

21st June, 2017

Open letter to Jayne Ozanne and members of Church of England General Synod

Dear Jayne,

It was good to meet you last year at a fringe meeting of the Church of Ireland General Synod. I hope that members of the Church of England General Synod might similarly listen to an Anglican voice from Ireland. In the light of your negative response to my recent letter addressed to you personally, I believe I must now write an open letter in similar terms to your colleagues on General Synod.

You have tabled a motion that Synod endorse the 16th January statement by the UK Council for Psychotherapy [UKCP] *et al*, that “the practice of conversion therapy is unethical, harmful and not supported by evidence.” The lead author of that statement is Janet Weisz, CEO of UKCP. I have had extensive correspondence with UKCP over their claim that therapy to reduce same-sex attraction is harmful. On 30th June 2015 I wrote to Ms Weisz, “I am sorry that you have not addressed the fact that even the American Psychological Association’s systematic review¹ could find no recent research that would justify them in saying that sexual orientation change efforts are harmful. Your avoidance of this question reinforces the impression that you are not able to point to a single peer reviewed study that shows a causal link between therapy and harm [please correct me on this if I am wrong],”. ***Ms Weisz did not reply.***

In 2013 I also corresponded with the Bishop of Buckingham, who had been vocal on the matter. I said, “I hope you will not feel it unreasonable that I should ask you for the name of just one reputable study to represent the 'overwhelming evidence' that such therapies are harmful. My conviction on this is such that if you can do this, I shall donate £100 to a charity of your choice.” ***The bishop declined my offer.***

I would make the same offer to you, Jayne - £100 to a charity of your choice. **And if, as I anticipate, your researches don’t yield even one study that follows participants through therapy and finds that on average they were harmed more than helped (using a scientifically recognised measure of distress), I would appeal to your integrity not to support the unscientific 16th January statement.**

Further, the claim that therapy is ‘not supported by evidence’ is really a half-truth: by the same evidential standard, the case for banning it is not supported by evidence either. The simple fact is that no randomised controlled trials, which might enable us to determine the matter, have been carried out.

¹ <https://www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/resources/therapeutic-response.pdf> (pp 2,3,83)

There is an ideological background to this. An article in the Journal of Medical Ethics last year² said, “[M]easures meant to change sexual orientation are ... **deeply alarming**, even and indeed **especially if they are safe and effective** ... widespread use of reorientation therapy, although not intrinsically bad, could have disastrous effects on sexual minorities, potentially dooming queer communities to extinction.”[my emphasis]

I would ask you, Jayne, to withdraw your motion for a year and engage with me to find the truth on this matter. I shall be glad to work constructively with you, and you can always propose it again next year if you wish. Failing such withdrawal, I would urge Synod members please to reject the motion.

Otherwise, are we to say, “Without evidence from a single scientific study, we denied people freedom to have therapy to reduce unwanted same-sex attraction even to save their families”?

Yours sincerely



Dermot O'Callaghan
Director, Core Issues Trust

Endorsed by Revd Canon Dr Chris Sugden
General Synod (2005-2010, 2011- 2015)

Directors:

Dr Michael Davidson, CEO (NI); Andrea Minichiello Williams (CEO Christian Legal Centre); Dermot O'Callaghan (Church of Ireland, NI)

Council of Reference:

Mr Andrew Comiskey (CEO Desert Stream /Living Waters), USA; Professor Robert Gagnon, (Pittsburgh Theological Seminary), USA; Rev David Johnston, (Presbyterian, NI); GB; Canon Dr Chris Sugden (C of E, GB); Rev Hadden Wilson (Baptist, NI)

Registered Office: 102 Kinedale Park Ballynahinch BT248YS | Charity Commission, number 105095 | M: 07833098998 | L: 02897563008 | W: www.core-issues.org

² Aas S, Delmas C. Journal of Medical Ethics 2016;0:1–8. doi:10.1136/medethics-2016-103562