

Listening with
Love & Faith 
Responses in More Detail

About the cover image

The image on the front cover is inspired by the Rose Window of Durham Cathedral and, with Christ at the centre, reflects the diverse ways in which people who responded to the Living in Love and Faith questionnaire described themselves. We are most grateful to the Library and Chapter of Durham Cathedral for permission to use the tracery and central panel in this infographic.

The centre panel shows Christ in Majesty. In the original window Christ is surrounded by the 12 Apostles and the 24 Elders of Revelation.

The “panes” in the image represent the ‘identifying words’ used by people responding to the LLF questionnaire. Each pane corresponds to one such word, positioned randomly throughout.

The inner ring illustrates how people described themselves in relation to sexuality while the outer ring has two sets of panels. From the top, moving clockwise the first indicates words relating to sex / gender / transgender, alternating with those showing relationship status.

The panels were constructed in ‘R’ and the image compiled using GIMP by Fiona Tweedie.

Inner Ring - Sexuality

	Asexual
	Bisexual
	Demisexual
	Gay lesbian
	Heterosexual
	Pansexual
	Queer
	Same-sex attracted

Outer Ring - Gender

	Female
	Gender-fluid
	Male
	Non-binary
	Cisgender
	Transgender

Outer Ring - Relationship

	Married (opposite-sex)
	Married (same-sex)
	Married (other)
	Widow/widower
	Divorced/Separated
	Remarried
	Single
	Co-habiting (opposite-sex)
	Co-habiting (same-sex)
	Co-habiting (other)
	Civil-partnered (opposite-sex)
	Civil-partnered (same-sex)
	Vowed celibate

Preface

Living in Love and Faith is a Church of England initiative that has involved the production of a suite of resources about identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage and enabled churchwide engagement with them. Responses to the churchwide engagement that took place between November 2020 and April 2022 were gathered by a variety of means, including inviting people who took part to complete a questionnaire and to consider joining a focus group. Over 6,400 people responded using the questionnaire, and 9 focus groups were held. In addition, over 240 unsolicited submissions were received, largely via the contact form on the LLF website. The outcomes of the gathered responses were published under the title, *Listening with Love and Faith: Gathered responses from churchwide engagement*.

This report accompanies this publication. It provides an account of the methodologies and technical aspects of the three ways in which responses from churchwide engagement were gathered and analysed: by means of the LLF questionnaire, focus groups and independent submissions. In addition, it contains in greater detail the outcomes of this work.

Each of the three pieces of work was carried out by researchers with appropriate expertise. The questionnaire was designed and analysed by Fiona Tweedie, Emma Teale and Sarah Reed of Brendan Research, the focus groups were run and analysed by Lu Skerratt and John Tomlinson of Church Army's Research Unit, and the independent submissions were analysed by Claire Dalpra working with the Brendan Research team.

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QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES IN MORE DETAIL



Introduction

Within the Living in Love and Faith (LLF) process, the “Respond” phase was the first time that the Church of England (CofE) had sought to listen so widely to people engaging with its resources.¹ In order to hear directly from as many individuals as possible, an online questionnaire was developed as part of a suite of ways of responding. Other elements included focus groups and creative responses.

This part of the report on the responses to the questionnaire acts as a technical backup to the summary presented in the publication “Listening with Love and Faith: Gathered responses from churchwide engagement”.²

What was the questionnaire for?

The purpose of the questionnaire was to enable the Church of England to listen to the learning, reflections and experiences of those who engaged with the Living in Love and Faith (LLF) resources.

The survey method allowed us to capture a diversity of perspectives and hear a range of voices which Braun et al (2021) highlight is particularly appropriate for sense-making research of under-explored areas and sensitive topics.³ Whilst the qualitative analysis identifies popular answers and prominent themes, its goal is not to establish one generalized truth. Rather, it allows us to understand the diversity of views. Throughout this report, therefore, we present responses that exemplify themes, indicating the variety of views expressed with minimal comment.⁴

Structure of the questionnaire

The detail of the questionnaire is given in the Appendix to this report. Here we outline the main areas.

- To understand the diversity of people taking part, there were sections asking about geographical location, age, and how people identified themselves in terms of gender, sexuality and relationships.
- The LLF course looked at different aspects of the topics relating to identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage – a section asked about the different ways they were approached, and how new the material in each section was for the respondent.

¹ <https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/living-love-and-faith/living-love-and-faith-respond>. Last accessed 23 August 2022.

² *Listening with Love and Faith: Gathered responses from churchwide engagement*, Church House Publishing, 2022.

³ Braun, V. et al (2021) ‘The online survey as a qualitative research tool.’ *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 24(6):641-654.

⁴ An example of a project with similar methodology is *The Listening Project* conducted by the Church of Scotland to hear about people’s experiences of the lockdown to prevent spread of COVID-19, available at <https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/worship/the-listening-project>. Last accessed 23 August 2022.

- To learn about the difference that the course was making, people were asked about their overall experience, what difference it had made for them, and for their hopes for the local and national Church.
- To understand the further spread of this material, a section asked how people had shared the material, and if they would recommend the course to a friend.
- To inform future work of this type, there were questions about which resources had been used, which found most helpful, how leaders had been supported, etc. Course leaders had an additional section enquiring about their experiences.
- To gauge the course experience, we asked how safe people felt, and how varied the groups had been.
- As the first phase of listening, the questionnaire also acted as a place for people to offer to be part of the next steps, as this was where contact details were gathered for the focus groups facilitated by Church Army's Research Unit.

This report

In this part of the report we begin by presenting technical and methodological aspects of the work, such as details of question types and data processing. This is followed by a report of the quantitative and qualitative responses following the structure of the *Listening with Love and Faith: Gathered responses from churchwide engagement* report.

For the quantitative data, responses to individual questions are given, while the qualitative responses are presented thematically as topics could and did arise across a number of questions.

Throughout this report we quote respondents' own words. These are highlighted "in this format".

Technical material

In this section we cover technical details about the questionnaire, how it was set up, the numbers of responses and issues around ethics, data processing, transfer and destruction.

The questionnaire was linked from the LLF Learning Hub, and information about it was emailed to all those registered. The questionnaire was open between 30 March 2021 and 30 April 2022. Some responses were printed and posted to the LLF offices. They were added to the online system and analysed with the others.

Number of responses

Respondents gave varying degrees of information. Some chose to give only their diocese or their postcode, others chose to fill in some, part or all of the questionnaire. In summary:

- 6,448 people completed at least some of the feedback questionnaire, of whom,
- 6,323 people named the diocese of which they were part,
- 5,815 people gave local area information in England,
- 1,149 course leaders gave feedback,
- 3,989 people would like to receive a summary report of the results,
- 1,655 people were prepared to be part of a focus group. The vast majority of these came in after the closing date for the focus groups, but people chose to be added to a reserve list.

Data protection, safeguarding and ethics

Sexuality and religion are both categorised as “special category” data until Article 9 of the GDPR, and data protection was regarded as being of utmost importance throughout this work.

The privacy statement was reviewed by the Church of England Data Protection Team, and by Dr Bev Botting, then Head of Research and Statistics, and Dr Liz Graveling, Research Officer, Ministry Division.

Respondents were invited to read the privacy notice, and to explicitly grant consent to the processing of their data in the ways described. Consent could be revoked by contacting Brendan Research. If a participant did not consent to their data being processed, the survey was bypassed, and they were able to request a summary report of the survey results.

The survey was conducted through the SurveyMonkey platform.⁵ Data is held on this platform in the United States of America. To minimize exposure to reduced data security, responses were downloaded weekly and deleted from the SurveyMonkey website. Once downloaded, the data was held on an encrypted drive only accessible by the primary researcher.

All responses were read to check for any safeguarding issues being raised. Any that were found were flagged to Dr Eeva John for onward reporting. Any names of persons or places were redacted before further processing.

Data Processing

The downloads from SurveyMonkey were held on an encrypted drive, and processed as follows:

1. Email addresses of people who had asked for summary reports were saved in a separate file and removed from the main data. This included a small number who did not wish to participate, but who did ask for a summary report.
2. Entries where consent for processing the survey had NOT been given were removed.
3. Contact details for people who expressed interest in being part of the focus groups being conducted by Church Army's Research Unit were extracted to a separate file and removed from the main data.
4. Information about the Diocese of the respondent was removed from the data and saved separately. A link ID was included so that responses could be matched if needed.
5. Postcode details were removed and matched with IMD and Rural/Urban Codes. The postcodes were then removed from this data set. The link ID was also included in this data set so that responses could be matched later if needed.
6. The remaining data with its link ID was saved in a file for analysis. No personal data is included in this file.
7. Data held in the qualitative data software is held in a password protected file.

Transfer of records to Church Army's Research Unit

In order to fully comply with the privacy notice, Church Army's Research Unit (CARU) were only provided with contact details of people who were willing to be part of a focus group. No information about what they had contributed in the questionnaire was supplied.

These data were supplied in a password-protected Excel file, emailed to the researchers involved.

⁵ <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/>

Indeed, in our initial stage, we realised that we had not asked permission to send details on to CARU, even as part of this research. The privacy notice was changed to allow for this, and all those who had given their email addresses prior to this were contacted by Brendan Research to ask for permission to pass on their contact details. Email addresses of those who did give permission were passed to CARU; those who refused, or did not reply, had their email addresses deleted from our systems.

Data Destruction

In line with the Privacy Notice, Brendan Research will destroy all data one year following publication of this report, that is 30 August, 2023.

Contact details for focus groups for CARU have been destroyed by Brendan Research.

Contact details for those who asked for a summary report will be destroyed as soon as this is issued.

Postcode data have been deleted following the identification of their LSOAs for the report.⁶

Data capture methods

This questionnaire uses a mixture of methods to capture data:

- Drop-down menus, e.g. diocese,
- Categories, e.g. age groups; dioceses,
- Write-in text categories e.g. postcodes, other responses in categorical scales,
- Sliding scales e.g. course experience,
- Longer textual answers, e.g. "How has engaging with this course made a difference for you?"

This variety enables us to hear nuance, to understand the spread of people engaging with the LLF process, and to avoid some coding issues such as mis-spellings.

Data collected through the first four methods were analysed using the statistical software R, while the longer textual answers were analysed using the qualitative data analysis software NVivo.⁷

All of the questions were optional, except the one giving or refusing consent to process the data. Many people completed all of the questions; some chose a few sections to answer. Throughout the report we give the number of responses to each question. As is usual, questions at the start are answered by more people, details are given of response rates throughout the report.

⁶ LSOA: Lower-layer Super Output Area - small areas with around 1,500 people or 650 households, used by the Office of National Statistics (ONS) to publish data.

⁷ R, R Project, <https://www.r-project.org/about.html>; NVivo, QSR International, NVivo, QSR International <https://www.qsrinternational.com/nvivo-qualitative-data-analysis-software/home>

Quantitative Data

Drop-down menus

Where there is a known subset of possible answers, such as the dioceses of the Church of England, or being outside those dioceses, a drop-down menu allows for a selection. This makes the coding and analysis of the categories simpler as common errors such as misspellings can be avoided.

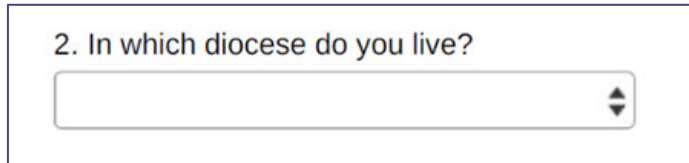
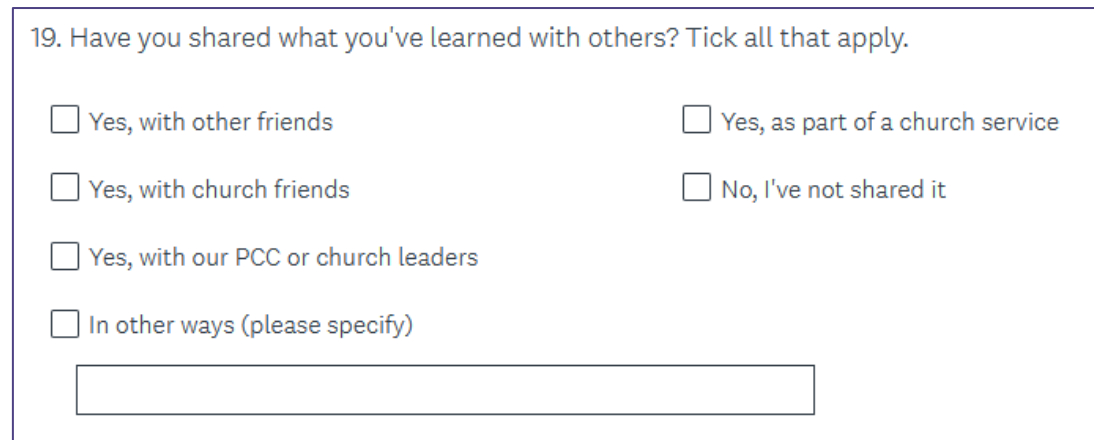


Figure 1: An example of a drop-down menu

Categorical Data

This data includes answers to questions such as “Have you shared what you’ve learned with others?” (Q19; Figure 2). It is tabulated and may be presented in a bar chart, or if the values total 100%, as pie-chart or stacked bar chart. Single category answers, such as “Were you in touch with your Diocesan LLF Advocate?” (Q20) are represented by the percentage of people ticking an option, e.g. “24% had been in touch with their Diocesan advocate.”

Figure 2: An example of a categorical question



Write-in text categories

Where there is a textual category, such as a postcode, or an Advocate Code, respondents are invited to complete a small text field. Where there may be a number of options in a reply, an “other” option is offered to allow people to give an answer that is closest to their experience.⁸ For most questions, there are few responses in these sections. The responses are read to find out if there is a category that had not been offered in the

⁸ See for example, “What gets counted counts”, chapter 4 of *Data Feminism*, C. D’Ignazio and L. F. Klein, MIT Press, 2020.

question, but should be reported upon. For example, 5% of respondents to the question shown in Figure 2 above wrote in that they had shared information about the LLF course with family members.

Question 24, which asked how people described themselves, had a large number of people choosing to write-in an identity and new categories such as “widowed”, “divorced” and “gender-fluid” were added to our reporting.

24. To help us gauge the degree of diversity of people who engaged with the course, please indicate which of these are words that you would use to describe yourself. Tick as many as appropriate.

<input type="checkbox"/> heterosexual	<input type="checkbox"/> cisgender	<input type="checkbox"/> opposite-sex married
<input type="checkbox"/> gay lesbian	<input type="checkbox"/> queer	<input type="checkbox"/> same-sex married
<input type="checkbox"/> same sex attracted	<input type="checkbox"/> asexual	<input type="checkbox"/> other married
<input type="checkbox"/> bisexual	<input type="checkbox"/> intersex	<input type="checkbox"/> same-sex civil partnered
<input type="checkbox"/> male	<input type="checkbox"/> single	<input type="checkbox"/> opposite-sex civil partnered
<input type="checkbox"/> female	<input type="checkbox"/> same-sex cohabiting	<input type="checkbox"/> other civil partnered
<input type="checkbox"/> transgender	<input type="checkbox"/> opposite-sex cohabiting	<input type="checkbox"/> prefer not to say
<input type="checkbox"/> non-binary	<input type="checkbox"/> other co-habiting, e.g. where one person is trans	
<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify)		

Figure 3: An example of a question with a write-in option

Postcodes

Postcodes were matched with Lower-layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs) using look-up tables provided by the Office of National Statistics. Those that were not matched (around 1,000) were checked. A number came from beyond the UK, from the Dioceses of Europe and Sodor and Man. Some were from outside England - in Scotland or Wales. Others had spaces missing or the like, and were manually corrected and re-matched so that most data could be included. The resulting IMD and Rural/Urban codes (RUCs) were shown as bar-charts. In both of these cases we also include the number of responses we would expect to receive if respondents were spread over England in the same way as the whole population. Sadly, there is no comparable data on the distribution of people within the Church of England, so while we can compare the characteristics of the local areas of

those who have responded to the questionnaire with people in England, we do not know how representative they are of the people of the Church of England.

Sliding Scales

In a number of places in the questionnaire, e.g. Q6. “I am more aware of the complexities of identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage.” it would have been possible to describe agreement with statements on a five-point, or seven-point Likert scale, from “Strongly disagree” to “Strongly agree”. We note the words of D’Ignazio and Klein (2020) in speaking against “the process of dominating and disciplining data” where perspective and nuance may be lost.⁹ We chose, therefore, to use a Visual Analogue Scale (VAS), where respondents choose a place on a line that best represents their level of agreement, as illustrated in Figure 4. Reips and Funke (2008) note that “measurement by a VAS is more exact and the scale needs less explanation.”¹⁰

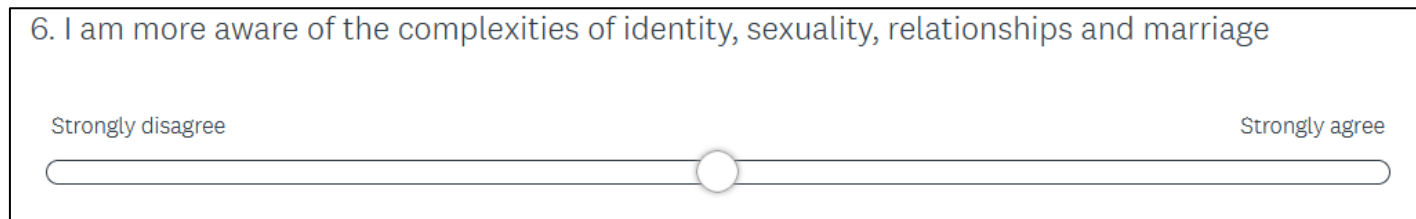


Figure 4: An example of a sliding scale from the SurveyMonkey questionnaire

Data was collected through the SurveyMonkey platform which implements VAS through “sliders” where a marker is “dragged” to the place on the scale selected by the respondent. The starting place of the marker has been shown to impact on the responses, so we chose to place the marker in the centre of the line to avoid such bias.¹¹ While this method has been shown to add cognitive load and to take longer to respond to, we must set this against the nuance that is available through the finer granularity of response.¹² To mitigate the increase in cognitive load, we chose to keep this format of question in a variety of places throughout the questionnaire to ensure consistency for the participant.

⁹ D’Ignazio and Klein, *op cit*, p131.

¹⁰ Reips, U.-D. and Funke, F. (2008) Interval-level measurement with visual analogue scales in Internet-based research: VAS Generator, *Behavior Research Methods*, 2008, 40(3): 699-704.

¹¹ Funke, F., Reips, U.-D., and Thomas, R. K. (2011). Sliders for the smart: type of rating scale on the web interacts with education level. *Social Science Computer Review*, 29(2): 221–231.

¹² Toepoel, V. and Funke, F. (2018) Sliders, visual analogue scales, or buttons: Influence of formats and scales in mobile and desktop surveys, *Mathematical Population Studies* 25(2): 112-122.

The results of questions of this type are presented through kernel-density plots, as well as the average response, both mean and median. These plots allow for smoothing between discrete responses, and let us visualize the number of people choosing responses at each part.¹³ For example, Figure 5, a copy of Figure 15 (page 29) shows that most people chose a position around three-quarters of the way along the slider, but that there is also a number between a quarter and half way along where we can see a plateau in the graph.

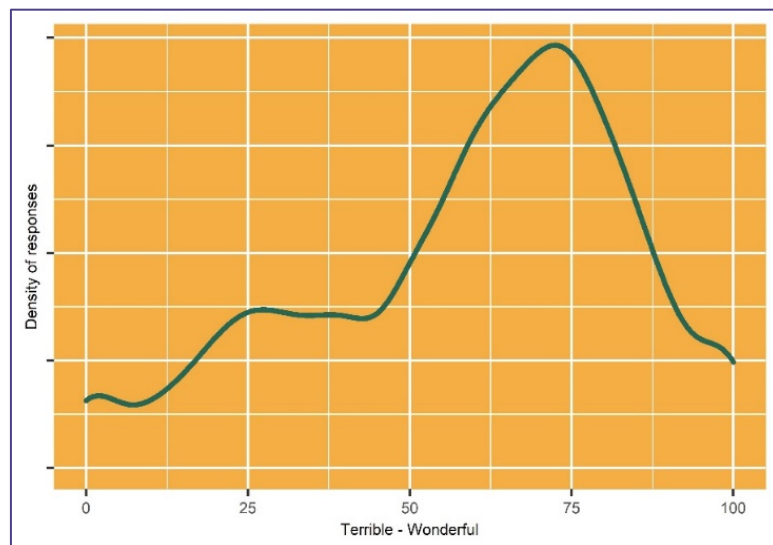


Figure 5: An example of a density plot

Textual Responses and Qualitative Methodology

The non-quantifiable, textual elements of the survey data, for example as shown in Figure 6 on the next page, were subject to qualitative analysis. These questions inquired about experiences, comments and feedback and allowed us to gather qualitative information, permitting people to express their sentiments more fully on key issues. Open questions in the survey – e.g. “is there anything else you would like to tell us about...” – allowed us to capture unanticipated data and learn what was important to the respondent.

¹³ The smoothing leads to edge-effects, where the density at the limits of the scale appears to fall.

14. What would you like to tell us about the overall course experience? Please don't mention anyone's name or location in your response.

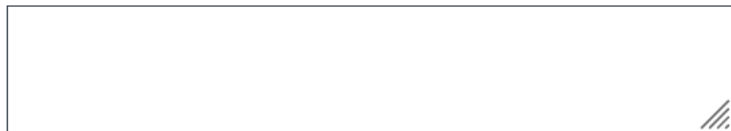


Figure 6: An example of a textual question

The qualitative data was processed using the qualitative data analysis software NVivo.¹⁴ Every survey response was read by one of the researchers and included in thematic analysis. Responses to the survey questions were sorted into themes or 'codes'¹⁵. The codes were continually adapted to capture themes as they emerged and became clearer. This is an iterative process, led by the data. The manual coding involved in this research method means that the researchers become very familiar with the data which facilitates the analytical process. As well as establishing the most prominent themes in each question, the researchers looked at the survey as a whole, developing analytic patterns across the dataset (Braun et al, 2021).¹⁶

The survey was mixed-method and the quantitative and qualitative researchers worked together closely throughout data collection and analysis to integrate the statistical and textual elements of the survey data and understand their interaction.

¹⁴ NVivo, from QSR International, <https://www.qsrinternational.com/nvivo-qualitative-data-analysis-software/home>

¹⁵ All survey responses received between March 2021 and February 2022 were manually coded by the researchers. At this point the code structure was saturated, in other words the themes we were seeing became stable and predictable, with no significant changes in the types of answers being given to the survey. This enabled us to conduct more selective coding on the large amounts of data received between March and the end of April.

¹⁶ Braun, V. et al (2021) *op cit*.

Taking part

Who took part?

This section covers the numbers and characteristics of people who returned the questionnaire, looking at geography, demography and identify, and how people found taking part in, or leading the LLF course.

6,448 people from all over the Church of England have told us about their engagement with the LLF course. We look at who they are through the lenses of geography, demography and identity. At a geographical level, we consider diocese and English local characteristics such as urban/rural and deprivation.

Geography

Diocesan response rates

Table 1 and Table 2 show which diocese respondents came from. The greatest number of responses came from the Diocese of Chester (415 responses; 133 responses per 10,000 people on Electoral Rolls), the Diocese of Oxford (412 responses; 90 responses per 10,000) and the Diocese of Exeter (404 responses; 177 per 10,000).¹⁷

Table 2 on the subsequent page, shows the response rate for each diocese as a rate per 10,000 people on the 2020 Electoral Roll.¹⁸ Three dioceses have over 150 people per 10,000 responding to the questionnaire, while four dioceses have fewer than 30 people per 10,000.

Diocese	No. of Responses	Diocese	No. of Responses	Diocese	No. of Responses
Bath & Wells	292	Hereford	68	Salisbury	138
Birmingham	140	Leeds	245	Sheffield	106
Blackburn	104	Leicester	121	Sodor & Man	18
Bristol	196	Lichfield	245	Southwark	324
Canterbury	98	Lincoln	57	Southwell & Nottingham	86
Carlisle	27	Liverpool	135	Truro	31
Chelmsford	193	London	335	Winchester	113
Chester	415	Manchester	105	Worcester	79
Chichester	104	Newcastle	87	York	127
Coventry	102	Norwich	63	Europe	150
Derby	111	Oxford	412		
Durham	82	Peterborough	59		
Ely	115	Portsmouth	41		
Exeter	404	Rochester	159	HM Forces	3
Gloucester	97	St Albans	235	National Church Institutions	1
Guildford	212	St Edmundsbury and Ipswich	78	Not part of a CofE Diocese	30

Table 1: Responses by Diocese (n=6,318)

¹⁷ Data about the diocese people came from were removed from the main data before analysis.

¹⁸ Electoral Roll figures from *Statistics for Mission 2020*, <https://www.churchofengland.org/media/26026>, Accessed 21 February, 2022.

Diocese/area	Electoral Roll 2020	Responses	Responses per 10,000 ER
Exeter	22,800	404	177.2
Bristol	12,500	196	156.8
Europe	9,600	150	156.2
Chester	31,200	415	133.0
Bath & Wells	25,200	292	115.9
Sodor & Man	1,700	18	105.9
Birmingham	13,400	140	104.5
Guildford	23,100	212	91.8
Oxford	45,700	412	90.2
Leicester	13,100	121	92.4
St Albans	26,300	235	89.4
Southwark	37,600	324	86.2
Derby	13,100	111	84.7
Sheffield	13,000	106	81.5
Leeds	32,400	245	75.6
Coventry	13,500	102	75.6
Lichfield	32,600	243	74.5
Newcastle	11,800	87	73.7
Rochester	21,900	159	72.6
Liverpool	19,000	135	71.1
Ely	16,300	115	70.5
Worcester	11,700	79	67.5
Canterbury	15,300	98	64.1

Diocese/area	Electoral Roll 2020	Responses	Responses per 10,000 ER
Southwell & Nottingham	14,000	86	61.4
Chelmsford	34,300	193	56.3
Durham	15,000	82	54.7
Gloucester	17,800	97	54.5
London	61,400	334	54.4
Hereford	12,900	68	52.7
York	24,200	127	52.5
Winchester	23,100	113	48.9
Manchester	22,100	105	47.5
Salisbury	29,600	138	46.6
St Edmundsbury & Ipswich	16,900	78	46.2
Blackburn	22,700	104	45.8
Peterborough	15,800	59	37.3
Norwich	16,900	63	37.3
Portsmouth	12,100	41	33.9
Lincoln	19,100	57	29.8
Truro	10,700	31	29.0
Chichester	38,900	104	26.7
Carlisle	15,400	27	17.5

Table 2: Responses by Diocese ordered by response rate (n=6,284, does not include HM Forces, NCIs, those not in CofE dioceses)

Local area characteristics

Postcodes within England were given by 5,815 questionnaire respondents. Postcodes or their equivalent were also given for locations outwith England; in other parts of the UK, the British Isles and Europe. English postcodes were linked to their Lower-layer Super Output Area (LSOA; small areas with around 1,500 people or 650 households, used by the Office of National Statistics (ONS) to publish data) which enabled us to identify the socio-economic and rural/urban characteristics of where respondents lived. These data were separated from the main data before analysis.

a) Deprivation

Figure 7 and Table 3 show the number and percentage of respondents in each of the ten deciles of the Index of Multiple Deprivation.¹⁹ If people responding to the feedback questionnaire were equally distributed across England, we would expect the bars to be of equal height, indicated by the black line. We can see that more people are responding from less deprived areas - there are more people at the right-hand side of the plot. There are seven and a half times as many responses from people living in the least deprived areas, as from people living in the most deprived areas of England.

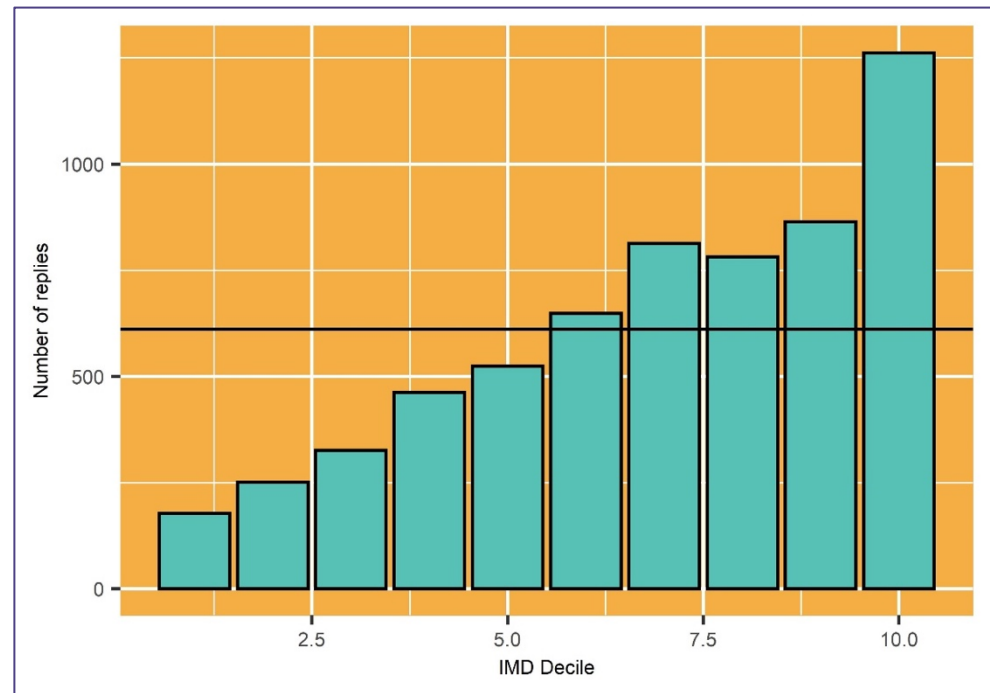


Figure 7: Levels of Deprivation

¹⁹ The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) is the official measure of relative deprivation for small areas in England, bringing together data on income, employment, education, health, crime, housing and environment. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2019>. Accessed 31 May, 2021.

IMD	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10
%	2.6	4.3	5.6	7.0	9.0	11.1	13.5	12.5	14.4	19.8

Table 3: % of responses from each IMD decile

It is impossible to say if this graph is representative of Church of England attenders as no comparable data set exists. The low numbers responding in areas of higher deprivation may be due to fewer CofE attenders living in those areas, people in areas of higher deprivation being less likely to complete an online feedback questionnaire, or reflect what has been described as the “wordy” nature of the resources which may be more difficult to engage with for people in such areas.

b) Rural/Urban Areas

We can also investigate the type of community where respondents live, using the rural-urban classification (RUC).²⁰ This divides England into rural and urban areas (settlements of more than 10,000 people), which are then divided into the size of community, and whether or not the area is sparsely populated. While rural areas make up 85% of the land area, 82% of the population live in urban areas. Figure 8 an **Error! Reference source not found.** Table 4 show the level of response from the different types of area. The blue lines indicate the number of responses that we would expect if they were evenly distributed across England.

Table 4: Rural Urban Classification

Area Code	Area Name	Number of responses	Expected number of responses ²¹
A1	Urban major conurbation	1,557	1,928
B1	Urban minor conurbation	144	202
C1	Urban city and town	2,701	2,631
C2	Urban city and town in a sparse setting	22	16
D1	Rural town and fringe	643	534
D2	Rural town and fringe in a sparse setting	21	33
E1	Rural village and dispersed	665	417
E2	Rural village and dispersed in a sparse setting	62	55

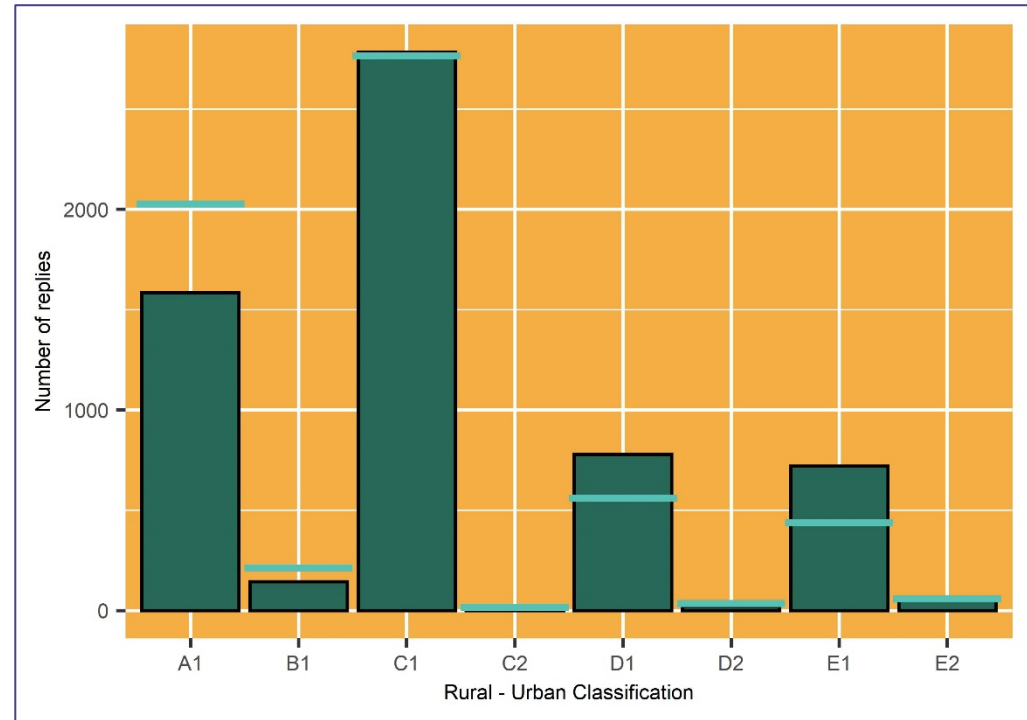
²⁰ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/methodology/geography/geographicalproducts/ruralurbanclassifications/2011ruralurbanclassification> Accessed 31 May, 2021.

²¹ This is the number of responses we’d expect to see in each category if respondents were equally spread across the population.

We can see that most responses have come from urban areas, and in particular “city and town” (C1) areas. There are fewer than expected responses from “major conurbations” (A1), but more responses than expected from “urban city and town” and “rural town and fringe” (C1, D1) areas. As before, there is no comparable data on where attenders of Churches of England live, so it is not possible to determine if this is a representative sample. It may be worth noting that many areas of deprivation are found in major conurbations, so the lack of responses from such areas (A1) may be highlighting the lower number of responses from deprived areas as measured by the IMD.

We investigated whether responses to the questionnaire differed between those in urban or rural areas and found no systematic difference.

Figure 8: Rural Urban Classification



Demography

Aspects of demography were gathered at various places in the questionnaire. Age was asked as a single question, while other characteristics were asked as part of a question about identity (Q24, Figure 9).

Participants were asked to select words that they would use to describe themselves - these included aspects of gender, sexuality and marital status. All options can be selected in combination with others. There was an “prefer not to say” option, and many people used the “Other” option to give more detail or to describe themselves in ways in which they felt comfortable. Where there were a number of responses in a category, e.g. “divorced”, we have added it to our reporting.

24. To help us gauge the degree of diversity of people who engaged with the course, please indicate which of these are words that you would use to describe yourself. Tick as many as appropriate.

<input type="checkbox"/> heterosexual	<input type="checkbox"/> cisgender	<input type="checkbox"/> opposite-sex married
<input type="checkbox"/> gay lesbian	<input type="checkbox"/> queer	<input type="checkbox"/> same-sex married
<input type="checkbox"/> same sex attracted	<input type="checkbox"/> asexual	<input type="checkbox"/> other married
<input type="checkbox"/> bisexual	<input type="checkbox"/> intersex	<input type="checkbox"/> same-sex civil partnered
<input type="checkbox"/> male	<input type="checkbox"/> single	<input type="checkbox"/> opposite-sex civil partnered
<input type="checkbox"/> female	<input type="checkbox"/> same-sex cohabiting	<input type="checkbox"/> other civil partnered
<input type="checkbox"/> transgender	<input type="checkbox"/> opposite-sex cohabiting	<input type="checkbox"/> prefer not to say
<input type="checkbox"/> non-binary	<input type="checkbox"/> other co-habiting, e.g. where one person is trans	
<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify)		
<input type="text"/>		

Figure 9: Question 24 in the questionnaire

Age

Data about a person’s age were collected as part of the main questionnaire. Age-group boundaries were chosen in line with the Government Statistical Service harmonised questions Grouping B, amalgamating the two oldest categories.²² Of the 5,649 people who gave their age, only 1.6% were 24 or younger, while 40.4% were 65 or over. Recently released figures from the 2021 Census indicate that in England as a whole, 14.2% of those over 15 are 24 or under, and 22.3% are 65 or over.²³ The ages of those responding to the questionnaire is not at all representative of England more generally. Table 5 and Figure 10 give the detailed breakdown.

