

Same Sex Relationships and the Scottish Episcopal Church

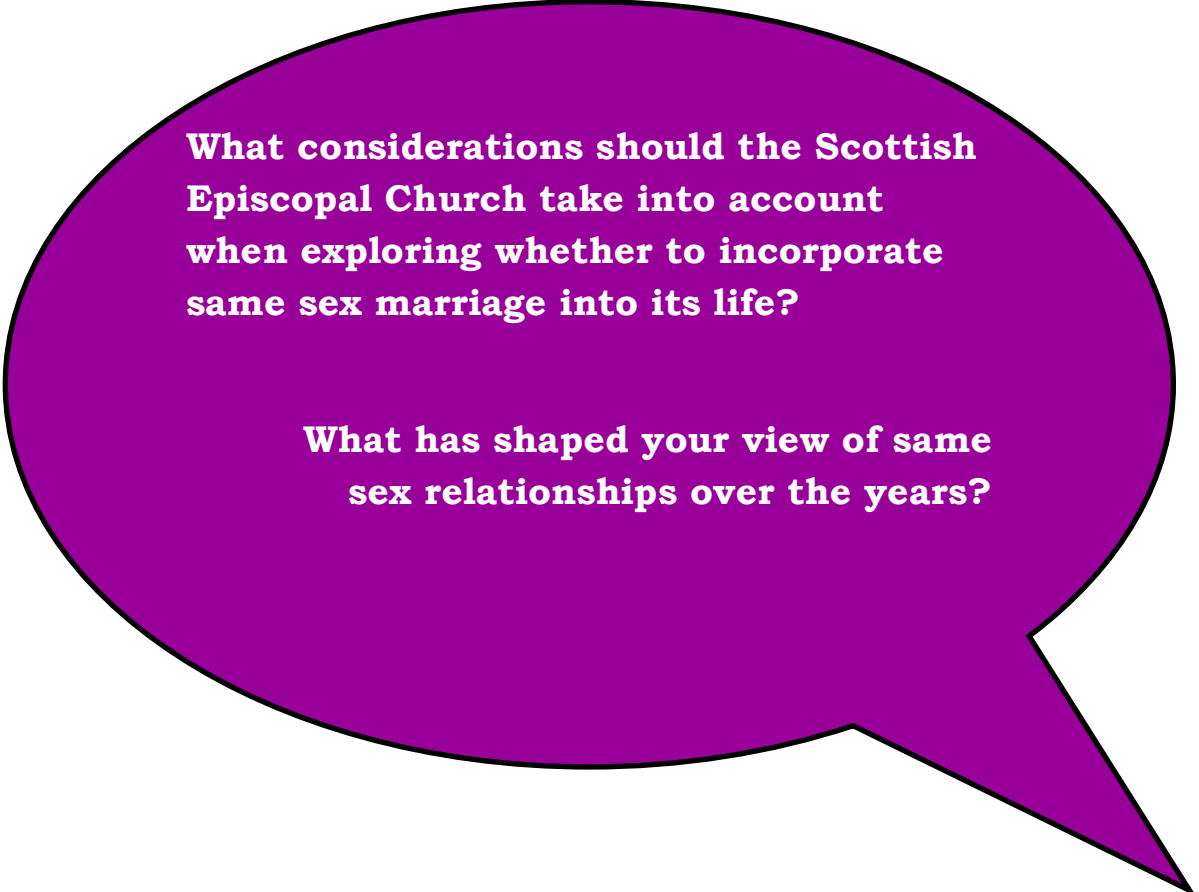
Brechin Diocese was well represented at the recent *Cascade Conversation on Same Sex Relationships within the Scottish Episcopal Church* which drew 60 participants to the Atholl Palace Hotel in Pitlochry on 29-30 April.

Jeremy Auld, Gordon Aitken, Mairi Cuthbert, Kirrilee Reid, Rosemary Stirling and Iain Turnbull attended; also Bishop Nigel and the Dean who were part of the Design Group organising the event and John Cuthbert who was one of the group discussion facilitators.

Participants came with a range of views on a topic which many find challenging. Facilitated conversations directed by **Hugh Donald** from *Place for Hope* were key to the shape and character of our time together. It was about attentive listening and understanding. A number of invited participants from within and beyond Scotland shared in conversations: **Father Ed Hone** (Roman Catholic Redemptorist priest based in Luxembourg, **Ms Ruth Jeffries** (Social worker specialising in kinship care and Lay Member of the Diocese of Moray, Ross and Caithness), **The Rev Dr Marjory Maclean** (Church of Scotland minister and member of the General Assembly Theological Commission on Same Sex Relationships and the Ministry), **The Rev Canon David Porter** (Archbishop of Canterbury's Director for Reconciliation) and **The Rt Rev Keith Sinclair** (Bishop of Birkenhead and member of the Church of England House of Bishops Working Group on Human Sexuality).

Conversations continued enthusiastically in facilitated small discussion groups.

Some impressions and outcomes have already been reported in *Inspires On-line*. Overall the Conversation seems to have been considered more helpful than anything previously attempted provincially.



What considerations should the Scottish Episcopal Church take into account when exploring whether to incorporate same sex marriage into its life?

What has shaped your view of same sex relationships over the years?

PITLOCHRY COMMENTS

"We heard people rather than positions. In the future can we stretch the tent to keep all within?"

"We value the respectful nature of the conversation we have had and would hope that as the process continues the tone remains as important as the content of the outcome."

"For me I took away three things from Pitlochry. The first is that it is possible to have a serious, respectful and meaningful dialogue on the subject. This was witnessed to by a number of outsiders to the SEC who commended our ability to engage in the conversation with grace.

