processes require:

- Convenors - to explain why we need to listen and to set the parameters of the conversation.
- Facilitators - to safeguard confidentiality and integrity so that all are heard and no single vulnerability outweighs any other
- Experts – to resource the process
- Those with experience – to resource the process

The Convenor - The Archbishop of Canterbury

The Archbishop of Canterbury calls us together to ask us to listen to one another, to experts and to the voices of those whose experience is relevant.

Facilitators

The facilitators will be people who can present the broad spectrum of views held within the communion. They need to be expert in their field (e.g. Biblical hermeneutics, medicine or, theology), but not committed to a single agenda.

Their task will be, from their area of expertise to provide a guide to the dialogue within framework set out by the convenor.

They will be asked to use all the resources offered to them and to order them so that they are comprehensible to all.

Resources

The materials collated by the Facilitator for the Listening Process. Studies and reports and articles from the Provinces of the Communion.

Published materials, books and articles.

Contributions from academics, commentators or practitioners in a specific, relevant field.

Contributions from those whose experience is relevant.

Contributions can be: academic articles, testimonies, statistics, Bible studies, poems, sermons as well as video and audio materials.

To ensure a full and appropriate coverage from within the Anglican Communion we request contributions from:

- the full geographic diversity of the communion
- the theological diversity of the communion
- women and men
- a breadth of different experiences.
- gay and lesbian people

- academics
- bishops, clergy, and lay people
- primates
- ecumenical partners

What will the Study Guide look like?

The Study Guide will be a book with eight sections. Each section will be written by the facilitator or facilitators drawing on the contributions gathered as above. Each facilitator will aim to guide the reader through the conversations and hear the range of differing opinions. The reader will be able to study and pray in order to seek to hear God speaking to them. Significant contributions will be highlighted and selected quotes or summaries placed within the text.

In addition it is intended to publish, in the form of a CD ROM, a companion to the guide. On the CD we intend to publish a range of the contributions from individuals, provinces, dioceses and groups submitted to the process. The CD ROM will follow the structure of the guide and will allow the user to navigate to the texts behind the guide.

We hope everyone will recognise their own perspectives represented within guide and the CD.

Summary

The Study guide will be a resource for those wishing to listen to the experience of homosexual people and for those wishing to engage in mutual listening.

It is convened by the Archbishop of Canterbury and supported by the Facilitator for the Listening Process on Human Sexuality. Facilitated by a range of experts who are prepared to allow the voices of all to be fairly heard, the guide will be resourced by existing materials and new submissions from Provinces, individuals and groups.

Along with the Guide, we will publish a spectrum of the contributions in CD ROM form. Submissions will be limited to 3,000 words. Shorter submissions are likely to be read more widely. Submissions can be academic texts, poems, liturgical material, video, testimony, Bible study or any other format. They may be submitted in any major language used within the Anglican Communion.

All submissions will be passed on to the relevant section facilitator, anonymously if requested. If they recommend a submission as significant it will be included on the CD.

The Study Guide – The Section Headings

Section 1. The Mission of the Church.

The aim of the Lambeth Conference is to prepare Bishops for God's mission in the modern world. This section will be the common ground.

We ask for contributions on how the church should engage in mission to gay and lesbian people and with gay and lesbian people.

Contributors are asked to consider these marks of mission, agreed as part of the five marks of mission of the Anglican Communion:

- To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
- To teach, baptise and nurture new believers
- To respond to human need by loving service
- To seek to transform unjust structures of society

Section 2. The Witness of the Bible.

We ask for study of hermeneutical approaches and relevant Bible texts.

You may offer reflections on hermeneutical methodology.

You may submit reflections on specific verses or on the thrust of the Biblical witness.

For many, this will focus on the understanding of homosexuality in the Bible, but it could be a reflection on the manner of loving service, on the significance of marriage, or on the biblical understanding of human identity.

This section will be split into 2 parts within the text.

Section 3. The Witness of Tradition.

We seek contributions on such questions as:

Has the tradition of the church remained static on sexual relationships?

How has the church moved on in its understanding of the role of issues such as women priests and slavery and does this have any relevance for our attitude to lesbian and gay Christians?

Section 4. Homosexuality and Science.

The Lambeth Conferences since 1978 have called for scientific study to inform the debate.

We ask for contributions from those who have expertise in medical science and psychotherapy.

We will take notice of geneticists, medical experts, therapists.

We ask for the experience of gay and lesbian people, including those who have struggled with unwanted same sex attraction and their experiences of therapy.

Section 5. Homosexuality and Culture

We ask for contributions from around the communion. We will seek to understand how human sexuality is understood in the diverse cultures of the communion.

We will also ask how can we talk across cultures and inculturate our understandings.

Section 6. Sexuality and Identity.

What does it mean to say we have our identity in Christ?

The St Andrew's Day Statement said:

“Our sexual affections can no more define who we are than can our class, race or nationality.”

Is this a reality for us? How does this relate to the wider Biblical understanding of humanity.

We ask for reflections of those who have experience of victimisation and diminishment due to their ethnicity or gender and seek to ask if there is any relationship with the victimisation of gay and lesbian Christians.

Section 7. Sexuality and Spirituality

We ask for contributions on how marriage enriches our personal and corporate spirituality.

We seek reflections on the impact of gay partnerships on marriage.

We are aware of the huge contribution gay and lesbian Christians in the mission and ministry of the church and we would like reflections on what, if any, specific contribution to spirituality for the whole church has come from and is available to from those who are attracted to people of the same sex.

