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This is an archive of the website previously found at www.sharedconversations.org and for reference only.

Contact

Please [use this form if you'd like to get in contact](#) with the Projects Coordinator of the Archbishop of Canterbury's Reconciliation Ministry team, who were responsible for this project.

About

In its report published in November 2013, the House of Bishops Working Group on Human Sexuality recommended that:

“The subject of sexuality, with its history of deeply entrenched views, would be best addressed by facilitated conversations or a similar process to which the Church of England needs to commit itself at national and diocesan level.”

In order to meet this, the Church of England has undertaken a process of Shared Conversations across three circles: the College of Bishops (September 2014); Regionally (April 2015-March 2016); and with members of General Synod (July 2016). The key question on which the church has reflected in these three circles is: **Given the significant changes in our culture in relation to human sexuality, how should the Church respond?**

The facilitated conversations have taken place to create safe spaces in which questions of difference and disagreement can be explored in relation to questions of scripture, mission and human sexuality. They started with the premise that sound judgements about others must start with adequate knowledge about who the “other” is and what they actually believe and practise. When members of the church draw different conclusions from their reading of scripture and hold that God’s call to his people has implications for conduct and ethics which others within the church dispute strongly, knowing the “other” becomes crucial.

The aim of the Shared Conversations was that the diversity of views within the church would be expressed honestly and heard respectfully, with the hope that, in so doing, individuals might come to discern that which is of Christ in those with whom they profoundly disagree. Neither this process of conversation, nor any of those involved in facilitating it, have any authority in the decision-making of the church.

The paradox of conversations of this kind is that they do not require that any participant changes his or her mind. Minds may change – but that would not be a measure, in itself, of the “success” of the conversations. The conversations are intended to help us find out how much we can agree on, how much difference we can accept in fellow Christians without agreeing, and where we find the limits of agreement to lie.

The Shared Conversations in the College of Bishops and the Regional Conversations have both concluded. The third circle of Shared Conversations with members of General Synod took place in July 2016, immediately after the Synod had been prorogued and official business concluded.

Facilitators

23 experienced facilitators were chosen and trained to underpin the Shared Conversations. These facilitators are a very diverse group of professionals, all with wide-ranging and often international experience, and all committed to the flourishing of the Shared Conversation.

FAQs

What is the intended outcome of the Shared Conversations?

The aim of the conversations is simply to create safe spaces in which difference and disagreement can be explored in relation to questions of scripture, mission and human sexuality. It is hoped that this process will encourage and enable people who take a wide range of views to discern that which is of Christ in those with whom they profoundly disagree. There is no preconceived or prescribed outcome beyond this.

It will be the participants alone who will, on the basis of what they have heard and experienced, and informed by scripture and people’s theological convictions, reflect the diversity expressed in their conversation and the implications for a church in which these views are held. In many, perhaps the majority of, cases, they may not reach any conclusion. This is fine. The conversations in themselves have no decision-making authority in the Church of England.

How is the safety of participants in the Shared Conversations being protected?

Honesty is essential to this process of talking and listening and, as such, the safety of participants is paramount. All conversations are being governed by the St Michael’s House Protocols. Under these, a space is created in which all feel welcomed and respected, in which diversity is encouraged, and which is private but not secret. In keeping with these protocols, the identity of a participant will not be disclosed by anyone other than the participant him-/herself. Additionally, participants make the commitment that whatever information they hear is not used to disadvantage any participant in situations outside the conversation.

Of course, it is the nature of conversations around conflict and disagreement that each participant has to take responsibility for their own safety. However, the hope is that, by the end of the two days, everybody will take responsibility for each other's safety, because there will be a sharing of each other's hopes and desire to follow Christ.

Oversight and Design

In preparing for the Shared Conversations, great importance has been given to ensuring that the process is both well-planned and robustly accountable. For that reason, 3 levels of accountability and planning are being built in to the process. These are as follows:

Design Group

This group comprises the facilitators Andrew Acland, Sandra Cobbin, Ruth Scott, Peter Woodward, along with Canon David Porter and Rev Dr Malcolm Brown. They have the responsibility for designing each session of the facilitated conversation process and for revising and adjusting the programme content as appropriate.

Steering Committee:

The standing committee is being invited to authorise a small group to act on their behalf on a Steering Committee. The group of three representatives on behalf of the standing committee of the House of Bishops (Bishop Steven Croft, Bishop Graham James, the Venerable Christine Wilson) work alongside 2 members of the Design Group (Sandra Cobbin and Ruth Scott), and Canon David Porter and Rev Dr Malcolm Brown.

