

Lutheran Church of Australia and Uniting Church in Australia National Dialogue

Summary and Outcome of Discussion on Interpretation of Scripture

1. Preamble

The dialogue between the UCA and the LCA has its origins in a preliminary meeting on 14 October 1978, in which it was proposed that the general aim of the dialogue was 'to establish pulpit and altar fellowship between the churches'. To this end a number of agreed statements were produced and approved by our two churches. However, when the general aim did not appear to be coming any closer to realisation there was a three year break in meetings (1994-1997). Toward the end of this time the two churches agreed that the dialogue be re-established on a different basis with more emphasis on the practical life of our churches at a local level. At the inaugural meeting of the new dialogue teams in Horsham in 1997, the following resolution was passed:

We commit ourselves within this dialogue to appropriate theological reflection, with a view to appropriate outcomes for our churches (Minutes of Meeting, 8-9 May 1997).

The renewed dialogue began with a service of worship in which the members dedicated themselves to the task to which they were committed. The service included a Doxological Affirmation which, with some revision over time, has been a basic statement for the dialogue. Several statements were produced over the following years; for example on eschatology, realised eschatology (in preparation for the new millennium) and Law and Gospel. At the conclusion of the discussion on Law and Gospel, the dialogue agreed to the following:

It is acknowledged that in the past both the Lutheran and Reformed traditions have been guilty of separating the church from the world and/or identifying the church with prevailing 'world views'. ... [T]he dialogue group resolved that it recognised that the Lutheran and Reformed traditions have had differing paradigms for understanding the dialectical relationship between church and world, creation and redemption, gospel and law. It is not possible theologically to integrate these traditions into a unitary view, but it is recognised and agreed that both in their own way attempt to distinguish but not separate the church and the world, creation and redemption, for the purposes of safeguarding the integrity of the Gospel of grace and God's will to renew creation. (Mins: April 21-23, 2002)

Also, to facilitate possible co-operation by congregations of the two churches, a number of documents were prepared to assist negotiations and to give a sound basis for such co-operation. These documents are now available in our respective church offices.

Meanwhile, the issue of the ordination of persons in same-sex relationships arose in the UCA. After a period of consultation, study and deliberation within the councils of the church, the issue came before the 2003 Assembly. The members of Assembly chose not to make a decision for or against the ordination of persons in same-sex relationships but reaffirmed the responsibility of presbyteries in this matter. The presbytery is the council of the UCA responsible for the ordination and pastoral care of ministers. Decisions on who is to be ordained are the responsibility of the presbytery and are taken on a case by case basis. This raised the question for the LCA whether it could continue to be in dialogue with a church that did not seem to prohibit individual presbyteries from ordaining persons in a same-sex relationship. However, it decided to continue in dialogue but asked that the dialogue take up the topic of the interpretation of scripture as a matter of urgency.

The LCA understands the key texts in the homosexuality debate to prohibit all homosexual activity of any kind. It must be understood that the LCA is only now beginning church-wide debate on the topic of homosexuality. The Commission on Social and Bio-ethical Questions (CSBQ) has been asked to review and redraft the LCA's 1975 statement on homosexuality, with special focus on the pastoral care of homosexual persons, and the Commission on Theology and Inter-Church Relations (CTICR) has been asked to undertake a thorough biblical and theological study of human sexuality, generally, and homosexuality in particular.

Our dialogue is held in the context of worship. It was therefore appropriate that the first meeting after the Assembly decision was held at the Community of the Transfiguration in Geelong, Victoria. The dialogue had the support of prayer and liturgy from the members of the community. The Baptist Union of Victoria sent a letter assuring members of prayers and support in the stresses following the UCA Assembly decision. The letter was signed by all the superintendents of the Baptist Church in Victoria and contained the significant sentence, 'We hope ... that your mutual understanding of each other will continue to deepen'. Such understanding is always at the heart of dialogue and at the centre of discussions on church relationships, co-operation and unity.

Conscious of such encouragement, and knowing that the dialogue had the full support of our two churches, members were greatly helped in that first meeting. Of necessity, much of the time of the meeting was taken up with explaining the position of each of our churches in relation to the Assembly decision, drawing on the mutual trust among members developed over the years of meeting and consideration of matters vital to our relationship as part of the body of Christ. This discussion clarified some of our differences and identified points of agreement. The outcome was a recognition that in-depth discussion of the interpretation of scripture—and related hermeneutical issues—would be of great importance for the developing relationship between our two churches.

