

The College of Bishops met on 27th January, 2014 to begin a process of reflection on the issues raised by the Pilling Report (GS 1929). The College expressed appreciation to Sir Joseph Pilling and to all members of the working party for the work they have done on behalf of the Church.

We are united in welcoming and affirming the presence and ministry within the Church of gay and lesbian people, both lay and ordained. We are united in acknowledging the need for the Church to repent for the homophobic attitudes it has sometimes failed to rebuke and affirming the need to stand firmly against homophobia wherever and whenever it is to be found.

We are united in seeking to be faithful to the Scriptures and the tradition of the Church and in seeking to make a loving, compassionate and respectful response to gay men and women within Church and society.

We recognise the very significant change in social attitudes to sexuality in the United Kingdom in recent years.

We recognise also the strongly held and divergent views reflected in the Pilling Report, across the Anglican Communion and in the Church of England. We acknowledge that these differences are reflected also within the College of Bishops and society as a whole.

We accept the recommendation of the Pilling Report that the subject of sexuality, with its history of deeply entrenched views, would best be addressed by facilitated conversations, ecumenically, across the Anglican Communion and at national and diocesan level and that this should continue to involve profound reflection on the interpretation and application of Scripture. These conversations should set the discussion of sexuality within the wider context of human flourishing.

We have together asked the Archbishops to commission a small group to design a process for these conversations and additional materials to support and enable them. We hope that the outline for the process and the additional materials will be approved by the House of Bishops in May.

We acknowledge that one of the challenges we face is to create safe space for all those involved to be honest about their own views and feelings. This has not always happened and it must do so in the future. We recognise that we will not all agree and that this process is in part committed to seeking good disagreement that testifies to our love for one another across the church in obedience to Christ.

As the Archbishops noted in November, the Pilling report is not a new policy statement from the Church of England and we are clear that the Church of England's pastoral and liturgical practice remains unchanged during this process of facilitated conversation.

No change to the Church of England's teaching on marriage is proposed or envisaged. The House of Bishops will be meeting next month to consider its approach when same sex marriage becomes lawful in England in March.

We are grateful to the whole Church for their prayers for our meeting today and for the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We recognise that on many occasions in the past the Church has faced challenging questions. It is vital in these moments to take counsel together, to read and reflect upon the Scriptures and to continue to discern together the mind of Christ.

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