

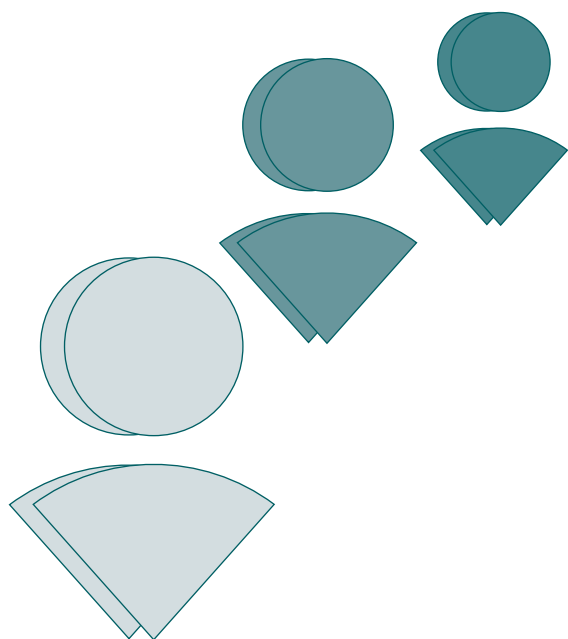
Sexual Orientation

Module

7.1



Equality, Diversity
and Inclusion Toolkit



The EDI Toolkit is updated according to a regular schedule. If you see anything you think needs revising, or have any other feedback, please get in touch by contacting equality&diversity@methodistchurch.org.uk

If you would like to request this resource in an alternative format, please contact us to discuss your needs at publishing@methodistchurch.org.uk

REMINDER

The Theological Underpinning of Methodist EDI Work

A document called *Theological Underpinning of Methodist EDI Work* is provided separately. All participants should have a copy of this when they attend their first session. It does not need to be considered in detail every time, but participants should be introduced to it at least once, and made aware that this is the starting point for all our work on EDI issues in the Methodist Church.

Module 7.1

Sexual Orientation

Contents

Introduction	4
Opening Worship	7
EXPLORE	8
1. Context and introductory activity	8
2. The journey to date: living with contradictory convictions	10
3. Homophobia	10
4. Civil partnerships and LGBT+ marriage	11
APPLY and REFLECT	12
1. Case studies	12
2. Intersectionality	24
3. Summary and questions	26
EXTEND (for further study or personal reflection)	28
1. Diversity of views	28
2. Being biblical	29
3. Being theological	33
Closing Worship	34

Appendices

(separate publications available on the Methodist Church website with the EDI toolkit modules: [methodist.org.uk](https://www.methodist.org.uk))

- Homophobia: definition and guidance
- Challenging conversations – A worship resource to support Living with Contradictory Convictions

Introduction

The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) toolkit builds on the mandatory EDI training for all those in leadership within the Methodist Church, including Ministers, Stewards, Local Preachers and Worship Leaders, and employed Lay Workers. The mandatory training introduces EDI work within the Methodist Church, including examining the legal context, the role of unconscious bias, and the Strategy for Justice, Dignity and Solidarity adopted by the Methodist Conference of 2021. One of the learning objectives of the mandatory training was to “be able to continue personal EDI development through self-directed learning.” The EDI toolkit provides an opportunity to do that through a series of modules which build on the mandatory training. It begins with an Introductory Module, which includes the Theological Underpinning of Methodist EDI Work, and then consists of a series of main modules, of which this is one.

The EDI Toolkit can be used in various ways. It is suitable for any area of church life, including house groups, leadership teams and continuing learning for preachers and worship leaders. This module can be completed as a single session. Alternatively, these materials can be used as a resource to respond to a particular issue. Selected resources or activities from this module could be used or adapted for use in worship or small groups. The materials can also be read by individuals as part of their individual commitment to EDI learning.

How long does it take?

