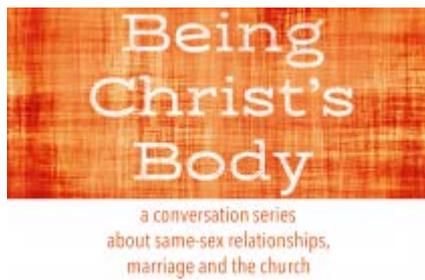


Mon 19 September 2016



In September 2015, the Synod of the Anglican Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn began a conversation about revisions proposed for the Marriage Act to include people in same-sex relationships.

In September 2016, the Public Issues Commission released a set of resources to further develop the conversation. These resources, *Being Christ's Body*, are now available and can be [downloaded here](#).



Our conversation was focussed on the potential pastoral implications that might arise from such changes to federal law. The conversation proved thoughtful, prayerful and respectful. A majority of Synod members agreed that a set of resources designed help our members talk about these issues would be helpful. Synod members wanted to talk further about such things as:

- the nature of marriage;
- the power of government;
- the nature of religious conscience; and
- how LGBTQI people belong in the church.

Nevertheless, it was also apparent that Anglicans were not of a common mind about how our church should respond to the proposed change to the legal definition of marriage. Many were concerned about what potential impact recognition might have on our life as a church and the practice of pastoral ministry across our varied parishes.

Being Christ's Body is designed to do three things. First, encourage Christians to explore the issues surrounding same-sex relationships and marriage thoughtfully. Second, to encourage people to listen to each other carefully. Third, to focus attention on the pastoral implications associated with same-sex marriage.

The resources utilise a kitchen-table format because of its capacity to produce the outcomes of learning, listening and praying together. The format is designed to bring a small group of people together with a host and a facilitator. It is designed to build trust through hospitality in a relaxed and respectful manner.

The format is a deeply Scriptural and provides a theological framework designed to help people talk about difficult things, especially when opinion and viewpoints are sharply polarised. It is designed to help people be responsible – not only for what they say but for how they respond to each other and to God.

Consequently, the format doesn't tell people what to think, what to do or what needs to be done. Rather, it provides a framework that helps people take ownership for what happens with each other. It asks them to put the needs of someone else first in order to find acceptance, not necessarily agreement.

There are six conversations in the series. The resource begins by putting issues that typically sidelined or ignored right up front. These are the issues that we're called to grapple with. These **resources** are designed to be downloaded and printed locally.

The first conversation is about the words we use and it asks us to think about whether we use them to wound or heal. It is designed to open up for us the world of sexually and gender diverse in some small way.

The next conversation draws out attention to our life together as the church. It explores how Christians can disagree with each other in a respectful way and the challenges of finding reconciliation in a space where people disagree sharply.

The third conversation draws attention to the matter as to why the Federal government has been asked to revise the legal definition within the Marriage Act of 1961. It sets out how the Marriage Act affects same-sex couples and how discrimination is defined and addressed in law.

Three more conversations are yet to come.

The fourth conversation explores what Christians mean by marriage (October 2016).

The fifth conversation explores the nature of religious liberty and the freedom of conscience (November 2016).

The final conversation explores how sexually and gender diverse people belong in the church (December 2016).

The order is designed to help people build trust and generosity by starting with the issues that feature most prominently in the public domain before moving to those that most important for us as God's people.

This ordering gives space for people to explore the conversations and whether they really want to talk, listen and pray together about the public issues before us. Our hope is that by pursuing a less familiar route, using a less used method, *Being Christ's Body* might help us to build new pastoral ploughshares that will better equip us all to live as Christ's body in a changing world.

By **Bishop Stephen Pickard**