

GENERAL SYNOD

The *Living in Love and Faith* Project and the Pastoral Advisory Group**Summary**

This paper summarises developments regarding the *Living in Love and Faith* project and the work of the Pastoral Advisory Group. It includes an account of some of the key activities that the work has involved, the emerging shape of the groups' next steps and how these relate to finding a way forward for the Church in matters relating to human identity, sexuality and marriage.

The paper introduces two key pieces of work, namely the '*Living in Love and Faith* Learning Outcomes' and '*Held Together in the Love of Christ: Pastoral Principles for Living Well Together*' produced by the Pastoral Advisory group. A series of fringe sessions are introduced that offer informal engagement with individuals who are members of LLF or PAG as well as members of General Synod.

1. Work of the *Living in Love and Faith* Thematic Working Groups

The Biblical Studies, History, Theology and Social and Biological Sciences Thematic Working Groups have held between four and six meetings during 2018 and produced more than 70 scholarly papers on a wide range of subjects relating to human identity, sexuality, gender, marriage, friendship, celibacy, family.

The Coordinating Group has met four times during 2018. The group has begun to implement strategies for engaging with other churches, other religions and across the Anglican Communion. The group has taken on a leadership role in relation to constructing and coordinating the next complex and challenging phases of the task. This has included proposing a structure for the resources that is in line with their pedagogical character and that draws the academic material together with lived experience. A detailed plan for progressing this interdisciplinary work is now in place for 2019.

There have been some changes to the membership of the groups:

- a) The Bishop of Hull, the Rt Revd Alison White, has withdrawn from the Coordinating Group due to time pressures.
- b) The Bishop of Woolwich, the Rt Revd Dr Karowei Dorgu, has agreed to join the Coordinating Group, initially for 3 months.
- c) The Bishop of Warrington, the Revd Beverly Mason, has agreed to join the Coordinating Group from January 2019.
- d) Dr Medi-Ann Volpe has stepped down from the History Group due to time pressures. The Revd Dr Gabrielle Thomas (Durham University) has agreed to join the group.
- e) The Revd Marcus Green and Ms Jeanette Howard have agreed to join the Biblical Studies Group.

2. Learning Outcomes for the *Living in Love and Faith* resources

The Coordinating Group, together with the Thematic Groups, have agreed a set of learning outcomes that will function as a touchstone for producing the resources.

As a result of engaging with these resources people and church communities will ...	<i>This will require the resources to...</i>
1. be inspired by scripture's glorious and joyful vision of God's intention for human life.	<i>... be 'missional' in relation to God's intention for humanity, drawing people into this vision even when they are seeking answers to specific questions.</i>
2. have discovered how to engage with rich biblical, theological, historical and scientific thinking about human identity, sexuality and marriage in a way that deepens their desire to know God and follow Christ.	<i>... feature themes of holiness and intimacy, integrating matters relating to gender, sexuality, singleness and relationships with Christian spirituality and pastoral care. ...be produced in diverse genres, explaining technical language where needed, resisting over-simplification and inviting readers to think for themselves.</i>
3. have a deeper understanding of the Church's inherited teaching on Christian living in love and faith, especially with regard to marriage and singleness, and of emergent views and the Christian reasoning behind them.	<i>... offer faithful and fair presentations of the breadth of inherited and emergent views with proper attention to scripture, the Church's theological tradition and pastoral and liturgical practice.</i>
4. have heard the voices and encountered the experiences of people who would otherwise have been invisible to them.	<i>... reflect engagement with a wide array of lived experiences in the process of producing them.</i>
5. have learned different ways of reading scripture together well, allowing it to exert its transforming and revelatory power.	<i>... explain and critique different hermeneutical understandings of scripture and the theological and ethical conclusions that different forms of Christian thought draw about gender, sexuality and marriage.</i>
6. find help for everyday Christian discipleship in all its diversity, physicality, messiness and grittiness.	<i>... produce material that encourages and educates the people of God in the way of costly discipleship, acknowledging how different theological perspectives give rise to different patterns of discipleship.</i>
7. be alert to the interaction between the life of the church and its cultural contexts and equipped to engage in the public square about what it means to be human and sexual.	<i>... explore the situatedness of the gospel in culture, the principles provided by scripture and the insights of the theological, historical, missional and pastoral traditions of the Church, especially in relation to the power dynamics that silence people and influence the Church's polity.</i>

3. The shape of the *Living in Love and Faith* resources and plans for 2019

Members of the groups have agreed on a shape for the resources that, together with the Learning Outcomes (below) provide the parameters for the next interdisciplinary phase of the work. The pedagogical character of the shape requires work to be begun in the first three sections (A to C) before embarking on the last two (D and E). The shape encompasses theological reflection that maps and interweaves scholarship and lived experience in a way that invites openness to new insights.

