

C of E Bishops' Working Group on Human Sexuality reports

The report of the House of Bishops Working Group on Human Sexuality was published yesterday 28 November 2013

A report by the Church of England's Working Group on Human Sexuality has recommended two-years of facilitated conversations, but no new liturgy. All but one of the group, led by Chairman Sir Joseph Pilling, were agreed on the content of the final report and its recommendations. The Bishop of Birkenhead Keith Sinclair however wrote a 'dissenting report' laying out his own thoughts about the main report and the issues discussed.

What the whole group did agree, however on, however was a need for greater conversation and listening.

The main report recommends: "The subject of sexuality, with its history of deeply entrenched views, would best be addressed by facilitated conversations or a similar process to which the Church of England need



s to commit itself at national and diocesan level. This should continue to involve profound reflection on the interpretation of scripture."

It added that consultation should be conducted "without undue haste, but with a



sense of urgency, perhaps over a period of two years."

The report acknowledges that how the Church of England discusses the issue of same sex relationships affects Christians in other countries. Therefore it also recommends that England enter into close dialogue with the wider Anglican Communion and other churches.

The total report is not a policy document, rather it has been written to "offer proposals on how the continuing discussion within the Church of England about these matters might be best shaped in the light of the listening process.

The report considers the rapidly changing context within which the group undertook its work. It examines the available data about the views of the public in our country over time. The report considers homophobia, evidence from science, from scripture and from theologians. During their work, members of the group not only gathered evidence from many experts, groups and individuals but also met a number of gay and lesbian people, often in their homes, to listen to their experiences and insights.

The main report offers 18 recommendations. A statement from the Church of England said yesterday, "The recommendations do not propose any

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change in the church's teaching on sexual conduct.

"They do propose that clergy, with the agreement of their Church Council, should be able to offer appropriate services to mark a faithful same sex relationship. The group does not propose an authorised liturgy for this purpose but understands the proposed provision to be a pastoral accommodation which does not entail any change to what the church teaches. No member of the clergy, or parish, would be required to offer such services and it could not extend to solemnising same sex marriages without major changes to the law."

The majority of the group—the bishops of Gloucester, Fulham and Warwick* and three advisers Professor Robert Song, The Ven. Rachel Treweek and the Revd Dr Jessica Martin—agreed that "the nub of the disagreement" turns on "the church's ongoing disagreement on questions of sexuality, on the meaning and authority of scripture."

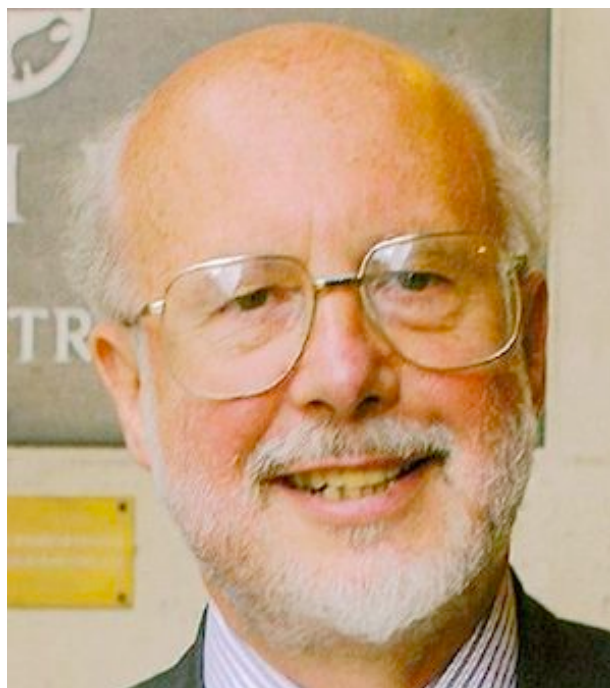
"The problem, we are unable, collectively, to solve is between the belief that God's purposes revealed in scripture are eternal, unchanging and consistent, and the plain fact that faithful, prayerful Christians who aspire for their lives to be governed by scripture, do not agree about the implications of the scriptural texts for same sex relationships."

The Church of England's House of Bishops will discuss the report for the first time in December 2013, and it will be further debated by the College of Bishops in January 2014.

Press release

The Archbishops of Canterbury and York have today published the *Report of the House of Bishops Working Group on Human Sexuality*.

