

## Brenda Harrison -a brief in memoriam

Brenda died on Wednesday 24 February in the Phyllis Tuckwell Hospice in Farnham. Pam, her life-partner, slept in the Hospice and was at her bedside for the final hours of Brenda's life.

Brenda was an amazing person, an evangelical Christian with a passion and a key member of the Changing Attitude team. She was a campaigner and fighter and was always totally committed to whatever she became involved with. Brenda became involved with Changing Attitude in the early years and was instrumental with others in creating a strong, independent LGBT Anglican witness. She worked half-time for Changing Attitude for three years as administrator and continued to work unpaid with the same commitment until a few weeks before she died. She had also become a trustee and ensured that we adhered to all the legal and financial rules.

Changing Attitude would not have been organised with such efficiency and we would not be in such a stable financial position without Brenda. But, more than her practical skills, Brenda brought her cheeky smile and a bouncy attitude to meetings and events. She was involved with many other groups, had been a president of the European Forum, a member of the Evangelical Fellowship, CA convener for Guildford, and a member of the Human Sexuality Group in Guildford Diocese. She had many more irons in the fire all of which helped her cross boundaries and form friendships with a huge network of people.

Brenda was an inspiration to so many and we all have so much to thank her for - a determined fore-runner who has campaigned for so many of the things some now enjoy and take for granted. Brenda wanted the campaigning to continue until all are able to enjoy freedom in the Kingdom of God. Her inspiration and love touched so many over the years.



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# Forward Thinking

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

The newsletter of CHANGING ATTITUDE

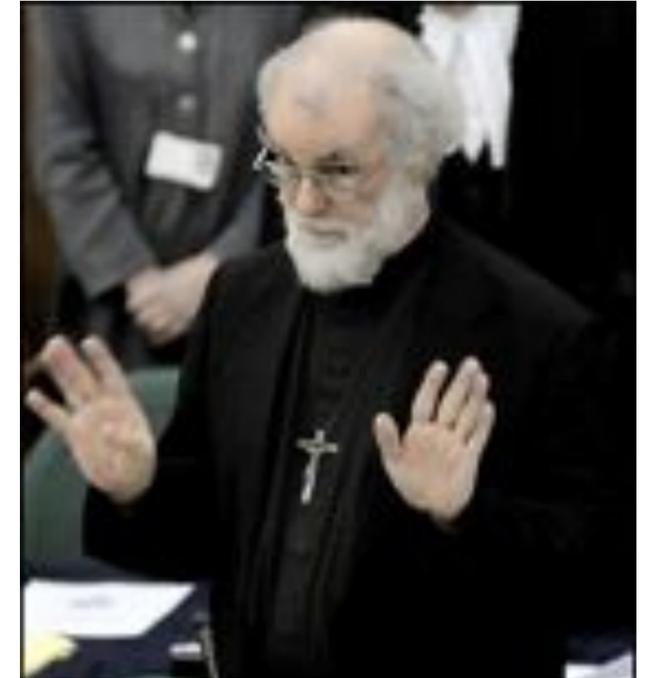
March 2010 No.

## The Archbishop of Canterbury makes an apology

In a thoughtful and carefully-argued Presidential Address to the General Synod at its meeting in February, Dr Rowan Williams said he was profoundly sorry for speaking about the "many regular worshippers of gay or lesbian orientation and many sacrificial and exemplary priests who share this orientation" with a carelessness that could give such an impression that seemed "to ignore these human realities or to undervalue them." He said the "questions are not best addressed in the megaphone tones we are all too used to hearing" but "require a three-dimensional approach". The debate over the status and vocational possibilities of LGBT people in the Church is not helped by ignoring facts or speaking inappropriately.

The topics coming up in public discussion in the last few weeks all centre on one set of questions which reflect painfully accurately some of the problems we face in our church, locally and internationally, he said. The questions include heated debates around the Equality Bill, pressure and anxiety about euthanasia and assisted dying, and debates later in the year on women bishops and on the Anglican Covenant. The rights and dignities of gay and lesbian people are a matter of proper concern for all of us and securing these rights is obviously a mark of a civilised and humane society. When those rights are threatened – as in the infamous legislation that was being discussed in Uganda – we quite rightly express repugnance.