Regional Advisory Group

A representative from each of the 13 regional conversations (a bishop or female regional representatives, nominated by each regional grouping) are forming an Advisory group as we take the process forward. This group met regularly in 2015 and early 2016 to guide the Shared Conversations process, share knowledge and give feedback as the regional conversations progressed and as we look ahead to the General Synod Process.

Programme

The Shared Conversation for members of General Synod took place after General Synod had been prorogued in July 2016. A full programme was issued to all General Synod members .

[View the programme for the 3-day Regional Shared Conversations](#) which took place from April 2015 to March 2016.

Regional Shared Conversations

The second circle of the Shared Conversations took place regionally. All the dioceses of the Church of England met in 13 clusters of between 3 and 5 dioceses at venues across England between April 2015 and March 2016. This process has now concluded.

Regions:

The regional groupings of dioceses can be seen illustrated on the map below.

A map of the regional areas used in Shared Conversations

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Resources

Grace and Disagreement

The core resources for the Regional Shared Conversations are two booklets, entitled *Grace and Disagreement*. The first booklet outlines the thinking behind the conversations, the process and their place in the life of the church. The second booklet comprises four essays, with varying views, which participants in the conversations are asked to read prior to taking part in the conversations. Both are available to download by clicking on the links below.

[Grace and Disagreement 1: Thinking through the process](#)

[Grace and Disagreement 2: A Reader – writings to resource conversation](#)

Hard copies are available to purchase through the Church House Bookshop website by following these links:

[Part 1](#)

[Part 2](#)

Other Church of England Resources

The Church of England has produced various resources in the past which looked at human sexuality. These include:

- **The Pilling Report** (2013) This can be [downloaded](#) for free or [purchased](#) in hard copy
- **Some Issues in Human Sexuality** (2003) – A discussion document from the House of Bishops' Group on *Issues in Human Sexuality*, which can be downloaded [here](#)
- **Being Human: A Christian Understanding of Personhood Illustrated with Reference to Power, Money, Sex and Time**, a report by the Doctrine Commission of the Church of England (2003) which can be downloaded [here](#)

Presentations from the Shared Conversation with General Synod members

As part of the final Shared Conversation with General Synod members, a panel of three speakers addressed theological and scriptural aspects of human sexuality, each from their own distinct personal perspective, informed by their scholarship in this area. The notes from these presentations will be made available as soon as we have them and can be found below:

[Andrew Goddard](#)

[Loveday Alexander](#)

[Robert Song](#)

A great deal has been written from a wide range of theological perspectives on the topic of human sexuality. Below are articles, books and other resources which we are aware of. They are offered to enable people to engage with the spectrum of thought and approaches to the issue, but none are endorsed by the Church of England or the organisers of the Shared Conversations, nor is the list exhaustive. Some of the books listed

below deal do not deal exclusively (or even principally) with human sexuality but are offered because the perspective they present is relevant to the Shared Conversations.

External Resources

Online

- A set of resources from **EGGS** (Evangelical Group on General Synod) are available [here](#).
- The [website](#) of **Accepting Evangelicals** has a series of articles on the [Bible](#), as well as personal stories and a section on transgender issues.

Books

- **Love is an Orientation** by Andrew Marin, IVP (2009)
- **The Plausibility Problem** by Ed Shaw, IVP (2015)
- **Sexuality: The Inclusive Church Resource**, Darton Longman & Todd, London (2014)
- **Single Minded** by Kate Wharton, Monarch (2013)
- **Covenant and Calling** by Robert Song, SCM Press (2014)
- **Is God antigay?** by Sam Allberry, The Good Book Company (2013)
- **Living Reconciliation** by Phil Groves and Angharad Parry Jones, SPCK (2014)
- **Washed and Waiting** by Wesley Hill, Zondervan (2010)
- **God, Gentiles and Gay Christians: Acts 15 and Change in the Church** by Andrew Goddard, Grove booklet (E121) (2001)
- **The Gay Gospels** by Dr Keith Sharpe, Circle Books London (2011)
- **Human Sexuality and the 'Same Sex Marriage' Debate**, ed. Mark D Thompson (2015)
- **Dirt, Greed & Sex: Sexual Ethics in the New Testament and their Implications for Today** by L. William Countryman, Fortress Press (2007)
- **More Perfect Union? Understanding same-sex Christian marriage**, by Alan Wilson, Darton, Longman & Todd (2014)
- **An Acceptable Sacrifice?**, Duncan Dormor and Jeremy Morris (eds.), SPCK (2007)

St Michael's House Protocols

All three circles of the Shared Conversations are underpinned by the St Michael's House Protocols. These are guidelines for seminars and conversations, developed by St Michael's House which is at the heart of Coventry Cathedral's reconciliation ministry.

[Download the St Michael's House Protocols guidelines.](#)

