

The Church and Sexuality:

A First Look

- Outline and aims
- Dwelling in the Word
- Guidelines for Good Listening
- A Timeline of the Church of England & Sexuality
- January 2023 Report from House of Bishops
- Letter from Bishops of Ely and Huntingdon
- Questions, encouragements, and concerns.
- We will finish by 9pm latest.



Aims of the evening

We want to:

- Help people be aware of what is going on in the wider church
- Equip ourselves to respond when asked questions
- Start to develop a shared vocabulary as a church
- Socialise the questions that we may have as a community
- Identify things people would like to explore at a later date

We are not:

- Looking to debate the rights or wrongs
- Get into deep theological debate
- Decision making



Guidelines for Good Listening

- Confidentiality within the room
- Avoid interrupting one another
- Notice who is talking and make space for all to contribute.
- Be mindful of our feelings by noticing body language.
- Invite people to reflect on their own before sharing.
- Take time out from time to time
- Offer an opportunity to say if there is anything in the conversation that has been difficult but hard to express



The Pastoral Principles*

acknowledge

PREJUDICE

cast out

FEAR

speak into

SILENCE

admit

HYPOCRISY

address

IGNORANCE

pay attention to

POWER

**Developed to guide these conversations throughout the Church of England.*

More here: <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/leadership-and-governance/general-synod/bishops/pastoral-principles>

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A First Look

- A Timeline of the Church of England & Sexuality
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The background of the image is a stack of old, yellowed newspapers and papers. The text is overlaid on this background in four light blue speech bubble shapes. The text is in a bold, blue, sans-serif font.

To reflect on at another time:

How has society changed in

your lifetime?

What has shaped our

perspectives?



Key themes that emerged from the group's discussions were equality, inclusion, justice and Christian love for all. The young people described a person's relationship with Jesus as 'the most defining feature of our identity as Christians'.

'Please be welcoming and gentle to our new congregation and be respectful to anyone who has their own life path. Pray for their relationship with God and don't judge anyone by their gender / sexuality [...] the most important thing in our lives is the relationships we and those around us have with God. Help us have humility, gentleness when it comes to other relationships that aren't our own''

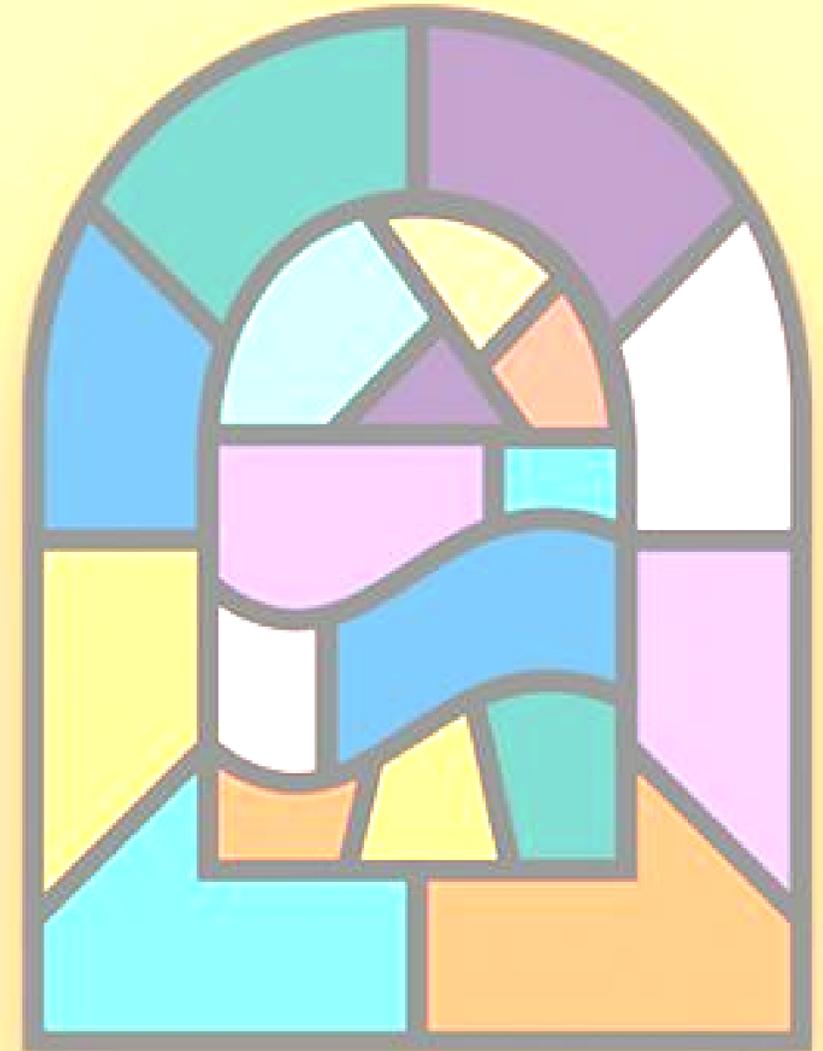
from Listening with Love and Faith.

