

Could the Church of England change its mind on same-sex marriage?

Recently the Archbishops and Bishops of the Church of England have become more active in what might be described as leadership in the nation fulfilling the traditional role of the 'Established Church'. For example, joining with the other Anglican primates of the four countries represented by the United Kingdom, the Archbishops of Canterbury and York have publicly challenged the Johnson government for what might be a "disastrous precedent" in relation to a willingness to break international law over Brexit.ⁱ

However improbable, it would be nice to think that this new burst of activity was in response to this website's October editorial? Much more likely, combined pressures from a variety of sources, not least the mood of the second chamber House of Lords where the Archbishops sit as a right and an almost universal dislike of the idea of maverick British governance prompted them.

In a similar vein "The Church of England could reverse its opposition to same-sex marriage by as early as 2022."ⁱⁱ So runs the content of one of a number of reports from different sources about the House of Bishops embarking on a "decision-making" process over the Church's approach to same-sex marriage, gender and the universal Church's uncomfortable *bête noire*, namely sex.

A paper for the General Synod entitled 'Working Group on Human Sexuality'ⁱⁱⁱ has recently emerged containing a dauntingly long 203 pages. This is a close live-in-together companion of some 40 or more contributors who have been engaged (please pardon all the puns) with the coyly entitled 'Living In Love and Faith'.^{iv} The official acronym LLF has thus far escaped becoming a four-letter word LLLF by careful management but there is no shortage of words from the contributors who offer a whole suite of resources, podcasts, videos, a course and everything designed to reduce sex to as an innocuous and academic investigation as possible.

Trying to interpret the spirit of LLF, this means that after churchgoers have 'listened and learned together' and LLF has been digested it will supposedly have encouraged variously: penitence, holiness, discipleship, pain, etc. Tantalisingly, we are told that then after perhaps two years' worth of consummation the Church of England will finally make its mind up about what to do with same-sex relationships?

Anything would be better than the present C of E policy of allowing same-sex clergy to enter into civil partnerships (but definitely not what is essentially the same state, that of marriage) whilst assuring everyone, especially the bishops, that these are no more than celibate but loving relationships. Such an arrangement nonetheless still represents the 'kiss of death' to any career progress within the Church and apart from keeping an uneasy peace with conservative Anglican provinces remains a profoundly disingenuous and discriminatory nonsense.

The question therefore remains, as the two-year process will more or less coincide with preparations for the next (COVID-19 permitting) Lambeth Conference. Is this just an elaborate 'kicking of the can down the road' or is it an exercise that will at last do more than raise false, unfulfillable hopes for those who want lesbian and gay people to enjoy married life within the Church?

This sounds rather like an essay question to be answered say in 4000 words, showing a close working knowledge of sources and an understanding of the issues concerned - discuss.^v

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ⁱ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/oct/18/uk-archbishops-urge-ministers-not-to-breach-international-law-over-brexit>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/church-of-england-to-rethink-sex-sexuality-marriage-and-gender-sb0hdt7xt>

ⁱⁱⁱ https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2018-01/GS%201929%20Working%20Group%20on%20human%20sexuality_0.pdf

^{iv} <https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/living-love-and-faith>

^v Should anyone wish to attempt this for publication here on the anglicanism.org website, please do send your paper in Word format to the editor: info@anglicanism.org