

## **Submission to Ma Whea Commission**

**Rt. Rev. Richard Ellena**

**Bishop of Nelson**

*‘Ma whai kia mau te kotahitanga o te Wairua, he mea paihere na te rangimarie’  
(Ephesians 4:3)*

To the members of the Commission:

Kia ora, ni san bula, greetings.

My sincere thanks to you all for your willingness to be part of the commission that seeks to listen to the Church as it struggles with the difficult issues surrounding homosexuality and same sex relationships within the ministry of the Church and also for the privilege of presenting this submission to you which will reflect the more conservative perspective of the debate. At times I use the word ‘we’ and this is to reflect the wider, evangelically orthodox, viewpoint.

### **Preamble:**

It is not my intention to present a detailed theological submission on the nature of our human sexuality and of human relationships. I am aware that my Diocese is presenting a submission that touches on this and there are certainly a plethora of books written on this subject - from both ends of the theological spectrum.

I would however like to briefly comment on some of the foundational frameworks that determine or colour the decisions that we/I face regarding this debate within the life and doctrines of the Church while, at the same time, holding a deep respect for people who traditionally have felt marginalised and (at times) persecuted for their sexual orientation.

1. The place, and the authority, of scripture within this debate.
2. The nature of ordination.
3. Toward an understanding of human freedom
4. Culture and Christianity
5. General Synod and unity

### **The place, and the authority, of scripture within the debate.**

- The authority of scripture and the constitution of the Church.  
The Bible is foundational in determining the life and doctrines of the Church and this is reflected in the Formularies from Part A of the Constitution of our Church.  
*(Appendix A)*  
These Formularies recognise that our doctrines of faith – the way we order and govern our lives corporately and individually – are drawn from an orthodox understanding of the primacy of scripture which is why many conservative Anglicans are so concerned about this issue. The ‘hermeneutical gymnastics’ that need to happen in order to biblically justify a change in our practice necessitate a revisional approach to scripture that we don’t believe is endorsed by the constitution.  
This is the heart of the argument from the evangelically orthodox Church. It is not about a lack of respect or love for people of same sex orientation, it is about a deep love, passion and respect for the primacy of scripture in our life and faith.

- Interpreting and understanding scripture.

The Anglican Church (including the Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia) loves to quote the 'three-legged stool' by the 16<sup>th</sup> century Anglican theologian Richard Hooker, who (the Church believes) gives equal weight to the three 'values' of scripture, tradition and reason. But it (the Church) seems to have elevated 'reason' to a dominant position that it didn't have in the writings of Hooker (who never spoke about a three legged stool!). Hooker was adamant that tradition and reason were important in the formation of doctrine and practice – *but only insofar as they were validated by scripture.*

What Richard Hooker was insisting on, and what we believe is essential to our Anglican identity, is the need for the very best of biblical, hermeneutical and theological scholarship when it comes to the interpretation of scripture in determining our response to issues such as the one that lies before us.

I don't believe that this has been the case within our Church where decisions are based on emotion and rhetoric rather than an honest exploration of the biblical text itself. We seem to have embraced a post-modern 'contextual' theology that has placed a pre-eminent value on the interpretation of biblical text solely on one's own personal context and experience. It leads ultimately, to us creating God in *our* image rather than us being created (and recreated) in *God's* image.

- Guided by scripture.

The book of Genesis clearly describes God's creation of humanity as male and female – but it then goes on to describe how the union of these two created beings becomes the fullest expression of God's glory. Although the science of genetics has advanced to a stage where cloning is reality, and artificial insemination has paved the way for anonymous impregnation, the 'natural' way of procreation is through the union of a man and a woman. This led to the development of marriage as a secure environment within which to raise the child who carries the genes of both biological parents. Of course, marriage is so much more than this and we freely acknowledge the companionship and the mutual support and encouragement and the self-giving love that are also dynamics of marriage.

However, the Genesis account of marriage remains the normative expression of our human sexuality and we cannot dismiss it as a contextual myth because Jesus himself refers to it in Matthew 19.

While so much time is spent arguing over specific biblical passages that affirm or denounce certain behaviours, the Bible actually provides us with something greater. It is the 'metanarrative' of God's mission in and through the world - from Genesis to Revelation.