2. Process

The discussion in Geelong concluded with a request to the Adelaide members of the dialogue to identify congruent areas in the approach to scripture and identify items on which the dialogue must work. A list of hermeneutical issues for both our churches was compiled, and relevant papers were prepared.

These papers, which had a particular emphasis on hermeneutical questions, were discussed along with other background papers both from LCA and UCA sources. While it was recognised that there is value in attending to the different perspectives on the Bible that are apparent in all denominations, the discussion revealed significant agreement between our churches on hermeneutical issues. Of course, emphasis is put on different places, but the value of doing biblical work in community cannot be stressed too highly. It is easy to marginalise certain perspectives, but humility before the text and respect for the fellow believer demand that we listen attentively even to those voices that radically contradict our own interpretations. Rather than impose our views, we can be confident that in the cut and thrust of ecclesiastical debate the will of God will prevail.

It was then decided that the dialogue should demonstrate the way in which the hermeneutical approaches of the two churches influence the exegetical process and its outcomes. This was done by members exegeting the texts most frequently cited in the debate on human sexuality, that is, Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, Romans 1:18–32, 1 Corinthians 6:9–11, Galatians 3:28 and 1 Timothy 1:8–11. The papers presented were discussed in detail over the next two meetings to show the way in which the hermeneutics of each church influenced particular exegetical outcomes.

Members recognised that texts may be used by the church politically as instruments of power to exclude minorities and to privilege the status quo. Also, the church's interpretative moves can be uncritically influenced by contemporary culture and personal agenda.

Since God has revealed God's own self in history at a particular time and place, the scriptures also reflect the history and culture of their times. By the same token, every interpretation of scripture is culture-specific since we bring to the text our presuppositions and cultural biases which in turn need to be critiqued by the text. This means that there is no such thing as an objective interpreter, or exegesis without presuppositions. Therefore, the need to identify our own cultural and ideological pre-commitments is as critical as the need to identify cultural factors in the scriptures themselves.

We acknowledge the variety of hermeneutical approaches and exegetical conclusions within our respective churches that are not necessarily represented in this document. Here we present the ways in which members of the dialogue have worked within the ethos of their respective churches.

3. Interpretation of Scripture

3.1 Lutheran Church of Australia

The LCA is committed to the authority of the scriptures but at the same time acknowledges that scripture needs to be interpreted. In its understanding of the authority of the scriptures the LCA is guided by two principles: (1) the scriptures are authoritative because they are the inspired and infallible word of God, and (2) the scriptures are authoritative because they bear witness to Christ who is the centre and fulfilment of scripture. These two principles are not to be played off against each other but are to be held in tension.

The LCA identifies God's word with scripture and also holds that all of scripture bears witness to Christ, the living word. Therefore, the LCA holds that the Bible not only *contains* God's word but *is* God's word. However, the crucial question is whether a particular statement in scripture is still authoritative for the church today, for not everything in the Bible applies to us. Luther says in his tract on how Christians should regard Moses (1525), that 'what God says in scripture may well be the word of God, but the important question is, is it word of God for me?' (LW 35:170f).

The LCA acknowledges that in any given context the word of God can be any one of three things:

- the living word (Christ)
- the written word (Bible)
- the proclaimed word (gospel)

Although the LCA identifies the word of God with scripture, it also holds that the word of God is first and foremost Christ, the living word. Lutheranism has always emphasised that the written word of God can never be separated from the word that the church proclaims, which is ultimately Christ and his gift of forgiveness and reconciliation.

The main hermeneutical principles that guide the LCA's interpretative work are as follows:

- scripture is the only source and norm of doctrine
- Christ and the gospel are the heart of scripture
- the overall message of scripture as law and gospel is clear, even though there are some passages that are difficult to interpret
- a proper distinction must be maintained between law and gospel
- unclear or obscure passages should be interpreted in the light of clear passages (scripture interprets scripture)

When gaps and silences become evident in biblical texts, as they did in the course of our exegetical studies, Lutherans tend to fill in these gaps according to the rule of faith and the tradition of the church. This is because they hold that

while scripture challenges the church it is only the church that can properly interpret the scriptures.

3.2 Uniting Church in Australia

In the Basis of Union¹ the Uniting Church

acknowledges that the Church has received the books of the Old and New Testaments as unique prophetic and apostolic testimony, in which it hears the Word of God and by which its faith and obedience are nourished and regulated. When the Church preaches Jesus Christ, its message is controlled by the biblical witnesses. The Word of God on whom salvation depends is to be heard and known from Scripture appropriated in the worshipping and witnessing life of the Church (paragraph 5).

