

GENERAL SYNOD HUSTINGS FOR CLERGY QUESTION 5

What are your hopes and prayers for the current programme of Shared Conversations around Human Sexuality?

<p>BAKKER, the Revd Jane</p>	<p>My experience is that people at the grass roots of the Church of England have a generous and welcoming spirit towards the LGBT community and are baffled at the depth of discussion that they hear reported. This can make the church seem distant and irrelevant, especially to younger people.</p> <p>At its best the Church of England excels at holding different views in balance. The process by which we get there is crucial in this instance. Care is needed to avoid inflammatory language and a willingness to genuinely listen with grace and humility will be essential.</p> <p>My concern is that this will become <i>the</i> issue of the next synod, perhaps beyond. Important as it is, this subject has the potential to be a long-term distraction at the highest levels of the church.</p> <p>My hopes are that these Shared Conversations will broaden our understanding of Human Sexuality. The loudest voices always come from the extremes, should they choose to participate, but my prayer is that a generous and gracious outcome is reached.</p>
<p>FOSTER, the Revd Gavin</p>	<p>I don't think the Shared Conversations are intended to resolve the issue; they're intended to change the way we speak to each other. We will then be able to work together on the issues that divide us.</p> <p>I think there's more work to be done on why we understand the Bible differently and treat its authority differently. It's a big thing to suggest we should reach a conclusion different from that of the people of God over the last 2,000+ years, and I don't think we should.</p> <p>So I hope by the end of the Shared Conversations we will be able to understand each other better (including those who are feeling very hurt and vulnerable), talk to each other with trust, openness and respect, and make good decisions together about the issues that divide us.</p>
<p>MICKLEFIELD, the Revd Andrew</p>	<p>The conversations are around three areas - Scripture, Mission and Human Sexuality - that is the title given to them as the different regions meet together.</p> <p>My hope is that each of the three dimensions are given equal measure by those who engage in the conversations. To discuss human sexuality in isolation will skew thinking to secular ideologies and simply current social niceties. For the church it is crucial that we add in Scripture and mission to give the conversation a robust and theological mindset.</p> <p>Also the resources given for the shared conversations are titled 'Grace and Disagreement'. I would hope and will pray that as a Church we are profoundly able to do so. Our past experiences of late have modelled this and we should continue.</p> <p>All points of view should be given space and respect - we all read Scripture and engage in mission from different contexts. Listening before speaking is a Scriptural model whilst I would expect all to be free to speak for themselves.</p> <p>My overall prayer is that we, as a Church, can find common underlying principles which will help growth, discipleship and love.</p>

<p>NOEL, the Revd Rachel</p>	<p>I hope and pray that we find a way forward as a broad church, able to disagree well and disagree deeply, holding together in one large body different theologies and approaches to questions around Human Sexuality; whilst unified in our faith in Jesus Christ. I pray that the Shared Conversations will allow us to see God's Spirit at work in others with whom we profoundly disagree, realising that each of us has only a partial understanding of the fullness of God's love and work in the world. Whilst we struggle to recognise the Spirit working in other members of the Church, how can we hope to notice the Spirit at work in the world beyond the Church, and join in with that mission. In the longer term I hope that as a result of these conversations we will be able to move towards a situation, as we did with women's ministry, where churches and ministers are able to decide where they sit within the spectrum of approaches. This would allow some churches to be a place where everyone is able to fully participate in the membership and leadership of the church, regardless of gender, ethnicity, wealth, sexual orientation or disability.</p>
<p>NUTT, the Revd Angela</p>	<p>Overall my hope is for a way forward in unity and grace. There is never going to be one concrete outcome that will please everyone. Many hold with conviction their differing opinions on theology and practice. Others are still seeking to understand what the Bible is saying to them. We are all exploring how what we believe is worked out pastorally and under the authority of the church. I pray that the process of shared conversations will promote understanding across the spectrum of views. Opposed opinions need not, should not result in tribal opposition between individuals. We must all hold onto the possibility that we could be wrong. With a willingness to move forward to find a way of working that all can live within, my hope is for deepened understanding, not just of the "other" but of ourselves and our own convictions, leading to a way of working that all can be a part of.</p>
<p>PERRY, the Revd Canon William</p>	<p>Archbishop Justin has said that his desire is for the church to "disagree well". Given the personal convictions involved, disagreement is probably inevitable; what is important is that all parties approach these conversations with openness, concern for the best interests of all, and acceptance of the goodwill and Christian sincerity of those with whom we may strongly disagree. The manner in which the issue of women bishops was resolved, with conflicting convictions accommodated with integrity, demonstrates that "good disagreement" is not an impossible hope. The most important thing is to avoid assuming at the outset that the differences are so fundamentally irreconcilable as to be incapable of being held together under the one roof.</p>
<p>PITKIN, the Revd James</p>	<p>I believe in a church which is generous, welcoming, inclusive and open; a church where everyone is able to participate fully in membership and leadership regardless of gender, ethnicity, wealth, sexual orientation or disability. Synod anticipates taking part in facilitated conversations on the subject next year. I would hope to be part of conversations conducted with respect and sensitivity. Whatever the outcomes I want all to remain in relationship and committed to the mission of God together.</p>

