**Discussion Forum reflecting upon the collection of essays published as “Marriage, Same Sex marriage and the Anglican Church of Australia”.**

**Held at St John’s Anglican Church, Salisbury.**

**This forum resulted from the 2019 Synod and all Synod members were invited to attend. It was skilfully facilitated by Reverend Bronwyn Pagram (Brisbane) and used the Open Space Conversation methodology.**

**The forum was in two parts, beginning with a clergy forum on Friday 19th March attended by Rev Dr Jo Armour followed by a lay-Synod-reps-only meeting on Saturday attended by Howard Harris.**

My first time on some of the new expressway but you end up on the same old Salisbury Hwy after Main North Rd; and the centre of Salisbury is still a collection of confusing one-way streets. 25-30 people there. Topic was the issues arising from the Book of Essays from the Anglican Church of Australia Doctrine Commission about same-sex marriage and blessings. 300+ pages in the Book of Essays, and many of the essays written to represent unmistakable sides in the debate. On the Saturday there were 18 separate discussion groups using the Open Space Technology format, where anyone present can advertise a topic and if anyone comes there will be a discussion. I was in a couple of groups with 3 people and one with 6. It was calm, active and the ‘responsible, mediated, and safe’ mantra seemed to have been heeded. Everyone got and will get another chance to review the notes of discussions they were part of; the ‘Record’ of the meeting will be available quite widely.

It was not about making a decision. The (same-sex) question has a legal/doctrinal part, a scriptural part and a pastoral part. The discussion topics covered all three. I sensed among some an acceptance that whenever and however the matter is settled by vote, some underlying differences will remain. For some it seemed a split was inevitable – it has happened in US, Canada, CofE…there was a discussion group on this (page 45 in the Record book) but I was not part of it. (and at least one on the clergy day too (page 23).

Asked at the end what we would want to do next there was lots of agreement for meeting again in this format (the Synod format came in for much criticism), but there was a divide about whether the lay people should meet with or without the clergy. Personally, I was surprised by the number of lay people who felt that they would be intimidated if the clergy were present.  **Howard**

The clergy forum on the Friday followed a similar pattern that Howard has described- I found the Open Space Conversation a very helpful process which encouraged respectful discussion about sensitive issues. I had a sense that the clergy discussions were generally very mindful of the need to create churches that are inclusive, loving and respecting of difference. However there were a small number of clergy who struggled with the idea of same-sex marriage and the blessing of same-sex unions. Their difficulty arose from their particular stance in approaching scripture. **Jo**