The Basis of Union is unequivocal about the primary authority of the Bible in the church's contemporary teaching and preaching. It mentions several other important sources that guide us in the delicate task of interpreting the Bible's witness. John Wesley advised that Christian teaching needed to be guided by four sources: scripture, tradition, experience and reason—the so-called Wesleyan Quadrilateral.

Furthermore, in the Basis of Union, the UCA 'acknowledges that God has never left the church without faithful and scholarly interpreters of Scripture, or without those who have reflected deeply upon, and acted trustingly in obedience to, God's living Word' (paragraph 11).

The Word of God is the living, present Lord of the church, Jesus Christ, rather than words on a page. Furthermore, the Basis of Union regards interpreting the Bible as a corporate duty connecting believer to believer, council to council, the Uniting Church to other churches, the present generation to past generations. It is not quick or simple, and it is not unambiguous. It requires experts and other church members who in response to the gospel study and work together on the interpretation of biblical texts. It is not without its struggle and pain. But it is the way God deals with us, requiring us to be attentive and respectful of one another as we grow together into Christ's body.

The presence of the living Lord, as known through Scripture and the church, provides the context within which particular texts are to be understood. In the New Testament itself, Jesus challenged the Pharisees when they wanted to apply the law to him and his disciples' behaviour of picking corn on the Sabbath (Matt 12:1-8). In this instance Jesus spoke a new word into a situation even when it contradicted a part of the scriptures. This raised the question of whether the words of Jesus are authoritative for all time. If we look at Jesus' condemnation of remarriage after divorce in Mark 10:11–12, it is quite specific

¹ The Basis of Union is the statement of the UCA's understanding of Christ, scriptures, tradition and the church's life and witness.

and would seem to apply clearly for ever. However, the church marries divorced people and the rationale for this direct opposition to the scripture is the understanding that God offers forgiveness for those who admit there has been a breakdown in the relationship and seek a new beginning based on the grace and love of God. In other words, the gospel supersedes these particular words of Jesus in scripture. This decision to allow divorced people to remarry in the church is not individual resolution, but has been reached through the wisdom of the councils of the United Church, through the working of the Holy Spirit, and taking account of the traditions of the church. Therefore, UCA ministers officiate at weddings where one or both of the marriage parties have been divorced.

4. Exegesis of texts

4.1 Points made by UCA members

Members of the UCA team each took a designated text and did a close reading using various exegetical tools. The wider context of each text was taken into consideration because it is crucial to see how the text is part of the wider theological message of the writer. Failing to take seriously its part in the wider context can lead to eisegesis. Furthermore, we were aware that the world in which the texts were formed was very different from the world in which we live.

A brief comment is included from each of the exegetical papers offered by members of the UCA team.

It was noted that the commands in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 are tied to the requirement for the people to keep clean and holy. These commands are dependent on the need and desire to be separate from the surrounding nations. The commands against homosexual acts do not refer to women, suggesting that these prohibitions are not universal.

In 1 Timothy 1:8–11, the focus is on those who were subject to the law. A list of these people is given in verses 9–11 and includes ‘sodomites’ (NRSV), a word used in only one other place in the New Testament (1 Cor 6:9). There appears here to be a recollection of the commands against homosexual acts as in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 in which the verb used means ‘to sleep with’ to indicate proscribed sexual activity.

The situation which Paul describes in Romans 1:18–32 appears to be that of heterosexual people who have made their own bodies their idols and have given themselves to the pursuit of individual gratification, and have sought excitements by experimenting with same-sex relations. While this clearly refers to people who are ‘consumed with passion’, it is not clear that it refers to people who are homosexual in orientation and commit themselves both to Christ and to their partner. The reference to ‘consumed (or inflamed) with passion’ implies a promiscuous form of homosexuality. The reference to ‘exchanging the natural’ may refer to people in otherwise heterosexual relationships who are unfaithful.

Here Paul is talking in general terms and not about individual circumstances. There is certainly doubt that Paul knew or was speaking of people in stable homosexual relationships.

In interpreting this passage, and any other, we have to be mindful of the context that the words addressed, *and* the context in which they are now read. Our understanding of sexuality today is different from that of the first and second centuries of the Common Era, and, therefore, the words need to be heard and interpreted in this different context.

