

The Church of England has published a landmark set of resources drawing together the Bible, theology, science and history with powerful real-life stories as it embarks on a new process of discernment and decision-making on questions of identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage.

The product of three years' work by more than 40 people, led by the Bishop of Coventry, *Living in Love and Faith* includes a 480-page book, a series of films and podcasts, a course and an online library of other publications, in what is thought to be the most extensive work in this area by any faith group in the world.

It comes as the House of Bishops issues an appeal to the whole Church of England to participate in learning together, using the resources for open, honest and gracious discussion, listening and learning.

A group of bishops, chaired by the Bishop of London, Sarah Mullally, will lead the process of discernment and decision-making about a way forward for the church in relation to human identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage.

It is anticipated that the period of church-wide learning and engagement would take place **during 2021**. The House of Bishops would then bring the discernment and decision-making to a timely conclusion **in 2022** which would then be put before Synod.

In a foreword to the Living in Love and Faith resources, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, and Archbishop of York, Stephen Cottrell, acknowledge and apologise for the "huge damage and hurt" that has been caused particularly to LGBTI+ people within the Church.

"At the heart of our failure is the absence of a genuine love for those whom God loves in Christ, knowing as God does every aspect of all of our lives," they write.

But addressing the future, they add: "Our prayer for the Church through this work is that collectively we demonstrate the same love to one another that we have experienced from God."

The book opens with an account of how Jesus invited people to sit down together as he fed the 5,000. It notes how Jesus often sat down with people with radically different lives and views.

In their invitation to the church, the bishops say: "Our prayer is that as all of us, the people of God, take time to listen and learn together, our love for one another will be deepened and our faith in Jesus Christ strengthened so that His joy will be made complete in us."

The Bishop of Coventry, Christopher Cocksworth, who oversaw the Living in Love and Faith project, said: "These learning resources are the fruit of an extraordinary collaborative process."

"This has involved intense and prayerful study and reflection as well as listening to as wide a range of voices and experiences as possible.

"Our hope is that through them people will be inspired by the Bible's glorious and joyful vision of God's intention for human life.

Questions of identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage are deeply personal with real life consequences. Engaging with these resources will be enriching and, at different points for different people, deeply challenging and uncomfortable.

They ask us to examine afresh what it means for Christians to live in love and faith.

We offer them in the hope that the whole of the Church of England will embrace this opportunity to learn and reflect together across difference for the sake of our unity in Christ.

The Bishop of London, Sarah Mullally, who will lead the Next Steps Group, said: The challenges of the pandemic have underlined how we need each other more than ever.

At the same time, we can see how deeply divided the Church is over these questions, and we must seek God's will by learning together, listening to each other and to God.

We will encourage and support churches to do this in ways appropriate to their local contexts over the coming year, inviting people to reflect on their learning, both as groups and individually.

This must be a meaningful process with a clear way forward.

However, it will not succeed without love, grace, kindness and compassion.

Notes

- Register to explore the [Living in Love and Faith Learning Hub](#).

The members of the Next Steps Group are:Â Â

- **Bishop of London, Sarah Mullally (chair)**
- Bishop of Fulham, Jonathan Baker
- Bishop of Grantham, Nicholas Chamberlain
- Bishop of Loughborough, Guli Francis-Dehqani
- Bishop of Maidstone, Rod Thomas
- Bishop of Norwich, Graham Usher
- Bishop of Ripon, Helen-Ann Hartley
- Bishop of Sherborne, Karen Gorham
- Bishop of Truro, Philip Mounstephen
- Bishop of Warrington, Beverley Mason

- Bishop of Winchester, Tim Dakin
 - Bishop of Bradwell, John Perumbalath
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