A. What's going on?

This section will offer a contextual analysis of what is going on in relation to understandings of human identity, sexuality, gender, marriage, singleness, family, procreation, celibacy, friendship. It will explore what is going on in our society, in the Church, in lived experience and in the social, medical and biological sciences. It will explore these trends from historical, theological and biblical perspectives.

B. How does God communicate?

This section will explore how God communicates. It will maintain a focus on the authority of scripture in relation to how God communicates, offering a range of accounts of the interpretation / contextualisation of scripture in a way that does not further entrench polarisation but enables learning about the complexities of reading scripture in a way that both honours and challenges inherited and emergent perspectives. The study will focus on a communal (rather than individualistic) perspective: hearing God together as the church, and offer a historical perspective from which the Church can learn about hearing God in changing times.

C. Who are we as human beings, as church?

This section will address Christian understandings of what it means to be human and what it means to be the body of Christ, in the light of considering who God is. The section will offer biblical and theological underpinnings for a Christian anthropology with reference to sexualities, gender identities, embodiedness, relationships, families and communities – as well as attend to ecclesiology in the context of difference.

The following two sections will build on the study, writing and learning of the previous sections.

D. What do we discern God to be saying?

E. Where might we go from here?

A schedule of work has been drawn up that ensures that a full draft text and the draft digital and creative components of the resources are ready by December 2019. The plan includes opportunities for the House, the College and General Synod to engage with elements of the draft resources throughout the year.

4. Production of the *Living in Love and Faith* resources

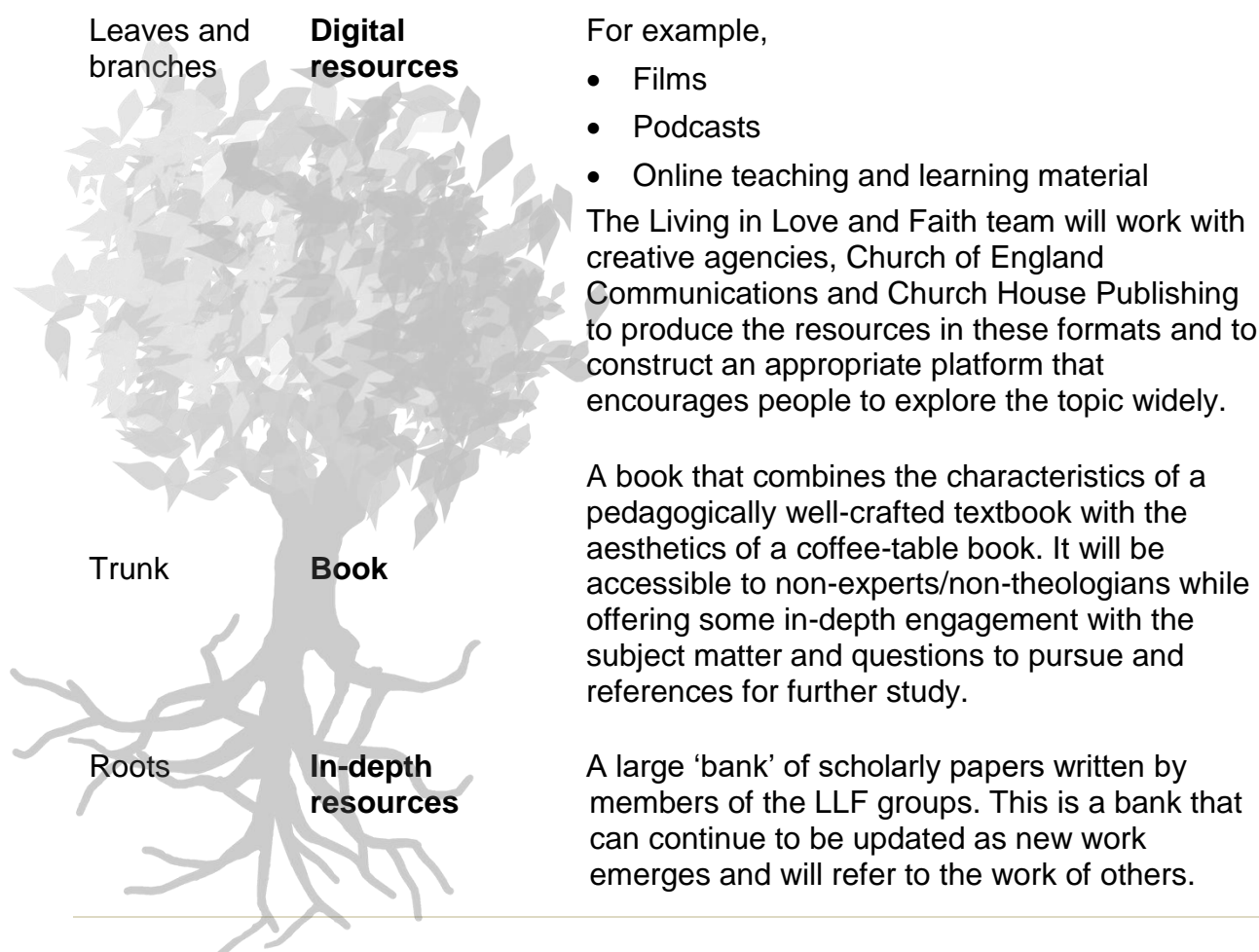
The *Living in Love and Faith* team is working with the Communications Office, Church House Publishing and two creative agencies regarding the production of the various components of the resources. The creative agencies were selected from a range of