²² <https://gss.civilservice.gov.uk/policy-store/age-and-date-of-birth/> Accessed 5 May, 2022.

²³ Population and Household Estimates, England and Wales: Census 2021, released 28 June, 2022.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/datasets/populationandhouseholdestimatesenglandandwalescensus2021> Accessed 23 August, 2022. Percentages given are of the population aged 15 or over – data is currently available in 5-year age bands.

Age	24 or under (%)	Between 25 and 44 (%)	Between 45 and 64 (%)	65 and over (%)	Prefer not to say (%)
Respondents	1.6	12.5	42.9	40.4	2.5
Census 2021	14.2	32.2	31.2	22.3	-

Table 5: Age of participants (n=5,649)

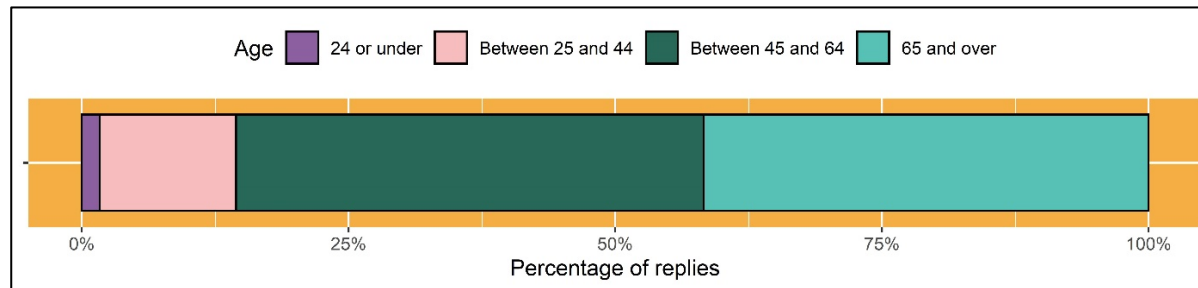


Figure 10: Age of participants

Gender

Gender was asked as part of Q24 (shown above in Figure 9) which offered a choice of words that people could use to describe themselves; respondents could choose "female", "intersex", "male" and/or "non-binary" as gender options.

Following analysis of the write-in "Other" section, "gender-fluid" was also added as a category. Table 6 and Figure 11 give details of numbers.²⁴

Description	Number
Female	2,556
<i>Gender-fluid</i>	6
Intersex	3
Male	1,723
Non-binary	46

Table 6: Gender characteristics (n=4,211)

²⁴ The visualisations in this section deliberately focus on the numerically smaller groups, as per K. E. Guyan, *Queer Data*, Bloomsbury, 2022, p23 "The queering of data ... [has] implications for whose stories are placed at the centre and on the margins."

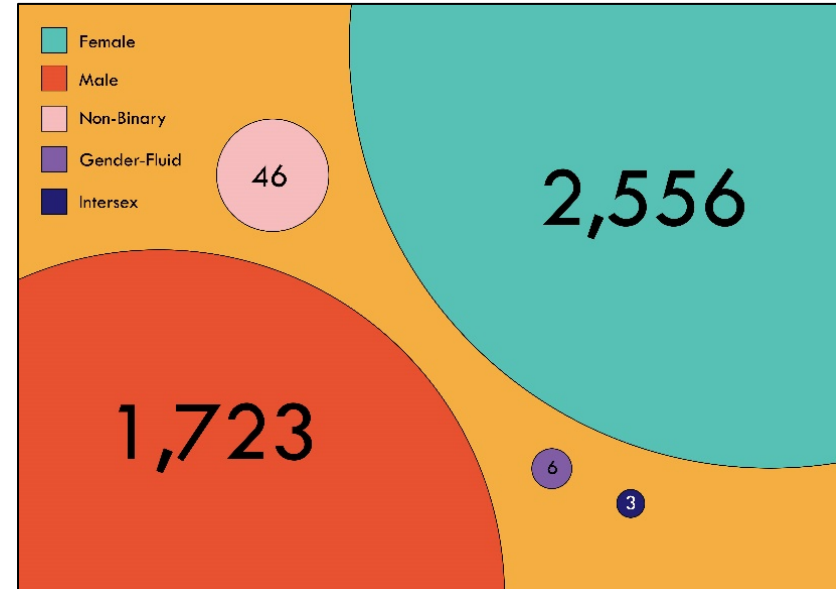


Figure 11: Gender categories

Transgender status

Respondents could choose to describe themselves as transgender or cisgender. Relatively few people have chosen to describe themselves as cisgender.²⁵ One response also described what they termed a “same-sex” relationship with someone who had identified as another sex during the relationship.

Description	Number
Cisgender	675
Transgender	34

Table 7: Transgender status (n=709)

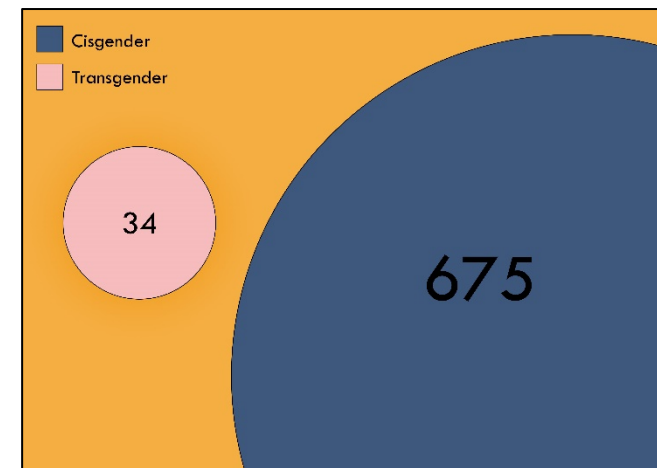


Figure 12: Transgender status

²⁵ Guyan, *op cit*, p55-56, notes that “the relational dimension of data is particularly pertinent among participants who identify with majority, normative identity categories – in other words, those who are cis and/or heterosexual. Several scholars have noted a lack of familiarity or identification with terms such as “heterosexual” and “straight” among heterosexual/straight survey respondents.”

Sexuality

89% of those who indicated a response in this section described themselves as heterosexual. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) estimate that the figure for England in 2020 was 94.4%.²⁶ The next most common responses were gay | lesbian (7%; England: 1.8%) and bisexual (3.5%;1.2%). Write-in responses of demisexual (those who only feel sexually attracted to someone when they have an emotional bond with them) and pansexual (those who are attracted to all genders) were included as categories in Table 8 and Figure 13.

Description	Number
Asexual	35
Bisexual	175
<i>Demisexual</i>	3
Gay Lesbian	346
Heterosexual	4,423
<i>Pansexual</i>	7
Queer	105
Same-sex attracted	140

Table 8: Sexuality characteristics (n=4,948)

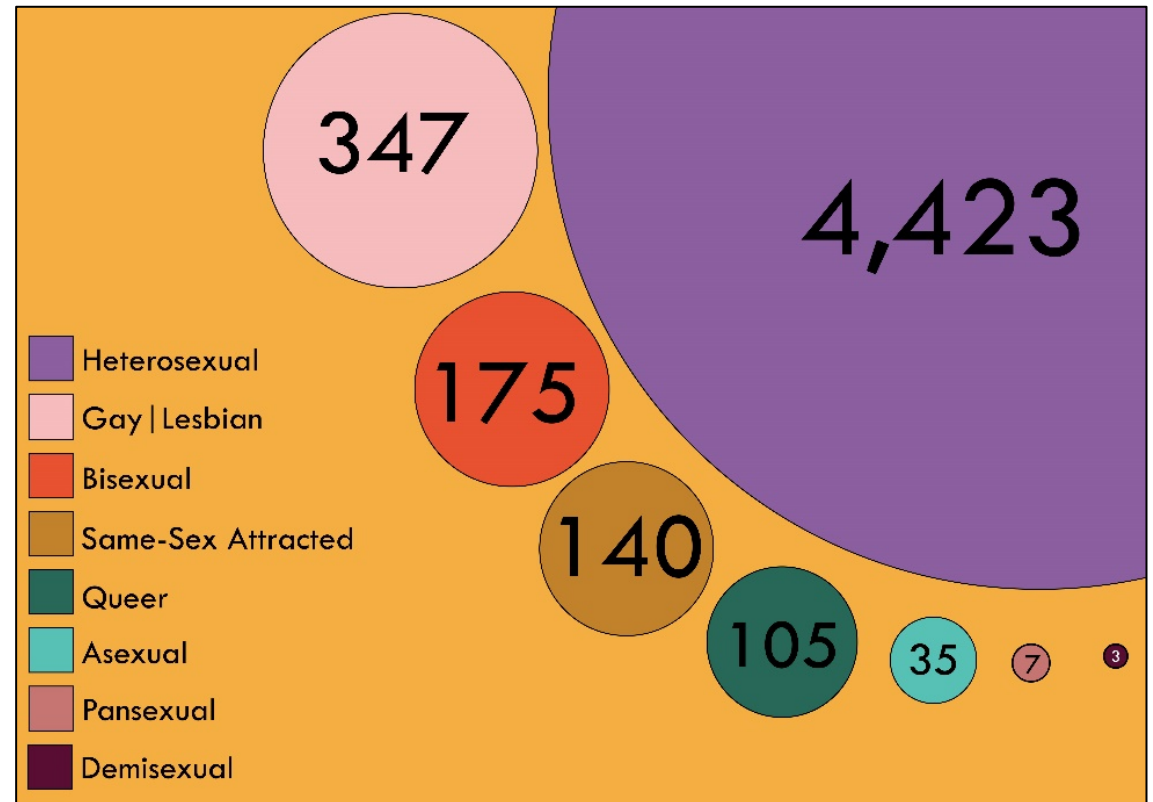


Figure 13: Sexuality

²⁶ Sexual Orientation, UK <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/sexuality/bulletins/sexualidentityuk/2020> Accessed 25 May 2022.

Relationships

Over half (61%) of respondents described themselves as married to someone of the opposite sex. 12% described themselves as single, and those in same-sex marriages were the next highest provided category (3%). A substantial number of people wrote in that they were a widow or widower (3.5%), or divorced or separated (2.3%). Ten people described themselves as remarried. These categories may refer to former opposite-sex or same-sex marriages. In addition, three people said that they had vowed celibacy, some within a community.

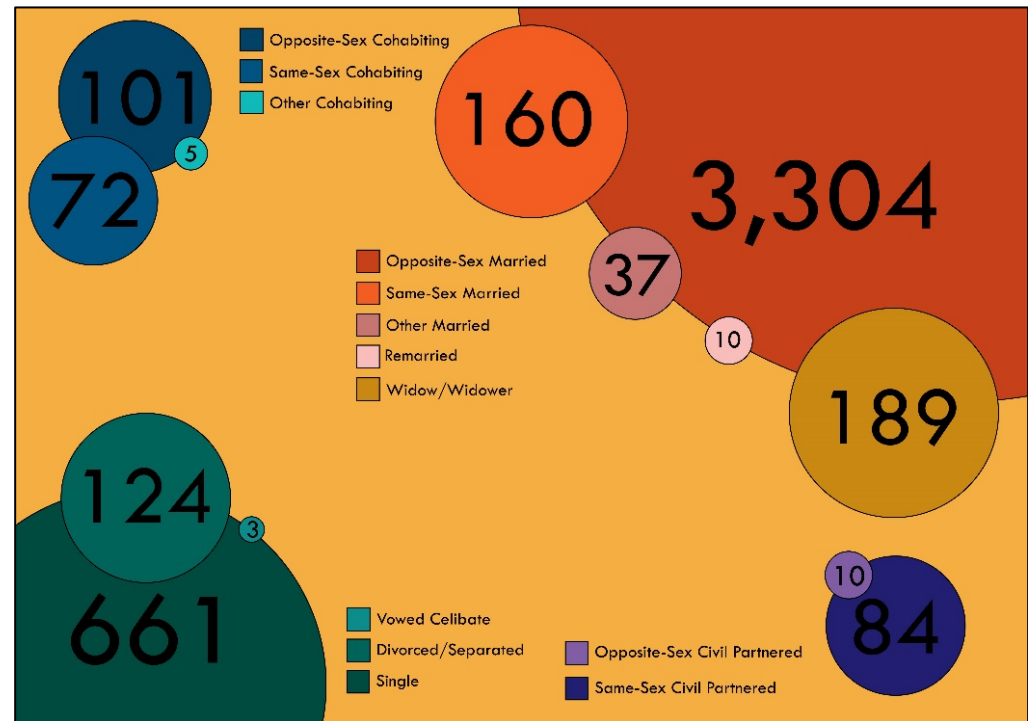


Figure 14: Relationships

Description	Number	Description	Number
Married (opposite-sex)	3,304	Co-habiting (opposite-sex)	101
Married (same-sex)	160	Co-habiting (same-sex)	72
Married (other)	37	Co-habiting (other)	5
Widow/Widower	189	Civil-partnered (opposite-sex)	10
Divorced/Separated	124	Civil-partnered (same-sex)	84
Remarried	10		
Single	661	Vowed celibate	3

Table 9: Relationship categories (n=5,410)

Other topics raised

The write-in section gave people the opportunity to describe how they wished to be identified in relation to their response to the course. This gave some the freedom to describe a more complex situation such as:

“Fluid, ever changing; emotionally more lesbian, sexually more heterosexual.”

“Some aspects of my persona are not stereotypically male.”

Other people noted that they were participating to better understand the issues that a family member was wrestling with, for example:

“My daughter identifies as bisexual, so I have her in mind as I take this course.”

“heterosexual parent of a gay, trans adult child”.

“Son of a same-sex attracted man, who decided to live in accordance with church teaching, for which I am thankful.”

How did people engage?

This questionnaire was available through the Learning Hub, so participants could reply having followed the material independently, or as part of a group. We found that 79% had been part of a group, while 11% had independently engaged with the resources. 9% gave another response, mostly group leaders or Diocesan Advocates.

71% of respondents had attended all five sessions of the course, and 24% had been in touch with their Diocesan Advocate.

What did you say about the course and its materials?

Overall experience

We asked participants to describe their overall experience with the LLF course by placing a slider between “Terrible” - 0 and “Wonderful” - 100. Figure 15 shows the responses received. We can see that most people found the course to be a positive experience, with scores just under 75. There is a plateau between 25 and 37, representing a group of people who found the experience of the course less helpful. The average (mean) score was 59 (median 64) – a fairly positive response.

We found that women (mean 63) reported a slightly better experience than men (56), while those who did, and did not describe themselves as heterosexual had almost identical averages (60 and 59). People who were transgender recorded an average of 56. Older people reported enjoying the course more than younger people (61 compared with 56).

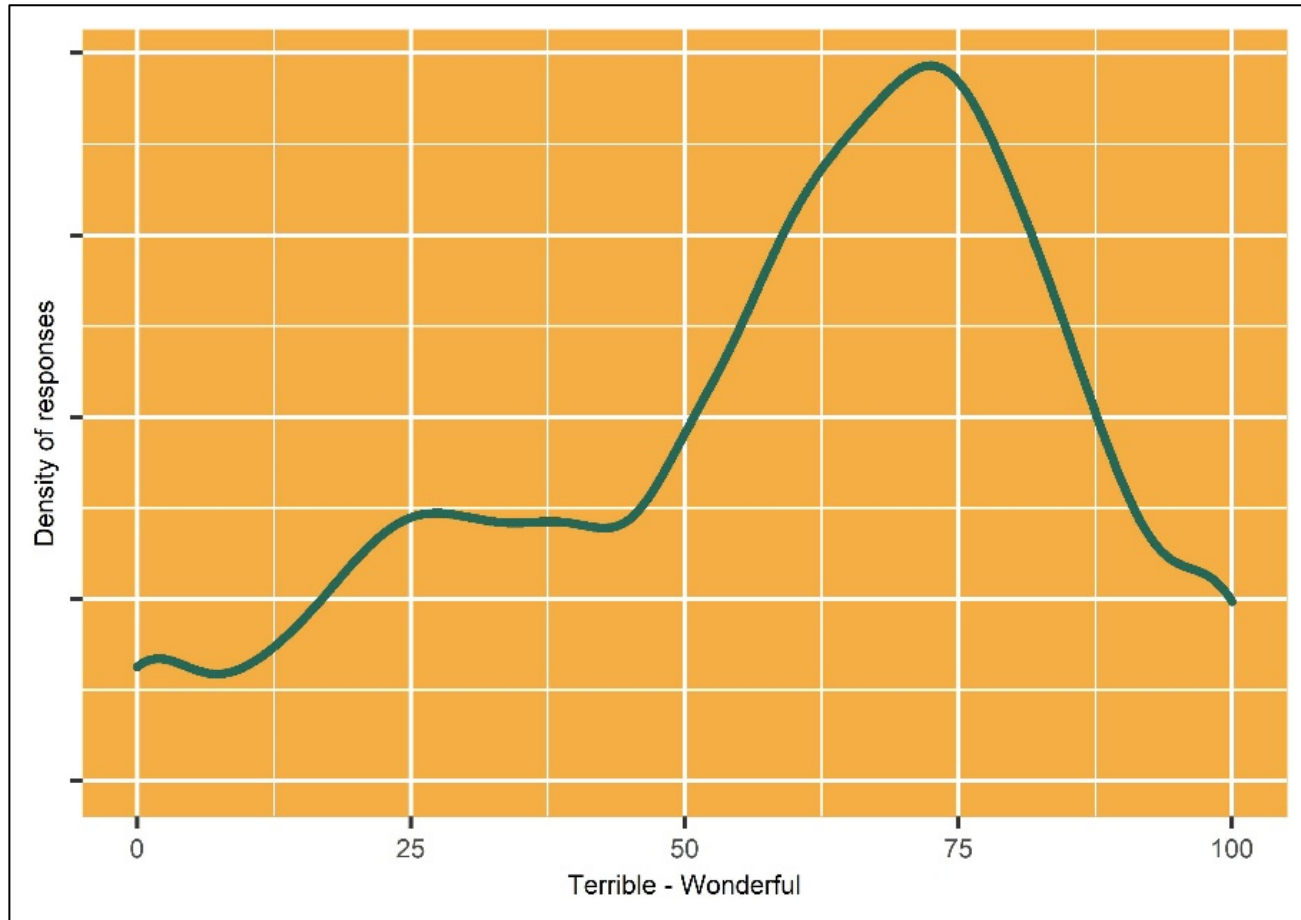


Figure 15: Overall experience

Course content and delivery

In the written responses, main themes included both praise and criticism of course content, and its format and delivery.

Praise for course content

A popular reason for recommending the course to others was that its content was **high quality**.

The **Story Films** received particularly high praise across several of the survey questions. People appreciated having “real life” examples to think with and discuss.

“Coming from a not very diverse church it was hugely beneficial to engage with the personal stories presented.”

“Great to hear stories. Lifts it from the pages into lived experience.”

“best bits for me were the short videos of the singles / couples talking about what it meant for them to live in love and faith”

The **Pastoral Principles** were also identified as an “excellent foundation” for discussion.

The course was described as “balanced and informative” and “carried out with love and humility”.

There was general praise for the quality and presentation of resources. For many, the resources were found to **stimulate conversation** and **provoke thought**.

“Compassionate, warming, hopeful - gentle - intelligent and informed”

“The mix of Bible readings, short films and time for discussion worked really well in stimulating discussion and reflection.”

“Carefully and brilliantly prepared material that is very fair and honest.”

Criticisms of course content

Some described the course as: “dense”, “confusing”, “wordy”, “lacked clarity”

Others used words like, “vague”, “woolly”, “superficial”, “flimsy”, “bland”, “anodyne”, “patronising”

Some critiqued the **discussion questions** as “trite”, “not ideal to foster good conversations”:

“Many of the discussion questions felt superficial and irrelevant in a way that is at odds with the urgency and seriousness of the questions facing LGBTI Christians...”

“The questions were very loose and could have been more precise as people did not know what exactly they are trying to answer.”

It was suggested that the course “**tip-toed**” around **difficult topics** and failed to really “get to grips” with the issues.

“I felt the material circled round the issues without ever getting to the heart of the matter.”

Requests for “**more depth**” appear in some responses and others felt the content was already familiar, so they did not learn much.

“I felt at the end that we had but scratched the surface of a difficult and controversial subject, that people wanted to carry on the discussion.”

Several respondents commented that the material was “biased”, “selective”, “one sided”. The course was identified as having **an underlying “agenda”**. Whilst some stated that the course assumes the conservative position to be “normative”, others felt that traditional/conservative Christians were portrayed as “ignorant”.

“It is carefully selected and does not cover human sexuality in a balanced way.”

“I felt that the course had quite a strong agenda. I happen to be quite aligned with it, but I felt a bit sorry for people with different opinions.”

“There seems to me to be a very clear agenda behind the course and that is that of a determination to change the church's -and God's - teaching on relationships and sex.”

“At times it felt there was a bias towards 'traditionalism'.”

“I suspected there was a hidden agenda which made me feel angry.”

Some respondents feared that the course leads participants to **stray from orthodoxy**.

“I feel the writers of the course have taken Bible verses out of context and I wonder if by attending this course I am denying my belief that the Bible is the word of God and the author of all truth.”

“The course needs to simply set out the teaching of the Bible and the historic teaching of the Church rather than also showcasing modern heresy.”

Some respondents were concerned that there was **not enough close theological engagement**. It was suggested that the course relied on “emotion” rather than starting from scripture.

“I feel like the course could have engaged more directly with some of the ‘difficult’ passages of scripture. At times it felt like we went out of the way to avoid discussing these even though our group were keen to!”

“I think the course spent a lot of time considering how people feel and very little on what the Bible teaches.”

“I felt the course was rather light in exploring Biblical passages and examining possible alternative interpretations of these.”

Course format and delivery

Participants felt that the course needed **more discussion time**. Some added that the course itself should be longer.

“We just never had the time each week to really explore and engage with the material.”

“Too much information to wrestle with in the sessions - needed longer discussion and it feels like we need a 6th more reflective ‘what next’ session.”

There were some **difficulties navigating online resources**. For instance, it was reported that you cannot look ahead to future weeks’ content.

“It was very frustrating, leading the course, having to trawl through each session to get to the next one. Also, not having any downloadable video was a dreadful assumption that everyone had access to the internet.”

“I found the hub confusing and I could not work out how to find info on the topics on which I was interested, bearing in mind that there is no way I could afford to buy the books”

For some, **using Zoom made discussion more challenging**, “distant” and perhaps impeded empathy. A few encountered technical hitches. That said, others were pleasantly surprised that use of **Zoom went smoothly** and did not seem to hamper the group’s conversation.

“We did the course online - without the pandemic, it would definitely be preferable to engage in person. There were a few emotional moments and it was hard to show care and love across zoom.”

“The use of Zoom made it possible for 5 very busy incumbents to engage with the course in a meaningful way.”

The leader/facilitator was found to influence respondents’ experience of the course. Most comments on this were positive:

“Our facilitator understood the content well and presented it in a gentle patient and non judgemental way.”

“Our facilitator was excellent and made sure it was a safe environment, meaning that participants felt able to express their views.”

Though a few found their facilitators were too forthcoming with their own views or too “controlling” of the discussion.

“The course was good however it was heavily influenced by the leader (Vicar) and his views on the subject which he was very clear about not wanting to listen to anything other than his view.”

“The course was sometimes led from the front and ideas pushed on us which I did not like.”

What did you tell other people about the course?

Three-quarters (73%) of respondents said that they would recommend the course to a friend. We might expect that some people who did not like the course, and therefore not recommend it, would not bother to complete a feedback response, but this remains a high number for such an exercise.

Older people were more likely to recommend the course than younger people (76%, 66%), and women more than men (81%, 68%). People who identified as heterosexual, those who did not, and those who are transgender shared similar rates (75%, 76%, 76%).

We also asked participants how they had shared their learning with others. Figure 16 and Table 10 show that the vast majority (85%) had shared their learning in some way, mainly with friends, at church (68%) and outside church (50%). People also wrote in that they had shared it with family members (5%), workplace colleagues, or other clergy and church staff.

Participants also spoke of the value of having these discussions, details are given under 'Conversations' on pages 50-51.

Whom I've shared with		%
With church friends	3,659	68.4%
With other friends	2,666	49.9%
As part of a church service	561	10.5%
With our PCC or church leaders	2,003	37.4%
Not been shared	780	14.6%

Table 10: How learning has been shared (n=5,347)

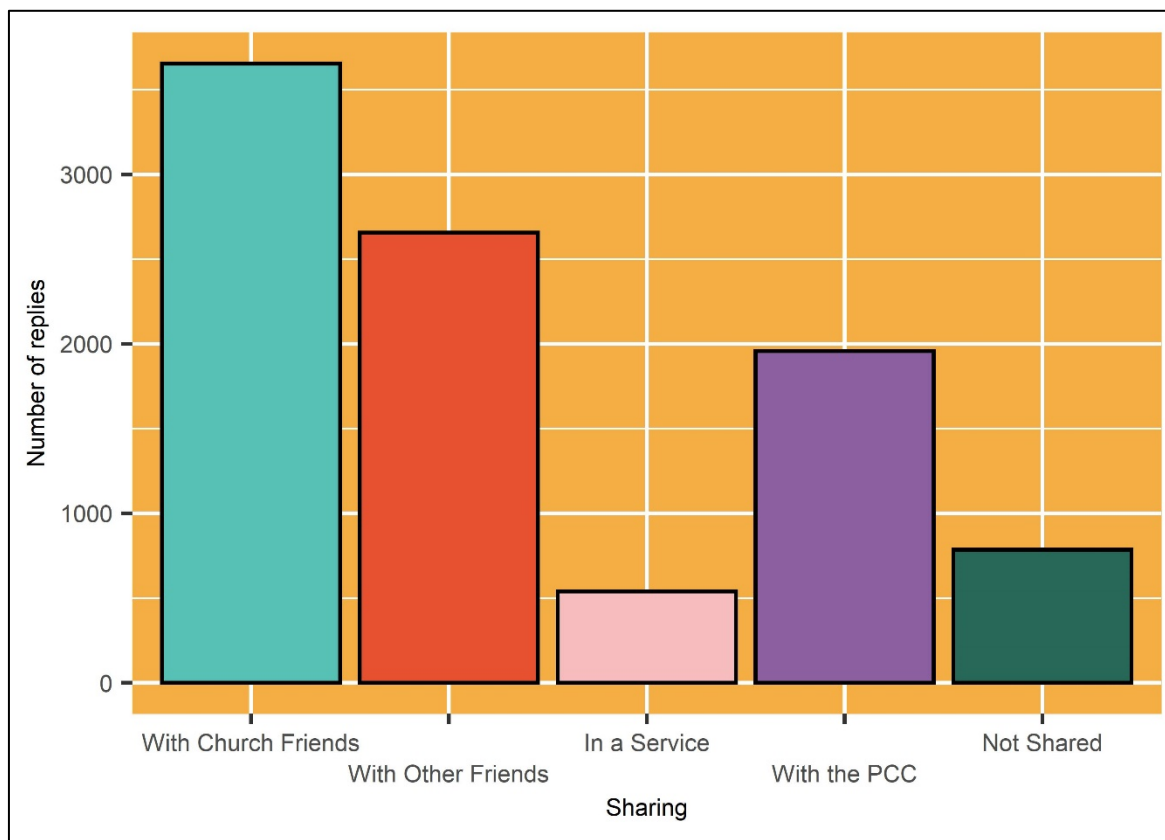


Figure 16: How learning has been shared

What did you say about leading a group?

A section of the questionnaire addressed those who led or facilitated the course, asking them about their experience. Our responses included 1,148 entries from group leaders.

One respondent summarised:

“Pleased to be part of something the church has avoided for far too long. Challenged to keep conversations from being divisive or unhelpful. Satisfied to have run the course to completion. Accepting that we don’t all have the same opinions but are willing to listen to each other.”

What roles did group leaders have?

Most of the group leaders are clergy (55%), followed by lay leaders (20%). 10% had no formal leadership role, and the 15% who reported an “Other” role included ordinands, church staff, retired clergy and others (Figure 17).

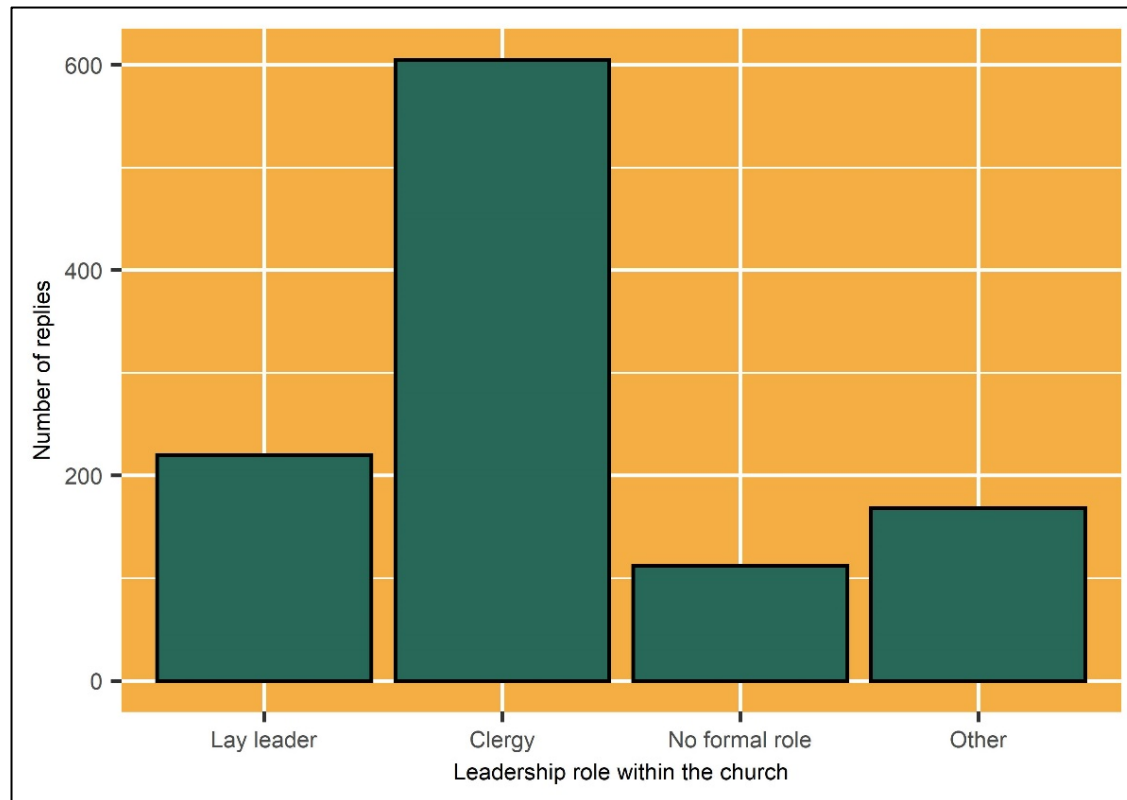


Figure 17: Groups leaders' roles (n=1,104)

How did group leaders experience the LLF course?

We asked leaders about their experience of leading their group and the results are shown in Figure 18. People found the experience positive with the mean score being 70 and the median 74 out of 100.

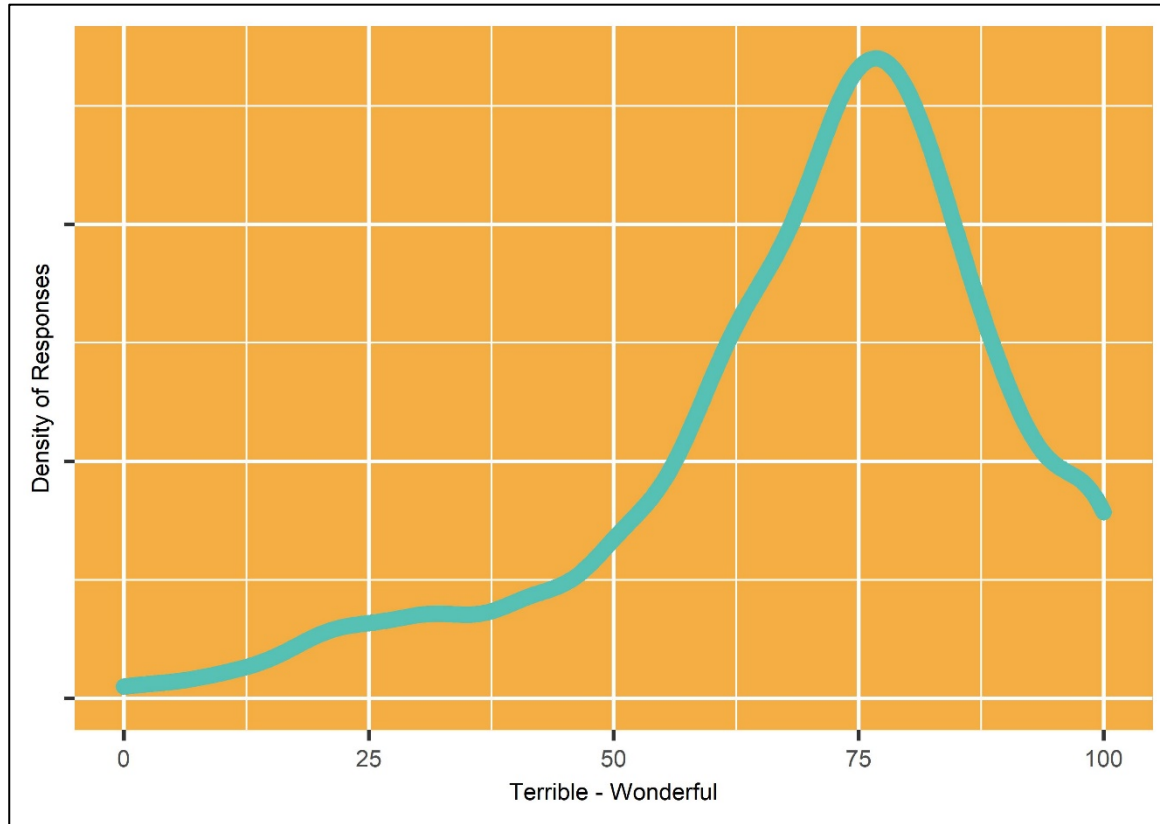


Figure 18: Group leaders' experiences (n=999)

Positive, comfortable, confident

A majority had a **positive experience of leading** the course:

"Challenging but positive."

"It was really exciting, a word I would rarely use in this context, and also helped me work through my own views and prejudices."

"A good experience; I should be happy to do it again with another group if asked."

Many responses reflected that the facilitators felt “comfortable” and “confident” in their role.

Initial nerves

It was common for leaders to experience some **nervousness** and trepidation:

“I initially felt a little reserved, as I didn’t know the theological perspectives of everyone attending the group at the start. However, as the group proceeded, I felt more at ease.”

“I was hesitant at first, but consider the issues addressed in the course to so important that I was prepared to take the plunge.”

Challenges

Some expressed that **facilitating was challenging**:

“It was quite demanding at times”

“It was significantly 'harder' than leading more familiar Bible Study discussions, but also more rewarding,”

Leaders felt challenged about if and/or **how to represent other views** in group discussions:

“The most difficult bits were where most of the group agreed with each other, meaning that opposite views were not really engaged with - then it is tempting to move out of the facilitator role and start challenging them to think harder about other perspectives.”

“Mostly positive but due to lack of diversity I had to do most of the presenting of other views myself.”

“It was often frustrating to be endorsing opinions that I didn't share, but important for group members to feel that they were being listened to.”

Some leaders highlighted that facilitating the course involved some **demanding preparation**:

“It required quite a lot of preparation”

“I was initially totally overwhelmed by the huge amount of material offered alongside each session. How was a leader expected to live a normal life and get through all of that in between sessions?”

“I found it quite daunting and I spent a lot of time each week preparing resources.”

Did you find the resources helpful?

