

## SESSION 5: Life together

### Notes for group leaders

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# LIVING IN LOVE & FAITH

The topics that are being explored in this session are ones about which there may be very different convictions. It may be helpful to remind the group of the commitments that the course invites people to make, as well as the pastoral principles that are introduced at the beginning of each session.

This is the last session of the course, so it would be good to reserve some time for a longer reflection at the end of the session about the course as a whole. ***A key question for the group to consider is: in light of all that they have learned and experienced through the course, what do they hear God to be saying to the church?*** An idea might be to meet once more to review people's experience of the course and what has emerged from it. Do encourage the group to share their learning and reflections through the survey and creative response option on the LLF Learning Hub.

***Remember to prepare the group for the story films (see below), allowing space after each of them is shown, as they may trigger a strong emotional response.***

***Note that the story about Debbie and Stephanie may be particularly difficult for some trans people because of Debbie's views on transgender matters, which some consider to be 'anti-trans'. These views are not expressed in the film, however.***

### Overview of the session

- Pastoral Principle: Admitting hypocrisy
- Story film: Elaine & Alan  
*This is a story about a heterosexual couple who have been married for many years*
- Learning together: A community called by God
- Story film: Stephanie & Debbie  
*This is a story about a married couple with teenaged children, one of whom (Debbie) is now trans*
- Bible study: John 17
- Learning together: Disagreement and life together
- Reflection and prayer
- An appeal from the Bishops

The following notes relate to the interactive elements at the end of each of the sections.

## Ice Breaker

Gather a selection of newspapers and magazines. Divide the group into 2s or 3s and give the group a large sheet of paper, scissors, glue and a couple of marker pens. Challenge them to create a poster entitled 'Living well together'. After about 5 minutes, invite each group to talk a little about what they included or excluded. Recognise that there may be differences of opinion in the room.

## Discussing together: being a community called by God

*Allow 15 minutes for this discussion.*

Invite people to share their experiences of being part of a local church community.

Here are some other questions to get the group discussion going:

- How have you and your local church experienced the tensions within the Church of England about identity, sexuality and marriage?
- Are there areas in your life together in your church community to be repented about, to rejoice in?

## Bible study: John 17: 14-23

## The church's life together

*Allow about 20-30 minutes for this Lectio Divina.*

- Read John 17:14-23 (a shorter portion of the reading than suggested in the Course video and booklet) and allow for a short pause, before going around the group and letting each person who wishes to share a word or phrase that they felt God was highlighting for them– without further comment from themselves or others.
- Sit in silence, reflecting and praying on what has been shared
- Re-read part of the passage aloud, starting from verse 13, asking God to shed light on how this speaks into our struggles with unity and diversity.
- Go round and let each person who wishes share briefly – without questioning others – what they believe God has shown them.

## Discussing together: disagreement and life together

*Allow about 15 minutes for this discussion.*

As the course draws to a close, use this time to begin reflecting on what members of the group are discerning God to be saying to themselves and to the church.

Here are some questions for the group to consider, as appropriate:

- How would you categorise the church's differences over identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage?
- What new insights, difficulties or possibilities will you take to God in prayer?

## Reflection and prayer

Different groups have different ways of praying and ending their time together. Feel free to find ways of praying and concluding that feels natural for the group. One way might be to invite participants to write a paragraph or draw a picture expressing what they have learned/experienced over the last five weeks.

It may be helpful to read Ephesians 4.1-6 and to invite each person in the group to light a candle and pray – out loud or silently – a prayer for their own church in the light of what they have heard God speaking to them during this course.

*It may be appropriate to let the group know what pastoral support is available locally in case this or any of the other sessions have raised difficult issues for individuals.*

## Participating in discernment

You may wish to consider how the group would like to share its experiences and learning with the wider church. Encourage participants to be creative in their ideas.

There are three ways you and the members of the group can share the experience, learning and insights they gained from participating in a *Living in Love and Faith* group.

1. **Complete the online survey.** Everyone can do this, even without registering on the LLF Learning Hub. Do share the link: <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/LLFcourse>.
2. **Offer a creative response as individuals or as a group.** This is further explained here (and does require registering on the LLF Learning Hub): <https://llf.churchofengland.org/course/view.php?id=27>.
3. **Offer a 'snapshot' of your group's experience,** with a photo of the group (making sure everyone agrees to sharing the photo publicly) and sharing some of the highlights of the group's discussions, learning and experience either as an audio recording, a video or in written form. As for (2), this is further explained here: <https://llf.churchofengland.org/course/view.php?id=27>.

Here are the questions to help prompt the kinds of responses we are looking for, which are also shown on the video:

- 1 What have **you learned** from the course - about God, yourself, each other, the church?
- 2 **How diverse was your group?** What did you discover about each other's different perspectives?
- 3 What **aspects of identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage** felt particularly important to learn about?
- 4 How has the course affected **your own life** and the **life of your church** community?
- 5 What did you find **hopeful, challenging**?
- 6 What did you **hear God saying** to the church?