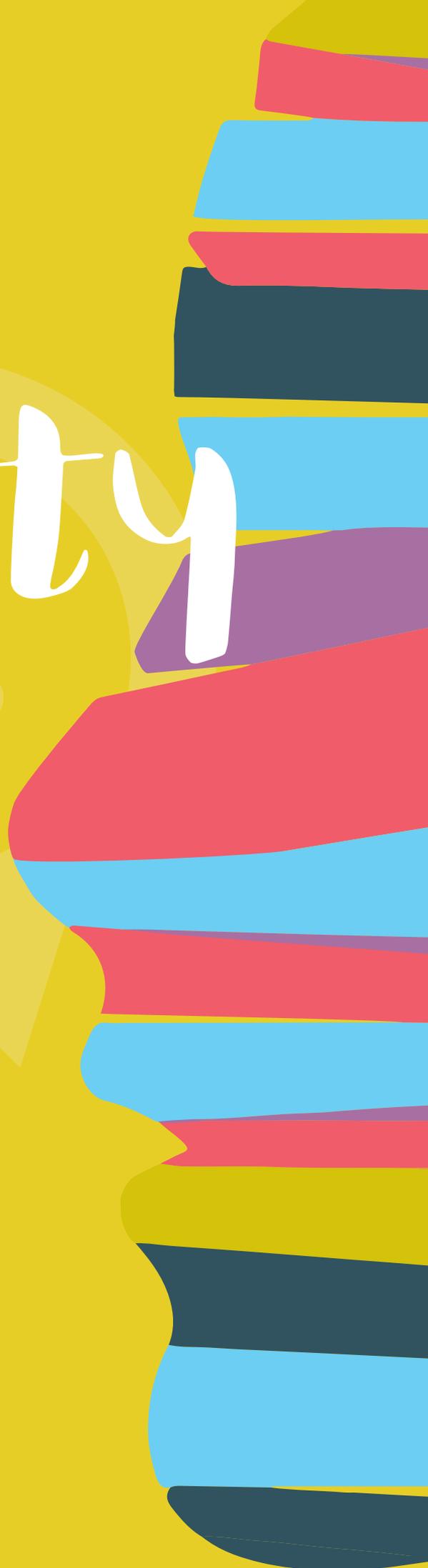




Sexuality

DISCUSSION SESSION 3

Discussing Homosexuality



Note to Discussion Sessions

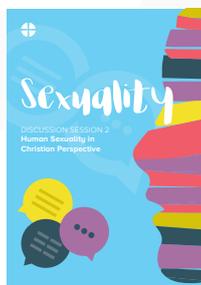
The following discussion session is part of a 4 series programme which has been designed to be used in a group from a local congregation or circuit. You can decide how much or how little of the suggested format to use. You know your context best. Please, modify or adapt the sessions as you see fit for the comfort level of your participants. If the full plan is followed, you should allow an hour to an hour and a half for each of the four sessions, which might easily be scheduled one night a week for a month.

The session guides are complements to and assume that participants will have read 'Sexuality – Developing Good Conversation on Difficult Questions' or the relevant sections of the document for each session prior to attendance. If your group does not wish to work in this way, you may plan to have some copies of the document on hand for people to review the relevant sections over a cup of tea/coffee prior to the start of the session.

Session 1 Why This, Why Now



Session 2 Human Sexuality in Christian Perspective



Session 3 Discussing Homosexuality



Session 4 What Should We Do next



🌐 All of these can be downloaded from www.irishmethodist.org/WPHS

Sexuality

DISCUSSION SESSION 3

Discussing Homosexuality



You Will Need:

- ✓ a Bible for each participant
- ✓ a copy of 'Sexuality – Developing Good Conversation on Difficult Questions' for each participant
- ✓ Coloured pieces of paper
- ✓ colouring pencils/crayons
- ✓ a flip chart
- ✓ The statement about 'God's purposes and intentions for human sexuality' from last time hung in a prominent place in the room
- ✓ Rules for good discussions page the group created in the first session hung in a prominent place in the room
- ✓ One copy each of Handout – Testimony 1-5
- ✓ A copy for each participant of either the Romans handout or the 1 Corinthians handout
- ✓ A copy of 'Methodist Teaching' handout for each participant