The LLF course group materials were reported to be very helpful indeed with 87% of leaders finding them to be usually or always helping the group to engage with the topics - the first two columns of Table 11 give a detailed breakdown.

Did the group materials help people engage?	%	Did you use the Going Further resources?	%
Not at all	0.3%	Not at all	18.3%
Not really	3.9%	Not really	26.2%
Occasionally	8.8%	Occasionally	31.7%
Usually	52.3%	Usually	16.2%
Always	34.7%	Always	7.6%

Table 11: Helpfulness of group materials (n=1,099) and use of further resources (n=1,097)

“Going Further” resources were also available, and could be used by the leaders for study before the sessions (Table 11, columns 3 and 4). These were less commonly used, with only 24% using them more than occasionally.

Materials

Generally, facilitators found the **materials supported and enabled them** well in their role.

“The material made facilitation very easy”

“It was a real privilege - and very easy, given the user-friendly nature of the material”

“the videos really helped to frame discussion and to keep some personal distance for me as leader.”

Which items were most discussed?

Leaders were asked which aspects of the course had provoked the most discussion and their answers are shown in Table 12 and Figure 19.

Item	%
Story Film	73.4%
Bible Study	45.2%
Learning Together	40.3%
Pastoral Principle	11.5%

Almost three-quarters of the leaders (73%) reported that the story films had generated most discussion, followed by the Bible study and learning together. This reflects the material described above where 56% of group participants said that they often used the story film resources.

Table 12: Areas discussed (n=1,085)

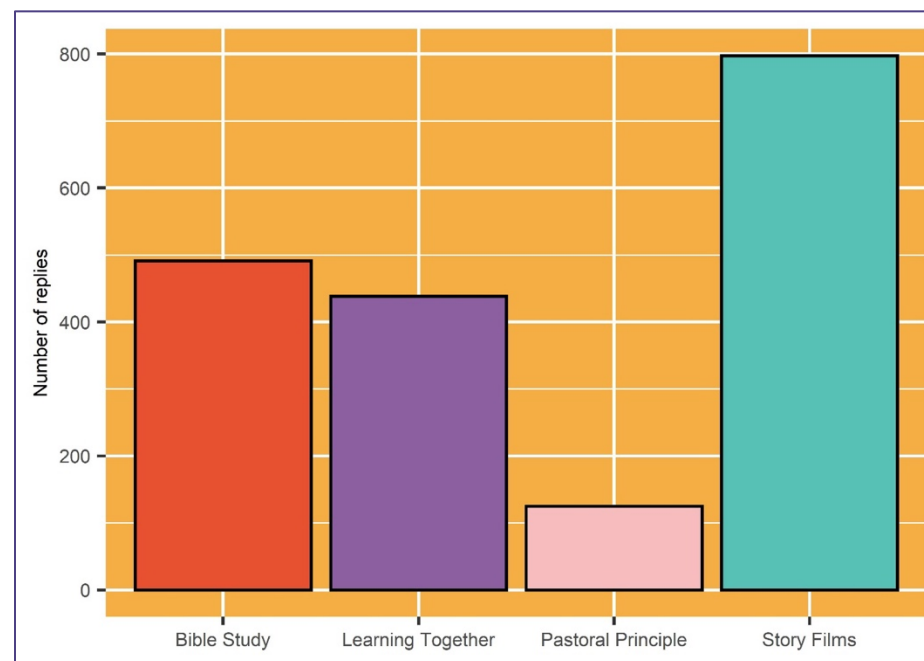


Figure 19: Which areas were most discussed?

Other comments

Leaders who received **training** before the course were grateful for it and some who did not, said it would have been helpful: "OK, but wished there had been training before the course."

Co-leading was recommended: "I co-led the group as a 20-year-old female with an older male. This worked as a great duo because we could support each other and members of the group in different ways as well as bring different experiences and perspectives to the discussions."

Some spoke of **adapting the course** material e.g. the discussion questions, others had **experience as a participant** before becoming a facilitator.

Learning

This section considers the questions, “What did you learn?” and “How did the course affect what you thought?”

Some of the survey respondents told us that that the **course made little difference to them because they were already familiar with the material**. Whilst a few of those respondents were frustrated by this, a larger number still felt the course was worthwhile and were glad their church was engaging with the material.

“I actually found it slightly annoying. Perhaps this is because I have done some reading and thinking through these issues for myself I found it a bit patronising.”

“I had already thought and read a lot on LGBTQI inclusion before the course, so probably it has not made a big difference, but it was good that some of my church engaged in it.”

“It was interesting to hear different view points, but I don't think I learned much that I didn't already know.”

What did you learn?

There are five sessions in the LLF course:

1. What does it mean to learn together as followers of Jesus Christ?
2. How does our identity in Christ relate to sex and gender?
3. What kinds of relationships does God call us to?
4. Where do our bodies and sex fit in to all of this?
5. How do diversity and difference affect our life together as a church?

Participants were asked how new the material in each of the sessions was to them, on a scale of 0 - very familiar, to 100 - very new. Figure 20 and Table 13 show the responses obtained. We can see that the responses are bimodal - there are two “bumps” - one around the 25 mark, and another around the 60 point. **For some people, the material was not very new - they'd met it before, while for others, they were meeting new material**. Session 1, on Learning Together, contained the most familiar material for participants - its curve is distinctively high on the left of Figure 20 - followed by Session 3, Relationships. The remaining sessions had similar average responses, with roughly equal curves.

Session	Average novelty	Median novelty	Number of responses
1 - Learning Together	29	25	5,515
2 - Identity	40	38	5,418
3 - Relationships	35	32	5,352
4 - Bodies and Sex	39	36	5,260
5 - Life Together	41	39	5,248

Table 13: Novelty of the material in each session

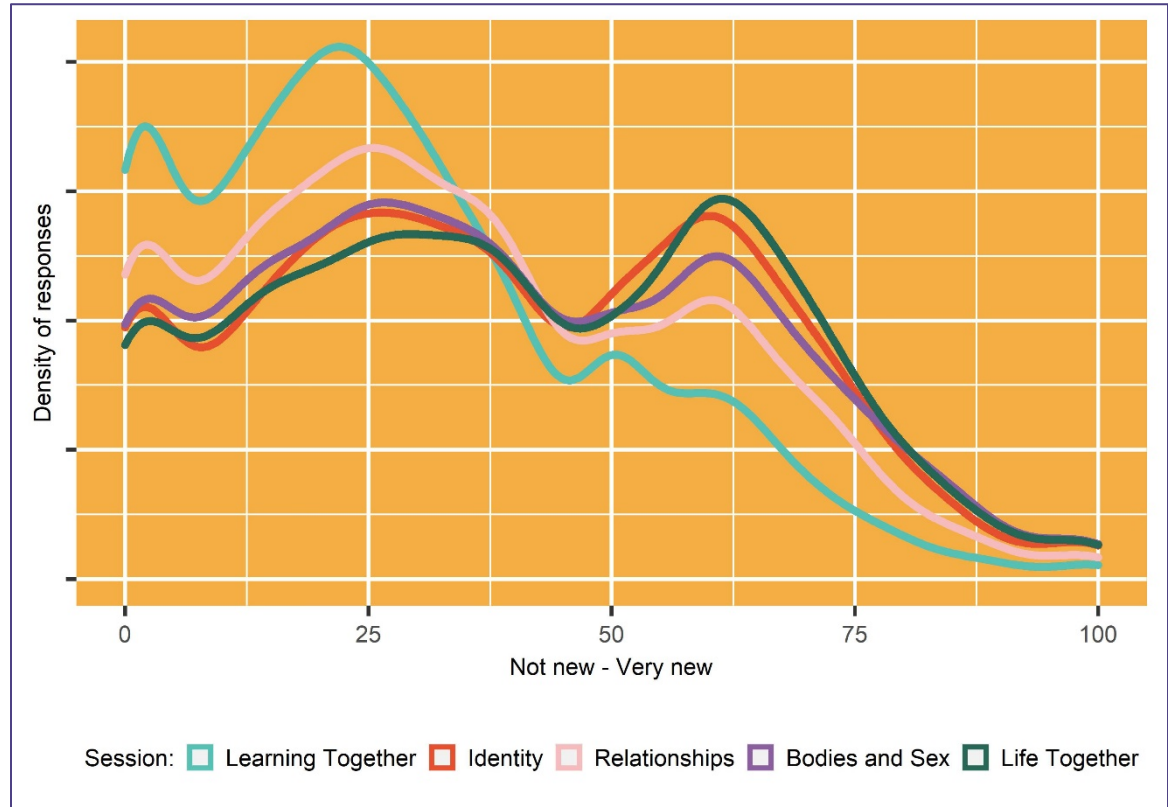


Figure 20: Novelty of the material in each session

For respondents who did not identify as heterosexual, the average novelty scores for each session were consistently a few points below those of those who said they were heterosexual, indicating that the material was more familiar. Women found the material on Identity and Bodies and Sex more new than men, while scores were similar in the other areas. Transgender people reported the novelty of each session as rather lower (means of 24-29) than all the other groups. The first sessions, Learning Together, was similar for older and younger people, but older people found the later sessions consistently newer (3 to 5 points higher on average).

How did the course affect what you thought?

The LLF course aimed to deepen understanding of topics relating to identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage, through the following aspects:

- teaching from the Bible,
- the inherited teaching of the Church,
- emerging Christian views on these topics, and
- understanding different views and encountering different experiences.

Questionnaire respondents were asked if their understanding had been deepened in these areas. They were asked to express their level of agreement with each statement on a sliding scale from 0 to 100, where 0 indicates the strongest disagreement, and 100 the strongest agreement. The results are shown in Table 14 and Figure 21 below.

Statement	Mean level of agreement	Median level of agreement	Number of responses
I have a deeper understanding of what the Bible says about these topics.	54	58	5,982
I have a deeper understanding of the Church's inherited teaching and emerging Christian views on these topics.	59	62	5,727
I am more aware of the complexities of identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage.	66	68	5,745
I'm now able to relate more compassionately and respectfully to people with different views from mine.	64	66	5,356

Table 14: Deepening understanding

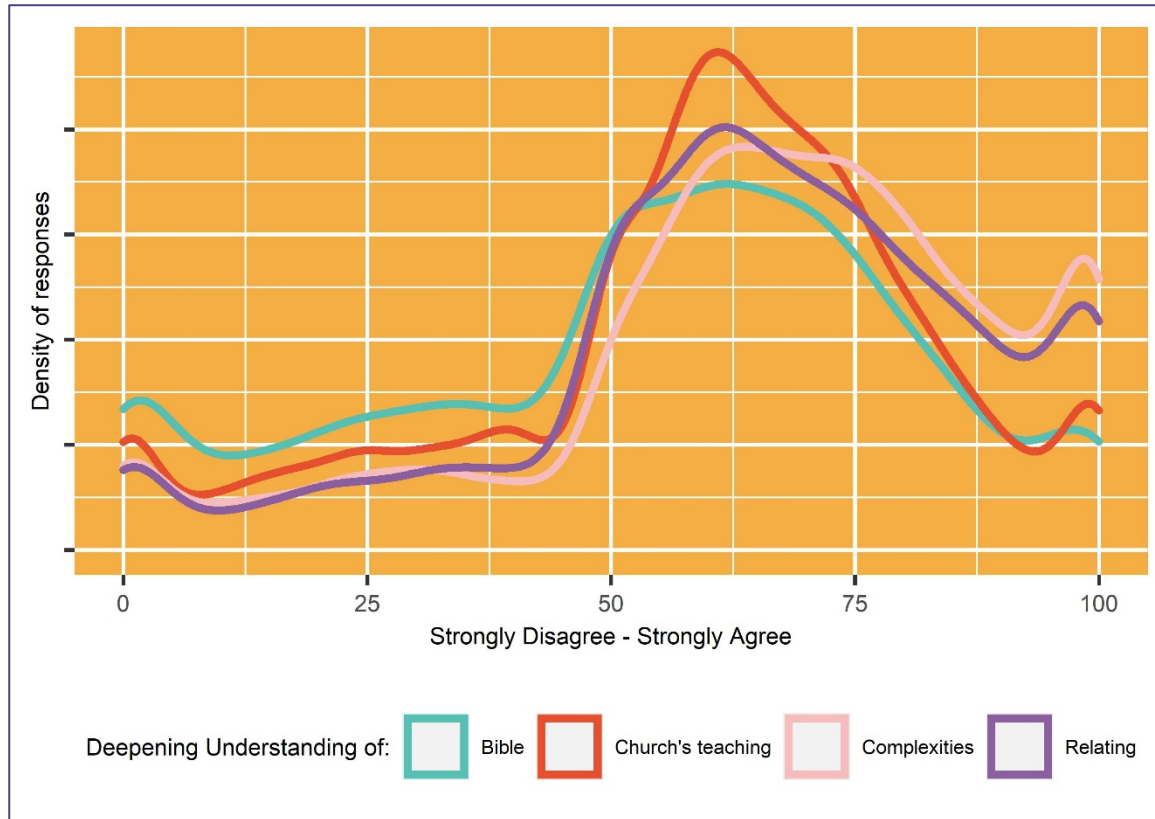


Figure 21: Levels of agreement about deepening understanding

The area that people reported being most in agreement about was having greater awareness of the complexities around the topics (pink line in Figure 21), with an average of 66 (median 68). Having a deeper understanding of the Bible's teaching (light blue line) was the area with most disagreement expressed - its average was barely above the centre point at 54 (median 58).

People who identified as heterosexual reported higher averages (3 points higher, apart from complexities which was 9 points higher – 68 compared with 59) than those who did not. It is likely that many people who are not heterosexual have considered the material before this process. Similarly, those who are transgender had less agreement with mean scores of between 53 and 55, with 58 for the statement on relating more compassionately. Older people said they had deepened their understanding more than young people, with differences of between 3 and 8 points (for what the Bible says). Women reported deepening understanding more than men, their average scores were between 3 and 6 points higher.

What difference has the course made in your thinking?

The main themes described by respondents in this section were:

- Increased awareness of diversity and LGBT experience
- Depth, clarity, confidence
- Compassion
- Confirmed views, new attitudes

Examples of the comments are given below.

Increased awareness of diversity and LGBT experience

One of the most popular responses to the questions about what difference the course has made, or might make, was that the course had **increased awareness and understanding**.

Respondents spoke of increased **awareness of LGBT experience**, including the rejection some have faced in church.

“I hope that the real life stories and the invitation to reflect will show people who unaware that LGBTI Christians belong to the church and have just as rich a faith as any other Christians. I hope that the stories will make people aware of how badly LGBTI Christians are being treated by the church in general and how much we are suffering because of it and that positive change will result locally, including more LGBTI people experiencing the fulness of God's love.”

Some people said that their **eyes were opened to contemporary discussions about sexual/gender diversity**, and knowledge of previously unfamiliar subjects – e.g. sexual diversity, trans experience - increased. Several described the course as “enlightening”.

“...I felt I had had my eyes opened to the world around me in 2021.”

“We felt that the overall experience of the course was insightful and helped us to gain a greater understanding of the complexities surrounding the topics of same-sex marriage and same-sex activity.”

“I hope that it will make our congregation more aware of issues of gender and identity and help them to be more open minded.”

“Make people realise it's an issue that's important to talk about.”

Depth, clarity, confidence

Participants said that the **LLF course helped to “clarify” their thoughts** and point of view.

“It has strengthened my own views on these issues; but it has also reminded me of the complexity of the issues involved.”

“It has helped to clarify some of the issues.”

“It has prompted me to revisit previous articles and booklets I have read, and to think more deeply, trying to go beyond my preconceptions.”

Some found that the course enabled them to feel **more confident in articulating their thoughts** and engaging discussion about the subject.

“I am now more confident to express my beliefs about sexuality, diversity and inclusion.”

“Helped with a vocabulary for these conversations.”

“It has given me the confidence to approach discussions on the content within a framework of CofE application of scripture.”

“more confident in raising topics of gender and sexuality with other Christians”

Compassion

As well as encountering new information and clarifying knowledge, some responses spoke of engaging emotionally with the subjects of LLF. Participants reflected on **increased feelings of empathy and compassion** for LGBTQ+ people, including new awareness of the “hurt” they experience.

“It hasn't changed my orthodox convictions, but I hope that I have more compassionate understanding of those who do not.”

“It has made me realize the pain that not accepting people from the LGBT community is causing.”

“I have more empathy but am still confused about my views.”

Confirmed views, new attitudes

Some course participants had their **initial views confirmed**:

“More aware of some of the issues. Interestingly enough, more affirmed in my own, in many respects, traditional understanding of these.”

“Now confident that my views on human sexuality agree with this course and has reinforced my sympathy with gay people.”

“It has strengthened my belief in the love of God for all whatever their gender.”

Moreover, some found that **the course galvanised them to act** on their stance, e.g. advocating for change.

“It has strengthened my resolve to work for change in the Church of England.”

“It has challenged me to push for change and to stand up for those who have made different life choices.”

“Made me more determined to broaden my congregation's experience of biblical hermeneutics and alternative theological interpretations of the Bible.”

Almost no one cited a wholesale change in their opinion or stance on the topics covered by LLF. However, some did describe of a **change in attitude or approach**:

“It made me look again at my views and prejudices.”

“It has helped me to be open minded and understand how others feel.”

“Made me more liberal in my views.”

“It makes me realise that the subject is no longer something I can think doesn't affect me.”

Several of the survey respondents spoke of **increased “openness”**, including being more “open minded”, being more open with fellow church members, open to “different interpretations of the Bible”, more open to “engage with others” on these topics, openness to “accepting difference”.

Some told us that they left the course feeling **confused, conflicted or uncertain** as they did not reach a desired resolution:

“a little bit more uncertain.”

“Not a lot. I still have a sort of cognitive dissonance to what the Bible says and what I'd prefer it to say or not say.”

“Slightly confused me”

“I remain very conflicted. I have read widely around this over several years and the arguments and scriptural interpretations are persuasive in both directions.

What my heart and mind say don't always match and I am fearful of doing harm.

I am left feeling as though I need to read, pray and think a lot more.”

Relating

In this section we present the results on engaging with the course as part of a group, the variety and safety within the group, and how conversations with others affected respondents and relationships.

What was it like participating in your group?

How varied were the groups?

We asked people how varied their group was in terms of lived experiences and perspectives on the topics discussed in the LLF course. We can see from Figure 22 that the groups were roughly equally split between being quite varied, and quite similar - there are two major “bumps” in the data at around 10-15, and 30-35 out of 50. The mean response was at 25.6, and the median response was 30, which reflect the symmetry but not the profile of the results.

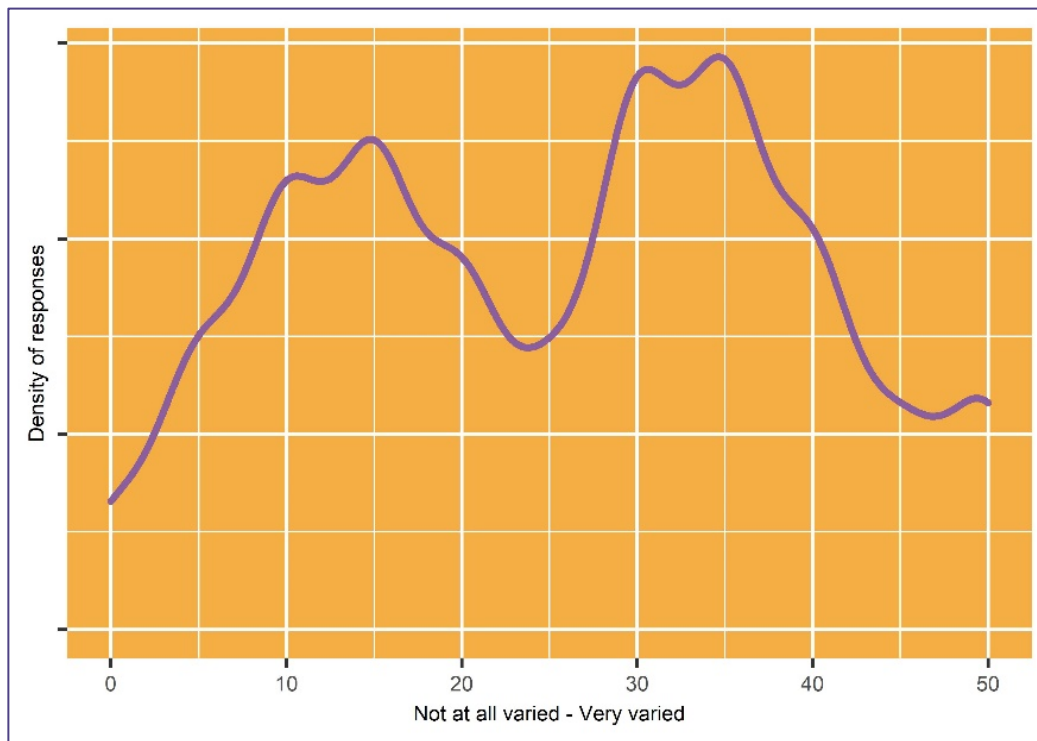


Figure 22: Variety within the groups

Older people and people who are heterosexual reported lower average scores for group variety, means of 25 for both, while young people had an average score of 28, those who are not heterosexual had a mean score of 30 and those who are transgender the highest average at 32.

In the textual responses, respondents appreciated learning from diverse views and experiences in their groups and had positive experiences of disagreeing well with others:

“To have such a mixed group was great as it provided a variety of life experiences and views.”

“Was very good, people were respectful, some things were said that could be taken the wrong way however it was good to allow them to say what was needed and for a 'gay' perspective to be put on it as they hadn't thought about it in this way and said were naive.

This was the same from me as a non-Christian gay married woman.

I would much rather have an open and honest conversation than people turn around and say things behind my back.”

“It was good to see that we disagreed on certain things but that we agreed to disagree.”

“It was a good experience of diverse views respectfully heard.”

“While we couldn't always agree, we were able to disagree without acrimony and tried to understand others' views.”

Some told us that they learned to better **understand opposing points of view and became more tolerant** of them.

“The course certainly enabled me to empathize with various viewpoints that much better.”

“I have felt that I understand the points of view of others on the subjects better. I wonder how many felt inhibited to speak like I did.”

“It has enabled me to understand other Christians who are different to me.”

Did you feel safe speaking in your group?

Group participants were also asked how safe they had felt in speaking in their group (Figure 23). Almost everyone felt very safe in speaking in their group, the mean was 84 and the median 91. Again, we note that we are considering responses from people who have chosen to complete this feedback. Those who had a negative experience are much less likely to spend the time engaging with a response such as this, which could be a source of bias in the data.

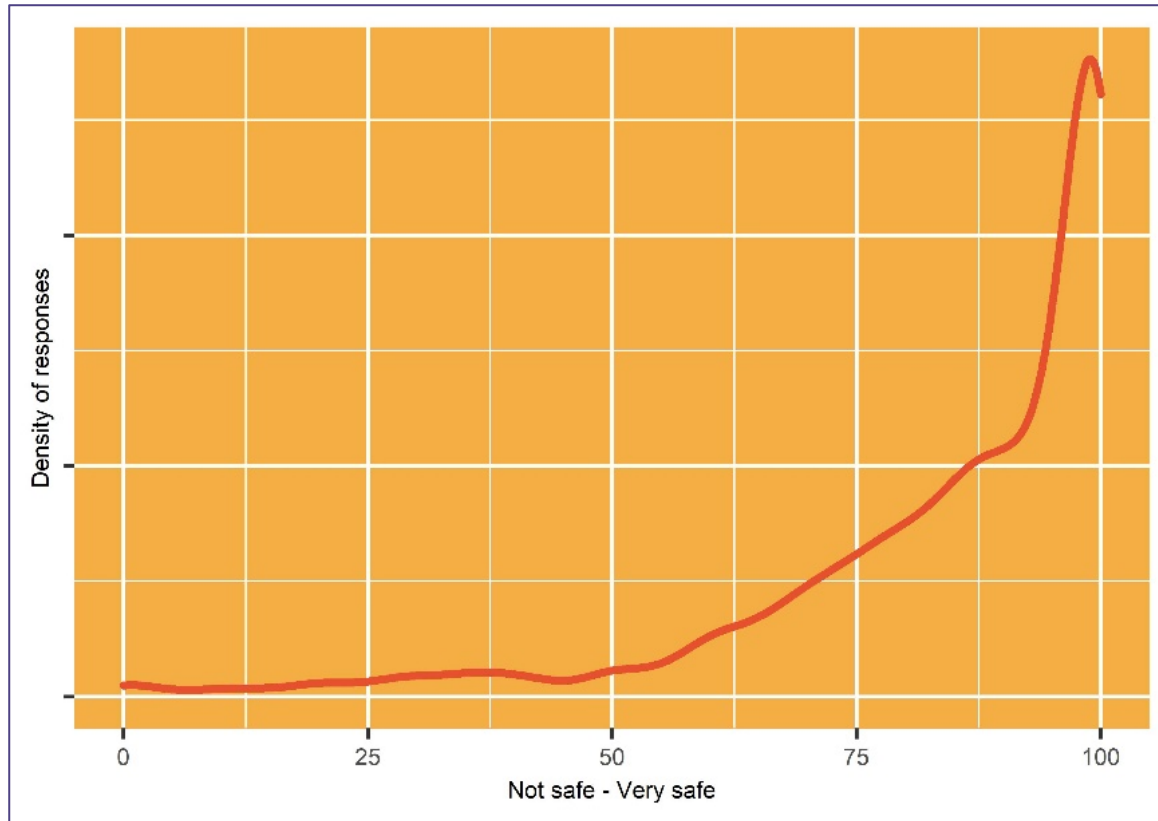


Figure 23: Safety in speaking in the group

Those who are older, and those who are male had the highest average scores, 85 in both cases, while women were almost identical with an average of 84. Young people felt slightly less safe with an average of 82, and those who are not heterosexual were at 81. Those who are transgender had the lowest mean score of 72, but there were smaller numbers of people in this category, and it is skewed by three particularly low scores. The median score is 92 which is a point higher than the overall median.

To examine whether safety was related to the variety within the group, we looked at a plot of variety against safety, as shown in Figure 24 and Figure 25 as a filled contour plot. We wondered if groups that were less varied might feel more, or less, safe. However, we can see that the pattern of people reporting a great deal of safety is the same across all levels of group variety – in general people felt very safe regardless of the variety of people in the group.

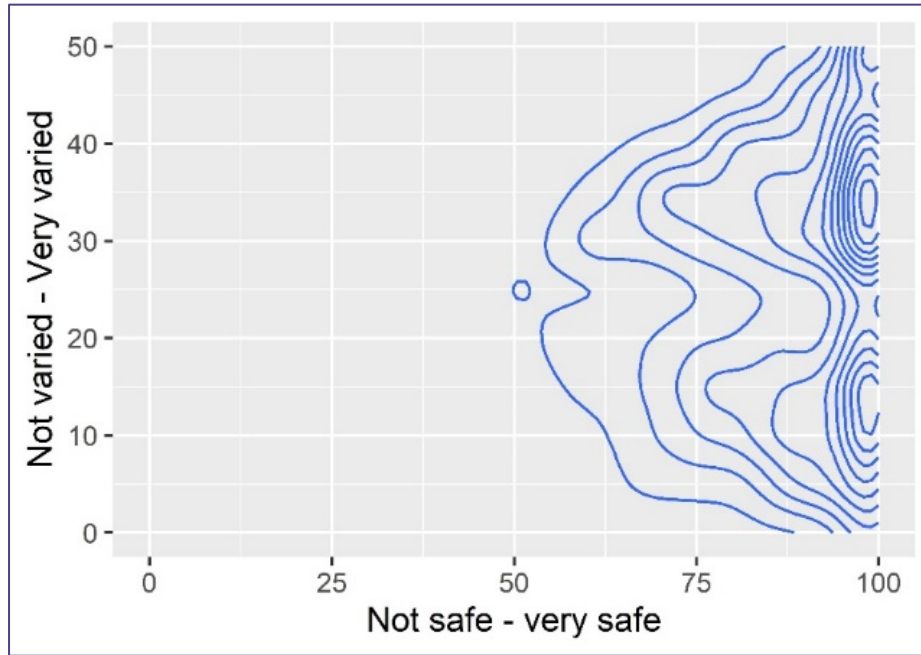


Figure 24: Safety and variety within the group

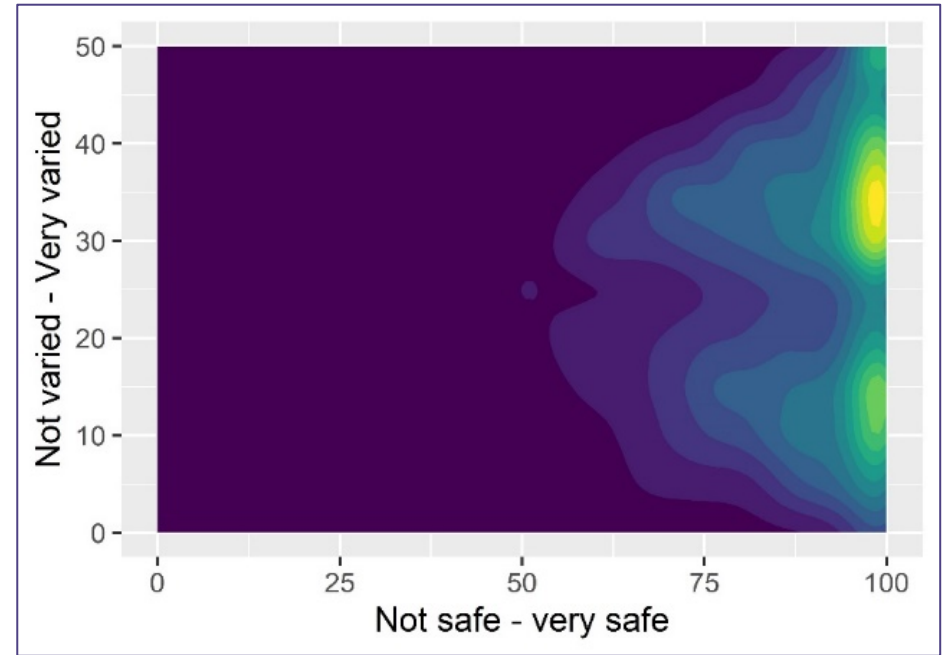


Figure 25: Filled contour plot of safety and variety

Many respondents reported **feelings of safety and openness** in their groups which made for good conversation.

“People felt totally free to express their views.”

“Friendly, encouraging, supportive.”

“There was a significant degree of openness and candour which was really helpful.”

“We felt confident enough to be honest to each other with our thoughts and feelings.”

Some highlighted that **initial shyness reduced** as the course progressed. Though in other cases this **inhibition persisted**.

“We all knew each other fairly well via church life but were shy to begin with, encouraged to speak by our leader. As each session progressed we became more open and shared our thoughts, feelings, and understanding.”

“People wanted to discuss but were quite nervous about how open to be. This improved but since there was no baseline established at the beginning as to where people stood this did not aid the conversations.”

“People seemed shy, and more time would have enabled more depth.”

Diverse opinions

In some cases, where participants represented a minority opinion in their group, there was **reluctance to share**:

“Because most of us were of a more open and inclusive perspective, the one person who wasn't kept saying she didn't want to take up the time defending their position.”

“I was worried my traditional views would cause problems.”

“I was the only one in my group that expressed my particular view. I did manage to speak but it was an uncomfortable experience.”

In other cases, an **outspoken minority was seen to deter others** from contributing:

“One or two members expressed opinions that were opposed to the messages in the course. The majority seemed supportive, but I sensed a reluctance to speak out openly in support - perhaps because of not wanting to disturb an initiative that is long overdue.”

“I felt that a few, with more extreme views, were allowed to dominate discussion and restrict exchange of opinions. The views were largely conservative.”

“Aware of a minority who were very vocal in expressing their views, which may have hindered others from joining in.”

Many groups reported that they were **like-minded and fairly “uniform”**.

“Interesting discussions but all the same view point.”

“Good, we were not that varied in views and were all rather agreeable. I guess we are victims of our own echo chamber.”

Like-minded groups expressed that they **would have liked more diversity**:

“I would have liked to have had more variety in my group, we were all heterosexual, married with children.”

“Group had variety of experiences but I would say all were open and supportive of the issues
- it would have been interesting to have some present who struggled with material more...but they didn't come to the course.”

“There was a limited range of viewpoints in the group, so perhaps with some more variety,
there may have been deeper and more informed discussions, pertaining to other viewpoints.”

“While the group represented the congregation there was little variation in lived experience
which meant we had to rely on the story videos etc. to understand other points of view.”

Other respondents found that that the **presence of differing opinions was challenging** and led to friction in group discussions:

“Those at the extremes found it hardest to engage. There were 3 conservative evangelicals who all
failed to finish the course and 2 LGBT Christians who told the whole group that they
had suffered at the hands of conservative evangelicals in their small group discussions.
Those 'in the middle' had a better sense of how they could facilitate the course locally.”

“I met several lovely people from a neighbouring church but was also taken aback that some attenders
were deeply uncomfortable hearing opposing even when those views were not expressed in a threatening manner.”

“I felt judged by some for believing the traditional view of sex and marriage is the correct one.
At times I was "grilled" by those who believe differently and forced to defend my beliefs.”

“There were some difficult moments in the discussion as one person in particular had personal views which
the rest of the group disagreed with but didn't feel able to voice their opinions without sounding critical.”

At times, the discussion groups were said to be somewhat **awkward or hesitant**. In some cases, it was identified that group members were timid in
their contributions “in case they upset anyone or offended them.”

“I was able to participate openly but because we were all trying not to scare off people we judged probably
had different views I don't think we were really open about our own views, but tiptoed around topics.”

“I felt there was a certain amount of caginess in the discussions and some people were cautious about how much they said.”

Conversations

Many of the survey respondents told us that **the LLF course has started a conversation**:

“There were no startling new insights, but it was good to be prompted to discuss matters
with which I have wrestled, often privately, for many years.”

“It has been a start where there has previously been relative silence.”

“It's good to feel it's not such a taboo subject within the church.”

“It was a helpful start to potentially difficult but necessary conversations on sexuality and gender in the church.”

Discussions were “illuminating” and a highlight of the course experience for many course participants:

“Most helpful was engaging with fellow church members discussing the subject and their views and insights.”

“I loved the fact our Church was embracing this course and willing to engage in very frank conversation about all issues raised. Amazingly we had a mix of people and we all respected each others views.”

“Discussions were at times very challenging. They let to much reflection between sessions. It was also enlightening to learn others views and to share my own.”

“Deep and meaningful discussions resulted. People shared things that they had not before.”

Of those who were critical of the course content, many were still pleased with the **opportunity to discuss** these subjects: “Fortunately, we didn't let the course material get in the way of a good discussion.”

There is a **desire to continue these conversations**:

“It's a good starting block for further discussion and easier when it is generated from a Church of England source.”

“I hope it will lead to open, informed and respectful discussion between people of all points of view.”

“I hope that those of us who took part will feel enabled to have conversations with others acknowledging and valuing everyone, and being prepared to talk about diversity and loving relationships.”

Specifically, there is a desire to **take the conversation to church members who have not yet taken the LLF course**. It is hoped that further conversations would cover more breadth as well as diving deeper than the course allowed:

“I think it is a brave start to the process but the conversations need to become more public and widespread.”

“I hope more people from local Church will do this course and would like to see open and frank discussions within local Church ahead of any potential scenarios occurring in real life.”

Church connectedness

Some people told us that taking part in the course **revealed to them the opinions of fellow churchgoers**. Some realised the diversity of views within the church:

“I understood the different view points within the church better after the course.”

“Useful for people to learn about the range of perspectives in the church both more widely and in our own church.”

Others spoke of being **disappointed** or **pleasantly surprised** by the opinions of fellow church members:

“Group discussions opened up my mind to how blinkered fellow Christians can be.”

“Sadly, it merely revealed the depth of the disagreements within the Church about not only sexuality but also other issues (e.g. Biblical authority).”

“I was pleased to hear that we have an open Church. I always thought it but have had it confirmed.”

“I was pleasantly surprised on how forward thinking many members were when I had wrongly made assumptions about their stance on same sex relationships for example.”

Another theme in participants’ feedback is the **increased feelings of connectedness within congregations** and course cohorts as a result of taking part in LLF together:

“It was great to be part of a group from my church learning together.”

“It was daunting to do but a very valuable experience that actually made us closer.”

“I feel more connected to my church community.”

