

A Review of *A Way Forward*, the report of the Working Group  
of the Church of Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia.

## Summary

This review is in four parts.

Part I (pp.1-2) explains the purpose of the report.

Part II (pp. 2- 22) gives an overview of the contents of the report and the arguments it puts forward for permitting the blessing of same-sex civil marriages. It also gives on pages 11-22 the text of the proposed liturgies for blessing same-sex and opposite sex civil marriages.

Part III (pp.22-27 ) notes eight problems with the report:

- It gives an inadequate account of unity and diversity;
- It gives an inadequate account of doctrinal development;
- It fails to give a convincing theological justification for the blessing of same-sex relationships;
- It ignores the consistent witness of the Bible and Christian Church against same-sex sexual activity;
- It fails to show why ordaining those in same-sex civil marriages would not lower the standard for ordination;
- It fails to show that what is proposed does not involve a change in doctrine;
- It ignores the teaching of the Anglican Communion and the impact of what is proposed on links with other Anglican churches and wider ecumenical relationships;
- It opens the door theologically to the blessing of polygamous and incestuous relationships.

Part IV (p.27) notes the significance of the report for the wider Anglican debate about same-sex relationships arguing that that it indicates a path that other Anglican churches should not follow.

### I. The purpose of the report

In May 2014 the meeting of the General Synod of the Church of Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia reached an agreement known as 'Motion 30' about how to take forward the issues of 'rightly-ordered relationships, the doctrine and nature of marriage, and the call from some to ordain partnered gay and lesbian Christians to holy orders.'<sup>1</sup>

This motion did two key things

First, it declared:

'The Church has received and articulated an understanding of intimate human relationships which it expresses through her doctrine of marriage between a man and a woman, and is life-long and monogamous.

We uphold this traditional doctrine of marriage.'<sup>2</sup>

Secondly, it mandated the setting up of a Working Party to recommend to the next General Synod:

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<sup>1</sup> *A Way Forward*, p.1.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. 50.

‘(a) A process and structure by which those who believe the blessing of same-gender relationships is contrary to scripture, doctrine, tikanga<sup>3</sup> or civil law, will not be required to perform any liturgy for the blessing of same-gender relationships, will continue to have integrity within the Church, and will remain compliant with the parliamentary legislation within any relevant jurisdiction;

(b) A process and structure by which those who believe the blessing of same-gender relationships is consonant with scripture, doctrine, tikanga and civil law may perform a yet to be developed liturgy for blessing same-gender relationships in a manner which maintains their integrity within the Church, is compliant with the parliamentary legislation within any relevant jurisdiction, and can remain in communion under scripture, doctrine and law; including

(i) A proposal for a new liturgy to bless right ordered same-gender relationships; (ii) A process and legislation (whether church or parliamentary) by which a new liturgy to bless right ordered same-gender relationships may be adopted.’<sup>4</sup>

Recognising that what was recommended by the Working Party would have an impact on the Church’s theology of ordination and marriage, the General Synod also asked it to report on: ‘(a) The theology of ordination to Anglican orders and requirements for that; and (b) The theology of marriage.’<sup>5</sup>

The purpose of *A Way Forward* is to fulfil this mandate.

## **II. The contents of the report.**

The report consists of twelve main sections and two appendixes.

Section 1 is the ‘Introduction.’ This explains the mandate given to the Working Party and the belief of the members of the Working Party that the recommendations contained in their report constitute ‘a complete and workable response’<sup>6</sup> to this mandate.

Section 2 is the ‘Executive Summary’ of the report.

Section 3, ‘The dynamic nature of doctrine, the path of unity,’ looks at three ‘critical questions.’<sup>7</sup>

The first question is ‘What does it mean to be human in the now?’ The answer the section gives is that this involves (a) being ‘in relationship with God our creator, (b) being ‘shaped by the past and present’ and living ‘in anticipation of the future,’ (c) relating to society and (d) being open to how fresh insights may lead to change and dynamism.’<sup>8</sup>

The second is, ‘When we speak of ‘two integrities’ how can we speak of the unity of the Church?’ In response to this question the section quotes Jesus’ prayer for the unity of the Church in John 17:20-21 and then goes on to declare:

‘Unity is not the same as uniformity. There has never been a unity of the church that has been lost. Indeed, from the beginning the church was marked by diversity. When Paul presents the image of

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<sup>3</sup> Maori ways and customs.

<sup>4</sup> *A Way Forward*, p.50.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, p.50.

<sup>6</sup> *A Way Forward* p.2.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, p.5.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, pp.5-6.

the body in 1 Corinthians 12,<sup>9</sup> he describes the fruit of the Spirit (not the fruits). Unity flourishes through variety and diversity.’<sup>10</sup>

As the section sees it, we should let unity:

‘...happen within us while attending to different integrities, rather like the Jewish proverb that ‘we bring near the kingdom by each small enacting of Torah.’ Unity is about each of us, and the church in its diversity, being turned to God, and letting God show and draw us into the fullness of a unity we sense but can only glimpse.’<sup>11</sup>

The third is ‘What do we mean by saying that Doctrine is dynamic?’ In answer to this question the section quotes Hebrews 1:1-3 and then states:

‘So it is throughout Christian history that Doctrine had to be thought out, and lived out in the worshipping life of the church, with reflections and ongoing decisions made through Councils and Creeds. In such a way, the church has developed a deeper and richer understanding of faith. This development continues today, as the Christian faith is lived out in multiple cultures and contexts. Scripture is read and re-read constantly alongside the tradition of the church, with ongoing debate and discernment. We attend to the phrase *Lex orandi, lex credendi, lex vivendi*; as we worship, so we believe, so we live.’<sup>12</sup>

Section 4 considers ‘The theology of ordination and marriage.’

This section argues that what is recommended in the report will not involve lowering the standard required for ordination. ‘The Church still requires those coming to be ordained to either be celibate or in ‘rightly ordered’ relationships; there is no suggestion that there is a lower standard now required.’<sup>13</sup> However, it says: ‘the proposals do expand the definition of rightly-ordered relationships to include those who are in a civil marriage and whose relationship has been blessed.’<sup>14</sup>

This section further argues that what is recommended does not involve a change in the church’s doctrine of marriage. It declares:

‘Because the motion that was passed at General Synod / te Hīnota Whānui in 2014 affirmed the “traditional doctrine of marriage”, there is no change to the existing formularies. The group’s proposal (in line with its commission) to propose a service for the blessing of same-sex relationships does not (in the view of the majority of the members) impact the current doctrine of marriage. It is accepted that the blessing of a relationship has some similarities with the rites of marriage, but even as the two are alike in many ways they are not the same. Neither would a doctrine of same-sex relationships be the same as the doctrine of marriage.’<sup>15</sup>

The section concludes by stating, for the sake of what it calls ‘utmost clarity,’ that:

‘...what is being proposed is the blessing of a relationship that manifests a number of virtues that honour each partner and God (and, thus, can be called a ‘Holy Union’). In line with Motion 30, it is the case that such couples also need to be already legally married. The marriage itself will have

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<sup>9</sup> The Pauline reference here is confusing. St. Paul teaches about the body of Christ in 1 Corinthians 12, but his teaching about the fruit of the Spirit is in Galatians 5:22-23.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p.7.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p.7.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p. 8.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p.9.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p.9.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p.9..

occurred elsewhere, and the working group acknowledges that this will fall short of some Christian same-sex couples' hopes because they cannot be married 'in church'.<sup>16</sup>

Section 5, 'An accompaniment to the proposed schedule,' expands the 'five primary reasons' given in a proposed schedule in the Canons for permitting the blessing in church of both opposite sex and same sex couples who have already: 'been legally married in a setting other than the Church, and who have not received a formal pronouncement of the blessing of the God we know in Trinity as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.'<sup>17</sup>

