

## Annual Report for 2013/2014 18<sup>th</sup> October 2014

### Introduction:

During 2013/14 we have seen significant progress in our campaign for LGB&T people in the Church.

- During the year we have been delighted to welcome a team of Patrons for Accepting Evangelicals. Bishop David Gillett, Rev Steve Chalke, Vickie Beeching, Rev Ruth Gouldbourne and Jeremy Marks have all become Patrons and helped to increase our public profile. You can find out more about each of our [Patrons](#) on the AE Website. We also hope to announce more Patrons soon.
- The Church of England 'Pilling Report' on sexuality included a specific section on an inclusive evangelical theology which quoted extensively from AE material. As a result, an inclusive evangelical biblical view has been recognised for the first time as valid part of the spectrum of theological views in the Church of England.
- As a result our membership continues to rise and visits to the AE website have doubled. We have also launched a Facebook page and a YouTube channel (more below).
- There have been further indications that The Baptist Union of Great Britain is relaxing its ban on ministers performing sex-sex blessings and has now published a statement saying that Ministers will not be disciplined for conducting blessings which have the backing of the local congregation.
- The Association of Christian Counsellors in the UK has rejected 'reparative therapies' and have required all their members to stop providing it.
- On our 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary weekend in July, we held a successful fringe event at the Church of England's General Synod in York. Over 40 members of Synod attended and heard from David Runcorn (author of the inclusive Evangelical section in the Pilling Report) and David Ison, the Dean of St Pauls Cathedral in London. This was our first return to General Synod since our launch in 2004.

As a result, we are hopeful that this increasing momentum towards the acceptance and celebration of LGB&T people and partnerships will continue. Our aim continues to be promoting the acceptance of faithful, loving same-sex partnerships at every level of church life and the development of a positive Christian ethic for LGB&T people.

### The Trustees and Steering Group

has met 4 times over the past year, co-chaired by Martin Stears-Handscomb and Elaine Sommers.

Many thanks to our Trustees:

- Martin Stears-Handscomb (Co-Chair), Mike Dark (Treasurer), Jeremy Marks (Secretary), Ray Khan, Mel & Benny Hazlehurst.

and to our additional steering group members:

- Elaine Sommers (Co-Chair), Nim Njuguna, Alex Huzzey, Bren Marks, Rob Day, Sally Layburn, Hazel Thorpe and Jane Newsham.

## **Membership, Website and Social Media**

Membership of AE rose by 24% from June 2013 to September 2014 from 643 to 796.

The use of the [AE Website](#) is increasing as we continue to post regularly on the AE Blog, and keep members involved via Newsletters. In over the past year we have seen the average number of visits per month rise from 5,600 to 10,500. The number of pages viewed has increased further from 18,000 per month to 42,200. Web hits have risen in the same period from 66,400 to 94,500 per month.

In April this year, we also launched the [Accepting Evangelicals Facebook Page](#) which has been a huge success, publicising relevant news, stories, and articles. The most popular postings so far were those about Evangelical Alliance 'discontinuing Oasis Membership', about the Baptist Union changing its approach on same-sex blessings and most recently about the American Pastor who wrote on how to respond if your child tells you they are gay. Each of these posts reached several thousand people. 'Like' us on Facebook to get updates on postings.

And just to top it all, we have also created a [YouTube Channel](#) posting 2 videos so far, both featuring interviews with LGBT Christians about their life, faith and sexuality. Many thanks to Alex Huzzey for his hard work in setting this up.

***We would like to produce more videos but need someone who has skills and experience in video production and editing to take this forward. If you have such skills or know someone who does, please [contact us](#).***

## **Transgender Issues:**

Following last year's Annual Meeting where Elaine Sommers spoke about Trans issues, we have developed the [Transgender section](#) of the website and Elaine is Co-Chair of AE.

We also provided a half page article for the Church of England Newspaper entitled 'Listening to T' which was published earlier this year.

If you would like Elaine to speak at your church, fellowship or group, please [contact us](#).

## **Other Events and Speaking Engagements:**

Invitations to speak have continued to come from a variety of sources over the past year including:

- SEITE (The South East Institute of Theological Education) contributing a full day at their Easter residential for ordinands.
- A weekend workshop on sexuality in the St Paul's Church, Walsall, West Midlands
- Houses of Parliament – for an event reflecting on the journey of same-sex marriage legislation through Parliament – organised by Parliout.
- General Synod Event at York
- Two:23 where our Director Benny Hazlehurst spoke in September.

We also wrote to Spring Harvest to apply for an exhibition stall at their events this year, but they refused our application. We are intending to ask again next year.

## **Press and Media**

During the year we have issued several press releases – including

- Welcoming the Pilling Report to the House of Bishops
- Announcing new Patrons to AE
- Supporting Steve Chalke and Oasis when Evangelical Alliance removed them from membership
- Supporting Vicky Beeching in her courageous decision to ‘come out’ publicly.

We have also supplied 2 articles to the Church of England newspaper including “[A Case of Mistaken Identity](#)” which produced a strong reaction amongst more conservative evangelicals.

We were invited to provide an extended article for Anvil Theological Journal entitled “[Cracking the Binary Code](#)”. The article is at No2 in their chart of most downloaded articles from their website.

## **Working in Partnership:**

We have continued to work in partnership with *Evangelical Fellowship, Affirm (Baptist Network), Christians Together at Pride, LGB&T Anglican Coalition*, and *Two:23*.

Members of the Steering Group have continued to meet formally and informally with leading figures in the debate on sexuality and the Church, including a meeting at Lambeth Palace with the Archbishops Adviser on Reconciliation, David Porter.

## **Finance:**

Income for the year 2013/14 was £2,982 down from £3,099 the previous year.

Expenditure rose from £2,089 to £2,387 during the same period.

The main reason for this was that we paid for a stall in Greenbelt during both years. However, the donations towards the stall (from members and sister organisations) fell by £228 from 2012/13 to 2013/14 whilst the cost rose by £276. Despite this we recorded a surplus of income over expenditure of £595 taking our reserves to £2,242.

Our finances are generally sound, however, there is a concern that regular donations only come from a small group of people leaving AE vulnerable should people’s circumstances change.

[Donations](#) can be made to AE by cheque, Paypal, and CAF, and we are registered with HM Revenue and Customs to claim giftaid on donations from taxpayers.

God Bless & Keep You

***The Trustees of Accepting Evangelicals***