

GENERAL SYNOD**Shared Conversations on Sexuality, Scripture and Mission**

1. The Pilling Report, published in 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 and involving others in the Anglican Communion. This recommendation was endorsed by the College of Bishops in January. The outlines of the process were agreed by the House of Bishops in May.
2. The House agreed in May that the process should be managed centrally for the sake of consistency and clarity in reporting back. It also approved a shape and timescale for the discussions, and authorised its Standing Committee to consider and sign-off final materials and arrangements. The Standing Committee met on 18 June and this note records its conclusions
3. The proposal for conversations has two objectives, both with a focus on the church's mission. One is to enable the Church of England to reflect, in the light of scripture, on the implications of the immense cultural change that has been taking place. It is common ground that social attitudes have changed extremely rapidly. Because of our calling to present the gospel afresh in every generation, a changing context always raises new questions about our missional stance toward culture. Clarifying how we can most effectively be a missionary church in a changing culture around sexuality is a key objective.
4. The other objective is to clarify the implications of what it means for the Church of England to live with what the Archbishop of Canterbury has called "good disagreement" on these issues. There is no expectation of achieving any consensus - in either direction - in the foreseeable future. But there is a task to be done of encouraging those within the church who are at odds on this issue to express their concerns in a safe environment, listen carefully to those with whom they disagree profoundly, find something of Christ in each other and consider together what the practical consequence of disagreement might be.
5. From New Testament times the church of Christ has had to face disagreement. Fashioning our life as a church includes finding ways to "disagree Christianly".
6. Under the direction of the Archbishop of Canterbury's Director for Reconciliation, Canon David Porter, a team of around 20 trained facilitators will support a process of conversations across the Church of England. They will bring the skills necessary to ensure that the process provides a safe place for all viewpoints to be expressed and to

keep the conversations to the objective of seeking understanding rather than having any predetermined trajectory.

7. The process will begin at the meeting of the College of Bishops in September where the bishops will spend two days working in small groups with facilitators. This will mean that the bishops are exposed to the process first, helping them to offer leadership and reassurance in their dioceses, and also enable the process and resource materials to be refined in the light of experience.
8. The bishops will be supported in their conversations by resource materials which will help shape the parameters and focus of the conversations and which will include substantial theological material commissioned from scholars with differing viewpoints. Once these materials have been road-tested by the College of Bishops, they will be published and will be used by the other conversation groups.
9. Following the meeting of the College of Bishops, the process will then extend across the dioceses, with dioceses working in “clusters” to enable 12 regional conversations, each involving around 60 participants, to experience the process.
10. The choice of diocesan participants will rest with the diocesan bishop. They will select participants so that, apart from the bishops, the group will be composed of equal numbers of clergy and laity and equal numbers of women and men. Diocesan bishops will normally attend conversations in regions other than their own. The aim will be for a quarter of the group to be under 40 years old. LGBTI people should be represented by more than one person in each diocesan group. The range and balance of views in the group should, as far as is possible, reflect the range and balance within the diocese itself.
11. Dioceses will look at ways to use their relationships with their companion links to involve participants from elsewhere in the Anglican Communion.
12. The work will come to a conclusion in July 2016 when the recently elected General Synod will itself spend two days in shared conversations on this topic. Reports from all the conversations will be drawn together so that the direction and impact of the whole process can be evaluated.

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26 June 2014