The first two chapters of Genesis set the scene with God's **creation** of the universe and of humanity and provide, in the most beautiful simplicity, the ideal that God had in mind for our relationship with God and with one another.

Chapter 3 of Genesis describes '**the Fall**' – humanity's decision to do life our way and not God's way and the inevitable consequences of that decision. This is the foundation of human 'sinfulness' which is *not* specific wrongdoing but a general failure to meet God's ideal for our lives.

The rest of the Old Testament describes God's attempts at '*restoration*' as he seeks to draw people back to the ideal relationship – with God and with one another – and with the whole created world.

All of this paves the way for our '*redemption*' which is found in the person of Jesus – who came to 'save' the world by drawing us back into the way (and the heart) of God through his atoning death on the cross.

The '*consummation*' of this amazing journey is found in the book of Revelation when all of creation (including humanity) is united as a new heaven and a new earth.

For those who hold to the authority of scripture, the debate about human sexuality – as with other issues such as caring for our natural resources; the use (or misuse) of power – must be held within the framework of this 'metanarrative.'

But this is where the debate becomes so difficult because those of us who hold an evangelically orthodox position affirm the authority of scripture in the formation of our life and doctrine as a church and anything that falls outside the creative intent of God, as discovered in scripture, comes under the spotlight of human sinfulness and must be debated within that context and also within our experience of the amazing grace of God.

As a Bishop I am called upon to be a focus of the Church's *unity* and mission. The constitution lists four creedal attributes of the Church as 'one', 'holy', 'catholic' and '*apostolic*.' It then describes 'apostolic' as presenting 'the faith of the apostles'. This apostolic faith is centred on the scriptures of the church and the historic documents of the Church that have interpreted scripture and determined our tradition (and our liturgy).

For many Anglicans the move to embrace a more liberal and contemporary expression of our human sexuality involves the revisioning of scripture and therefore the undermining of the authority of that same scripture. This is something that we cannot accept.

### **The nature of ordination.**

While the current debate within the Church (and within the Community) swirls around the redefinition of marriage in order to be inclusive of people in same sex relationships, this commission is also focussed, more specifically, on the ordination of people in same sex relationships.

So much of the discussion around this topic seems to imply that ordination is a basic human right and to deny anybody that right is to perpetuate an injustice. Ordination to the diaconate, priesthood and episcopacy are not 'jobs' that can be applied for, but a divine calling that needs to be discerned and affirmed by the church.

How that discernment is implemented, and what criteria are used to determine the authenticity of the call, remains the prerogative of the ordaining Bishop (in the case of ordination to the diaconate and priesthood), although each Bishop will have their own ministry advisors who represent the wider church in the process.

It is a highly subjective process that involves, on my part as a Bishop, much prayer, observation, evaluative ministry testing, psychological testing, and not a small amount of 'gut feeling!'

In his letter to Timothy, the apostle Paul listed quite a few attributes that those being set apart for leadership should possess. (*Appendix B*)

It is rather a daunting list. But it provides an insight into some of the characteristics and qualities expected of those in ministry within the early church, and provides a biblical reference for consideration today.

While leadership gifts are essential to the priestly task of building and growing the Body of Christ, I am more interested in discovering a maturity of faith that is evidenced by a life that has been transformed by Christ; a sacrificial life and a servant heart. A person, in other words, who has died to self and who now lives for Christ. This stands in total contrast to the 'I am' and 'I expect' attitude that permeates so much of this debate.

Ordination is not a platform to advocate for some personal agenda – whether it is a same sex agenda, a feminist agenda or male headship. The only agenda is that of Christ (died and risen).

Linking these first two sections together (scripture and ordination) I concur (quite strongly) with the decision made recently by the English Bishops who affirmed that sexual orientation is no bar to ordination. But the biblical mandate for our sexuality is within committed, monogamous, heterosexual marriage. Any other sexual practice, whether it be with multiple partners, homosexual partners, or casual partners is not endorsed by scripture anywhere in the Bible – in fact it is the very opposite - and therefore is not compatible with the biblical requirements for those considering ordination.