Section 8. Developing Skills in Listening

How can we as a church enable listening in safe space and common ground?

We seek best practice and stories of listening.

We specifically want to hear how listening can happen in places where homosexuality is illegal or the prevailing culture is hostile or even dangerous for gay and lesbian people.

Guidelines for Submissions – General

1. Respect

Respect for Gay and Lesbian people.

The demonising, victimising and diminishment of people whose attractions happen to be ordered towards people of the same sex is condemned by the Windsor Report, the Primates in 2005 and by consistent Resolutions of the Lambeth Conference.

Respect for people whose reading of the Bible and understanding of tradition and reason lead them to reject homosexual practice.

The easy labelling of someone as “phobic” for principled views will not allow dialogue to emerge.

Guide to Respect

a. Not Seeking to Cause Offence

Submissions should not seek to cause offence.

b. Language Used

i) Submissions in English should follow the language used in the “Glossary of Terms” on this website. <http://www.aco.org/listening/glossary.cfm>

For example: The word “gay” is defined as “a man who is emotionally and sexually attracted to other men. It is the preferred term of self identification for many homosexual men. It is also a term used to describe the whole GLBT community. Some men who have sex with men do not self-identify as gay.” By this definition a “gay” man is not assumed to be in an active partnership.

ii) The use of the terms of self identification is always encouraged. Thus an ex gay man may wish to be known as some one who struggled with unwanted same sex attraction issues.

c. UK Law

As we intend to publish in the UK. All submissions will have to conform to UK law.

2. Mission Orientation

The resources for the Lambeth Conference are designed to assist the Bishops in the task of God’s mission. All submissions should take that into consideration. Four of the Five Marks of Mission are deemed relevant and while it is not expected that any one submission will address all of these marks, at least one should be held in mind in the writing of the submissions.

The Five Marks of Mission

To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom

To teach, baptise and nurture new believers

To respond to human need by loving service

To seek to transform unjust structures of society

To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth

3. Develop Dialogue

Contributors are asked to consider how their submission might contribute to dialogue. Strongly held beliefs and attitudes are welcomed. However, such beliefs need to be offered in a manner which does not dismiss or diminish the offerings of others. This requires contributors to argue positively for their own perspective rather than to be negative about those of others.

4. **Prayer**

Contributors are asked to pray about their submission. The ultimate task is for us collectively to hear the voice of God.

5. **The Anglican Way of Doing Theology**

Contributors are asked to bear in mind the Anglican Way of doing theology. For an outline of the methodology you can refer to the Virginia Report Section 3.5 to 3.11 on <http://www.lambethconference.org/1998/documents/report-1.pdf> (page 15ff).

Guidelines for Submission – Practical

1. **Language**

Submissions may be made in any major language of the Anglican Communion. A synopsis of no more than 300 words is required.

2. **The Variety of Submissions**

Submissions may be academic articles, poems, video clips, audio recordings, statements, testimony, book reviews, liturgical materials, Bible studies, pictures or any other material which seems significant to the contributor.

Submissions may focus on one section or may cover more than one section. For example: an article entitled “Marriage in the Tradition of the Church” would be aimed at Section 3. However, a submission such as “Marriage in the Tradition of the Church and in the culture of West Africa” would be very welcome and might equally fit in both Section 3 and Section 5.

3. **Academic Articles**

Articles for publication on the CD should be no longer than 3,000 words in length. A series of articles from the same source is welcomed. Shorter more precise articles are more likely to be accessed and utilised than longer ones. There is no intention to translate the submitted articles into other languages of the communion (as opposed to the Study Guide) and so care should be taken to use plain English, readable for those to whom English is a second language.

4. **Previously Published Material**

Previously Published material is welcome for submission. For copy right reasons any such material must be clearly marked and permission for publication obtained and forwarded to us. The author of the material has responsibility for obtaining the permission to publish on the CD. The form is on [WebPage]

5. **Form of Submission**

Submissions should be sent by email to listeningsubmissions@anglicancommuion.org with ‘Submission for Resources’ on the subject line.

Submissions will preferably be in Microsoft Word or readable by Microsoft Word.

Submissions on paper text will be accepted, especially from parts of the world where access to computers is limited.

Pictures and video clips etc. will require other forms.

Please label clearly which section or sections you are submitting to. Clarity and brevity will be taken as significant virtues for publication.

6. **Information Required**

For a submission from a group or diocese:

We need the name of the group, a contact name for the submission (including title and position in the group), a physical address (including country) and any website and phone number.

For an individual submission:

We need: A contact name, title, a physical address (including country) and phone number. If the person holds a position in the church, lay or ordained we would value

that information. For lay people or ministers in secular employment we would value your job title.

7. Anonymity and Submission

We are dedicated to making safe space. For this, the facilitator offers anonymity to those who wish it. However, the Facilitator will need all the above information for publication. Anonymity can be of name alone or can include role in the church, job title and nationality.

8. Criteria for Publication

The decision to publish will be solely in the hands of the Facilitator, who will be advised by the editors.

Submission is not a guarantee of publication.

Where several submissions have effectively covered the same ground from the same cultural context it will be necessary to choose those which reflect best a point of view or a life experience.

9. In line with the commitment of the bishops in Resolution I.10 of the 1998 Lambeth conference to “listen to the experience of homosexual persons”, priority will be given to hearing that experience.