

# NSKK NEWSLETTER

日本聖公会管区事務所だより

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## Issues on Homosexuality and the Primates of the Anglican Communion Meeting

The Rt. Rev. David Shoji Tani

The Anglican Communion is at present confronted by the very serious situation relating to the issues regarding homosexuality, and as to whether or not the Anglican Communion can maintain its unity as a communion. The Archbishop of Canterbury called the Primates to urgently meet together at Lambeth Palace on 15th and 16th October 2003. Among the 38 Provinces worldwide, all the Primates got together, except the one from the Diocese of Philippines, and had heated discussions. After serious consideration, the attached Statement was finally presented.

The issues which we were called to discuss were:

- 1) the controversial decisions to authorize a Public Rite of Blessing for those in committed same sex relationships made by the Diocese of New Westminster, Canada, and
- 2) the election of Canon Gene Robinson, who is in a committed same sex relationship, to the office of and work of a Bishop of the diocese of New Hampshire which was confirmed by the General Convention of the Episcopal Church (USA).

Eighteen provinces including African, South American, and some Asian countries have already made a decisive resolution to secede from the Anglican Communion, depending on the outcome of the discussions. Thus the Meeting started in a highly tense atmosphere. First of all, each Province presented its own comments on these issues; some Provinces submitted their comments in a documented form. Among the comments, there were some which seemed to be quite subjective and personal.

We, NSKK, reported our view on the issue which had been seriously and eagerly deliberated at the Extraordinary Bishops' Meeting held on 10th September. A summary follows:

1. It is difficult for homosexuals to come out in the open and publicly declare their homosexuality. However, it is true to say there is the side that maintains homosexuality is secretly accepted by the society.

There is an increasing understanding of "Gender Identity Disorder" by intellectuals and the well educated.

But it is also a fact that there are some homosexuals who are suffering from social pressure. In particular, amongst the Christian churches, members of the Protestant churches are suffering because their churches regard homosexuality as a sin.

The Nippon Sei Ko Kai on the other hand is gradually beginning to understand that homosexuality is not a matter of the individual's "choice", but rather of "orientation".

He or she is born homosexual. For this reason there is a widespread tendency to accept homosexuals as they are among our members.

2. We do not unilaterally declare homosexuality as being against the Bible. We are aware that there are some passages in the New Testament that condemn homosexuality (Romans 1:26-28, 1 Corinthians 6:9) but we try to see these passages within their historical contexts. We realize that there is a need to understand the differences in the times.

3. A more pressing pastoral problem in the Nippon Sei Ko Kai is the problem of divorce. At present, divorce is not unconditionally accepted in the church. In cases where divorce could not be avoided and is accepted by the church, both parties are asked to repent and ask for God's forgiveness. They are encouraged to continue to come to church. If a clergy divorces, it is expected for him or her to resign.

Will the Nippon Sei Ko Kai accept a homosexual as a priest or in particular as a bishop? Members regard priests and bishops as role models as well as protectors of the faith. Based on the present level of understanding and acceptance of homosexuals among the members, I have to say that it is still difficult.

4. With regard to the acceptance of the installation of Bishop Robinson as the bishop of the Diocese of New Hampshire;

Nippon Sei Ko Kai recognizes that a lot of serious deliberation and a lot of pain has been incurred in making this decision. Thus, we respect the final conclusion. We believe that the pros and cons of this issue have been seriously considered and discussed, and therefore the result of the vote taken on this issue is valid. We support the efforts of ECUSA to remain as one body in spite of the threats of schism that it is faced with.

We renounce the efforts to create more confusion by those from outside the ECUSA who support those against this decision. Care should be taken to avoid such a situation.

However the Nippon Sei Ko Kai condemns that this decision has been made right after the Primates' meeting in Brazil. We see it as an act which ignores the efforts of the Anglican Communion and the agreement made during that meeting and the Lambeth Conference to remain as one body. We ask everyone to be more considerate from now on.

5. There is a minority number of the bishops who think this problem is important enough to cause a schism in the Anglican Communion, but the majority of the bishops do not regard this problem to be grave and fundamental enough for such a schism. We pray that we all will agree to maintain our unity.
6. From now on, NSKK will exert its efforts to continue to study the problem of homosexuality so as to be more pastoral towards our homosexual members. We will also work and study the issue of the ordination of homosexuals to priesthood and the blessing of same sex unions as essential issues in the church community.