“I have met some lovely people we began as a group of strangers in week one and by week five we all felt like we were co-pilgrims affirming each other as we travelled together.”

Viewpoints

Some specific viewpoints were found throughout the questionnaire responses, particularly around same-sex marriage and orthodoxy and tradition. Examples of the comments received are given below.

Same-sex marriage

A persistent theme in the survey answers was **same-sex marriage**. Most of the comments on this theme expressed hope that the LLF course might contribute to the “acceptance of same sex marriage” or “blessing of same sex partnerships”.

“I hope the Church will make changes to its rules, especially by celebrating same-sex marriages and by allowing LGBTI+ priests and other ministers to live openly.”

“I hope the CofE will learn that the silent majority are now in favour of extending both Liturgy and Canon to all consenting couples for marriage and blessing of faithful relationships.”

“The national church needs to allow same sex weddings but clergy whose beliefs won't allow this should not be forced to hold them or feel they have to leave the church.”

A smaller number presented the opposing view, speaking against such a change in doctrine:

“That we will be able to hold loving grace-filled relationships whilst holding to an orthodox view of sexuality and marriage.”

“I hope that the national Church will make a firm resolution to confirm the present situation. I also hope that there will not be any change to the form of marriage or any blessing of same sex relationships or any watering down of responsibility so that individual ministers could agree to something in their church.”

“I hope it will lead to greater empathy and inclusion and that the sanctity of marriage between one man and one woman till death us do part will be upheld.”

Orthodoxy and tradition

A section of respondents expressed concerned that the course will “lead people astray from the Bible.” Some spoke of their **traditional “values [as] under threat”**.

“I do hope that it reinforces the determination to follow the Bible and not be tempted to fit in with the world.”

“The CofE needs to be clear about what the Bible says, how to love all people, how we treat the LBT community. We must not shy away from upsetting the LBG community just because it makes our life easier.”

“I pray that it will lead to a recovery of confidence in the church's traditional understanding of these issues.”

Being church

In expressing hopes for the future of the local and national Church, prominent themes were welcome, and acceptance.

Welcome

The questionnaire responses show **a widely held desire for the church to be welcoming to all**. This desire for welcome is shared by those with otherwise diverse views.

“I am hoping that our Church will be even more welcoming.”

“That there will continue to be an attitude of generous welcoming.”

“I hope we are more welcoming to all people with whom we have contact.

I also hope that we express our desire to remain faithful to God by sticking to the biblical pattern for marriage, sex and identity.”

“I hope people will find a place of welcome even amongst differing views on sexuality.”

“I hope the church find a way to work together to find ways to show love and hospitality to everyone regardless.”

Acceptance and inclusion

Some said that they hope for **increased “acceptance”** and others spoke in terms of **“active inclusion”**.

“I hope we will become formally inclusive.”

“I hope that there will be an opening of the acceptance of difference that Jesus demands.”

“I hope we will continue to be explicit and open about how inclusive we aim to be,
and to check that this really is the message we give out.”

“I hope that the national Church will accept the rich diversity of God’s creation and recognise
that God doesn’t solely speak to us through scripture,
but also through the cries of God’s people who long for inclusion and dignity.”

Moving forward

This report describes the words of people of the Church of England in response to the LLF process. The process is ongoing, and this report joins others to inform the House of Bishops of the diversity and breadth of views within the Church. This section considers answers to the questions:

- How do we make decisions and move forward in the church?
- What does it mean now to live in love and faith?

Unity

Many hope that through LLF, church members will gain greater **openness to others' views**; that diversity of opinion in the church will be respectfully acknowledged; and that **the church will be united**.

"I hope that we will learn to disagree gracefully, to allow for differences of opinion to be acknowledged and accepted, but to move on to becoming a more inclusive church, and to avoid the harm caused to many brothers and sisters in Christ who have been excluded or vilified."

"My message would be the same -- ONE VIEW for all the Church. We might not all agree with it, but you would know what is expected."

"I hope and pray that God uses LLF to keep the C of E together. Schism would be an offence to God and a hammer blow to our mission."

"Hopefully most people will come to accept that there is more than one valid point of view and see others as just as much valid Christians as they are."

"I hope that we can agree to disagree in love."

However, some suggest that **LLF might lead to division** in the church:

"I hope it doesn't lead to gay marriage being sanctioned. I believe a move like this would divide the church."

"Having regard to the depth of the disagreements, it is hard to say.

Perhaps it will help everyone to recognise the roots of these disagreements but I don't see it resolving them."

"I pray that change will happen soon - even if it means schism."

"The national church is the 'largest ecumenical' experiment ever to be conceived and therefore we should expect and welcome a diverse response to LLF.

We will all be changed by the course and the next steps.

Some will stay where they are but others will find a fresh impetus to kingdom building."

Church of England's approach to change

Whilst the course led some to feel **encouraged and hopeful** about the Church of England's position...

"It has encouraged me that the church is trying to catch up with the rest of society in recognising that humankind is diverse."

"I feel more positive about the church future"

"Given me hope."

"It has given me hope that we may yet hold together as a church despite our differences as long as we all refrain from drawing lines in the sand."

...many felt that LLF saw **the CofE avoiding making a clear statement** on matters of sexual and gender diversity - attempting to "have its cake and eat it", or simply "kick the issue into the long grass".

"It has made me feel even more dispirited about the CofE's seriousness of intent in engaging with issues relating to sexuality, identity and relationships."

"Made me even more aware that am not sure where the CofE is going."

Some saw in LLF **an indication of the Church of England's intentions for the future:**

"I feel I know more about the way the Church of England is planning to develop its doctrine/approach to relationships."

And for some, they **are frustrated or disappointed** about its direction:

"I feel less hopeful for the Church of England."

"Making me feel even more strongly that the Church has lost its direction."

"Just reinforced my anxiety that the Church of England wants to stray from the clear Christian teaching and accommodate the latest trends."

For some respondents the course furthered their **impatience for the church to act** and were galvanised to bring about change.

"Engaging with this course has reinforced my view that the church cannot continue inflicting pain and suffering on LGBTI Christians in the way that it is currently (as has done historically) and that this is a matter for urgent attention rather than leisurely discussion."

"It's also made me more determined to work for change towards a more inclusive Church of England."

"It has made me even more passionate about campaigning for equal marriage."

Respondents expressed that they want church authorities to **listen to congregations**:

“Hopefully the hierarchy will actually listen to what parishes/parishioners are saying and not to 'what their itching ears want to hear'.”

“I would hope that the national Church would be listening to the messages being sent by this church-wide initiative and draw up policies accordingly.”

“I hope that the process will show the national Church leadership what the range of views is amongst clergy and laity; that it will act as something akin to a "citizens' assembly" to guide future decision-making in this area.”

Importance and relevance of LLF

Participants emphasised the **importance and relevance** of LLF's subject matter:

“It is an area that affects many aspects of our day-to-day life and is becoming increasingly important, we cannot rely on ignorance as an excuse.”

“Because it covers incredibly important areas that the church needs to focus on to be a light in the world.”

“Because it addresses some of the key issues that provide barriers to us moving forward as a church.”

“Because it seems the Anglican Church could split on the matter of same sex marriage, and people should be informed about the issues and listen and have their say.”

Some highlighted that engagement with LLF was important for **perceptions of the church**, both in terms of church members understanding CofE's stance plus the way the public perceives the church from the outside.

“It shows the current thinking of church leaders.”

“It's good to see what the Church of England sees as important.”

“I think it would be good for people to be aware of the matters highlighted in the course, and hopefully to show that the National Church are trying to engage with modern life.”

“Think it is fundamental in encouraging non-believers to investigate Christianity.”

Some expressed that if the Church of England fails to engage with issues of diversity and take significant steps toward increasing inclusivity, then **younger generations** will be put off joining the church or lost from the congregation.

“I also pray for those sections of society that find the church laughable and displaying hypocrisy for their efforts over this issue and the people who will not be drawn to Church/ Jesus because of the example set.

I also pray for the youth of today who see judgments measured out by people wearing purple robes

and see their friends and class mates (colleagues/ family) excluded from Church and therefore from Salvation.
This particularly breaks my heart and I feel will cause the church to crumble
as younger people will find it too difficult to work in an organisation that isn't able to accept changing society.”

“I think the Church of England is in huge, huge trouble, if it does not start accepting LGBTQAI folk as equals.

It is a violation of UK law. I am a younger adult than most churchgoers and can assure the CofE
that if it does not start to be inclusive, most people my age will not tolerate it being in charge of schools, politics, or charities going forward.

In twenty years’ time people my age will be in charge, the majority of current churchgoers will be dead.

A church vs state separation is most definitely coming if the church does not adapt on this.

And, as I asked my mini group, I ask you the same question: Is this really the hill you want the CofE to die on?”

Degree of engagement

Several respondents emphasised that **the impact of LLF depends on the degree of engagement** with the course. It was highlighted that church leaders’ decisions to promote the course, and the inclusion of people with diverse viewpoints will be deciding factors in whether/how LLF shapes the Church of England’s future.

“For it to make any difference more people need to do the course.”

“Very little as apart from the clergy I am not aware of any others taking the course.”

“Don't think it will make a difference as perhaps the curious to learn signed up for the course, whilst others declined.”

About the researchers

This research was carried out by Fiona Tweedie, Emma Teale, Claire Dalpra and Sarah Reed at Brendan Research. Founded in 2020, Brendan Research specialises in statistical and qualitative analysis for Christian denominations, so that they can take confident steps in a changing world.²⁷

September 2022

Solo Deo Gloria



²⁷ <https://www.brendanresearch.com/>

FOCUS GROUP RESPONSES IN MORE DETAIL



Introduction

In March 2021, the Church of England (CofE) Archbishops' Council commissioned Church Army's Research Unit (CARU) as qualitative researchers in the Living in Love and Faith (LLF) findings process. The primary task was for CARU to collect and analyse data on the first two sections of the LLF journey²⁸ through the qualitative method of focus groups.

This technical report does not present any desired outcomes of how the Church of England may progress its discernment relating to sexuality, identity, bodies, relationships and marriage. Rather it provides a snapshot from voices in the CofE on these topics and their own hopes, fears, and suggestions for how the CofE could move forward towards a 'radical new Christian inclusion'²⁹ in both love and faith.

CARU was tasked with listening to and analysing the experiences of those who had participated in and/or facilitated a LLF course between November 2020-April 2022 by means of focus groups. The active data collection period for all focus groups ran between December 2021 and April 2022 and involved four online and five onsite focus groups across England. Those attending online focus groups could join from any location.

In this report we list the views expressed by those who were part of the nine focus groups. Not all that was said is reported as often views were repeated and re-emphasised, but we give the range and the examples of what was shared. Some of the comments related to the creative element, while others emerged during the discussions. We collected about fifty pieces of creative work, and have included a selection here within each section, sometimes with comments attached where the participant gave consent. As with all the contributions, whether spoken or visual, none is attributable or identifiable with any particular focus group or individual.

It is important to note that there is not a consistency in these comments, and often contradictory views were expressed. This is a natural outcome of focus groups that include people from various standpoints, and underlines how the participants were drawn from a wide spectrum of views.

²⁸ The Living in Love and Faith resources are to enable the whole church to embark on a journey together. The stages of the journey are separated into four distinct categories: Learning, Listening, Discerning and Deciding. <https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/living-love-and-faith/living-love-and-faith-journey> (accessed 19/04/2022)

²⁹ <https://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/speaking-and-writing/speeches/statement-archbishop-canterbury-following-todays-general-synod> (accessed 28/04/2022)

Methodology, research design and process

The research methodology is rooted in participatory creative visual and group discussion methods. Visual methods are known to give voice and enable actively listening to communication 'in ways which text may not',³⁰ and we felt this was important in order to gain a rich diversity of responses. Through intentionally using this mixed mode methodology, participants were offered the opportunity to contribute to the data collection process through creative processes, storytelling and verbal conversation in a safe and controlled research environment prioritising agency, ethical research practice, and active consent.

The research scope

The research undertaken by CARU is limited to the research design, data collection, an analysis, and presentation of the participatory verbal and creative/visual feedback from a self-selecting group of individuals who engaged with and/or facilitated an LLF course. After completing the quantitative LLF questionnaire, they consented to be invited to a focus group and were subsequently invited by CARU to be involved as prospective participants. The groups are defined as self-selecting because they are dependent not just on doing the course or completing the LLF questionnaire but also being available for the times, dates, and in some cases the locations of the focus groups.

The topics in the LLF course that were covered over 5 sessions were Learning Together, Identity, Relationships, Sex, and Life Together. As a result, this research primarily focuses upon the research participants' responses to these broad topics. However, in the process of data collection we also encountered personal stories and the articulation of responses relating to the current CofE position on marriage and LGBTQ+ relationships, as well as experiences of inclusion and exclusion in CofE churches and worshipping communities.

The research aims

Our primary research aim has been to faithfully and authentically present the views, experiences, and feelings of those who engaged with the LLF course, to further inform the discernment and decision-making process for the bishops of the Church of England. We have collected data from approximately 90 participants which explored their experiences of the course, reactions to the topics that were raised, and what participants would like to articulate or say to the House of Bishops to move forward in love and faith. Our data collection processes and methodology have been designed with an acute awareness that as researchers we have a responsibility to hold the different perspectives with integrity whilst recognising

³⁰ Pauwels, L, 2015, *Participatory visual research revisited: A critical-constructive assessment of epistemological, methodological and social activist tenets*, *Ethnography*, Vol 16:1, pp 95-117

that researchers have the power to amplify and/or silence data. We wanted to document as many voices as possible and thus have aimed to 'demarginalise the margins'³¹ so all participants, especially those from the LGBTQ+ community, are not just heard, but actively listened to.

The research limits

As with all qualitative research projects, we are limited by both external (such as budget and timeframe) and internal (such as participant correspondence) factors in the research development. In the following chapter on research design and process we will explain participant selection and involvement whilst recognising that not everyone who did the LLF course in the Church of England provided feedback through the quantitative survey and/or a focus group. Likewise, we recognise that LGBTQ+ people who have engaged in the LLF process have faced significant barriers to participation due to the nature of the topics, fear of exclusion or discrimination and the personal vulnerabilities of having a lived experience that can be discussed and/or debated by others. We recognise the unequal power dynamics at play in the LLF process and in our research methodology we have attempted to challenge these by ensuring every voice is treated with utmost dignity, care and respect.

However, despite these limitations, our research design and data collection process has provided a detailed and representative enquiry into the current feeling in the CofE today on the topics discussed in LLF. As we have already stated, the aim of this research was not to provide an answer or a set of potential outcomes for the Church of England to proceed in its discernment. We do however agree with the Archbishop of Canterbury's statement that, *'the way forward needs to be about love, joy and celebration of our humanity; of our creation in the image of God, of our belonging to Christ - all of us, without exception, without exclusion'*.³² In order to support this task from the Archbishop we offer comprehensive and detailed findings that have been authentically and honestly given from across the breadth of the Church of England.

Qualitative research and focus groups

Qualitative research is rooted in the enquiry of the qualities present in lived experiences and human perceptions. It enables researchers to obtain and explore insights into the life of another person or social group and how they might perceive, react, and act in their specific context or because of a particular worldview. Qualitative data is not numerical, but instead it most often uses *'transcripts from interviews or focus groups, open-text responses in surveys, and sources such as images, song lyrics, film, and television dialogue ... [and] its analysis ... can present rich findings and insights into how and why things have happened'*.³³ Miles and Huberman state that qualitative datasets *'are a source of well-grounded, rich descriptions and explanations of processes in identifiable local contexts. With qualitative data one can preserve chronological flow, see precisely*

³¹ Michaelanne Dye, Neha Kumar, Ari Schlesinger, Marisol Wong-Villacres, Morgan G Ames, Rajesh Veeraraghavan, Jacki Oneill, Joyojeet Pal, and Mary L Gray, *Solidarity Across Borders: Navigating Intersections towards Equity and Inclusion* in Companion of the 2018 ACM Conference on Computer Supported Cooperative Work and Social Computing – CSCW 18 (New York: ACM, 2018) pp 487-494

³² <https://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/speaking-and-writing/speeches/statement-archbishop-canterbury-following-todays-general-synod> (accessed 28/04/2022)

³³ Guyan, K, *Queer Data: Using Gender, Sex and Sexuality Data for Action*, London: Bloomsbury; 2009: 15

which events lead to which consequences, and derive fruitful explanations.'³⁴ Therefore when collecting and analysing the responses from participants, qualitative researchers attempt to find examples of behaviour, trends, and clarify thoughts and feelings of participants, and what these participants might be saying about the wider social context into which they are speaking. In this way, 'qualitative data can help **plug the gaps and explain the why of quantitative data trends**'³⁵.

There are broad varieties of methods used to collect data in qualitative research. One of the most common methods of data collection when aiming to listen directly to the opinions of a group of people, is through focus groups. There is a great diversity in how focus groups are designed and their part in the research and data lifecycle. However, for the purpose of this research project, our focus groups can be defined in the following ways:

- **Mixed method and participatory** – i.e., using both creative and discussion elements
- **Available online and onsite**
- **Anonymous.** Other than names, personal characteristics were not known before attending a focus group. Some participants chose to use pseudonyms when talking about their creative piece.
- **Impartial.** All focus groups were not made aware of the facilitator's personal views on any of the topics discussed.
- **Semi-structured.** At least two members of CARU acted as both facilitators and note takers.
- **Prioritising active consent.** Consent forms (see appendix) were signed by participants and returned to CARU facilitators before any data collection could commence.

Our research principles and ethics

The foundational ethical consideration that underpins all CARU's work is to ensure the maximum benefit of any research project whilst reducing the risk of actual or potential harm. In CARU, this means that we are orientated in our research towards the good of others, with the dignity and wellbeing of those taking part always in mind.

Our approach to research ethics is informed by the Church of England National Church Institutions' *Research Ethics Framework* (2016). This has been influenced by the Economic and Social Research Council's *Framework for Research Ethics*, which is widely considered an authority on ethical research in the social sciences in the UK.³⁶ Both frameworks are informed by the following core principles, which in turn guide CARU's approach:

³⁴ Miles B, Huberman AM. *Qualitative data analysis*. Thousand Oaks (CA): Sage Publications Ltd; 2009

³⁵ Guyan, K, *Queer Data: Using Gender, Sex and Sexuality Data for Action*, London: Bloomsbury; 2009: 15

³⁶ <https://www.ukri.org/councils/esrc/guidance-for-applicants/research-ethics-guidance/framework-for-research-ethics/our-core-principles/#contents-list>

- Research participants should take part voluntarily, free from any coercion or undue influence, and their rights, dignity and (when possible) autonomy should be respected and appropriately protected.
- Research should be worthwhile and provide value that outweighs any risk or harm. Researchers should aim to maximise the benefit of the research and minimise potential risk of harm to participants and researchers. All potential risk and harm should be mitigated by robust precautions.
- Research staff and participants should be given appropriate information about the purpose, methods and intended uses of the research, what their participation in the research entails and what risks and benefits, if any, are involved.
- Individual research participant and group preferences regarding anonymity should be respected and participant requirements concerning the confidential nature of information and personal data should be respected.
- Research should be designed, reviewed, and undertaken to ensure recognised standards of integrity are met, and quality and transparency are assured.
- The independence of research should be clear, and any conflicts of interest or partiality should be explicit.

(ESRC Framework for Research Ethics, January 2015)

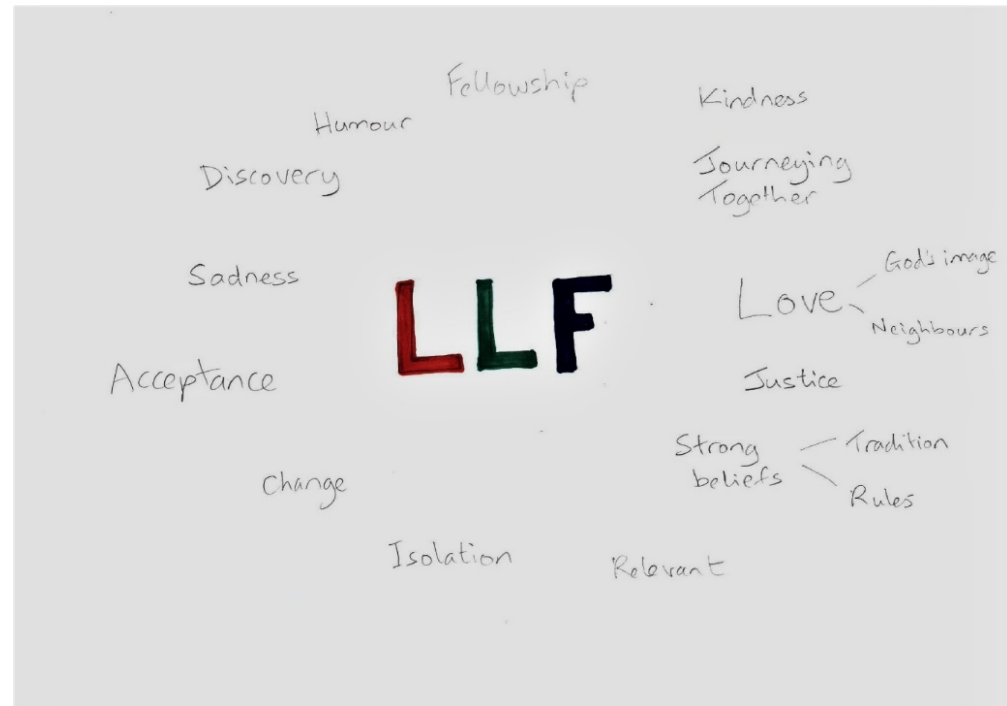
CARU seeks to adhere to these principles through each stage of any research projects we undertake - from initial conversations with prospective clients to how we handle data after the research project has been completed and submitted.

Our approach to impartiality and neutrality

The research for LLF did not take place in isolation but in a variety of situations with real people, real voices and real reactions. In actively listening to the stories, voices, and communication of all participants, including how they felt and what they meant when they used certain words, phrases or anecdotes, we made a positional choice to stay impartial in the focus group setting, and were able to focus on 'honouring context, architecting attention, and taking action to defy stereotypes and reimagine the world'.³⁷ This process holistically and thematically explores the experience of all participants and recognises our positionality not 'as threats or influences that might have biased our work ... [but] as offering a set of valuable perspectives'³⁸ when collecting data. In honouring the stories of all those who have been willing to engage in the research process we have recorded the thoughts and feelings of every research participant who engaged in a focus group with autonomy, active consent, and a faithful transcription of what they shared.

Selection and preparation of participants

All individuals who had consented to be invited to a focus group were contacted to ask whether they were willing to be involved in either an online or an onsite group. There was inevitable drop-off from people who did not respond to the invitation or declined for a variety of personal reasons. Those who replied to the invitation to participate were subsequently informed of the dates and times of the online groups, and the dates, times, and locations of the onsite groups. The online groups ran between 7-9pm on weekday evenings and four out of the five onsite groups ran in the afternoons on weekdays. The first onsite group, which also acted as a research pilot in order to trial our methodology in the field, ran from 7-9pm on a weekday evening. Due to time, dates, or geographical constraints, some potential participants were unable to attend. All potential participants



³⁷ D'Ignazio, C, & Klein, L. 3. 'On Rational, Scientific, Objective Viewpoints from Mythical, Imaginary, Impossible Standpoints'. In *Data Feminism*. 2020: MIT: Massachusetts: 96

³⁸ Ibid

who could attend and had selected a group (online or onsite) were contacted and invited to participate. The majority of people who were invited were able to participate; however, due to personal circumstances, some people were unable to attend on the day.

Attendance

We held 4 online focus groups in December 2021 and January 2022:

Group A: 11 participants

Group B: 12 participants

Group C: 10 participants

Group D: 9 participants

We held 5 onsite focus groups between December 2021 and March 2022. These can be split into the following regions:

Yorkshire and the Humber (2) – 13 participants invited, 12 attended

Northwest (1) – 13 participants invited, 10 attended

East of England (1) – 6 participants invited, 5 attended

Southwest (1) – 11 participants invited, 8 attended

Consent, anonymity and privacy

In line with CARU's Research Ethics procedures, when inviting people to take part in a research project, we supply participants with appropriate information about:

- the purpose, methods and intended uses of the research
- what their participation in the research entails
- any risks and benefits involved

Potential participants must indicate if they are willing to take part, via a consent form.

When invited to participate in a research project that involves the gathering of personal data, potential research participants are supplied with a copy of Church Army's Research Privacy Notice, documenting:

- The rights of research participants
- Arrangements around data storage, data retention and data sharing (as outlined below)
- How to obtain further information about Church Army's data protection policy and raise any questions or concerns

Other than the names and email addresses of prospective participants, no other identifiable information was shared. In focus groups, participants could share their names if they wanted to, but all participants were asked not to share names or any attributable detail of what was said out of the focus group space. All data collected was recorded anonymously, categorised, and analysed without any attributable information attached or recorded.

Creative element research process

As part of the focus groups, we explored an artistic and creative method of data collection alongside the more traditional discussion aspect. This creative element of data collection provided an additional opportunity for participants to share their learning and listening without a reliance on text or words, understanding that some experiences and beliefs are beyond words, and the importance of sensitivity involved in capturing some of these feelings.

Therefore, we invited participants in the focus groups to create an artistic piece which used physical copies of the LLF Course resources as a creative medium. Most, but not all, pieces took the form of a collage. This can be an extremely useful visual, interpretative tool that informs experiential research approaches. In qualitative research, collage portraiture provides a space for reflective processes, elicitation, flexibility, spontaneity, and an encouraging space for new meanings to develop and be expressed. The use of collage as a technique, especially when focusing on the self, *'allows the participant to add dimension and depth to their answers as well as playing with colour, texture and form'*.³⁹ Collage can provide a space for multiple participant meanings by listening visually in such a way that it *'reveals unconscious connections and new understandings'*.⁴⁰

Some of the creative elements did not take the form of collage, but rather a diagram, simple drawing or poem. In one case we were pleased to receive a piece of music as an expression of the LLF process.

The majority of participants, both in the online and onsite focus groups, took part in this element, providing a rich dataset of creative and prayerful expressions of their engagement with the LLF process.

Discussion element research process

The discussion element of any qualitative focus group needs to offer the opportunity for all participants to express themselves freely and with active consent. After the creative element of the focus group, we invited participants into a time of sharing before asking semi-structured discussions with freeform answers. The principles of our discussion element process were:

- holding each other before God in prayer

³⁹ Gerstenblatt, P. (2013) *Collage Portraits as a Method of Analysis in Qualitative Research*, IJQM, pp216

⁴⁰ Butler-Kisher, P. (2010) 'The Power of Visual Approaches in Qualitative Enquiry: The Use of Collage Making and Concept Mapping in Experiential Research', *Journal of Research Practice* 6:2

- praying for the presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit in all our conversations
- learning together from Scripture and from each other
- enabling everyone to speak
- making space for those whose voices have not yet been heard to contribute – but without putting people on the spot if they do not wish to speak
- avoiding interrupting each other, and instead acknowledging what others say before moving on to have our say
- keeping confidential anything personal or attributable that is shared
- taking care how we speak about others who are not in the room
- looking out for and being sensitive to people’s feelings
- giving each other time to reflect before sharing with others
- offer one another an opportunity to say if there is anything in the discussion, they have found difficult but have not been able to express
- learning together how we can live more fully in the way of Christ

Participant statistics

All participants who consented through the LLF feedback questionnaire to be part of a focus group were invited to participate. Out of a total of 1,655 people, 112 responded to the invitation. During the invitation process we asked potential participants to self-select how they described themselves in relation to a number of characteristics. All this data is anonymous and not attributable. However, none of these categories where people could describe themselves are value-neutral, and for researcher, participant and reader, some of these terms are often emotive.

Age group

Age group	n	%
18-24 years old	2	1.8%
25-44 years old	20	17.9%
45-64 years old	51	45.5%
65-79 years old	36	32.1%
80+ years old	3	2.7%

Ethnicity

Ethnicity	n	%
White	108	96.4%
Mixed/Multiple	3	2.7%
Black	0	0%
Asian	0	0%
Other	0	0%
Did not respond	1	0.9%

Sexual identity

Note – the below figures add up to more than 100% since multiple-identification is possible.

Sexual identity	n	%
Gay / lesbian	9	7.76%
Same sex attracted	8	6.90%
Bisexual	5	4.31%
Prefer not to say	1	0.86%
Queer	0	0.00%
None of these or heterosexual	93	80.17%

Some respondents selected multiple characteristics to describe their sexuality. The table below lists all the combinations of sexual identity present among invitees.

Distinct sexual identity	n
None selected	93
Bisexual	5
Gay / lesbian	5
Gay / lesbian; Same sex attracted	4
Same sex attracted	4
Prefer not to say	1

Gender identity

Note – the below figures add up to more than 100% since multiple-identification is possible.

Gender identity	n	%
Male	60	41.7%
Female	44	30.6%
Cisgender	31	21.5%
Asexual	2	1.4%
Intersex	0	0.0%
Nonbinary	0	0.0%
Queer	0	0.0%
Transgender	0	0.0%
None of these	7	4.9%

Some respondents selected multiple characteristics to describe their gender. The table below lists all the combinations of sexual identity present among invitees.

Distinct gender identity	n	%
Male	42	37.5%
Female	31	27.7%
Male; Cis	17	15.2%
Female; Cis	12	10.7%
None selected	7	6.2%
Cis	1	0.9%
Female; Cis; Asexual	1	0.9%
Male; Asexual	1	0.9%

Relationship status

Relationship status	n	%
Single	16	14.16%
Married (opposite-sex)	79	69.91%
Married (other)	1	0.88%
Civil partnership (opposite-sex)	0	0.00%
Civil partnership (same-sex)	3	2.65%
Civil partnership (other)	0	0.00%
Cohabiting (opposite-sex)	1	0.88%
Cohabiting (same-sex)	1	0.88%
Cohabiting (other)	0	0.00%
Prefer not to say	1	0.88%
None of these	11	9.73%

Church tradition

Primary tradition	n	%
Liberal	36	32.1%
Evangelical	29	25.9%
Central	22	19.6%
Conservative	12	10.7%
Catholic	11	9.8%
Charismatic	2	1.8%

Disability

13 invitees said that they had a disability, which is **11.6%** of all invitees.

Differences and similarities between online and onsite groups

There were some practical differences between the online and onsite focus groups which are important to clarify. Any difference can impact the data collection process, but despite this, both the online and onsite groups have provided rich data from a variety of voices and perspectives.

- Four out of the five onsite focus groups ran on weekday afternoons. The pilot focus group ran on a weekday evening.
- Online focus groups ran on weekday evenings.
- Onsite focus groups ran for three-and-a-half to four hours, whereas online focus groups ran for two to two-and-a-half hours. In the pilot focus group, the session ran for two to two-and-a-half hours.
- The creative period for online groups ran for 20 minutes, whereas for onsite groups, this element lasted for an hour. For the pilot focus group, the creative task ran for 45 minutes.
- For the online creative process, participants provided their own art materials. In onsite groups, a variety of art materials was provided for them.
- All participants engaged with both informal icebreaker exercises.
- All participants were free to speak at any point in the discussion element.
- All focus groups had at least two CARU researchers present acting as facilitator and note taker.
- All focus groups began and ended in prayer led by a CARU researcher.

Those who did not get involved

One of our key research aims was to listen to a variety of voices from a breadth of lived experiences and intersections in the Church of England. Despite repeated attempts to facilitate a focus group in the southeast (including London), in an area of deprivation (UPA), or with participants who are from minority ethnic or global majority heritage backgrounds, we were unsuccessful in gaining these voices in an onsite focus group. It must be noted that the online focus groups were not dependent on geographical location, so participants could join from any area. The failure of hosting an onsite focus group with one of more of the above criteria was due in part to timing restrictions, but there were more complex reasons. It is important to emphasise that those who decided to opt out of the LLF process and/or did not want to host a focus group were also listened to. Some of the responses for not participating, or not wanting to hold a focus group, can be summarised as follows:

- One incumbent stated that their church was not excited by the LLF process and that their community holds a clear view of marriage and relationships which is traditionally biblical. They said their PCC had discussed how a biblical view of relationships is seen as intolerant in current society and were dealing with that concern privately.
- A minister from an estate church felt that LLF was a non-issue for estate churches and didn't know of any that had run a course.
- A priest from a UPA area in the North of England informed us that their PCC had voted unanimously against engaging with LLF for a number of reasons. These included an expression that the Bible was very clear on teachings of marriage and Scripture, so it was not necessary to do the course. Other responses felt that LLF was forcing ideas onto congregations. One PCC member felt that the course structure was not inclusive of working-class people or practical for those with multiple jobs or responsibilities.
- An incumbent in the southeast of England felt it was not safe to run an LLF course as they had an ethos of equality of all protected characteristics in their church and having an LLF discussion would feel like questioning people's sense of belonging and potentially give inadvertent permission for discrimination. This incumbent felt LLF conversations were better done at deanery level.

Adaptability and feedback

In this research project, it was essential to not shy away from emotion or embodiment but embrace it as a natural and needed part of our research design and methodological development. Part of this elevation of emotion and embodiment is an awareness that elements of the research and data collection can change depending on the reaction of participants. Thus, we needed to develop a methodology that was robust enough to exist within that space. As a result, we were very willing to change the structure, approach or timings of focus groups, especially if their construction was hindering active, honest, and free participation. This willingness is further highlighted by the sharing of anonymous feedback forms for participants to complete. This was useful for us as researchers, both for our own reflections and to address any particular issues in the process.

A significant change that was made as a result of the feedback from the pilot focus group was to extend the onsite focus group to give an additional 15 minutes to the creative exercise. This change was successful and well received by the majority of participants who subsequently attended onsite focus groups.

Here are anonymous feedback quotes from participants:

'I had a very good experience ... thank you. It felt as if, perhaps to a greater extent than had been the case in the sessions of the course there was a frank, honest, and thoughtful exchange of views.'

'I was nervous about the creative element, but it worked ok. I enjoyed being part of the group.'

'It was the first occasion where I had come across negative comments about the course.'

'I was unsure about the creative element, but it turned out [to be] helpful.'

'I didn't like the creative section but understand it may have helped some people to open up.'

'Thoughtful, engaging, open, creative.'

'Very inclusive and very safe.'

'The leadership was very enabling.'

'The discussion group was the most useful thing.'

'The shape of the afternoon was great; the different modes of expression enabled an opening up of the brain.'

'The whole experience was very intense. As the only person in my group who held conservative views at times it felt rather pressurised. But people were respectful.'



Taking part

The course group composition was varied

Participants of the focus groups were asked about who attended their LLF course groups. A mixed pattern has emerged, some groups had a range of backgrounds and viewpoints, whilst others had more universality and shared agreement. Some groups were parish based, and others brought people together at both deanery and diocesan levels. An important factor in group composition was the involvement of both ordained and lay people, with clergy often taking on the role of group leader or facilitator. Some groups were exclusively clergy, and it was suggested by one participant this may have allowed some clergy to be more open in their personal views.

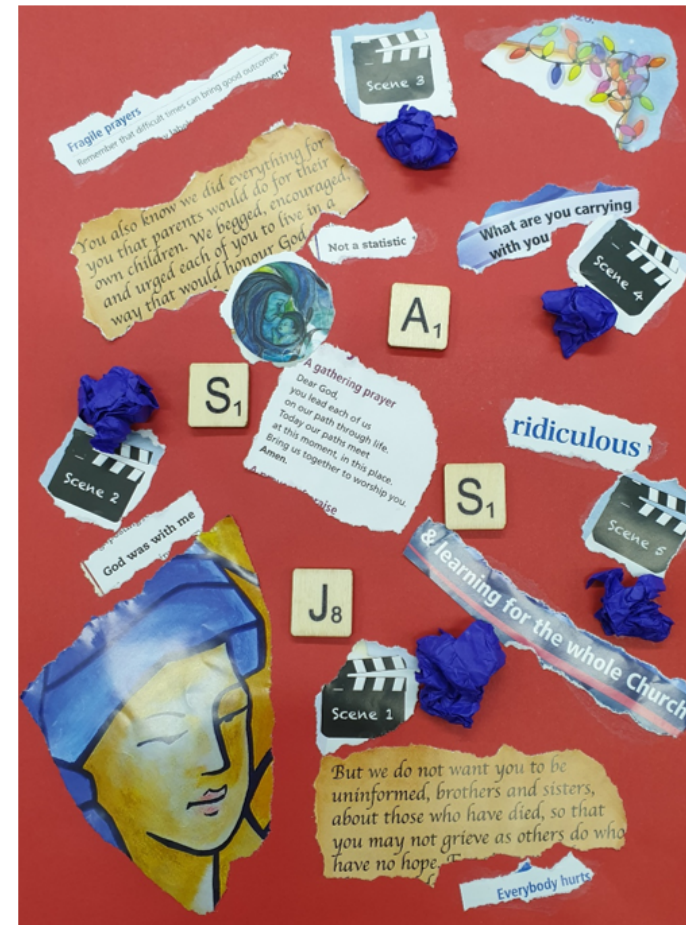
'As clergy, we spoke very well to each other. We all learned things. It would have been massively different if lay people had been present.'