In a statement thanking the working group - chaired by Sir Joseph Pilling - for its report, the Archbishops commented that the report "is a substantial document proposing a process of facilitated conversations in the Church of England over a period of perhaps two years. The document offers findings and recommendations to form part of that process of facilitated conversations. It is not a new policy statement from the Church of England."



Sir Joseph Pilling

Noting that "the issues with which the Report grapples are difficult and divisive" the Archbishops recognise Sir Joseph's Pilling's comment that 'disagreements have been explored in the warmth of a shared faith'. The Archbishops continue "Our prayer is that the process of reflection that will now be needed in the Church of England, shaped by the House of Bishops and the College, will be characterised by a similar spirit."

Commissioned by the House of Bishops of the Church of England in January 2012, the working group included the bishops of Gloucester, Birkenhead, Fulham and Warwick. The group invited three advisers

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to join in the work. They were: Professor Robert Song, The Ven Rachel Treweek and the Revd Dr Jessica Martin.

The report considers the rapidly changing context within which the group undertook its work. It examines the available data about the views of the public in our country over time. The report considers homophobia, evidence from science, from scripture and from theologians. During their work, members of the group not only gathered evidence from many experts, groups and individuals but also met a number of gay and lesbian people, often in their homes, to listen to their experiences and insights.

The report offers 18 recommendations. The first recommendation is intended to set the context for the report as a whole. It warmly welcomes and affirms the presence and ministry within the church of gay and lesbian people both lay and ordained.

Three recommendations look at the report's proposal for 'facilitated conversations', across the Church of England and in dialogue with the Anglican Communion and other churches, so that Christians who disagree deeply about the meaning of scripture on questions of sexuality, and on the demands of living in holiness for gay and lesbian people, should understand each other's concerns more clearly and seek to hear each other as authentic Christian disciples. Further recommendations call on the church to combat homophobia whenever and wherever it is found, and to repent of the lack of welcome and acceptance extended to homosexual people in the past.

The recommendations do not propose any change in the church's teaching on sexual conduct. They do propose that clergy, with the agreement of their Church Council, should be able to offer appropriate services to mark a faithful same sex relationship. The group does not propose churchnewsireland@gmail.com

an authorised liturgy for this purpose but understands the proposed provision to be a pastoral accommodation which does not entail any change to what the church teaches. No member of the clergy, or parish, would be required to offer such services and it could not extend to solemnising same sex marriages without major changes to the law.

The report notes that the church's teaching on sexuality is in tension with contemporary social attitudes, not only for gay and lesbian Christians, but for straight Christians too. In relation to candidates for ministry, it recommends that whether someone is married, single or in a civil partnership should have no bearing on the assurances sought from them that they intend to order their lives consistently with the teaching of the Church on sexual conduct.

The report includes a 'dissenting statement' from the Bishop of Birkenhead who found himself unable to support all the recommendations made by the group as a whole. The main part of the report is supported and signed by all the other members of the group, including the advisers.

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CNI notes -

The Report of the *House of Bishops Working Group on Human Sexuality* is published by Church House Publishing in Paperback and Ebook formats (ISBN 978 0 7151 4437 4, 224pp, £16.99) and is also available to view [online](http://www.churchofengland.org/media/1891063/pilling_report_gs_1929_web.pdf) here - http://www.churchofengland.org/media/1891063/pilling_report_gs_1929_web.pdf

Audio interview

An audio interview with Sir Joseph Pilling is available [here](#) -

Statement by Archbishops

The full text of the statement from the Archbishops of Canterbury and York follows -

Earlier this month, the Review Group established in 2011 by the House of Bishops under the chairmanship of Sir Joseph Pilling delivered to us its Report. This is a substantial document proposing a process of facilitated conversations in the Church of England over a period of perhaps two years. The document offers findings and recommendations to form part of that process of facilitated conversations.

It is not a new policy statement from the Church of England.

The House of Bishops will be meeting next month and the College of Bishops the following month to consider the Report and decide how such a process might best be shaped. In view of the interest in the Report we have decided that it should be published now, without delay.

As the chair notes in his foreword, the issues with which the Report grapples are difficult and divisive. We want therefore, on behalf of the House of Bishops, to express our sincere appreciation and gratitude to the members of the group, its advisers and to the staff who supported it, for the investment of time, intellect and emotion that they have made in order to produce such a wide ranging and searching document.