A complicating factor (from paragraph 3 of this section) in allowing Dioceses and Bishops to exercise conscience on the selection of candidates for ordination is the fact that people are not ordained into a specific Diocese; they are ordained into the Church. This unity has been one of the distinctive features of Anglicanism and it may be that this is one of the casualties if the Church of the Province moves on this issue.

### **Toward an understanding of human freedom.**

Yet another feature of the debate on the issue of human sexuality and ordination is the reference to freedom and liberation – the freedom experienced by people of same-sex orientation after years of marginalisation and exclusion.

This dimension of debate flows out of 'Liberation Theology' that had something of a following in the 1970's. It has identified itself with the dehumanising experiences associated with the poverty in Latin America – a poverty caused by social injustice.

'Freedom,' in the debate on human sexuality, is expressed as the right of total freedom in the experience and practice of our sexuality – whatever it might be.

However, 'Liberation Theology' lost much of its credibility when it transformed itself into a political movement that sought to impose one form of political ideology with another.

People still felt still trapped while those with influence continued to play their own power games.

‘Freedom’ as defined by popular contemporary (and secular) philosophy is the right to be who we want to be and to do what we want to do as long as it doesn’t impinge on, or restrict, someone else’s personal ‘rights.’

Christian (or biblical) freedom is the total opposite. It is a total submission of our will to the will of God. We no longer live for ourselves – we live for God. And, paradoxically, we discover in the process a peace and a joy that has been the inspiration for many of the great spiritual writers over the past two thousand years.

I am really not interested in telling people how they can or can’t live. I am passionately interested in introducing them to Jesus and letting them discover through his living word and living presence the answer to their questions and the freedom that they seek.

I am looking for people to ordain who are on this transforming journey described above, because only they can honestly and effectively lead others along the same spiritual journey into the fullness of life in Christ.

### **Culture and Christianity.**

As we consider the ordination of people in same-sex relationships and the blessing of these same relationships our country is also debating whether to redefine marriage to include same-sex relationships. It appears that there is quite a generational imbalance in the statistics with young people being more open to inclusivity on this issue. The ‘P.R. campaign’ to change public perception and opinion seems to have been very successful.

However it raises the question as to how culture and spirituality interact. If our society takes a liberal stand on this issue, should the church also move in order to retain its relevance and not become relegated to a bunch of reactionary ‘has-beens’.

Sadly, the Church – including the evangelically orthodox - seems to be very selective in our answer to the question.

We will march on the streets to oppose gay rights but will develop a ‘prosperity gospel’ to embrace western society’s love of possessions and wealth. We will be very vocal on sexual ethics but remarkably silent on the increasing gap between rich and poor or the terrible figures on child poverty in our society. But because we cannot stand for all, should we stand for nothing?

There is a fundamental philosophical question here as to whether culture should interpret our scriptures – as contextual theology is wont to do - or should our scripture enable us to interpret our culture and critique our culture accordingly – even though, as just mentioned, our selective processes have tended to undermine our credibility.

The evangelical church, with its emphasis on the authority of scripture would definitely use scripture to interpret culture while being very flexible in allowing culture to influence our forms of worship. The liberal church on the other hand would be very open to culture interpreting scripture (and changing our theology accordingly) while adopting a rigid liturgical worship that is immune to modern cultural trends in music and the visual arts.

This is, of course, a huge generalisation but it does highlight the polar opposites that we have within this debate and the philosophical divide that exists within our church.

Whether this can be reconciled is briefly considered in the final section of this submission – ‘General Synod and Unity’.

Jesus made it very clear (in John 17) that we were not to be taken 'out of the world' but protected for our work in the world.

Therefore it is my/our view that our church is not required or mandated to embrace every new wind of cultural change but to carefully critique it through the honest and committed study of scripture. This critique should not be condemnatory in nature but should be facilitated through the example of individuals (and a community of faith) living the liberating life of faith empowered and inspired by the redeeming and atoning love and grace of God in (and through) Christ.

### **General Synod and Unity.**

How does General Synod respond to the views are passionately held by proponents on both sides of this debate and hold on to the unity of the Church?

Unity is a major theological concept in the New Testament, particularly in Pauline and Johannine theology. (*Appendix C*)

This 'unity' is both a unity in the person of Christ and unity in the gospel of Christ and these unifying concepts are articulated within the constitution of the Church and foundational in the formation of the doctrines of the Church.