The first reason is 'Love.' The report declares:

'We are followers of Jesus Christ and know the blessing that comes through his life, death and resurrection as a result of his self-giving love. We proclaim that "Through Christ, and with all your saints, we offer ourselves and our lives to your service." So, in the first instance, as followers of the same Jesus Christ, we lift up to God the greatest elected earthly commitment to love that two people make, as it too is dedicated to and blessed by God. In this manner, a couple who are already married in a civil ceremony orient their chosen love life to the source of love: God.'<sup>18</sup>

The second reason is 'Union.' The report states that:

'In the bond and union of body, mind, and soul, a couple finds in the quality of their companionship a fit such that their individual lives have greater meaning, value and purpose. This is an outworking of the abundant life that Christ promises to all.'<sup>19</sup>

Drawing on the work of the American feminist scholar Phyllis Trible, the report argues that the creation account in Genesis 2 does not teach that this union has to be between two people of the opposite sex:

'It is Jesus who directs us into Genesis when in Matthew 19 he speaks of two becoming one flesh, and this informs our understanding of union. It is certain, however, that the Genesis texts are freighted with more weight than they were designed to bear – and not just in this debate. To go to them to discern what is God's will for us in creation is always fraught. However, we can recall that the problem in Genesis 2 was 'aloneness' and it was this that gave rise to the divine sculpting of the earth-creature, a 'fit companion' being created, and then the drama and joy of the world's first poem (mythically speaking) as the male describes the female as 'bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh' (2:23).

Following the seminal reading of Phyllis Trible, 'these words speak unity, solidarity, mutuality, and equality.' These are the virtues that confirm 'fit' and the characteristics we are looking for in a holy union: 'a union of strength, sympathy, and delight.' Because the identification of these virtues, mythically speaking, occur from the beginning of the world, the proposed rites speak of 'a pattern of mutual support and faithful partnership established from the very beginning.'

We see then that the desire of God for the first earth creature is that it might have a 'fit companion' or, as Trible would describe it, a 'companion corresponding to it.' This becomes, in turn, the concern of both the same-sex couple and the other-sex couple. But we can see that this desire looks beyond the surface of a binary, heteronormative world. It is expressed not in finding a partner of the

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p.12.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p.13.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p.13.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p.14.

opposite sex but a partner of the apposite sex. It is to this partner that one “cleaves” in a union for all of this life’.<sup>20</sup>

The report also underlines that the union is one that will involve sexual union between the couple involved:

‘The cleaving in a holy union is not simply an intellectual abstraction, it is becoming ‘one flesh.’ So, while we speak of a union of unity, solidarity, mutuality, and equality, this is certainly a bodily union, one of intimate physical presence with one’s partner. This union of love in a nuptial relationship is one that echoes God’s bodily (incarnate) commitment to the loving of the world – “for God so loved the world that he gave his only Son” – and the most extended reflection on this ‘mystical’ union is in Ephesians 5. There is, then, something almost necessary (it has to be always freely chosen) and divine in the bodily union of a couple who are bodily committed to each other’s ultimate good (this point is pursued further under the title ‘Gift’).’<sup>21</sup>

The third reason is ‘Covenant.’ The report states that: ‘Marriage is a covenant where the couple vow to life-long faithfulness and, with God’s help, hope to match the faithfulness of God in keeping covenant with God’s people.’<sup>22</sup> It goes on to say that the reason it is right to talk of ‘nuptial relationships’ in terms of a covenant is because:

‘...they are not like most human contracts and agreements that are based on a conditional ‘if you do this, and if I do that, then we are in partnership.’ Rather the structure of both divine and human nuptial commitments (and it is this that makes them sacred and covenantal) is one of ‘Because of the love I have for you, I will ...’ In divine terms that is “because of my crucified and risen life, you are redeemed.” The human commitment, by the grace of God, parallels that structure: ‘Because I love you...’<sup>23</sup>

A key feature of a covenant relationship, it says, is the presence of ‘constancy and faithfulness in love, which we know as a blessing from God and revelation of God’s self’ and this means that the Anglican Church was right to honour polygamous marriages and, in the view of some, would be right to honour same-sex relationships as well:

‘Precisely because the institutional blessing authorises what is theologically mimetic (that is, it mirrors or represents the character of God) we can understand that constancy allows, and even demands, that existing polygamous marriage relationships of converts are most properly to be honoured, and second and third wives are not sent away. The Anglican Church was correct when it made this possible, not simply because it avoided possible pain and persecution of the women in such marriages in particular, but because it mirrored God’s constancy in love and faithfulness. Likewise, while it seems irregular to some, to others it may appear that same-sex couples can manifest a godly constancy through committed lifelong relationships.’<sup>24</sup>

The fourth reason is ‘Gift.’ Here the report suggests that: ‘The giving of oneself and the receiving evidenced in marriage is a particular instance of the truth that God creates us to receive our lives as ‘gift’, both from God and from the community we inhabit.’

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid, pp.14, quoting Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978, pp.99 & 90.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p.15.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p.15.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p.15.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, p.15-16.

Developing the idea of gift, and drawing on Rowan Williams' essay 'The Body's Grace', the report goes on to argue that desire, including sexual desire, is part of the gift God gives us and part of what we celebrate in a life-long relationship:

'Rowan Williams' essay 'The Body's Grace' sets out what we might mean theologically when we speak of desire ...The origin of bodily desire is in God's desire for us. As Williams puts it:

*The whole story of creation, incarnation, and our incorporation into the fellowship of Christ's body tells us that God desires us, as if we were God, as if we were that unconditional response to God's giving that God's self makes in the life of the Trinity. We are created so that we may grow into the wholehearted love of God by learning that God loves us as God loves God.*

This is important because it rightly frames our desire, including our sexual desire, as a good gift from God. It also places desire not as some aspect of our lives that in order to be holy needs to be channelled towards some worthy instrumental purpose (for example, procreation), rather, our desire for each other can simply be for the joy and delight of each other and this is the divinely purposed end of desire. So, we are divinely shaped, like the persons of the Trinity, to bring joy to each other. The further layer to this gift is that it is not so much that we are to get joy from each other as to give joy to each other. We thus perceive and receive each other as occasions for joy. This is the blessing that we rejoice in and pronounce in a life-long relationship'<sup>25</sup>

The fifth reason is 'Household.' In the report's view:

'As a household, a 'little church' or 'micro-basileia', the married couple is first, through their love for one another, a sign (mysterion) of Christ's love for the world. Indeed, as Ephesians 5 suggests both a church and marriage is a sign and a re-membering (anamnesis) of Christ's love. Marriage, like a church, is a purposed household. Its purpose is for the sanctification of its members.'<sup>26</sup>

Because the purpose of marriage is the sanctification of the couple involved it follows, says the report, that:

'...when we assemble to bless a civil marriage to be dedicated to God, that we have a present and future confidence that a couple, same-sex or opposite-sex, will sanctify each other through their household of shared faith, hope, and love and, in that way, will be life-long ministers of God's grace and blessing.'<sup>27</sup>

Section 6, 'Of the Doctrine and Sacraments of Christ.' addresses the question of whether the General Synod could lawfully adopt the proposals contained in this report. It explains that the Te Pouhere (constitution) of the church:

'...clearly sets out that General Synod / te Hīnota Whānui is bound to hold and maintain 'the Doctrine and Sacraments of Christ as the Lord commanded in Holy Scripture and as explained in

The Book of Common Prayer 1662

Te Rawiri'<sup>28</sup>

The Form and Manner of Making, Ordaining, and Consecrating Bishops, Priests and Deacons

The Thirty Nine Articles of Religion

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p.16-17 quoting Rowan Williams, 'The Body's Grace' from Charles Hefling (ed), *Our Selves, Our Souls and Bodies: sexuality and the household of God*, Cambridge Mass: Cowley, 1996, p.59.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p.17.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, p.18.