A few participants commented that when clergy met with lay people they were perhaps holding back for the sake of the unity in their church or parish context. Others thought that the laity were more able to express stronger or personal views.

'One of the frustrations I have is that no clergy person is prepared to say actually what they believe, because we're so terrified of upsetting the laity.'

'The laity are a long way ahead of where the clergy are in many cases.'

'I do wonder whether clergy have been the bottle stop out of fear of what we might release ... whether [that] is [the] Holy Spirit doing something in our church, with lay people standing up.'



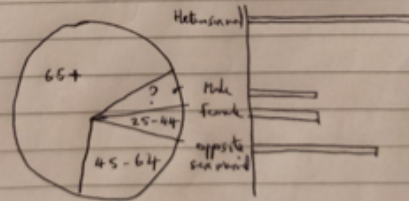
Jazz (a pseudonym) - Red is for anger. I knew 'I just had to have red'.

The purple spots and clapperboard pictures refer to the sessions – every session gave us an opportunity to share about our lives – a scene from our lives ... but at the end of the course we all said 'what was that?' Why did we feel an underlying narrative that wasn't ours? We had to reclaim quite a lot of ground. This was not an even playing field.

God was with me. Not a statistic. Everybody hurts.



Some people engaging with the course and chatting amicably, and a few people having a bit of a huff and a strop and not really enjoying what they were asked to do. Another picture: The Bible, but just some headlines in there, very little depth in biblical analysis in the course. Third picture: Demographic, most people in course 65+ and heterosexual.



A significant number of people did not take part

All the focus group participants had been part of an LLF course group; however, they also offered thoughts on why others might not have got involved. There seem to be two main reasons for this suggested lack of involvement: either people feel this is not a relevant topic for the Church, or they had already made up their minds without a willingness to change. This second reason could apply to people with views across the theological spectrum and this was not limited to those with strong opinions. A number of comments were made across all focus groups about the voices that were missing.

'Those who had already made up their minds didn't take part, which was a shame.'

'After doing the course, I attended deanery synod and saw that there were a lot of people who had already made up their minds about the course without having attended it. One was promoting an alternative.'

'People at one end or the other didn't want to join in. I would've liked more diversity but it's difficult and not everybody wants to be open and vulnerable.'

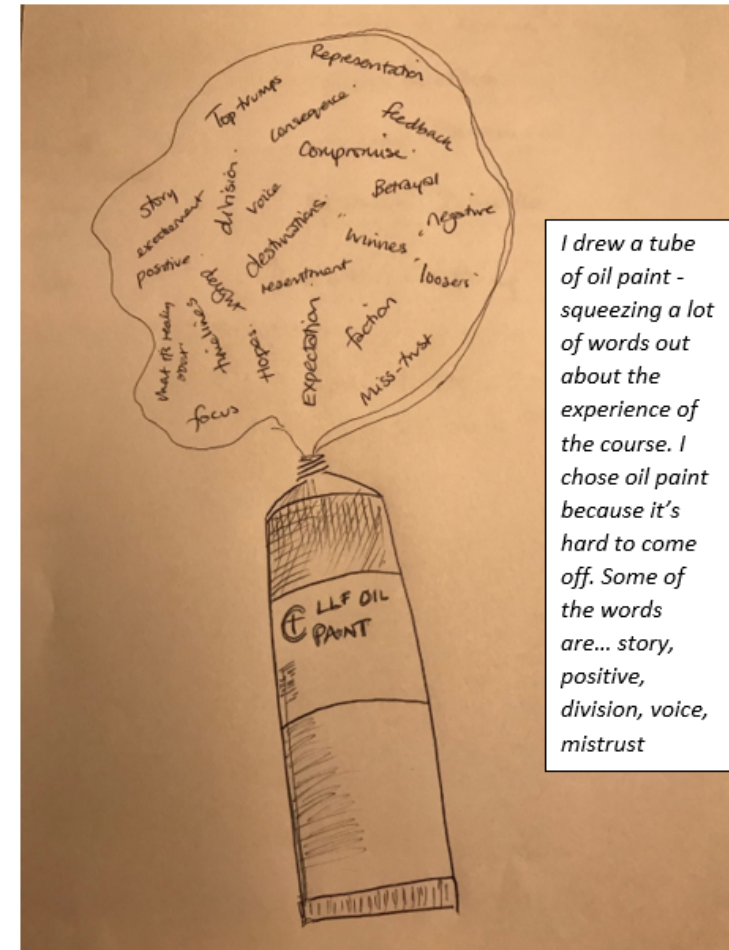
'I worry about the people who don't know what LLF means and aren't interested.'

'A lot of people aren't interested – and asked why we are still talking about this – they thought it was sorted 10 to 15 years ago.'

'I was aware of people who didn't engage, but it wasn't the subject matter, they just don't come to study groups.'

'I would like to hear the voices of those who weren't in the room ... I don't want to talk about them in a negative way.'

'Were the people who weren't there reading between the lines?'



There was a general view across all focus groups that the refusal to get involved had a negative effect.

'The worst part was how some parts of the Church denigrated the course or refused to take part.'

It was also indicated by a few participants that some people might be fearful of the LLF process.

'It was noticeable who was not engaging with the course ... there was a fear that if people did engage, they would somehow be endorsing something or going in a direction they did not want to go.'

'People in our church who didn't attend a group were really worried the course was happening, which I found astonishing and a little sad.'

A minority of participants stated that others simply did not know about the LLF course.

'My parish doesn't even know this course exists, despite my best efforts.'

Groups at deanery level or wider tended to work better than in parishes

Participants who had experienced different groups in a variety of settings offered a view on how well the groups functioned. Groups with people drawn from a broader area or from different churches seemed to work better.

'I was in a deanery course which was really good as we could be more anonymous outside of our church.'

'I took part in a deanery group ... I wanted to be challenged by other opinions.'

'The parish one didn't work because we all knew each other too well and were guarded against each other. The deanery one was a meeting of personalities, minds, experiences, and backgrounds that didn't usually rub up against each other.'

'I think this course works better if you only know each other a little.'

'I was disappointed in our parish group with how it didn't open minds.'

'When it was done as a deanery it was far more successful ... in listening together, learning together, and feeding back.'

Learning

A new kind of learning

For many people in the focus groups, the topics discussed and the process of the LLF course provided a new kind of learning. For some participants it was the first time that the topics had been discussed in their church.

'It was good to discuss things that have never been discussed before.'

'A lot of people said the church has never talked about sex, or marriage, or [being] LGBTQ+ before, but now we can, as a first step.'

'The congregation has had little exposure to those with different sexualities before.'

'I think some of the older members were a bit shocked by some of the issues raised.'

'The way the course was run, with an emphasis on listening and open discussion, was considered an innovative and valuable development.'

'It seems to me that the value of this exercise is the process as well as the outcome create more courses like this on pressing issues using a similar structure.'

There is plenty of evidence from the focus groups that learning did take place, and participants were able to reflect on, refine their views, and relate these to their faith and experience.

'I thought I knew exactly where I stood but it was good to be exposed to other ideas.'

'One person expressed a traditional view of marriage. The next week, they said they had been thinking all week and now believed that gay people shouldn't be denied marriage.'

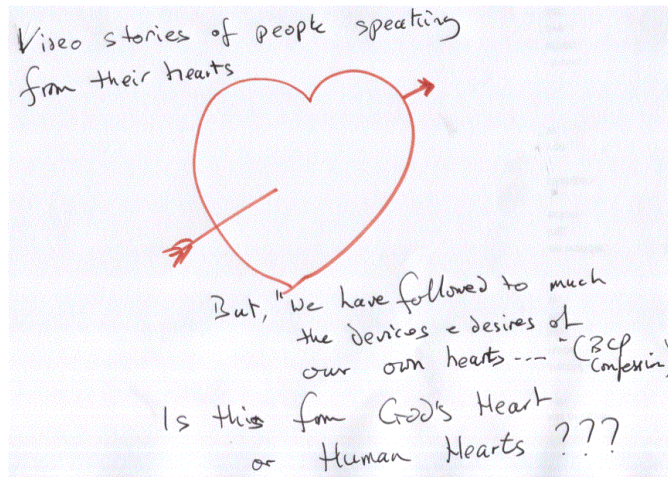
'It opened up the opportunity to have pastoral conversations which we wouldn't have been able to have.'

'We had a really good discussion on relationships and marriage.'

'A friend of mine was in a group and had never heard of things like "transsexual", so it was all new to him. He really had to go home and process all of this.'

The most impactful part of the learning were the personal stories

Almost universally the true stories in Living in Love and Faith were the most remembered and influential part of the course for focus group participants. These revealed the experience of others in a powerful way. Three personal stories were particularly mentioned: the young man who identified as same sex attracted and was choosing to be celibate, the two women in a relationship who were very active in their church, and the married couple where one partner is transgender. Some people saw these as positive and some as negative stories, but most regarded them as compelling:



'The stories were very powerful.'

'I was moved by my own reaction, but also other reactions in the group.'

'It was a surprise and refreshing to use the videos.'

'It is such an honour to hear those stories.'

'For me, the stories brought things to life, a real eye

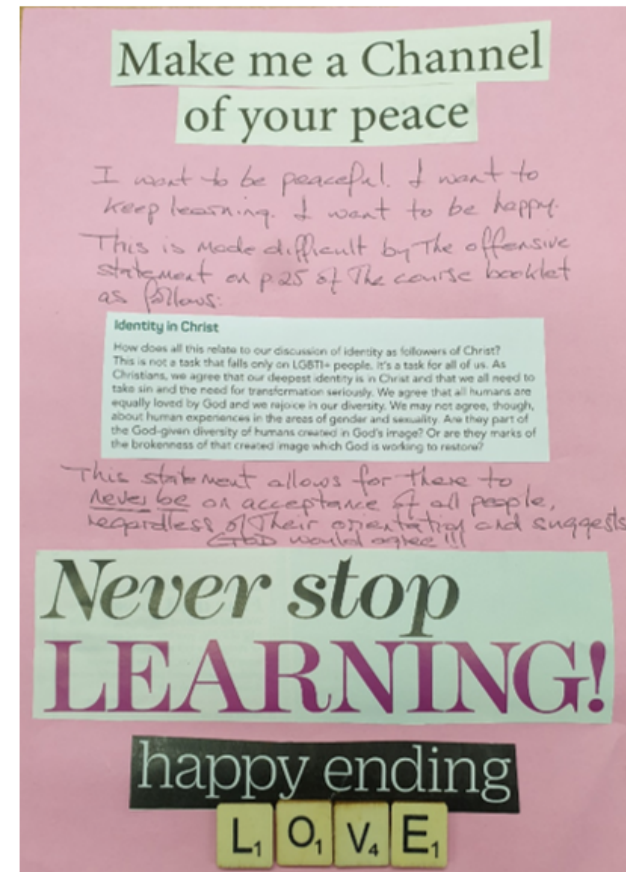
opener to see the breadth and diversity of Christians and their lived experiences.'

'The videos were very powerful. I watched them all through and the fact they ended with "we're living in love and faith" was very affirming.'

'There was a lot of pain and rejection in the stories, and it really stuck with me.'

'Your heart went out to those people who are rejected from parts of the church.'

'The most surprising thing was to see people who were rejected in churches – I had never been aware of this – to see that people get such negativity when they come to church, to imagine it is not a safe place was quite shocking. For a person like me who has always been to church, I have never been uncomfortable.'



Feeling apprehensive. Churns your stomach. Rise of emotion. Not sure what that's about...

An article from the Church Times ... then I got another CT article... Never Stop Learning.

The middle of the image is from p. 25 of the book that I found very offensive. There are good things about the course but... We may not agree... Marks of a brokenness... to restore.

The quote from p. 25 negates the whole thing for me...this paragraph made it quite difficult. To have something undermine...offensive and dreadfully disappointing...

A sense of being really hurt by the course

The way the group was led was important in the learning experience

According to some participants, group facilitators that guided the discussion to allow all viewpoints created a better experience for those involved. It is noted that much of this was explicitly informed by the use of the Pastoral Principles in practice.

'We managed to accommodate somehow with those who have very different views and not leave anyone behind, and to journey together.'

'There was a light bulb meeting when someone said, "I am so relieved we are talking about this", and then from then on everyone felt able to talk honestly, openly, and compassionately and relax with each other.'

'The Pastoral Principles are such an important background. It moved us on as a church with all sorts of issues. We were able to approach each other with love and understanding which was great.'

According to other participants, some facilitators were less proficient which meant that meaningful discussion was limited.

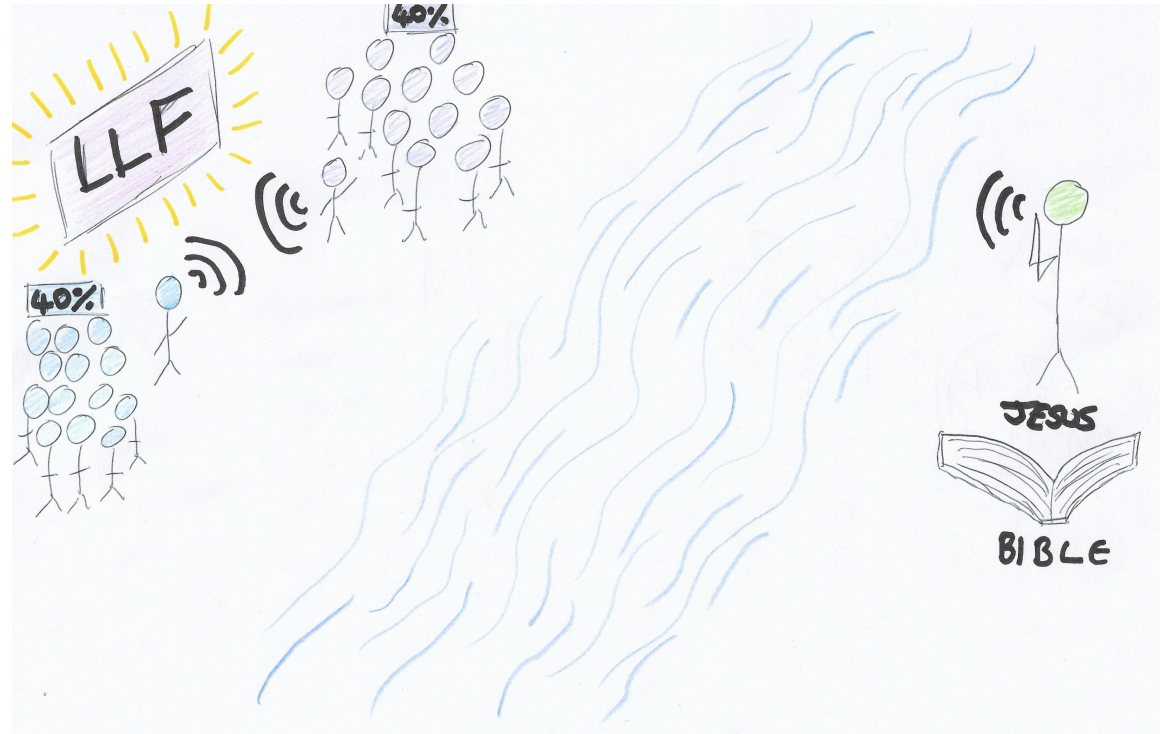
'There was a bit too much emphasis on getting through the material, as there was so much of it, rather than finding the space to discuss and explore.'

'I don't think the facilitators prepared for it enough.'

For a minority of participants, their experience of facilitating a group had a personal cost.

'I found it difficult to remain impartial because we're talking about real people, real problems.'

'I held back as a facilitator to make sure the conservative voices in the room felt safe enough to speak.'



The place and role of the Bible in the LLF Course was important

Alongside the personal stories, the use of biblical passages in the course was one of the most discussed topics in the focus groups. There were strong views expressed by many participants that important parts of Scripture were not included or were not handled appropriately.

'The Bible was not treated as the main authority.'

'Some key Bible passages were missing.'

'There was not enough biblical content so that we could get under the text.'

'The biblical content was very weak.'

'People came expecting the so-called "clobber texts" ... I think we ought to have addressed them ... we side-skipped that opportunity.'

'There was an over-emphasis on story rather than biblical discussion, which meant the group couldn't have an honest discussion.'

'It was distressing to see personal stories seen as equivalent to Scripture.'

'We talked about feelings a lot but not a lot about Scripture and didn't come back to Scripture in the end.'

Some articulated there was perhaps a deliberate attempt to not present what some might refer to as a traditional biblical view, particularly about the institution of marriage.

'Are people reinventing what is said in the Bible?'

'Even in LLF it says the Bible says there is no other way than man-woman relationship, so is the Church confused?'

'Stick to what the Bible says: marriage is between a man and a woman.'

'I will accept anyone into the Church, but God made Adam and Eve, a man and a woman.'

The Bible says a relationship between two men is an abomination.'

'There was no one coming forward who gave the biblical view. There is sin and we need to be more aware of that, and the wrath and judgement of God, as it says in Scripture.'

Many others argued for a different understanding where the biblical approach is less traditional regarding the institution of marriage and/or LGBTQ+ equality:

'God made me. I didn't choose to be the way I am. With the Bible, it is all to do with interpretation and translation. It is about love.'

*'I think tackling how we understand how we read the Bible is a more helpful way to open the doors ...
we need the Holy Spirit to open and speak through the texts.'*

'My plea is that the biblical view of marriage changes all over the Bible.

*'I'm nervous of people who just pick verses – to allow apartheid, allow slavery, stop those who died by suicide to be buried in hallowed ground.
The Bible is so important, but it is so complex; there is no one view of marriage in the Bible at all.'*

*'What really came to me most strongly is the fundamental differences in what we believe the Bible tells us,
and we need to bring that out into the open and talk to each other.'*

It is apparent that the issue of biblical and Scriptural authority in relation to lived experiences and identity was beyond the scope of these focus groups, but it did have a direct effect upon them.

'I didn't like how the Scriptures were used. It would have been interesting to hear how and why people used the Scriptures in different ways.'

'This is bigger than sexuality, it is really about the Bible.'

There was too much material in the course

A few people expressed the view that the course contained too much content and detail and therefore could not be adequately considered in the appropriate time given. For some, this affected the possibilities for a full discussion.

*'We were often running close on time which meant
there was little time built into the course to discuss.'*

*Now we need another course to go deeper
and do some more biblical study.'*

*'When a big conversation was going to happen, we had to move on
– much too much material to get through respectfully.'*

'I felt I just needed more time with everything – there was so much stuff.'





There were elements missing in the course

Focus group participants were asked if there was anything that the course should have contained but was absent or limited. Several had wished the material might have been developed further in certain areas, while others identified what they deemed to be different and often conflicting forms of cultural bias.

'I found it frustrating because we went so far and then didn't go any further.'

'It was the tip of the iceberg without getting to grips with anything deeply.'

'There wasn't enough time to engage with other people on key topics.'

'It had some major experiences missing, a lot it was unhelpful and not nuanced.'

'We were not able to talk about sex ... if felt infantile.'

'We are grown-ups and yet we still couldn't talk frankly about a sexual relationship.'

'The course was too short – it was really a course on listening, rather than on identity and sexuality.'



'There was a real opportunity missed in the opening session

to do proper listening ... we really need to learn how to listen properly.'

'In the course, there was a lot of attention to the wider Anglican Communion. It felt quite elitist and Western-centric. This grated with me.'

'This course was such a white middle class exercise.'

Some thought the approach to sexuality was too restricted.

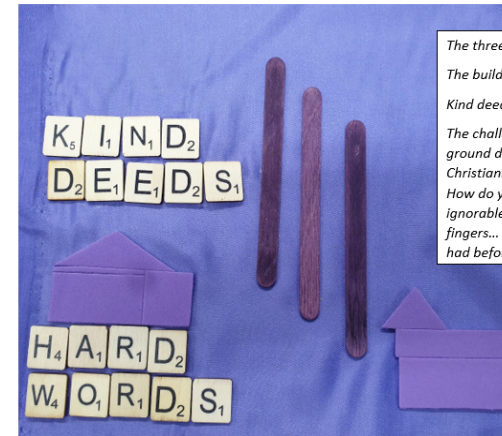
'In terms of the materials as they were presented – I didn't feel they were inclusive in any way; they were stereotyped.

Even if it was LGBTQ+ people they were couples, and the only single person was celibate – it all felt very controlled.'

'LLF puts LGBTQ+ people into a monolith which I think oversimplifies the situation.'

Others thought that major theological themes were not fully explored.

'There was no theology of sin and repentance. A lot of talk about identity but for Christians it is about behaviour, like the young man in the video who read his Bible and found his gay life wasn't in his morality, so he felt he needed to stay single.'



The three lines are the Trinity.

The buildings are the organised church.

Kind deeds...what I've experienced.

The challenge of this course to an educated liberal is: on what ground does my conviction stand? On what ground, does my Christianity and faith stand? How do you relate to scripture? How do you know which bits of Bible are negotiable and ignorable? ...it feels as though it can slither through your fingers... I now have a problem with scripture that I had not had before.

'I don't think any tools were given to help us to think theologically and assess different arguments.'

'We were not given a theological or ecclesiological position with which to engage contemporary social practice.'

'We weren't able to see people as sinners – instead we followed the philosophy of today.'

Sometimes the different viewpoints made the learning difficult

In the course, focus group participants heard many different and contrasting views expressed, most often about the place of biblical authority, sexuality, and the role of the Church. Often participants felt that the disagreement was not productive.

'We had a couple of people out of the 12 who had very strong views which was a difficult dynamic to encounter, especially for the course leader.'

'The hardest thing in being a facilitator was helping people to listen to each other.'

'We weren't able to bridge the gap between liberal and conservative.'

'I'm willing to speak to people who want a genuine conversation, but the church isn't willing.'

'I found it very difficult not to take things personally, because it's my life and the way I live.'

'We need to make sure that we go out of our way to love the people who have been hurt, whatever our position.'

'The difficulty was I effectively had a gagging order put on me as a priest where I work – there is a fear that drives that, which is really sad. I kept quiet ... we are not in a position to disagree well because we have to acquiesce.'

'I didn't want us to have disagreements, but I felt like I missed something by not disagreeing, if that makes sense.'

'If anyone said anything difficult or controversial the subject would be changed.'



*'There are those who are conservative and those who are liberal, already decided,
but I thought the idea was they meet and maybe change.'*

*'We don't have a shared vocabulary for our faith. We may use the same words ...
but these words take on different meanings and this makes it very difficult to understand one another.'*

Some focus group participants thought there was a hidden agenda and presumed that there was an unacknowledged standpoint being advocated through the material and the structure of the course. It is interesting to note that what the hidden agenda or unacknowledged standpoint was conflicted depending on the participants' own theology or personal convictions.

*'What is the real goal of LLF? It can only be the inclusion of LGBTQ+ [people] because that is not the status quo
– otherwise why do it? I think there is a latent dishonesty in that objective – is it nefarious?'*

*'What was the course all about? Why all the money and time spent on it? I felt angry and deceived
all the way through because nobody would actually say what it was really about.'*

'Why weren't we told at the beginning that the Church might change its position – I feel angry and betrayed.'

*'At one moment at about session three, during the Bible reading, someone at the back shouted
"what on earth is this all this about? No one is telling us, and what do you want from me?"'*

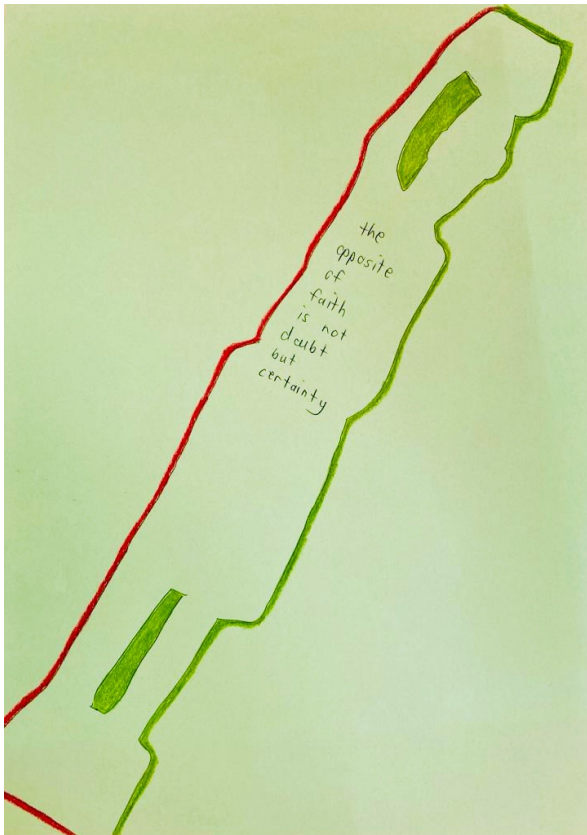
Relating

Has there been an improved understanding of church as community?

Some focus group participants viewed their church experience as a community was brought closer together through the learning process, even without complete agreement on the issues.

'As a parish we felt transformed by it, and we all learnt to listen better as the Body of Christ.'

'I believe I now know members of the church better.'



'We had different views, but a level of trust built up. We were able to say what we felt in a way that was held by everyone in the group, whether we agreed with each other or not. Relationships between people grew.'

'I felt I was a bit more understanding of people who disagree with me.'

'There's such importance in being able to value the people you don't agree with.'

'I think people know each other better in the church by the end of the process.'

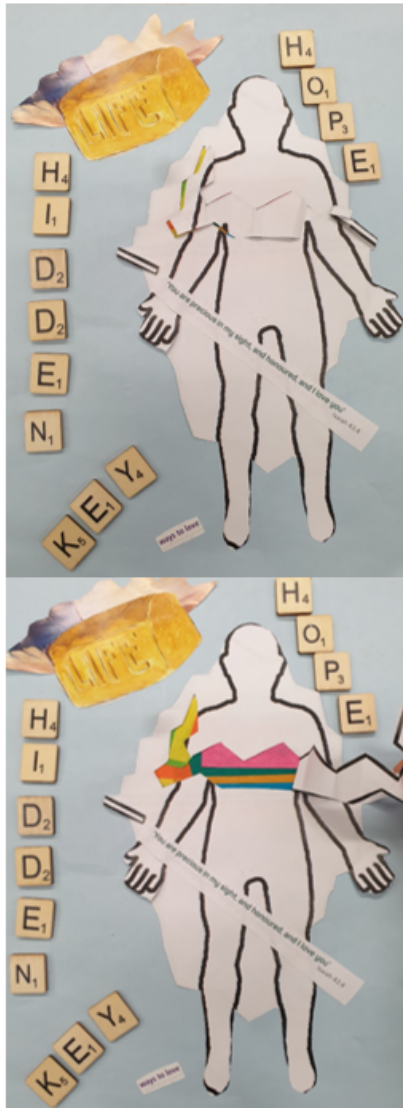
'Our group was demographically similar but theologically diverse, but we managed to leave differences standing and live with the difference.'

'Our group was able to live with difference.'

'I was pleasantly surprised by how strongly different views were heard, and very much respected within the group.'



I drew two things, the world, half in dark, half in light. And a heart with a crack in the middle as by the end of the course, people still disagreed. I feel like those in darkness will see a great light of equality, love, and hope. I also wrote 'he made us all - no slave or free'.



An image with a zig zag section across the chest to pull back to reveal layered colours.

Although the course presented as being as equal in opportunity – the process is more costly for LGBT+ people, things are hidden – the key hasn't really been opened.

A deeper consultation with people would've born more fruit. Life and the spirit in hope – there must be something in the process.

It was meant to be an equal line but I don't think it is.

Bible verse: 'You are precious in my sight and I love you'.

'We agreed to disagree. We did not go out to argue with each other. The conversations were tremendous and encouraging.'

'There was no animosity or arguing between people, but there wasn't a meeting of views.'

'We genuinely listened to each other ... and tried to understand where they were coming from.'

Others felt there was a level of disagreement revealed by the course that prevented meaningful sharing or even created a sense of disunity.

'Our group came together from different churches, and we didn't have the ability to gel together as a group – on Zoom as relative strangers we didn't get that closeness.'

'I found the agreement in our group a bit odd. Surely, we can't agree on everything. Did people feel they couldn't express a different view?'

*'What do disagreements do to us as a church community?
Can we disagree but still work together?
Or are the agreements so fundamental that we can't work together?
I am not sure we can.'*

'If people can't be authentic, we can't be an authentic church.'

'I felt everyone was keen to agree with each other and not rock the boat, but private conversations have happened since.'

'My church hasn't changed much in terms of managing disagreement ... there were a couple of strong characters, one who was more progressive, the other more conservative.'

'I wanted to understand what others thought in my deanery. Now I don't want to work with those churches in my community.'

The space was safe

For some participants the LLF process felt safe, if not at the beginning, then certainly by the end:

'At the start I had trepidation and nervousness about feeling under scrutiny and being under attack, but the first session was so affirming and loving.'

'I have a female partner, and even though people in church are traditional they were very welcoming of me and my partner.'

'I purposely chose a group that wasn't happening at my church, so that it would be safe.'

'It was only by session 5 that I felt able to come out as a same sex attracted woman.'

Good to hear other opinions, and feel more able to run this in the parish.'

'The Pastoral Principles have been developed so that we can disagree well – that is great.'

'There were people in my group with very different views, but the Pastoral Principles meant that no one got angry despite coming from very different approaches ... we respected one another.'

'People were very careful in how they expressed their views and did so with love, but that's because they knew each other.'

The space was not safe

For others the process did not feel safe, either for themselves or for others. Most people who did not feel safe in the LLF course process were from the LGBTQ+ community. However, a minority of people who held conservative viewpoints also highlighted how there were points where they too didn't feel safe.

'It didn't feel like a safe place for me being LGBTQ+.'

'I was really hurt by the course – some of it was offensive and dreadfully disappointing.'

'Some of the language the participants used in my small group ... would have offended or hurt the LGBT+ community a lot.'

'It is always the LGBTQ+ people who are asked to be vulnerable.'

'Although the course was presented as being as equal in opportunity – the process was more costly for LGBTQ+ people.'

'One person objected to a woman saying she has a wife rather than a partner.'

'I felt very shut down as a gay person for the whole course ... somehow, I kept going ... it was a very painful process.'

'It was evident that LGBTQ+ people were asked to do a lot of stepping up ... it was the expectation that we would share our story ... as the powerless minority. You don't want to be constantly used like that and made to speak out.'

'I remember sitting there allowing somebody to say stuff that is hurtful and homophobic.'

'Those with a traditional point of view felt silenced.'

'Had someone been there who was conservative I didn't think it would have felt safe.'

'I was the only evangelical in the group, and everybody was liberal. I was overwhelmed by that opinion.'

'It is funny how those who are most attuned to microaggressions and vocab are not in my experience very self-reflective of how they use language, because they think they have justice on their side.'

'I am made to feel like I'm a homophobe or oppressive if I don't hold liberal views, made to feel like a monster and not loving, which is not true.'

'I don't feel people who hold conservative opinions on the matter are respected any more.'

'I find many of the conversations troubling because of the caricatures – words and phrases like "bigot" or "phobic" or "not inclusive" or "not holding an advanced view".'

'A lot of people feel they have listened but not been heard.'

'I don't think there was a lot of pastoral care embedded in the course – such a contentious topic, and the disagreements brought up a lot of past hurt and trauma.'

Being church

The need for change

Several focus group participants shared the experience of being treated negatively in church and stated that the church needed to change its standpoint and how it treated people.

'I didn't realise that churches could treat people so badly.'

'Some people in our group said, "love the sinner and not the sin". Would you actually say that to their faces? It made me question whether it was appropriate for those people to be welcomed at our church.'

'I am aware of our casual carelessness in how we treat individuals and the Church's damage of people.'

'The course revealed to me the Church is more broken than I thought it was.'

'Single people can feel very isolated and excluded in church, especially with this increasing focus on family – that is married with children.'

'The Church of England is much more closed and behind, and it needs to catch up. The Methodists have allowed equal marriage.'

'The Holy Spirit has spoken, the nation has changed, social attitudes have changed, and the Church now needs to change.'

'Society has changed but the Church hasn't – gay people being forced to hide, not be their true self, not being their true self to God.'

'People have faith in God but they're not keen on the institution – because of its lack of inclusiveness.'

'Maybe demonstrate love more and rules less.'

'I want an inclusive, loving, faithful Church, that is diverse and loves Jesus.'



'I struggle with heterosexual people who want to get married in church but have no faith and no intention of going to church ... but if you're LGBTQ+, even if you attend that church, have faith and are part of the community, you don't have the same welcome or love and you can't even receive a blessing.'

'There are a lot of ways people can be excluded in church and not welcomed, and not just sexuality. It could be language barriers, or class or whatever.'

'I hope that the Church will change, but I am not sure that it will.'

A minority of participants stated that they did not want the Church to avoid challenging people regarding LGBTQ+ equality even if this was painful or costly.

'Love involves telling people hard things sometimes. We are called to live holy lives ... not bringing from our culture into the Bible.'

'The church should be holy and walk in God's way. We must be caring and do outreach for all people to find Jesus.'

'Welcoming and missional, listening to the Holy Spirit. God knows what is best for each person, but we shouldn't be compromised or change our minds ... Jesus is the same yesterday, today and for ever.'

A more profound understanding of God

Participants were asked if doing the course had changed their understanding of God, perhaps an unexpected question to some - many needed time to think and reflect about their reply.

'It is really hard to put into words ... I think it's broadened my understanding of God and of humanity, especially as what people were talking about is quite under the radar and not spoken about.'

'In the course, God is taken as read and understood, which isn't the case at all. I think trying to define what God thinks says something rather important about how the course has been structured.'

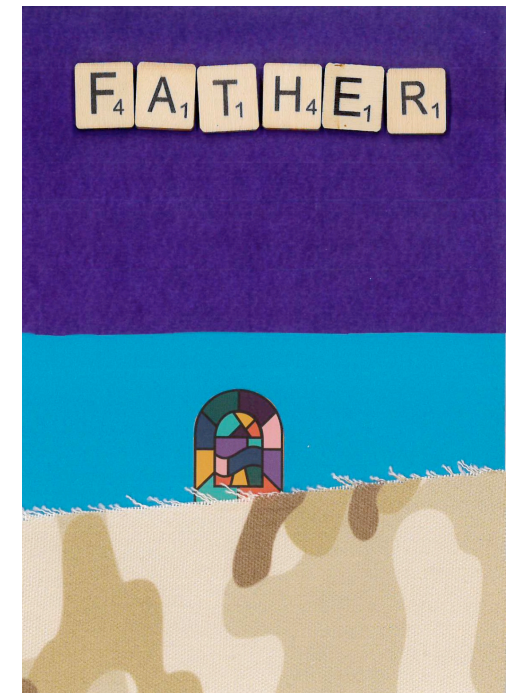
'God is in the messiness and this course was too tidy.'

'In one of the videos, someone said that God wants them to be happy – I don't think God says that – rather God wants us to be a holy people.'

'I wonder every night, God, what do you make of all this?'

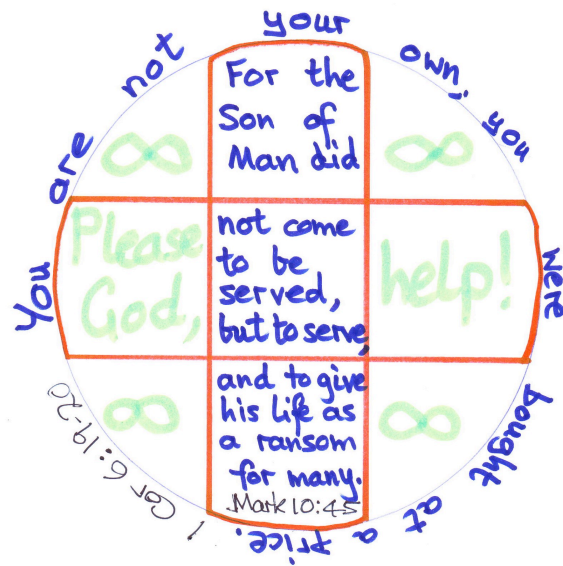
'God is so much bigger than my own view.'