In Sir Joseph's words their 'disagreements have been explored in the warmth of a shared faith'. Our prayer is that the process of reflection that will now be needed in the Church of England, shaped by the House of Bishops and the College, will be characterised by a similar spirit.
+Justin Cantuar +Sentamu Eboracensis
28 November 2013

Initial responses

Telegraph

[Churches should perform gay blessings, CofE says](#)

In a historic shift in thinking a panel of bishops recommend the Church of England allow special services which will amount to gay marriages in all but name

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/10480341/Churches-should-perform-gay-blessings-CofE-says.html>

The Guardian

[Church should allow blessings of gay relationships, CofE report says](#)

The Church of England should lift its ban on blessing people in same-sex relationships, according to a long-awaited report on the church's attitude to [sexuality](#).

The report of the house of bishops working group on human sexuality, which was chaired by the retired civil servant Sir Joseph Pilling, suggests couples in permanent and faithful civil partnerships could have their relationships blessed as part of an Anglican service.

It comes seven months after the church said that the ban on blessing same-sex relationships would remain in force.

The recommendations of the report, which was commissioned by the church in January 2012, are likely to be welcomed by liberal Anglicans but provoke fury among conservative evangelicals, who remain deeply opposed to any moves to soften the church's line on homosexuality.

While stressing that there should be no change to the "church's teaching on sexual

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conduct", the report notes that society has moved on.

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/nov/28/church-blessings-same-sex-relationships-report>

Anglican Communion News Service

[Report on sexuality: "Hold Church-wide facilitated conversations"](#)

A report by the Church of England's Working Group on Human Sexuality has recommended two-years of facilitated conversations, but no new liturgy.

All but one of the group, led by Chairman Sir Joseph Pilling, were agreed on the content of the final report and its recommendations. The Bishop of Birkenhead Keith Sinclair however wrote a 'dissenting report' laying out his own thoughts about the main report and the issues discussed.

What the whole group did agree, however on, however was a need for greater conversation and listening.

The main report recommends: "The subject of sexuality, with its history of deeply entrenched views, would best be addressed by facilitated conversations or a similar process to which the Church of England needs to commit itself at national and diocesan level. This should continue to involve profound reflection on the interpretation of scripture."

It added that consultation should be conducted "without undue haste, but with a sense of urgency, perhaps over a period of two years."

<http://www.anglicannews.org/news/2013/11/report-on-sexuality-%E2%80%99Hold-church-wide-facilitated-conversations%E2%80%99D.aspx>

Church of England Newspaper

[Same sex 'blessings' recommended in report](#)

Clergy could be allowed to bless same-sex relationships, if the recommendations of the Pilling report are accepted by the House of Bishops.

The report, published today, recommends that 'clergy, in agreement with their PCC, should be free to mark the formation of a permanent same sex relationship in a public service.' However, the report stresses that clergy should be under no obligation to do so.

Interestingly, the role of the diocesan bishop will be removed from the decision, in a move that could see splits emerge.

The long-awaited report says that the Church should repent of its history of homophobia, but also argues that no one should be accused of homophobia 'solely for articulating traditional Christian teaching on same sex relationships.'

<http://www.churchnewspaper.com/36049/archives>

BBC News

[Same-sex blessings backed by Church of England report](#)

Members of the clergy should be allowed to offer blessings to same-sex couples, a report commissioned by the Church of England has recommended.

The report, produced by four bishops and chaired by former civil servant Sir Joseph Pilling, does not propose offering a "formal liturgy".

But it says priests should be "free" to give gay couples a "public service".

The Church pointed out the report is for discussion and is "not a new policy statement from the Church of England".

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The report says the Church must find "ways of honouring" gay Christians who "conscious of the Church's teaching, have embraced a chaste and single lifestyle, and also those who in good conscience have entered partnerships with a firm intention of life-long fidelity".

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-25141239>

Christian Today

[Church of England report on human sexuality: Clergy should be able to bless same sex partnerships](#)

The Church of England has published a major report on human sexuality today.

The House of Bishops, which commissioned a working group to compile the report, announced back in January 2012 that it intended to draw together material from the Church of England and offer proposals on how the ongoing discussion about matters of sexuality might be best shaped.

