



Listening for the truth in love

**Worcester Diocesan Listening Process
on Human Sexuality**



About this pack

Introduction

As the group responsible for producing this pack, we have tried to make sure the range of views on same-sex relationships is fairly represented among us. Arguments for a particular point of view are put forward by someone holding that view. We all believe it is important to listen to what people are actually saying about what they believe, and not to someone else's version of it.

Listening is at the heart of the process the Diocesan Synod called for in its resolution, and we have tried to ensure that in our work as a group we have listened carefully to each other. We hope that the materials we have produced will also help people across the diocese, in parishes and deaneries, to listen to each other as well.

For us listening is based on the assumption that the person we are listening to is made in the image of God, and therefore needs to be respected. When we engage in dialogue we start from this fundamental truth. As people made in the image of God we begin by trying to relate to people, rather than trying to win an argument. The materials we have put together here are intended to help people of different views relate better to each other as fellow members of Christ's Church, rather than to convert anyone to a particular way of thinking.

Our group has within it those who wish the Church to teach positively about same-sex relationships, those who wish to re-affirm marriage and celibacy as the only ideal ways of life, and those who are uncertain what they think. We have different approaches to Scripture, and vary between ourselves in the relative importance we give to tradition, reason and experience. There are as many and more diverse views held in our parishes and deaneries, as well as many people who wish this would all go away.

In our dialogue within the group planning this, we have shared a commitment not only to walking together, but to helping one another walk together with Christ. We hope that listening carefully and respectfully to one another as God's dearly loved children will enable us to do that, both within our diocese, and within our Anglican Communion.

What will you find in this pack?

This pack contains:

- An introductory letter from the co-presidents of the Diocesan Synod, commending the Synod's decision to the diocese.
- This leaflet, setting down an outline of the group's thinking, so that you can better understand what we have included in the pack, and why. It also contains suggestions about how to organise meetings.
- A leaflet containing some suggested worship resources that may be used before or after group meetings.
- A leaflet containing some material and exercises on the process of listening.
- A re-affirmation of the received understanding of Scripture.
- A lesbian/gay affirmative reading of Scripture.

- A leaflet containing a range of personal stories from real people about their experience, so that groups can hear people speaking for themselves
- A background booklet that looks at the difficult texts of the Bible, and raises a number of questions, both our questions about the Bible, and the questions that reading the Bible poses for us.
- A list of some key resources for further thinking or background reading on sexuality.

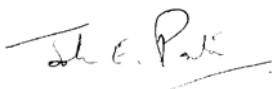
Copies of this material are available for downloading and photocopying from the Diocesan web site: www.cofe-worcester.org.uk

A final word

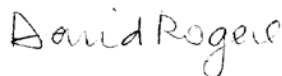
We admit that many of us find it very difficult even to talk about some of the questions this listening process will raise. We hope that you will find the material we have prepared helpful, and that it will make it easier not simply to talk about these questions, but to listen to other people whose views and experiences may be very different from yours.



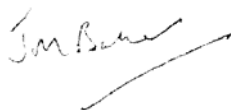
Nick Barker
Diocesan Evangelical
Fellowship



John Paxton
Board for Social
Responsibility



David Rogers
Changing Attitude



Judy Baker
Department of Training
and Development



Margaret Rutter
Board for Mission



Doug Chaplin
Department of Training
and Development

For more than half our meetings we were also joined and guided by Martin Baddeley who was then part-time leader of the Department of Training and Development. All of us take shared responsibility for the material in this pack.

Arranging meetings

Each meeting will need an experienced chair or facilitator. If you are holding a large meeting, you will need enough facilitators for smaller groups within the meeting. You may find groups of eight work well. The facilitators will need to ensure that the small groups are focused on listening and trying to understand rather than people scoring points or trying to win arguments.

Each deanery or parish will have to decide on the number of meetings, how long they will last and how they are timed. Some will simply have one meeting, others a short series. It will be helpful if those planning and chairing meetings decide in advance what use they will make of the leaflets in this pack.

When the chairperson welcomes everyone and introduces the meeting, it will help if they can also outline how the time will be spent. Their introduction should encourage people to agree to respect the confidentiality of what is said. People may say things in these groups that are personal and this should not be repeated by someone else. The chair will also need to emphasise that the purpose of the meeting is to help us listen to one another and understand other people's points of view. It is not about trying to change people's minds.

We encourage you to include more worship than a single prayer. It is appropriate if the worship includes some silence for listening to God. There are some suggestions in this pack. The main worship may come at either the beginning or end of the meeting.

Those looking for a starting point for the small group discussion may find the following suggestions helpful.

- a) Scripture passages could be read and then in turn each individual asked to share what it says for them, or what stood out for them. This is not a time for discussion. After everyone has spoken, the facilitator could try to pick up some common themes as a starting point for the discussion.
- b) Each of the stories in the leaflet retelling people's experience could be read. People are initially asked to share something that stood out for them or spoke to them. After all the stories have been considered, the facilitator might help the group pick up common themes for discussion.

Whether the starting point is scripture or people's stories, it will be important over the course of the meeting or meetings to make time to listen both to scripture and people's experience.