The module can be used in various ways, and you will need to adapt the timings according to your group and context. However, if you are completing this module in one 90-minute session, you may find these suggested timings useful:

Welcome	Worship	EXPLORE	APPLY and REFLECT	EXTEND and preparation for next session	Worship
5 mins	10 mins	20 mins	45 mins	Minimal	10 mins

Pastoral concerns

This session was designed, as far as possible, to encourage full participation of all those attending. The facilitator needs to be aware that people may be reluctant to contribute, perhaps because of personal experience of discrimination, bullying or prejudice. We would therefore recommend that you encourage participants to respect one another – particularly respecting confidentiality (where it does not infringe on good safeguarding protocol).

There may be a danger of some participants dominating the discussion if they have a lot to say. We therefore encourage you to circulate the discussion groups if you think this will help. You could also introduce different facilitation tools, such as using a 'speaking object' (like a ball, talking stick etc) or allowing people to write feedback as well as verbalising it. This can maximise opportunities for all to participate.

Finally, there is also a risk that some people participating in this session will be upset by the topic under discussion. The sensitivity of the subject needs to be acknowledged at the start of the session and participants need to be aware of the different ways in which they can seek support to help deal with issues – both during the session and afterwards. Whilst it is important, as outlined above, that participants have equal opportunities to speak if they wish, this should always be optional.

You may want to have a separate space for worship, which could also be used as reflective space if anyone needs to take time out. You should also consider Chaplaincy provision, during the event if possible or afterwards if necessary. Your district or local EDI Officer may be able to assist you in sourcing appropriate Chaplaincy provision.

Equality Impact Assessments

The Methodist Church has published an Equality Impact Assessment at: methodist.org.uk/inclusive-church/eia

This is a way of reviewing the things we do now and those we plan to do in the future. This process helps ensure that our

practices are fair and inclusive, and that no individual or group of people is inadvertently disadvantaged. This enables us to anticipate and remove or reduce any negative impact.

The EDI Toolkit is designed to help us learn about a range of issues that can affect people within our fellowship and society. But learning is not sufficient. We also need action, to change our processes and procedures to ensure church meets everyone's needs including those who do not attend. The Equality Impact Assessment also prompts us to think inclusively. We may have a brilliant idea that will meet the needs of some people in our church or community. Collaboratively completing an Equality Impact Assessment ensures a range of different voices are involved in planning and decision making, so that all people are taken into account in our activities.

Opening worship

Thanks for friends who keep on loving
Singing the Faith 619

The Holy Spirit is poured out in unanticipated ways
Acts 10:9-16, 44-48

Prayer

Lord God, who greets us anew
in the change and challenge of each day,
grant us insight to recognise you at work,
stillness to hear you speaking to us
through the events of this day,
and courage to respond.

Amen.

(Ian White)

EXPLORE

1 Context and introductory activity

Context

This module recognises that the Methodist Church affirms and celebrates the participation and ministry of its LGBT+ members. The aim of this module is to explore how we live with a diversity of views within the Church, by listening to the experiences of members of the Methodist LGBT+ community. We will have the opportunity to consider those points in Church life where we need to be particularly aware of how discrimination against members of the LGBT+ community impacts on individuals and on the life of the Church.

Introductory activity – listening to each other

Learning objective

The purpose of this exercise is to develop participants as listeners rather than talkers. There may be differences of opinion and you may need to help participants to see that they live with differences of opinion all the time. This is important because the Bible is interpreted and understood differently by people who support LGBT+ equality and those who disagree. Both sides use the Bible, and the Church has not resolved this difference of view – but the Church does expect people to respect others.

This introductory activity should take about 20 minutes and every member of the group needs to have time to speak, but also to hear at least two other speakers. So it is recommended that people work in teams of three or four. Depending on the size and nature of your group, you might need to adjust the session timings to allow for everyone to participate in this activity.

Individually, think of a situation where you have encountered disagreement. This could be something you have experienced or observed. Spend a few minutes reflecting on the experience by yourself. If it helps, jot down a few notes.

