

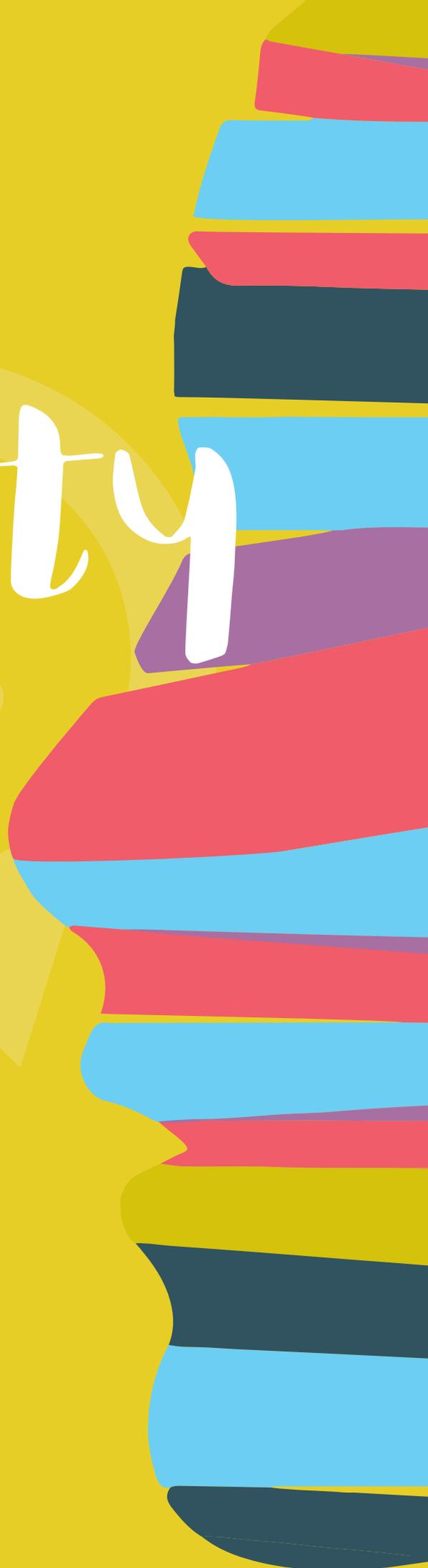
**YOUTH  
EDITION**



# Sexuality

DISCUSSION SESSION 3

**Discussing Homosexuality**



# Note to Discussion Sessions

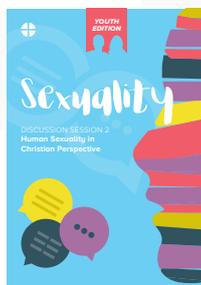
The following discussion session is part of a 4 series programme which has been designed to be used in a group from a local congregation or circuit. You can decide how much or how little of the suggested format to use. You know your context best. Please, modify or adapt the sessions as you see fit for the comfort level of your participants. If the full plan is followed, you should allow an hour to an hour and a half for each of the four sessions, which might easily be scheduled one night a week for a month.

The session guides are complements to and assume that participants will have read 'Sexuality – Developing Good Conversation on Difficult Questions' or the relevant sections of the document for each session prior to attendance. If your group does not wish to work in this way, you may plan to have some copies of the document on hand for people to review the relevant sections over a cup of tea/coffee prior to the start of the session.

## Session 1 Why This, Why Now



## Session 2 Human Sexuality in Christian Perspective



## Session 3 Discussing Homosexuality



## Session 4 What Should We Do next



🌐 All of these can be downloaded from [www.irishmethodist.org/WPHS](http://www.irishmethodist.org/WPHS)

# Sexuality

DISCUSSION SESSION 3

**Discussing Homosexuality**



## You Will Need:

- ✓ Flipchart
- ✓ Paper
- ✓ Pens
- ✓ Markers
- ✓ Coloured sticky dots
- ✓ Envelopes
- ✓ Flipchart pages from previous sessions

### PRAYER

#### Open the Session with prayer.

##### To the leader:

It's always good to re-cap on the previous sessions to remind everyone what has been covered.

### INTRO TO HOMOSEXUALITY

 10 mins

##### To the leader:

This would be a good time to look back at the good conversations discussion that took place in the first session - have the flipchart paper stuck up as a reminder. It is important to understand that members of the group will have different opinions and will be feeling differently about this session. You are here for dialogue not debate.

Ask your group how comfortable they are with having a conversation about homosexuality.

- » Have paper around the room with different statements on them regarding how you could feel.
- » Give each person a sheet of coloured dots or stickers and ask them to go round the room and stick them on any statements that they relate to.
- » They can use as many stickers as they want on as many statements as they want.

'I am terrified to be talking about homosexuality in church.'

'I am relieved that the church is talking about homosexuality.'

'I am uncomfortable with talking about homosexuality.'

'I understand that homosexuality needs to be discussed in the church.'

'I am excited about having a conversation about homosexuality.'

