

JASON

Who are you?

I'm Jason Roach. I work as Senior Pastor of a multi-ethnic church plant on a housing estate called "The Bridge" and as a part time advisor to the Bishop of London.

What's your role been in the LLF process?

I was a consultant member of the Coordinating Group for the process. This group was made up of Bishops and consultants from a variety of churchmanships and personal theological convictions. We worked together, with regular consultation and input from the College of Bishops, to coordinate the direction and shape of the suite of resources that have emerged.

What have you learned so far by being involved?

There is huge benefit to slowing down and listening to the stories and thinking of people that you disagree with. This is certainly something that I would have said before. But I have had to live this out in a much more personal and sometimes painful way, over several years, as we have journeyed together as a group. The time we took to do this, meant that all of this happened within an increasing level of trust and friendship, which makes a massive difference. Despite the discomfort that this sometimes meant, it was in the end hugely enriching for my faith, my understanding of the specific issues that we were thinking through and frankly, my recognition that behind every position is a person, made in the image of God who has a story that matters.

What challenged you and how did you challenge others?

The overarching challenge was to step out of a Christian subculture that has shared norms, into a place where those will not be assumed and will be questioned. In a sense this is actually very healthy as it helps us understand our own convictions and those of others more clearly. But it goes deeper than mere 'convictions' because discussions about sexuality quickly become discussions about identity. This means that for those theological convictions to be challenged tends to be far more painful and difficult. Throughout the three years this was a two way process, with all views being heard and given room to be expressed. They inevitably led to discussions around the interpretation of scripture, and I was helped to see that our conclusions often tracked back to our assumptions about how the authority of scripture operated. The process was helpful in trying to allow for open dialogue and the expression of difference in as winsome a way as possible.

What's your top tip for those getting involved in parish, deanery and diocesan discussions?

Enter those discussions with the attitude that you, like everyone in the room, don't have all the answers. Assume that Christians need each other and should prize unity as highly as Jesus does in John 17. Assume that you may have made or may well make, wrong assumptions about people you are speaking to and so you need to listen for longer than you think you do. Assume that the Spirit will be at work. And remember that you are talking to people, with their own stories, families and feelings. Pray hard, listen well then speak gently but honestly. Specifically, use the opportunity that the material gives us to talk about different approaches to scripture – which helps to get to the heart of why we think differently. Views about identity won't be

changed 'on the night.' But a friendship might begin that opens up all kinds of fruitful conversations down the line.