ICE-BREAKER

 10 mins

Write the following statements on pieces of coloured paper: 'I am terrified to be talking about homosexuality in church', 'I am so relieved that the church is talking about homosexuality', 'I am uncomfortable with the topic of homosexuality but know it needs to be discussed', 'I am excited about this conversation about homosexuality', 'I am nervous about being here talking about homosexuality.' Place these pieces of paper around the room in different areas and put some colouring pencils/crayons with each.

As people arrive at the session, invite them to find the piece of paper that describes how they are feeling and to sit in that area of the room. Once the group has gathered, invite people to talk with the others who are at the same location in the room as them and to draw [or write] something as a group

on their piece of paper that shows how they are feeling.

Ask each group to say a little about what their piece of paper is and what they discussed/drew [wrote].

Open the Session with prayer.

PRAYER

Mighty God, in our weakness you show your strength. Everlasting Wisdom, you have chosen the foolishness of this world to shame the wise. Our weakness and limitation around the subject of our sexuality pale in the light of your great love for us. May we place ourselves and our fears fully in your hands and offer ourselves to what you would say to us through your Holy Spirit, both now and always. Amen.

DISCUSSION

 40 mins

Hang up the page you produced as a group about God's purposes for human sexuality from last time, and the 'rules for good conversations' page from the first session where everyone can see them. Also hang up a blank 'Four Wesleyan Sources' flip chart page.

Explain that it is important to understand that members of the group may be feeling differently about this conversation as we have seen in the previous activity. We will be pursuing dialogue rather than debate (as discussed in the first session) and we need to be attentive to each other's needs and comfort levels as we discuss.

The document we have been discussing 'Sexuality – Developing Good Conversation on Difficult Questions' is the result of a process of listening to people within the MCI. Tonight we are going to do a bit of listening ourselves.

Ask for 5 volunteers to each read a 'testimony' (see handouts Testimony 1, etc.). Have each read aloud to the group without comment between them. Ask the group:

- » How did you feel hearing those testimonies?
- » With whom did you most identify? (speaker 1, etc.)
- » Who did you feel the most compassion for? Why?
- » What stood out to you from these testimonies?
- » How do these stories resonate with or stand in tension with your own and/or family/friends' experiences? What would you like to share/add?
- » What do we want to put onto our Quadrilateral sheet from what we have heard?

BIBLE STUDY

 35 mins

Ask group members to re-read the section of 'Sexuality – Developing Good Conversation on Difficult Questions' under the heading 'How do we deal with Scripture?'

Discuss the following:

- » How do you respond to the idea that Scripture requires interpretation? What does this mean?
- » Of the four approaches Hays describes for seeking moral guidance in the Bible, which do you think you normally employ? Why? Is one or more particularly appropriate for the subject of homosexuality?

Emphasise the four points of the summary of that section:

1. community of readers
2. context

3. big picture of the Bible and voices within
4. openness to hearing the interpretations of others

Break the group into two discussion groups. Give each a biblical text to work with and a copy of the handout appropriate for their group. The texts are:

- » Romans 1:16-2:1
- » 1 Corinthians 6: 1-20

To the leader: Each of these passages is discussed at length from two conflicting positions in the Col document 'The Guide: A Resource to assist the Church in Listening, Learning and Dialogue on Human Sexuality in the Context of Christian Belief'. See pages 62 and 68 for Romans and 62-63 and 68-69 for 1 Corinthians. This material may help you to be prepared for your group's conversation. These texts are chosen for discussion because they come up in many people's thinking about the issue of homosexuality. However, there are other texts to add to your group's discussion listed below. If your group has raised different issues for discussion in your earlier sessions and you think they would benefit from different text choices, you might find some of the texts listed below helpful.

Have the groups read their text and report on their discussion. Add anything you learn together to the 'Scripture' portion of your Quadrilateral flip chart page.

