



Rev. Andy Carley

# Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans Conference – A brief report

**To be honest, I'm not easily impressed when it comes to conferences. In my experience they promise much but deliver only a shadow of that promise.**

Not so the two conferences organised by the newly formed New Zealand branch of the Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans: a one day conference in Christchurch which drew nearly 400, and what was effectively a two day conference in Auckland attended by about 160 or so. The organisers certainly packed a lot into them with a very full program of speakers and workshops. I have to say that this was probably one of the best conferences I've been to in recent years. Overall, I found it very informative with the main emphasis being our Anglican identity as a church rooted in the word of God and the historic creeds, the importance of remaining faithful to the historic faith handed down to us by the apostles, and the importance of our mission to reach the lost and lonely for Christ.

There appeared to be a good cross section of lay leaders, wardens and vestry members, together with a number of clergy from around the country. And pleasingly, the two conferences attracted a range of people from different expressions of churchmanship with those from evangelical, charismatic, and more traditional liturgical expressions present. As with all conferences, some of the best conversations are had in the breaks between sessions, so it was in Auckland where I spoke to a number of people who all lamented the lack of opportunities they had been given in their own dioceses to talk about the issue at hand (there appears to be a willingness to talk about *A Way Forward Report* and *Motion 30* but not the actual issue itself) so these two conferences certainly filled a commonly felt gap in the larger conversation on our Anglican identity.

Of course we could not escape the 'elephant in the room' and a number of speakers did address the issues facing our church at this time, making reference to *A Way Forward Report* and *Motion 30*. All speakers were clear that we face a 1st order issue which we must address and engage in at every level. Most helpful here was the main

speaker, Rev. Vaughan Roberts from St Ebbe's, Oxford, UK. As a person who himself experiences same sex attraction, he spoke on the need to have a clear understanding of the issue from a biblical perspective, and how those who are same-sex attracted can receive the pastoral help and support they require.

Also helpful was a presentation by the Rev Dr. Sarah Harris from Auckland. Her presentation on hermeneutics and the Bible's understanding of this issue was clear and easy enough for anyone to understand. Sarah made the point that we must take the whole counsel of scripture into account when we consider the issues we face, it is not good enough to ignore parts of scripture in order to enforce our own particular views, which of course applies to both sides of the debate! As an example of a 2nd order issue, and drawing her arguments from scripture, Sarah also spoke on the role of women in leadership in the church. Again this was helpful as this has been an issue that has, in the past, caused some unnecessary division amongst conservative Anglicans.

In framing a pastoral response, there was a helpful panel presentation from those who either experience same-sex attraction themselves, or who have brothers, sisters, or children who are in homosexual relationships. This was helpful as it not only allowed very personal struggles to be aired, but allowed the panelists to share what has been most helpful in their dealings with the church and family on this issue.

Whatever happens in the coming months and years we were urged to remain faithful to Jesus and his church. Make no mistake, these are difficult times for our church, but this conference was not a call for leaving but an encouragement to a true unity around the gospel of Jesus Christ and the faith of the Anglican Church as found in the constitution and formularies of our church.