'I am nervous about being here talking about homosexuality.'

- » Allow the group some space to write down one or more of the statements that they identify with - put these into a sealed envelope and write their name on it - these will be taken off them and then returned at the end of the final session.

### OPENING DISCUSSION

 15 mins

Split the group into pairs/smaller groups and give each group scenarios to read and discuss.

##### To the leader:

The point here is to get the young people to put themselves into the shoes of someone who is going through something like this and to discuss how they would feel in this situation.

- » 'You are homosexual and you are too afraid to tell anyone in case they react negatively.'
- » 'You are homosexual and you are struggling with it because you believe that it is wrong.'
- » 'You tell everyone that you are homosexual and are met with anger and hatred.'

- » 'You tell everyone that you are homosexual and are met with love, joy and acceptance.'

Ask the groups to discuss how they would feel and what they would do in their scenarios.

Ask each group to feedback their thoughts and outline the fact that there are many different situations people can be in.

### TESTIMONIES

 25 mins

In small groups, read the testimonies from people across Ireland about their experience with homosexuality and the church. (Depending on the size of your groups, you can give 2 or 3 testimonies per group.)

#### Questions to ask:

- » How did you feel reading these testimonies?
- » Did you identify with anyone in-particular?
- » Who did you feel most compassionate towards? Why?
- » Have you had any experience like these in your own life that you would like to share?

Ask each group to feedback to the others.

In these groups read **Colossians 3:5-17** together. Ask what stands out in the passage. What does this passage say to us when discussing this topic?

#### To the leader:

The point that would be good to get across here is compassion and how it is a gift that crosses all boundaries. There is nothing that separates us from the love of Christ and we should treat others in such a way that leads to and glorifies Him.

### BIBLE INTERPRETATION

 25 mins

There are around 6 passages of scripture that are regularly considered by those seeking God's perspective on homosexuality – among scholars there are varying views as to the relevance/application of these passages to the conversation.

-  Genesis 19.
-  Leviticus 18:22.
-  Leviticus 20:13.
-  1 Corinthians 6:9-11.
-  1 Timothy 1:8-10.
-  Romans 1:18-32 (we'll be using this one as the focus of our discussions later).

#### Instructions:

1. Split these passage among the groups (in at least pairs).
2. Ask them to read them and some of the verses around them to see the context in which they were written.
3. Ask for feedback from the group – what did the verses make you think God's view is on homosexuality?
4. Explain to the young people - Unfortunately, with many issues in the church and Christianity, such as creation, use of alcohol and same sex relationships, there are two very different views. Both groups take the Bible very seriously and believe in the authority of Scripture. Their application and understanding of the passages, however, is very different. Questions that arise for some people are: 'How clear is the Bible on this subject? Is it possible categorically to equate the biblical teaching with a certain present-day position?' One side seems comfortable with such an equation, the other seems more to be saying that when studied, the Bible does not yield a clear position.

**To the leader:**

There needs to be an awareness that the English Bible we have is a translation from Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic and those who translate interpret words using ones that fit best to their theological understanding, which may not be the most accurate translation.

The same is true when it comes to creation. There are those who believe that the world was created in six days and God rested on the seventh. There are others who see the creation stories as an understanding of how we came to be here and believe that the world could have been created in six days, but are just as content to believe that the biblical accounts of creation are compatible with the theory of evolution. They do not read the text literally, but recognise the different genres of Scripture all of which convey God's Word.

**5.** Read together as a group the following passage: Romans 1:18-32.

**6.** Explain to the young people: Romans 1:18-32 is a passage that is often quoted as being against homosexuality and how same sex relationships were not intended for us as human beings. Here are a couple of viewpoints on this passage:

This passage states that God is judging sinful humanity by giving them 'over in the sinful desire of their hearts to sexual impurity.' (Verse 24). It says that God created men and women to be in relationship with each other. Anything that is different to this, for example in verses 26 & 27, is not in line with God's purpose for humanity and therefore sinful. The context of this passage is that Paul is speaking to the Hellenistic culture the Romans were part of. As part of their worship, first-century Romans practiced homosexual rituals and worshipped many gods. This passage is not condemning homosexuality in general, it is not possible to draw a direct comparison between monogamous same sex relationships today, and the rituals of homosexual prostitution in worship that were part of that culture.

**7.** Break the young people into smaller groups and ask them to discuss what they think is the meaning of this passage. Come back together and get some feedback from each group.

**8.** Give each individual some space to think through this question - If you were going to write your viewpoint (which could be number 1, 2 or something different) what would you say?

Once they have had some time to think of it themselves ask them to discuss in groups of 2 or 3 and feedback to the whole group.

**To the leader:**

You may want to note in this discussion that Paul is in fact writing to a culture that worships many gods. He is illustrating how God allowed them to experience life apart from God because of their misplaced worship. There are numerous ways we might misplace our worship; sexual expressions of all forms can be among those ways. It's easy for sex to become an idol in our culture just as much as in the Roman world.