Invite the group to suggest other voices or themes within Scripture that need a hearing on this matter. If the group does not suggest them, you might add any of the following (mutual love, discipline 1 Peter 1:14-25; forgiveness/forbearance/sinfulness of all Romans 3:21-26; love for one another and God's forgiveness 1 John 4:7-21; do not judge, be merciful, you will know a tree by its fruits Luke 6:36-45).

Add any further insights to the Scripture portion of your Four Wesleyan Sources flip chart page.

ADDING SOME TRADITION

 10 mins

Distribute the handout page ‘Methodist Teaching on Homosexuality’ and have someone read each statement aloud.

Give the whole group a few minutes to work with these texts as individuals. Invite each person to underline or circle words that seem to be important principles to apply to the discussion. After a few minutes, ask people to share what they underlined or thought important. Add these ideas to the Four Wesleyan Sources flip chart.

DRAWING THINGS TO A CLOSE

 10 mins

Ask people to take a few minutes with one other person and share aloud/think through aloud what they have heard and thought and said tonight about the subject. Discuss how the pieces from Tradition, Scripture, Reason and Experience fit together. What do you think your tentative current position might be?

If people feel comfortable, invite them to share their thoughts with the larger group.

Close the Session with prayer.

PRAYER

Just, Righteous and Holy One, you know the hearts of every person. You know our secret desires and the judgements we pass on ourselves and others. You are gracious and merciful, abounding in steadfast love and compassion. Help us to offer our weaknesses to your strength, and our sinful selves to your forgiving love. May we find the grace to love one another with a measure of the love we have been shown. We ask these things in the name of the one who loved us first, Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Romans Handout

Read the following passage as a group:

Romans 1:16 - 2:1 (NRSV) ¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹⁷ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, "The one who is righteous will live by faith." ¹⁸ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those who by their wickedness suppress the truth. ¹⁹ For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰ Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. So they are without excuse; ²¹ for though they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened. ²² Claiming to be wise, they became fools; ²³ and they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal human being or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles. ²⁴ Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the degrading of their bodies among themselves, ²⁵ because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. ²⁶ For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, ²⁷ and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error. ²⁸ And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind and to things that should not be done. ²⁹ They were filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, craftiness, they are gossips, ³⁰ slanderers, God-haters, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, rebellious toward parents, ³¹ foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. ³² They know God's decree, that those who practice such things deserve to die-- yet they not only do them but even applaud others who practice them. **Romans 2:1** Therefore you have no excuse, whoever you are, when you judge others; for in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, are doing the very same things.

DISCUSS

- » Is Paul offering rules, principles, stories/models or world-views and patterns here? Why? What would you say are the points of emphasis?
- » How do you react to the list in vs. 29-31? How do these relate to the description of sexual behaviour in Paul's argument?
- » How does Paul present sexual behaviour here? Is it part of a larger idea or is it the main idea? What purpose does it serve in his argument? What might he assume his audience thinks?
- » What does Paul urge Christians to do?

1 Corinthians Handout

Read the following passage as a group:

1 Corinthians 6:1-20 (NRSV) ¹ When any of you has a grievance against another, do you dare to take it to court before the unrighteous, instead of taking it before the saints? ² Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? ³ Do you not know that we are to judge angels-- to say nothing of ordinary matters? ⁴ If you have ordinary cases, then, do you appoint as judges those who have no standing in the church? ⁵ I say this to your shame. Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to decide between one believer and another, ⁶ but a believer goes to court against a believer-- and before unbelievers at that? ⁷ In fact, to have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded? ⁸ But you yourselves wrong and defraud-- and believers at that. ⁹ Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, ¹⁰ thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers-- none of these will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹ And this is what some of you used to be. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God. ¹² "All things are lawful for me," but not all things are beneficial. "All things are lawful for me," but I will not be dominated by anything. ¹³ "Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food," and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is meant not for fornication but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. ¹⁴ And God raised the Lord and will also raise us by his power. ¹⁵ Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Should I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! ¹⁶ Do you not know that whoever is united to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For it is said, "The two shall be one flesh." ¹⁷ But anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. ¹⁸ Shun fornication! Every sin that a person commits is outside the body; but the fornicator sins against the body itself. ¹⁹ Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? ²⁰ For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.