<sup>28</sup> The Maori language version of the 1662 Book of Common Prayer.

Change to the formularies is permitted, but with the proviso that any change ‘shall not empower or be deemed to empower the General Synod / te Hīnota Whānui to depart from the Doctrine and Sacraments of Christ as defined in the Fundamental Provisions of this constitution.’<sup>29</sup>

According to the report, the members of the Working Party that produced it are divided about: ‘whether a rite of blessing of same-sex relationships, which would then be regarded as rightly ordered, would represent a departure from the Doctrine and Sacraments of Christ’ and this issue is likely to be the focus of the forthcoming debate in General Synod.<sup>30</sup>

In order to help the members of Synod the report offers three observations:

‘1. The formularies are clear that the Sacraments of Christ are Baptism and Holy Communion alone. Marriage is expressly excluded as a sacrament by articles 25 and 39 of the Articles of Religion. The addition of a liturgy for the blessing of same-sex relationships would not therefore have sacramental import.

2. Precisely what is meant by “the Doctrine of Christ” (and what is not meant) is less obviously established. The phrase may mean a particular body of teaching about Christ, or Jesus’ own particular teaching. Some might assert it is the core matters of faith in Christ as they bear upon the matter of redemption accomplished by and in him. Others may hold that the Doctrine of Christ means all that we read in scripture regarding the whole of life as lived to God in faithful response to the gospel. This last possibility demonstrates the differing interpretations of scripture that are set out in the report of the Commission on Doctrine and Theological Questions that was delivered to the Standing Committee of Te Hīnota Whānui / General Synod and the Ma Whea? Commission in March 2014.

3. Some are likely to understand the phrase “the Doctrine of Christ... as the Lord has commanded in Holy Scripture” as meaning that every part of scripture is “the Doctrine of Christ.” Others will understand that reading the Doctrine of Christ through the formularies will lead us to understand that Doctrine as involving the essential matters that are dealt with in the Creeds, for example, and that matters outside of these are not covered by Te Pouhere in referring to the Doctrine of Christ.’<sup>31</sup>

The section also explains a possible way forward should the General Synod agree that the recommendations of the report do not contradict the Doctrine of Christ.

Section 7, ‘The Process of Change,’ explains in more detail how the process for considering the report’s recommendations for the adoption of new liturgies and changes to the Canons would work.

The adoption of new liturgies, it says, would require a simple majority in General Synod in 2016 followed by the agreement of a majority of the dioceses and final approval by a 2/3 majority in each House of the General Synod in 2018. Changes to the Canons, by contrast, would only require a simple majority at one session of the General Synod. However, the report suggests that the suggested changes should be tabled at the General Synod in 2016 with a motion to agree them in principle. They would then be considered by the dioceses and a further motion approving them would then be put to General Synod in 2018, concurrent with the vote on the final approval of the new liturgies.

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid, p.19.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p.19.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p.19.

The report also notes the possibility of an appeal against the lawfulness of the new liturgies under the terms of Te Pouhere being made to a specially convened Tribunal up to a year after the General Synod vote in 2018.

Section 8, 'Changes to Title D Canon I,' explains 'the proposal for changes to canons required to enable a person who has entered a civil marriage with a person of the same sex to qualify for ordination'<sup>32</sup>

In order for people to be ordained in the Church of Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia they have to be in 'rightly ordered' relationships. At present, the report says, only those who 'are celibate or who have been married by the Church are considered to be in rightly ordered relationships.'<sup>33</sup> What is recommended in the report would enable:

'... those who have entered a civil marriage and have been blessed also to be rightly ordered. Those in civil marriages will not be considered to be in rightly ordered relationships unless the marriage has been blessed by a service authorised in the diocese / amorangi in which they minister.'<sup>34</sup>

The report further notes that this change has three implications.

First, it means that 'those who are in an existing civil marriage that has not been blessed through an authorised service will not be considered to be in a rightly ordered relationship.'<sup>35</sup>

Secondly, all dioceses will therefore 'need to adopt an authorised service of blessing for heterosexual couples in order to ensure that ministers in existing civil marriages will be able to have their marriages blessed, and thereby to be considered as in a rightly ordered relationship.'<sup>36</sup>

Thirdly, those who are in same-sex civil marriages will only be considered in a rightly ordered relationship, and therefore eligible for ordination, in dioceses that bless such marriages.

Section 9, 'Changes to Title G Canon III,' explains the changes 'required to introduce formularies'<sup>37</sup> for the new blessings for those who have entered a civil marriages.'<sup>38</sup>

These changes would involve minor alterations to the existing Canon relating to marriage to replace the existing references to 'forbidden marriages' with a general prohibition of marriages 'that are not permitted under state law'<sup>39</sup> and a deletion of the present clause relating to blessing of civil marriages.

The amended version of the existing Canon would then be labelled 'Part A: Marriage' and this would be supplemented by 'Part B: Civil Marriages' which would make provision for the blessing of existing civil marriages according to the proposed new rites where this was agreed by a diocese and where the diocese of the officiating minister had agreed this as well. It would also specify that 'no minister may be compelled to officiate at a service where their conscience prevents them from doing so.'<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p.24.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p.24.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p.24.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid p.24.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, p.24.

<sup>37</sup> The term 'formularies' is used here to refer to authorised liturgies.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, p.25.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p.25.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, p.25.

The section goes on to give a draft of the proposed new canon and the schedule to the canon which sets out the theology behind marriages services held in churches. This schedule ('Schedule I') includes existing material from both the *New Zealand Prayer Book* and the 1928 version of the *Book of Common Prayer*. It states:

'1. Marriage is intended by God to be a creative relationship - God's blessing enables husband and wife to love and support each other in good times and bad. For Christians, marriage is also an invitation to share life together in the spirit of Jesus Christ. It is based upon a solemn, public and life-long covenant between a man and a woman, made and celebrated in the presence of God and before a priest and congregation. (A New Zealand Prayer Book - He Karakia Mihinare o Aotearoa, p. 779)

2. Marriage is a gift of God our Creator, whose intention is that husband and wife should be united in heart, body and mind. In their union they fulfil their love for each other. Marriage is given to provide the stability necessary for family life, so that children may be cared for lovingly and grow to full maturity. Marriage is a way of life to be upheld and honoured. No one should enter into it lightly. It involves a serious and life-long commitment to each other's good in a union of strength, sympathy and delight. (A New Zealand Prayer Book - He Karakia Mihinare o Aotearoa, p. 780)

3. Praying is an outlook, a sustained energy, which creates a marriage and makes love and forgiveness life-long. Eternal love never fails; our love needs to forgive and be forgiven. As we pray and forgive we minister reconciliation. Those who marry are God's ministers to each other of reconciliation and change. As they grow together, wife and husband foster one another's strengths, they provide each other with reassurance and love needed to overcome their weaknesses. From this beginning God draws them now to a completely new life. They become awake to each other, aware of each other, sensitive to each other's needs. (A New Zealand Prayer Book - He Karakia Mihinare o Aotearoa, p. 785f.)

4. Marriage is the promise of hope between a man and a woman who love each other, who trust that love, and who wish to share the future together. It enables two separate people to share their desires, longings, dreams and memories, and to help each other through their uncertainties. It provides the encouragement to risk more and thus to gain more. In marriage, husband and wife belong together, providing mutual support and a stability in which their children may grow. (A New Zealand Prayer Book - He Karakia Mihinare o Aotearoa, p. 790)

5. Marriage involves caring and giving. It involves learning to share one's life with another person, forgiving as Christ forgives; enjoying the love and meaning which can be found together. It involves facing together whatever adversity may arise. (A New Zealand Prayer Book - He Karakia Mihinare o Aotearoa, p. 790)

6. [Marriage is to be entered into in the fear of God], duly considering the causes for which Matrimony was ordained.