**9.** Anything that is talked about in this section can be added to your Scripture section in the Wesleyan quadrilateral.

**10.** Give the young people a challenge to take away the other passages talked about at the start and see if they can research the varying viewpoints on these. You might want to take some feedback from this at the start of the next session.

## TRADITION

 5 mins

Read over the attached paragraphs entitled 'Methodist Teaching on Homosexuality' - this will be more of a re-cap from the previous session but will be a good reminder at this point.

## EVALUATION

 5 mins

Ask your group to take a few minutes with someone else and discuss what they have heard during the session.

- » Are you in a place to share what you think about homosexuality in the church?
- » What do you think has influenced your thinking the most? Scripture? Church? Personal Experience?

After all that you have heard tonight are you able to say what you think? If you have an opinion can you work out where it has been shaped or influenced?

Refer back to the Wesleyan Quadrilateral to see if you can work it out.

## SECRET QUESTIONS

 5 mins

Bring your secret questions box back. Ask each young person to write a question that they have after this session and put it into the box - maybe it is something they would like to know more about.

## PRAYER

**Close the Session with prayer.**



# Methodist Teaching on Homosexuality

## From 'Methodist Belief'

*'Modern scientific knowledge has no uniform view about the factors involved in sexuality in general and homosexuality in particular. What is recognized is their complexity. In keeping with New Testament teaching, we are opposed to all debased forms of sexuality and sexual practice, whether heterosexual or homosexual. However, we plead for understanding and tolerance for those whose sexual orientation is towards those of their own gender. We encourage the Church to give a greater lead in the education of society, including Christians, regarding this issue, so that ignorance, prejudice and fear may disappear.'*

## Excerpt from CSR Council amended Pastoral Responses 12th March 2011

*The Methodist Church in Ireland in common with every other Christian Church has members who are of homosexual orientation (whether lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender). Many never have heard any reference to sexuality from their pulpit, or if they have, it has often been negative. As a consequence some feel confused and hide their true feelings because they fear being marginalised and excluded from the Church family.*

*The Committee/Council if of a mind that homosexual orientation is not, in and of itself, a sin, however the Committee/Council is unable to come to an agreed mind on the question of homosexual lifestyle. In common with many churches we find ourselves divided into two main streams of Biblical interpretation in relation to the latter issue.*

*It is therefore important that we respect the integrity of those whose interpretation of scripture is different from our own and continue to work together in Christian love.*

# Testimonies

1

*We should love and welcome all in our churches. We should give people the space and the safety to seek the answers to these questions without always banging on about this one, rather minor issue. We should honour scriptural authority, wrestling honestly with hard passages. Gay people should be allowed to develop close, intimate friendships without being judged. However that intimacy should not include sexual relationships. This is a boundary line that we remove at our peril. Therefore the answer to gay marriage in the church, or extra marital sexual relationships between Christians in general, and Ministers of the gospel in particular is still no.*

2

*A and B believe their son was born that way. It is not a lifestyle choice. So why can't society and the church just accept him? They followed that question by challenging the need even to use the word 'acceptance'. As an example, they said we don't look at a black person and think "I'll accept them". Words like acceptance, toleration, compassion imply there is something wrong or lacking in gay people. They are just people. Their son has his good points and bad points like everyone else.*

4

*Even though X was able to share his story more with trusted people, the burden of his "secret" and its implications weighed more heavily on him. At his lowest, X prayed "With the least amount of suffering for my family, God take me", such was the depth of loneliness, desperation and sense of being trapped.*

*X is finding the loneliness and the singleness are detrimental to his health... He does not feel called to a life of singleness...He believes he is someone who needs companionship.*

3

*The weight of not being me became too much to bear, I came out to family and a few close Christian friends...However, in a strange way I hadn't come out to myself. Having spent so many years hating myself, looking in the mirror and crying – wanting to be straight – that damaged me. I didn't love myself and therefore I couldn't let anyone else love me – I was un-loveable.*

*Over the next few months, instead of embracing my new openness, my life spiraled out of control and I hit rock bottom until eventually I had to dig much deeper than ever before and try to learn to love me for being me. This was so hard for me to do, but very slowly I began to accept me and love me.*

*I had chosen to set aside my Faith at this juncture as I couldn't wrestle with the question of being Gay and Christian at the same time. I do look back and know that God walked with me at this time.*

5

*For us, pastoral care simply did not exist. Two ministers have come and gone and we feel they have simply avoided the situation. They have been lovely men but neither has known what to say, how to react, how to pastor in this situation. So the result was that they said nothing or very little. We have suffered because of this. We don't want to go over and over things but we would have loved someone to pray with us, to care... I don't blame the ministers for this and hold no bitterness or resentment of any kind... they have been very gracious men of God and we have been fond of them both. But we both feel that ministers need to be better equipped. We knew they couldn't change the situation but they simply didn't know how to handle it..*