

EXPLORING *Marriage & Sexuality* AS A CHURCH FAMILY



May 2022

BACKGROUND

After a few years of consultations and debates about marriage and sexuality, in Summer 2016, the URC voted at General Assembly (GA) to adopt a resolution that allowed each local congregation to decide whether it felt led to register its buildings for the marriage of same-sex couples.

In 2017 our church spent some months engaging with the issues related to the GA decision and considered what our response should be. This culminated in October 2017 with a vote, which according to the parameters agreed at church meeting, resulted in HURC deciding not to register.

We then had a 'cooling off period', which was lengthened by the emergence of Covid! Over recent months, however, we have begun to revisit that decision. In January 2022, we conducted a short questionnaire to gauge where people now stand on the issue. The results were fed into a *Thinking & Praying Ahead* forum discussion in February and the comments raised there led to March's church meeting commissioning another period of exploration, with a vote scheduled for the autumn.

One of the key thoughts from the process so far has been that we need to look more broadly at marriage and sexuality and not just focus on the decision about equal / same-sex marriage.

OBJECTIVES & APPROACH

Therefore, with input from a task group, the elders have endorsed five vital objectives for the current process:

- ⊙ Grow in our willingness and openness to engage with each other over issues we disagree on
- ⊙ Gain a better understanding and love of the individuals who make up our fellowship
- ⊙ Have a wider and clearer understanding of marriage and sexuality in the context of Christian faith and God's faithfulness
- ⊙ Grow in our understanding of all relevant Bible passages
- ⊙ Feel better prepared to take an informed vote on same-sex marriage and remain lovingly united in Christ regardless of the outcome

Based on this and the discussions in February, it is important to recognise that the process is **as much for learning (more) about other points of view as it is for putting forth your own**. Whether we are listening or speaking, it is helpful to recommit ourselves to the ***Covenant for Dialogue and Debate in the Church***, which we produced in 2017 (available below).

So, how will we be exploring marriage and sexuality?

NEXT STEPS...



We'd like you to fill out **a quick survey**. It has two purposes:

- ✓ it will help us see what types of material and events will be most helpful to you and thus shape how we engage with the topic over the coming months;
- ✓ it will give us a 'benchmark' so that we'll be able to assess how well we've achieved our objectives at the end of the process.

It's available right now and needs to be completed **by Sunday 29th May**.

If possible, please fill it in online at:



www.tinyurl.com/HURCMay22survey



(or scan the QR code)

If that's not possible, then please fill in a paper copy (available in church) and put it in the box provided.



In the next couple of weeks, a **designated webpage** on the HURC website will go live, which will be a resource hub with ideas and pointers to articles, websites and video clips.

If you have any suggestions of useful resources for this, please tell us in the survey or email minister@hadleighurc.org.uk



We're having a **bring-and-share lunch event** on **Sunday 26th June** after morning worship. The content of this event will be shaped by your survey responses (see Step 1) but the overall idea will be to feed back to you what the survey has revealed and start engaging with each other on matters we think differently about, including the broad topic of marriage and sexuality.

This will be an important event, so please do plan to attend!



Following this, there will be **a variety of ways to engage** with the topic, ranging from prayerful/reflective to informational to discussion and debate.

And we will also be considering how best to prepare for and conduct the vote about equal / same-sex marriage scheduled for the autumn.

...

Finally, we mustn't lose sight of something that we need to be doing throughout this process – praying. **With every step we take, let's be praying** that we will truly grow in love, understanding and unity. Let's pray that 'exploring marriage and sexuality as a church family' will be an opportunity for us to grow as followers of our Lord Jesus Christ.





A COVENANT FOR DIALOGUE AND DEBATE IN THE CHURCH

As followers of Jesus Christ, learning 'the way', we first and foremost commit ourselves to the way of love as shown in Christ. We recognise that it is through earnest Christlike love for one another that our faith is witnessed and affirmed (John 13:34-35; 1 Peter 4:8; 1 John 4:7-12).

Practically speaking, that may look like:

- **Considering others better than ourselves**
(Luke 6:41-41; Philippians 2:1-4; Romans 12:3)
- **Speaking that builds others up rather than tears them down**
(Ephesians 4:29-32; Romans 14)
- **Listening before speaking**
(James 1:19)
- **Avoiding arrogant, bitter or divisive talk**
(Galatians 5:19-23; 1 Corinthians 13:4-5)
- **Restraining our tongue when necessary**
(James 1:26 & 4:11)
- **Treating those who are hostile towards us with generosity**
(Matt 5:43-48; 1 Peter 2:18-23)
- **Leaving grievances in God's hands rather than retaliating**
(Matt 5:38-42; James 4:10; 1 Peter 2:23)
- **Seeking forgiveness and reconciliation wherever possible**
(Colossians 3:12-13; Matt 5:23-24)

We accept that this list is not exhaustive but merely provides some substance and expression to Jesus' command to love each other; we will endeavour to conduct ourselves in dialogue and debate in such a way that our love for God and our love for each other will be evidenced in our attitudes, words and actions – especially the command to love others as we love ourselves and to treat others in the way that we would like to be treated (Matt 22:36-40 & 7:12).

We also accept that because we are pilgrims learning the way of Jesus, we will at times stray from the way of love. So, we commit ourselves to a humble willingness to hear and receive loving rebuke when it is appropriately offered (cf. Matt 18:15-20).

Ultimately, in all our dialogue and debate we are seeking to discern God's truth in love – for the glory of God and the wellbeing of others. We therefore affirm our need for a prayerful seeking of the Spirit's guidance (cf. John 16:12-13; Acts 15), whilst acknowledging that our sisters and brothers in Christ can come to differences in understanding and conscience (Romans 14). Where there is disagreement, we will seek to respect each other and protect the unity and harmony that is rooted in our love for Jesus and one another.

***By the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit,
we covenant with each other to live out this Christian ethic.***