'I have been prompted through the whole process to focus more on God's grace.'



'Thinking about the flesh of God - you can't separate the body from the soul, so sexuality and relationships are part of the body of God, of Christ.'

'What it has made me realise is very simple - God is love, and we start from that perspective. That's my main signpost - the Church needs to include people who hold different views.'



Moving forward

General comments

Participants were asked what message they would pass on to the bishops, and the majority of respondents understood that overall, the House of Bishops have a difficult but essential task, but a decision on moving forward needs to be made soon.

'We need to pray for you as this may be the hardest thing you will ever have to do.'

'You are representing everybody, so I guess it's very difficult.'

'You need to seriously listen.'

'I don't want you to think you have listened to everyone because you haven't.'

'Have you all done the course, and if not, why not?'

'Why can't you finally make a decision soon? It has been so long, for goodness' sake.'

'Be courageous and make a decision.'

'Get ahead of the game rather than just responding. It has been so slow, and all these delays are the worst of all worlds.'

'Move this forward as soon as possible so we can have a really inclusive Church.'

'The decision time has come; the nation is watching.'

'If you don't do anything, I will leave and go somewhere where I feel welcome for being gay ... I don't think I can carry on like this.'

'I need you to be people of prayer, Scripture, sacraments, and the Communion of Saints.'

'We need change, as we cannot go along as we are.'

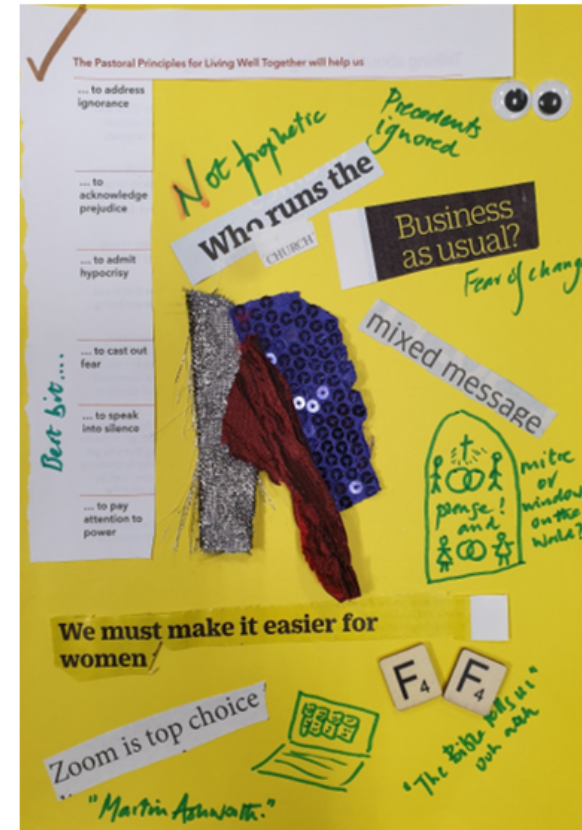
'All of this in the backdrop of Covid, climate change and the war in Ukraine – there are much bigger things going on at the moment.'

'I think in the global Anglican Communion there are massive global issues going on, and we should not squabble and split over this.'

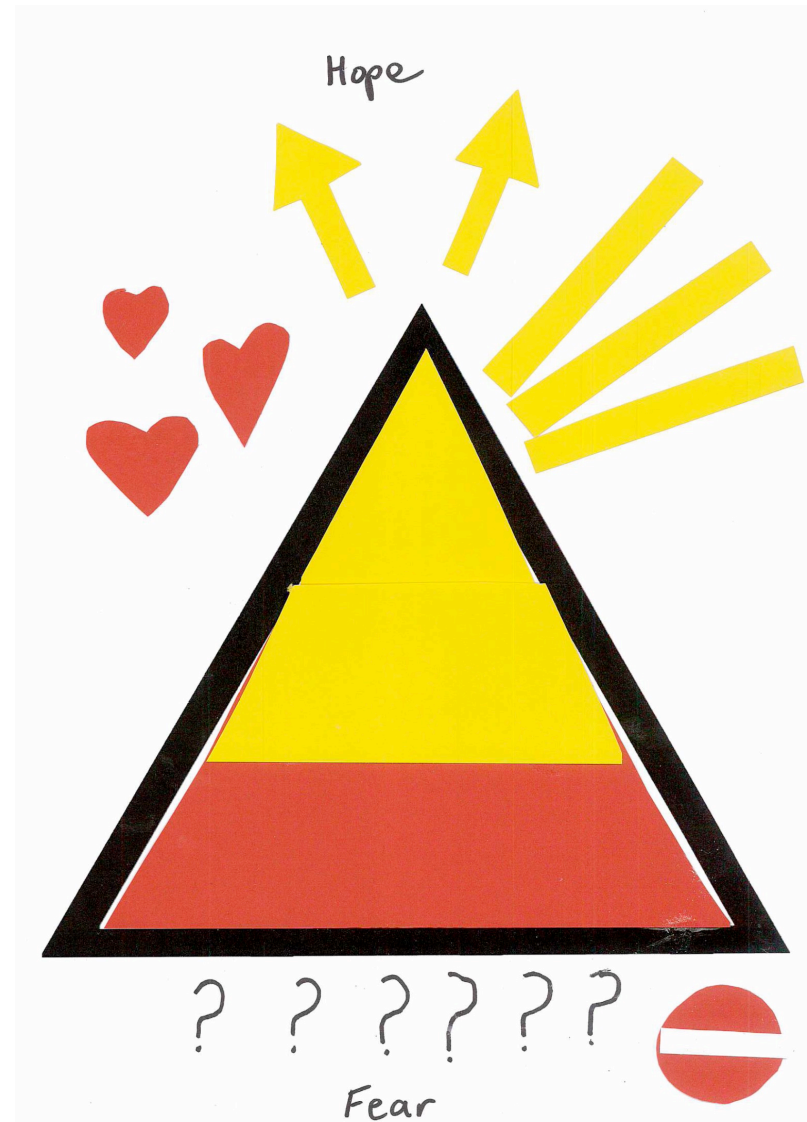
'It will be a complete waste of time if nothing happens.'

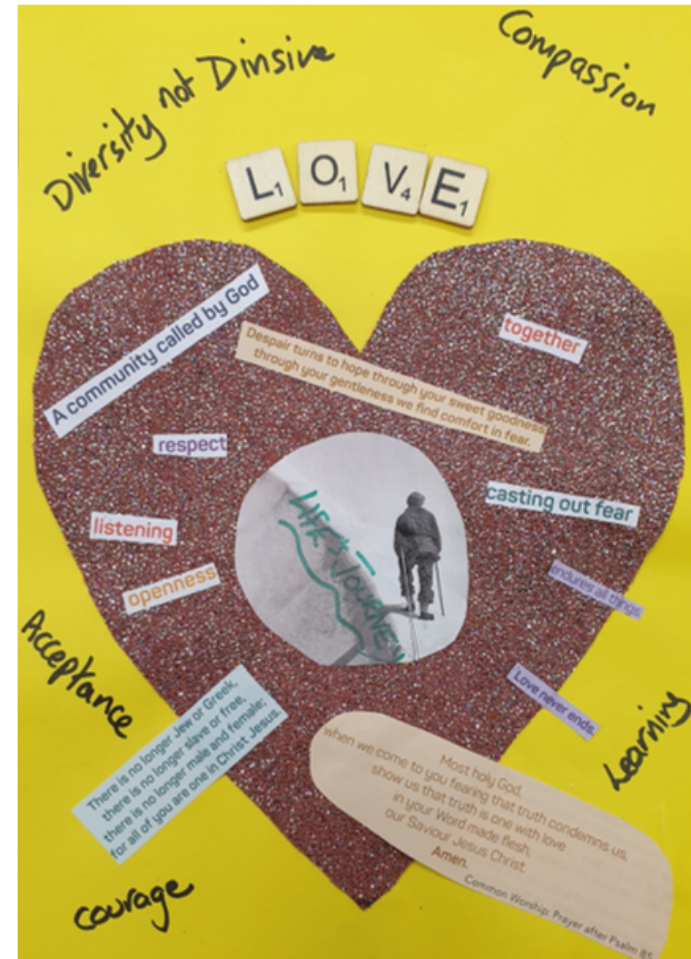
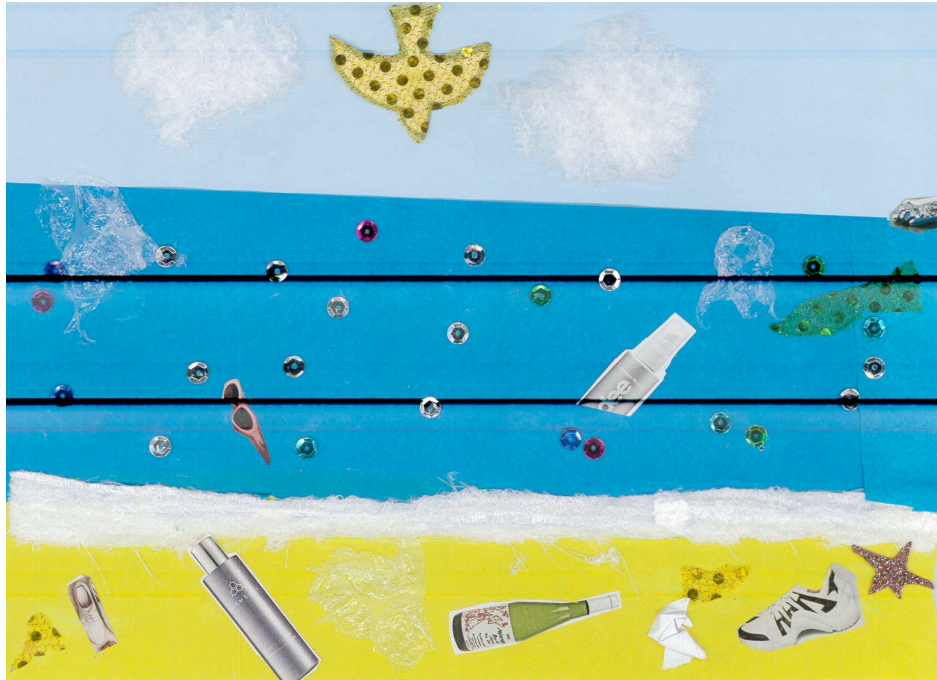


My picture is of Jesus in the centre and rings around the outside of people in the Church and outside and how close they felt to Jesus by how the Church treated them. I hope that whatever happens Jesus is at the centre of it all



Pseudonym: Martin Ashworth. The choice of yellow was deliberate, associated with cowardice – I don't intend to suggest that the authors of the course are cowardly, but they are – to my mind – defensive. The first thing I stuck on were the pastoral principles as I think these are the best thing to come so far out of LLF. The various words at the top – and including 'mixed messages' – express my frustration at an opportunity lost (back to defensiveness). When I drew the mitre/window I was thinking first of a window through which we look at the world (and the world looks at us), longing for movement to allow same sex marriages in the church. I then realised it was also a mitre thereby giving a message to the bishops. The reference to Zoom is merely that the group I facilitated was on Zoom. The "ooh ah" really should have been an "oh yes?" This is because the whole approach to Scripture is very limited, and takes little account of any other readings than those which the authors want us to see. The FF was for Father Forgive! The pieces of fabric are suggestive of the glorious variety in the church. The eyes were something of an afterthought (looking round nervously – but who is doing the looking? never quite still?) and very much open to interpretation.





I hadn't realised what [another participant] said about page 25 in the course book was what was niggling me.

We should be happy smiley people. Hence the heart.

In the middle is an explorer in a lonely, isolated - in a pretty dark place.

You want love, love that never ends. Openness. The way to fix people is not to change them but to love them – that's what I hoped to get out of the course, but felt hurt and disappointed over. You might as well rip it all up if you say people need to change. Acceptance was what was wanted.

Be brave and true

Most people in the focus groups suggested that the decisions made by the House of Bishops needed to be bold, courageous and honest. This was the same for those who want change and for those who want to maintain current teaching.

'Please be brave and tackle it. We need to deal with it and be bold and decisive. My generation and below won't be attracted to the Church if it doesn't move on this.'

'Please be honest and say what you believe, because doing one thing and saying another doesn't help.'

'If we don't get over this it will be a missiological disaster that will go on and on.'

'Be honest, especially to those who are LGBTQ+.'

'Think carefully, what is the heart of Jesus and what is Scripturally right.'

'Listen to the pain of the LGBTQ+ community who feel so second class. And God doesn't create people to be second class, does he?'

'I would like the church to go back to who Jesus was. Jesus was with the outsiders always and we should follow that example.'

'Please understand the hurt you're inflicting on people, and have inflicted on people for decades, the damage you are doing.'

'I want my children to know that the Church accepts them, whatever they are.'

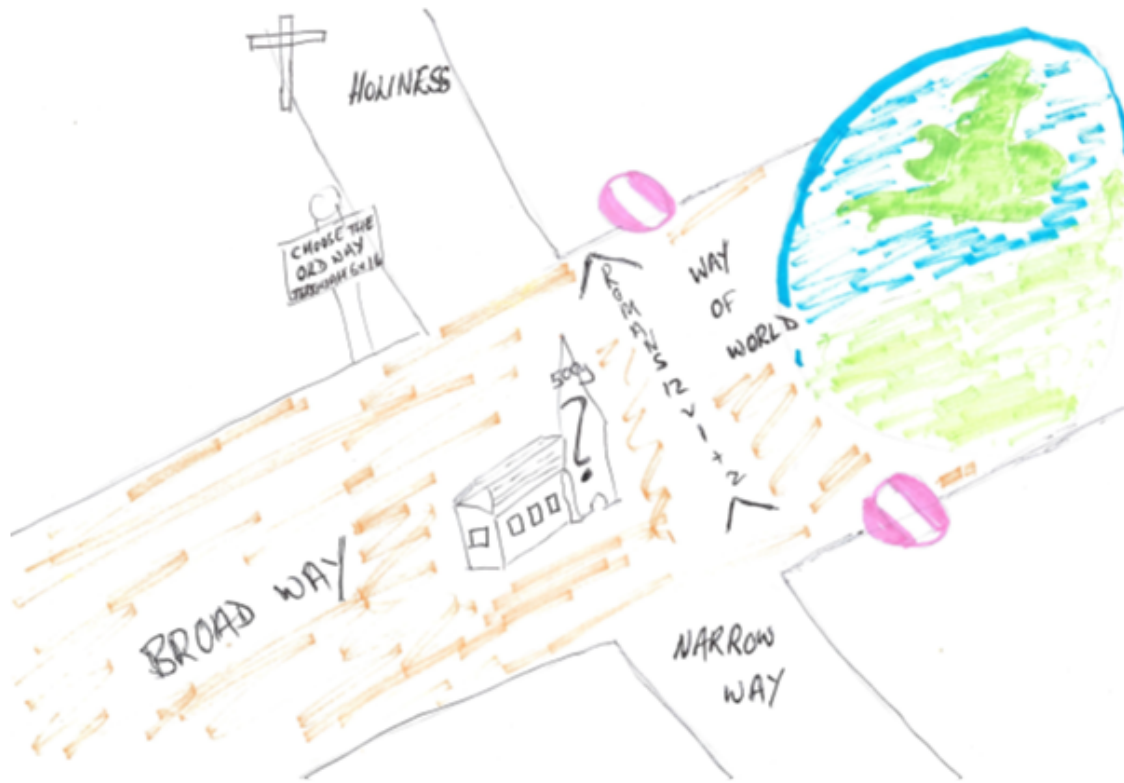
'The Church risks being irrelevant. We don't get more people in by rejecting a significant portion of the population.'

'Amazing things have happened in the Church every time a risk has been taken, such as women priests and bishops. Have the power and strength to take a risk.'

'The Gospel is love and acceptance. Discrimination does not have a place in it. Who is in the circle of grace and who is outside of it, is that for you to decide?'

'As I read Scripture, God is clear, and he has spoken. It breaks my heart that bishops are not sticking to Scripture.'





The Church of England has been upholding the Truth of God's word for nearly 500 years but it seems to find itself at a crossroads. It is as if newer thinking of the last 50 years or so somehow makes the teaching of scripture from Genesis to Revelation outdated, no longer culturally relevant (even though LLF acknowledges that the Bible never commends other than male and female marriage). I have called it the narrow way and the broad way. There are scriptural cautions in Jeremiah to choose the old ways and in Romans to be touched by the mercies of God and do not to let the world squeeze you into its mould. I do beg the Archbishops and Bishops to let themselves be touched by the mercies of God and the tenets of scripture rather than the attractive and fashionable ways of the world. The Bible has never been a democracy. It is the Word of the Living God.

'I would like to say to the bishops, if you are going to move forward with same sex marriage, what are you going to say to gay people who have decided to stay single?'

'We need to be loving and compassionate to those who have been hurt in the past, and to welcome all people. But the most loving thing to do is to proclaim the truth, to preach it faithfully. I believe the Word of God is very clear on these matters, and we mustn't be influenced by the world around us.'

'Romans 12:1-2 – I beg the bishops to not be conformed to this world. Recognise that the Bible never allowed for anything than a man and a woman to be married.'

'We must not be conformed to the world, and we need worldwide unity. There is a lot of pressure from those who push things through which are against the Bible. Bishops need to say what the Bible says, and we can't adapt out theology to everyone's individual experience.'

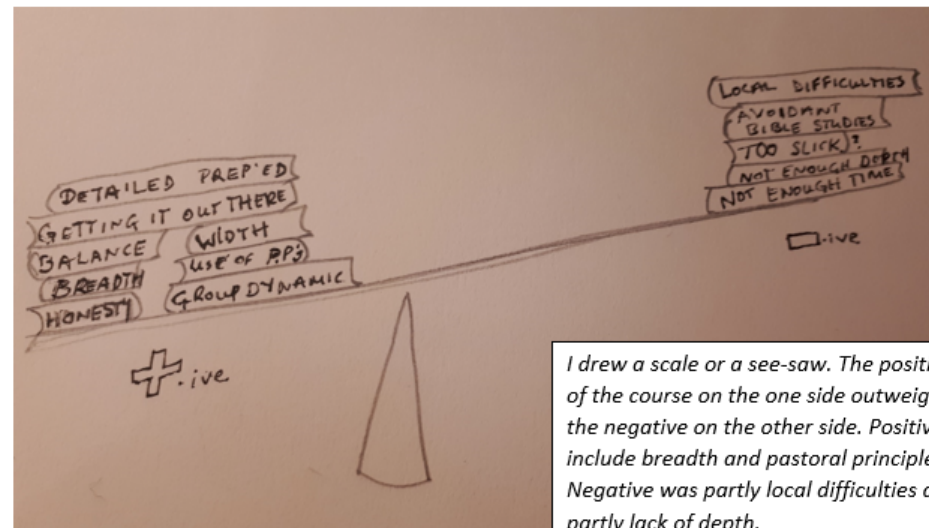
'1 John 4 – God is love. Accept that God created all of us whatever our sexuality. God created us to be equal.'

'I want the bishops to use their prophetic voice and be more removed from the business of politics and administration.'

'I want them to come out with some clarity, so then I know where I stand as a conservative.'

'I'd love to see clear teaching ... because Christians think they can do things but don't understand God's will. God wants our joy, but there are boundaries to our joy.'

'Don't make it wishy-washy; whatever decision you make, it needs to be clear and meaningful.'



It is right that the bishops should make the decisions

Most, but not all, accepted that the episcopate should lead the approach of moving forward in love and faith.

'The bishops should be leading us towards doctrine and sound faith. LLF is investing a lot of time in bottom-up and not top-down, and this isn't episcopal.'

'I'm not sure LLF gives the bishops a clear mandate for change.'

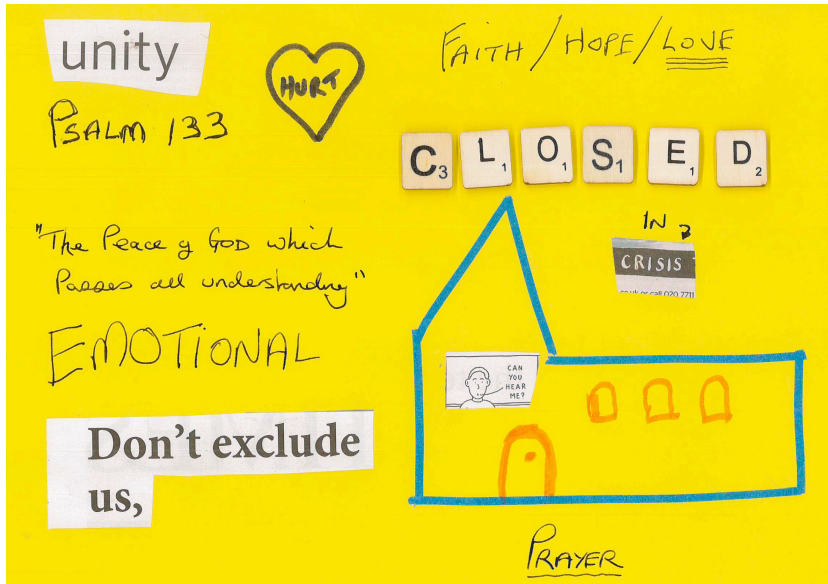
'It is good that we were doing this and making an effort to find out where people are at and what the range of opinion is, rather than impose a top-down solution.'

'I am a bit worried that at the end of the whole LLF process we'll throw it back to the "grown-ups" (the bishops) to squabble all over it again.'

'We are going to be fighting very publicly about who is equal and it's going to be awful.'

'Look to the lay leadership to progress some of this, as they are not so trapped by hierarchy.'

'Listen to the people with specialist knowledge.'



'We need you to give us that theological specialism of what is a human being, from a theological perspective that is creedal, that is about the incarnation, redemption and the cross.'

'We need the bishops to use their apostolic witness.'

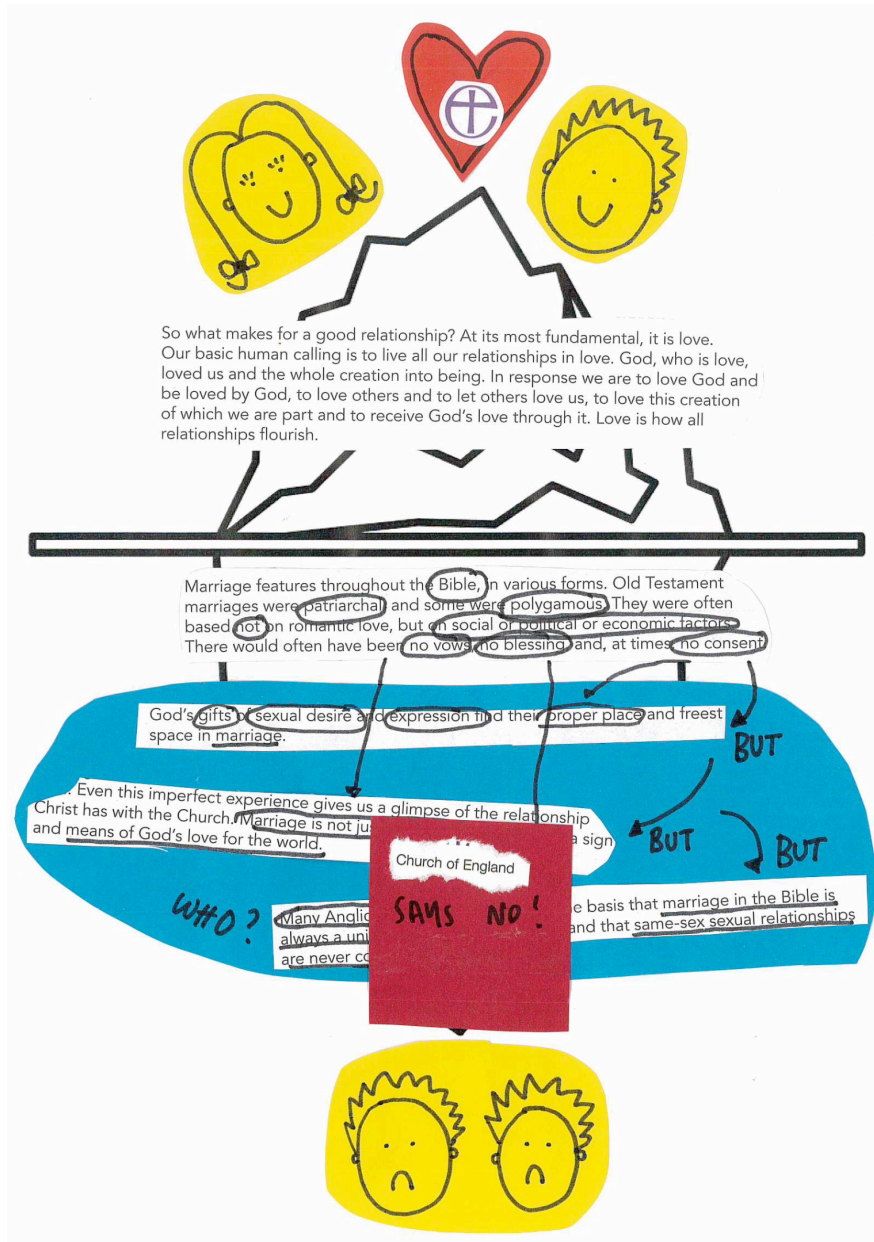
'The bishops have an authority given to them. It is not democracy ... it is up to us to accept the bishops' decision, hopefully highly informed.'

'The bishops have a responsibility to counter and banish all erroneous doctrine.'

'I cannot belong in a church where I feel this question of morality is undermined. Women bishops is a structure issue, this is a moral and gospel issue.'

'The shepherds need to know what we, the sheep, are actually saying.'





Preserve the unity of the Church

Most focus group participants thought that the unity of the Church is paramount, and church leaders need to work to preserve this.

'Christ calls us to unity - we shouldn't have to split as a church. What is the Holy Spirit saying to the Church today? It is time for us to listen.'

'Jesus cries out for unity – but we have to figure out how.'

'I fear that the bishops want to make same sex marriages legal. I wonder how many people will leave the Church if they do this, and if nothing happens, how many other people will leave?'

'None of the content of LLF is heretical. It's real people, real relationships. We need to hold each other in the process.'

'The Church needs to develop the skills of speaking to each other, listening, reconciling, engaging and mediating. We need a truth and reconciliation project.'

'It is sad that there so many splits in the Church, so many little groups, when we're supposed to be one Church.'

'Do you want a more united Church than at present? – if so, look at the most caring, respectful pathway.'

'We can't all agree, but we can accommodate our differences.'

Can we learn to live in disunity?

Some were clear that proclaiming the truth is more important than preserving the unity of the Church

'Unity that is paper thin is not really unity.'

'If we have to split, we have to split. Give us places to go.'

'We have to disagree with love, despite our differences.'

*'There is part of me that sometimes wonders if there is a need for some sort of break for the truth and reconciliation to happen.
Perhaps a break would facilitate listening and conversation.'*

'Give us the freedom to express different views and different ways of living.'

'Pursue what is true without trying to hold something together that I don't think can hold together in its current form.'

'Is unity ever an attainable goal?'

About the researchers

Church Army's Research Unit (CARU) is a team of researchers (not employed or funded by the Church of England) who have a mix of qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method practical theology research specialisms. A team within the Church Army (established 1882),⁴¹ CARU has specific and long-term experience in researching the breadth of mission and evangelism in the Anglican church across the UK and Ireland as well as providing research consultancy with charities and other national church institutions.

We hope and pray that this technical report will help the House of Bishops discern their decision-making, guided both by the Holy Spirit and through listening to the voices of those who have generously given their time and energy as participants in the data collection process.

We wish to acknowledge with thanks the contributions of all those involved in this research, in particular those who expressed their views in various forms through the focus groups, but who cannot be mentioned by name.

Lu Skerratt and John Tomlinson
Church Army's Research Unit



⁴¹ <https://churcharmy.org/>

INDEPENDENT SUBMISSION RESPONSES IN MORE DETAIL



Introduction

At the start of the research process, it was envisaged that analysis of survey data, together with the feedback from focus groups, would be sufficient to summarise the breadth and depth of findings from the Living in Love and Faith (LLF) listening process. The LLF webpages on the Church of England website gave the link to the online questionnaire, which included within it the opportunity to express interest in taking part in a focus group. The webpages also invited creative responses from groups or individuals.

However, at different points in the course materials (course booklet, final video), it was stated that responses from participants would be welcomed in letter form. We acknowledge guidance on submitting independent feedback was not clear and consistent.

As the deadline for all feedback was extended, the number of independent submissions grew. By April 30th 2022, just under 250 churches and individuals had communicated their views in a variety of written formats independent of the survey and focus groups, although some indicated they had completed the survey also (and encouraged church members who had taken part in a LLF course to do the same).

Some independent submissions were from churches and individuals who did not provide any evidence of having engaged in the Living in Love and Faith process first-hand.

The decision was taken to represent all the independent submissions in the final reporting for the following reasons:

They offer an insight into group discussion and, for some, what it has felt like as a group or an individual to take part in the course sessions over some weeks.

Many illustrate the multiple topics that arose in group discussion, highlighting the complexity of the subject matter where short survey questions may be limited in capturing nuance.

Some expressed frustration that the feedback process had not explicitly invited opinions on how the bishops should vote and wished to state their views on record. Rather than omit this data, it is only fair to include it as a faithful reflection of what churches, groups and individuals urgently wished to feed back.

There were a few handwritten submissions from those who could not access the technology of the online questionnaire and did not avail themselves of the option to use the questionnaire offline.

This is an opportunity to hear some of the viewpoints of those that were underrepresented in survey and focus group data: churches in more deprived areas, those younger and older than the typical age of those completing the survey or contributing to the focus groups and those who did not identify as heterosexual. Please note these views are not representative of all in these categories.

Methodology

Research approach

All independent submissions were read at least twice in their entirety by two people. Firstly, they were read by Eeva John who replied to each to acknowledge safe receipt. Secondly, they were read in the process of this research analysis.

In the **first stage** of the process, all submissions were categorised according to whether it was feedback on behalf of a group or feedback submitted by an individual. It was also noted at this stage whether there was evidence that the group or individual had engaged first-hand with the LLF book, course and/or materials in any way.

	Evidence of engagement with material	No evidence of engagement with material
No. of submissions from churches	65	22
No. of submissions from individuals	114	38

The **second stage** of the process involved cataloguing submissions noting initial data (where specified) such as:

- geographical information by diocese (of church attended)
- the format in which the response was presented
- the status and gender of those who submitted the feedback
- viewpoints where the group or individual had made them explicitly in the course of the response.

The data collated on the gender of the person submitting the response was based on first name.

The **third stage** involved selecting illustrative case studies to offer as evidence of engagement in either the LLF book, course and/or materials or – for those who did not engage – a reflection on the wider debate it has generated.

Given the reasons for inclusion of the material outlined above, a straightforward case study approach was selected to convey as many of the thoughts and feelings of those involved as anonymous reporting allowed us to share. Case studies are a helpful way to convey multiple perspectives and illustrate complexity of subject matter. In all the case studies, the gender of the submitter was not identified in order to safeguard anonymity.

Case studies for this report were chosen on the basis of content that 1) related directly to vision, aims and hopes of the Living in Love and Faith process and 2) when presented together, modelled something of the breadth of diverse opinion expressed across the independent submissions.

Acknowledged limitations

A case study approach suited some submissions more than others in terms of style and length; those that were very short or very long were not selected.

There was something of an art rather than a science to selecting which submissions should become case studies. It was impossible to select a small number of case studies to be fully representative of the whole, incorporating every aspect of the detail submitted. However, decisions were made by the researcher in consultation with the wider team to manage research bias to a modest degree.

There *is* acknowledged bias in selecting case studies from those that relate to LLF aims, but this is balanced by also representing a few submissions from those who did not appear to engage with the course at all.

Adapting material as case studies involves condensing and paraphrasing which inevitably means not every detail can be captured from the original source material.

We realise that, for group submissions, the process of summarising multiple viewpoints and group dynamics has taken place *already* by the person who submitted the feedback on their behalf. Without any further data, we have had to proceed on the assumption that group submissions reporting to be a faithful summary of congregation or group views indeed were; in reality, we are aware that compiling accurate summaries of multiple viewpoints is an imperfect process. However, the contents of some reports were signed off as having been checked by course group members, leadership teams and/or PCCs.

Responses from churches which engaged with the LLF resources

Initial data from 65 responses

From where did responses come?

Diocese	No. of responses	Diocese	No. of responses	Diocese	No. of responses
Bath & Wells	2	Leeds	1	Rochester	6
Canterbury	1	Lichfield	3	Salisbury	1
Chelmsford	3	Lincoln	1	Sheffield	2
Chester	7	London	7	Southwark	7
Chichester	2	Manchester	2	Southwell & Nottingham	1
Durham	1	Newcastle	1	St Albans	1
Ely	1	Oxford	3		
Exeter	3	Peterborough	2	Not specified	7

In what format did they present their group feedback?

Type of submission	No. of responses	Type of submission	No. of responses
Short summary report or response	19	PCC statement voting for no change	3
Letter to Next Steps Group, LLF Advocate or bishop	13	Bespoke feedback gathering statistical data	2
Medium length report or response	9	Collated feedback under selected survey questions	2
Collated feedback under course booklet questions	7	PCC statement voting for change	1
Bespoke feedback using open-ended questions	5	Parish newsletter article	1
Extensive and detailed report	3		

Where types were defined by length, 'short' was defined as up to 1500 words and 'medium' between 1500 and 3000 words. For those over 3000 words, we acknowledge with grateful thanks the considerable work that went into gathering data and writing up these reports.

Status and gender of those who submitted responses on behalf of groups or churches

Status	No. of responses
Clergy	15
Lay (including licensed)	3
PCC	27
Not specified	20

Gender	No. of responses
Male	17
Female	6
Not specified or submitted by more than one person	42

Viewpoints made explicit in responses

Across the 65 churches who had engaged with the course, those who explicitly stated they **were in favour of change** to the Church's current teaching and those who **were not in favour of change** were almost equal in number. There were three more submissions in favour of change although these included requests for *any* change to the current teaching. For example, alongside requests for same-sex marriage in churches, some asked for liturgical provision to bless same-sex relationships or discretion for churches and clergy to make their own decisions at local level. Some wished for immediate change but others were in favour of a longer, more careful process.

Those not in favour of changes to the Church's current teaching almost always referred to their belief in a traditional or orthodox interpretation of scripture as the reason. In addition, they often included loving concern in their responses. For example, one church wrote '*We are thankful that the course encourages us to speak with compassion for those suffering and struggling with gender, sexuality, marriage and relationships.*'

Nine submissions came from churches who described themselves as inclusive churches or working towards being signed up to the Inclusive Church network.

Just over a quarter stated their appreciation for the difficult decisions the national Church will have to make or expressed their concern for the Church in remaining united while holding diverse viewpoints.

Some submissions fed back that there were topics in the course that should not have been included or that there were topics that were left out of the course that should have been included:

'The inclusion of gender dysphoria in the LLF project brings in a very different set of issues from those associated with God's will for sexual activity.'

'...there was no attempt to look at singleness in the church or [offer] help for those who have experienced marital breakdown.'

*'One couple [on our course] reminded us that the biggest group in society were not represented in this course:
those who do not attend church or have any faith.'*

'There are enormous societal expectations that are not addressed, for instance, the current expectation that everyone should have had sex by a certain age. Simply reiterating that sex outside marriage is not part of the Christian package doesn't address this issue.'

'The course material did not include enough engagement with the themes of discipleship or of our understanding of desires.'

'The course did not offer the church any guidance on how to be welcoming and inclusive whilst also affirming at the same time Jesus' sexual ethic which we believe is given for our good and our flourishing.'

Others outlined aspects of the course that they were frustrated and disappointed with or hurt by. Comments included:

'We were however disappointed with the teaching material provided by the bishops of the Church of England ... do they actually think all methods of interpreting Scripture are equally valid or do they believe there might be a right way ... ?'

