

<b>Institution: University of Leeds</b>
<b>Unit of Assessment: 33</b>
<b>Title of case study: Advancing global church debate on sexuality: Intercultural understanding and new methods for dialogue</b>
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>From 2008, University of Leeds research on Christianity and sexuality has changed both the form and the content of church discussions of sexuality, mainly but not only within the global Anglican Communion. The relevant Leeds-based research is Ward's work on sexuality and global Anglicanism (2002-); an international study of Anglican/Episcopal churches (2008-2010); and Muers' work on theology, sexuality and gender (2007-). Specifically, Leeds research shaped the design and evaluation of the Anglican Communion's "Continuing Indaba" (2008-) process. Leeds research has also informed the content of that debate, and in promoting understanding of under-recognised perspectives in wider debates on sexuality.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>Sexuality is both a key factor in current global debates within Christian churches, and a lively area of current research at the intersections between theology, ethics and society. Theology and Religious Studies at Leeds, as an interdisciplinary team with a strong focus on religion and public life and distinctive expertise in African religion, is well placed to contribute to this fast-developing field. This case study highlights the work of Kevin Ward (Senior Lecturer, Leeds 1995-present), Joanna Sadgrove (PDRA, Leeds 2008-2010) and Rachel Muers (Lecturer &amp; Senior Lecturer, Leeds 2007-present).</p> <p>Ward has long-established research interests in East African Christianity, the Anglican Communion, and debates about homosexuality within Christianity. He critically evaluated the stereotypes circulating about African views on homosexuality, and demonstrated how the 1998 Lambeth Conference framed the global Anglican debate on sexuality in terms that failed to reflect the complex local negotiations of teaching and pastoral practice around sexuality in East Africa – including the paradoxical importance of evangelicalism on the development of modern East African homosexual identities (1). Subsequent articles developed the implications of these findings for a global church communion in a post-colonial context (2).</p> <p>Sadgrove's Leeds-based research was part of the project on 'Sexuality and Global Faith Networks', 2008-2010, a collaboration with the School of Geography (University of Leeds). Recent debates within the worldwide Anglican Communion and the media about the ordination of gay clergy and the recognition of civil partnerships provided the immediate context for the research. The aim was to collect new information in the UK, USA, and South Africa on how individuals and congregations viewed such debates and what they thought about the future direction of the Church. As part of the project the researchers interviewed key stakeholders, observed national conventions (e.g. Lambeth Conference 2008, General Convention of the Episcopal Church 2009) and hosted an advisory group of clerical and LGBT experts (3).</p> <p>In six parish case studies in New York, Leeds and Pietermaritzburg, the researchers were able to document the ambiguities over sexuality expressed by ordinary church goers in three very different locations (4). The research contributed to deconstructing established notions of a simple dichotomy between the Western world and the Global South - the latter often being erroneously constructed in the West as consistently "anti-homosexual". A key theme of the research findings was the importance of location in conversations about sexuality and global communion; both "sexuality" and "Anglican Communion" can best be understood as in each case <i>local</i> church issues, approached through complex local negotiations of a community's mission. This has significant implications for how progress can be made in global conversations.</p> <p>Muers' work on sexuality and gender in theological tradition uses feminist and gender-critical approaches to question established – or newly fashionable – theological justifications of</p>

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heteronormativity (5). She has also produced overviews of the shape and implications of modern theological debates on gender and sexuality for major textbooks. Ongoing research links this work on sexuality, particularly the theological grounds for challenging heteronormativity, specifically to Quaker traditions of theological ethics and to current and recent debates on same-sex marriage.

