

## The Beautiful Story

In the autumn of 2020, the Church of England released a suite of resources (called 'Living in Love and Faith') and launched a dialogue around human experiences of identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage. And though this discussion is not yet complete we are approaching a big and important milestone : we are now getting close to the point where we shall finally have to make up our minds about same-sex sexual relationships in particular, and this is going to affect every parish in the land, every ministry, every incumbent, and every PCC.

One option for the future is that we simply accept that the Church has a range of views and that we must learn to live with difference. But that is a bit like saying that we don't really need to make up our minds at all.

And provided you don't think about it too much, it sounds attractive.

But is it possible to say and do a number of contradictory things at the same time? Think of the continued pain and confusion that will bring those most directly affected? Do we believe that sex outside of marriage is part of God's design for human flourishing or don't we? Can you affirm a variety of views, in the same congregation without doing more harm than good? Can the historic biblical teaching on sex and marriage that we inherited from the Apostles survive at all when the Church speaks with so many different voices?

Most important of all, would it be right to lose confidence in God's design for human flourishing at this critical moment in our nation's history?

This CEEC film 'The Beautiful Story' brings together a diverse range of evangelical Anglican leaders who believe the time has come to say where we stand. It is not exhaustive (e.g. there is no exploration of the experiences of transgender people) and it will not answer all the questions that people might have. However, they believe it is time to speak up for what we are for rather than what we are against. They believe in another story, a better story, that has been given for our good and for human flourishing. And if the church decides to introduce alternative practice or teachings that depart from the Apostolic tradition, they believe that we must now work out together how the church can adapt her structures in new and imaginative ways to ensure that the inherited biblical tradition is nurtured and sustained.

We believe that The Beautiful Story will help Christian leaders work out how to progress the necessary conversations in their PCC's and with their congregations. Each local situation is different with different needs, but none can afford to bury these discussions in the hope that they will go away, because they won't. But more important than that, we have a beautiful story that has to be told. It isn't going to be easy, but it's time to rediscover our confidence that what we have been given is for the life of the world. And now it is our turn to be faithful to what we have received.

## **A message to clergy and lay leaders in parishes.**

The Church of England Evangelical Council (CEEC) invites evangelical leaders up and down the country to view this film and to be doing two things:

(1) To be asking the question – will this film help people in my parish to explore important questions around identity, gender and sexuality?

The following simple questions might be helpful:

What did the film make us feel? Why?

What are we wanting to do in response? Why?

What questions are we wanting to explore further? How could we do that?

Many people might find it helpful to view it together in the context of a Zoom meeting – to do this, simply start the zoom meeting, then ask everyone to mute audio/switch off their video – watch the film (whilst zoom stays open) and then reconvene on Zoom to discuss the questions above.

(Please note – the film is also available on the CEEC website in 'chapters' – this might help if it is appropriate to launch discussion in several 'chunks').

(2) To set some dates in the summer/autumn to show the film to groups within your church (e.g. PCC, ministry teams, small group leaders etc) and to lead a discussion thereafter.

## **Engaging in Living in Love and Faith (LLF) discussions**

CEEC is encouraging evangelicals to participate with the LLF course – and will be in the near future making available advice as to how to engage with Living in Love and Faith discussions that are being/will be encouraged/facilitated in your diocese.