

**GENERAL SYNOD****Being the change: diversity, disagreement and difference****Summary**

This paper offers Synod members the opportunity and tools to shape the way they inhabit their responsibilities over the next quinquennium when engaging with major pieces of work. It accompanies the small group work which will offer members an opportunity to learn about and experience two resources that have the potential to transform the culture of the Church's engagement with challenging questions in the context of difference and diversity. These are the Difference Course and the Pastoral Principles Course.

Members are invited to consider doing one of these courses as a group of Synod representatives in their diocese as a vital part of their preparation for the coming quinquennium. Accepting this invitation has the potential to be transformative for the life of the Synod.

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**The context: a new quinquennium**

1. At the inaugural sessions of Synod in November 2021, members were introduced to major pieces of work which will shape the new quinquennium. These include the Church's Vision and Strategy, the National Governance Review, and the final leg of the Living in Love and Faith journey.
2. In his Presidential Address in November 2021, Archbishop Justin spoke of the Church finding itself in the midst of a 'wave of change': "this Synod will be crucial in how we ride that wave and how we are shaped by it".
3. Disagreeing well is more challenging in our society today than it has been for many years. The group work that is planned during the February 2022 group of sessions offers members an opportunity to learn about and experience two resources that have the potential to transform the culture of the Church's engagement with challenging questions in the context of difference and diversity. These are the Difference Course and the Pastoral Principles.
4. These courses provide a shared language and framework for General Synod members to come together to face important issues and to move forward together with confidence and in a way that deepens relationships and mutual understanding.
5. Enabling members of Synod to model disagreeing well – even appreciatively – is not only vital for the flourishing of the Church, but has the potential to be a gift to the communities among which the Church lives out the reconciling love of Christ. It is a missional commitment.

**The aims of Synod engagement**

6. The aims of members' engagement with the two courses at the February sessions of General Synod are:

- a) for Difference and Pastoral Principles to support and resource the ethos and dynamics of Synod in engaging with questions that are complex and about which there are often deep differences of opinion and conviction;
- b) to understand what the two courses are about and how they relate to each other;
- c) to understand what is involved in taking part in the courses;
- d) to inspire members to commit to engaging with one or both courses as a group of Synod members in their dioceses.

### **Introducing the Difference Course**

See Appendix 1.

### **Introducing the Pastoral Principles Course**

See Appendix 2.

### **Two courses, one purpose**

- 7. Both courses are grounded in the character of Jesus as the basis for being formed into his likeness as individuals and as church communities. Both courses invite participants to explore disagreement and difference in their everyday lives and relationships through the lens of Scripture and our shared calling as followers of Jesus Christ.
- 8. The Difference Course invites participants to learn three formational habits: to be curious, to be present and to reimagine; these habits can enable us to follow God's call to cross divides, navigate disagreement, practise forgiveness and risk hope.
- 9. The Pastoral Principles Course invites participants to identify obstacles to these good habits in their own lives and in the life of their church community: ignorance, prejudice, silence, fear, power and hypocrisy.
- 10. Both courses offer the potential for difference and conflict to draw people closer together, rather than pushing one another apart. Underpinning both courses is the belief that new insights and a reimagined world can emerge when we relinquish the obstacles that impair our relationships and put new habits in their place.
- 11. Both courses encourage the Church to see the way we encounter one another across our diversity and difference as a missional endeavour, offering to the world the gift of the reconciling love of Christ as a means of engaging with difference and diversity.

### **The context revisited: an opportunity to be the change**

The work of General Synod is a particularly visible aspect of the life of the national Church – visible both to local church communities and to the nation it serves in its role as the established church. As members embark on a new quinquennium this is a significant opportunity for the Church to testify to the reconciling work of Christ in a highly conflicted and polarised society and church.

How will this new Synod make the most of this opportunity? How will this Synod model good – and even appreciative – disagreement to the church communities it represents and the wider society it serves? How will this Synod embody hopefulness in the way members engage with one another across difference as they grapple with complex questions?

Taking part in one or both of these courses is transformative. Synod members are invited to run one of these courses as a group within their own church community and/or with Synod representatives in their dioceses, and so to bring a new ethos of working across difference in General Synod. This is an opportunity to enable rich and hopeful discussions at Synod over the coming quinquennium that open up new insights and ways forward in the life of the Church and its witness to the world.

Emma Ineson, Bishop to the Archbishops

January 2022

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# difference.

The power of faith  
in a conflicted world

*Difference* is a course that explores what it means to follow Jesus in a complex and divided world, seeing transformation through everyday encounters.



## Vision

Archbishop Justin Welby has a vision for the church to be a reconciling presence in the midst of conflict.







Navigating a divided and complex world can be hard. We encounter this in our relationships, in our communities and in our wider systems and structures. Many of us long to make a difference, but often we don't know how to respond or where to start. This is why leading practitioners and thinkers have been brought together to create *Difference* – equipping you to cross divides, navigate disagreement and pursue a just and flourishing world.

## The Course

This course is designed for both large and small groups, meeting online or in-person.