Secondly I had the chance to speak with people who come at the issues from a different direction to me and yet be able to learn from them and find a meeting place.

Lastly that this is not an issue of one side of the argument or the other – people are at different places in their understanding and beliefs – there are many different perspectives and we may find common ground on one and difference on another. The challenge is to move forward whilst respecting the things we hold in common and recognising the things we do not. "

"I think it was a great achievement to bring together people of widely differing views on the subject of same sex relationships and the response of the church to same sex marriage and for the tone to be so caring. There was very honest sharing of the pain of individuals on each end of the debate as to whether they could be part of the church if the church said yes or no to same sex marriage.

We did not finish with answers but with a greater understanding and a desire to grapple with the issues in a way which can hold people together.

I hope that each of us who were at the conference can encourage conversations in congregations in a similar respectful and listening tone which is far more positive than fiery rhetoric."

"It is not always easy to sit around a table hearing such widely disparate views and having to restrain oneself from becoming either aggressive or defensive about one's own position—feeling that there is an argument to win or lose. However, my experience within my group were that people were respectful of one another and grew in understanding of each other's perspectives. For those involved in the decision making process, they will know the cost it is demanding of those whom the voting process does not favour."

"The format of the conference, I feel, achieved what it was hoped could be achieved i.e. the time and the opportunity to listen, think and discuss without prejudice or ridicule and in respectful confidentiality.

It was good to have contributors from various standpoints and experiences so that we can possibly avoid wasting time going down dead end avenues and can concentrate on finding a mutually positive outcome.

We had the chance to "step into the shoes" of others and really appreciate their viewpoints and to realise that there are some totally committed, deeply spiritual fellow Christians who are being treated very shabbily because of their sexuality."

WHAT HAPPENED AT GENERAL SYNOD

General Synod met in Edinburgh 12-14 June with Same Sex Relationships and the Church as one of the agenda items. Bishop Nigel convenes the Design Group tasked with enabling a Whole Church discussion during 2014. He reported on the facilitated discussions at March Diocesan Synods, the significance of the Pitlochry Conversation and the subsequent cascading of local discussions and material becoming available on the Scottish Episcopal Church website.

General Synod then observed four Pitlochry attendees (including our Provost Jeremy) sharing together their experiences and feelings about the event and their views on how the Church should view same sex relationships. Facilitated group discussion then ensued around the questions: What shapes our perhaps changing views? How might the Scottish Episcopal Church approach incorporating same sex marriage into its life?

A procedural motion to have a debate at this year's General Synod, proposed by Dr Beth Routledge of Glasgow & Galloway Diocese, narrowly did not gain the necessary two thirds majority of synod members' votes. Had it been debated the motion sought to end delay and to require the Faith & Order Board to prepare an amendment to the Canon on Marriage – to allow same sex marriages in the SEC – for first reading at the June 2015 General Synod.

The Primus sought to offer a way forward, through “consultation with particular individuals and groups to explore approaches ... and to seek some work on the theology of marriage from our Doctrine Committee... it would be a mistake, I think, to conclude that there is not a significant feeling in this church that we should be moving on Human Sexuality issues. How far and in what timescale - that will be for this Synod to decide. But I think the changed context in which we find ourselves because of the passing of the Marriage and Civil Partnership Bill makes movement necessary and inevitable. We are also aware of the rapidly-changing social attitudes which are all around us and which are particularly visible among young people.”

**His full address is available on the SEC website.
<http://www.scotland.anglican.org/news-and-issues/>**

*“We do need a clearer
understanding of marriage”*

Where do we go from here?

Would you like a member of the Pitlochry Conversations to attend a meeting at your local Church to facilitate a discussion with your congregation?

Rosemary Stirling, Mairi Cuthbert, Jean Forbes, Jeremy Auld, Kirrilee Reid, Iain Turnbull and Gordon Aitken would be happy to assist.

The video mentioned below makes a great discussion starter.

Bishop Nigel is willing to come and have discussions with vestry, congregations and local groups.

Please contact Jackie Milton at the Diocesan Office if you are interested.
office@brechin.anglican.org Tele: 01382 562244

The Brechin Diocese Clergy Study Day takes place on Tuesday, 18 November 2014, continuing the discussion on same-sex relationships within the Scottish Episcopal Church.

The Scottish Government enacts same sex marriage provisions in Scotland shortly. However same sex marriage will not immediately be available in our churches.

This is because Church bodies i.e. our Scottish Episcopal Church have to apply to the government to opt into the arrangements. Safeguards for clergy who in conscience do not wish to celebrate same sex marriage will be put in place.

Discussion on changing our Canon on marriage and creating fresh marriage services will need to happen through General Synod, normally a two year process. The necessary motion can be presented at General Synod 2015 which may result in same sex marriage becoming possible in the Scottish Episcopal Church later in 2017.

“It's important to remember that this is about more than Same-Sex Marriage and whether our clergy will celebrate such marriages in our churches. It's about the situation which arises when clergy who are in Civil Partnerships decide to enter into a same-sex marriage - and when a person who is in a same-sex marriage presents themselves in the process of vocational discernment for ministry.” (The Primus)

VIEW A VIDEO

A conversation between The Reverend Dean Fostekew, Rector of the Church of the Good Shepherd, Edinburgh and The Reverend David Richards, Rector of St Paul's and St George's following on from the recent Cascade Conversation on same-sex Relationships. Twenty minute great discussion starter.

This can be found on the SEC website.

[http://www.scotland.anglican.org/news-and-issues/
Follow Same Sex Relationships—Cascade Conversation](http://www.scotland.anglican.org/news-and-issues/Follow-Same-Sex-Relationships-Cascade-Conversation)