Dr Williams asked whether we can spend the time before the Synod debates in July constructively and whether we might learn anything from the way our culture is moving that will help us maintain some level of health or maturity in our church. The questions linking these apparently diverse issues are about the nature of freedom in society – and thus also with how we talk about our 'rights'. Dealing specifically with the Equality Bill he said "very few Christians were contesting



the civil liberties of gay and lesbian people in general; nor should they have been." Changing Attitude might take issue with the view that the bishops who spoke and voted in the debate were contesting a relatively small but extremely significant point of detail - whether government had the right to tell religious bodies for which tasks they might employ people and which did not require some level of compliance with the public teaching of the Church about behaviour.

The Government had difficulty in seeing that this was not just about clergy and official teachers of the faith and the Church had difficulty explaining that there might be positions "which had some kind of semi-official standing such that it would be very strange for someone to hold such a position when they were manifestly in dispute with some aspects of the Church's teaching."

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The names of diocesan group leaders and other diocesan contact people are listed along the bottom of the pages.

## Archbishop's apology

*Continued from page one*

Talking about competing freedoms in the Communion, the Archbishop said "there is an undoubted good in the fact that some provinces are increasingly patient, compassionate, and thankful in respect of the experience and ministry of gay and lesbian people – entirely in accord with what the Lambeth Conferences and Primates' statements have said." The problems arise when affirmation takes the form of pre-empting the discernment of the wider Anglican fellowship, acting in ways that negate the limits set by Bible and tradition, which conflicts with the capacity of the Anglican family to affirm and support one another in diverse contexts. The freedom claimed by an African Anglican to support anti-gay legislation has a serious impact on the credibility of the gospel in our setting, he said.

Changing Attitude would add that problems also arise because the House of Bishops are so divided amongst themselves about the place of LGBT people in the church. Those who are strongly supportive remain silent when conservatives bishops turn out in force in the Lords arguing for a position which other bishops directly challenge by their actions. The Church of England is not, in practice, committed to 'Issues' or Lambeth I.10. One of the many things that distresses LGBT Anglicans is the knowledge that different rules apply in different dioceses so that many have no idea that there are bishops and congregations who affirm their LGBT clergy and laity.

## Changing Attitude in the media

Changing Attitude continues to receive requests to take part in TV and radio programmes and to advise researchers and producers. Colin is regularly phoned by Premier Radio to give brief reactions to current stories for use in news bulletins. In February he was being consulted by BBC Radio 4 for a 'Between Ourselves' programme about gay clergy and for someone to record an interview for 'Beyond belief' also on R4. Clive, convener of the Manchester group, recorded an interview which was broadcast.

Colin took part in a live debate on BBC 1 on 'The Big Questions' Sunday morning programme on 14 February hosted by Nicky Cambell. The third discussion topic was 'Should the Anglican Church split?'. Everyone had told the researchers that it shouldn't, but in the studio the conservatives revealed an absolute refusal to inhabit a church which welcomed and affirmed partnered lesbians and gay men. Those members of the studio audience who talked with me afterwards were shocked and distressed by the anti-gay opinions of the conservatives.

All these media interviews provide an opportunity to make Changing Attitude and the experience of LGBT Christians better known and to do a little to redress the impression of bigoted, prejudiced Christianity which the church gives people – when bishops oppose equality legislation and others express what are seen to be extreme views even or especially when claimed to be authorised by the Bible.

## Cutting Edge Consortium

Colin Coward on behalf of Changing Attitude and Tina Beardsley, CA trustee but representing the Sibyls, attended a meeting of the Cutting Edge Consortium in the House of Commons on 24 November chaired by Clare Short MP. The meeting was called to discuss the religious exemptions to the legislation on sexuality and gender identity in the Equality Bill.

The presence of the British Humanist Association, the National Secular Society, Unison, Changing Attitude, LGCM, Sibyls, Ekklesia and the Muslim Women's Network working together demonstrated how people of different faiths and no faith can work creatively together for LGBT equality. One message was reiterated several times – that the exemptions granted to the church in the original Equality Act were very narrowly drawn and religious organisations have repeatedly pushed the boundaries beyond where they should rightly be. The Church of England is unafraid of lobbying, and lobbying successfully, for exemptions which allow the church to continue to discriminate against equality in ministry for lay and ordained LGBT Anglicans. Two groups in particular have been campaigning against the equality legislation as it applies to LGBT people – the Christian Legal Centre and Christian Concern for Our Nation; they were described as 'fabulously well organised'.