Examples could be differences of view between family and friends about:

- Should the chairs in church be arranged in rows or in a circle?
- Should junior church be before, after or at the same time as the Sunday morning service?
- Should there be more wind farms?
- Should we get rid of all weapons?
- Diet, such as vegetarians versus meat eaters.
- A political/ethical question like: how to reduce a budget deficit, whether all pensioners should get a winter fuel allowance, whether all school children should have free school meals, what is the boundary between free speech and being offensive.
- Should we ban smoking?

Then, in their small teams, each person tells their story of this encounter/experience – especially how they felt about the disagreement and whether or not they could learn to live with the difference of opinion. The other members listen and make no comment whilst the story of the disagreement is being told.

The person who told the story then remains quiet while the others in the team say in turn what struck them about the story and any thoughts and questions that arose for them whilst they were listening. Team members should not comment while each person is giving their thoughts.

When everyone has spoken and given feedback, the team reflects together on the experience of the listening exercise. Talk about what you learned from it and how that might be applied positively in how you consider the rest of this module.

As a team, try to identify two or three issues where:

- views once commonly held have changed over time
- there is no agreement on what is right, so people have agreed to disagree.

2 The journey to date: living with contradictory convictions

When we consider Scripture we find that on some subjects, such as marriage and sexuality, there is a diverse and changing range of views. There is a wide range of ways in which Christians understand and interpret Scripture. This prompts a great deal of reflection for the Church, and we 'live with contradictory convictions'. In short, there are some things where we disagree and have agreed to disagree for the time being, but to do so with respect for other people and their understanding of the Bible.

In terms of employment, and in the provision of goods and services, it is illegal (under the Equality Act 2010) to discriminate against people on the basis of their sexual orientation – however they self-identify within the LGBT+ communities. The law allows religious/faith organisations to opt out of some parts of the Equality Act in relation to employing people for religious purposes (eg ministers, priests, rabbis, pastoral workers), but not for secular purposes (eg administrators, accountants, kitchen staff).

The report to Conference 2021, 'God in Love Unites Us', can be found at methodist.org.uk/media/12606/3240-10-amended-marriage-and-relationships-report.pdf

3 Homophobia

In 2000, the Conference passed a resolution from the Youth Conference Report: "The Methodist Conference, with the Methodist Youth Conference, unequivocally states that homophobia is unacceptable and reaffirms our Church's openness and inclusivity." In 2014, the Conference resolved that further work be done to define homophobia and provide guidance on how to deal with homophobia. A definition and guidance was produced in 2015, a copy of which is provided with this toolkit. It can be found online at methodist.org.uk/media/2089/7-1-1-sexual-orientation-homophobia-guidance.pdf

The future revision of this module will include transphobia and biphobia.

4 Civil partnerships and LGBT+ marriage

This section is due to be revised in the light of the decisions from Conference 2021 'God in Love Unites Us'.

The report can be found at methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf-2019-10-amended-marriage-and-relationships-report.pdf

The response from the Faith and Order Committee from the Conference of 2021 is at methodist.org.uk/media/21970/conf-2021-60-the-response-of-the-faith-and-order-committee-to-the-god-in-love-unites-us-report.pdf

Some answers to frequently asked questions can be found at methodist.org.uk/mandr-faqs

APPLY and REFLECT

1 Case studies

This section contains case studies for you to reflect on in small teams.

Each team should consider at least two of the stories. If possible, all of the stories should be looked at by at least one team. There will be an opportunity to offer feedback to the whole group.

Each of these is a true story, although names and some details have been changed to maintain anonymity. They were provided by the individuals concerned and so reflect their choice of language to describe their story.

At the end of the stories, there are questions for you to consider. It may be helpful to refer back to the SCIP classification in the Introductory Module. Here is a headline reminder of the SCIP classification:

- **Structural** – eg legal and political structures, policies, committees etc
- **Cultural** – the cultural norms of a group or society, commonly held views
- **Institutional** – practices, how things are done
- **Personal** – personal behaviours and practices.