'We are disturbed and concerned about the continuing discrimination in churches towards women who have not had children, both those who are married, and those who are not married whether because they have chosen that path (without sanctifying it with the name celibacy) or who have never found someone with whom they wish to live together.'

'There was a very real sense that we as individuals within the group "moved on from all this a long time ago".'

'We were angry about some aspects of the course. At times, the course presented particular points of view, for example, "we agree...about the costly universal call to discipline and self-denial in our sexual lives" which we did not necessarily feel we agreed with or found helpful given the way the church has treated individuals based on their sexuality or gender.'

'Sadly, we find that the LLF process is flawed because it fails to provide sufficient clarity as to what the Bible teaches on human anthropology (who mankind is), sexual-ethics (how humans are to behave sexually), and how to understand the culture in which we live.'

'I sometimes had an uncomfortable feeling that we were somehow meant to be 'judging' or making decisions about the people in the interviews, rather than simply accepting them for who they were. That we were meant to be deciding what was right for them to do in their private lives and whether their behaviour was acceptable to the church ... I felt deeply for all the participants and applaud their courage in coming forward.'

'The whole course was 'manipulative' (the concentration of Jesus' discourse on unity from John 17 in the last session felt to some as if unity is the prior category.)'

'The church needs to get away from a situation where they will bless a lesbian penguin but not a lesbian human being. It will however cover for paedophile priests!!'

'I have a real problem equating anti same sex marriage with anti LGB. I think that's way too simple.'

'The content reads, on many pages, like an overly-prolonged explanation and justification of existing Anglican theology, such that it appears biased towards conservative theology and practices relating to marriage, gender and sexuality.'

'Given its objectives, the LLF process cannot in any way be used to justify (or even lay the ground for) changing doctrine, liturgy or practice: LLF was not a consultation with the Church on these matters.'

Illustrative case studies

Relating honestly in diversity and disagreement

One group's anonymous submission outlined their learning in a group of ten participants holding 'a range of perspectives'. This was an existing small group who devoted five meetings to look at course sessions and included a sixth follow-on session to reflect together on their '*thinking and feeling about the many difficult issues raised*', which included some straw polling of opinion.

This group was described as being made up of some with strongly held traditional views that same-sex partnerships '*always fall short of God's plan for people's lives*'. Another saw no reason why the Church should not '*get on and catch up with where society is on this*'. Then there were several who weren't quite sure what to think, some of whom valued the '*strong traditional Christian influence*' they had grown up with but recognised that what they were previously taught '*may need re-evaluation if the Church is to be engaged with issues that society finds so important*'.

By the end of the course, all agreed LLF helped them to listen to the experiences of others by way of the *'short story films'* and all recognised that some people are same-sex attracted and some have *'a sense of unease about their gender, perceiving a mismatch between their biological sex and their gender identity'*.

The straw poll (conducted with care so no vote influenced another) confirmed the range of perspectives. On whether *'the Church of England should maintain its current doctrinal position'*: two agreed definitely, two were undecided or unsure, one disagreed on balance and one definitely disagreed.

The group noted there had been *'a high degree of honesty and openness among us, not just in discussing "issues", but also in acknowledging our own feelings and reactions. This, we felt, has drawn us closer together as a group.'*

Humility and obedience

A letter from the PCC of a participating church expressed thanks for the work being done to coordinate feedback, adding they were *'praying for godly wisdom in the coming months'* for the Next Steps Group.

Engaging with LLF in a variety of ways led the church to be *'particularly struck by God's creation of us as those made in His image'* and that *'each person is worthy of dignity and loving concern even when we disagree'*. It was *'helpful and humbling'* to discuss where *'we may need to repent'* of failure to do so.

In the course of discussion, they recognised that the church had *'bought into our culture's idolisation of romantic relationships and marriage rather than upholding the goodness and all-sufficiency of a relationship with Jesus.'* As a church family, LLF helped them reflect on the love and welcome they wanted to get better at offering to all.

While acknowledging the especially personal nature of the LLF material and the pain that can be caused when it is discussed at a national level, the PCC's views were summarised beginning with the view that *'growing in Christ means a call for all of us to obey the Bible's sexual ethic'* and that appearing *'counter-cultural and radical'* should be expected in a *'fallen world'*.

As a PCC, they were not persuaded that LLF material warrants *'a revision to received apostolic teaching.'* *'We believe God's design revealed in Scripture is a good and better way than the directions our culture is embracing.'* Though the video material was compelling, they were concerned about the way the material was presented as an authority *'alongside, if not over and above, the biblical and apostolic testimony.'* In summary, they desired no change in doctrine or practice in the Church of England and would need to work out the practical implications if change were to occur.

However, they expressed the desire to be a church who *'help, love and support those who live with issues raised by LLF'* and stand with those who, in costly obedience, seek to *'live out the God-given pattern of gender and sexuality'* so would find a change in doctrine undermining and unsettling.

Topics that cause controversy

Seven participants completed the five course sessions and reflected back their surprise at the Church of England's *'harsh'* official position on sexuality for those in ministry which *'came as an unwelcome shock'* to them; the gap between reality in terms of practice and belief and the official line is *'huge and unsustainable'*.

For some in the group, the pain felt by those who have been *'excluded and mistreated by the church or in the name of Jesus'* was the most powerful aspect of the course. This pain was *'echoed'* by group members who were female, had LGBTQI relatives or were LGBTQI themselves.

Regarding the format of the course, they found the story films the most *'impactful'*. The chronological order of material presented in sessions provoked debate on whether the LLF process was thought to be suggesting *'experience interprets scripture and tradition'* or *'scripture and tradition interpret experience'* with the group favouring the former. Some were uncomfortable with the *'light'* style adopted by the presenters for such a weighty subject matter.

Discussion touched on the ways in which traditional teaching about sex before marriage had condemned unmarried mothers and been *'used to justify babies being removed from'* them. In addition, prioritising the sanctity of marriage can sometimes be in danger of downplaying *'women's safety and wellbeing when those marriages are abusive.'*

In summary, the course was *'thought-provoking and challenging'* although it underlined the time and energy that the Church spends discussing sexuality and how out of touch it must make the Church appear. Didn't Jesus spend more time teaching on the world's unhealthy relationship with money *'and the poverty that results from it'?*

The group recognised - being largely liberal in outlook - they were not a very diverse group although they felt *'it's a very big ask to expect people with very widely differing perspectives and beliefs ... to sit down and listen respectfully ... a lot of preparatory work would have been needed ...'*

Traditional teaching on same-sex relationships and the transgender debate

A PCC of a church approved feedback to the LLF Next Steps Group in the form of numbered statements of belief. Compiled by their deanery synod representatives, they first acknowledged the pastoral aspect as it is *'painful and difficult'* for many *'of all shades of opinion'* in the Church of England and the wider Anglican Communion when these matters are discussed.

The PCC weren't clear on what *kind* of feedback was being asked for so their response addressed the issue of same-sex marriage assuming this was why the LLF materials had been produced. They believed the Church's *'current doctrinal position reflects biblical teaching'* and thus the Church should not change its position *'or adopt policies or practices that are inconsistent with it'*.

With this, they expressed the belief that the Bible's teaching is also clear about abstinence outside marriage for those in opposite-sex relationships. However, in the course of the Church's emphasis *'on families comprising of a married couple and children'*, this has had negative effects including *'resulting in those who are single feeling excluded'*.

They outlined the need for repentance as *'all have rejected God and his requirements and need to repent and turn back to God.'* The church is made up of sinners so there is *'no ground for any Christian to reject another'* and *'we should seek to help one another in our struggles'* by showing *'forgiveness, love and sensitivity'* in obeying God's commands.

In addition, this church were very concerned about the transgender debate. They believed that *'the Bible indicates that humans are created as either male or female'* and *'the concept of gender fluidity is not in accordance with its teaching'*. Yet pastoral sensitivity was needed for those affected by this due to the pain experienced in gender dysphoria.

Their greatest concern were the young people who - while vulnerable *'as they grow up'* - are being led to believe they can choose their gender. The church should speak out against the dangers of these young people taking *'decisions that could impact the rest of their lives'*.

Optimistic but with a note of scepticism

A group of both laity and clergy from three team churches met for evening sessions to study the LLF course. Others in their churches engaged independently with LLF resources and a modest amount of feedback was collected from all who engaged.

Most respondents indicated that they were *'familiar with different Christian views on the topics under discussion'* although LLF had enabled them to be more aware of the complexities. One person fed back their struggle to *'relate respectfully to others with conservative views'* and believed the course was *'pre-determined toward a retention of conservative teaching in the church.'*

While most found the course discussion helpful for active participation and engagement in a safe space with respectful listening, another found the discussions frustrating. Clergy on the course reported that it had been *'a good conversation starter for a number of people who had never considered the issues raised by LLF'*.

Views on the difference it will make to the local and national church were mixed. One said *'the course pussy-footed around the controversial issues'* and didn't tackle why the Church has been so slow in making progress in this area. Others fed back *'Grass roots change is needed to achieve change in central decision making'* and *'I don't hold out great hope for changes in the national church'*. This was balanced with someone else's comment, *'I hope that it will make us a more inclusive national church and that it will help us learn how to disagree more bravely and kindly.'*

While the group seemed largely *'optimistic for LLF raising awareness and deepening understanding, this was tinged with a note of scepticism.'* It was likened to *Issues in Human Sexuality* for mistakenly trying to do everything possible to please *'hardliners'*. Concerns were also expressed that only those who were already *'liberal'* in outlook would be likely to engage.

Most who took part reported back that *'they had shared what they had learned with others.'* These were mostly fellow churchgoers *'but also their partners'*. One of the clergy shared what they had learned with a few people – locally and further afield – who were *'interested in talking [about] gender and sexuality with an inclusive vicar.'*

A response from an urban estate church

A church in a parish *'characterised by financial, educational and health poverty'* shared their experience of engaging with the LLF material. Describing themselves as *'multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, multi-generational and multi-ability'*, they introduced themselves as having *'a spirit of openness to all'*.

The vicar, with backing from the PCC, began with *'a preaching series on the pastoral principles'*. As a result, some congregation members commented that they could now *'voice their support'* for change. Those who were unsure about same-sex marriage *'remained challenged'* but felt it might be *'a generational issue for them'*.

'A couple of months later a listening exercise was offered on a Saturday morning.' Five of the film resources were played to represent *'different types of story'*. After each one, a time of silence was kept and everyone present was invited to *'share one single word as a response'*. This they described as three-way listening – listening to the experience of those in the films, to God and to one another.

To conclude, they shared their responses to the questions *'What is the Spirit saying to the church?'* and *'What does the church want to say in response to the consultation?'* From this engagement, the majority recognised that *'compassion and love should always be chosen over fear and judgmentalism'*.

Looking ahead, their existing spirit of welcome will *'now more naturally extend towards those whose experiences of sexuality and gender are different to our own'*. The majority expressed a wish to *'offer God's blessing on same-sex relationships including marriage'*, but as a church they did not feel it was right to take a *'vote'* at this stage because they *'seek to move together as a community and try not to bring things to a division on any issue'*.

Surprise at the level of openness and interest

A member of the clergy facilitated two groups within their church and offered *'summary points'* on what had been discussed in both. Participants expressed *'a strong unanimous view that the church should be more compassionate about blessing people who remarry'* and that *'this should be seen as an opportunity for grace and forgiveness'*.

Regarding *'gay relationships'*, all who engaged in the course *'felt they had moved in their thinking'*. *'Almost all felt'* gay people should be able to get married, although the course helped them understand *'the complexities'* involved. *'They thought clergy should be able to have a conscience clause but should be obliged to signpost people to a church that would be willing to marry them.'*

There was *'a strong feeling'* that delaying action would *'further disenfranchise younger church members'*. Almost all agreed that *'being silent on the matter isn't right or fair'*. They discussed the possible tensions arising if a priest were more conservative than their congregation; care would be needed in enabling members to have a voice.

Extra time was given to learning about trans people as there were different perspectives in the group on *'whether when someone is young their identities are fixed or fluid'*. This included a *'long discussion about baptism and other rites of marking a person's transition'* as part of welcoming them into the church.

The leader was *'surprised by how open the parish was ... in understanding different theological perspectives around these issues'*. They described their own *'complete turn'* in realising *'for too long people in the LGBTQI+ community have been made to feel like second-class citizens ... there has been less expectation that they can be called or used by God and that is wrong ... it is shameful how [gay clergy] are singled out and this needs urgent addressing and apology.'*

The most important thing

The leader of a church youth group submitted a response about the group's engagement with the LLF Course. This group of 11–18 year olds knew each other and their leaders well: they had been meeting fortnightly for over four years.

The leader described the sessions as *'one of the most engaging series of themed studies we have embarked upon as a group [...] The story films provided a way into the discussions and could be recalled in detail several weeks later. The group were frequently shocked by stories of individuals having being excluded, rejected or side-lined by a church when a particular relationship or sexuality had been disclosed, which has not been their experience in this church in which they have grown up, at school or at home.'*

The young people *'were well-versed with the language and definitions of sexuality and gender identity and had a good understanding of societal issues of inclusion, prejudice and abuse. Most had direct experience of knowing someone who was gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender from school or, in two cases, in their own immediate family'*. Key themes that emerged from the group's discussions were equality, inclusion, justice and Christian love for all. The young people described a person's relationship with Jesus as *'the most defining feature of our identity as Christians'*.

When invited to write an open letter to the church in response to their learning, one young person wrote, *'please be welcoming and gentle to our new congregation and be respectful to anyone who has their own life path. Pray for their relationship with God and don't judge anyone by their gender / sexuality [...] the most important thing in our lives is the relationships we and those around us have with God. Help us have humility, gentleness when it comes to other relationships that aren't our own'*.

Responses from individuals who engaged with the LLF resources

Initial data from 114 responses

From where did responses come?

Diocese	No. of responses	Diocese	No. of responses	Diocese	No. of responses
Bath and Wells	1	Exeter	2	Oxford	1
Birmingham	1	Gloucester	1	Rochester	21
Bristol	1	Guildford	1	Salisbury	1
Canterbury	1	Hereford	3	Southwark	3
Chelmsford	1	Leeds	3	Southwell & Nottingham	1
Chester	4	London	6	Winchester	2
Ely	2	Manchester	3	Worcester	1
Europe	1	Norwich	1	Not specified	52

In what format did individuals present their feedback?

Type of submission	No. of responses	Type of submission	No. of responses
Short summary report or response	51	Book review or course materials review	2
Collated feedback under course booklet questions	25	Bespoke survey questions	2
Letter to Next Steps Group, LLF Advocate or bishop	20	Prophetic vision	1
Medium length report or response	12	Long response	1

As in the previous section, where types are defined by length, 'short' was deemed to be anything up to 1500 words and 'medium' between 1500 and 3000 words. We also acknowledge with grateful thanks the considerable work that went into writing the detailed, considered and helpful longer responses including the two very thoughtful book reviews.

Status and gender of those who submitted responses

Status	No. of responses
Clergy	12
Lay (including licensed)	13
Not specified	89

Gender	No. of responses
Male	44
Female	17
Mixed e.g. married couple	5
Not specified	48

Viewpoints made explicit in responses

Across the 114 individuals who engaged with the course, there were more submissions explicitly stating they **were not in favour of change** to the Church's current teaching. Once again, those not in favour of changes to the Church's current teaching often included comments such as '*[LLF] helped me to understand more fully the problems which LGBT+ people face on a daily basis and the prejudice which some face in their local churches.*'

There were slightly fewer submissions (a difference of seven) explicitly stating they **were in favour of change** to the Church's current teaching and a minority acknowledged they still held mixed views. As indicated above, 25 submissions used the course booklet questions as a framework; these questions focused more on what participants felt they had learned during the course and did not explicitly ask for viewpoints on changes to the Church's current teaching.

Just over a quarter of the responses commented that they valued or enjoyed the course. More responses identified topics that should not have been included or topics that were left out when they should have been included. Here are a sample:

'I didn't feel the transgender situation was explored in enough depth.'

'I have one criticism: In the final session, that heterosexual were lovely and had a very happy marriage with none of the struggles the other couples had ...

As a 76 year old Christian who has been married for 53 years and has worked in the community, I know this is not the case. All relationships struggle at times and have to be worked at.'

'The key message should be that sex without love and consent and infidelity are wrong. That would not only cover adultery but also an assortment of abusive situations e.g. the availability of pornography 24/7, children and young people being bullied into sexting and becoming sexually active at an increasingly younger age and domestic abuse cases which can include rape and sexual abuse within marriage.'

'LLF says nothing about its Christology.'

'I do think that LLF pays too little attention to the possibility of having close relationships which are not sexual.'

'We must be clear that celibacy and singleness are a specific and personal calling from God it is not something to be imposed on anyone: to do so is abusive.'

'We also need ... to be sensitive to women who may feel threatened by the presence of trans-women. We ... need to be careful when thinking about toilet facilities and single sex groups, especially when these are seen as "safe places" for women or for men.'

'In my view we cannot have mutually respectful LLF discussions when ... some of us are asking the Government to introduce legislation which may criminalise others of us who are supporting persons distressed by aspects of their sexuality. That support may include seeing whether the person can move away from an unwanted same-sex attraction if they freely wish to explore this.'

' ... the section on Acts 15 (the panel on pp 321-323) risked missing crucial points. This is most unfortunate as this passage is the clearest parallel in the New Testament to the situation we face ... in Acts 15, we see two key principles emerging – (1) providing for the needs of people by not laying unnecessary burdens on them, and (2) being in step with what God is doing.'

'Oddly, for me the one thing I came away wanting to think about more was the idea of Christian marriage, which wasn't touched on much in the course.'

There were many responses expressing frustration, disappointment or hurt in or by the course, or some aspect of it. Comments included:

'I am very disappointed however in how LLF handles the subject of cross dressing.'

'The course was excellent tho' obviously designed to persuade us all to accept the bishops' views on LGBT issues.'

'My feeling is that the course was simply trying to persuade people that no firm conclusion can be reached on many issues of human sexuality and therefore we should all just agree to differ and remain united. I don't believe this is the case.'

'However, I worry greatly about a theological methodology that does hermeneutics by public consultation or determines doctrine by popular consent.'

'In fact, I wish we had been given more time, and the process had been extended further. The pandemic dominated everything for most of the time that the LLF process was going on, and it has been very hard to find time to focus on LLF.'

'...totally missing was any presentation of the difficulties and discrimination such people have experienced in the past and may still be experiencing in our current culture.'

'The course condenses complex theological and contextual issues into a time frame which does not permit proper exploration. This was very frustrating.'

'A particularly troubling element of the material was the oft repeated assertion that we should not put too much trust in scientific evidence and research, whereas (our preferred interpretation of) the Bible may be regarded as reliable, even infallible by some. This potentially sounds rather cultish, and whilst scientific research and consensus naturally develops and evolves it is still dangerous to dismiss it out of hand; it also leaves the church looking very narrow minded and out of touch (or worse) in the eyes of those we need to reach.'

'Why are we tying ourselves in knots over problems of identity, sexuality and gender when the Jesus of the gospels is more concerned with how we use our power and issues of justice, poverty, our approach to those in society...?'

'... the original word(s) that in our Bibles have been rendered as the English word 'marriage' cannot simply be transposed to our modern understanding of it, which is vastly different to what it was even a few hundred years ago, never mind in the NT, even more so in OT times! Instead we need to step back and understand the overarching principles in Scripture, which is universally critical of abusive relationships and oppression of the powerless and marginalised, a lesson still highly relevant today.'

'I have been very concerned that the traditional views expressed to me privately concerning same-sex blessings/marriage have been rarely heard at the meetings. I have spoken up myself at the meetings and it was a very stressful experience. ... People ... feel reluctant, or just plain scared, to express [traditional views] publicly, for fear of what others may think of them.'

'Many of us who are married would find it upsetting if marriage was reduced simply to the "solemnisation of a covenantal relationship". Indeed, the sacramental aspects of marriage within other denominations are made clear in LLF and it is a bold church that removes marriage from its deservedly lofty position.'

Illustrative case studies

Hurt on both sides

One person submitted anonymous feedback having attended the course with a deanery group on Zoom. They thought the course was covering a 'tough subject' but that it had been 'framed helpfully' by the materials to 'invite discussion' rather than attempt 'to give a definitive view'. They noted the Church of England already permits certain things that many feel are 'contrary to what the Bible encourages us to believe', for example, civil partnerships are allowed for same-sex attracted clergy couples.

They raised concerns that the course suggested 'there is an even split of opinion' in the Church. Rather than giving 'the impression ... that the church is equally divided', it should have indicated that scholars and clergy who take a liberal view are 'a small number.'

Furthermore, they noted the course did not 'spend any time on the texts in the Bible which might seem to challenge some of the behaviour being spoken of by some in the videos'. They expected these 'main texts' would have been included with 'the range of interpretations' presented. Instead, other passages of scripture were used and often quoted 'out of context'. This person was left with the feeling that the course was designed to not only 'discuss the issues but to push the liberal view'.

Concern should be given to 'the hurt experienced by the LGBTQ community' and there should be repentance of wrongdoing where 'unfeeling attitudes' have led to anyone feeling 'alienated'. But added to this, there are those who are also hurting because the Church is 'already countenancing and endorsing behaviour which some believe the Bible is against.'

The book, they thought, presented the material in a better way than the course. They noted their 'sadness' that the course seemed to conflate 'the doctrinal view of the church and the attitude to outsiders to the church community.' Whatever views are held of the former, all must be welcomed and invited to hear the 'good news and come to faith in Jesus.'

However, 'if the church changes its stance on who it will marry and what behaviour it blesses ... it will stray from Bible teaching and lose many good people who seek in good conscience to follow God and not the world.'

Scripture, reason, tradition and experience

One member of the clergy reported how helpful the course had been in their church context for raising important and controversial matters rarely discussed. The pastoral principles *'helped us pay careful attention'* to how they were discussed and the videos were helpful for offering *'a wide range of life experiences and views on human sexuality and identity'*, thus preventing *'us from forming caricatures of people with whom we might disagree'*.

They offered a detailed response under the headings of *'scripture, reason and tradition'* - as the way Anglicans have historically made decisions about faith and how to live - including comments on *'human experience'* which the LLF course acknowledges as an additional consideration.

Under scripture, they outlined concerns that *'the contested Bible passages, listed on page 48 of the booklet, were not discussed'*. In their view, while acknowledging some would say these passages only apply to abusive or predatory relationships, there was *'nothing in the Bible itself to suggest an alternative reading for these texts is legitimate.'* Also, what of *'God's ultimate plan for marriage as a picture of his relationship with the church'* if a non-traditional view of marriage is held?

Under reason, the course was patchy, needing more input on current research into *'genetic or environmental causes of homosexual orientation and gender identity.'* Under tradition, it was noted there *'was almost nothing on how Christians down the ages have thought about gay relationships and how they responded to those in them'*.

They felt the course drew heavily on *'experience'* and the videos were *'heart-wrenching and emotionally charged.'* However, because of the way they were presented, it was *'easy for experience to trump scripture, reason and tradition as the supreme source of authority'*.

By the end of the course, participants concluded that they *'had covered so many issues that it is impossible to lump them together'*. Concerning the blessing of a gay relationship or marrying a gay couple, the person wrote *'this would contradict the Bible's teaching ... and I would not be able to perform or allow either'*.

However, they wanted their local church to be known for its love in welcoming anyone. Following the example of Jesus in his encounter with the woman at the well in John 4, they could talk about relationships without anyone feeling rejected and outlined practical *'commitments'* to help them do this.

Learning to reconcile holiness and compassion

A course participant in their *'ninth decade'* submitted a response summarising their learning.

They wrote: *'God's ways are not our ways'* before noting that *'however much I think I am right in my understanding of the Bible and LLF topics'*, the course brought to light the *'many graduations in such understanding'* within church that *'we frequently gloss over'*. This includes those who have taught *'from the front'* over the last 20 years. *'We have assumed a uniformity of view which is rarely defined or discussed.'*

They described the concept of 'identity' as being 'new to me, perhaps because I don't use social media much and watch quite a narrow range of TV'. Despite being a difficult concept, they appreciated the opportunity to learn. They felt the course had been important for defining the word 'marriage' more precisely, compared with other types of partnership. They also felt it was important to understand what 'authority of Scripture' meant, and wished that the course had dealt with Bible passages on gender, sex or marriage in a more direct way.

In response to the question 'How has this course affected your life and that of my church?', they noted, 'It is impossible and much too soon to say. It left me quite anxious and confused.' They wrote that they were 'hopeful but not optimistic' that the course topics will continue to be discussed more openly and that 'we will look again in this spirit at our Bibles and discover how to interpret it just as Jesus interpreted his Scriptures.'

Hopefully, a way will be found to reconcile the Bible's 'clear, disturbing morality and calls to holiness' with 'Jesus' love and compassion for the lost and outcast'.

What goes on behind closed doors

One independent submission opened with reflections on the word 'acceptance' being better than 'tolerance', but with the word still feeling like it is a concession when used in LGBTQ discussions. 'It implies something given from a position of superiority by a supposed majority that feels good by showing understanding and magnanimity towards a supposedly inferior minority.'

People are drawn to the idea that the majority is intrinsically better, and they feel safer if they think they are connected to a larger number of people, regardless of whether the majority is defined by something good or not. 'When it comes to sexuality, we believe that "straight" people represent a majority therefore they must be right/better/superior/normal' but this is a 'flawed concept'. What is labelled as 'normal', doesn't involve us knowing what happens 'behind closed doors'.

So-called 'normal' couples never have to 'justify themselves' and yet the realities of being in an opposite-sex couple is not as simple as sometimes assumed. One friend they knew 'believed she loved and married a man ... but discovered ten years later – and after having two children – that she had never experienced with her husband what love and sexual fulfilment ... really meant. She found this in a relationship with another married woman – a relationship which was accepted by both husbands and is still ongoing'.

Another friend had recently gone through a divorce having been unhappy in her marriage for three decades. A male friend is married but bisexual or possibly homosexual. Yet alongside this, 'the supposed minority' of LGBTQ people are 'seen and treated and bullied and even persecuted'.

They concluded with two thoughts. Firstly, because of the time in which the Old Testament was written, 'we no longer accept certain errors or some customs it describes: the sun turning around the earth, stoning, slaves, men with many wives' but some still use certain verses to back up arguments around sexuality. When it comes to the New Testament, 'where does Jesus stand' on homosexuality?

Secondly, where some insist *'sexual orientation is a choice'*, this is *'due to ignorance and ultimately a lack of respect for every person's sexual identity and orientation, which are granted to us ... by God.'* If God is love, does he really want those whose sexual identity and orientation are judged by *'ill-informed ... arrogant'* viewpoints to be miserable, even to the point of suicide?

Spaces for all to flourish

A teenager offered their feedback after their family used LLF as *'an intense Holy Week course'* in the Easter holidays. Using the questions at the back of the course booklet as a framework, they wrote that they had learned about *'different views'* in the Church and *'loved seeing the wide diversity of LGBTQ+ Christians'* reflected because *'we are often forgotten about'* in these debates *'as if we are rare and outsiders'*.

They thought it was important to *'focus on the Bible'*, but also to *'look at the Church in the wider world'* and the ways in which Christians can support and accept those outside the Church, *'not in order to convert'* but to make the world a better place.

They were encouraged that LLF used the *'right terminology and definitions of different identities, trying not to "other" people who we see as different'*. However, they found *'the video session about marriage challenging'* because it seemed to imply the rules about marriage *'weren't going to change any time soon, because of Bible passages saying that marriage is between a man and a woman'*.

Rather than deny Christian marriage to LGBTQ+ couples, *'the Church of England should change Canon Law'* so that any couple *'regardless of gender, can get married'*. Looking to the future, they expressed their sadness at the thought that marriage in church felt like an unrealistic dream for them *'as a queer person'*.

In response to the question *'What do you hear God saying to the Church?'*, they believed the Church should *'start to undo the historic oppression that Christianity has been responsible for'*. Unity should not be valued above the lives of marginalised people. Everyone should have spaces *'to flourish and be their true selves without fear of hatred'*.

Feeling bruised and aware the world is watching

Setting out some thoughts as someone who experiences same-sex attraction *'and who is and has always been committed to the Biblical view of sex and marriage'*, one respondent asked for a careful framing of the ongoing discussion.

This debate is *'invariably bruising for people like me'* and sometimes listening to the debate between conservatives and liberals *'makes me feel like the child of parents who are heading to a bitter divorce, and where neither of them wants custody of the children.'*

Added to this, the Church can be *'dangerously unaware of how the secular world sees us.'* Where in society all expressions of love are seen as valid, if the Church's automatic response in debate is to refer to doctrine, *'our conversations will be short, angry and spiritually ineffective.'*

The response explores the way the different points of view *'warn darkly that the time is coming when we may have to decide to separate ourselves from the Church of England, as North American Anglican Conservatives have already done from the Episcopal Church.'* But if conservative evangelicals felt they had to leave the Church of England, *'what would that mean for how we see people like me? Why is my sexuality the thing that must divide the church?'*

As someone committed to celibacy as the proper response to Scripture, *'I am also often very, very unhappy, indescribably lonely, and in constant, deep fear of what those who sit next to me at church would think if they knew.'* Discussions focus on who one has sex with so it feels as though *'I am held to account for something I have never done'*. And there is a *'strange paradox'* that marriage is held out as a *'beautiful metaphor'* for Christ and his Church and yet some are told they *'must not experience that wonderful, beautiful, celebrated thing'* with a life-partner.

So doctrine must not be spoken of first as then *'we will always be seen as the people who hate.'* The response includes practical advice for how conservative evangelical churches might move forward, to *'think, speak and act pastorally, and let that be seen long, long before we speak of doctrine.'*

Suggested steps towards change

One member of the clergy wrote to *'put on record a number of proposals about the constructive steps which might be taken'* to *'embrace the "radical Christian inclusion"'* hoped for through the LLF learning process.

They expressed concern that *Issues in Human Sexuality* was *'no longer fit for purpose in expressing the mind of the Church'*. As a study document, it was never *'approved'* as the Church's teaching by General Synod and Synod members had recently *'invited the House of Bishops to reflect on the fact that it alludes positively to forms of conversion therapy for bisexual people'* which is not *'consonant with General Synod's express decision to reject conversion therapy'*.

Issues in Human Sexuality (1991) was *'drafted before the development of civil partnerships and equal marriage'* and *'casuistical interpretations of this text ... have not served to create healthy and open discussions around sexuality and ministry'*. In their view, *'it has generated a culture of fear and anxiety for LGBTQ+ clergy and lay ministers. We need to create greater honesty and openness around issues of relationships, loneliness, trust and integrity in ministry. We also need to remember that prurience has never been a Christian value.'*

They went on to write they believed in equal marriage not because they were *'a liberal'* but because they *'believe that faithfulness and commitment matter'*. On the assumption that developments towards equal marriage might *'proceed in the same vein'* as the *'gentle, if untidy, pastoral pragmatism'* adopted to address divorce and remarriage in the Church, they suggested two things. Firstly, *'a revised liturgy for the Dedication of a Civil Marriage'* should be developed to recognise *'that Civil Marriage means equal marriage'*. Secondly, conscience clauses should be introduced for ministers and parishes *'who might object to equal marriage'*.

LGBTQ friends and family members

An 83-year-old submitted their feedback having taken part in the course with fellow group members who were *'most if not all ... pro LGBTQ'*.

This participant indicated that they had not learned much that was new to them, although it did confirm their *'view that unfortunately the LGBTQ community is still, in 2022, very badly discriminated against by the Church of England.'*

They wrote, *'If the church really wants to Live in Love and Faith it has to change the current situation and become completely all inclusive, which it certainly is not at the moment'* before expressing their hope that *'change could happen in the near future'*.

Citing examples of the changes needed, they described gay clergy – who can only enter into a civil partnership providing it is celibate – as being only *'partially accepted'*. Among the laity, they wrote that it isn't right when gay people wish to offer service but *'have been refused because of their sexuality'*. *'I believe that everyone should be accepted for who they are and not be penalised and punished for the way God has made them.'*

Growing up, they had gay friends and family members who were gay. They also had *'one sadly deceased transsexual'* in the family so they consider themselves *'qualified to express'* their feelings.

'I have been a Christian for as long as I can remember and try to live my life true to my faith. I have lived and worked in many different countries, returning to live in England fifteen years ago.'

For the last few years, they served as a church warden *'delighting in the fact'* that their church is inclusive which is one of the main reasons they chose to worship where they do. They signed off with a request that those making decisions *'prayerfully consider the necessary changes in order for us to truly be able to Live in Love and Faith.'*

Living in fear

A course leader who is themselves gay shared their experience of running a course on Zoom for their parishes.

They wrote *'After 45 years in our church I no longer find our church a "safe place"'* and explained that the course had *'brought out into the open the few, including our priest'* who think *'I am sinful and will be judged by God for being gay.'*

They explained they had only been in one relationship throughout their life and they had been with their partner for 18 years. The majority of their church fully supported them, but having the clergy and a few others hold an extreme view was unnerving. In light of this, they wondered where they could go for clerical support. *'I still feel safe in the Lord's care, but do not feel safe in our church.'*

After leading one course session, *'I was so traumatised that I cried all night and took a few days to recover. I still well-up when I talk to people about it.'* They expressed some embarrassment in letting these comments get to them, but added *'I now realise how deep hurt has been in my life.'*

'It's not all bad news as I have had many lovely emails, talks and letters from supporters on the course. But how can I now listen to sermons in our church on what I thought was a loving God but am now being told is a God who is angry with me and my whole life is sinful?'

They described their faith in a loving God as being stronger than their hate and so they will stay in church and fight their 'corner'. They reflected on the strangeness and sadness of feeling as though they had been 'naively "living in love and faith"' all these years but, after the experience of the course, are now living in fear.

How can the Church retain integrity if it changes its mind?

One course participant submitted feedback, asking for written confirmation that their thoughts and views would be taken into consideration.

They enjoyed the first session of the course, but in the second session, *'The issue of single gender marriages was touched upon and the other three members of my group were in favour, one enthusiastically so.'* One of the priests present in the session went so far as to say, were they 'permitted to', they would 'be relaxed in marrying couples of the same gender.' The session left them *'feeling distressed to the extent I experienced a restless night.'*

They wrote, *'I have to rely on Scripture for my beliefs – not human opinions, liberal theologians or modern philosophers. To do otherwise would be culture driving the Church whereas it is my contention the Church should and must drive culture.'* before adding *'My own understanding of scripture is that God intended all sexual acts to be within heterosexual marriage.'*

However, they stressed the need to invite, welcome and love those who are *'bisexual, homosexual, lesbians and those transitioning into our Christian communities'* but, when appropriate, gently explain it is not God's intention or plan for them.

They concluded with two further comments. Firstly, *'For many, many generations the Church of England has taught that marriage is only between a man and a woman. How will it be possible for the Church to now change its mind and yet retain authority, integrity and goodwill of those both within but more especially outside the Church of England?'*

Secondly, *'should the Church of England start marrying people of the same gender'*, it will need to also answer the question of how Christians can love one another when they *'profoundly disagree.'* Currently, they would find it *'very difficult, perhaps even impossible, to be part of a Church led by a minister prepared to marry people of the same gender.'*

Even when we disagree, we must bless one another

A course participant who read the LLF book and took part in a pilot group on Zoom provided the following feedback as an individual.

They described their group as *'a real blessing to meet with'* but reflected it was *'a shame ... that the group was quite uniform in its outlook'*. All hoped *'that something might change in the Church of England's stance on LGBT+ issues'* and realised this meant they missed the opportunity to *'listen to and discuss with those who might have a more conservative outlook'*.

They expressed their appreciation to those who compiled the LLF resources for *'such an amazing and wonderful set of material'*, and asked for thanks to be passed onto those who took part in the *'story films'* which were *'truly wonderful'*. They commented that there was a *'wealth of material'* and that meetings would have needed to be longer if there were diverse viewpoints in the group.

They recollected that – at the beginning of the course – it was hard to see how unity could be achieved when *'the two sides of the debate seem so entrenched and unmoving'*. However, by the end of the course, the meditation on John 17 struck them *'quite forcefully (and unusually)'*, inspiring them to write a set of statements on how a path towards unity may be forged.