In the present Primates' Conference, the majority held the negative and unilateral views concerning homosexual persons, based on the interpretation of Scripture. Diversity of interpretation of the Scripture was not a major topic to be discussed in the present Meeting. However, we have to admit that there is a profound controversy among the provinces and dioceses of the Anglican Communion whether or not homosexuals are to be regarded as "immoral sexual relationship" as written in Scripture or as "homosexually oriented persons" which is the generally accepted opinion in present society. At the same

time, we have also to know that each province has its own social and religious back-ground which must be taken seriously into consideration.

The recent actions of the Diocese of New Westminster in Canada and the Episcopal Church (USA) have raised a serious question as to whether they would lead to disunity in the Anglican Communion or not. After reporting the opinions and views from each province and after having discussed them, four bishops raised proposals. Based on these proposals, heated discussion continued, and finally the Draft Committee presented a Statement, which was further deliberated. During the course of this difficult situation, we came up against a large wall, which caused us to wonder whether any common idea could be brought up ever again. However, we all appreciated the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams that that difficult situation could be overcome due to his extraordinary catholicity and leadership.

On the 1st day of the Meeting a daytime Holy Eucharist was proposed. Some bishops stated that under such circumstances, they would not attend the Eucharist, and some other provincial representatives agreed with their decision. What would happen to the Anglican Communion if disagreement should occur in the Holy Eucharist which is the most important expression of unity for all the Anglican Communion? Such negative action would put the whole Anglican Communion in jeopardy. One bishop said "The matter has yet to be concluded, and at this stage if you are declined to accept the invitation to the Holy Table, your action will be regarded as unfaithful to the God." Those opposed to the holding of the Eucharist agreed with this suggestion, and subsequently all the members attended the Eucharist. Thus we all felt relieved. In such a state of tension, the meeting could be maintained by the aid of morning and evening prayers, sermons and study of the Scriptures.

The Statement has thrown at us a very serious question. The break-up of the Communion has seemingly been avoided for the time being. However, if the Installation of the new bishop in the Diocese of New Hampshire to be held on 2nd November 2003, should take place, no one can predict the outcome. On the other hand, each Province has been asked to prudently consider the matter. It is greatly expected that the matter is to be resolved by deliberation of the "Commission" and through the mediation of the Archbishop of Canterbury. We of the NSKK, must buckle down to facing this issue as an urgent and most important subject.

### **A Get-together Meeting of South Korean Priests and their Families staying apart in Japan.**

There are five priests and one deacon from South Korea serving in Nippon Sei Ko Kai right now. They are The Rev. Sikyung Yoo who works at St. Paul's University and Deacon Min Soo Rhee at Tokyo St. Paul's Church in Tokyo Diocese, The Rev. Ignatius Yoon Sik Chong at Niigata St. Paul's Church in Chubu Diocese, the Rev. Seong Jong Sung and the Rev. Mi Hyun Park at Shuri St. Andrew's Church in Okinawa Diocese and me the Rev. Dae Bin Im of Osaka St. Paul's Church in Osaka Diocese.

The Get-together Meeting of South Korean priests and their families staying apart in Japan took place from July 29th (Tues.) to 31st (Thurs.) both in Tokyo and Hakone. The meeting came about because of Primate Uno's positive response to a request made by the Rev. Sikyung Yoo of St. Paul's University at the meeting of The Conference of Overseas Missionary Works of the Korean Priests in Japan held last year.

On the first day, July 29th (Tues.), 18 Korean priests and their families, Primate Uno, The

Rev. Yutaka Minabe, the General Secretary, Mr. Shinya Yawata, the Secretary of Partners in Mission, the Rev. Naoki Kimura, the Secretary of the Department of Ministry Works, the Rev. Yoshihiko Maeda, the Chairman of the Committee of Peace and Justice and the Rev. Hiroto Kayama from Tokyo Diocese attended. Moreover, the Rev. Paul Keun Sang Kim director of the Department of Ministry Affairs and the Rev. Jung Ho Lee director of the Center for Foreign Labors from Seoul Diocese also attended from South Korea and had worship services and opportunities to exchange opinions together.