The group was chaired by Sir Joseph Pilling, a former Permanent Secretary of the Northern Ireland Office, and its members included the Bishops of Gloucester, Birkenhead, Fulham and Warwick.

Professor Robert Song, the Ven Rachel Treweek and the Reverend Dr Jessica Martin were also invited to be advisors for the group.

<http://www.christiantoday.com/article/church.of.english.report.on.human.sexuality.clergy.should.be.able.to.bless.same.sex.partnerships/34854.htm>

Pink News

[Church of England report on sexuality recognises tension on gays in church but urges for understanding](#)

Today the Church of England published a report on "human sexuality" which notes a churchnewsireland@gmail.com

tension between the church and contemporary culture, but which recommends that same-sex marriages and civil partnerships should be blessed, and that homophobia should be tackled across the church.

<http://www.pinknews.co.uk/2013/11/28/church-of-england-report-on-sexuality-recognises-tension-on-gays-in-church-but-urges-for-understanding/>

Church Times

[Pilling opens door to gay blessings in church](#)

[The Church Times' report](#) includes this:

On the subject of permitting gay blessings, Sir Joseph said on Thursday: "If a priest and a priest's PCC [parish council] agree together that a couple in a permanent, faithful, stable relationship, typically a civil partnership, come forward and say they would like their relationship to be marked in an act of public worship, that should be possible."

It adds:

The report is not unanimous. It contains a dissenting appendix from the Bishop of Birkenhead, the Rt Revd Keith Sinclair, a conservative Evangelical, in which he warns that "the trajectory in the report will undermine the discipleship and pastoral care of many faithful Christians and, by leading the Church into the kind of cultural captivity which much of the prophetic writings warn against, weaken our commitment to God's mission." There follows a second appendix, written by the Revd David Runcorn, which states the more liberal view of "Including Evangelicals".

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<http://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2013/29-november/news/uk/pilling-opens-door-to-gay-blessings-in-church>

Episcopal Cafe

Writing on the US blog, Jim Naughten concludes - "It would be premature to speculate on how the conversations in the Church of England will unfold, but it seems safe to say that the days of worrying about whether the Episcopal Church will be thrown out of the Anglican Communion for moving toward the full inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Christians are over."

Reform

Reform Chairman Prebendary Rod Thomas said yesterday that he was "deeply ashamed" that the Pilling Report was opening up divisive discussions about the church's stance on human sexuality.

He said: "Anglican evangelicals want to encourage the best possible provision of pastoral care for everyone involved in parish life. The calling of Christians is to a transformed life. True pastoral care in the case of those experiencing same-sex attraction will be to help them live Christianly. The report does not do this in its recommendations for "pastoral accommodation". Reform profoundly regrets this insensitivity to real pastoral need.

Speaking at the close of the pan-evangelical ReNew conference, attended by over 250 senior Anglican leaders, Rod Thomas said that the report's proposals were "very divisive and distressing". He warmly endorsed the Bishop of Birkenhead's dissenting statement with its understanding that the trajectory of the report "...undermined the discipleship and pastoral care of many faithful Christians".

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The Reform Council gave initial consideration to the report yesterday. It concluded that the inevitable result of the report's recommendations would be that pressure will increase for changes to the church's understanding of marriage and of God's purposes for human flourishing as outlined in the Bible. The Council reiterated its belief that the Anglican approach to doctrine and ethics can only be based on Scripture and therefore was not open to negotiation in facilitated conversations.

Reform is an evangelical network within the Church of England. It has 1,700 members of whom one-third are clergy.

Church Society

Lee Gatiss, of Church Society said - Church Society welcomes the publication of the Report of the House of Bishops Working Group on Human Sexuality, so that it can be discussed openly and publicly by the whole church.

Like the apostle Jude, in the Bible, we would prefer to discuss the good news of Jesus Christ and the salvation he offers to all, but feel constrained to respond to the teaching of those who are changing the gospel into an affirmation of immoral behaviour.

We call on the church to read the report prayerfully, and to weigh its teaching and recommendations carefully in the light of scripture's very clear teaching on sexuality, to which the Church of England is committed in its canons, doctrinal formularies, Synodical statements, and the resolutions of the Lambeth Conference. We particularly commend to people the "dissenting statement" in the report from the Bishop of Birkenhead, and thank him for its clarity and care. A further statement will be made in due course.