Before you read the stories

1. Think of a time when you or someone you know felt welcomed and had a sense of belonging in church. Write down the words and emotions to describe how you/they felt.
2. Think of a time when you or someone you know felt unwelcomed or did not belong in church. Write down the words and emotions to describe how you/they felt.

After you read the stories

At the 2021 Conference, a report was adopted called 'Strategy for Justice, Dignity and Solidarity'. This report sets out some recommendations to help Methodists with the work of treating people with respect. You might like to read the report and think about which of these recommendations, as they are put into place, would help in the situations described in these stories.

The report can be found at methodist.org.uk/inclusive-mc-strategy

Christine's story

Christine is in her 40s. She trained as a local preacher, having sensed a call to preach at MethSoc while at university. She has always felt confused about her identity, worried that the way she felt about some women was contrary to the Bible's teaching.

She served as a mission partner in Africa and this took her away from the challenges of liberal Western life. It gave a purpose to her singleness and she loved the work.

Back in the UK, Christine is really torn about her feelings. She would like to have a partner to ease her loneliness, but is not sure whether her liking for a friend, John, is enough to get married. She finds Halima's company more exciting, but prays that she will not be tempted by this. She wishes she could have an honest conversation with her minister, but doubts whether he would understand her dilemma.

Questions

Experience

What is preventing Christine having an honest conversation with her minister? What might she be worried about, especially as she is still working out for herself how she feels?

Learning and action

How could the Church create a 'safe space' for people to speak about their feelings, where they can feel they are not judged?

Martin's story

Martin is single, in his 70s and looks after his increasingly frail mother. He's always been a Christian and has served as a Methodist junior church teacher for over 20 years. He became aware of being gay in his teens, but couldn't admit it to himself, let alone anyone else. He became challenged to face his sexuality in his 50s, through debates in his trade union meetings and the reports of the 1993 Methodist Conference. He serves as a circuit secretary and the circuit staff are far more interested in his clear and promptly produced minutes than his sexuality.

Questions

Experience and learning

- What prompted Martin to face his sexuality?
- How might other LGBT+ people be affected by the current conversations in Methodism? How would you know?

Action

- How could the church create a 'safe space' for LGBT+ people to speak from their experience?

Moira's story

Moira is in her mid-30s. She is a lay employee working in three churches. She is openly in a civil partnership of eight years, which is accepted and supported by the congregations she works for. However, her ecumenical colleagues have been undermining and bullying both her and members of one of the Methodist churches.

By effectively refusing to work with Moira or her church members, these colleagues make one of the church mission projects very difficult to manage. Moira is uncertain as to where she can turn for help.

Questions

Experience

- Are 'bullying' and 'undermining' Christian behaviours?
- Within Methodism, who or what is failing Moira?

Learning

- What is the effect of leaving Moira unsupported? Specifically, how might this affect her, the members of her church and the wider mission of the Church?

Action

- How can Moira be supported?
- What support and procedures are in place if you became aware of someone being bullied? How could you/we ensure such support and procedures work for LGBT+ people?

Robin's story

Robin is in his 30s, an only child of Christian parents. He grew up in a conservative Methodist church and while at school had no support, because of Section 28*. While he was at college, he had major struggles with his sexuality and the Church's teaching. Fortunately, an understanding chaplain helped him understand God's unconditional love and

he was later confirmed. Robin introduced his boyfriend David to their local Methodist church, but they now attend the Metropolitan Community Church in the city centre. Unlike the Methodist church, it supports their household and has a Sunday school that David's two children enjoy.

* Section 28 of the Local Government Act 1988 prohibited local authorities from "promoting" homosexuality or gay relationships as a "normal family relationship". It prevented councils spending money on educational materials and projects perceived to promote a gay lifestyle.

Questions

Experience

- If we say that we affirm LGBT+ people in the life of the Methodist Church, why does Robin no longer attend?

Learning

- How affirming of LGBT+ people is your church? How do you know?

Action

- What could you/your church do to demonstrate that LGBT+ people are welcome?

