

A Devon vicar says the questions around human sexuality, gender and relationships covered by the Church of England's Living in Love and Faith course are as relevant in her rural parishes as anywhere else.

Living in Love and Faith.

Mother Elizabeth Burke is the Rector of Holsworthy Benefice in North Devon, which includes the small market town of Holsworthy and four villages.

She said, "Rural might be stereotyped as backward or more traditional but the reality is, that this is a subject area that is affecting people locally and people want to engage with.

"The ratios of LGBTQI+ people growing-up are the same in a rural area as in a city. It's just that the populations are smaller and dispersed.

"I think it is harder for those of the LGBTQI+ community in rural areas, because there is a lack of support or places to meet."

Lizzy Flaherty, a student church member who did the course, said: "As a young person growing up in a rural church as a member of the LGBTQ+ community, taking part in LLF was an incredibly valuable opportunity – although difficult at times.

"It was great to talk about these topics on which there is often silence, speak about my experiences of both inclusion and discrimination, and be listened to, listen to others, and most importantly listen to the Holy Spirit."

Elizabeth said she found running the course "very positive."

She added, "There was lots of healthy open discussion. Even the shyest of people joined in and contributed.

"People were very respectful and listened to each other.

"There was a sense of a relief that we were talking about these issues and they found the materials really helpful."

Elizabeth feels it is important for as many churches as possible to engage with the LLF process.

"The body of Christ has this opportunity to listen and learn from one another.

"For those churches either nervous or against the process ask yourselves why?

"If we don't engage, if we don't seek to listen, learn and understand, then we can't expect our position to be taken into account when decisions are made going forward."

Notes

- [Living in Love and Faith](#) is a set of resources exploring questions of human identity, sexuality, relationships, and marriage, launched on 9 November 2020.
- The LLF resources – which include a 5-session course for local groups – are designed to facilitate open, honest, and gracious learning and discussion among churchgoers across the country.
- All 42 dioceses have appointed ‘LLF Advocates’, who are enabling churches to engage with the LLF resources in ways appropriate to local contexts.
- People who have done the course are invited to feedback and share their views via an online survey as well as in creative ways. This will be open until the end of April 2022.

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