DISCUSS

- » Is Paul offering rules, principles, stories/models or world-views and patterns here? Why? What would you say are the points of emphasis?
- » How does Paul interpret the body of the Christian in this passage? How does this idea relate to the description of sexual behaviour in Paul's argument?
- » How does Paul present sexual behaviour here? Is it part of a larger idea or is it the main idea? What purpose does it serve in his argument? What might he assume his audience thinks?
- » What does Paul urge Christians to do?



Methodist Teaching on Homosexuality

From 'Methodist Belief'

'Modern scientific knowledge has no uniform view about the factors involved in sexuality in general and homosexuality in particular. What is recognized is their complexity. In keeping with New Testament teaching, we are opposed to all debased forms of sexuality and sexual practice, whether heterosexual or homosexual. However, we plead for understanding and tolerance for those whose sexual orientation is towards those of their own gender. We encourage the Church to give a greater lead in the education of society, including Christians, regarding this issue, so that ignorance, prejudice and fear may disappear.'

From 'Pastoral Responses regarding those of Homosexual Orientation' (2011)

'We therefore believe that God loves everyone and Jesus died for all. We teach that people are made in the image of God but our lives have been tainted by sin; that sin has spoiled God's original intention for us and that sin affects every aspect of our lives, including our sexuality. However we also emphasise that God's grace is available to all and from the moment people respond to Jesus in faith, the Holy Spirit begins the process of sanctification, i.e. enables us to grow in grace.'

Testimonies

1

We should love and welcome all in our churches. We should give people the space and the safety to seek the answers to these questions without always banging on about this one, rather minor issue. We should honour scriptural authority, wrestling honestly with hard passages. Gay people should be allowed to develop close, intimate friendships without being judged. However that intimacy should not include sexual relationships. This is a boundary line that we remove at our peril. Therefore the answer to gay marriage in the church, or extra marital sexual relationships between Christians in general, and Ministers of the gospel in particular is still no.

2

A and B believe their son was born that way. It is not a lifestyle choice. So why can't society and the church just accept him? They followed that question by challenging the need even to use the word 'acceptance'. As an example, they said we don't look at a black person and think "I'll accept them". Words like acceptance, toleration, compassion imply there is something wrong or lacking in gay people. They are just people. Their son has his good points and bad points like everyone else.

4

Even though X was able to share his story more with trusted people, the burden of his "secret" and its implications weighed more heavily on him. At his lowest, X prayed "With the least amount of suffering for my family, God take me", such was the depth of loneliness, desperation and sense of being trapped.

X is finding the loneliness and the singleness are detrimental to his health... He does not feel called to a life of singleness...He believes he is someone who needs companionship.

3

The weight of not being me became too much to bear, I came out to family and a few close Christian friends...However, in a strange way I hadn't come out to myself. Having spent so many years hating myself, looking in the mirror and crying – wanting to be straight – that damaged me. I didn't love myself and therefore I couldn't let anyone else love me – I was un-loveable.

Over the next few months, instead of embracing my new openness, my life spiraled out of control and I hit rock bottom until eventually I had to dig much deeper than ever before and try to learn to love me for being me. This was so hard for me to do, but very slowly I began to accept me and love me.

I had chosen to set aside my Faith at this juncture as I couldn't wrestle with the question of being Gay and Christian at the same time. I do look back and know that God walked with me at this time.

5

For us, pastoral care simply did not exist. Two ministers have come and gone and we feel they have simply avoided the situation. They have been lovely men but neither has known what to say, how to react, how to pastor in this situation. So the result was that they said nothing or very little. We have suffered because of this. We don't want to go over and over things but we would have loved someone to pray with us, to care... I don't blame the ministers for this and hold no bitterness or resentment of any kind... they have been very gracious men of God and we have been fond of them both. But we both feel that ministers need to be better equipped. We knew they couldn't change the situation but they simply didn't know how to handle it..