First, It was ordained for the increase of mankind according to the will of God, and that children might be brought up in the fear and nurture of the Lord, and to the praise of his holy Name.

Secondly, It was ordained in order that the natural instincts and affections, implanted by God, should be hallowed and directed aright; that those who are called by God to this holy estate, should continue therein in pureness of living.

Thirdly, It was ordained for the mutual society, help, and comfort, that the one ought to have of the other, both in prosperity and in adversity. (Book of Common Prayer, 1928).<sup>41</sup>

Section 10, 'Proposed Schedule to Part B of Title G Canon III,' contains a proposed second schedule to the canon which sets out the theology behind the blessing of civil marriages (including those of the same sex). This schedule, which summarises the theology already set out in section 5 of the report, runs as follows:

'Of Christian blessing of civil or non-Christian marriages

The following is a brief consideration of the reasons for the provision of a blessing of an existing marriage that was conducted by a civil jurisdiction or by a religious authority other than Christian, and an understanding of the nature of such a blessing.

The tenor of formal blessings offered in public worship is plain: it is God who blesses, so the bishop or priest and the assembly are both seeking and announcing God's blessing upon some person or persons. These blessings are not the Church granting God's blessing, but declaring it. This involves confidence and trust that God is pleased to bless that which the Church blesses. In the case of blessing a married couple, that confidence is expressed in recognising God's blessing already at work in the couple's lives and rightly asking for God's continued blessing.

In the case of those who have been legally married in a setting other than the Church, and who have not received a formal pronouncement of the blessing of the God we know in Trinity as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the Church offers and announces that blessing for five primary reasons:

#### 1. Love

We are followers of Jesus Christ and know the blessing that comes through his life, death and resurrection as a result of his self-giving love. We also know this kind of love is a blessing when we live in the same manner with each other. Marriage is emblematic of this love. Moreover, in the depth of faithful and life-long commitments a couple finds a 'living for the other' that reflects the example of Jesus Christ's living for the Church.

#### 2. Union

In the bond and union of body, mind, and soul, a couple finds in the quality of their companionship a fit such that their lives have greater meaning, value and purpose. This is an outworking of the abundant life that Christ promises to all.

#### 3. Covenant

A covenant is a sacred commitment. Marriage is one kind of commitment where the couple vows to life-long faithfulness, and hopes to emulate the faithfulness of God in keeping covenant with God's people. Covenant entails constancy and faithfulness in love, which we know is a blessing from God.

#### 4. Gift

The giving of oneself and receiving that is evidenced in marriage is a particular instance of the truth that God creates us to receive our lives as a gift both from God and from the community we inhabit. The intimacy of marriage is an intense form of this giving and receiving of selves in the interplay of gift and giving.

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid, p.29.

## 5. Household

As a household, a 'little church' or 'micro-basileia', the married couple is, through their love for one another, a sign (mysterion) of Christ's love for the world. Indeed, they are both a sign and a remembering (anamnesis) of Christ's love. The couple is both an example of Christ's self-giving love, and the parties themselves model their love on Christ's example.

Finally, in receiving the pronouncement of God's blessing and asking for that blessing to continue and deepen in their life together, it is the expectation that a couple become a greater blessing to one another and in the overflowing generosity of God, become a blessing to the world.<sup>42</sup>

Section 11, 'Proposed motion for General Synod / Te Hīnota Whānui 2016,' contains the motion in support of the recommendations in the report to be put to General Synod.

Section 12, 'The proposed rites of blessing,' sets out the two proposed rites of blessing for those who have entered into a civil marriage. Form 1 is for use with same sex couples and form 2 is for use with couples of an opposite sex.

These two rites are set out below in a comparative form which I owe to Dr Andrew Goddard. In this comparative form, but not in the original text, the references to marriage are underlined and the one difference between the two texts is in a different type face and bold.

<p><i>The blessing of the relationship of those who have entered a <u>civil marriage (Form 1)</u></i></p> <p><b>The Gathering of the People</b></p> <p><i>All standing, the presiding priest or bishop says</i></p> <p>Grace to you and peace from God, Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier of Life, the love at our beginning and without end, in our midst and with us.</p> <p><b>God is with us, here we find new life.</b></p> <p>Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; <b>everyone who loves is born of God, and knows God.</b></p> <p>God's love was revealed among us in this way: <b>God sent his only Son into the world so that we might have abundant life.</b></p> <p>God is love,</p>	<p><i>The blessing of the relationship of those who have entered a <u>civil marriage (Form 2)</u></i></p> <p><b>The Gathering of the People</b></p> <p><i>All standing, the presiding priest or bishop says</i></p> <p>Grace to you and peace from God, Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier of Life, the love at our beginning and without end, in our midst and with us.</p> <p><b>God is with us, here we find new life.</b></p> <p>Beloved let us love one another, because love is from God; <b>everyone who loves is born of God, and knows God.</b></p> <p>God's love was revealed among us in this way: <b>God sent his only Son into the world so that we might have abundant life.</b></p> <p>God is love,</p>
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<sup>42</sup> Ibid, pp.30-31.

**Those who live in love, live in God, and God in them .**

E ōku hoa aroha (Dear friends),  
we have gathered in the presence of God  
to recognise the **marriage** of N. and N. before  
Christ's church,  
to pray God's blessing on them,  
to share their joy,  
and to celebrate their love.

In the beginning, when God created the first  
human,  
God declared that it is not good for us to  
remain alone.

Out of compassion, God created a companion  
flesh of flesh and bone of bone,  
so that two people could comfort and care for  
each other,  
and thereby a pattern of mutual support and  
faithful partnership  
was established from the very beginning.

[In God's love for creation,  
God made a covenant with all people,  
saying to Noah, "When I see the bow in the  
clouds I will remember my everlasting covenant  
between me and every living creature of all  
flesh that is on the earth."

God promised descendants to Abraham and  
Sarah, as numerous as the stars,  
and led the chosen people out of bondage into  
freedom.

Ever faithful in love, God gave the law,  
taught, and warned Israel by the holy  
prophets.

God showed the help and blessing  
that can come to us in the best of friendships  
Ruth and Naomi, Jonathan and David brought  
great blessing to each other.

Christ said to his disciples, "No longer do I call  
you servants but I call you friends."

God's faithful love was manifest in fullness  
in the redemption of the whole world by our

**Those who live in love, live in God, and God in them .**

E ōku hoa aroha (Dear friends),  
we have gathered in the presence of God  
to recognise the **marriage** of N. and N. before  
Christ's church,  
to pray God's blessing on them,  
to share their joy,  
and to celebrate their love.

In the beginning, when God created the first  
human,  
God declared that it is not good for us to  
remain alone.

Out of compassion, God created a companion  
flesh of flesh and bone of bone,  
so that two people could comfort and care for  
each other,  
and thereby a pattern of mutual support and  
faithful partnership  
was established ***between a man and a  
woman*** from the very beginning.

[In God's love for creation,  
God made a covenant with all people,  
saying to Noah, "When I see the bow in the  
clouds I will remember my everlasting covenant  
between me and every living creature of all  
flesh that is on the earth."

God promised descendants to Abraham and  
Sarah, as numerous as the stars,  
and led the chosen people out of bondage into  
freedom.

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taught, and warned Israel by the holy  
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God showed the help and blessing  
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Ruth and Naomi, Jonathan and David brought  
great blessing to each other.