**3. References to the research**

1. Ward, Kevin (2002) 'Same-sex relations in Africa and the debate on homosexuality in East African Anglicanism', *Anglican Theological Review*, 84:1, 81-111. [Peer-reviewed article widely cited in subsequent debates]
2. Ward, Kevin (2009) 'Pluralism and Fundamentalism as Challenges for the African Churches: Globalisation, New-Colonialism and Debates about Homosexuality', in Klaus Koschorke (editor), *Einstuerzende Mauern, Das Jahr 1989/90 als Epochenjahr in der Geschichte des Weltchristentums [Falling Walls]*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 157-177. [Invited contribution to an international consultation]
3. Sadgrove, Joanna, Vanderbeck, Robert M., Ward, Kevin, Valentine, Gill and Andersson, Johan (2010) 'Constructing the boundaries of Anglican orthodoxy: an analysis of the Global Anglican Future Conference (GAFCON)', *Religion*, 40(3): 193–206. [doi:10.1016/j.religion.2010.02.006](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.religion.2010.02.006) [Major peer-reviewed journal; empirically-grounded account of a key event in recent Anglican history that has proved particularly difficult for researchers to access]
4. Vanderbeck, Robert M., Valentine, Gill, Ward, Kevin, Sadgrove, Joanna and Andersson, Johan (2010) 'The meanings of communion: Anglican identities, the sexuality debates, and Christian relationality', *Sociological Research Online*. 15(2). DOI: 10.5153/sro.2106. [Peer-reviewed article presenting key findings from congregational fieldwork]
5. Muers, Rachel (2007). "A Queer Theology: Hans Urs von Balthasar", in Gerard Loughlin (ed.) *Queer Theology: Rethinking the Western Body*. Oxford: Blackwell. 200-211. [Chapter in a major collection cited in subsequent textbooks/overviews of the subject].

**Grants:**

AHRC/ESRC Large Grant (Religion and Society Programme) 'Sexuality and Global Faith Networks', G. Valentine, K. Ward, R. Vanderbeck (all University of Leeds), 2008-2010, £298, 293. See the final report

6. Valentine, Gill, Vanderbeck, Robert M., Ward, Kevin, Sadgrove, Joanna and Andersson, Johan (2010). *Sexuality and Global Faith Networks: A Research Project on the Debates over Homosexuality in the Anglican Communion*. Available from [http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly\\_fs/1.268641!/file/global\\_faiths\\_report\\_2010\\_8.pdf](http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.268641!/file/global_faiths_report_2010_8.pdf).

**4. Details of the impact**Form of Global Conversations: Continuing Indaba

As a direct result of the Global Faith Networks project, following an interdisciplinary research day in Leeds in 2010 at which findings were presented to academic and non-academic audiences, Sadgrove was invited to act as an advisor and evaluator for the global Anglican consultation process "Continuing Indaba" (CI) in its pilot stage (2009-2011). CI enables conversations and listening about human sexuality and other globally contentious issues; its distinctive emphases include awareness of local context and forming relationships of trust. Following success at the pilot stage, CI has been adopted for wider use by numerous Anglican provinces including the Church of England (b). CI's pilot stage involved dioceses from Africa, Asia, Europe and the Americas. Its evaluation (involving Sadgrove) was funded by the Morehouse School of Medicine with a view to developing new approaches to inter-contextual conversations about controversial subjects in a range of contexts, including other worldwide denominations.

The findings and research methods of Global Faith Networks contributed directly to the design and the evaluation of CI. The Anglican Consultative Council's (ACC's) Facilitator of CI describes how the Leeds research "was significant in initial process design... [its findings] gave substance to a project that sought to question the depth of the so called fracture... in a process of developing transnational relationships in a global church" (c). The leader of the CI design team describes the

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distinctive expertise Sadgrove offered in “very important, but tricky areas”, such as the transnational dynamics of debates around sexual morality (d).

Content of Global Conversations: Understanding Approaches to Sexuality

Following the Lambeth Conference, from 2008 Ward was invited to contribute to the ACC’s international ‘Listening Process’ on human sexuality. He was also invited to respond to the major consultation commissioned by the House of Bishops of The Episcopal Church USA (TEC) on same-sex marriage; his response was presented with the consultation documents to the House of Bishops in 2011 (a) to form the basis for future discussions about TEC policy and practice on sexuality. In 2011 Ward addressed a conference of new Anglican Bishops (from India, Melanesia, USA, Australia, NZ, Tanzania, Ghana, Nigeria) on the sexuality debate, and gave several talks for *Changing Attitude*, an Anglican group arguing for more acceptance of LGBT people.