## Uganda Anti-homosexuality Bill 2009

The Bill had just been published when the previous newsletter went to press. Changing Attitude and Inclusive Church had written to the Archbishops of Canterbury, York, Uganda as well as bishops with links in Uganda. The Archbishop of York eventually commented on the Bill on Radio 4 on 24 December. He said: "I'm opposed to the death sentence. I'm also not happy when you describe people in the kind of language you find in this private member's bill." This was not the total condemnation of the Bill that we believe Lambeth I.10 and Dromantine require.

The Archbishop of Canterbury was quick to question the election of Mary Glasspool as a bishop in Los Angeles but had not by then made any comment about Uganda. CA supporters were angry and Ruth Gledhill published an interview with Colin Coward in the Times which was critical of the Archbishop. When Archbishop Rowan finally gave an interview to the Daily Telegraph he issued a strong condemnation, saying "Overall, the proposed legislation is of shocking severity, and I can't see how it could be supported by any Anglican who is committed to what the Communion has said in recent decades". He added that "Apart from invoking the death penalty, it makes pastoral care impossible – it seeks to turn pastors into informers". At General Synod he expressed repugnance at the infamous legislation.

The Church of Uganda didn't comment until 10 February. The position statement is cleverly worded; it does not explicitly state opposition to the Bill but recommends the introduction of a completely new Bill that would amend the present Penal Code. If the Bahati Bill is passed, the Church of Uganda will be on record as not having supported it. If the Bill fails to pass, will there be any traction behind the proposal to amend existing legislation? It would effectively kick the whole process into the long grass.

International opposition to the Bill has been intense and has put the President and Government under pressure to distance themselves from the Bill. A Million-Man March planned by Pastor Martin Ssempe for Ash Wednesday was banned at the last minute. Instead, the pastor showed gay pornographic slides in the evening to a Pentecostal meeting.

The outcome of the Bill is still uncertain, a significant change from expectations when it was first published. Changing Attitude has contributed very effectively to the campaign against the Bill. It is significant for us because it shows that the Church of Uganda finds it difficult oppose such legislation as contrary to Lambeth I.10 and Windsor. This has been an educational opportunity and many conversations have taken place between English and Ugandan Anglican leaders.

It is still shocking to us that a Bill proposing the death penalty for gay men and imprisonment for family and friends could have been tabled and received so much support from Christians in Uganda. At the same time the process has opened opportunities for dialogue and education. Reports of the Bill's progress can be found on the CA blog <http://changingattitude-england.blogspot.com/>

Judith Ngunjiri - a Ugandan lesbian activist



A demonstration outside Uganda House in London



## A gay wedding in Uganda

Gug, the gay Ugandan, reported that a Gay Wedding took place in Uganda one Saturday in December. Two gay guys, two kuchus wanted to celebrate their love, and they did it in full awareness of the Bill in parliament and the current climate of hostility, homophobia, and violence being cultivated in Uganda.

The couple came out to their parents, an amazing thing in itself because it never, ever happens for most kuchus. It is too dangerous and courts the risk of being thrown out of the tribe and losing everything. With their parents' permission the couple planned their wedding despite all the impediments, fears, and the risks. Traditionally the whole community fundraises for the couple but this gay couple couldn't risk that so they raised the money on their own. They informed a few other kuchus who joined wholeheartedly in the preparations – they are unfailingly good in the party organising business. The secret was closely guarded but personal invitations were delivered face-to-face a week before the wedding.



Gug and his partner assumed that they had been invited to a heterosexual wedding ceremony - the prospective groom didn't bother to tell them that this was going to be different. The wedding took place in an enclosed compound which was secured by two armed policemen at the gate. The ceremony started on time. It was long, with lots of gift-giving, hyperbole, and laughter. The grooms were not visibly present. It is an elaborate ritual of give and take, laughter, noise, story telling, introductions, with a master of ceremony on both sides whose job is to make it as lively and interesting as possible, each competing to outdo the other.