Christ said to his disciples, "No longer do I call  
you servants but I call you friends."

God's faithful love was manifest in fullness

Lord Jesus Christ.

In Christ a new covenant has been established by the laying down of his life for his friends.

In Christ the poor are invited to the heavenly **marriage** feast.

In Christ our humanity is wedded to God forever.]

With God's faithful purpose in mind we have come together to ask God to bless N. and N.,

who have made binding commitments of love and faithfulness to each other, in accordance with civil law.

We will pray that the Holy Spirit may comfort, guide and strengthen them, that they may remain faithful to God and to each other

through the promises they have already made, and that, by God's help and with the support of the Church,

they may fulfil God's purposes for the whole of their earthly life together.

Let us pray.

*Silence may be kept*

Most loving God, creator and redeemer, we love because you first love us.

you remain faithful to us through all our life, even when we turn our faces from you.

In your mercy, pour your blessing on N. and N., who come this day to seek your guidance and protection for their life together.

Bestow upon this couple, who have been joined together in lawful union, the gifts of peace, trust, and steadfast love.

And grant to us all the knowledge of your grace,

that most excellent gift of love, that we may know we are bound to you,

whatever life may bring;

through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**

in the redemption of the whole world by our Lord Jesus Christ.

In Christ a new covenant has been established by the laying down of his life for his friends.

In Christ the poor are invited to the heavenly **marriage** feast.

In Christ our humanity is wedded to God forever.]

With God's faithful purpose in mind we have come together to ask God to bless N. and N.,

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We will pray that the Holy Spirit may comfort, guide and strengthen them, that they may remain faithful to God and to each other

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In your mercy, pour your blessing on N. and N. who come this day to seek your guidance and protection for their life together.

Bestow upon this couple, who have been joined together in lawful union, the gifts of peace, trust, and steadfast love.

And grant to us all the knowledge of your grace,

that most excellent gift of love,

that we may know we are bound to you,

whatever life may bring;

through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**The Ministry of the Word**

*A suitable reading (or readings) follows here.*

*After the reading a minister may speak to the people.*

**The Declarations**

*The priest or bishop asks the couple*

Do you attest to God’s blessing in your life?

**God has blessed us richly.**

What do you ask of God?

**We ask for God’s blessing on our life together.**

**We ask for God’s help to remain faithful to our promises.**

**We ask for God’s gifts of constancy and love.**

What do you ask of the Church and from each of us gathered here?

**We ask for your prayers, your love, and your support.**

*The priest or bishop continues*

You have made promises (and given a ring/ rings) in token of your love for each other.

Do you attest before God and before this congregation that you are **duly and legally married** and that you honour the promises you made to each other in accordance with civil law?

**We do.**

*The congregation stands. The couple faces their family and friends.*

E ōku hoa aroha (Dear friends), do you recognise this **lawful marriage**?

**We do .**

Will you uphold and support this couple now and in the years ahead?

**We will.**

*The priest or bishop asks the couple to declare their commitment to each other before the*

**Amen.**

**The Ministry of the Word**

*A suitable reading (or readings) follows here.*

*After the reading a minister may speak to the people.*

**The Declarations**

*The priest or bishop asks the couple*

Do you attest to God’s blessing in your life?

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What do you ask of God?

**We ask for God’s blessing on our life together.**

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What do you ask of the Church and from each of us gathered here?

**We ask for your prayers, your love, and your support.**

*The priest or bishop continues*

You have made promises (and given a ring/ rings) in token of your love for each other.

Do you attest before God and before this congregation that you are **duly and legally married** and that you honour the promises you made to each other in accordance with civil law?

**We do.**

*The congregation stands. The couple faces their family and friends.*

E ōku hoa aroha (Dear friends), do you recognise this **lawful marriage**?

**We do .**

Will you uphold and support this couple now and in the years ahead?

**We will.**

*congregation.*

N. and N., in the sight of God and of this congregation, I invite you to declare your commitment to each other and to God.

**N., I have committed my whole life to you and seek now to grow in love for you and for God.**

**May God keep me faithful to the vows we made  
that as we live together we may be strengthened  
in our ever deepening love and trust  
and daily show forth love and joy in our lives.**

**N., I have committed my whole life to you and seek now to grow in love for you and for God.**

**May God keep me faithful to the vows we made  
that as we live together we may be strengthened  
in our ever deepening love and trust  
and daily show forth love and joy in our lives.**

*The priest or bishop addresses the people*

In the presence of God, and before this congregation

N. and N. have given testimony of their **lawful marriage** and have now affirmed the commitments they made.

### **The Prayers**

*The priest or bishop or lay person leads the prayers:*

Let us pray:

Faithful God,  
holy and eternal,  
hear us as we pray for N and N.

May their union be life-giving and life-long,  
enriched by your presence and strengthened

*The priest or bishop asks the couple to declare their commitment to each other before the congregation.*

N. and N., in the sight of God and of this congregation, I invite you to declare your commitment to each other and to God.

**N., I have committed my whole life to you and seek now to grow in love for you and for God.**

**May God keep me faithful to the vows we made  
that as we live together we may be strengthened  
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**May God keep me faithful to the vows we made  
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and daily show forth love and joy in our lives.**

*The priest or bishop addresses the people*

In the presence of God, and before this congregation

N. and N. have given testimony of their **lawful marriage** and have now affirmed the commitments they made.

### **The Prayers**

*The priest or bishop or lay person leads the prayers:*

Let us pray:

Faithful God,  
holy and eternal,  
hear us as we pray for N. and N..

by your grace;  
may they bring comfort and confidence to  
each other  
in tenderness, faithfulness, respect, and trust.

God of love / E te Atua aroha

**Grant our prayer. / Whakarongo mai ki tā  
mātou īnoi.**

May the hospitality of their home  
bring refreshment and joy to strangers and  
friends alike;  
may their love for each other  
in good times and bad  
overflow to neighbours in need.

May they celebrate with the joyful,  
befriend the lonely  
and comfort those in sorrow.

God of love / E te Atua aroha

**Grant our prayer. / Whakarongo mai ki tā  
mātou īnoi.**

By your word and sacraments  
may they be filled with your grace  
and may your Holy Spirit  
grant them insight and patience to discern  
your will  
the courage and the strength to follow it.  
May they come to know the joy that you have  
prepared for all people when,  
at the end of this life, you receive us all into  
your eternal kingdom.

God of love / E te Atua aroha

**Grant our prayer. / Whakarongo mai ki tā  
mātou īnoi.**

May their life together be a sign of your love for  
this broken world,  
so that unity may overcome estrangement,  
forgiveness heal guilt,  
and joy triumph over despair.

God of love / E te Atua aroha

**Grant our prayer. / Whakarongo mai ki tā**

May their union be life-giving and life-long,  
enriched by your presence and strengthened  
by your grace;  
may they bring comfort and confidence to  
each other  
in tenderness, faithfulness, respect, and trust.

God of love / E te Atua aroha

**Grant our prayer. / Whakarongo mai ki tā  
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bring refreshment and joy to strangers and  
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may they be filled with your grace  
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grant them insight and patience to discern  
your will  
the courage and the strength to follow it.  
May they come to know the joy that you have  
prepared for all people when,  
at the end of this life, you receive us all into  
your eternal kingdom.

God of love / E te Atua aroha

**Grant our prayer. / Whakarongo mai ki tā  
mātou īnoi.**

May their life together be a sign of your love for  
this broken world,  
so that unity may overcome estrangement,  
forgiveness heal guilt,  
and joy triumph over despair.

mātou inoi.

**The Lord's Prayer**

Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Save us from the time of trial  
and deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are  
yours  
now and for ever. Amen.

