

## Time to accept gay bishops, says Anglican Coalition

In a recent interview with *The Times* the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, was unclear whether celibate but partnered gay clergy are acceptable as bishops in the Church of England. The archbishop stated his unwillingness to consider partnered gay men and lesbians as bishops because of their 'particular choice of life, a partnership, and what the Church has to say about that.'

The LGBT Anglican Coalition believes that acceptance should be extended beyond those who are celibate, but says:

'Your statement has also left ambiguity regarding those in loving life-long but celibate relationships. Such people would appear to be complying fully with the requirements of "Issues in Human Sexuality" and yet still seem to be excluded simply on the grounds of some other people's disapproval. If this is not your intention, we ask you to clarify what you meant. Given that you said that you "have no problem" with gay bishops who are celibate, we would ask you to make clear your position on the acceptability for higher office of celibate gay clergy who are in civil partnerships.'

In a letter sent to the Archbishop, the Coalition criticizes the Archbishop's remarks as 'hurtful and undermining to the many lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people who have been called to ordained ministry but not to celibacy'. The Coalition calls the Church of England to a renewed study of sexuality in the light of modern scientific and theological understanding.

The letter is also highly critical of the culture of secrecy, fear and dishonesty around human sexuality which is blighting the Church of England, and damaging our witness to society, and which urgently needs to be dispelled. It says that, 'in numerous Church of England parishes, worshippers fully accept LGBT people, whether single or partnered, and believe that all forms of ministry should be open to God's children regardless of sexual orientation.'

ENDS

### Notes for Editors

1. The Anglican Coalition is here to provide UK-based Christian LGBT organisations with opportunities to create resources for the Anglican community and to develop a shared voice for the full acceptance of LGBT people in the Anglican Communion.

2. The Coalition members are:

Accepting Evangelicals [www.acceptingevangelicals.org](http://www.acceptingevangelicals.org)

Changing Attitude [www.changingattitude.org.uk](http://www.changingattitude.org.uk)

The Clergy Consultation [www.clergyconsultation.org](http://www.clergyconsultation.org)

Courage [www.courage.org.uk](http://www.courage.org.uk)

The Evangelical Fellowship for Lesbian and Gay Christians [www.eflgc.org.uk](http://www.eflgc.org.uk)

Inclusive Church [www.inclusivechurch2.net](http://www.inclusivechurch2.net)

The Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement [www.lgcm.org.uk](http://www.lgcm.org.uk)

The Sibyls [www.sibyls.co.uk](http://www.sibyls.co.uk)

3. For more information contact:

Savi Hensman 07833 937 756 or Revd Benny Hazlehurst 07788 426090

## Full Text of Letter to the Archbishop

Dear Archbishop Rowan

We are deeply dismayed that, in an interview with *The Times*, you stated your unwillingness to consider partnered gay men and lesbians as bishops because of their 'particular choice of life, a partnership, and what the Church has to say about that.' This is not only hurtful and undermining to the many lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people who have been called to ordained ministry but not to celibacy – a valued but rare vocation among people of any sexual orientation – but also to the life and witness of the Church of England.

Your statement has also left ambiguity regarding those in loving life-long but celibate relationships. Such people would appear to be complying fully with the requirements of 'Issues in Human Sexuality' and yet still seem to be excluded simply on the grounds of some other people's disapproval. If this is not your intention, we ask you to clarify what you meant. Given that you said that you 'have no problem' with gay bishops who are celibate, we would ask you to make clear your position on the acceptability for higher office of celibate gay clergy who are in civil partnerships.

As Archbishop of Canterbury, we expect you to encourage the Church of England to continue to strive thoughtfully and prayerfully to discern God's will on human sexuality, taking account of the findings of theologians and scientists and in conversation with other Anglicans and the wider church. It is regrettable that some bishops elsewhere in the Anglican Communion remain unwilling to enter into dialogue with those in their own dioceses who are lesbian or gay, or to take note of the diligent work of scholars through which Christians can develop an ever-richer understanding of God's creation, our place within it and where the Holy Spirit is leading us. However this must not deter us from acting justly and lovingly in the context of our own mission and ministry.

Increasingly, eminent theologians have come to accept that Christians who are neither heterosexual nor called to celibacy may acceptably enter into committed relationships with members of the same sex, in which they can grow more responsive to God's love and be more faithful in following Christ. Likewise, in numerous Church of England parishes, worshippers fully accept LGBT people, whether single or partnered, and believe that all forms of ministry should be open to God's children regardless of sexual orientation. Meanwhile, social and natural scientists have helped to throw fresh light on the complexity and diversity of life on earth and the role of same-sex as well as opposite-sex attraction.

As Sister Rosemary CHN, representing Religious Communities, explained in a debate in General Synod in 2004:

*'For those of us under religious vows, who treasure celibacy as call and gift, the idea of forced celibacy is as abhorrent as the idea of forced marriage...'*

*'Some gay clergy have reluctantly accepted celibacy as an imposed discipline. Some of these, I feel sure, have found that through their struggles they have been given grace... For others, however, misery remains just misery, and they are exposed to the danger of a kind of withering of the heart, which makes them less able to love anybody.'*

*'Christians who are happily married can bear witness to the way in which a partner's love can be both a means of grace and a school of the Lord's service: a channel of God's love to them and through them. Gay Christians in committed relationships say that it is the same for them. When I observe the quality of their lives, and feel warmed and healed by their friendship, I know that it is true.'*

We regret that any senior clergy in the Church of England should seem to be moving in the opposite direction from ordinary members in order to placate the small minority among us who are fiercely opposed to greater inclusion and even some in other churches who also object. It is important that they, like the rest of us, be challenged to understand that the church is not the possession of one faction and that theological diversity is part of our inheritance as Anglicans. There is a culture of secrecy, fear and dishonesty around human sexuality which is blighting the Church of England, and damaging our witness to society, and which urgently needs to be dispelled.

We urge you to acknowledge the contribution of so many LGBT people, often partnered, to the ministry of the church, and to promote rigorous and prayerful study of the issues involved in the light of present knowledge.

Yours sincerely

Jeremy Timm, Changing Attitude  
On behalf of the LGBT Anglican Coalition

Accepting Evangelicals [www.acceptingevangelicals.org](http://www.acceptingevangelicals.org)  
Changing Attitude [www.changingattitude.org.uk](http://www.changingattitude.org.uk)  
The Clergy Consultation [www.clergyconsultation.org](http://www.clergyconsultation.org)  
Courage [www.courage.org.uk](http://www.courage.org.uk)  
The Evangelical Fellowship for Lesbian and Gay Christians [www.eflgc.org.uk](http://www.eflgc.org.uk)  
Inclusive Church [www.inclusivechurch2.net](http://www.inclusivechurch2.net)  
The Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement [www.lgcm.org.uk](http://www.lgcm.org.uk)  
The Sibyls [www.sibyls.co.uk](http://www.sibyls.co.uk)