agencies which pitched for this work in early January 2019 on the basis of a Creative Brief.

The challenge is to produce resources that

- a) are inspiring and create a hunger for learning about what it means to be human
- b) draw learners into the complexity and depth of the subject matter without oversimplifying or overwhelming, meeting the needs of a wide range of learners that spans academics and regular churchgoers
- c) present different (and potentially opposing) perspectives and lived experiences fairly, sensitively and with integrity.
- d) offer a range of resources within a coherently badged 'package' of multiple interconnecting genres (film, study guides, podcasts, book)
- e) range from 'formal' course-type material to informal learning
- f) stand the test of time and are relevant when new challenges emerge relating to sexuality, gender, identity and relationships.
- g) encompass a potentially large volume of material

A tree is a useful way of illustrating the kinds of resources that will be produced:



5. Wider Engagement

a) Wider Participation: individuals and church communities

Together with the Pastoral Advisory Group, the Coordinating Group commissioned a Wider Participation process of engaging with churches and individuals across the dioceses. Having gathered the names of 90 church communities and 138 individuals from 35 dioceses and 8 organisations, face to face meetings with 20 church groups and 40 individuals have begun. These have been independently selected to ensure a balance across a range of characteristics. All the other church communities and individuals will be invited to send written contributions.

In addition to this gathering of 'oral histories', *Living in Love and Faith* is also connecting with some diocesan discussion groups and a gathering of LGBTQI+ organisations.

b) Church of England bishops

The *Living in Love and Faith* project is episcopally led. That is why a key focus has been to ensure bishops have a range of opportunities to hear about, participate in and respond to the project.

Regional Bishops Meetings: All eight regional groups of Bishops have had opportunities to hear about and discuss the project at their meetings in 2018.

College of Bishops: Most of the September College of Bishops meeting was devoted to the work of the *Living in Love and Faith* project and the work of the Pastoral Advisory Group.

House of Bishops: At the December House, bishops heard about and commended the *Pastoral Principles*. They considered how the *Living in Love and Faith* resources will feed into the decision-making processes of the Church, as well as spending several hours in small groups, listening to a short podcast of young people's perceptions about matters relating to sexuality, gender, identity and relationships and undergoing a structured theological reflection on it.

c) Ecumenical consultation

Contacts have been made with 11 groups of churches, both to inform them about *Living in Love and Faith*, and to invite them to share their own resources, reflections and processes relating to matters of human identity, sexuality and marriage. Most have responded positively and shared resources. Face to face meetings are being organised for more in-depth discussions and mutual learning.

d) Consultation with the Anglican Communion

A number of approaches have been pursued to both inform Anglican Communion churches, including meeting with visiting Primates, liaising with the Anglican Communion Office, the Lambeth Design Team. This aspect of the project will accelerate in 2019 and 2020 with involvement in a range of Anglican Communion gatherings and liaising with Church of England Diocesan Link Partners.

e) Inter-religious consultation

A summary document about views on human sexuality among UK communities of other faiths has been produced, and conversations with leaders of other faiths are ongoing.

