



Auckland Community Church

Letter to Bishop Vercoe

This Letter was written to Bishop Vercoe on behalf of Auckland Community Church after his pronouncements in the NZ Herald

9 June 2004

The Most Rev. Whakahuihui Vercoe PCNZM, MBE
Te Pihopatanga O Aotearoa
PO Box 146
Rotorua

Dear Archbishop Vercoe,

I am writing on behalf of Auckland Community Church, an independent nondenominational Christian church of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered and straight people which has met every Sunday for nearly 25 years in St Matthew-in-the-City. Last Sunday the congregation discussed your reported statements in the New Zealand Herald on Saturday 5 June. We write to express to you our dismay and deep sadness at your reported statements.

Words like yours are very familiar to us. We have all met them individually and collectively, from many people at various levels in society. Invariably such views are a strange compound of wilful ignorance and deep conservatism. You acknowledge that they are not based on scripture, but on a view of nature - one we know that many other Maori do not share.

The disappointment to us is that your own church made very different statements at the very General Synod which elected you Archbishop. You are dishonest not to acknowledge this. Furthermore you impute to us a demand for gay marriage. This is not the position of all gay people. You try the usual line; that you love us as individuals but you reject same sex unions. But if you want to accept us as individuals this means accepting us as we are; people with same-sex attraction. Do you demand higher standards of us than of heterosexual people? Do you deny that God made us as we are? Your statements about our sexuality being unnatural fall flat precisely because we are here as a living part of God's creation; some of the people that God made. It is not a question of morality; it is a question of being - for surely you can see that we didn't choose to be gay. (There is plenty of evidence for this if you would like to see it.)

You said in your interview in the Herald that you were speaking personally. We know you have a long history of speaking out for Maori, which we respect, but you are now primate of the largest church in New Zealand. What you say has an immediate impact. Your words were the headlines in the Saturday Herald (although of course you are not responsible for that decision). They have been picked up by gay and lesbian people with hurt and dismay. Some of our congregation have reported incidents of deep distress among Christian gays who have held to the assumption that we all share equally in the love and acceptance of God. None of your subsequent words of moderation will have any effect on that headline. You spoke as the church and the result will be that more gay and lesbian people will leave. We will try to pick up the pieces, but you must be held responsible for the pastoral damage you have done.

Archbishop Vercoe, we are keen to meet with you, not merely for us to repeat the sentiments of this letter but so that you could discover us as we are; discover that we are people of moral and ethical standards; who share your concern for a church and a nation where love and justice will reign. Would you meet with us? Would you hear our hearts and our concerns? A convenient date for us would be Sunday 8 August at 7.30 pm at St

Matthew-in-the-City, Auckland. We pray that you will discover the pastoral nature of your responsibilities. We continue to pray for the whole Church of God in New Zealand and your leadership in it. Meanwhile we bring our witness against your views and the damage to so many people at risk in their faith and in their lives.