

Diocese of Argyll and The Isles – Diocesan Synod 2014

Indaba Discussion on Same Sex Relationships and the Scottish Episcopal Church

Members of Diocesan Synod were randomly allocated to one of eight groups in which discussion took place in Indaba fashion.

Group Questions:

1. What has shaped your views about same sex relationships over the years?

Most people had had their views shaped by knowing gay people (8)

Personal experience in workplace or community (5)

Influence of upbringing, traditions of the church & bible study (3)

The discussion over the last 10 years (1)

Changes in equality legislation (1)

Media coverage (1)

2. What considerations should the SEC take into account when exploring whether to incorporate same sex marriage into its life?

The definition of marriage (10)

What would happen to marriage? (3)

The possibility of separating state (registration of marriage) and church; blessing civil marriages (4)

The importance of being inclusive and welcoming to all (6)

The law and Biblical interpretations (5)

The attitude of congregations including members who it affects (4)

No bulldozing (1)

Is the pace too fast (1)

Do we need change? (1)

Unintended & unimagined consequences and the effect on the next generation (3)

Ecumenical challenge/ effect on other groups/faiths (2)

Let out clause for dissenting clergy (1)

God's "ideal" – heterosexual (1)

Same sex relationships are sinful (1)

Latest research (1)

What would Jesus do? (1)

3. What areas of agreement exist in your group and what are the greatest barriers to discussion of same sex relationships?

Fear, discomfort, difficulty in sharing views. (4)

Generally don't see barriers (1)

Language "us/them" can create barriers (1)

Concept of what marriage is (1)

Objection to things being forced upon us (1)

4. What outcomes might you envisage emerging from the whole Church discussion of same sex relationships planned for 2014?

Waffling, abdication of decision, fudge arranged (3)

Start Synod process towards same sex marriage (1)

More discussion groups at all levels (1)

Polarisation of those "for" and "against" (1)

Cut out the sacrament of marriage and make civil partnerships for all with a blessing offered. (1)

Group 1 (no dissenting voices!)

Question 1

- Personal experience - as medical professional; as hospitality manager; as close friend; in the forces - seeing people ostracised
- Personal sense of justice.

Question 2

- Let out clause for dissenting clergy; can vestry-approved outsider be brought in?
- Don't want to be seen closing doors to a group of people accepted by society.
- Marriage is fundamentally about love.
- Could reaffirm the importance of marriage.

Question 3

- Generally don't see barriers.
- Language "us/them" can create barriers.

Question 4

- Start Synod process towards same sex marriage.

Group 2 (no real agreement)

Question 1

- Being at Art College.
- Just last 10 years' discussion.
- I don't know where I stand – I know some delightful gay people.
- Shaped by knowing gay couples.
- Some of best friends are gay.
- Laws in the past prevented us knowing how many gay people.
- Highland background in church made it unacceptable biblically.
- Bible study on David and Jonathan helped.
- Knowing people made one less judgemental/ getting to grips with the subject.
- Knowing people who have come out.
- Media coverage.
- Know more about it now.
- Have travelled a distance.
- Generational attitudes.
- Knowledge of several faithful same sex relationships.
- Impressed by changes in equality legislation.

Question 2

- Attitude of congregation – full spectrum.
- Members who it actually affects.
- Law.
- Latest research.
- I feel it is difficult to comprehend marriage of two people of the same sex.
- What would Jesus do?
- Probably got to accept it but may not like it.
- Does the fact that church thinks marriage is a sacrament between man and woman matter?
- Value of Gospel is unconditional love and there should be an openness to change.
- Worried about next generation – particularly will children be bullied. How will it shape them?

- Scottish opinion – 60% against despite change of law – impact on sacrament of marriage.
- Need to watch we don't turn seekers away.

Question 3

- Fear, uncomfortable
- Difficult to share views.
- Difficult to know what we feel.
- Congregations would benefit from more discussion groups.
- Discussion may be more difficult in some rural communities.

Question 4

- Maybe more discussion groups at all levels.
- The LGBT lobby is a very strong "brand". Whether or not one agrees with their policies.
- No doubt a compromise/fudge will be arranged.
- Cut out the sacrament of marriage and make marriage a civil partnership for all sexes with a blessing offered.

Group 5

Question 1

- Getting to know people before knowing their sexuality.
- Some seeking change can do themselves a disservice.
- Influence of upbringing.
- Influence of traditions of church.
- Issues/associations of the time : homosexuality & spies
- Objection to things being forced upon us.

Question 2

- Primus' response is balanced, laying out issues.
- SEC would be far more effective if we told others what we think.
- Wide range of opinions in our congregations.
- No bulldozing
- Consider the meaning of the word "marriage".
- Look for unintended consequences.
- Separate state (registration of marriage) and church.

Question 3

- Homophobia is wrong.
- Happy to be open.

Question 4

- Look for unintended consequences on other groups/faiths (especially outside Scotland)

Group ?

Question 1

- Having children.
- Meeting folk in relationships.
- Head says "no".
- Meeting/building relationships "yes".
- No awareness in younger days – assumed it was wrong but no views.
- Meeting people where they are.
- Don't pretend to understand – understanding not needed to welcome.
- May cause fear.
- Love is what matters.

- Concerns over youngsters today thinking you have to experience a homosexual relationship so you can “decide”.
- God’s “ideal” – heterosexual.

Question 2

- It’s going to happen – we have to find a way to remain open, inclusive and welcoming.
- Marriage – problem with the word – new one?
- Don’t wish to hide behind a dog collar.

Question 3

- Church should be leading not following.
- Are we bending over backwards to please a world that doesn’t care what the church think?
- Barrier – concept of what the word marriage is.

Question 4

- Loads of waffling.
- Abdication of decision.
- Polarisation of those “for” and “against”.

Group ??

- A definition of the purpose of marriage.
- Theologically? (do we need)
- Does it really need to change?
- A majority “are not fussed” – have gay friends.
- What are the implications for law and Biblical interpretation of the change?
- Pastoral issue for those who disagree with whatever way a discussion goes.
- Ecumenical challenge.
- Is the pace too fast?

Group ???

- Marriage as a sacrament would have to be redefined.
- Possibility of blessing civil marriages?
- Same for all.
- “Homophobia” as a separate issue should be addressed.
- Fewer barriers to discussion nowadays.

Group ????

- What happens to marriage?
- Is marriage to provide a safe environment for children? (the only one?)
- Unimagined (unintended) consequences?
- Can we “ditch” the word of Jesus (God)?
- I don’t want to know about it – but don’t want them to use the word “marriage”.
- I’m okay with gay relationships but not happy about marriage (& family)
- Civil partnership is ok – NOT a sacrament.
- “Same sex relationships are sinful”
- Will we destroy marriage?
- Why do same sex couples need marriage?

Group ?????

- The joy & wonder in a same-sex marriage is exactly the same as traditional marriage.

- There can be a generational and cultural visceral reaction. In the young now, this is not an issue.
- Fidelity in a relationship is of more importance.
- Importance of Biblical etc discussions – a new person does not know SEC history on this.
- We must be fully inclusive.
- “us” not “them”