6. *Living in Love and Faith* and the way forward for the Church

The Coordinating Group has overseen a plan of engagement that clarifies the aims of the project and how these relate to the process of discerning a way forward for the Church in matters relating to same sex relationships as well as other questions. The process of producing the resources may well help the Church to discern a direction for the Church. While the process neither pre-empts what this may be nor has a decision-making process as its aim, it keeps open a hopeful space for the movement of the Holy Spirit in shaping the Church.

Once the resources are published in June 2020, parishes across the country will be encouraged to engage with them over a period of 6 to 9 months as part of a process of corporate discernment. Members of General Synod will have been given opportunities to engage with the resources throughout the period of their production. Clearly this is likely to become more focused in July 2020 and also the inaugural Synod in November 2020.

7. The work of the Pastoral Advisory Group

a) The Pastoral Principles (see Appendix)

The episcopal members of the Pastoral Advisory Group have continued to respond to a small number of 'cases' sent to them from bishops. The biggest component of the work of the group, however, has been to produce some Pastoral Principles for pastoral ministry among LGBTI+ people. The College of Bishops were given an opportunity to respond to a first draft which has now been developed further and was presented to the House of Bishops in December.

This document seeks to set out some principles of pastoral practice for how the people of God in the Church of England can live well together within the parameters of its current position on marriage and the different deeply held convictions that individuals and churches hold on these matters.

The Church has been found wanting in its welcome and treatment of LGBTI+ people** and much can be done to address this. The Pastoral Principles are about encouraging churches to offer a welcome that is Christ-centred, that sees difference as a gift rather than a problem, and that builds trust and models generosity. The Bishops hope that these principles will go some way toward inspiring individuals and congregations to examine and enhance the quality of their welcome for all who are seeking a spiritual home in which they can flourish.

Adopting these principles is likely to require a change of culture in terms of the quality of our relationships. The principles identify some unacceptable barriers to the welcome of Christ to which the Church is called. These barriers can be described as six pervading evils that are a bar to good pastoral practice in the Church. They are prejudice, silence, ignorance, fear, hypocrisy, prejudice and misuse of power. Acting on these evils – which are applicable to all people – could be transformative for the Church and so the principles describe each of them in turn and how and why they must be avoided.

* We have adopted the formulation "LGBTI+" (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and others) on the advice of many whom we have consulted. We recognise that this formulation brings together a variety of groups of people whose interests and characteristics are not the same and do not always demand an identical response, but who, collectively, challenge many historic perceptions about human identity and sexuality. At times, it may be appropriate to use a different formulation – for example, omitting the "I" when talking specifically about sexuality rather than identity, as Intersex does not denote a sexuality.

The Principles begin and end, however, with the good news of welcome to all people with its biblical understanding of new birth, the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, the common call to repentance and faith, and our new identity in Christ.

The Principles are commended by the House of Bishops for the dioceses and parishes of the Church of England. The Bishops' hope and prayer is that they will be used by clergy and laity with responsibility for welcome and pastoral care in the church and as a resource for discipleship and study groups across the spectrum of traditions.

While this document sets out principles for good practice, a substantial collection of *Pastoral Resources* is also being prepared that will enable congregations across the Church of England to put these principles into practice.

b) Working together with *Living in Love and Faith*

The group has wrestled with the complexity and weight of the task that it has been given, especially in relation to the very real tensions between doctrine, liturgy and pastoral practice. In addition, members have been mindful of the broader context of the *Living in Love and Faith* project. The Pastoral Advisory Group will meet together with the *Living in Love and Faith* groups in March 2019 in order to ensure that the pastoral dimensions of the group's work – and the outputs from the Wider Participation process – form an integral part of the *Living in Love and Faith* resources.

The Pastoral Advisory Group believes that when church communities engage honestly and openly with the *Pastoral Principles* as described above, they will be better prepared to receive and reflect on the *Living in Love and Faith* resources in 2020 and, in doing so, better able to participate in enabling the Church to move into the future together.