- 1 God's Call**
- 2 Crossing Divides**
- 3 Navigating Disagreement**
- 4 Practising Forgiveness**
- 5 Risking Hope**

## The session includes:

-  **Films** – stories from Christians facing conflict
-  **Bible** – Jesus engaging with difference and division
-  **Interactive exercises**
-  **Prayer**
-  **Discussion**
-  **It is designed to last 90 minutes**



# Three Habits

Drawing deeply on Jesus's encounters in the Gospels and the wisdom of expert peacemakers, we have distilled three habits that transform everyday relationships. The course gives participants the chance to develop the habits and start applying them to their own lives.



**Listen to others' stories and see the world through their eyes.**

Seek to value and understand the other and explore the limits of our own stories.

| Every person is made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26–27).



**Encounter others with authenticity and confidence.**

Build trust with others by engaging our whole selves in honesty, humility and vulnerability.

| Our encounters with others are inseparable from our relationship with Jesus (Matthew 25:31–46).



**Find hope and opportunity in the places where we long to see change.**

Offer everything back to God, and allow him to lead us into forgiveness, courage and creativity.

| God is making all things new (Revelation 21:5). We are new creations (2 Corinthians 5:16).

'Living in these times of uncertainty, fracture and polarisation, a lot of churches want to respond but don't know where to start. Here in Coventry diocese, many churches have run the Difference course to do just that. The course is accessible, rooted in Scripture and practical.'

**Right Reverend Dr Christopher Cocksworth, Bishop of Coventry**

'The description of key themes with accompanying videos, enabled a rich discussion around what can be seen as a complex topic. We hope to run it again and would recommend it to others who are thinking of running it.'

**Revd Canon Dr Sharon Prentis**



## Running the course

Running the course is simple and transformative, for those leading and participating. We call those who lead the course 'hosts'. At least one host from each group needs to have completed the 'Introduction to Difference' module from our online Training and Resource Hub. The training gives hosts everything they need to prepare and run each session, including all the materials for the course, key skills and top tips.

## After the course

To transform relationships, we don't need a new 'to-do' list or just another course. Difference develops habits that change how we act in the long term. To keep going in the face of setbacks, we will need a community around us who identify the same call and practise the same habits.

We encourage that in two ways:

### 1 Re-Gathering

We suggest groups meet around a month after the final session and, if possible, regularly thereafter, to share stories of hope and challenge, dig deeper into their shared commitments and reimagine how God is at work through them. We provide a basic resource to support regathering.

### 2 Stay Connected

We invite all hosts and participants to sign up to our mailing list and follow us on social media to receive inspiration for being **curious**, being **present** and **reimagining** in your everyday life, as well as the latest news about what we're up to and how you can get involved.

🖱 [difference.rln.global](https://difference.rln.global)

📷 [difference.rln](https://www.instagram.com/difference.rln)    🐦 [@DifferenceRLN](https://twitter.com/DifferenceRLN)



## About us

RLN is a registered charity, established as part of the Archbishop of Canterbury's Reconciliation Ministry. We're committed to mobilising followers of Jesus to live out their calling as peacemakers and reconcilers, for a just and flourishing society.

Being a reconciler is an essential part of following Jesus. We believe that the fracture and division in our world cries out for people committed to reconciliation, whose actions and words show that a new and better way is possible: we need reconciling leaders. This is a call to every one of us, whether we think of ourselves as 'leaders' or not. We also believe that there is power in interconnection and, together, we are so much more than the sum of our parts.

**RLN** DIFFERENCE IS A PART OF THE  
RECONCILING LEADERS NETWORK



ARCHBISHOP OF  
CANTERBURY'S  
RECONCILIATION  
MINISTRY



## Session Info

The course enables participants to develop habits through its session structure:

### Story

Listening to stories from the Bible and from Christians facing conflict today

### Space

Putting the habits into practice through an activity or reflection

### Sanctuary

Sharing with and listening to God, seeking his guidance, by the Spirit

## 1 God's Call

**God can transform relationships in a conflicted world. God's call and equipping make that possible.**

God is at work to renew and reconcile all things and he calls us to be caught up in what he is doing. We live in between the wholeness that God intended in the beginning and the ultimate restoration of all things, of heaven and earth, which we are promised. We have a calling in the here and now to bring hope and to be hope in a messy and complex world. Following Jesus means really loving our neighbours and our enemies. It means allowing God to open our eyes to those places where relationships with God, ourselves, our community and the earth have broken down. And it means letting him lead us, one step at a time, into the heart of the divides which he can transform.

### This session includes:

- The biblical call to Christians in a divided and complex world: Matthew 5:5-9
- Setting parameters for group culture: encouraging honesty, sensitivity and ways of relating well to one another
- Interactive exercise to explore the 3 habits and the stories we bring

## 2 Crossing Divides

**God invites us to see where difference or prejudice divide us from others and offers us opportunities to see them as he does.**

It is easy to distrust and feel wary of those who are different from us. We often find ourselves in echo chambers, surrounded by voices that reinforce our own perspective. It is increasingly easy to avoid or shut out those who make us uncomfortable or fearful, creating a dividing wall between us. But we are called to something different, to a curiosity about others as people made in the image of God. This session is about responding to God's invitation to know ourselves better by seeing our walls and the people on the other side.

