

HOW IMPORTANT ARE OUR DIFFERENCES?

Film 3 of God's Beautiful Story



LOCAL CHURCH LEADERS KNOW BEST

The following comments/suggestions are not intended to be prescriptive – each church leader knows his/her context better than anyone else and is therefore the person best placed to make a decision about what would help/be appropriate for the people in that context.

The following suggestions are therefore simply offered as **options** – or in the hope that they will **generate further ideas** that might be appropriate for your context.

AIM IN SHOWING THE FILM

The film is intended to help churches understand/appreciate the scale and significance of the differences that exists within the C of E as to what people believe about marriage and sexuality. This will be the built upon in the films that follow.

KEY THEME/MESSAGE

Living in Love and Faith has brought into sharp focus the profound differences of opinion that exists across the Church of England with regard to issues of marriage and sexuality. This film suggests that these differences cannot be 'papered over' – because they are significant.

The film suggests that these differences are significant because :

- they have different views of identity and what it means to be human
- of the contrary way in which they are interpreting what the Bible says about marriage and sexuality
- to change the historic view of the C of E will undermine the unity of the Anglican Communion
- what is being advocated by those asking for change appears to be contrary to the endorsements of Jesus regarding marriage and sexuality.

RESPONDING TO THE FILM

Leaders will need to make a call as to what would be most helpful for their congregation having watched the film – but here are 4 suggestions (you might wish to mix/match – or add other ideas):

(a) Read the following Bible passages together and ask the question "are these passages consistent or varying in what they say about sexuality and marriage"

- Genesis 1v27-28
- Genesis 2v18-25
- Matthew 15v19
- Matthew 19v3-6
- 1 Corinthians 6v15-20
- 1 Corinthians 7v1-11
- Ephesians 5v31-32
- Revelation 19v6-9

(b) If it would help to study the topic of 'adiaphora' (things about which we believe the bible has latitude and things about which we think it does not) read the following passages and ask the questions offered:

- Romans 14v2 and v17 – why does it not matter what Paul's readers eat?
- 1 Corinthians 8v7-8 and 10v27 – why does it not matter whether food has been offered to idols or not?
- Galatians 6v16 and 5v6 – why does it not matter whether someone is circumcised or not?

Note to leaders – having studied the verses above it might be worth exploring with those in your discussion how, in each of the 3 examples above, it is clear that the 'latitude' exists because food and circumcision are not 'core' to being a Christian. By contrast – the bible consistently portrays holiness (which includes our sexual ethics) as core to discipleship.

Invite the group to share their reflections.

(c) Study the following statements from the Living in the Love and Faith course book (pages 256-258 - leaders might wish to photocopy them for the group) and then address the 3 questions:

Some of us maintain – in line with the Church of England's teaching in this area – that marriage between a man and a woman, held together by promises before God and the wider community, is the only proper context for a sexual relationship. Those living in sexual relationships other than marriage are to be welcomed into the life of the church and should not be shamed or condemned – but growing in Christ and walking the path of holiness will involve recognizing the need to live differently in this area, as in other areas, of their life.

Some of us say that the critical point in a relationship is where the couple have committed themselves to the lifelong relationship of marriage, and that this promise to be with and for each other and for whatever children come from their union, is the point at which sexual intercourse becomes a fully responsible action of love.

Some of us hold that faithful commitment can take other forms than marriage, and that there are many people who in other ways have made a commitment to live together as a couple that the church can recognize as good, while at the same time also inviting them to take a further step to confirm that commitment before God and the community.

Some of us say that sexual activity belongs as appropriately to same-sex as it does to opposite-sex relationships – whether we think that means within a same-sex marriage, or within the relationships of those who have committed themselves to marriage, or within other patterns of faithful commitment.

Q1 - To what degree are these statements similar or contrary to each other?

Q2 - How easy/difficult is it to reconcile them to each other?

Q3 - Do you consider (any of) these statements to be biblical/nonbiblical. Why?

(d) How important is it for the following people to believe what might be called a traditional biblical viewpoint: someone on a Christianity Explored or Alpha course, a church member, a PCC member or churchwarden, a Vicar, a Bishop ?