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**Held together
in the love of
Christ**

**Pastoral principles
for living well
together**

The Church of England

PASTORAL ADVISORY GROUP

December 2018

PRINCIPLE 1

Because of our understanding that all are made in the image of God, we will receive our differences as gift, valuing all people, and seek to see Christ in all our neighbours. To help us do this we will acknowledge and address our prejudices.

Can it be right that anyone fails to explore her or his own prejudices?

*No-one is unconditioned by their experience of life, positively or negatively. All of us must reflect deeply on our attitudes and behaviour. All are loved children of God. The cross of Christ is for all. The journey from **prejudice** to hatred is a short one.*

Central to our faith is a belief that each of us is unique: we rejoice that we are fearfully and wonderfully made by God. There is a sense of awe and mystery about each one of us – an element of ‘otherness’ – that cannot be reduced to something that we can fully grasp within our finite understanding.

This principle applies to how all manner of human differences are perceived and responded to. Although our focus in this document is specifically on LGBTI+ people, these principles apply to all our relationships. We believe that all of us need to reflect deeply on our attitudes and behaviour in order to extend a Christ-like welcome to LGBTI+ people in our midst.

We will need to uphold the principles of

- welcoming people as they are, rather than offering a welcome that is dependent on individuals’ willingness to conform to a way of thinking and being that is perceived as ‘the norm’: people ‘like us’.
- unconditional positive regard that is without judgement or question.
- acknowledging that unintentional subliminal actions or language can convey powerful messages.

PRINCIPLE 2

Because of our understanding of the Church as the Body of Christ, we seek to be a place of welcome, acceptance, challenge and hospitality.

Can it be right for our church communities to promote a culture of silence – whether consciously or subconsciously – about matters relating to sexuality and gender?

*Good pastoral care of LGBTI+ people can never happen in an environment where their presence or questions are intentionally ignored by those in church leadership. **Silence** can shelter abuses of power. People must speak and be allowed to speak – so that those who are vulnerable can hear and thus not feel that they are alone. If our church really believes that it wishes to welcome everyone, no matter their personal circumstances, then this welcome must be voiced in words that come from both head and heart.*

Central to our understanding of the Christian community is the Body of Christ where our welcome must be voiced in words that come from both head and heart and lead into deep engagement and dialogue in community. We live and work together, offering and using our

God-given gifts, blessings, insights and experience. Here mutual respect, accountability and responsibility play out in the context of the history and living tradition of that given community.

Such a community will be characterised by

- shared exploration of God's will for all aspects of our lives as revealed in the Scriptures.
- an attentiveness and presence to the other without a hidden agenda.
- a quality and depth of relationships that means people are missed when they are not there.
- an openness to grow together as disciples of Jesus Christ and to learn together what it means to grow in love and holiness as part of the body of Christ.
- a willingness to respect difference so that all feel they belong.
- acknowledging that the Church is composed of people who are different from each other, and people who embody particular kinds of difference are missed when they are not there.

PRINCIPLE 3

Because of our understanding that the Bible and the Church of England's foundational documents are our authority, we will ensure that our theological discussions are conducted with respect for our inheritance and for each other.

Can it be right that some with pastoral responsibility in the church are so often ignorant of what it is like to be LGBTI+?

***Ignorance** is inevitable
but ignorance can and should be
addressed.*

Central to our Anglican identity is our recognition that the Church of England is both catholic and reformed, using God's gifts of reason and wisdom shaped by the Spirit. Whilst this inevitably can

give rise to potential tensions and differences both within and across our church communities, we see this as a sign of strength rather than weakness in that it reflects our understanding that God's church is a diverse church, welcoming the diversity of the people God calls.

The more successfully we (both individuals and churches) have been able to embrace principles 1 and 2 above, then the better placed we are to respect and talk about difference as we study Scripture and pray together. This will enable us to address the more challenging questions of what it means to be faithful to Scripture and how the life of a disciple of Jesus Christ is to be characterised.

Our preaching, Bible study groups, public prayer and praying in informal contexts,

- will flow from having established authentic relationships and exercised deep listening.
- will not project presuppositions about a person's needs or situation.
- will not categorise a person's physical difference, identity or sexual orientation in themselves as an illness, or as demonic or as sinful.

PRINCIPLE 4

Because of our understanding that pastoral practice in the Church of England entails the Church being there for all, we will consciously demonstrate and live out what it means for perfect love to cast out all fear.