*or*

Kua akona nei tātou e tō tātou Ariki,  
ka inoi tātou

**E tō mātou Matua i te rangi**  
**Kia tapu tōu Ingoa.**  
**Kia tae mai tōu rangatiratanga.**  
**Kia meatia tāu e pai ai**  
**ki runga ki te whenua,**  
**kia rite anō ki tō te rangi.**  
**Hōmai ki a mātou āiane**  
**he taro mā mātou mō tēnei rā.**  
**Murua ō mātou hara,**  
**Me mātou hoki e muru nei**  
**i ō te hunga e hara ana ki a mātou.**  
**Āua hoki mātou e kawea kia whakawaia;**  
**Engari whakaorangia mātou i te kino:**  
**Nōu hoki te rangatiratanga, te kaha,**  
**me te korōria,**  
**Āke ake ake. Āmine.**

*or*

**Eternal Spirit,**  
**Earth-maker, Pain-bearer, Life-giver,**  
**Source of all that is and that shall be,**  
**Father and Mother of us all,**  
**Loving God, in whom is heaven:**

God of love / E te Atua aroha

**Grant our prayer. / Whakarongo mai ki tā**  
**mātou inoi.**

**The Lord's Prayer**

Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Save us from the time of trial  
and deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are  
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**he taro mā mātou mō tēnei rā.**  
**Murua ō mātou hara,**  
**Me mātou hoki e muru nei**  
**i ō te hunga e hara ana ki a mātou.**  
**Āua hoki mātou e kawea kia whakawaia;**  
**Engari whakaorangia mātou i te kino:**  
**Nōu hoki te rangatiratanga, te kaha,**  
**me te korōria,**  
**Āke ake ake. Āmine.**

*or*

**Eternal Spirit,**  
**Earth-maker, Pain-bearer, Life-giver,**  
**Source of all that is and that shall be,**

The hallowing of your name echo through the universe!

The way of your justice be followed by the peoples of the world!

Your heavenly will be done by all created beings!

Your commonwealth of peace and freedom sustain our hope and come on earth.

With the bread we need for today, feed us.  
In the hurts we absorb from one another, forgive us.

In times of temptation and test, strengthen us.

From trials too great to endure, spare us.

From the grip of all that is evil, free us.

For you reign in the glory of the power that is love,  
now and for ever.

Amen.

#### The Blessing of the Couple

*The couple kneels. The priest or bishop prays one of the following blessings:*

Blessed are you, O God, ruler of the universe,  
for you have created all things  
and you surround us with signs of your faithfulness.

Pour now the abundance of your blessing on N.  
and N.

who have committed their lives to each other.

Let their love for each other be a seal upon their hearts

and a crown upon their heads.

Bless them in their work and in their companionship;

awake and asleep,

in joy and in sorrow,

in life and in death.

Finally, in your mercy, bring them to that heavenly **marriage** feast,

where your saints feast for ever more.

Through Jesus Christ your Son, our Lord,  
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,

Father and Mother of us all,

Loving God, in whom is heaven:

The hallowing of your name echo through the universe!

The way of your justice be followed by the peoples of the world!

Your heavenly will be done by all created beings!

Your commonwealth of peace and freedom sustain our hope and come on earth.

With the bread we need for today, feed us.  
In the hurts we absorb from one another, forgive us.

In times of temptation and test, strengthen us.

From trials too great to endure, spare us.

From the grip of all that is evil, free us.

For you reign in the glory of the power that is love,  
now and for ever.

Amen.

#### The blessing of the couple

*The couple kneels. The priest or bishop prays one of the following blessings:*

Blessed are you, O God, ruler of the universe,  
for you have created all things  
and you surround us with signs of your faithfulness.

Pour now the abundance of your blessing on N.  
and N.

who have committed their lives to each other.

Let their love for each other be a seal upon their hearts

and a crown upon their heads.

Bless them in their work and in their companionship;

awake and asleep,

in joy and in sorrow,

in life and in death.

Finally, in your mercy, bring them to that heavenly **marriage** feast,

where your saints feast for ever more.

Through Jesus Christ your Son, our Lord,

one God, now and for ever.

**Amen.**

God the Father,  
God the Son,  
God the Holy Spirit,  
bless, preserve, and keep you;  
God grant you abundant grace  
that, living together in faith and love,  
you may be a blessing to each other  
and may receive the blessings of eternal life.

**Amen.**

*or*

Most gracious God,  
we praise you for the gift of human love.  
We give you thanks for N. and N.,  
and the promises of faithfulness they have  
made.  
Pour out the abundance of your Holy Spirit  
upon them.  
Keep them in your steadfast love;  
protect them in all danger;  
fill them with your wisdom and peace;  
and lead them in service to each other and the  
world.

May the blessing of God the Father  
God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit,  
be with you and remain with you,  
that you may always be a blessing to each  
other  
and to all whom you meet. **Amen.**

*Or*

Eternal God,  
you create us out of love  
that we should love you and one another.  
Bless N. and N., each made in your image,  
whose commitment to each other  
is a sign of your faithful love to us  
in Christ our Lord.

**Amen .**

who lives and reigns with you and the Holy  
Spirit,

one God, now and for ever.

**Amen.**

God the Father,  
God the Son,  
God the Holy Spirit,  
bless, preserve, and keep you;  
God grant you abundant grace  
that, living together in faith and love,  
you may be a blessing to each other  
and may receive the blessings of eternal life.

**Amen.**

*or*

Most gracious God,  
we praise you for the gift of human love.  
We give you thanks for N. and N.,  
and the promises of faithfulness they have  
made.  
Pour out the abundance of your Holy Spirit  
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Keep them in your steadfast love;  
protect them in all danger;  
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and lead them in service to each other and the  
world.

May the blessing of God the Father  
God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit,  
be with you and remain with you,  
that you may always be a blessing to each  
other  
and to all whom you meet.

**Amen.**

*Or*

Eternal God,  
you create us out of love  
that we should love you and one another.  
Bless N. and N., each made in your image,  
whose commitment to each other  
is a sign of your faithful love to us  
in Christ our Lord.

By your Holy Spirit,  
fill them both with wisdom and hope  
that they may delight in your gift of love  
and enrich one another in love and steadfast  
faithfulness;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**

Bring them to that table  
where your saints celebrate forever in your  
heavenly home;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord,  
who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and  
reigns,  
one God, forever and ever.

**Amen.**

*or*

May God who has made covenant with us  
keep you in love with each other  
so that you will be a sign  
and an example of God's never-failing love.

May God give you friends and family  
to help you live in peace with all people.

May you always bear witness to the love of God  
so that the afflicted and the needy will find  
welcome in your home.

And may the Almighty God bless you: Father ,  
Son and Holy Spirit.

**Amen.**

### **The Dismissal**

*The priest or bishop may give a blessing*

*The service may be concluded with the  
following or other appropriate words*

Grace be with you.

**Thanks be to God.**

Go in peace.

**Amen. We go in the name of Christ.**

*This service may only be conducted for a couple*

**Amen .**

By your Holy Spirit,  
fill them both with wisdom and hope  
that they may delight in your gift of love  
and enrich one another in love and steadfast  
faithfulness;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**

Bring them to that table  
where your saints celebrate forever in your  
heavenly home;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord,  
who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and  
reigns,  
one God, forever and ever.

**Amen.**

*or*

May God who has made covenant with us  
keep you in love with each other  
so that you will be a sign  
and an example of God's never-failing love.

May God give you friends and family  
to help you live in peace with all people.

May you always bear witness to the love of God  
so that the afflicted and the needy will find  
welcome in your home.

And may the Almighty God bless you: Father ,  
Son and Holy Spirit.

