

St Peters Willis Street Reflections on: A Way Forward Structure Small Working Group Interim Report

St Peter's Church Willis Street is a faith community committed to the radical and inclusive love of Jesus Christ. We acknowledge and celebrate the Image of God in all people and especially seek to welcome the marginalised to our table. We have a history of being an open and affirming community for LGBT people and in 2016 passed this motion at our AGM:

THAT: This AGM endorses statements made by present and former St Peter's vicars, Rev Brian Dawson and Rt Rev Richard Randerson, strongly supporting reform of Church laws to ensure that all Anglicans, regardless of sexuality or marital state, have equal rights of access to our Church's offices and sacraments. It asks all clergy, officers and members of the parish to take every possible opportunity to advance such reform at synods, within our diocese and throughout the Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia.

St Peters acknowledges the difficult work of those involved in the Working Group in seeking to reach a position to enable the blessing of same sex couples. However we have significant concerns that the proposal is lacking in vision and will have little positive effect for our LGBT Brothers and Sisters.

St Peters firmly believes we must allow greater equality for LGBT people in our church if we are to have any future, indeed our young people demand this of us.

These are our primary concerns:

1. The Anglican Church is said to be "episcopally led, and synodically governed". There are multiple parts of this report which seems to dilute this. The suggestion to amend declarations of submission and adherence to the authority of GSTHW is a concerning example of this. As is the suggestion to give Bishop's primary authority in authorising or restricting same-sex blessings in their diocese/ hui amorangi.
2. The report continues to emphasise unity rather than equity and justice for LGBT Anglicans. St Peter's believes that this approach is too timid and continues to perpetuate injustice and oppression.
3. There is a concern that there are progressive and inclusive parishes in most dioceses and hui amorangi who will be distressed if their Bishops do not permit them to offer same-sex blessings.
4. The report is silent on the matter of ordination. This needs to be addressed and be clearly defined.
5. As per the Working Group recommendations individual clergy could be authorised to conduct same-sex blessings with or without consent of Vestry. This could create tensions within Ministry Units.
6. We are unsure on the purpose or usefulness of the recommendation to create Orders of Consecrated Life. We are concerned this could create 'flying Bishops' which we do not consider desirable.
7. The Report does not offer the church any guidance on the status of these 'blessed relationships.' For example would the Priest be encouraged to provide any marriage education prior to the blessing service taking place?

St Peters also notes that in 2014 the debate was then around blessings of same sex couples and the ordination of LGBT priests. It shifted in 2016 to blessings for same sex couples previously

married in a civil ceremony and with less emphasis on ordination. Now it retains the prospect of enabling blessings of same sex couples already married in a civil union but only with episcopal permission. We are concerned that the proposal is a significant back-track from where the discussion has previously been.

Therefore we recommend the following as an alternative-

1. That every Anglican parish is free to conduct same-gender blessings if they choose to do so without sanction.
2. That every Anglican parish is free to choose *not* to conduct same-gender blessings if they choose not to do so without sanction.
3. Every Anglican priest must be free to conduct (or not to conduct) same-gender blessings without sanction.
4. A person living in a civil union or a marriage with a same-gender partner must be eligible for consideration for ordination in the Anglican Church should they wish to do so.