I have worked hard to maintain 'unity' within the Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia and, as the Bishop, of an evangelically orthodox Diocese I am quite passionate that this Diocese be a catalyst for unity.

However, there are two non-negotiables for us in the exercise of this unity and they are: the Lordship of Christ and the authority of scripture. We believe these to be distinctive marks of Anglicanism and a part of the constitution of this Church.

The difficulty that we face when approaching the issues that lie before us is that we feel both these core values are compromised. As I tried to show in Appendix C, Paul's letters display a clear sense of 'unity in diversity' but it is diversity in the non-essentials of church practice and unity in the core doctrines of the person of Christ and the gospel of Christ.

If the Church moves to a more revisionist understanding of these core doctrines in order to embrace the issues that lie in front of General Synod, then I'm not sure where I/we stand within a church that requires me to assent to the authority of General Synod. This seems to have been the impasse reached within The Episcopal Church of North America.

Our Church has shown more resilience in our diversity through the development of our three Tikanga Church – and maybe this provides us with a way ahead.

It seems that General Synod has three options:

1. General Synod endorses all the motions regarding human sexuality that currently lie before it and deals with those individuals, parishes and dioceses who cannot assent to this practice through the title D processes of our Canons. Essentially this is the North American situation.
2. General Synod chooses to retain the status quo and risk alienating those who believe that this is an issue of natural justice.
3. General Synod makes no decision to endorse or reject the issues that lie before it, but either:

- Allows Dioceses to exercise their own conscience on this matter. This however raises the question as to how evangelically orthodox parishes might exist within liberal Dioceses. Maybe there will be a need to explore alternative Episcopal oversight – as the UK has sought to do in the issue of women Bishops.
- Or explores how a fourth ‘Tikanga’ might be created that is a theological ‘Tikanga’.
- Or some other similar way of structurally acknowledging and affirming the theological diversity that now exists within the Church.

The only way that I can see General Synod moving in order to maintain the unity of the Church is to take the time to explore constitutional ways of embracing option 3.

## Appendix A

(highlights are mine)

*From the Fundamental Provisions of the Constitution of the Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia.*

Clause 1

**This branch of the United Church of England and Ireland in New Zealand doth hold and maintain the Doctrine and Sacraments of CHRIST as the LORD hath commanded in His Holy Word**, and as the United Church of England and Ireland hath received and explained the same in the Book of Common Prayer in the Form and Manner of Making, Ordaining, and consecrating of Bishops, Priests, and Deacons, and in the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion. **And the General Synod hereinafter constituted for the government of this Branch of the said Church shall also hold and maintain the said Doctrine and Sacraments of CHRIST, and shall have no power to make any alteration in the authorised version of the Holy Scriptures, or in the above-named Formularies of the Church.**

Clause 2.

*Provided that* nothing herein contained shall prevent the General Synod from accepting any alteration of the above-named formularies, and version of the Bible, as may from time to time be adopted by the United Church of England and Ireland with the consent of the Crown and Convocation.

Clause 3.

*Provided also that* in case a Licence be granted by the Crown to this Branch of the Church of England to frame new and modify existing rules (**not affecting doctrine**) with the view of meeting the peculiar circumstances of this Colony and native people, it shall be lawful for this Branch of the said Church to avail itself of that liberty.

Clause 4

*And whereas* opinions have been expressed by eminent legal authorities in England that the property of the Church in New Zealand might be placed in jeopardy, unless provision were made for the contingency or separation of New Zealand from the Mother Country, and for that of an alteration in the existing relations between Church and State; it is hereby further declared that, in the event of a separation of the Colony of New Zealand from the Mother Country, or of a separation of the Church from the State in England and Ireland, the General Synod shall have full power to make such alterations in the Articles, Services, and Ceremonies of this Branch of the United Church of England and Ireland, the General Synod shall have full power to make such alterations in the Articles, Services, and Ceremonies of this Branch of the United Church of England and Ireland in New Zealand as its altered circumstances may require, or to make such alterations as it may think fit in the authorised version of the Bible.