**Amen.**

### **The Dismissal**

*The priest or bishop may give a blessing*

*The service may be concluded with the  
following or other appropriate words*

Grace be with you.

**Thanks be to God.**

Go in peace.

that is **legally married** in a prior **civil marriage** or in a prior ceremony of another religious tradition.

*If the Eucharist is included it occurs after the Prayers and before the Blessing of the Couple. If that is the case the Lord's Prayer may be omitted after the Prayers and be in the usual places in a Eucharist.*

**Some Suggested Readings**

Genesis 9:12-17

Ruth 1:16-17

1 Samuel 18:1b, 3, 20:16-17, 42a;

or 1 Samuel 18:1-4 Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

Song of Solomon 2:10-13, 8:6-7

Micah 4:1-4

Romans 12:9-18

1 Corinthians 12:31b-13:13

2 Corinthians 5:17-20

Galatians 5:14, 22-26

Ephesians 3:14-21

Colossians 3:12-17

1 John 3:18-24

1 John 4:7-16, 21

Matthew 5:1-16

Mark 12:28-34

Luke 6:32-38

John 15:9-17

John 17:1-2, 18-26

**Amen. We go in the name of Christ.**

*This service may only be conducted for a couple that is **legally married** in a prior **civil marriage** or in a prior ceremony of another religious tradition.*

*If the Eucharist is included it occurs after the Prayers and before the Blessing of the Couple. If that is the case the Lord's Prayer may be omitted after the Prayers and be in the usual places in a Eucharist.*

**Some Suggested Readings**

Genesis 9:12-17

Ruth 1:16-17

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Romans 12:9-18

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2 Corinthians 5:17-20

Galatians 5:14, 22-26

Ephesians 3:14-21

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1 John 4:7-16, 21

Matthew 5:1-16

Mark 12:28-34

Luke 6:32-38

John 15:9-17

John 17:1-2, 18-26

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Finally, Appendix 1 contains the text of Motion 30 and Appendix 2 contains a bibliography.

### **III. The problems with the report**

There can be no doubt that the members of the Working Party that produced *A Way Forward* tried to the best of their ability to produce a report that fulfilled the mandate given to them by Motion 30.

Their report attempts to maintain their church's traditional doctrine of marriage while making provision for the blessing of same-gender relationships by those who feel that this is the right thing to do. It also attempt to link this development to an understanding of the theology of Anglican ordination and of the theology of marriage.

Unfortunately, their attempt to do this is theologically problematic for the following eight reasons.

First, the report contains no discussion of the difference between legitimate and illegitimate diversity. It claims that unity 'flourishes through variety and diversity' but it does not consider the issue of whether some forms of belief and behaviour are incompatible with the unity that God wills for his people.

For example, Christians have traditionally said that the unity of the Church has to be based on a common belief that Jesus is Lord and that God raised him from the dead (Romans 10:9) and that the unity of the Church cannot be confined to one ethnic group but has to include disciples of Christ drawn from all nations (Matthew 28:19). This means that a form of unity that permitted people to deny the Lordship of Christ or his resurrection or that excluded a particular ethnic group would be an illegitimate form of unity.

What *A Way Forward* fails to provide is any sort of framework for deciding whether permitting the blessing of same-sex relationships and the ordaining of those within them is compatible with the unity that God wills for his people or whether, like the two examples I have just given, it is incompatible with it.

Secondly, in a similar way, the report contains an inadequate account of doctrinal development.

a. It is not clear how the text which the report cites, Hebrews 1:1-3a, is relevant to the issue of the development of Christian doctrine. It is about the way in which the partial revelation given through the Scriptures of the Old Testament has been superseded by the full revelation given in Christ, not about how Christian belief can or should develop.

b. While it is undoubtedly the case that Christian doctrine has developed over the centuries and that this has led, as the report says, to 'a deeper and richer understanding of the faith,' not all developments of doctrine have been right developments. For example, Arianism, Pelagianism and the theology of the 'German Christians' of the 1930s are all examples of doctrinal development, but most people would argue that they were not right developments because the accounts of the Christian faith that they put forward are in various ways incompatible with the witness of the New Testament.

What the report once again fails to provide is any sort of framework for assessing doctrinal development that would indicate whether or not permitting the blessing of same-sex relationships and the blessing of those within them was or was not a right development.

Thirdly, the report fails to provide a convincing theological justification for its proposal to allow the blessing of same-sex civil marriages.

Given the almost identical nature of the two liturgies of blessing put forward by the report as shown in the table above and the repeated use of the term marriage in both of them, and given the repeated references to marriage in the theological arguments put forward to justify the proposed liturgies, it is clear that the report thinks that the form 1 rite of blessing proposed for use with same-sex couples is the blessing of a marriage. To put it simply, if the form 2 rite is the blessing of a marriage (and that is clearly what it is meant to be) then so is the form 1 rite for same-sex couples.

Unfortunately, the arguments put forward by the report do not show that a same-sex relationship can be what the Bible and the unbroken tradition of the Christian Church down the centuries have called marriage.

As the report makes clear in its citations from the *New Zealand Prayer Book* and the 1928 version of the *Book of Common Prayer*, the traditional Christian view of marriage is that it is a relationship between a man and a woman one of the three purposes of which is the procreation of children. The report, however, dispenses with the necessity of either of these elements in favour of the idea that where there is love, union, covenant, gift and a household there can be a marital relationship which the Church can recognise and bless even when the relationship is not between a man and woman and is therefore necessarily incapable of being procreative.

The report ignores entirely the issue of how a same-sex relationship that is intrinsically closed to the possibility of procreation can be called marriage. It therefore fails to give any justification for its departure from the Christian tradition in this regard.

The report justifies dispensing with the requirement for marriage to involve a man and a woman by building on the work of Phyllis Tribble and arguing that in the creation account in Genesis 2 what is important for the 'first earth creature' is not 'finding a partner of the opposite sex but a partner of the apposite sex.' The fact that Adam's companion was Eve was thus right for him, and an opposite sex partner would be right for someone of a heterosexual disposition, but for someone of a homosexual orientation the 'apposite partner' would be someone of the same sex.

It is this belief in the dispensability of the partner being someone of the opposite sex that lies behind the re-wording of the Genesis 2 account in the form 1 rite of blessing.

'In the beginning, when God created the first human,  
God declared that it is not good for us to remain alone.  
Out of compassion, God created a companion  
flesh of flesh and bone of bone,  
so that two people could comfort and care for each other,  
and thereby a pattern of mutual support and faithful partnership  
was established from the very beginning.'

In this re-wording the fact that Adam and Eve were male and female is irrelevant. All that matters is that they were two people of whatever sex.

In response to this argument there are two points that need to be made.

a. In Genesis 2 we are not dealing with a sexually undifferentiated 'earth creature,' but with a male human being. As the American Old Testament scholar Richard Davidson puts it: 'There is no hint in

the text of an originally bisexual or sexually undifferentiated being split into two different sexes.’<sup>43</sup> After the creation of Eve Adam is clearly a male human being and there is nothing in the text to suggest that he only became male as a result of the creation of Eve. To quote Davidson again: ‘Nothing has changed in the makeup of ‘the human’ during his sleep except the loss of a rib.’<sup>44</sup>

b. The reason that the woman is the ‘apposite’ companion for this man is precisely because as a woman she is sexually ‘opposite’ to him.

In Genesis 1:27 (and 5:2) human beings are said to have been created in God’s image and likeness as two opposite sexes, male and female, and as such they are given a mandate to procreate in Genesis 1:28. The way the book of Genesis is constructed the reader is expected to have read Genesis 1 first and to read Genesis 2 in the light of it. This means that Genesis 2 needs to be seen as a narrative expansion of Genesis 1:26-28 explaining in the form of a story why God created human beings as male and female. The point of the story is that the only fit companion for the man is a woman and any doctrine of marriage based on this story has to reflect this fact. Men and women, says Genesis 2, were made for each other and the nature of marriage as a relationship between men and women reflects this fact (*‘Therefore a man leaves his father and mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh.’*).