<p>ROUCH, the Ven Dr Peter</p>	<p>Over the centuries the Church has experienced sharp disagreement over many things. With the passage of time some of those disagreements now seem more or less incomprehensible. Communities are sometimes defined not so much by what they agree about, but by their mutual recognition of what they regard as important enough to disagree about. This suggests to me that the manner in which those of differing views converse is as important as the eventual doctrinal and ecclesial outcome.</p> <p>My hopes and prayers then are that those who participate directly in these conversations, and by extension the rest of us in the Church, are able to see each other clearly enough, and understand each other's faith and experience deeply enough, to recognise in each other a mutuality of belonging.</p> <p>I don't expect this to change the views of many people one way or another. It will however promote a rather different form of debate, one I hope that those who observe our struggles can respect and honour rather than caricature as blind and regressive ideology. I suspect also that it will shape and broaden the kind of doctrinal and ecclesial solutions we think are desirable for the longer term.</p>
<p>RUTHERFORD, the Revd Rosalind</p>	<p>I took part in the facilitated conversations to find a way forward on legislation for women to be appointed bishops and found that experience really important in starting to understand the views of those with whom I disagreed fundamentally. We discovered a shared commitment to finding a way through the apparent impasse, and rediscovered what we had in common.</p> <p>My hopes for the current shared conversations are that they will provide a similar experience of mutual recognition of what we share, as well as an acceptance of the differences, and acknowledge the pain and feelings of exclusion that many are feeling.</p> <p>So far, from what I have read, it seems that the conversations are providing a place where participants are able to listen to some of the deepest feelings and beliefs of others. My hopes are that the conversations will enable members of the Church to find a way forward which respects different views, but also acts to affirm that those who currently feel excluded from the church, because of their sexuality, both lay and ordained, are able to be fully included in the church.</p>
<p>SARGENT, the Revd Dr Benjamin</p>	<p>Understanding. As Christians, we have failed to understand what it has been like for LGBTQ people to be on the receiving end of condemnation which appears to single out their feelings and behaviour as particularly sinful. At the same time, we have often failed to understand the legitimacy of a nuanced view of sexuality in a society that wants only black and white simplicity: where any deviation from the dominant public voice is homophobia. Homophobia is a real and terrible problem in the world, but blame for it cannot be placed on the Church's failure to bless same-sex unions. I am not persuaded that a coherent historical, hermeneutical or theological argument can be made to change the Church of England's view on what faithfulness to Scripture looks like here (and I don't say this lightly – see my election address). My great, but perhaps unrealistic, hope for the Shared Conversations is that we get a better understanding of the Bible's message of the seriousness of our sin and our need for God's grace, whether we're gay or straight, and be encouraged to revere God more than the opinions of society (Acts 5:29).</p>

<p>STEED, the Revd Dr Christopher</p>	<p>Good disagreement.</p> <p>The Pilling Report of November 2013 recommended that the church’s internal dialogue on the subject of human sexuality might best be addressed through a process of conversations across the church. The House of Bishops has noted that the process of shared conversations must demonstrate primarily how the Church of England could model living together with issues of tension, where members took opposing views whilst remaining committed to one another as disciples of Jesus Christ – members of one church in both unity and diversity.</p> <p>I support this. As Pilling suggested, how the Church of England discusses the issue of same sex relationships affects Christians in other countries. In my own developing views on this issue as part of a study of sociology, I have elicited evidence from many experts, groups and individuals but also met many gay and lesbian people, to listen to their experiences and insights.</p> <p>Yet I do not believe that the church – or indeed Government – can re-write the definition of marriage. Those are my own convictions. So I pray for good disagreement, probably expressed globally in terms of a Federal structure.</p>
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