### This session includes:

- The story of Sami Awad from the Bethlehem about overcoming walls between Israelis and Palestinians
- The account of Jesus meeting a Samaritan woman: John 4:1-30
- Interactive exercise about building and dismantling walls of prejudice

### 3 Navigating Disagreement

God is with us as we face the challenge of disagreement, which can become an opportunity for stronger relationships if handled well.

We all encounter conflict and it rarely feels comfortable. But we don't need to be overwhelmed by it. Jesus' example shows us that we can respond to disagreement with curiosity and generosity, without compromising our convictions. In fact, sometimes conflict can be an opportunity to deepen and strengthen relationships in ways we had never imagined. Jesus seeks to encounter the person behind the conflict, the issue or the label. Approaching disagreement in this way can change our experience of conflict and, ultimately, our relationships.

#### This session includes:

- The story of Mariam Tadros from London about handling a family disagreement
- The account of the woman who washes Jesus' feet: Luke 7:36-50
- Interactive exercise about disagreement and empathy

### 4 Practising Forgiveness

God is with us in the mess and complexity of trying to put forgiveness into practice in our relationships.

Jesus teaches again and again about forgiveness in the gospels. This suggests two things: firstly, that it is a crucial part of finding life in all its fullness; secondly, that it's pretty hard to get our heads around and even harder to live out every day. This session is about allowing ourselves to be excited by the possibilities of forgiveness in our relationships, while being honest about the places we get stuck.

#### This session includes:

- The story of Craig Stewart from Cape Town about taking steps to ask for forgiveness from colleagues and friends
- The account of Jesus and Peter on the beach from John 21: 1-19
- Guided reflection, 'stepping into' the Bible passage

### 5 Risking Hope

Doing relationships God's way will sometimes be risky and resisted, but the hope it brings is transformative.

The kingdom of God is so transformative precisely because it is enacting something brand new which is often counter-cultural. But this doesn't always feel comfortable. We know that there are times when following Jesus in our relationships still feels like an uphill struggle. As we prepare for what's next, we need to know that we are called to be part of God's bigger story of restoration in the world and that God will resource us.

#### This session includes:

- The stories of Guvna B from London and Tom Herbert from Gloucester about communities that enable them to see change where there was brokenness
- The account of Jesus washing the disciples' feet from John 13:1-17
- Interactive exercise about how the habits enable us to embody hope



HELD TOGETHER  
IN THE LOVE  
OF CHRIST:

# Pastoral Principles for living and learning well together

A 5-session course for groups



**How can we learn to relate better to one other across the differences and diversity that we find in our church communities?** This five-session course is designed to help identify the roadblocks that can so easily hinder us from understanding each other better and loving each other more deeply. The course encourages us to find creative ways to grow and learn together in the love of God.

The course is based on the Church of England's 'Pastoral Principles for Living Well Together'. These Principles identify six 'pervading evils' that hinder our growth as Christians, hurt other people and create barriers that stop our churches from growing into Christian communities of welcome and belonging. Each session focuses on one or two of these 'evils' and includes resources for Bible study, reflection, discussion and worship. Free accompanying videos are available via [churchofengland.org/PAG](http://churchofengland.org/PAG).

By exploring these in our everyday lives and relationships, the course helps us to play our part in seeking unity in our church communities as well as in the wider community. It can be used to explore particular topics about which there is disagreement, or used simply as a means of becoming a community that lives more fully in the way of Christ.

*This booklet is also available in money-saving packs of 6.*

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# INTRODUCTION

The fruit of the Spirit is  
love, joy, peace, patience,  
kindness, generosity, faithfulness,  
gentleness, and self-control.  
There is no law against such things.  
(Galatians 5.22–23)

The purpose of this course is to help church communities to examine afresh their life and learning together in the face of difference and diversity. It is based on the Church of England's 'Pastoral Principles for Living Well Together' ([www.churchofengland.org/PAG](http://www.churchofengland.org/PAG)). Although the Pastoral Principles were developed to encourage better inclusion of LGBTI+ people, they can be applied to other differences within our church communities.

In this course we are invited to think about the things which impair relationships. The Pastoral Principles identify six 'pervading evils': prejudice, silence, ignorance, fear, hypocrisy and power. These 'evils' hinder our personal growth as Christians, hurt other people, and create barriers that stop our churches from growing into Christian communities of welcome and belonging. They are the opposite of the fruit of the Spirit. It is easy to see these 'evils' in others; the hard work is to see them within ourselves.

When there are strongly held differences among us, we are tempted to form like-minded groups or factions. Communities that become divided in this way is one of the greatest challenges for our Church and society today. We can all play a part in seeking unity in our Church as well as in the wider community. This course encourages us to find creative ways to grow and learn together in the love of Christ.