

ARE SERVICES OF BLESSING FOR SAME SEX COUPLES A POSSIBLE COMPROMISE?

Film 4 of God's Beautiful Story



CEEC

CHURCH OF ENGLAND
EVANGELICAL COUNCIL

LOCAL CHURCH LEADERS KNOW BEST

The following comments/suggestions are not intended to be prescriptive – each church leader knows his/her context better than anyone else and is therefore the person best placed to make a decision about what would help/be appropriate for the people in that context.

The following suggestions are therefore simply offered as **options** – or in the hope that they will **generate further ideas** that might be appropriate for your context.

AIM IN SHOWING THE FILM

Film 4 is intended to help people see that what might be called a compromise or 'live and let live' option is unlikely to work. It introduces people to what is sometimes referred to as 'provision' or 'pastoral accommodation' (NB – this phrase can mean different things to different people) and attempts to indicate that such a route forward will not help either orthodoxy or those wishing to see significant change.

KEY THEME/MESSAGE

The film suggests that the compromise of a 'pastoral accommodation' in helping the C of E move forwards is unable to meet either the aspirations of those who wish for change or of those who wish to hold on to our inherited Anglican doctrine, liturgy and practice.

As such, the possibility of 'agreeing to disagree' appears to lose credibility – something that is underlined by some of the contributors to the film who make it clear that as people who experience same-sex attraction they would find any such proposal highly damaging to them and their membership of the C of E.

RESPONDING TO THE FILM

To leaders – you will need to decide :

- What should be the **focus** of any discussion after viewing Film 4, and
- What '**level**' of **engagement** would your church members appreciate – do they want to talk about general principles, do some bible study or explore the political realities of General Synod and the decisions it might have to make.

Please then choose from the following discussion starters.

1) THE VOICES IN THE FILM

Q1 - Do you think that Dean and Melanie are right in saying that – in practice – the granting of 'accommodations' or 'permissions' in Wales has changed/will change the church's understanding of marriage ?

Q2 - What does Andrew mean when he talks about the blessing of same-sex unions as being potentially 'brutal' for him (and other same-sex attracted celibate Christians like him) ?

Q3 - Do you agree with Ed that a compromise would be 'devastating' for same sex attracted people in the C of E?

2) ALLOWING OR AFFIRMING

Q4 - Is it possible to 'square the circle' of giving affirmation to something the bible does not permit ?

3) 'PASTORAL ACCOMMODATION' – A CLOSER LOOK

The C of E has a group called the 'Faith and Order Commission' who play a lead role in the theological 'thinking' of the church. In their 2013 report 'Men and Women in Marriage' they describe how pastoral accommodations (para 49):

'bear(ing) witness in special ways to the abiding importance of the norm'.

In this sentence 'norm' is the understanding/teaching of the church.

They also suggest that 'well-designed accommodations proclaim the form of life given by God's creative goodness and bring those in difficult positions into closer approximation to it.'

In other words – 'accommodations' do 2 things :

- They celebrate and affirm the 'norm'
- They bring people closer to the 'norm'

Q5 – In what ways would the following Private Members Motion (currently available to General Synod) fail to fulfil these 2 functions if passed?

That this Synod request the House of Bishops to commend an order of Prayer and Dedication after the registration of a civil partnership or same sex marriage, for use by ministers in exercise of their discretion under Canon B5, being a form of service neither contrary to, nor indicative of any departure from, the doctrine of the Church of England in any essential matter, together with guidance that no parish should be obliged to host, nor minister conduct, such a service.'

NB - In an article on Ian Paul's blog, Andrew Goddard critiques an antecedent Motion : <https://www.psephizo.com/sexuality-2/can-the-church-change-its-practice-on-marriage-without-changing-its-doctrine/>

4) PRACTICAL PARISH LIFE

Q6 – Assuming the C of E made it possible for a blessing (or some other form of service) to be provided for people wishing to mark/celebrate their same-sex sexual relationship (whether marriage or not), would your PCC :

- Support a vicar who declined to conduct the service – and if so how
- Not support a vicar who declined to conduct the service – and if so, how might that play out?

Q7 – How do think it might play out in your local community if your vicar declined a request to conduct a Service for a same sex couple?