And the said BISHOPS, CLERGY, and LAITY *do further declare and establish* as follows:-

Clause 5

There shall be a representative Governing Body for the management of the affairs of the Church to be called the General Synod of the Branch of the United Church of England and Ireland, in the Colony of New Zealand, which shall consist of three distinct Orders, viz.: the BISHOPS, the CLERGY, and the LAITY, the consent of all of which Orders shall be necessary to all acts binding upon the Synod, and upon all persons recognising its authority.

Clause 6

**The above Provisions shall be deemed FUNDAMENTAL, and it shall not be within the power of the General Synod, or of any Diocesan Synod, to *alter, revoke, add to, or diminish any of the same.***

## Appendix B

### *1 Timothy 3:1-16*

Here is a trustworthy saying: Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task. Now the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.

He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap.

In the same way, deacons are to be worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons.

In the same way, the women are to be worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything.

A deacon must be faithful to his wife and must manage his children and his household well. Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus.

Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing you these instructions so that, if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth. Beyond all question, the mystery from which true godliness springs is great:

He appeared in the flesh,  
was vindicated by the Spirit,  
was seen by angels,  
was preached among the nations,  
was believed on in the world,  
was taken up in glory.

## Appendix C:

### *Unity in the New Testament*

Unity as a core value for the Church as the 'Body of Christ' is clearly articulated throughout the New Testament.

It is probably summed up in the passage from Paul's letter to the Ephesians (4:3) that is found in our New Zealand Prayer Book

*'Keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.'*

'Unity' is found both in Johannine theology (the gospel and the epistles of John) and in Pauline theology (the writings of the apostle John and in the apostle Paul (particularly 1 Corinthians and Ephesians).

### **John 17:20-26**

<sup>20</sup> *"My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, <sup>21</sup> that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. <sup>22</sup> I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one - <sup>23</sup> I in them and you in me - so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.*

<sup>24</sup> *"Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.*

<sup>25</sup> *"Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. <sup>26</sup> I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them."*

Three times in this passage he refers to unity or 'oneness.'

Verse 21 'that all of them may be one'

Verse 22 'that they may be one'

Verse 23 'that they may be brought to complete unity' – or as the RSV puts it 'that they may become perfectly one.'

This is Jesus overriding prayer for the church and yet it is the greatest challenge facing us as his church that is more divided than it has ever been.

If we tease this passage out just a little to discover what was on the heart of Jesus when he prayed that 'we might be one.'

Or probably more correctly – what he *wasn't* referring to....

**Firstly:** this is a unity built upon the apostolic teaching.

This implication is discovered in the first verse:

*'...I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one...'*

The word '*their*' is of course referring to the disciples from the passage just preceding this.

And the basis of their belief was the truth of the apostles' message.

The 'oneness' that Jesus is praying for therefore is a 'unity' that comes from their common belief that flows out of the words of truth they heard from these apostles.

**Secondly** Jesus is praying for a relational unity not a structural one.

This cry of Jesus for the unity of believers has been used as the mandate for structural unity within the church.

When Jesus prays for a unity, he is praying for a 'oneness' that reflects the unity that he has with his Father. It is a spiritual unity – a supernatural unity – that is based on the relationship between the Father and the Son. It is a unity based on relationship and can't exist outside relationship.

**Thirdly:** it is a unity marked by love.

*Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.'*

**Finally:** it is a unity that defines and empowers the mission of the Church.

*I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.*

## 1 Corinthians.

This letter was written to address serious divisions that were growing within the church in Corinth:

*<sup>10</sup>I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought. <sup>11</sup>My brothers and sisters, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. <sup>12</sup>What I mean is this: One of you says, "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Cephas"; still another, "I follow Christ."*

*<sup>13</sup>Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul? <sup>14</sup>I thank God that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, <sup>15</sup>so no one can say that you were baptized into my name. <sup>16</sup>(Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don't remember if I baptized anyone else.) <sup>17</sup>For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with wisdom and eloquence, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.*

It appears that the divisions were not so much about the particular charisma of the leaders but the church practices that developed alongside the teaching of these leaders. Paul wrote to draw them back to a unified faith centred on the person of Christ and on the gospel of Christ:

*<sup>4</sup>For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not mere human beings? <sup>5</sup>What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. <sup>6</sup>I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow..... <sup>10</sup>By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care. <sup>11</sup>For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.'*

