

31 March 2012

To Whom it May Concern

As a Christian priest, I write to support moves to allow the recognition of same-sex relationships in law on the same basis as heterosexual marriage. I do believe that, at this juncture, care must be taken to recognise the conscience of those who think otherwise: specifically in allowing religious bodies the continuing right to determine their own decisions on marriage ceremonies. However I believe that the nation and its legislators should not be swayed by the small but noisy chorus of religious and other voices against recognition of same-sex relationships. Rather I believe that time will show that, for good religious reasons, as well as others, this development is to be welcomed.

My chief reasons for supporting change in the law arise from 25 years of Christian ministry, during 22 of which, though a happily married heterosexual man, I have been a member of the Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement. I also speak as one who can speak from within the Christian Church when many who share my views do not feel able to do so for fear of recrimination or causing division. These reasons include my understanding, born of my pastoral and theological experience, that:

- Marriage per se is not a property belonging to one or more religions but something which has been determined and developed in various ages in different ways
- Whilst religious bodies should be allowed to determine their own regulations within their own rites, it is misleading and hurtful for religions to make this exclusive to their own interpretation
- Marriage is a gift of God to strengthen human lives and reflect God's own relationship of unity in diversity. It is therefore wrong if this 'means of grace' is unnecessarily limited to only some.
- I have seen far too many gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people suffer unnecessarily due to the inability of much of society and religion to affirm their lives and God-given dignity. Much loss of life and suffering could have been prevented if support – including as legal, ceremonial and spiritual recognition – was available.
- The Bible, though a crucial central source of Christian holiness and understanding was written in a very different context to our own and without the benefit of the psychological, genetic and other human scientific knowledge we have of sexuality today. It says hardly anything on the subject of what we know today as lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered life and Jesus says precisely nothing. Christians and other religious people who listen to God in the promptings of God in human wisdom increasingly recognise this across the world and this should be acknowledged.
- The practice of all the great teachers and embodiments of God's love and grace – not least the Jesus Christ and the Buddha – call us to love and compassion and inclusion not judgement and

exclusion. Just as the example of Christ pointed to the full dignity of slaves and women in the past, today it points, among other things, to the full dignity of people of different sexualities.

- Conventional 'Christian' marriages are not dramatically more successful in avoiding sexual and other abuse of children and marriage partners
- Many gay, lesbian and transsexual people have amply demonstrated their depth of love, fidelity and other qualities associated with a true marriage. It is time this could be publicly affirmed and strengthened.

With many for your consideration of my views.

Name **(The Revd. Dr) Jonathan Inkpin**