



 THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND
ARCHBISHOPS'
COUNCIL

The Most Reverend the Archbishop of Uppsala
S-751 70
Uppsala
Sweden

The Council for Christian Unity
The Faith and Order Advisory
Group

26th June 2009

Dear Archbishop Anders,

Your letter concerning the questions facing the Church of Sweden in the matter of same-sex relationships and the law of marriage has been received and discussed by the Faith and Order Advisory Group of the Church of England. As chairmen of the Council for Christian Unity and the Faith and Order advisory Group we are writing with some initial reflections in response to your courtesy in informing us of the situation.

We are very conscious of the limitations of our knowledge of your situation and we hope that in coming months there may be close contact between the officers of our respective churches to enable us to understand more clearly the proposals themselves and their theological and ecumenical implications.

We must however say that already, from the viewpoint of the Church of England, the existing practice in the Church of Sweden of blessing same-sex relationships was problematic, not least because the same practice in one or two member churches of the Anglican Communion has led to divisions within our Communion. Although there is a continuing debate among Anglicans about human sexuality, the teaching and discipline of the Church of England, like that of the Anglican Communion as a whole as expressed in the Lambeth Conference of 1998, is that it is not right either to bless same-sex sexual relationships or to ordain those who are involved in them.

If we understand the situation in the Church of Sweden correctly, what is now proposed appears to be a fundamental re-definition of the Christian doctrine of marriage and of basic Christian anthropology. This development might be seen as part of a wider shift within Western culture and theology to a position in which the idea of a fundamental distinction between the genders is seen as irrelevant and in which marriage is therefore seen as something that can and should be gender neutral. This position would be at odds with the biblical teaching about the significance of God's creation of human beings as male and female as this has been received by the Church of England and by the Catholic tradition in general.