It is not until the end that the 'shy' bride is brought out of the house and that's when gug's partner realised that it was a groom introducing a groom - a gay introduction ceremony. The secret had been so well kept that a number of people didn't know. Gug's partner's anxiety levels shot into the stratosphere! People were peeping through the fence and the secret was out. A crowd gathered and the policemen were overwhelmed.

They wanted to know what was happening inside the compound. The rumours were too tantalising and the music and atmosphere of gaiety too tempting.

The kuchus started sneaking out, one by one, leaving the food and drink on the tables. They feared being photographed in all their finery, photos which would be damning if published in the local tabloids. Many decided to disguise the fact that they had been at the wedding, taking off their kanzus, mingling with the crowd and slipping away.

It was, says gug, pure madness, absolute, sweet madness, to have such a ceremony in Uganda at this moment. No amount of security could keep such an event secret. The punishment for such a 'gay marriage' in the Bahati/Benson Anti-Homosexuality Bill is life imprisonment for the happy couple and three years in prison for those who participated in the ceremony if they fail to reveal the marriage to police. That's if they haven't already been lynched by the enraged crowd.



## Trans update

It is heartening that Christian Trans people are turning to Changing Attitude for advice and support and that we are able to offer information to individuals as well as to bishops and clergy.

Two recent requests from someone who was about to transition another from a cross-dresser, neatly shared the work between Elaine Sommers, and myself, since I tend to focus on issues facing transsexual people, especially those who undergo gender reassignment, whereas Elaine's remit is transgender people who cross-dress rather than transition.

To have this range of emphases among the Trustees for Trans people adds breadth to Changing Attitude England as an LGBT campaigning organisation and I have written before about the distinction between transsexual people and transgender people. It is a pity, therefore, that the members of the House of Lords were not helped to appreciate these differences during the reading of the Equality Bill. In some ways this is not surprising. Stakeholders and campaigners, rightly I think, had hoped that that the Bill's protections would include Transgender people who cross-dress as well as Transsexual people who 'intend to undergo, are undergoing, or have undergone gender re-assignment'. However, the government made it very clear, during the Lord's debate, that the provisions of this section of the Equality Bill relate exclusively to gender reassignment, thus confirming that the Bill was drafted to codify and consolidate existing legislation rather than to extend it.

One of the surprise amendments came from the Bishop of Chester, Peter Forster, who sought reassurance that those intending to undergo 'gender reassignment' were under medical supervision. Known as a 'probing' amendment - a highly appropriate description for this somewhat unexpected appeal to the medical model of the human person - the Bishop of Chichester (in the Bishop of Chester's absence) was happy to withdraw it, once it became clear that the legislation's provisions would be limited to those who transition permanently.

Less welcome was the bishops' determination to extend the conscientious exemption to officiating at the marriage of someone who had undergone gender reassignment beyond the Church of England and the Church in Wales to clergy of other denominations. (No one thought to mention the corresponding right of couples in England to marry in their parish church – or a church with which they have strong links - though this is enshrined in law). And yet, at an earlier stage in the debate, even though he admitted that the House of Bishops were divided over the subject of gender reassignment, it was somewhat surprising, but encouraging, to learn that the Bishop of Chester might be prepared to consider ordaining, or officiating at the marriage of, someone who has transitioned. That seemed like a huge concession - the sign, perhaps, of a conversation waiting to begin.

*Tina (Christina) Beardsley*

## Bisexual news

Last year, Jeremy Timm attended the BiCon annual conference on behalf of Changing Attitude to make connections with bisexual networks. This year's conference will be held in association with BiReCon on 26th August 2010 at the University of East London.

The conference aims to: bring together international research on bisexuality, showcase UK research, activism, and policy, and build bridges between the bisexual community and the wider world. The conference organisers are inviting contributions from a wide range of organisations and individuals. A number of prominent people will be presenting, including Jonathan Alexander (Journal of Bisexuality), Robyn Ochs (Bisexual Resources Centre), Steven Angelides (author of 'A History of Bisexuality'), and Serena Anderlini D'Onofrio (author of 'Gai and the New Politics of Love').

