



CNI

NEWS FOCUS

- Committee proposes blessing of same sex marriages for Anglicans in New Zealand

The long-awaited report of the Way Forward Working Group has been released. This week's publication comes almost 18 months since the 13-member group began its work – and it proposes two new liturgies to be considered by May's General Synod.

These liturgies have been designed to allow for the blessing of couples who have been married in a civil ceremony – according either to New Zealand law, or to the law in the Pacific Island nations which form part of this church. These liturgies also create a pathway for the people in such relationships to become ordained.

Civil marriages between a man and a woman have long been recognised in law in both New Zealand and in those Pacific Island nations. In New Zealand's case, of course, an amendment to marriage law came into effect in August 2013 – which allows same-sex couples to legally marry...

...Should these rites be adopted, heterosexual couples who were married in a civil ceremony (say, on the beach at Bali) will be able to seek for their relationship to be blessed by the Church.

And the WFWG is also proposing a separate, but similar, rite of blessing for same-sex couples who have married in a civil ceremony...

...“It is the view of the majority of the group,” the report notes, “that the proposed liturgies do not represent a departure from the Doctrine and Sacraments of Christ, and are therefore not prohibited by Te Pouhere, however the group also recognises that this will be a crucial matter for debate.”

The full text of the document is available here - www.anglican.org.nz/content/download/41332/208885/file/Way%20Forward%20Report%20RELEASE.pdf

The covering letter sent by the Archbishops is available here -

www.anglican.org.nz/content/download/41331/208882/file/Archbishops%20Cover%20Letter%20WFWG%20RELEASE.pdf

Bosco Peters is an Anglican priest in New Zealand who is well known for his liturgy blog. He commented on the report and process writing -

The thanks and congratulations of the Church must go to the Working Group members.

I suggest you use the above links because, unfortunately, the church's [official media website's version](#) (on *Anglican Taonga*) has stripped any pagination (making the contents pointing to page numbers redundant), messed up numbering, and removed clarity of layout (making it difficult to distinguish, for example, the two distinct blessing rites). Unfortunately the PDF also has layout issues (our church does really struggle with digital technology – but that is another issue) but it is by far the better version.

Obviously, I have not had time to digest the document in the manner it deserves. My first

impression is that this indeed provides a way forward. Just as we hold together in one church those who accept remarriage after divorce and those who don't, just as we hold together in one church pacifists and army chaplains and those who would bless instruments of war, so the hope is that we will hold together in one church those who accept the blessing of committed same-sex couples and those who do not.

In any comments to this post, please maintain the culture of this site: your real name; no ad hominem; light rather than heat.

These are merely my initial notes:

- I am pleased to see that the route being proposed is to create a formulary. This means no alteration need take place to the normal process for authorising Blessing a Same-Sex Couple (GSTHW – hui amorangi/diocesan synods – GSTHW; a year's wait to see if there are any objections). [Statute 711](#), returning to GSTHW 2016 after just squeaking through to the slightest majority of dioceses, is not needed for this Blessing Rite, so it can happily be discarded.

- In more than one place, the report speaks of diocese or amorangi “choosing to adopt” or “not authorise” this Blessing Rite. Someone please explain this to me. I do not think that dioceses or amorangi can make choices about formularies once they have been authorised by the Church.
- I underscore the sadness of same-sex couple who hope to be married “in church” that this is specifically excluded. Furthermore, this rite can only be used by those who have been civilly married.
- Our Constitution (and the Church of England Empowering Act) stresses that we cannot make changes to the Doctrine and Sacraments of Christ. The report is clear: marriage is not a “Sacrament of Christ”, and “Doctrine of Christ” is unclear and undefined.
- The Church of England Empowering Act has not caught up with the Tikanga changes in our Church. The report encourages updating that Act.

- There is a change suggested to the Marriage Canon so that the Church no longer have its own list of those excluded from the possibility of marriage – but merely accepts the State’s list. The State, however, might change that list. The report calls removing our own list a “simplification” rather than “substantive”. I strongly disagree. This *is* substantive. The Church might take into account changes to the understanding of marriage that the State undertakes; we might hear God’s voice in changes that the State undertakes; but the Church should clearly retain our independence of the State’s changing understanding of marriage. We should not have a “what they said” canon.
- The suggested altered Marriage Canon has “3.7 As a matter of doctrine any minister has the right to decline to officiate at a service blessing civil marriages (whether involving divorced persons or where the couple are of the same sex) and may not be subject to any disciplinary proceedings for doing so.” I am interested why this is termed “a matter of doctrine”. As I would understand it – a canon cannot change

doctrine. I can see a possible problem: those in the against-blessing-committed-same-sex “integrity” will have a formulary blessing such unions. A formulary is binding on belief. This conflict needs to be resolved within the formulary, it seems to me – I do not think it can be done outside it by a canon. Previously, when people disagree about a formulary they have simply ignored it or disobeyed it, but issues around same-sex couples seem to generate more energy and debate than other ones. I can only suggest that the formulary itself needs to include the word “may”, e.g. beginning with a rubric such as: “After a couple has been married in a civil ceremony they may be blessed using the following form.”

- The two rites presented follow the Kiwi Anglican tendency of responses that need to be read with heads in books, pamphlets or staring at screens. I think well-known responses should have been at least an alternative option.

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