



Living in Love and Faith

Religion Media Centre

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- Progress on the Church of England's Living in Love and Faith project was outlined to the General Synod (the church's parliament) in February 2020.
- It was set up to enable a wider and deeper discussion within the church over its differences on homosexuality, marriage and relationships and will report to the worldwide gathering of Anglican bishops at the Lambeth Conference in July 2020.
- The project will result in the publication of a range of resources, such as booklets and podcasts, to "stimulate learning" in the hope that greater understanding will lessen the rancour and polarisation that deep disagreements have caused. It will not arrive at a decision.
- Interpretation of biblical texts lies at the heart of the dispute, with traditionalists taking literally a text which calls homosexual acts an "abomination" and others seeing this as a code written at a particular time in history, while the thrust of Christian teaching is for love, tolerance and understanding.
- The debate came into sharp focus in the 1980s and has rumbled on in England – and globally – ever since, leading to bishops in the worldwide Anglican Communion forming an alternative traditionalist organisation.
- In 2017, bishops attempted to deal with the dispute by asserting that church marriages should be between men and women, and same-sex relationships cannot be blessed. But the General Synod [threw this out](#), and the Living in Love and Faith project was born.
- Chaired by the Bishop of Coventry, Dr Christopher Cocksworth, with Dr Eeva John as its enabling officer, four working groups have met to consider sexuality through the lens of biblical studies, theology, history and social and biological sciences. A co-ordinating group oversees the work of the groups and engages with other churches and faith communities.
- In a low-key presentation, the synod meeting in London in February 2020 was told that the three-year process had already seen "eruptions of anger, sometimes with tears of frustration and confusion, sometimes with moments of epiphany". But with no common view emerging, campaigners say the Church of England is simply [kicking the can](#) down the road.
- Little progress appears to have been made. A statement from the bishops released in January 2020 continued to maintain that sex is only for married heterosexual couples – and those in civil partnerships should be celibate: a situation that the Bishop of Liverpool the Rt Rev Paul Bayes said had made the church a laughing stock.

- The process for selecting members of the working groups has been criticised. The project statement says: “At this first stage of the project’s development, priority was given to finding people with the appropriate subject expertise, while also paying attention to achieving a balance of theological perspectives and representation by LGBTI+ people.
- “In forming the individual groups, it has not always been possible to find both, although across the groups there is a good balance. Naturally, not all members wish to disclose publicly their personal stories, their identities or even perspectives, so face-value conclusions about representation cannot be drawn.”

TIMELINE

- **15 October 2018** Eleven bishops posted an [open letter](#) on the website of the Church of England Evangelical Council, warning the project against suggesting an “Anglican fudge” and hinting the worldwide church could split if the church’s traditional teaching on marriage were not upheld.
- **1 February 2019** A transgender priest, the Rev Dr Christina Beardsley, [withdrew](#) from the co-ordinating group, saying that not enough attention was being paid to the experiences of LGBTI+ churchpeople and questioning the neutral stance. Alex Clare-Young, a trans ordinand, replaced her.
- **1 March 2019** Dr Eeva John told the General Synod that the working groups had assembled 80 academic papers and 200 stories, including oral histories of LGBT people.
- **January 2020** Bishops produce pastoral guidance saying sex belongs only within heterosexual marriage and those in civil partnerships and gay partnerships should be celibate.
- **11 February 2020** General Synod updated on the progress of the project, before the House of Bishops approves the final document in March.