

## **Same Sex Partnerships**

### **I. An Open Discussion and an Indication of Preference**

- I.1 Following a period of consultation at a diocesan level, the Bench of Bishops would like to invite Governing Body members to participate in an open discussion on options open to the Church in Wales in relation to same sex partnerships. At the end of that discussion members will be asked to indicate their preference from three options, by secret ballot. There is also an option of a second preference, should members have one.
- I.2 The results of the ballot, collated by Orders, will be announced at the meeting, and will then be considered in more detail by the Bishops as they seek to discern the will of the Church in Wales on this matter, and to determine what might be the appropriate next step, if any.
- I.3 The Archbishop will introduce the discussion and report on the results of the diocesan consultation exercise (see section 2, below). The Bishops will not participate in the discussion; rather, they wish to listen to members' views on the following options:
- Option 1: No change to the Church's current teaching and practice on marriage and partnerships;
- Option 2: To allow same sex unions to be blessed in the Church in Wales;
- Option 3: To enable same sex couples to marry in the Church in Wales.
- I.4 The Reverend Dr Ainsley Griffiths, who is a member of the Standing Doctrinal Commission, will also speak to introduce the three options. The Commission's report *The Church in Wales and Same Sex Partnerships* provides a useful overview of the issues under consideration, and was circulated to members to help inform the group discussions at the April 2014 Governing Body meeting. It is also available, together with background papers, on the Church in Wales website:  
<http://www.churchinwales.org.uk/faith/doctrinal-commission/>
- (Hard copies are available from the Provincial Office on request.)
- I.5 Whilst the outcome of the ballot will help to inform future consideration of how the Church in Wales might respond to recent changes in the Marriage law, it will not constitute a decision of the Governing Body, nor by itself provide any basis for a change in the Church's teaching or practice on marriage and partnerships. Should the Bench wish to propose a change in the current position, it would be necessary for a Bill to be brought to the Governing Body for debate.

## 2. Discussions within the Church in Wales

### i) Group Discussion at Governing Body

2.1 In response to changes in the Marriage law in relation to same sex couples (and to the lifting in 2011 of the prohibition on the registration of Civil Partnerships in religious premises should the Church in Wales at the Governing Body give assent to make that a possibility) the Bench of Bishops asked the Standing Doctrinal Commission to provide advice for the Church in Wales on same sex partnerships. The Commission's report was shared with the Governing Body at its meeting in April 2014, at which there was also preliminary discussion in groups on the question:

*A couple of the same sex come to worship in your parish. After a period of attendance, and enthusiastic participation in church life, they enquire if their relationship can be blessed. How can the Church in Wales respond to same sex couples – theologically and pastorally?*

2.2 Although these were informal discussions, notes from the groups suggested that in general Governing Body members were keen that the Church should be able to respond to same sex couples with more pastoral sensitivity than might have been the case in the past when dealing with remarried divorcees. Some members were clearly uncomfortable with the concept of same sex marriage, but others appeared to be open to the possibility of blessing such unions.

### ii) Diocesan Consultations

2.3 In the light of the group discussions in the April 2014 meeting and the work carried out by the Standing Doctrinal Commission, the Bench of Bishops agreed to consult dioceses on three options for the way in which the Church in Wales should relate to same sex partnerships in future. (These were the same three options on which Governing Body members are now being asked to indicate a preference, and which are set out in section 1, above).

2.4 Dioceses were given discretion about the way in which each consultation was carried out and consultation papers were circulated within dioceses, and consultation events held, during the first six months of this year. The results of the six diocesan consultations were reviewed by the Bench of Bishops at its meeting in June.

2.5 All dioceses asked members to consider the same three options, although the actual format of the "indication of preference" – who/how many voted, in what forum – differed from diocese to diocese (and sometimes also within dioceses). A summary of the results of the consultations may be found in the Annex.

2.6 Because of the differences in approach to the consultation, it is difficult to make a like-for-like comparison between diocesan results. However, the key indications were:

- No clear mandate overall for one of the options, although some dioceses did vote decisively for either option 1 or option 3;
- No diocese voted in favour of option 2 as its first choice. There were indications from some dioceses that members had spoken against option 2

as being “neither one thing nor another”, but in other dioceses that some who had supported options 1 or 3 might accept option 2 as a compromise. However, other than in the diocese of St Asaph, there is no empirical evidence of the level of “secondary” support for option 2.

- 2.7 The consultation confirmed what is already known: that this is an issue on which there are a range of views across the Church, with these views very strongly held in some areas.