Synod: our governing body.

"Episcopally led and synodically governed" or
"Led by bishops in synod"

In General Synod:

- **House of Bishops**
- **House of Clergy**
- **House of Laity**



relationships

point of view.

Timeline

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events in chro

listing import

dates also

The Marriage
(Same Sex Couples)
Act 2013:

The Equality and Human Rights
Implications for Marriage and
the Law in England and Wales

November 2013:
Working Group on human sexuality
a.k.a. "The Pilling Report"

Commissioned in 2012 by the House of Bishops

Made 18 recommendations including services to mark same-sex partnerships.

Largely rejected, except...

The House of Bishops

Working Group on
human sexuality

From 2014: Shared conversations

"Given the significant changes in our culture in relation to human sexuality, how should the church respond?"

Outcomes:

- "maximum freedom" without changing doctrine, liturgy or pastoral practice
- A "Take Note" debate in General Synod



LIVING IN LOVE & FAITH

**In 2017 the House of Bishop's
commissioned **Living in Love and Faith.**
Aimed to be *a learning document* for the
whole church.**

In the meantime...

- **Motion in General Synod calling conversion therapy unethical 2017 (a state law passed 2021)**

<https://www.churchofengland.org/media-and-news/news-releases/conversion-therapy-ban-comment-bishop-london>

- **Gender transition marked through acceptance of baptismal faith or baptism 2018 (in response to a motion carried by General Synod)**

<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2018-12/Pastoral%20Guidance-Affirmation-Baptismal-Faith.pdf>

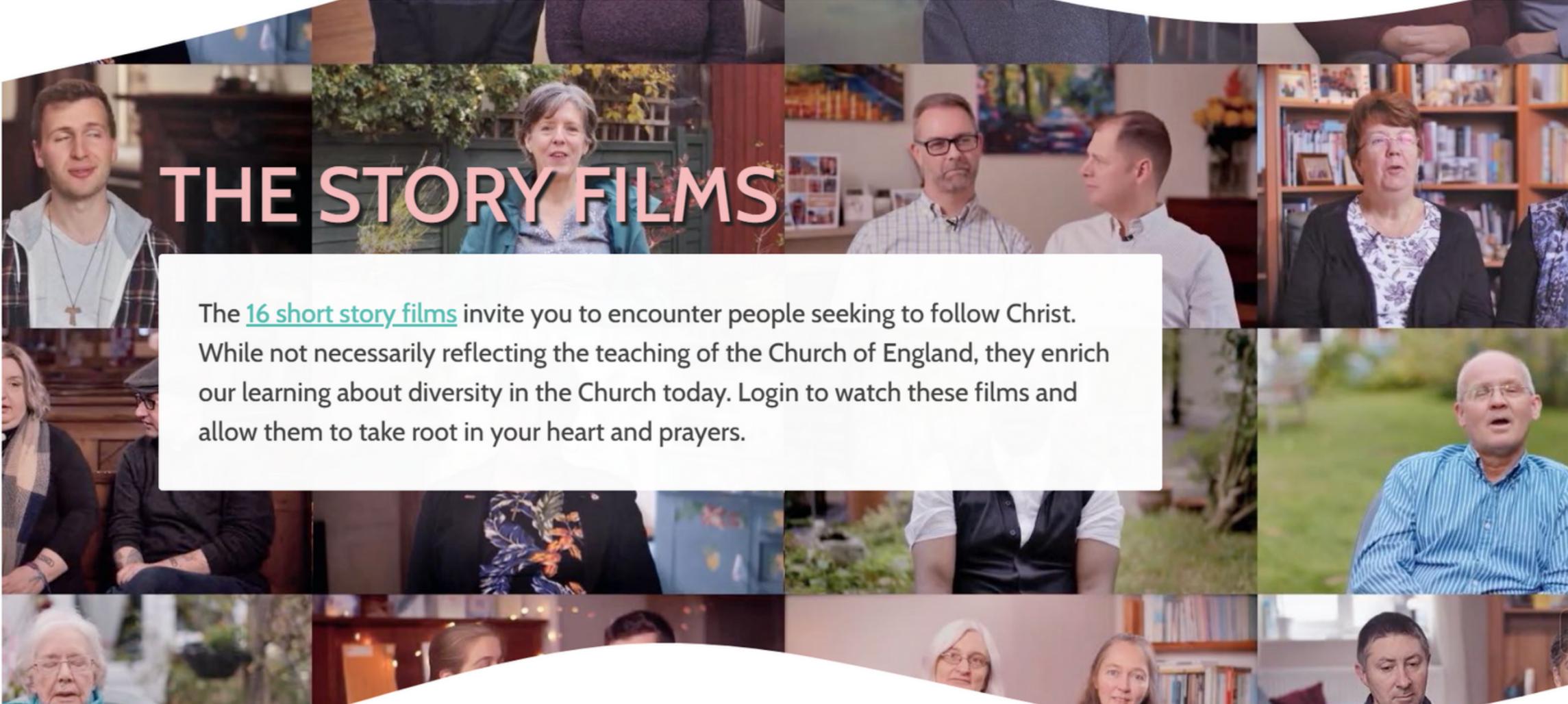
2020: Course, videos & podcasts.