4.2 Points made by LCA members

The texts prohibiting homosexual behaviour (Lev 18:22; 20:13; Rom 1:26,27; 1 Cor 6:9–11; 1 Tim 1:8–11) presuppose the Bible's teaching on marriage as an essential component of God's creation. Made in the image of God, humanity is defined in terms of male and female, who are charged to be fruitful and multiply (Gen 1:26–28). The polarity of male and female is built into the created order. The male and the female constitute the two halves of the human sexual whole. Their union in marriage receives the blessing of God. This is not to say that humans can only be made whole through marriage.

Humanity at large is the intended reader of the mandates in Leviticus 18, suggested by the Hebrew word for humanity (*hā'ādām*) in verse 5. Natural law is in view, applicable among the nations, not simply within Israel.

The prohibition of homosexual behaviour appears in the context of a series of moral vices: incest, adultery, child sacrifice and bestiality (Lev 20:7–26). Here they constitute an affront to the holiness of God and are not to be equated with the cultic prescriptions that Jesus abolishes.

Whatever the cause of the abhorrence in regard to the practice of homosexuality—the impossibility of offspring, uncleanness, alignment with the practices of the nations, breach of the shame–honour code of the ancient Near East—the prohibitions recur throughout the Bible.

The Bible warns against a judgmental spirit in these matters. When Jesus comes across those who would impose the harsh penalty of the law in connection with adultery, he exposes the woman's would-be executioners for their condemnatory attitude; but he does not overturn the law on adultery (John 8:1–11). In similar vein Paul speaks in the strongest terms against people who engage in various practices, including homosexuality, in Romans 1:18–32. He does so, however, in order to trap the proudly religious into condemning those who do such things and thereby condemn themselves out of their own mouths—ultimately as a means of demonstrating the universal guilt of humankind. But that in no way relativises the practices of which Paul speaks. They are prohibited by divine decree (Rom 1:32) and incur the wrath of God.

5. Issues arising from the discussion

5.1 Historical context

It is vital to study texts within their literary and historical contexts. This is done in order to understand what texts were saying to the people of the time about their relationship to God, and God's relationship to the world.

When Paul wrote to Corinth it was a busy port city, with all the associated social and moral problems. Those who became Christians in that environment had to struggle with the temptation to return to their old life. Paul's call to them was to move on from that, to become people who knew the love of God in Christ, and to share that selfless love along with the Christian community. He was strengthening them as they turned away from the old to the new culture.

It quickly became clear to dialogue members that the texts being studied did not necessarily answer a number of questions that arose. It also became clear that we tended to draw on the hermeneutical principles of our respective churches to answer these questions, or, as we put it, to plug the gaps. Among the gaps that we discerned, three were most glaring.

First, what motivations lay behind the formulation of the law prohibiting homosexuality (Lev 18:22; 20:13)? The LCA members filled the gap by pointing to the Bible's creation theology, the holiness of God, the image of God, gender complementarity, and God's will for human procreation. The UCA members said they believed that the prohibition was concerned to protect Israelites from the threats of low fertility, sexual violence and the idolatrous practices of the nations.

Secondly, did the authors know of loving and faithful homosexual relationships? In particular were such unions common in the Greco-Roman world, and did Paul's condemnation include such relationships? For LCA members the fact that the texts are not explicit at this point is unimportant. It is a case of the part representing the whole. Whether abusive or loving, promiscuous or faithful, all homosexual activity is banned. The prohibition requires no motivation other than the will of God. On the other hand, this gap led UCA members to a degree of openness on the question of whether we should read these texts as instruction for those in committed homosexual relationships.

Thirdly, dialogue members wondered why the Leviticus texts referred only to male homosexuality, even though we agreed that the focus on male misbehaviour in these texts more generally was symptomatic of the patriarchy and androcentrism of the age. LCA members filled this gap by saying that all homosexual behaviour is implied by the ban on male homosexual behaviour. Furthermore, lesbianism is ruled out by Romans 1:26. For UCA members, the Leviticus texts were instances of heterosexual men behaving selfishly and

oppressively, given that the other sexual practices banned were adultery by men, incest by men and bestiality by men.

5.2 Current context

The context within which interpretation takes place needs to be identified. Twenty-first century knowledge of the world and the universe is different from that of the people of biblical times, as is knowledge of the human being. Science has given us an understanding of why and how people behave in the way they do, and the variations that are seen among people. These things need to be taken into consideration in the processes of interpreting scripture, not to manipulate what it has to say to us, but to enable scripture to speak clearly to the contemporary situation.