During the day there will be opportunities to explore issues affecting bisexual people, hear about research on bisexuality, discuss ways in to better work with and for bisexual people, and take part in workshops.

To find out more, visit: [www.bicon2010.org.uk](http://www.bicon2010.org.uk) or, for information on BiUK, visit [www.biuk.org](http://www.biuk.org). If a bisexual supporter of Changing Attitude would like to represent us at the conference please contact Jeremy on [JCTimm@aol.com](mailto:JCTimm@aol.com) or Colin Coward.

## General Synod approves pension parity for clergy in Civil Partnerships

At the conclusion of an extremely good debate in which every speaker voiced unprecedented approval for pension equality, in a vote by Houses, Synod approved Mark Bratton's motion: "That this Synod request the Archbishops' Council and the Church of England Pensions Board to bring forward changes to the rules governing the clergy pension scheme in order to go beyond the requirements of the Civil Partnership Act 2004 and provide for pension benefits to be paid to the surviving civil partners of deceased clergy on the same basis as they are currently paid to surviving spouses." The voting figures showed overwhelming support for the motion.

Amendments had been tabled by the Bishop of Ripon and Leeds and by Philip Giddings. The amendment from Ripon and Leeds would have offered hardship grants rather than pension equality and from Philip Giddings, have extended equality to any qualifying relative living as a member of the deceased's household for more than five years. Both amendments were lost

Giles Goddard was called first in the debate and in a confident maiden speech, said that the issue is about justice, generosity, and care. Stephen Coles declared that he had a strong interest at the beginning of his speech and John Saxbee, Bishop of Lincoln, added strong support.

The result was not what I expected and I was rather astonished. In the period since the gay Tuesday debates two years ago, Synod seems to have changed its attitude even more radically in accepting that there are basic issues of justice affecting lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people - this, despite the bishops voting against the Equality Bill amendment in the Lords.

The core issues of equality and inclusion still have to be faced – real quality for LGBT clergy and lay ministers and the celebration of Civil Partnerships in church – but our church is learning and changing. There was a stronger recognition of the reality of LGBT lives and ministries in our Church at Synod.

Colin Coward



## Receiving Power

### - The International Interdenominational Conference of LGBT Christians, Moscow

An International Interdenominational Conference of LGBT Christians took place in Moscow on 21-22 November. Twenty-six people from Russia, Moldova, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, Estonia, Belarus, Ukraine, United Kingdom, Romania, and Norway took part in the conference representing Orthodox, Catholics, Metropolitan Community Church, Lutherans, Baptists, Pentecostals, Adventists, Quakers, and Jehovah's Witnesses.

The conference started with a prayer for all LGBT Christians who have found themselves at a spiritual crossroads and are forced to remain in the closet, struggling with accepting oneself as God created them and unable, for whatever reason, to come out within Churches and communities in which they live.

Participants shared stories which are significant to them, like becoming aware of being gay and reconciling that fact with one's own faith. A narrative approach – one of the new techniques of therapeutic work – had been chosen for this session to allow the participants to learn whether these kinds of simple techniques can be used with LGBT people to create an open and friendly environment.

Participants discussed the nature of same-sex partnerships and their dynamic in the light of Christian faith - different views, sometimes opposing, were expressed.

The second day of the conference started with a liturgical celebration led by an Orthodox priest, Maxim Bratukhin, from Kyrgyzstan and a Lutheran priest, Gard Sandaker-Nielsen, from Norway.

The conference looked at Christianity, civil activity, and human rights giving an opportunity to discuss issues of civil responsibility of LGBT Christians as members of both the LGBT and Christian communities. In the concluding session support for LGBT Christians in the countries of the former Soviet Union and practical methods of work with LGBT Christians and faith communities were discussed.

One participant reflected on the conference:

We surely had an important experience in Moscow. It was great to meet people from several countries in Eastern Europe and share experiences and thoughts about being LGBT and Christian.



For me, the most memorable time of the weekend, was the Eucharist celebration and worshipping on Sunday. There, in the middle of Moscow, we could be ourselves with our struggle, hope, doubt, faith, and sexuality, and together receive Christ. I have seldom felt such unity, and that gives me hope both for our community and for the church.

I don't think there are so many new things to do. We need to support each other and help us believe in ourselves.