Peter's story

As a result of family and social pressures, Peter married, because acting on being gay was still a criminal act when he was growing up. In spite of much effort and counselling, the marriage broke down. Mainly because of the trauma and the effect his divorce had on church members, Peter withdrew from all church activities (except church attendance) and was

single for the following eight years. Then Peter met a younger Christian member of the armed forces who attended the same church. Gradually a love grew between them, such that they made a commitment to each other and began building a home together. They have lived together for 14 years in a loving, monogamous relationship.

Questions

Experience and learning

- What kind of cultural expectations does society, church and family place on young people? And, in Peter's case, what were the consequences of that?

Action

- What could you/your church do to support young people to understand their feelings?

Richard's story

Richard responded to an urgent request for volunteers to share in leadership of the church youth group. A single man in his late 20s, Richard had recently moved into the area and joined the church. His offer was accepted once a clear DBS check had been received and safeguarding procedures and training completed. After

a few months, one parent visited the minister to say that he and a number of parents had learnt that Richard was gay. These parents no longer wanted Richard to be involved in the Christian care and nurture of children and young people. The minister felt conflicted as to how to proceed.

Questions

Experience

- What false assumptions/conclusions have been made about Richard?
- How would you feel if such assumptions were made about you or a member of your family?

Learning

- What should the minister do? Who can help?

Action

- What could you/your church do to ensure that homophobic assumptions are recognised and changed?

Grace's story

Grace is in her 70s and a retired deacon. For almost 50 years, she had a faithful relationship with Pam, another deacon. They managed to keep together despite lots of miles travelling to see each other on Saturdays. They never formally spoke to anyone of their relationship, but Sarah realised how much they meant to each

other when she helped Grace look after Pam in her last months of a terminal illness. Grace found the funeral service very difficult. It was organised by Pam's sister, who hardly knew Grace. She was just mentioned as a kindly fellow deacon who'd nursed Pam at the end.

Questions

Experience and learning

- What would it feel like if your relationship/marriage was not acknowledged?
- How could Sarah have supported Grace?

Action

- What could you/your church do to ensure that LGBT+ people's perspectives are acknowledged and listened to?

Bill's story

From an early age, Bill recognised that he was attracted to people of the same sex. Having grown up in an evangelical church, this created a struggle through his teenage years as to who he was and what was expected of him. At university, he joined another evangelical Methodist church and recognised his need to share his story. Plucking up courage he found a minister who provided a 'safe space' to discuss his sexuality and encouraged him to be honest with his parents. After their

initial shock, they expressed and continue to express their love for their son for who he is. Their son's minister put his parents in touch with a colleague who helped them in their own spiritual journey as they came to terms with Bill's sexuality. Bill chose to let a group of friends know he was gay and his choice to lead a life of singleness. They became a group of friends with whom he continues to share his struggles, loneliness, joys and hopes.

Questions

Experience and learning

- Why was it important to Bill for him to be open and honest about his sexuality?

Action

- What could you/your church do to ensure that LGBT+ people's perspectives are acknowledged and listened to?

Jessica's story

Jessica has been married for 20 years and sincerely doesn't believe she is homophobic. She doesn't agree with LGBT+ marriage in church. Based on her understanding of the Bible, her view of marriage is traditional and she feels strongly that its purpose is to ensure that children are brought up by their biological

parents. Jessica feels that people who intend to have children should marry and all others should be celibate. Now that LGBT+ marriage has been affirmed alongside heterosexual marriage, Jessica feels this will reduce the status of all marriages, including her own.

Questions

Experience and learning

- What is Jessica concerned about in this story?
- How might people with Jessica's views be feeling since the decision to affirm LGBT+ marriage as well as heterosexual marriage?

Action

- What could you/your church do to help members live with contradictory convictions?

Susan's story

The most negative experiences Susan has had in the Methodist Church were during her time as a candidate for ministry and whilst in training. She was asked whether she wanted to marry in the future. During the course of training, she was questioned about her sexual orientation. Susan is sure that if she had been open and explained that she didn't feel sexually attracted to other people, she wouldn't have been able to become a presbyter. This was in the context of the 1980s, when young married women candidates were asked about their childcare arrangements, and young childless couples were told they couldn't start a family until they were in circuit.