<https://llf.churchofengland.org/>

HOME LLF COURSE FURTHER RESOURCES RESPOND DIOCESAN ADVOCATES HELP

THE STORY FILMS

The [16 short story films](#) invite you to encounter people seeking to follow Christ. While not necessarily reflecting the teaching of the Church of England, they enrich our learning about diversity in the Church today. Login to watch these films and allow them to take root in your heart and prayers.





...First, the Call is about Human Dignity and also about Sexuality. The reason the two are combined is that its central theological foundation is that all human beings are of equal worth, loved by God and are those for whom Jesus died on the Cross and rose to life. As St Paul says again and again in Romans “there is no distinction”.

Second, as we discuss this, we are all vulnerable.

For the large majority of the Anglican Communion the traditional understanding of marriage is something that is understood, accepted and without question, not only by Bishops but their entire Church, and the societies in which they live. For them, to question this teaching is unthinkable, and in many countries would make the church a victim of derision, contempt and even attack. For many churches to change traditional teaching challenges their very existence.

For a minority, we can say almost the same. They have not arrived lightly at their ideas that traditional teaching needs to change. They are not careless about scripture. They do not reject Christ. But they have come to a different view on sexuality after long prayer, deep study and reflection on understandings of human nature. For them, to question this different teaching is unthinkable, and in many countries is making the church a victim of derision, contempt and even attack. For these churches not to change traditional teaching challenges their very existence.

So let us not treat each other lightly or carelessly. We are deeply divided. That will not end soon. We are called by Christ himself both to truth and unity.

Third, there is no attempt to change people’s minds in this Call...

**++Justin Welby,
Lambeth Conference 2022**

2022-23: The outcome of Living in Love and Faith



The College of Bishops Winter 2022-23

- **Three multiple-day meetings**
- **A Response**
- **Draft Prayers of Love and Faith**

What happens now?

- **General Synod 6th - 9th February**
- **Probably minister's discretion to use prayers or not**
- **A review in five years**



In the background... (and often the foreground!)

- Groups from a range of perspectives producing reports, blogs, videos, theological reflection**
- Each diocese engaging in conversation differently**
- LGBTQI+ christians of all convictions carry much of the emotional load**



**Beginning to take
a closer look...**



What have the Bishops actually said & done

- Processed and reflection upon material produced through LLF as well as their own studies.
- Had three multiple-day meetings to pray, discuss, share with each other.
- Been honest about the fact they are not in agreement - are proposing a first step not a solution.
- Have identified themselves as a diverse group.
- **Have now made a final response:**
 - An apology to the LGBTQI community**
 - A written response (see next slides)**
 - Prayers for Love and Faith**
- Have committed to review this again in five years.
- Have chosen not to try to pass a change of doctrine through synod.
- Have pointed to some of the positives e.g. awareness of singleness



Prayers of Love and Faith

- Are being offered as a pastoral resource for use at discretion of the minister (ordained or LLM)
- Bless the people but not the relationship
- Reflect both Side A and Side B
- Are for use after a civil partnership or civil marriage in most cases



A response from the Bishops...

- First part is a pastoral letter including the apology
- Second part of gives background to the Prayers of Love and Faith with theological reflection around marriage, sexual intimacy, the Church of England's relationship to the state, and what it means to bless something
- Third part outlines the need for new pastoral guidance; new guidance for praying with others; and new guidance for church of england school
- Final part identifies areas for the church to attend to and develop:
 - Human embodiment
 - Singleness, celibacy, friendship, community, family, household
 - Human identity
 - Everyday faithful relationships.



Why is it so messy?

1 – it isn't just one issue. And the issues contained within “human sexuality”

aren't as connected as we sometimes assume

2 – Deeply personal, speaking into identity, emotive, requires us to talk about things we may have learnt are off limits in church, disunity hurts and

unity is hard, asks vulnerability of us.

3 – the presenting issues of same-sex marriage and ordination of those in

same-sex marriage is not a simple “yes” or “no” for everyone...

interpretation of scripture, other doctrinal issues, relationship to the state, legally complicated, highly emotive, Anglican communion, justice, mission,

what does it mean to bless something (sacramental theology), relationship

to the church in Rome...

*Almighty God,
in Christ you make all things new:
transform the poverty of our nature by the riches of your grace,
and in the renewal of our lives make known your heavenly glory:
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen*

+ Stephen Ghy

+ Reginald Huntington



Preparing to explore more...

What questions do we have?

What encourages us?

What concerns us?