## European Forum of Lesbian and Gay Christian Groups

### Annual Conference 2010

Barcelona, Catalonia, Spain

24-27 June 2010

with a pre-conference on 23 June 2010

Organising group, ACGIL

(Associació Cristiana de Gais i Lesbianes de Catalunya)

Further information and booking form can be found at

<http://www.acgil.org/forum/?idioma=en>

If any supporter would like to represent Changing Attitude at the Forum, please contact Colin Coward.



## Indian Theological Roundtable on churches' response to human sexuality

Bishops, church leaders, theological educators, research scholars, professional counsellors, lawyers, and activists with different sexual orientations met at a Theological Roundtable on the Churches' Response to Human Sexuality from 5 to 6 December in Kolkata. After several brainstorming discussions and sessions on biblical, theological, ministerial, ecclesiastical, and legal perspectives they sent a remarkable message on human sexuality to all Christian communities in India.

The participants recognised that there are people with different sexual orientations and that everyone is created in the image of God irrespective of sexual orientation thus making it imperative to reject systemic and personal attitudes of homophobia and discrimination against sexual minorities. The group believes that the church is called to become a community reaching out to people who are stigmatised and demonised; to be a listening community to understand pains, desires, and hopes. The group appealed to Christian communities to sojourn with people of minority sexuality and their families without prejudice and discrimination and to provide ministries of love, compassionate care, and justice.

The conference requested the National Council of Churches in India to initiate an in-depth theological study on human sexuality for the better discernment of God's purpose involving a deeper engagement with the Bible, traditions, and other disciplines such as social theories, psychology, and medical science; this should be an inclusive process where people with different sexual orientations can learn from each other and contribute without prejudice or fear. Also there was a request to the theological fraternities in India to help this process through integrating issues related to human sexuality into the process of theological and ministerial formation.

## Los Angeles elects partnered lesbian Mary Glasspool as bishop suffragan



In December 2009 the Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles elected the Rev. Canon Mary Glasspool to the office of bishop suffragan. Mary Glasspool is the first openly-partnered lesbian to be elected a bishop in the Episcopal Church. Her father was also an Episcopal priest. She is a native of Staten Island, N.Y., and was ordained twenty-seven years ago. Becki Sander, her partner of nineteen years, holds a doctorate in social work.

Majority consent to her election by the bishops and standing committees of the Episcopal Church's other 108 dioceses must be received prior to the ordination to the episcopate which is planned for May 15.

Bishop Jon Bruno said that Mary Glasspool and her partner are an example of loving service and ministry and, in response to a reporter's question, acknowledged rumors of a "concerted effort not to give consent" because she is openly homosexual. He reminded the Episcopal Church and the House of Bishops that they need to be conscientious about respecting the canons of the church and the baptismal covenant to respect the dignity of every human being. "To not consent in this country out of fear of the reaction elsewhere in the Anglican Communion is to capitulate to titular heads."

As Forward Thinking went to press, we understood that a majority of consents in favour were likely to be received.

## Launch of Changing Attitude Sussex

Around seventy people attended the inaugural meeting of Changing Attitude Sussex which took place on a freezing cold night on Monday 8th February in Brighton.

The meeting was addressed by the Director of Changing Attitude, The Rev'd Colin Coward, who urged those present to challenge any hostility gay people might face in local churches. There then followed a lively discussion about the situation of LGBT people and clergy in the Diocese of Chichester. The local group, whose area covers the counties of East and West Sussex, will, initially, be campaigning to get churches to register officially with Changing Attitude as 'Open and Welcoming' to LGBT people. The group also intends to compile a 'Which Church?' dossier dividing churches into four categories from 'open and welcoming' to 'judgemental and rejecting'.

Provisional group convenor, Keith Sharpe, said: *'as the British Social Attitudes Survey recently showed, attitudes to same-sex relationships have become much more liberal. In the Church however things are getting worse not better. Church leaders increasingly make overt homophobic statements which foster hatred and bigotry and demonise LGBT people. It is very damaging for people's mental health to find themselves in a judgemental and rejecting church and we hope that our 'Which Church?' dossier will give them the information they need to make an informed choice. We also hope the publicity surrounding the dossier will encourage more churches to reconsider their position and become open and welcoming.'*

The next meeting of Changing Attitude Sussex will be on Monday 12th April at the Chapel Royal, North Street, Brighton, at 8.00pm, when the speaker will be Jeremy Marks, Director of Courage UK, an organisation which used to 'cure' gay people of their homosexuality but now affirms gay identity as a blessing from God. Everybody is welcome.