Form and Content of Local and National Conversations

The research process had impact on individual participants and congregations. The project involved six Anglican congregations (two each in UK, USA and South Africa). More than 140 people participated in interviews, and many more in discussions and Bible studies. The process provided the opportunity to speak about experiences that are hard to voice (see respondents’ comments, *Sexuality and Global Faith Networks*, reference 6 above, p. 7: “I have avoided too many open discussions... there are people who discuss the issue, but they’re small in number”; p. 10 “It’s hurtful to those of us that are gay and lesbian... to have the church say... we’ll hide you”). Congregations report lasting effects on attitudes and practice, for example having “become more aware of our need to give extra support to gay asylum seekers who are unable to return to their home countries because of their sexual orientation” (f).

Ward, Sadgrove and others led a study day on sexuality for the Diocese of Ripon and Leeds in 2010 for around 40 clergy and laity. This was followed by talks by Ward to groups within the diocese, including an address to the diocesan synod in 2011. Ward is a member of the Human Sexuality Task Group of the Diocese, which has prepared a study guide for parishes, drawing extensively on Ward’s research; the leader of a Lent group advertised across the diocese commented that the course led to “increasing awareness of difference and diversity and ability to speak freely, in a ‘safe space’, with respect” (e).

Following British Quakers’ 2009 decision to celebrate same-sex marriages, Muers produced a paper, drawing on her ongoing research on sexuality and Quaker ethics, to help Quakers to explain the decision and understand other churches’ concerns. This was published online in full (g), and referenced and excerpted extensively in “We are but witnesses”, the main document used by British Quaker representatives to explain Quakers’ position on same-sex marriage - which has been reprinted several times since its publication in 2009 (g, i). During the national equal-marriage consultation (2011), Muers discussed Quakers’ position – unusual among churches – on *R4 Today* and seven BBC local stations, in interviews that were taken up in other media (h). She later provided specialist advice to the national Quaker committee responsible for ecumenical relationships, and to staff of the national Quaker body, in the preparation of theological materials to support ongoing ecumenical conversations about the issue (i). A staff member commented that in the context of Quakers’ increased public visibility and exposure to controversy over sexuality, Muers’ advisory work “enables Quakers to communicate to a much wider audience, and also helps us to root our work and our vision for a better society more firmly in an aspect of our tradition” (i).

**5. Sources to corroborate the impact**

- a. Henry Nutt Parsely, Jr., “Foreword”, to *Anglican Theological Review*, Winter 2011, <http://www.anglicantheologicalreview.org/read/article/1232/> (1<sup>st</sup> November 2013), setting out the purpose, importance and wider impact of the consultation to which Ward responded. See also the postscript by the House of Bishops reflecting on lessons learned <http://www.anglicantheologicalreview.org/static/pdf/articles/postscript.pdf> (1st November 2013). For Ward’s own contribution see

[http://www.anglicantheologicalreview.org/static/pdf/articles/ward\\_response.pdf](http://www.anglicantheologicalreview.org/static/pdf/articles/ward_response.pdf) (1st November 2013)

- b. 'Continuing Indaba enables "gospel-shaped conversation" ', Anglican Communion Office, 31<sup>st</sup> July 2012  
<http://www.anglicancommunion.org/acns/digest/index.cfm/2012/7/31/Continuing-Indaba-enables-gospelshaped-conversation> (1<sup>st</sup> March 2013)
- c. Communication from Anglican Consultative Council, held on file
- d. Communication from lead designer of Continuing Indaba process, held on file
- e. Communication from office of Diocesan Director of Mission Resourcing passing on comments received from users of the resource, held on file
- f. Communication from clergy member at a Leeds church, held on file
- g. Muers' original paper "British Quakers and same-sex marriage" from <http://www.quaker.org.uk/qccir> (1<sup>st</sup> September 2013); Britain Yearly Meeting, "We are but witnesses: Marriage equality and the decision of Britain Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends to recognise same-sex marriage" (2009), <http://www.quaker.org.uk/sites/default/files/We-are-but-witnesses.pdf> (1<sup>st</sup> September 2013)
- h. Example of media coverage of Muers' interviews:  
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/9154043/Muslims-and-Sikhs-attack-Camerons-gay-marriage-plan.html> (1<sup>st</sup> September 2013)
- i. Communication from assistant general secretary of Quaker Peace and Social Witness, held on file