Since then, Susan has had a feeling of invisibility during the various discussions about sexual orientation. It feels awkward as it is like being in a room full of people and having everyone else behaving as though you weren't there. Although Susan has always believed that God made her as she is and called her into ministry, she's always felt that she's not sure whether she's welcome or not in the Methodist Church. Susan is aware of trying to hide part of who she is.

Susan found the 'God in Love Unites Us' report affirming as it did include asexuality in its definitions. The thing Susan would find most helpful would be to have more acknowledgement that there is a diversity of sexual orientations.

Questions

Experience

- To what extent do you think assumptions about marriage and family are still present in the Methodist Church?
- Have you ever had an experience where you felt invisible?

Learning

- The Equality Act 2010 defines sexual orientation as a sexual orientation towards people of the same sex, the opposite sex or either sex. This is a protected characteristic and so discrimination based on sexual orientation is prohibited. This definition means that the law does not protect those who are asexual from discrimination. Indeed, it does not even acknowledge the existence of people who do not feel sexual attraction to others. What impact might that have on those who are asexual?

Action

- What actions could the Methodist Church take to ensure people of all sexual orientations feel a sense of belonging in the Church?
- What kinds of changes could be made in your church?
- What can you do to bring about these changes?

2 Intersectionality

Intersectionality refers to the interconnectedness of our social characteristics: our ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status and so on. These overlap and create interdependent systems of discrimination and advantage. Being aware of intersectionality means we can better acknowledge and understand the differences among us.

There is no hierarchy of protected characteristics. There is no hierarchy of discrimination. Different forms of discrimination and exclusion will affect different people in different ways and at different times, but no single characteristic is more central to our experience of being human. Within the Methodist Church, we aim to go beyond the protected characteristics of the Equality Acts of Great Britain and the Isle of Man; the Discrimination (Jersey) Law; the Prevention of Discrimination (Guernsey) Ordinance; and the Equal Opportunities Act in Gibraltar. Instead, we consider all power dynamics within the church, such as socio-economic factors and the relationships between lay and ordained. In all our relationships and processes, we seek justice; for all to be treated with dignity; and to stand in solidarity with those who have experienced discrimination or exclusion.

None of our characteristics are lived in a vacuum. We all have a range of other personal and social attributes that affect our lived experiences. Therefore, each of our lived experiences will be unique.

For example, all gay people will have different experiences of being gay. Some gay people will be transgender; others will be cisgender. Being a gay man is a very different experience from being a lesbian and comes with a different set of biases and stereotypes. The level of homophobia that gay people have faced, and the degree to which they feel safe to be public about their sexuality, may vary considerably depending on their age and the country and community in which they grew up. Some may have had the opportunity to be parents. For others, their sexuality may have prevented them from being able to experience parenthood, which may come with a profound sense of loss. Many people in Britain grew up in countries where being gay remains illegal. Some gay people can get married in their local Methodist Church, whilst other churches have not voted in favour of permitting this.

These are just a few examples, and we cannot possibly consider all the different experiences people have of being gay. The important thing is to be mindful that being gay is experienced in many ways, and to always consider how different personal and social characteristics intersect to form our unique lived experiences. The same applies to all other expressions of human sexuality too. We therefore cannot make assumptions and should always listen to and learn from the experiences of others.

We are all made in the image of God, across all our differences. Together in our diversity we make up the Body of Christ. So, as we learn more about one another, we draw closer to Christ. Becoming more aware of intersectionality helps us to do this.

If you know of a story that may help improve the diversity of experiences within the case studies in this module, or would be willing to share your own story, please contact [**equality&diversity@methodistchurch.org.uk**](mailto:equality&diversity@methodistchurch.org.uk)

3 Summary and questions

Thinking about your answers to the questions and issues raised in the case studies, you should now reflect on:

- what you have learnt
- what the stories might mean in your church
- what you will do.