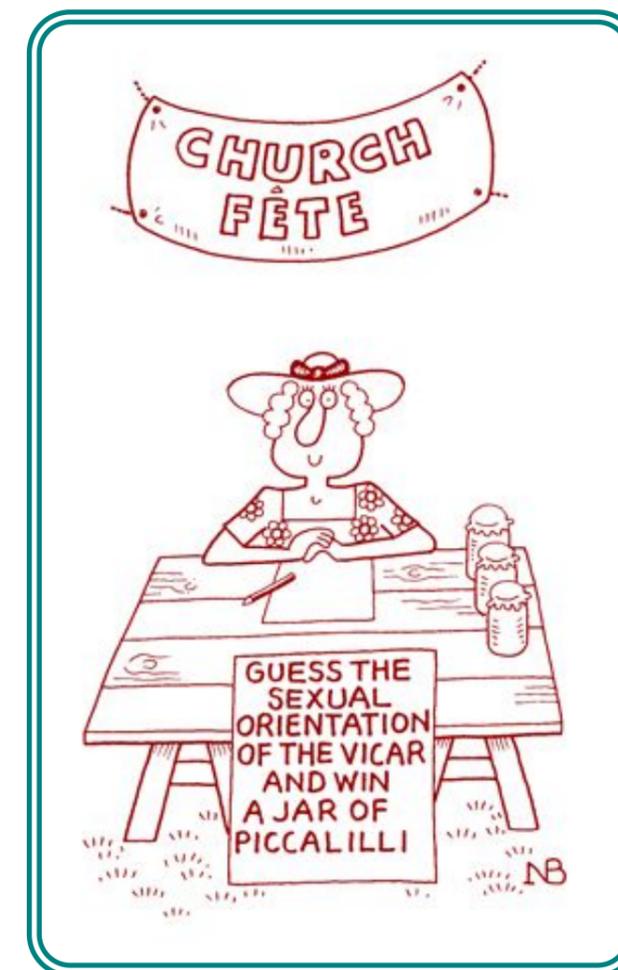
For further information please contact keith @changingattitudesussex.com or visit changingattitudesussex.com.



## Newcastle and Durham Group report

The Revd Bar Nash-Williams, the Convenor of the NE Group of Changing Attitude, recently had a session with the Bishop of Newcastle in which she raised the matter of re-booting the Listening Process. The bishop was very supportive and is happy for Changing Attitude to produce some material (plays, discussion material, etc) for use in the diocese.

Bar and a small group are now planning a day at Alnmouth Priory and are awaiting confirmation of a date from the Prior. This will provide an opportunity for people to meet and share their stories. In the afternoon workshops will be held to facilitate the process of producing material.



# Sexuality and Human Flourishing – A Day Conference

A report by the Rev'd. Clare Herbert, Programme Director of Inclusive Church

For me the word “inclusive” means reaching out to all – all parts of our church and world and all parts of me. The day conference of February 6th was trying to create a safe and holy space in which all sorts of people from within and beyond the Church of England could speak to each other about the discovery of God within their sexual identity and experience. In addition each of us was challenged to stretch beyond our “normal” way of seeing ourselves to ask whether there might not be whole spectra of experience and identity which we do not uncover for fear of disapproval and rejection.

Arnold Browne (1) led the day with a Bible Study on Paul. He demonstrated how Paul had been instrumental in holding together Christians of vastly different views in one emerging Church. Paul urged our submitting all things, including our sharp disagreement with our neighbour, to the overarching love of Christ as Paul did himself – remaining unmarried while other apostles married, calling uncircumcised gentiles to Christ while others adhered to Jewish practice, holding his own firm identity and opinions while permitting others to adhere to their own.