### **3. Background: Changes to the Marriage Law**

- 3.1 In 2013 Parliament passed the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act, through which the right to marry was extended to those in same sex relationships. The position of the Church in Wales was the subject of considerable discussion with politicians and civil servants during the period in which the Bill was drafted. The key consideration here was how best to protect the Church in Wales’s right to decide for itself whether or not to conduct same sex marriages despite its duty to marry those who met the necessary qualifying connections to marry in church.
- 3.2 To ensure that the Church in Wales’s duty to marry did not compromise its ability to determine its own teaching on marriage (and leave the Church open to legal challenge on equality grounds), the Act which was passed specifically prevented same sex marriages from being solemnised in the Church in Wales and Church of England. However, this was on the basis that the Lord Chancellor was required by the Act to amend the Marriage Law if in future the Governing Body resolved to enable same sex marriages to take place in the Church in Wales (Part 1, section 8 of the Act).
- 3.3 Currently, same sex marriages may not be solemnised according to the rites of the Church in Wales. No change to the Church in Wales’s teaching or practice in relation to same sex marriage may be made without the agreement of the Governing Body, and would require a Bill.

The Bench of Bishops  
September 2015

## Diocesan Consultations on Same Sex Partnerships Summary of Results

### i) St Asaph

Members were asked to express an opinion on all three options in a diocesan meeting.

#### *Option 1*

I strongly agree with this option	103
With hesitation, I can support this option	36
I have no strong view	20
I do not agree with this option, but I would accept it if it were the mind of the Church	82
I oppose this option, and continue to campaign for another option if it were the mind of the church	77
If this option were adopted I would find it hard to continue in the Church in Wales with integrity	29
Left Blank – but voted for another Option	15

#### *Option 2*

I strongly agree with this option	82
With hesitation, I can support this option	83
I have no strong view	15
I do not agree with this option, but I would accept it if it were the mind of the Church	62
I oppose this option, and continue to campaign for another option if it were the mind of the church	52
If this option were adopted I would find it hard to continue in the Church in Wales with integrity	57
Left Blank – but voted for another Option	11

#### *Option 3*

I strongly agree with this option	126
With hesitation, I can support this option	56
I have no strong view	9
I do not agree with this option, but I would accept it if it were the mind of the Church	48
I oppose this option, and continue to campaign for another option if it were the mind of the church	40
If this option were adopted I would find it hard to continue in the Church in Wales with integrity	75
Left Blank – but voted for another Option	8

ii) Bangor

The Diocese of Bangor held four synod meetings, two in each archdeaconry.

	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3
<i>Anglesey Synod</i>	21	6	9
<i>Bangor Synod</i>	26	12	4
<i>South Meirionydd (no formal vote)</i>	1	0	17
<i>North Meirionydd (6 abstentions)</i>	7	1	3

iii) St Davids

*Archidiaconal Consultations*

	Option 1 Cleric/Lay	Option 2 Cleric/Lay	Option 3 Cleric/Lay
<i>Cardigan</i>	22/83	1/9	10/22
<i>Carmarthen</i>	11/70	8/31	3/16
<i>St Davids</i>	18/75	6/35	3/33
<b>Total</b>	<b>51/228</b>	<b>15/75</b>	<b>16/71</b>
<b>%</b>	<b>62%/61%</b>	<b>18%/20%</b>	<b>20%/19%</b>
<b>Overall %</b>	<b>61%</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>19%</b>
<i>Diocesan Conference</i>	43/42	12/17	15/16
<b>%</b>	<b>61.5%/56%</b>	<b>17%/23%</b>	<b>21.5%/21%</b>
<b>Overall %</b>	<b>58.6%</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>21.4%</b>

iv) Llandaff

Votes cast in a meeting of the Diocesan Conference	<b>In favour</b>	<b>% in favour</b>
Option 1	55	29.41
Option 2	26	13.90
Option 3	106	56.68
<b>Total</b>	<b>187</b>	<b>100</b>

The outcome of the deanery discussions produced the following result:

Option 1	25% in favour
Option 2	24% in favour
Option 3	51% in favour

v) Monmouth

Results of a vote in a diocesan meeting:

Option 1	57 (51 from the Diocese)
Option 2	4 (all from the Diocese)
Option 3	51 (46 from the Diocese)

vi) Swansea and Brecon

Combined results from two Archdeaconry meetings and a postal vote by Diocesan Conference members:

42% favour option 1.  
29% favour option 2.  
29% favour option 3.