



**Case Summary: International Anglican Conversations on Human Sexuality, 1999-2001**

**Context/Challenge:**

Rising tensions in the Anglican Communion re: homosexuality as manifested in the Lambeth conference of 1998, where a resolution was passed declaring homosexuality as “contrary to Scripture” and at which an African bishop attempted to exorcise the demon of homosexuality from a priest advocating for gay rights. Resulting global atmosphere of distrust, anger, fear, cycles of dysfunctional communication that distorted perceptions and fed the widening divide.

**Response of the Archbishop of Canterbury (ABC):** gather a representative group of bishops and primates (national or regional authorities) for off-the-record conversations to achieve the following **purposes:**

- deepen our understanding of each others’ views about sexuality in general and homosexuality in particular as well as the theological and cultural contexts in which these views are grounded
- “help move the whole Communion forward” from the Lambeth Conference resolution on human sexuality
- provide the Communion with a model for how to handle the subject in a more general way across the boundaries and traditions which divide us.

**People:** See pamphlet. Representative group from England, US, Hong Kong, Brazil, Kenya, Canada, Australia, Wales and Nigeria including current ABC

**Process:**

**Preparation:**

- PCP works with representative planning team
- Interviews and reflections before each meeting; evaluation interviews after each meeting
- Questions for reflection before meetings
- Reading material before meetings

**Meetings:** 3 meetings of 4 days over three years

**1999: Holy Cross Monastery, West Park, NY**

- Meeting one another
- Forming a covenant
- Personal speaking: experience, heart, gray areas
- Mutual inquiry

- Shared observations of convergence, divergence, not-understanding and ideas for “moving forward”
- Shared writing of report to ABC

**2000: Alton Abbey, Alton, England**

- Review West Park: what valued, conditions for success
- Revise and update covenant
- Incorporate new members
- Establish hopes/ goals for this meeting
- Review intervening global events
- Focus on disputed Scripture passages
- Focus on provincial conditions/ resources
- Focus on personal perspectives on homosexuality
- Review learnings/ accomplishments to date; recommend next steps
- Letter to ABC

**2001: Dayspring Center, Sarasota, FL**

- Reconnect and update
- Sub-group design of worship and Scripture segments
- Focus on Scripture
- Review conversations across the AC
- Write final report and recommendations to ABC

**Immediate Effects:**

**1. Expanding the scope of conversation** from “does the Bible allow for or prohibit homosexuality?” to also include:

- The importance of cultivating and maintaining relationship with opponents
- Dynamics of exclusion: doctrinal, developed/ developing nations, North/south, sexual orientation, etc
- Pastoral concerns: how to minister to homosexual persons
- Kingdom of God/ Western Culture. How discern?
- Right role of compassion
- Language: power of, how used, how misused
- Communication. Effects of anxiety, fear, and mode (eg internet vs face to face)
- Provincial conditions (eg churches being burned in Muslim countries) and resources

**2. Enhanced understanding and respect**

**3. More clarity about “convergence and divergence”**

**4. Commendation of a dialogic approach to engage this and other difficult issues.**

**Wider Ripples:**

1. Demonstration of dialogue (and testimony) at US Bishops' gathering at Virginia Theological Seminary and Denver full House Of Bishops (HOB) meeting.
2. Dialogues in Australia and New South Wales
3. Procedure changes in New Zealand HOB
4. Testimony at Primates meetings
5. Re-design and facilitation of US HOB meetings 2003-2006 to deal with Windsor Report in a constructive way
6. Recommendations made to the Archbishop of Canterbury by the group about how conflict should be engaged across the international Anglican Communion. Endorsed by the ABC and published in "Final Report" available to churches.