

Review of General Synod

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General Synod/ Te Hinota Whanui was held at Waitangi in the Bay of Islands, adjacent to the Treaty House grounds. It was very beautiful and we were blessed with sunshine. We received excellent hospitality from Tikanga Maori and the Hui Amorangi of Tai Tokerau. At the centre of the Synod was the remembrance that it is two hundred years since the gospel was first brought to New Zealand. We went by boat to Oihi Bay as Samuel Marsden himself must have. We then landed and went to the rammed earth building with the roof in the shape of a wing and looked out over the bays and down to the Marsden Cross. We were welcomed to the site by descendants of the first missionary and Maori families of that time and this centred us on the gospel brought by Marsden and Ruatara.

The first item of business was the report back from the Ma Whea? Commission along with the report from the Doctrine Commission (these reports are available via the Latimer website). After discussion at our diocesan/Hui Amorangi tables we caucused in our various houses i.e. bishops, clergy and laity. Discussion was always courteous, respectful and honest. During this time it was possible to clarify the theological differences. It was clear that both 'sides' saw the issue of blessing same-sex relationships (and marriage, ordination, etc.) as being central to how we understand the Gospel and how we understand Scripture. Because of this, all recognized that it is not something that will go away with time. At the first plenary session the bishops reported back first and there were a number of us in tears. The support within the Christchurch Diocese was very special.

A call to a prayer vigil through the night was well supported and the next day the commitment across the board was to endeavour to find a way in which the unity of the body of the church could be maintained with integrity for all. A working group was selected from across the theological spectrum along with the three chancellors to get the wording right. The text of the motion (Motion 30) is available from the Anglican Taonga website (www.anglicantaonga.org.nz), and it is important to remember that this motion makes no change

to our doctrine or formularies. There is a real commitment to find a way to protect maintain the integrity of those who cannot in good conscience change, which includes many from Tikanga Polynesia.

We might have wished that the status quo would be maintained but that was never going to happen. The intention is to investigate a possible pathway for us to all be able to remain Anglicans with integrity to the beliefs we have.

However there is also a commitment to provide for those who seek change. The same working group who drafted Motion 30 (with some additional members) are tasked to explore what processes and structures are needed to do this. To do this there is to be study of the doctrine of marriage, the doctrine of ordination and liturgy for same sex relationships overseen by that working group along with an exploration as to what legal requirements might have to be addressed. In the meantime provision is made for same gender couples who have had a civil union or state marriage to be publicly recognised with the consent of the licensing bishop and vestry. It is specifically, unambiguously, not a marriage or a blessing.

We might have wished that the status quo would be maintained but that was never going to happen. The intention is to investigate a possible pathway for us to all be able to remain Anglicans with integrity to the beliefs we have. This is more than we had hoped for. The working group has been charged with being as creative as possible in working out the future - there were suggested separate constitutions, a separate province to name but two.

The report is to be completed with plenty of time for consultation before the next General Synod.