Can it be right that people live in fear of one another in our churches?

Central to our life as a Church are the sacraments. These are a means of God's grace in living lives of holiness in obedience to God's call. They are God's gifts, not ours and we receive them at Christ's invitation and his alone. At the same time, we are mindful that we are all sinners and fall short of what God asks of us each and every day. None of us is worthy to come, except through the mercy and forgiveness of God.

*There is **fear** in the clergy of how they may be held to account as they attempt to care. There is fear that a bishop's known views will colour her or his engagement with their people. There is fear that if one's personal circumstances are known then one will be deprived of home or office. There is fear about 'breaking ranks' and speaking out. These kinds of fear must be addressed because it can corrupt our life together and imprison individuals.*

Tensions around difference and being faithful to scripture can raise questions about what it means to be in right relationship with God before receiving these sacraments. The Book of Common Prayer (BCP), for example, helpfully exhorts everyone to examine their 'worthiness' before receiving communion. Issues of self-examination and conscience will always remain between a person and their maker, who knows all the secrets of our hearts.

Ongoing, prayerful consideration of this principle should cause us to wrestle with:

- how to live with the tensions that may arise between discipleship as a personal and individual response to Christ driven by conviction and conscience, and discipleship as membership of a community – the church – seeking to live in the light of its historically received and understood traditions.
- how to become a church that exhorts *everyone* to examine their 'worthiness' in a meaningful and habitual way.
- how to avoid the 'cheap grace' that denies the costliness of Christ's call to his disciples to take up their cross and follow him.
- when it is legitimate for Church leaders to seek to exclude people from sharing in leadership.
- how to repudiate pastoral practice that is coercive or abusive.

PRINCIPLE 5

Because of our understanding that all are valued and loved on the basis of Christ's redeeming love, life, death and resurrection, we will be communities marked by attentive listening, courtesy, kindness and the absolute belief that nobody is outside the love of God

Can it be right that there are situations where people who might wish to be open about their sexual orientation feel forced to dissemble, or where parishes find themselves evading issues of sexuality?

*We do not commend intrusive questioning, rather shining a light on structures and practices that promote evasiveness that can be seen as **hypocrisy**.*

Central to our faith is the belief that whilst we were still sinners, Christ died for all. We remain fallible, weak and broken and yet are called to love one another as Christ has loved us. Furthermore, a key theme in Jesus' teaching and in the letters to the early Church is judgmentalism. We journey together knowing that the poor in spirit and those who know their need of God are blessed.

Despite our deep disagreements about human sexuality, identity and relationships, we nevertheless know ourselves held in the love of Christ, all equally in need of his grace and called to live together in love. As we do so, we pray that we will learn from one another and discover more of the challenge to holy living and the wideness of God's mercy as the Spirit moves within us and amongst us and between us.

As equal recipients of God's love and grace in and through the work of the triune God, we uphold principles of

- deep and care-filled listening, to what is said and unsaid.
- heartfelt respect in the way we speak with one another.
- commitment to building open and trusting relationships in the face of disagreement.
- acknowledgement that we are all children of God and no one of us is outside the love of God.

PRINCIPLE 6

Because of our understanding that Christ calls us in humility to regard others as better than ourselves we refuse to exploit any perceived or real power over others. We will encourage our communities to be places where all seek to serve one another in the Spirit of Christ and to respond joyfully to his call to mutual submission.

Can it be right that pastoral encounters still take place without awareness of disparities of power?

*Inequalities of **power** have led to abuses in the past and will continue to do so unless all who exercise pastoral care reflect continuously on the power that they hold. Power must always be acknowledged.*

Matters relating to identity, sexuality, gender and relationships are deeply personal. Conversations relating to them must be carried out with utmost sensitivity to the real or perceived power that one may

have over another. We need to learn to become more aware both of our own power and of our vulnerability to the perceived power of others. We need to look for ways to identify, acknowledge, dispel and dismantle the power dynamics in our communities. In order to do so

- we will minister to one another in the recognition that God alone, through his Holy Spirit, can effect transformation in our lives and the lives of others.
- we will seek to be accountable to one another in relation to our perceived or actual power as a result of our role, social status, sexuality, gender, age or other characteristic.
- we will encourage vulnerability in our relationships and look for ways of modelling it appropriately