As I have been staying in Japan the longest among other Korean priests, I gave a message on "My experiences as a priest in Nippon Sei Ko Kai and its prospects." The Rev. Paul Keun Sang Kim's "The history of the exchanging of the priests and laymen between the Anglican Church of Korea and Nippon Sei Ko Kai and its prospects" and the Rev. Jung Ho Lee's "The recent information of the Anglican Church of Korea and the expectations for the activities of the Korean priests in Japan" followed.

During those three days, we talked over the present conditions of the places where we Korean priests were, our own experiences in ministry works in churches and how to develop our mission activities in churches in the future.

During the meeting we reflected that most of the women had no chance or place to present their thoughts or to explain the environments that they were in. We men attendants were so much occupied with our own talking, sticking the women attendants with taking care of the children, that we had not enough time to talk with each other.

It was our most great pleasure that our children, from infants to junior high school kids had a wonderful time to get to know each other. Having a good command of Korean, English Japanese, both Okinawan and Osaka dialects, they had a wonderful time to exchange with each other and seemed to realize that there were many friends in Japan under the same circumstance with them. Since this occasion my son in the second year of primary school has started to speak Korean without hesitation even though he has been accustomed to speaking Japanese since he entered the school.

On behalf of the Korean Priests in Japan, I'd like to express my hearty gratitude to Primate Uno and the members of the Province in Japan for giving us the most wonderful opportunity to have this meeting.

The Rev. Moses Dae Bin Im  
Osaka Diocese Nippon Sei Ko Kai

### **Preliminary NSKK 'Gender' Conference Held**

After returning from a Women's Conference in South Africa, Miki Mei saw there was a need to encourage more of the women of NSKK's to take a more prominent role in the decision-making of the Church.

A preliminary conference was held this August, attended by women from all over Japan.

Comic sketches about women in every day situations were debated, and brief introductions given on various gender issues, such as discrimination against women, domestic violence and sexual harassment.

Participants also looked at passages from the Bible from a woman's perspective, and were given presentations on the Environment, Filipinas in Japan, and Okinawa.

In the final session we considered what should be included in the agenda of the first full conference. Empowerment seemed to be the keyword, and training on this was requested,

along with sessions on the Bible and the prayer book from a feminist viewpoint. At the closing service we all wrote a word important to us on Japanese coloured handmade paper, and made a beautiful multi-coloured cross; a symbol of our hopes for women's rights for the future.

Claire Gelder  
NSKK Gender Committee member

### **Women's Solidarity Meeting in Okinawa**

The Women's Committees of the National Christian Council (NCC) Korea and Japan (including Korean women in Japan) have had solidarity meetings every two years in each country for ten years. The fifth meeting was held in Naha, Okinawa (Nov.26~ 30th). NCCJ took the initiative for the whole program with the cooperation of local Christian women in Okinawa. Since both committees are deeply involved with activities for "overcoming violence", responding to the Campaign of WCC, the theme of this meeting was set as "Let us listen to the call for life and pass it down to the next generation".

During the meeting, three worship services were prepared by each group. The key note speech was given by a woman who had sat fasting for 9 days in front of the US Consulate General, protesting the US attack against Iraq. After the Bible study, the regional reports and discussions, a whole day was spent on a field trip, pilgrimage to the World War 2 sites and exposure to the US military bases. Through the all these programs the participants have acknowledged that no military power can bring peace but has violated and is still violating the lives of God's creation. We have also realized that Christian women, especially women who live in the North East Asia are called to work together to bring about change and create a peaceful culture based on the Christian faith.

At the end of the meeting, the participants have determined to make common and decisive action plans as follows:

1. Protest against construction of new US base in Henoko, Okinawa
2. Protest against amendment of Article 9 of Constitution
3. Create common prayers and songs for peace
4. Protest against amendment of Japanese Constitution, Article 9 (Renunciation of War).

Junko Matsuura  
(Chair, Women's Committee of NCCJ)

### **Three new Bishops were installed in the 2003**

1. On 14th June, Rev. John Michihiro Kato was consecrated and installed as the 7th Bishop of Tohoku Diocese.
2. On 6th September, Rev. Barnabas Takashi Kohchi was consecrated and installed as 9th Bishop of Kyoto Diocese.
3. On 11th October, Rt. Rev. James Toru Uno was installed as 6th Bishop of Osaka Diocese.