

A WORKING DOCUMENT – SEXUALITY DISCERNMENT

Dialogue Feedback #1 – June 8, 2010

COMMENTS ON THE GROUPS:

The average group size was 19 members. (Some members reported that they chose not to participate: they had already talked enough.)

For some participants the discussion did not feel like a safe experience. These are conversations that have deep emotional connections for us, and it is widely recognized among Synod members that for many, this is a painful subject as there is a lot at stake.

There is a strong sense of fatigue and weariness when it comes to this discussion and a strong sense that, despite this, something must, at this time be said.

AFFIRMATIONS & VALUES

The protection of our common life. We have a desire to walk together – to find a way to continue to be in community despite our differences while we continue to find our way with these issues.

There is a strong sense of needing to get unstuck – to do or say something – but nothing that would provoke the wanton breaking of relationships. Many are deeply frustrated with the time we spend on this use and number of years the conversation has been going on – others are more patient – but there is a sense that regardless of this, we need to take some sort of step. This is a paradox and we recognize this is where we are.

There is a strong concern that people not be forced into any action that they cannot in good conscience, live with.

Members experience a tension between striving for the deepest pastoral response possible without impairing Communion and needing to care for the missional and pastoral context of the Canadian church. Again we recognize this as a paradox.

There is a strong call for continuing the theological study and dialogue that people are now beginning to experience. There is a growing, shared sense of being part of an on-going theological discernment that is helping us all to grow. *“At another time my ire would have been up by what you just said. Now I realize I need to do more theological work.”*

When we use the word “inclusive” to describe our church’s missional and pastoral context it now represents, and is being claimed by, a wider range of voices, not just those supporting same-gendered blessings.

We clearly heard aboriginal voices in the process who were able to share something of the distinction of their context and identify issues that are more pressing within their communities.

CONCERNS

Some very concerned with legislative (prescriptive) action at this time, preferring a descriptive statement of where we are (local discernment) – supporting unity without uniformity. Others are concerned with disunity and want to take decisive action at the National level (national discernment).

Members have a very strong concern with directional language (such as “moving forward” or “going ahead”), it is extremely unhelpful in the dialogue at this point and every attempt should be made to avoid using it.

REQUESTS

- We want to hold our common life together.
- We do not want anyone forced into a position they cannot live with.

IF dioceses were to extend the practice of locally determined generous pastoral care, they will need to be careful and robust qualifications in place:

- The response meets the missional context of the diocese (e.g. First Nations, urban rural)
- There will be no imposition of either conversation or action on or within any diocese
- There be accountability expressed through continuing dialogue within Canada and the wider Anglican Communion.
- This would include any diocese that makes a decision through its synod to act;; either to offer blessings or to not offer blessings.

IF we as a National Church acknowledge the existence of locally discerned options, there will need to be careful and robust understanding of what this actually means and the implications for our relationships – diocese to diocese and to the wider Communion.

There are particular requests for theological study; for further work on specific pastoral situations (such as clergy in same-gendered marriages); on marriage and blessings.

Some are requesting changes to the marriage canon to recognize same-gendered relationships. Some are requesting that diocese that have agreed to bless same gendered relationships or marriages – cease.

For some there is a strong desire for clarity with respect to the moratoria and its ongoing status. Many have indicated they are waiting on GS2010 for guidance regarding continued discernment, decision and action in their own context.

Overall, there is a growing sense of discernment. People found the community building helpful and are discerning deeper sense of dialogue guiding us rather than a battle to win a position. “I have already made up my mind on the issue. My challenge now is to be able to listen to other who have a different opinion on the issue. And to be patient as the Spirit work in and through us to some sort of resolution whatever it may be.”

There is a strong sense of relief that these conversations are respectful – allowing members to both speak and be heard together. Members experience this as very positive and hopeful compared to the last General Synod.