Two key questions arose in our discussions regarding revelation, scripture and interpretation. To what extent are we bound by the way texts have been interpreted in different situations in the history of the church? Is there an assumption that revelation can proceed only from scripture? These important questions go beyond the scope of this paper.

5.3 Pastoral considerations.

Our interpretation of scripture influences our dealing with homosexual people in pastoral care. Conversely our experiences in pastoral care can influence our interpretation of scripture. This highlights the role that experience plays in the interpretation of scripture and the formation of our theology.

5.3.1 Lutheran Church of Australia

The LCA rejoices that God's grace in Christ embraces all people. This grace is manifest in baptism which unites all believers with one another in union with Christ. Pastoral care is the ministry of grace that extends to individuals in their particular circumstances. It includes the call to righteous living to all Christians, including those who identify as homosexual.

Pastoral care in this area is left to the discretion of the individual pastor, particularly in relation to admission to the sacrament of Holy Communion. This pastoral care involves undertaking a journey towards understanding and obeying God's will for the individual. The pastoral care-giver will guide this journey, shaped by the awareness of a number of factors:

- the need for understanding, compassion and love
- the LCA's teaching on same sex relations
- the challenges of living a life of celibacy
- the social isolation and rejection faced by homosexuals in both church and society
- the impact on the individual's wider community, eg, family, friends and church
- the humility to acknowledge our shared brokenness

- the need for *all* people to hear the judgment of God against sin, the forgiveness of sin for Christ's sake, and the assurance of complete acceptance into the people of God

Pastoral care-givers find themselves on a journey also as a result of their interactions with homosexual Christians. Their experience can be formative as they revisit the scriptures, and as they learn the most appropriate ways of listening, speaking and giving care.

5.3.2 Uniting Church in Australia

The UCA has chosen not to condemn a homosexual person living in a committed relationship. Pastoral aspects have had an influence on its interpretation of scripture. It contextualises the specific texts, and views them in relation to the teaching of the Bible as a whole, especially the teaching about justice.

The only specific guideline from the UCA Assembly is that people with a same sex orientation should not be judged on the basis of the orientation but on the way it is expressed. The 1997 UCA Assembly Resolution (97.31.07) spoke about the importance of responsible sexual behaviour and practices which are neither exploitative nor demeaning and are expected of both heterosexual and homosexual people.

Some congregations have declared themselves to be 'Confessing Congregations' and will not accept practising homosexuals, even in a committed relationship. Other congregations are accepting of people in committed relationships. Because the UCA practises the open table for Holy Communion, it is unlikely that any person would be refused the elements at a service.

With regard to persons who offer themselves for ordination, the UCA has instructed presbyteries to judge their suitability on a case by case basis (see above, page 2). As a consequence, some presbyteries refuse to ordain homosexual people, but others go ahead.

The UCA is still working at these issues, and the present position should be seen as a stage rather than a conclusion.

5.4 Creation and the human condition

In discussion it was noted that texts dealing with homosexuality presuppose the Bible's teaching on creation, in particular the statement that humans, male and female, are made in the image of God and are charged to be fruitful and multiply. In this it was said that the polarity of male and female is part of the created order, blessed by God, and is essential to the fulfilling of God's charge. The prohibitions on homosexual practice recognise this important understanding of the creation of humans.

While this is the traditional position of the church, based on Genesis 1:26–28, many Christians, including those who oppose same-sex partnerships, believe that the church needs to explore afresh its understanding of God’s mandate to be fruitful and multiply in light of the emerging ecological crisis.

Both churches affirm that all people, including homosexuals and disabled people, are made in the image of God. Both churches distinguish between homosexual orientation and behaviour. Together they acknowledge that everyone finds their place along a spectrum of sexual orientation that includes varying degrees of homosexual orientation. Opinion is divided in both churches on the respective roles of nature and nurture in determining sexual orientation, and on the possibility and desirability of changes occurring. Whereas the LCA believes that the Bible prohibits homosexual behaviour, the UCA says it is not necessarily prohibited within loving covenantal relationships, and that all people, including homosexual people are made in the image of God (Gen 1:26), and that all people, including homosexual people, are a full reflection of the church of God.