They began with *'All who know God and believe in Jesus are in Christ ... are my sisters and brothers'* followed by *'We all should devote ourselves to sanctification by truth: to have our thoughts and desires refined and purified in the fire of the love of God, through the Spirit at work in us, and in the community of those in Christ.'* This they described as a costly calling, lasting *'a lifetime'* and requiring that *'we speak and listen profoundly to each other.'*

Then comes acceptance and *'trust that our sisters and brothers in Christ are likewise striving to be sanctified by truth'* and that *'we offer our blessings upon the paths that they discern for themselves'* even when there is profound disagreement.

For *'How do I know that I am right? Do I not have sins enough of my own to occupy me, instead of looking to the sins of the other?'* To withhold blessing is to judge the other, and say *'I am right and they are wrong.'* But *'we must bless'* despite disagreement.

Responses from churches which did not appear to engage with LLF

Initial data from 22 responses

From where did responses come?

Diocese	No. of responses	Diocese	No. of responses	Diocese	No. of responses
Birmingham	1	London	4	Sheffield	1
Chester	1	Peterborough	12	Southwark	1
Lichfield	1	Rochester	1		

11 responses came from individuals in the same church in Peterborough diocese who chose to engage with their own bespoke course material. This means responses came from 11 churches.

In what format did they present their group feedback?

Type of submission	No. of responses
Short summary report or response	15
Letter to Next Steps Group, LLF Advocate or bishop	5
Medium length report or response	1
PCC statement voting for no change	1

Status and gender of those who submitted responses on behalf of groups or churches

Status	No. of responses	Gender	No. of responses
Clergy	5	Male	5
Lay (including licensed)	4	Female	6
PCC	6	Not specified or submitted by more than one person	11
Not specified	7		

Viewpoints made explicit in responses

Within the 22 submissions in this category of responses from churches who showed no evidence of having engaged with the course, the overwhelming majority wrote to express they **were not in favour of changes** to the Church's current teaching.

A small number **were in favour of change** to the Church's current teaching and most of these identified themselves as part of the Inclusive Church network or working toward it.

With no evidence of engagement with the LLF materials, the following topics are offered as examples of viewpoints that were felt to be missing from the wider LLF debate (rather than the course itself):

'How many 'honourably' married couples can say they are without sexual sin in this case? Thus it is incumbent on each and every Christian to recognise the seriousness of all sexual sin both physical and mental. Every Christian (and by implication their church) must realise the significance of their own sin before they can even think of acting against another's sin (Matt 7:3-5).'

'[Those who experience same-sex attraction but are committed to abiding by the historic teaching of the church] are wonderfully valuable children of God who are acutely vulnerable at this time.'

Likewise, here are some of the comments expressing frustration, disappointment or hurt by the wider LLF conversation:

'...by stating that they didn't want feedback albeit initially if we did not agree to commit to the entire course of being 'taught' how to consider different views is also very demeaning and condescending as it makes the assumption that we do not already know how to do that.'

'...the very word inclusion is still passive aggressive. It locates power with the hetero-normative majority. "We are terribly reasonable, right on and to be commended for including you. The power and dignity remains with us." It is impossible to measure the energy this must suck out of the lives of those we "include." Tolerance is not a Christian virtue. It is delayed conflict. It is passive aggressive. We seek grace, not tolerance.'

'Personally, I was disgusted by some of the ways that people have publicly debated this issue on social media and the lack of discipline on this.'

'Part of my impatience with the LLF process is this endless "listening", as if Mavis in Tunstall is suddenly going to come up with some sparkling new insight that provides an easy way forward.'

Illustrative case studies

Costly discipleship but deep joy

A letter from the PCC and clergy of a church wrote in to express their concerns over the LLF course. Aware that *'many others'* were *'campaigning strongly'* on the process, they felt it was *'particularly important to write given the number of same-sex attracted Christians'* in their church. *'It is our duty to ensure their voices are heard and that they are supported.'*

They wrote that LLF is making it *'harder'* for their church to *'play a full part in the life of the diocese.'* They worried over the course's working assumptions that the Bible *'is not our ultimate authority, or that the teaching of the Bible is not clear in this issue.'* They were also concerned that the course implies Christians are free to hold different opinions on same-sex relationships. The Bible is their *'ultimate authority as Articles VI and XX recognise'* and that the Bible is clear that all sexual activity *'should only take place in marriage and marriage is a life-long union between one man and one woman ... Any attempts to reject or ignore God's pattern for sex and marriage will ... end up causing harm'*.

They wrote of the pastoral implications of this process for those in their church who are same-sex attracted and *'are committed to abide by the historic teaching of the church in spite of the costs.'* They have *'been marginalised in the wider debate'*; LLF felt like a *'betrayal of these people'* in its message that such sacrifice may not be necessary.

'Their voice is almost never heard in the secular press' and yet campaigners within the Church *'either deny their existence or seek to undermine their testimony by painting them as unhealthy and repressed.'* A church member's testimony was included with the letter. They wrote *'I have never felt judged or singled out as being uniquely sinful'* because of same-sex attraction. Church is a *'safe space where I can be open about my struggles and encouraged to be faithful as a disciple of Christ'*. Like the person who found treasure hidden in a field and sold all they had to buy that field (Matthew 13.44), the Christian life is characterised by costly repentance but also deep joy.

Change is coming but at what cost

A letter from a church who had not run the course wrote to explain why. They explained they were an ecumenical partnership with a minority of Anglican members, they had *'been a very publicly inclusive congregation for years'* and most of its members *'would be rather bemused to be invited to discuss the issues raised by LLF'*.

Their church has become known as *'a safe space for LGBT+ people to belong'*. With a number of evangelical churches nearby which *'take a conservative view of same-sex relationships and gender transition'*, their church had become a *'sanctuary'* for some who find it difficult to be their real selves elsewhere.

Yet, it is a painful thing to *'not be allowed to bless'* the marriage of same-sex couples. On one occasion, in offering a thanksgiving service, the leader remembered *'the anxiety of trying to draft a service that stayed within the letter of what was permitted while avoiding hurting them any more than I already had by saying "no" to things they wanted to include.'* It was also hard to see talented LGBT+ people tentatively explore a possible call to ordination but back away in *'horror at the thoughts of what following such a call might mean'* because of being gay.

They wrote that *'the hypocrisy of the church's position is clear for all to see'* citing examples that included use of the *'offensive, out-dated and ignorant Human Issues in Sexuality'* and *'the "don't tell me anything I need to know" that passes for permission but in fact simply feels like maintaining plausible deniability.'*

They are tired of being part of a church where bishops *'hide behind the need to be a focus for unity'* hearing *'carefully worded statements that cannot express the true beliefs of any of you.'* Such a situation seems to perpetuate *'the church's apparent preference for secrecy and obfuscation over openness and honesty.'*

They expressed their frustration that the LLF process involved *'endless "listening" ... It is simply kicking the can down the road.'* Change is coming in the same way it did with women's ordination and the remarriage of divorcees. It is just a matter of when and *'how many casualties – literal and metaphorical – fall along the way'*.

Responses from individuals who did not appear to engage with LLF

Initial data from 38 responses

From where did responses come?

Diocese	No. of responses	Diocese	No. of responses	Diocese	No. of responses
Blackburn	1	Coventry	1	Norwich	1
Bristol	2	Exeter	1	Oxford	1
Chester	1	Hereford	1	Southwark	1
Chichester	1	London	3	Worcester	1
				Not specified	23

In what format did individuals present their feedback?

Type of submission	No. of responses
Short summary report or response	29
Letter to Next Steps Group, LLF Advocate or bishop	7
Article	2

Status and gender of those who submitted responses

Status	No. of responses	Gender	No. of responses
Clergy	4	Male	18
Lay (including licensed)	11	Female	13
Not specified	23	Mixed e.g. married couple	1
		Not specified or submitted by more than one person	6

Viewpoints made explicit in responses

Across the 38 submissions in this category, almost the same number of individuals wrote to say they **were in favour of change** to the Church's current teaching as those who wrote to explain they **were not in favour of change**. As in other categories, those not in favour of change often included phrases such as *'I welcome treating everybody with respect and sharing Jesus's love.'*

Around the wider LLF debate, submissions expressed their concern that the following topics or viewpoints were in danger of being overlooked:

'...the Church has focused so much on [homosexuals], that you have "taken your eye off the ball" regarding other people. We are about 5% and contrary to what is claimed by Africans we do not cause disease or damage society; however, even today 89% of men define themselves as heterosexual and it is heterosexual immorality which damages society.'

'Your initiative is doing great harm to those you pretend to be seeking to help, by encouraging them to ignore the nature of, and need for "holiness" – without which no-one shall see God.'

The fact that such an initiative has even been considered valid is a sad reflection on the state of the CofE.'

'The arguments I have heard and read about so far seem to focus on adults, with little or no consideration given to the needs of children.'

Those frustrated, disappointed or hurt by the wider LLF debate noted:

'There is a mismatch between the legal status of equal marriage in England and the rules of the Established Church which makes the latter rules seem ridiculous.'

'I ask the bishops to find a way forward which represents firm closure, and is not some form of preparation by gradual erosion, enabling a drift towards change in the hope that it will go unnoticed. Absolving personal responsibility by putting specific changes to a vote, however moderated in textual content, will not help and may lead to further division, rather than a return to the desired unity.'

'Right now England is seeing millions forced into absolute poverty by a cost of living crisis they did not cause; we know about the explosion in food banks because there are collections for them in many churches.'

'So called same-sex marriage is not real marriage and gender transition is profoundly not a sacred journey.'

The church above all other institutions should stand for God's truth, and instead of accepting and celebrating the confusion we should be offering a better and more hopeful way with the pastoral care and support desperately needed by such persons.'

Illustrative case studies

The view of a parent new to church

One parent wrote to explain that they and their spouse began attending church after the birth of their son. They decided that they would *'like him to have faith and to have Christian values'*. From the parent's experience of working in an intensive care unit, they had *'seen the comfort faith provides to people in crisis'* and wanted their son to be able to access that comfort also. This they explained as wanting him to *'feel God's love and have the guidance of the Holy Spirit when making important decisions in life.'*

They joined a local church and began to learn about the Christian faith *'through Bible study groups and with senior church members.'* Having not grown up in the church, they are *'learning new things all the time'*. They sense their decision to raise their son in church has been the right one and they are growing in faith as a family.

However, on learning the Church of England does not permit same-sex marriage, they write that they were *'troubled'*. Another reason they joined a church is if something happens to them as parents, they would like their son *'to have a trusted community to rely on for support.'* However, if he is *'somewhere on the LGBTQ+ spectrum as an adult then I do not want to raise him in a community that would not accept him, that would actively deny him a loving marriage, that would imply that he is less deserving of God's love.'*

They will love their *'son regardless of his sexual identity'* and *'welcome any person who loves him and supports him into our family with open arms.'* And they believe God *'will also love him regardless'*. If the Church of England continues to prohibit same-sex marriage, they will not move away from the Christian faith but they may feel they have to *'find a more accepting church in which to raise him.'* This would be a difficult decision to make as they love their church.

They end with assurance of prayer for the decision-making process and the reflection that they cannot be the only parent *'who feels this way'*, and question whether potential new Christian families would be discouraged from joining because of the existing rule.

A handwritten plea to uphold biblical truths

A handwritten letter, addressed to the chair of the Next Steps Group, was submitted by a Church of England member now in their eighties.

They outlined their lifelong involvement in church life from attending Sunday school as a child through to becoming a PCC member and church warden for 35 years. They commented *'In the 1940s and subsequent years, the faith was very poorly taught in many Church of England parishes. Now it seems to me there are more evangelical vicars – including our own.'*

They went on to share their conviction that all true Christians believe that *'the Holy Bible is the unchanging, unchangeable word of God'* and that the Bible is clear in its teaching that marriage is between a man and a woman and that homosexuality is wrong. They write, *'It is bizarre to me that the church is even discussing blessing same-sex relationships and same-sex "marriage" – the Bible is very clear.'*

They go on to outline their suspicions that such changes are a result of some people thinking the *'church needs to be more relevant in today's society'* before adding, *'This is nonsense. The Bible has never been more relevant than now in our broken, fallen world ... Christians are meant to be different, and strive to follow a different, better way of life.'*

They conclude with the comment that many members would *'feel compelled'* to leave if churches were allowed to *'bless same-sex relationships'* and they implore the Next Steps Group to uphold *'the Biblical truths about homosexuality and marriage'*.

Not the red hot button issue some believe it is

A member of the clergy in a *'very deprived estate'* wrote in to say LLF had *'provoked many good conversations across the various viewpoints'*. However, they wished to outline some dynamics in their context not easily captured by the survey.

In their parish, there is a high percentage of UKME (United Kingdom Minority Ethnic) and *'at the last census 50% of the parish did not have UK passports.'* After ten years in the area, they have *'never been asked one question about LGBT issues'* by anyone in the local British white population. They have been asked about *'domestic violence, AA, foodbanks, crime and gangs. Never gay weddings.'* Thus, they wonder whether it feels as though it is a burning question for the Church because those at the top are listening only to *'certain groups'* and are *'quite unaware of what their "base" actually believe.'*

For those in their parish who are UKME, they wrote they *'feel very much ignored, side-lined and even slandered by their own church'*. The way Ghanaians have been attacked about *'their views on LGBT simply looked and sounded like thinly veiled racism and a form of theological colonialism'*. This disrespect felt very much like *"we advanced whites know better than you and you need to be brought into line"* and yet no one is speaking out about this as a concern.

They likened this situation to the 2015 European Referendum where the political establishment were sure they would win because they thought they knew *'their base'*. But unexpectedly, *'they lost the Referendum and then subsequent elections voted in pro-leave governments which eventually produced the "Red Wall" falling.'* Similarly, could there be *'an echo chamber at the top who simply do not know what their base truly believes'* regarding LLF topics?

Speaking to fellow clergy *'in middle class, prosperous and mainly white areas'*, the LLF conversation is *'a real hot button issue'*. However, *'the majority of Britain is not that demographic'*; so many read (for good or ill) the Daily Mirror, The Sun, Daily Mail and Daily Express newspapers. The *'true breadth'* of the national picture may not have been captured in this process. It may end up being of interest to only a small minority and grow in its alienation from other groups. *'It will then face its own "Red Wall" falling.'*

Responses from dioceses and organisations

Responses from dioceses

There were three responses on behalf of dioceses. Two of these were detailed reports of diocesan synod discussion and reporting and all captured varied viewpoints across their dioceses on the LLF topics, process and materials. Comments included:

'This has been a largely positive experience but has also flushed out some tensions (as you'd imagine!).'

'[The conservative evangelicals] want to engage but feel that there is not enough scriptural material in the course – the focus is too heavily on experience.'

'...there must be patience, time to allow those with strong views to hear other voices and through the grace of God and love, allow those voices and concerns to be heard through the church. There is real dislocation between the historic church and current cultural thinking – this cannot continue if the church is to be seen as relevant.'

'People feel cautious, intrigued, unsure what will happen, worried that the national agenda is already set, nervous about conflict in the group (but then often happily reassured).'

'It feels rushed to have to do it now so soon after Covid.'

'If we believe in the process we need to get people to keep doing it even after the deadline for responses – the material has value and we need to keep getting people to engage.'

'To be able to listen closely to a perspective at variance from our own without feeling either compromised by it or suspicious of where it might lead, takes some courage. If the current conversation has been fruitful in this respect, it would indicate the start of a new chapter in this process rather than its middle or end.'

'... Nobody wants to see the Church fractured. A high view of scripture demands a high view of unity. However, because the household of faith has been placed under pressure by these issues, ... there is a need to pray for grace and love as well as truth.'

Responses from organisations in favour of change

Three national organisations in favour of change to the Church's current teaching submitted responses. Comments included:

'It is clear that at some point we need to stop talking, take action and help the Church to move forward. No one wants to continue in this disruptive cycle of commissioning, publishing and debating a new report every five years while making no progress. Now is the time for the Church of England to grasp the nettle, take a decisive step towards ending the deadlock, and begin to dismantle the barriers to the full inclusion of LGBTQIA+ people in the Church.'

'We believe the House of Bishops must take responsibility for creating a radical new Christian inclusion for LGBTQIA+ people. There is no place in Christianity and the Church of England for teachings and theologies that are prejudiced against the equality, full inclusion and well-being of any group of people because of their God-given identities.'

'...we come back to you to say we want you to include and beyond that, to celebrate, the LGBTQ+ members of the church and all those beyond its walls who long to know that they are loved by God.'

One response was in favour of change but expressed grave concerns that the LLF process had caused 'damage' to those members of the LGBT+ community who had taken part:

'We are deeply concerned about the continued abuse of LGBT+ people, particularly young LGBT+ people within conservative churches, and the homophobic teaching that they are made to endure, which leads to self-hatred, shame and internalised homophobia – let alone rejection and alienation from their families and friends. Research shows that this has a significant and lifelong impact on their mental wellbeing and can lead many to consider or indeed to attempt to take their lives. This spiritual abuse must stop. For too long the Church of England has turned a blind eye to this abuse and left the brave testimonies of those who have spoken out go unheeded and unheard. This lack of resolve to tackle the damage done by conservative theology is deeply inconsistent with the Church's developing understanding and practice of the importance of safeguarding for vulnerable people and continues to make the Church of England vulnerable to the charge of complicity in abuse.'

A response from an organisation not in favour of change

The response not in favour of change provided thoughtful and detailed reflections using the survey questions as a framework. Comments included:

'... were the Church of England herself to embrace the teaching and practise of those Provinces which have departed from biblical and Anglican teaching, then the tear in communion, which has affected the global church, would be replicated here. We would be wanting to seek ways in which evangelicals in the Church of England could stand with our brothers and sisters in the Global South and GAFCON. We could not advise

“continuation” in fellowship and communion, where in effect the Church of England ordains something which is contrary to God’s word written, and in effect does expound one place of Scripture so that it is repugnant to another.’

‘I wish to express our concern that though the LLF material we believe sets out fairly the different positions held currently in the Church of England about marriage, sexuality and human identity in declining to express any view as to how the Church might decide between them, the Church is vulnerable to the conclusion that all may in some way be incorporated into the life and teaching of the Church of England.’

‘Such decisions and choices go to the heart of what it means to be the people of God. Of course choices and decisions made without love are “nothing worth” as 1 Corinthians 13 teaches us, but we cannot avoid the interplay between unity and truth; the plea for unity without truth is vacuous and self-defeating because without truth, there will be no life.’

About the researcher

This research was carried out by Claire Dalpra at Brendan Research. Founded in 2020, Brendan Research specialises in statistical and qualitative analysis for Christian denominations, so that they can take confident steps in a changing world.⁴²

September 2022



⁴² <https://www.brendanresearch.com/>

APPENDIX 1: The LLF Questionnaire

Listening to the whole Church



The purpose of this questionnaire is to enable the Church of England to listen to your learning, reflections and experiences of engaging with the Living in Love and Faith (LLF) resources. In this first phase of listening, we want to find out who has engaged with the LLF Course (and other resources) and some of the key learning that has emerged from it.

In addition to gathering the information from this survey, we will be carrying out discussions with focus groups. We are also encouraging individuals and groups to respond to their learning and experience creatively. Find out more about both of these opportunities at the end of this survey and on the LLF Learning Hub.

For any questions or suggestions, please do contact us: llf@churchofengland.org.

If you are able to complete this questionnaire digitally (and/or scan it), please email it to llf@churchofengland.org.

If you would like to post it, then please send it to:

Eeva John, LLF
Lambeth Palace
London
SE1 7JU

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ABOUT THIS SURVEY

Who is taking part?

Our hope is that most people will engage with the Living in Love and Faith resources to learn together in a group. However, it may be that some will work their way through the resources individually. All those who have used the resources either within a group or individually are invited to take part in this survey.

What will taking part involve?

The questionnaire will take about 25 minutes to complete and will contain a mixture of closed (tick boxes) and open-ended (write-in) questions. Please don't mention anyone's name or location in your comments.

Confidentiality

The survey is anonymous. We invite participants to share personal information related to identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage, as well as to supply their postcode, or that of their church. This is to enable us to gauge the diversity of people engaging with the LLF resources and their location. No other personal data is requested. Postcodes will only be used to obtain local area information from Office for National Statistics data, and deleted before analysis. IP addresses will be held initially to help prevent automated responses, then deleted before analysis.

Participation and Withdrawal

Offering your feedback is entirely voluntary. If you wish to do so, you will be asked to agree with the consent question below. If you agree to take part, you may still withdraw at any time up to your response being downloaded and the identifying data detached without giving a reason. If you wish to withdraw your response, please contact Fiona Tweedie at fiona.tweedie@brendanresearch.com.

Questions, Rights and Complaints

If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about any aspect of how you have been approached or treated in respect of this survey, please contact Eeva John at llf@churchofengland.org.

2

PRIVACY NOTICE

This formal privacy notice is provided by the Living in Love and Faith team to explain what to expect when we collect and process your personal information in accordance with the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK-GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018.

Data controller

The Data Controller is:
Rev Dr Fiona Tweedie
Brendan Research
fiona.tweedie@brendanresearch.com

Further information about Brendan Research's privacy policy can be found here:
<https://www.brendanresearch.com/privacy>

Why we collect and use your personal data

Personal information is collected for the following purposes:

- To gather responses that will help us understand what people have learned and experienced in their engagement with the Living in Love and Faith resources;
- To analyse that information in order to produce presentations and publications. All survey data will only be used in a way that will make it impossible for you to be identified in outputs.

The categories of personal data we collect

The information we process is:

- Postcode
- Gender identity
- Sexuality
- Age, within ranges
- Relationship status
- Name, if you choose to opt in to receiving further information
- Email address, if you choose to opt in to receiving further information

The lawful bases for using your information

We collect and use personal data under the following lawful bases:

Personal data

- Consent

Special category data

- Explicit consent

You are able to remove your consent at any time. You can do this by contacting Fiona Tweedie (fiona.tweedie@brendanresearch.com)

3

Who we collect from or share your information with

We collect your information **ONLY** through this survey. Your personal information is not shared with anyone, except those within Brendan Research who need to prepare the data for analysis.

Where we hold your data

The data that you provide through this survey is held by SurveyMonkey on servers in the United States. Their data privacy details are here (<https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/mp/legal/privacy/>), these are less stringent than those in the UK. Data is downloaded weekly and deleted from SurveyMonkey. Data that is transferred to Brendan Research is held in password-protected spreadsheets on Google Drive.

How long we keep your information

Postcode data within England are kept until the local area (<https://www.ons.gov.uk/methodology/geography/ukgeographies/censusgeography#super-output-area-soa>) has been identified, then destroyed.

Other data is held until one year following publication, then destroyed.

Once the survey is closed or within one week, we transfer your data to Brendan Research systems and delete it from SurveyMonkey.

Your rights

You have the following rights regarding your personal data:

- The right to be informed about any data we hold about you;
- The right to withdraw your consent until your data has been anonymised;
- The right to request a copy of your personal data which we hold about you;
- The right to request that we correct any personal data if it is found to be inaccurate or out of date;
- The right to request your personal data is erased where it is no longer necessary for us to retain such data;
- The right, where there is a dispute in relation to the accuracy or processing of your personal data, to request a restriction is placed on further processing;
- The right to object to the processing of your personal data;
- The right to obtain and reuse your personal data to move, copy or transfer it from one IT system to another.

To exercise these rights, please contact Fiona Tweedie (fiona.tweedie@brendanresearch.com).

Complaints or concerns

If you have any queries regarding this survey, please contact:

for Living in Love and Faith, the Enabling Officer, Eeva John (llf@churchofengland.org)

for data processing, Data Protection Officer, Brendan Research: Fiona Tweedie, (fiona.tweedie@brendanresearch.com)

for complaints about the survey, Head of Research & Statistics, Dr Bev Botting (bev.botting@churchofengland.org).

You can also complain to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) if you are unhappy with how we have used your data.

The ICO's address:

Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire SK9
5AF
Helpline number: 0303 123 1113

4

What happens next?

Thank you for taking the time to read the information about this questionnaire. If you would like to continue to the survey, please agree with the following consent statement:

*** 1. I confirm that I have read and understood the above information for this survey. I have also had the opportunity to ask any questions related to the survey and received satisfactory answers to my questions and any additional details I wanted.**

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time until my response is downloaded and anonymised without giving any reason. I also understand that relevant sections of data collected from me through this survey will be seen and reported as appropriate by those considering my response and that my personal identity will be kept anonymous.

I consent to my data being processed in the ways described in this Privacy Notice.

I confirm that my response is based on my engagement with the Living in Love and Faith Course (and other resources).

I agree to take part in this survey.

Yes

No

5



ABOUT WHERE YOU ARE

We would like to understand where people who are engaging with the LLF Course are located so that we can ensure that the whole church can be heard. This section asks about your diocese and local area.

2. In which diocese do you live?

3. We would like to understand the diversity of places where people who are engaging with the course are located. Please tell us your full postcode (e.g. EH2 4YN), or if you are a group leader, the full postcode of the course location.

This information will ONLY be used to establish the socio-economic and urban-rural nature of your local area, and then destroyed.

6

ABOUT THE COURSE AND YOU

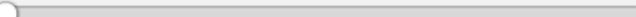
The Living in Love and Faith Course contains a variety of material on topics relating to identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage. It looks at these from different aspects:

- teaching from the Bible,
- the inherited teaching of the Church,
- emerging Christian views on these topics
- the complexities underlying these topics, and
- understanding different views and encountering different experiences.

This section asks whether your engagement with the course has deepened your understanding of these elements.

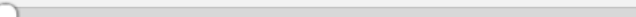
4. I have a deeper understanding of what the Bible says about these topics

Strongly disagree Strongly agree

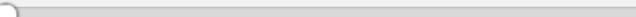
5. I have a deeper understanding of the Church's inherited teaching and emerging Christian views on these topics

Strongly disagree Strongly agree

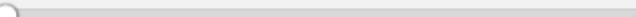
6. I am more aware of the complexities of identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage

Strongly disagree Strongly agree

7. I'm now able to relate more compassionately and respectfully to people with different views from mine

Strongly disagree Strongly agree


 

The next few questions are about individual sessions - did the course cover material that was new to you, or were the topics known to you already?

7

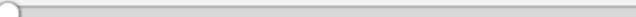
8. The material in Session 1 - What does it mean to learn together as followers of Jesus Christ? - was

Very familiar Very new


9. The material in Session 2 - How does our identity in Christ relate to sex and gender? - was

Very familiar Very new


10. The material in Session 3 - What kinds of relationships does God call us to? - was

Very familiar Very new

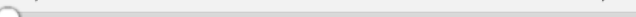
11. The material in Session 4 - Where do our bodies and sex fit in to all of this? - was

Very familiar Very new

12. The material in Session 5 - How do diversity and difference affect our life together as a church? - was

Very familiar Very new

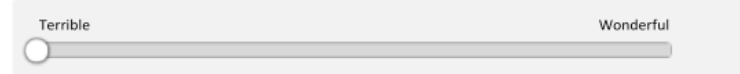
8

The course overall

Now, considering the experience of the course as a whole, how did you find it, and did you use the accompanying resources?

13. How did you find the overall experience of engaging with the course materials?

Terrible Wonderful



14. What would you like to tell us about the overall course experience? Please don't mention anyone's name or location in your response.

15. How has engaging with this course made a difference for you?

16. There are resources available to accompany the Living in Love and Faith course. Which of the following did you make use of in addition to the course?

	Did not use	Occasionally	Often
The LLF book	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
LLF Podcasts	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
LLF Story Films	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
LLF Learning Hub Library	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

17. How do you hope the engagement with this course will make a difference in your local church? Please don't mention anyone's name or location in your response.

18. How do you hope the church-wide engagement with this course will make a difference in the national Church? Please don't mention anyone's name or location in your response.

Sharing the learning

How are the ideas and topics covered in the LLF Course being spread more widely?

19. Have you shared what you've learned with others? Tick all that apply.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, with church friends | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, with our PCC or church leaders |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, with other friends | <input type="checkbox"/> No, I've not shared it |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, as part of a church service | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> In other ways (please specify) | |

20. Would you recommend this course to a friend?

- Yes No

21. Why, or why not? Please don't mention anyone's name or location in your response.



ANYTHING ELSE

22. If there is anything else you would like to tell us about your experience of engaging with the Living in Love and Faith resources, please add it here. Please don't mention anyone's name or location in your response.

About you

We'd like to understand a little about the people who have engaged with the LLF material. This section asks about you and your group, if you were part of one.

23. Are you completing this survey:

- As an individual member of a group
- As an individual who has engaged with the resources independently
- Other (please specify)

24. To help us gauge the degree of diversity of people who engaged with the course, please indicate which of these are words that you would use to describe yourself. Tick as many as appropriate.

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> heterosexual | <input type="checkbox"/> cisgender | <input type="checkbox"/> opposite-sex married |
| <input type="checkbox"/> gay lesbian | <input type="checkbox"/> queer | <input type="checkbox"/> same-sex married |
| <input type="checkbox"/> same sex attracted | <input type="checkbox"/> asexual | <input type="checkbox"/> other married |
| <input type="checkbox"/> bisexual | <input type="checkbox"/> intersex | <input type="checkbox"/> same-sex civil partnered |
| <input type="checkbox"/> male | <input type="checkbox"/> single | <input type="checkbox"/> opposite-sex civil partnered |
| <input type="checkbox"/> female | <input type="checkbox"/> same-sex cohabiting | <input type="checkbox"/> other civil partnered |
| <input type="checkbox"/> transgender | <input type="checkbox"/> opposite-sex cohabiting | <input type="checkbox"/> prefer not to say |
| <input type="checkbox"/> non-binary | <input type="checkbox"/> other co-habiting, e.g. where one person is trans | |

Other (please specify)

25. We would like to know about the ages of people engaging with the LLF resources. Please indicate your age using the options below:

- 24 or under
- Between 25 and 44
- Between 45 and 64
- 65 and over
- Prefer not to say

26. How many sessions did you attend or follow yourself?

0 5



27. Were you in touch with your Diocesan LLF Advocate?

- Yes
- No

28. Your Diocesan LLF Advocate may have provided a code to help us identify how you accessed the survey. If so, please enter it here:

About your group

We're interested in how the size and diversity of your LLF group made a difference to your experience. This section asks about your group.

29. How many people usually attended your group (including the leader)? Please don't mention anyone's name or location in your response.

30. To what extent did your group represent a variety of lived experiences and perspectives of the topics discussed?

not at all varied very varied

31. Were you able to participate openly and safely in the group?

No, not very Yes, very

32. What would you like to tell us about the overall group experience? Please don't mention anyone's name or location in your response.

* 33. Were you involved in leading the group?

 Yes

Please only complete this section if you were involved in leading a group.

BEING A GROUP LEADER

Facilitating a group can be a challenging experience. We're interested in your experience of leading the group and in how the members of the group related to each other in using the resources to learn together.

34. How did you feel about facilitating the group? Please don't mention anyone's name or location in your response.

35. Did the course materials help the group to engage in the subject matter?

Not at all Not really Occasionally Usually Always

36. Which elements provoked most discussion in your group?

Story FilmPastoral Principle
 Bible StudyLearning Together

37. As a group facilitator, did you make use of the "Going Further" resources before the session?

Not at all Not really Occasionally Usually Always

38. Did you feel that there was anything missing from the course materials? If so, please give details.

39. How did you find the overall experience of facilitating a group using the LLF Course resources?

40. How would you describe your experience of leading this course? Please don't mention anyone's name or location in your response.

41. What is your leadership role in your church?

- Lay leader No formal role
 Clergy
 Other (please specify)

Terrible Wonderful



FURTHER LISTENING

This survey is only one of the ways in which we are seeking to listen to the experiences of the Church.

Another step will be to carry out discussions with focus groups. These may be in-person or online. If you would be willing to participate in this aspect of our listening process, please give your name and email address below. The selection of interviewees will be based on gaining a range of lived experiences, perspectives and geographical locations.

Your contact details will only be used to invite you to be part of another aspect of our listening. They are detached from the rest of your response before analysis and stored separately with no link between the data sets. You can choose at any time to refuse to take part. Your contact details will be destroyed after your invitation.

We are also encouraging individuals and groups who have engaged with the LLF resources to share your learning and experience in creative ways. This is to inspire, encourage and connect with others to be part of the gathering together of the voices of the whole Church. These contributions will be gathered and exhibited in a variety of ways as part of the listening to the whole Church. To find out more please visit the Living in Love and Faith Learning Hub.

42. Contact details, if you are willing to be involved in further discussions

Name:

Email address:



LIVING
IN LOVE
& FAITH

THANK YOU!

THANK YOU for completing this survey, we really value your contribution.

If you would like to receive a summary report of its outcomes, please give your contact details below. They are detached from the rest of your response before analysis and stored separately with no link between the data sets. Your details will only be used for this purpose and will be deleted once the report has been sent out.

43. Contact details to receive the summary report

Name:

Email address:

APPENDIX 2: Project Information Sheet for Focus Group participants

Appendix

Project information sheet



About the project

[Church Army's Research Unit](#) has been commissioned to investigate through focus groups the effectiveness and influence of the Living in Love and Faith course and resources. As part of this research project, Church Army's Research Unit will be inviting a number of people to take part in one of the focus groups.

Taking part

Church Army's Research Unit would like to invite you to take part in the research. Before taking part, we will:

- Ask you to complete the questionnaire to give your consent to take part
- Send you details of the focus group to which you are invited
- Ensure all identifiable data is destroyed once the research has been completed

We will ask for personal information so that the membership of the focus groups reflects a cross-section of those who took part in the course. The findings of the focus groups will be anonymous, with nothing attributed to any particular member of the group. These findings may include a summary or quotation of what was said, or the product of some artistic activity. If we want to attribute comments or quotations to specific individuals, we will seek the permission of the people involved. The findings will be used to inform presentations and publications.

Further information about how we will handle your personal data can be found below.

Your personal data

Church Army believes in maintaining the highest professional standards in the handling of your data. At all times we are committed to processing your data in a fair, lawful and transparent manner in accordance with data protection legislation. Details about how we handle your data and your rights in relation to that data can be found in this privacy notice.

What data are we collecting?

This information is collected in accordance with the Data Protection Act (DPA) and General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR). We may ask for the following data from you:

- Name, email address and telephone number
- Information and opinions about the LLF

What will happen to your data?

Church Army (Wilson Carlisle Centre, 50 Cavendish Street, Sheffield, S3 7RZ) is the data controller with regards to the personal data you have disclosed to us. A data controller is the person or organisation who determines the purpose for which, and the way, any personal data is processed. Therefore, Church Army takes responsibility for establishing policies and procedures in line with the GDPR.

We will not disclose your data to any other third parties unless we have your explicit consent to do so. We only enter relationships with third parties who have appropriate data protection policies and procedures in place. Church Army will not sell your data to any third party.

We will only retain your personal data for purposes to which you have provided explicit consent in line with the provisions of the DPA and the GDPR. We review our retention on an annual basis and when records are no longer needed for historical, statistical or research purposes they are deleted.

Where will my data be stored?

Church Army stores your data on a secure cloud-based database hosted in the UK. None of your personal data will be transferred outside the EEA.

What are my rights?

In relation to our processing your personal data you have the following rights, which can be exercised at any time:

- To withdraw your consent for us to process your data.
- To be forgotten - to request your data is no longer processed or quarantined.
- Subject access requests - a right to request a copy of the data we hold about you.
- To object to your data being used by us for the purposes of direct marketing.
- To exercise any of these rights, please email ask@churcharmy.org at any time.

How can I find out more about the data we hold?

If you wish to receive further information regarding Church Army's data protection policy, together with a copy of that policy, please contact Robin Webb (Chief Operating Officer) at Church Army, Wilson Carlisle Centre, 50 Cavendish Street, Sheffield, S3 7RZ, 0300 123 2113 or robin.webb@churcharmy.org. Any issues, questions or concerns you may have in relation to the way Church Army process your data please do not hesitate to contact Robin Webb.

If, at any time, you have any concerns about the way your data has been processed by Church Army and those concerns cannot be resolved by Church Army directly you have the right to take those concerns externally and raise them with the regulator, the Information Commissioner. For details, please visit the Information Commissioner's office:

<https://ico.org.uk/>

APPENDIX 3: Consent Form for Focus Group participants

Consent form



Name of Research Project: Living in Love and Faith Focus Groups

Researchers: Lu Skerratt, John Tomlinson

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the participant information sheet and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason

3. I agree to take part in the above study.

Signed:

Name:

Date:

Email address:

Phone Number:
