

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.**"

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 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 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.

The 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.

ENDS

Note to Editors

The Report of the *House of Bishops Working Group on Human Sexuality* is published today 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](#).

An audio interview with Sir Joseph Pilling is [available on our SoundCloud page](#).

A video of the news conference with Sir Joseph Pilling is [available on our YouTube page](#).

The full text of the statement from the Archbishops of Canterbury and York can be found below

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

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