5.5 The end and fulfilment of the law

5.5.1 Uniting Church in Australia

In discussing the phrase ‘Christ is the end (*telos*) of the law’ (Rom 10:4, and variations elsewhere), it was noted that ‘end’ can have either temporal (‘finish’) or teleological (‘goal’) interpretation, or shades of meaning in between. Important too is the understanding of the word ‘law’ in this context. Is the whole law meant, or some particular part or function of the law? This latter question is not answered directly by the text, so our interpretation is necessarily informed by our wider theology of law.

The texts were written in the context of significant argument as to what was to be required of Gentile believers. We can conclude that Christ has ‘fulfilled’ the law teleologically by observing and interpreting it as the Son of God, and temporally by ending the law’s function as a form of exclusion against Gentiles and against those who could not otherwise escape the law’s condemnation. The expectations held for Gentile believers remain the responsibility of the church, interpreting scripture. Guidance for such an approach may be provided by

- the apostolic decree of Acts 15:28,29 (minimal moral requirements to be imposed on gentile believers),
- Christ’s command to love God and one another, and
- the fact that the prohibition of homosexual practice is not found in the Decalogue or the gospels.

5.5.2 Lutheran Church of Australia

Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5-7) reaffirms the second table of the Decalogue and asserts most emphatically that he has not come to abolish the law but to fulfil it in its entirety (Matt 5:17-20). This applies in the case of divorce (Mark 10:2–12) and adultery (John 8:1–11), and by extension it applies also to

homosexual behaviour. In each case, Jesus reaffirms God's original plan for humankind: the complementarity of the sexes and the institution of marriage (Gen 2:21-24).

When Paul says that Christ is the 'end' (*telos*) of the law (Rom 10:4), he does not mean that Christ abolished the moral law of the Decalogue but rather that he is its goal and fulfilment. What Christ abolished was the ritual law that created division between Jews and Gentiles (Eph 2:15). So the moral law, which is the same as the natural law, continues to remain valid for the church. Paul himself maintains that he did not nullify the law by preaching faith in Christ but rather upheld the law (Rom 3:31). Christ, by his self-sacrifice as a sin offering and by the gift of the Holy Spirit, has actually accomplished everything that the law, with its ritual legislation, had required (Rom 8:3-4). Christians then are freed from the law's condemnation and at the same time are led by the Spirit to live in harmony with the law, not in sinful violation of it (Rom 6:1-14; 8:1-11; Gal 3:13-14; 5:16-24). Therefore, Christ is the end of the accusing law in the *conscience* for all who believe, because he has fulfilled the law for us through his perfect obedience to the Father's will.

Since Christ has fulfilled the commandments and yet did not abolish them, he invites us to take his 'easy' yoke, the yoke of obedience to the law, because his commandments are not burdensome (Matt 11:28-30). They can be summed up in his command to love one another (John 15:12). The apostle John also urges us to keep God's commandments (1 John 2:3,7,8; 3:22-24; 4:21; 5:2-3).

God makes his will known to us through the law and guides us by his commandments so that we can be sure that what we do pleases him (1 John 3:22). When the Spirit empowers us to walk in the way of God's commands, we can delight in them because the very law that is given us to keep is the law that Christ himself has fulfilled for us through his active and passive obedience.

6. Conclusion

All churches are finding that sexuality is a divisive issue. It is causing some people to change affiliation, and there are threats of schism, especially in the Uniting Church. Thus variations in the interpretation of scripture in relation to homosexuality come into conflict with Christ's prayer that the Church be one (John 17:21), and they raise a question in regard to the veracity of our biblical interpretation. Whatever course a church chooses to pursue, an important pastoral aspect is how to live in love and with grace when people differ greatly.

Both churches are committed to the authority of scripture, but our ways of interpreting scripture lead us to different conclusions in regard to the issue of homosexual relations.

It is essential that we attempt to come to an understanding that enables us to deal with our differences in ways that are constructive and productive. It is

tempting to marginalise certain perspectives, but humility before the text and respect for the fellow believer demand that we listen attentively even to those voices that contradict our own interpretations. Rather than impose our views, we can be confident that in dialogue the Holy Spirit will be present and lead us to the truth.

The dialogue has afforded its members great encouragement to enter into conversation with people who hold different positions from their own. We have heard one another and grown in understanding both of our own positions and the positions of others. We have developed greater empathy for those who differ from us. We gratefully acknowledge the opportunity to hold a frank and difficult discussion in an atmosphere unclouded by suspicion, fear and anger, and we look forward to continuing the journey.

Rev Dr Charles Biggs

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