Summary

The Methodist Church recognises and affirms LGBT+ people in the life and ministry of the Church. LGBT+ people:

- experience their sexual orientation as an authentic and integral part of their identity
- often face hostility from other people whose attitude to them is a barrier to authentic debate
- often feel invisible, isolated or unsupported in church because their identity as LGBT+ people is often ignored or not acknowledged.

In recognising a wide diversity in how Christians understand Scripture in relation to sexual orientation, we are called upon to:

- acknowledge this diversity
- believe that Christ called us to strive to live together
- realise that this can only be done by reliance on the grace of God to enable mutual respect, love and continuing exploration together
- recognise that these views are held as deep convictions
- acknowledge that people are called to Christ through God's calling rather than personal choosing
- agree to continue to explore these differences in the light, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, through our pilgrimage of faith.

Questions

Experience

- What is your experience of the Church dealing with issues of sexuality and sexual orientation?
- To what extent do labels matter to God?
- In what areas of your life would you feel it was acceptable to talk about sexuality/sexual orientation? In what areas would you consider it taboo?

Learning

- What structural, cultural, institutional or personal issues are there for the people in these stories?
- How might assumptions about LGBT+ people impact on individuals and on the mission of the Church?
- How might you and/or your church community help and support the person/people in the stories?
- How are you able to worship alongside members of the church who hold different and contradictory convictions to your own on sexual orientation?

Action

- What could your church do to recognise, affirm and celebrate LGBT+ in Church life?

EXTEND

For further study or personal reflection. Keep for use with other modules

Contents

1. Diversity of views
2. Being biblical
3. Being theological

1 Diversity of views

Within the Church, there is a diversity of views on sexual orientation. A few days before the 1993 resolutions were adopted, the then President of the Conference summarised the range of views held within the Church in these words:

“For some it seems clear, on the basis of biblical teaching, that intimate sexual practices between persons of the same sex are forbidden ... for others it seems equally clear that the biblical doctrines of creation and grace, and modern insights into the nature of sexuality, call for an acceptance of such practices when they occur in the context of deeply committed relationships of love.”
(*Methodist Recorder*, 17 June 1993).

Reflect

- Some people feel that the debate on human sexuality is the wrong focus and receives too much attention.
- Some people feel that this debate is a necessary focus because it concerns biblical witness.
- Some people feel that this debate is a necessary focus because it is a matter of God’s unbounded grace and that this is an issue of justice.

In recognising the wide diversity of views, we:

- acknowledge this diversity
- believe that Christ called us to strive to live together
- realise that this can only be done by reliance on the grace of God to enable mutual respect, love and continuing exploration together
- recognise that these views are held as deep convictions
- acknowledge that those who are called to Christ are so through God's calling rather than personal choosing
- agree to continue to explore these differences in the light, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, through our pilgrimage of faith.

Questions

- Were you aware of the Conference 2021 decisions on human sexuality?
- Which positions are represented in your congregation?
- How might you ensure that the Conference resolutions are known within your congregation?

2 Being biblical

The biblical passages that apparently speak directly about LGBT+ activity are:

- Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13
- Genesis 19 (refers to gang rape and inhospitality to strangers)
- 1 Corinthians 6:9-10
- 1 Timothy 1:10
- Romans 1:26-27

Different commentators respond to these differently. Some argue that:

1. These texts are speaking about sexual activity between two men or two women and therefore relate to activity today. If these texts are clear, then LGBT+ sexual activity is condemned.
2. These texts need to be understood in the very different context in which they were written. For example, Genesis 19 and 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 are not referring to mutually loving LGBT+ relationships, but are challenging the ways in which sex was used as a way of exerting power over people, or even as part of a pagan religious ritual. If the passages are seen as challenging any circumstances where sex happens without love, or without consent, then faithful LGBT+ sexual activity need not be condemned.

These two perspectives are developed further on the next page and are presented as a dialogue.