In her talk Alison Webster (2) emphasised two points from her own experience which had included an outward shift from being lesbian to being married while she herself resisted categorising herself as either. She suggested that the categories into which we fit people – gay, straight, bisexual, transgendered, married, single, partnered – dictate the power people feel they have in our church and society and therefore deserve close scrutiny by Christians. She suggested there is a broad hinterland of relationships in all our lives less easily categorised so mistakenly ignored and devalued.

The morning's speakers argued for a diversity of sexual experience which we ignore in the scriptures and in ourselves and hinted too that “the who” we allow to speak for ourselves as the church, and “the how” we speak – by lectures, sermons, formal prayers, debates – are covering instead of unearthing the energy of God's connection with us in terms of our sexuality and human flourishing. How might the church facilitate a wider discussion of these issues, a listening process for us all? A panel of speakers, sensitively chaired by Brian Thorne (3)



took us to the heart of the matter: that the church may be profoundly supportive of people grappling with difficult issues of human sexuality and identity and may also be destructive of self-esteem. Transgendered, gay, lesbian, and heterosexual people, all at this stage of their lives in successful partnerships and marriages, gave moving accounts of being nurtured or in the wilderness in relation to church at different stages of their lives.

Participants met throughout the day to ask what resources the church might provide to facilitate rather than obstruct our flourishing as sexual human beings. Some suggested answers were these:

- Bible Study resources to help us move beyond over-simplistic interpretations of scripture.
- Spaces to extend the listening process to the involvement of us all so that questions of faith and sexual identity are not laid simply at the door of LGBT Christians.
- Ways of doing theology together so that we become more confident of our own voice.
- Protection and support for LGBT ordinands and ministers in post.

As a postscript, one of the most enjoyable features of the day was the working together of the Centre for the Study of Christianity and Sexuality, with two parish churches, a counselling centre, and member groups, including Inclusive Church, from the LGBT Anglican Coalition – in the struggle to be both

“real” and “Christian” we need all the help we can get. The temptation to be unreal – the punishment of honesty and the reward of secrecy – is alive and kicking in the church.

1. Arnold Browne, the former Dean of Trinity College Cambridge, has a special interest in the use and abuse of the Bible and in counselling psychology. He has contributed chapters to *Sex and the Christian Tradition* (ed. Jeremy Morris) and to *An Acceptable Sacrifice? Homosexuality and the Church* (eds. Duncan Dormer and Jeremy Morris)

2. Alison Webster is Social Responsibility Adviser for the Anglican Diocese of Oxford, and has a long-standing interest in identity issues, particularly gender, race, sexuality, and disability. She is the author of *Wellbeing* (SCM 2002) and *You are Mine* (SPCK 2009), an in-depth study of the formation of identity.

3. Brian Thorne is Emeritus Professor of the University of East Anglia and known internationally as a person-centred therapist and writer. He is a Lay Canon of Norwich and Professional Fellow in Residence at the Norwich Centre. His books include “*Infinitely Beloved*”, “*Behold the Man*”, and “*the Mystical Power of Person Centred Therapy*”. The morning talks may be found on the Inclusive Church Website [www.inclusivechurch2.net](http://www.inclusivechurch2.net)



## The Revd Stephen Barton and members of Changing Attitude Birmingham reflect on the day, calling it ‘A Model Conference’:

The title of the conference was reflected in the feelings of many at the end of the day: Sexuality and Human Flourishing. Six hours in church in conversation with such a wonderful variety of people about so many things that are often excluded from church-talk; it felt like we were flourishing.

Both Arnold and Alison in their keynote speeches acknowledged the creative and energising power of our sexuality as a key element in our relationships to one another and to God.

Above all, throughout the day there was a sense of the goodness of God's creation and a hope for the redemption of the church which both feeds us and also mistreats us. It was so good to hear of a congregation, at present in “interregnum”, that would not think of appointing a new vicar unless she or he was totally in support of the parish's inclusive policies. And it was wonderful to see people come to church in couples, who would often hesitate to do so, and find in one another a welcome and encouragement. Striking, too, was the level of maturity of listening and debate - sadly often missing in polarised and defensive church discussions of sexuality - as we attended to the complexity, fluidity, and uniqueness of sexuality in each person's life. This day was a model, not only in its content, but also in its process, of the kind of listening and sharing that could and should characterise conversation within the church around any of the issues about which Christians disagree.