

Statement from AWESOME and Reform

On Tues 5th January 2010, Bishop Keith Sinclair, Bishop of Birkenhead chaired a second meeting of representatives of AWESOME and Reform.ⁱ This time we were joined by invited theological consultants as guests. We met to discuss differences among evangelicals over biblical teaching about women's ministry and leadership and the implications of such teaching for any church committed to ordering its life as a faithful, obedient response to that teaching and were assisted by papers written by some of those attending. Our focus was mainly but not exclusively on issues of biblical theology, exegesis and hermeneutics rather than current political issues relating to women bishops.

We acknowledged that structured conversations with this focus have sadly not occurred among evangelicals in recent years and all found the meeting to be a valuable initiative, helping us as evangelicals to recognise the importance of unity around the gospel. Although significant differences clearly remain, as a result of our conversations we have identified a number of key areas we believe it is essential evangelicals explore together as we continue to wrestle with what it means to uphold our shared conviction that Scripture is "the wholly reliable revelation and record of God's grace, given by the Holy Spirit as the true word of God written...given to lead us to salvation, to be the ultimate rule for Christian faith and conduct, and the supreme authority by which the Church must ever reform itself and judge its traditions".ⁱⁱ

We believe it is important that evangelicals in the Church of England with different understandings of Scripture's teaching and divergent views on women presbyters and bishops should treat each other as evangelicals and Anglicans. The experience of AWESOME and other bodies within evangelicalism shows that differences here need not prevent us working together in the cause of the gospel as brothers and sisters in Christ who are committed evangelicals and Anglicans.

In order to accomplish this we believe more sustained discussions must continue between evangelicals, especially on the practical and pastoral implications of our differences in the life of both the local and the national church. We need to be clearer as to the patterns of evangelical love towards those with whom we disagree and how our views can be held while recognising others as evangelicals seeking faithfully to obey Scripture.

For those opposed to women presbyters and bishops as a development contrary to Scripture this requires ongoing reflection about:

- how to welcome and nurture evangelical women as they exercise their gifts and ministries
- how to relate to women in leadership positions in the church.

For those fully supportive of women presbyters and bishops as a biblical development this requires ongoing reflection about:

- how to welcome and nurture those opposed as they exercise their gifts and ministries in the Church of England
- how to relate to those who fear the Church of England's acceptance of women bishops will marginalise or exclude them

We are committed to continue these ongoing reflections together and view them as a matter of urgency in relation to General Synod's decision about whether and how to make provision for those opposed to any legislation for women bishops. We have therefore committed to meet together again before the July General Synod once the Revision Committee has published their draft legislation.

The Rt Revd Keith Sinclair, Bishop of Birkenhead (Chair)

Awesome representatives: The Revds Elisabeth Goddard, Tamsin Merchant and Rosie Ward

Awesome guests: The Revd Drs Andrew Goddard, Emma Ineson and Ian Paul.

Reform representatives: The Revd Dr Nigel Atkinson & the Revds David Banting and Carrie Sandom

Reform guests: The Rt Revd Wallace Benn, The Revd Drs Roger Beckwith and Mike Ovey.

In attendance at invitation of Chair: Professor Richard Bauckham

ⁱ AWESOME (<http://www.awesome.org.uk>) is a network of women ordained into the Anglican Church from across the Evangelical spectrum. It includes both permanent deacons and priests and exists to support and pray for each other in ministry, seeking to learn from Scripture, the Spirit and one another. Reform (www.reform.org.uk) is a network of individuals and churches within the Church of England committed to reforming the Church of England from within according to the Holy Scriptures. Its understanding of God's way of life for his people includes "the unique value of women's ministry in the local congregation but also the divine order of male headship, which makes the headship of women as priests in charge, incumbents, dignitaries and bishops inappropriate".

ⁱⁱ http://www.ceec.info/basis_of_belief.htm