Furthermore, it is as a marital couple consisting of a man and a woman that Adam and Eve are able to fulfil the command to ‘be fruitful and multiply’ in Genesis 1:28. Marriage and procreation go together as we see in Genesis 3:15-16 and Genesis 4:1-2.

What the report offers, therefore, is an account of marriage that contradicts the account of the offered in the creation narratives in Genesis 1 and 2, an account of marriage which Jesus himself treats as a normative in his discussion of marriage and divorce recorded in the Gospels (Matthew 19:3-12, Mark 10:2-12) and which has therefore been accepted as normative by every subsequent generation of the Christian Church up to the present day.

What the report is offering is an entirely novel definition of what marriage is and it fails to show any good reason why this new definition should be accepted.

Fourthly, the report is clear that what is being blessed is a ‘one flesh’ sexual union: ‘this is certainly a bodily union, one of intimate physical presence with one’s partner.’<sup>45</sup> This means that what the report is proposing is explicitly the blessing of same-sex sexual activity.

However, the report entirely fails to engage with the fact that the Bible consistently views such activity in extremely negative terms, regarding it as an ‘abomination’ that signifies the way in which the human race has rejected its creator, that violates God’s law and that has the capacity to exclude people from the life of God’s kingdom (see Genesis 19, Judges 19, Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, Deuteronomy 23:17-18, Romans 1:26-27, 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, 1 Timothy 1:10 and Jude 7). The report simply ignores the fact that such texts exist.

It also entirely ignores the ‘historic understanding held by Christians for two millennia that homosexual practice is incompatible with Christian discipleship, and church discipline may be

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<sup>43</sup> Richard Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh – Sexuality in the Old Testament*, Peabody: Hendrickson, 2007, p.20.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, p.20.

<sup>45</sup> *A Way Forward* p.15.

necessary if the practice is habitual.<sup>46</sup> The witness of both Scripture and Tradition is thus treated as though it did not exist.

Following Rowan Williams, the report argues that sexual desire is 'a good gift from God' because it enables people to bring joy to one another. What it does not consider at all is the fact that the Bible, and the Christian tradition following the Bible, have consistently held that the only legitimate context for the expression of sexual desire is heterosexual marriage because the context for which sex was designed by God is the union between husband and wife. As before, this consistent tradition is simply ignored.

Fifthly, the report proposes that someone in a same-sex civil marriage that has been blessed by the Church should be regarded as living a 'rightly ordered' life and therefore should be eligible for ordination and declares that this will 'not involve lowering the standard required for ordination.'<sup>47</sup>

This argument depends entirely on an acceptance of the view that a same-sex marriage blessed by the Church is a 'rightly ordered' relationship. 'Rightly ordered' here means what has traditionally been called 'holy' and as we have seen the report fails to make out a convincing case that a sexually active same-sex relationship should be seen as either marriage or holy. In the absence of such a convincing case it is hard to see why what is involved should not be seen as a lowering of the standard for ordination.

From a traditional Christian point of view there is also conversely something very odd about the suggestion that someone in a heterosexual civil marriage that conforms to the pattern set out in Genesis 2:24 is not living a 'rightly ordered' life and is therefore ineligible for ordination until their relationship has been blessed according to the liturgical form set out in the report. This proposed requirement for an additional blessing is not part of the existing Canon relating to ministry and it begs the question as to why an existing heterosexual marriage requires a blessing in order to be 'rightly ordered.' Surely a faithful, monogamous, heterosexual marriage is in itself the right ordering of a person's sexual life?

Sixthly, the report claims that what is proposed does not involve 'a change in the Church's doctrine of marriage.' This claim is impossible to sustain.

As we have already noted, the doctrine of marriage set out in the existing formularies of the Church of Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia (in line with the historic understanding of the Christian Church as a whole) is that it is a relationship between a man and a woman one of the purposes of which is the procreation of children. What the report is proposing is that this understanding of marriage should be extended to include as well a relationship between two people of the same sex whose relationships has the marks of love, union, covenant, gift and household even though such a relationship would be intrinsically closed to the possibility of procreation.

This extension would without doubt involve a change in doctrine. Even though the traditional view of marriage would remain in place, the fact that another view of marriage would be officially be accepted by the church alongside it and would form the basis for the church's practice would mean that a doctrinal change had taken place. If what is proposed is not doctrinal change it would be difficult to know what would be.

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<sup>46</sup> S. Donald Fortson III and Rollin G. Grams, *Unchanging Witness – The consistent Christian teaching on homosexuality in Scripture and Tradition*, Nashville: Baker Academic, 2016, p. 141.

<sup>47</sup> *A Way Forward*, p.9.

This would also mean that in spite of the fact that dioceses and individual clergy would be able to decline to accept the new services of blessing it would still be the case that they would be part of a church whose doctrine had changed. The church as a whole would have changed its position even if they declined to change with it.

Whether or not such a change would involve a 'Departure from the Doctrine and Sacraments of Christ' and therefore be in violation of the Te Pouhere (constitution) of the church depends, as the report says, on what is meant by the term 'the Doctrine of Christ.' It is difficult for someone who is not an expert on the Te Pouhere to offer a fully informed opinion about the matter, but the words of the report:

'... General Synod / te Hīnota Whānui is bound to hold and maintain 'the Doctrine and Sacraments of Christ as the Lord commanded in Holy Scripture and as explained in

The Book of Common Prayer 1662

Te Rawiri

The Form and Manner of Making, Ordaining, and Consecrating Bishops, Priests and Deacons

The Thirty Nine Articles of Religion

A New Zealand Prayer Book – He Karakia Mihinare o Aotearoa' ' 48

seem to rule out a minimalist approach that restricts the 'Doctrine of Christ' to some particular aspect, or aspects, of Christian doctrine. What seems more plausible is that the term refers in general terms to the whole of the teaching given by Christ to his people in the Bible and subsequently reflected in the four formularies mentioned. This being the case, the traditional doctrine of marriage set out in the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer* and *A New Zealand Prayer Book* would form part of the 'Doctrine of Christ' which the General Synod 'is bound to hold and maintain.' It would then follow that the proposal for the blessing of same-sex marriages contained in the report would be unconstitutional.

Seventhly, the report ignores entirely the teaching of the Anglican Communion about marriage and human sexuality as set out in Lambeth 1.10 and what impact any change in the doctrine and practice of the Church of Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia would have on its relations with other churches in the Communion. It also ignores entirely the question of what effect such a change would have on wider ecumenical relationships. Just as it ignores the witness of the Church down the ages the report also ignores the wider Church today.

Eighthly, the final problem about the report is about what it might portend for the future. If the only criteria for marriage is love, union, covenant, gift and household it is difficult to see on what grounds polygamous marriages (which already get a favourable mention in the report as examples of marital constancy<sup>49</sup>), or incestuous marriages would be ruled out as candidates for blessing if they meet the criteria laid down in the report of being permitted by state law. On what theological grounds would the report rule them out?

#### **IV. The significance of the report for the wider Anglican debate about same-sex relationships**

The significance of this report for the wider Anglican debate about same-sex relationships is that it shows that no church can have it both ways when it comes to the doctrine of marriage. It is

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid, p.19.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, p.15.

impossible for a church to consistently uphold a traditional Christian view of marriage while at the same time being willing to bless same-sex relationships as an alternative form of marriage. The path taken by the Church of Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia is therefore one that other Anglican churches (including the Church of England) should not go down.

M B Davie 14.3.16