Commentator 1	Commentator 2
<p>These texts are speaking about sexual activity between two men or two women and therefore relate to activity today. If these texts are clear, then LGBT+ sexual activity is condemned.</p>	<p>These texts need to be understood in the very different context in which they were written (eg Genesis 19 and 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 are not referring to mutually loving LGBT+ relationships, but are challenging the ways in which sex was used as a way of exerting power over people, or even as part of a pagan religious ritual. The passages were challenging any circumstances where sex happens without love or without consent).</p>
<p>Jesus affirms heterosexual, monogamous marriage, though as far as we know he did not marry.</p>	<p>Jesus is silent regarding any LGBT+ sexual activity.</p>
<p>Out of all the specific Bible references to homosexuality, every one is negative regarding its practice.</p>	<p>There are many other things prohibited within the Old Testament that we do not think of as problematic today. Examples include eating certain animals (Deuteronomy 14:3-5), or charging interest on loans, (Deuteronomy 23:19).</p>
<p>A discomfort with homosexuality resurfaces in the new covenant (New Testament) and is articulated in three new separate references. While the New Testament makes it clear that the ritual requirements of the law are now superseded in Christ (Acts 10:9-15), the moral law remains intact and in fact is reiterated forcibly.</p>	<p>The LGBT+ activity that would have been known in the time of the New Testament Church was embedded in Roman and Greek culture and was often sex between men and young boys, or with temple prostitutes and therefore idolatrous. Loving, stable relationships between two people of the same sex were not known (or at least not acknowledged) and therefore cannot be condemned by these texts.</p> <p>And because the context of life in the world was so different when these texts were written, these texts do not speak authoritatively for today about LGBT+ relationships.</p>

Another perspective

Idolatry, promiscuity and shrine prostitution are what Paul is addressing in Romans 1, not LGBT+ relationships between faithful and committed partners.

Exegesis and hermeneutics are two essential tools for understanding the Bible. Exegesis is a critical explanation of the written text: for example, looking at the genre, structure and meaning of its words and phrases, sentences and paragraphs and seeking to describe and reflect on them. Hermeneutics refers to theories of interpretation, ie how we understand and make meaning from the Bible.

In 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, Paul writes: “Women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak but should be subordinate, as the law also says. If there is something they want to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.” (NRSVue)

“It’s cultural” we say. But, if that’s the case, why is the issue of the role of women regarded as ‘cultural’ by so many, while homosexuality isn’t?

Questions

- How do you respond to the different ways of reading these texts?
- How do you relate to those people who read them differently from you?

3 Being theological

As well as thinking about the specific biblical texts, there are some wider issues within our faith that help us to think about LGBT+ relationships. We do theology whenever we talk about God (that is literally what theology means – ‘God talk’). So, what is it that the Bible and the teaching of the Church throughout the centuries tell us about being Christian? Again, different commentators point to different aspects of the Christian story.

Some theologians think in different ways and might stress the following:

That in creating human beings ‘male and female’ God intends men and women to complement one another by getting married and this is the pattern of Christian life in relationships.	That God calls people to a variety of different ways of living, some to marriage, some single (like Jesus) and others to LGBT+ relationships. The Bible does not stipulate one set way of living.
That the Church is called to a holiness of living which calls it to live differently from the surrounding culture.	That Jesus has broken down identities such as male and female, slave and free, Jew and Gentile and sexual orientation is like this.
That God intends human beings to procreate, while LGBT+ relationships are, by definition, infertile.	That God’s grace is always including people who have been marginalised by society. It is a matter of justice.

Questions

- What for you are the big themes of the Christian story? What do they say to you about how the Church might understand LGBT+ relationships?
- How do you deal with living in a Church where other people profoundly disagree with you and what can we all do going forward?

Closing worship

1 John 4:7-21

Prayer

Day by day, dear Lord,
of thee three things I pray:
to see thee more clearly,
to love thee more dearly,
to follow thee more nearly,
day by day.

Amen.

(Attributed to Saint Richard of Chichester, *Singing the Faith* 444)

Let love be real, in giving and receiving

Singing the Faith 615