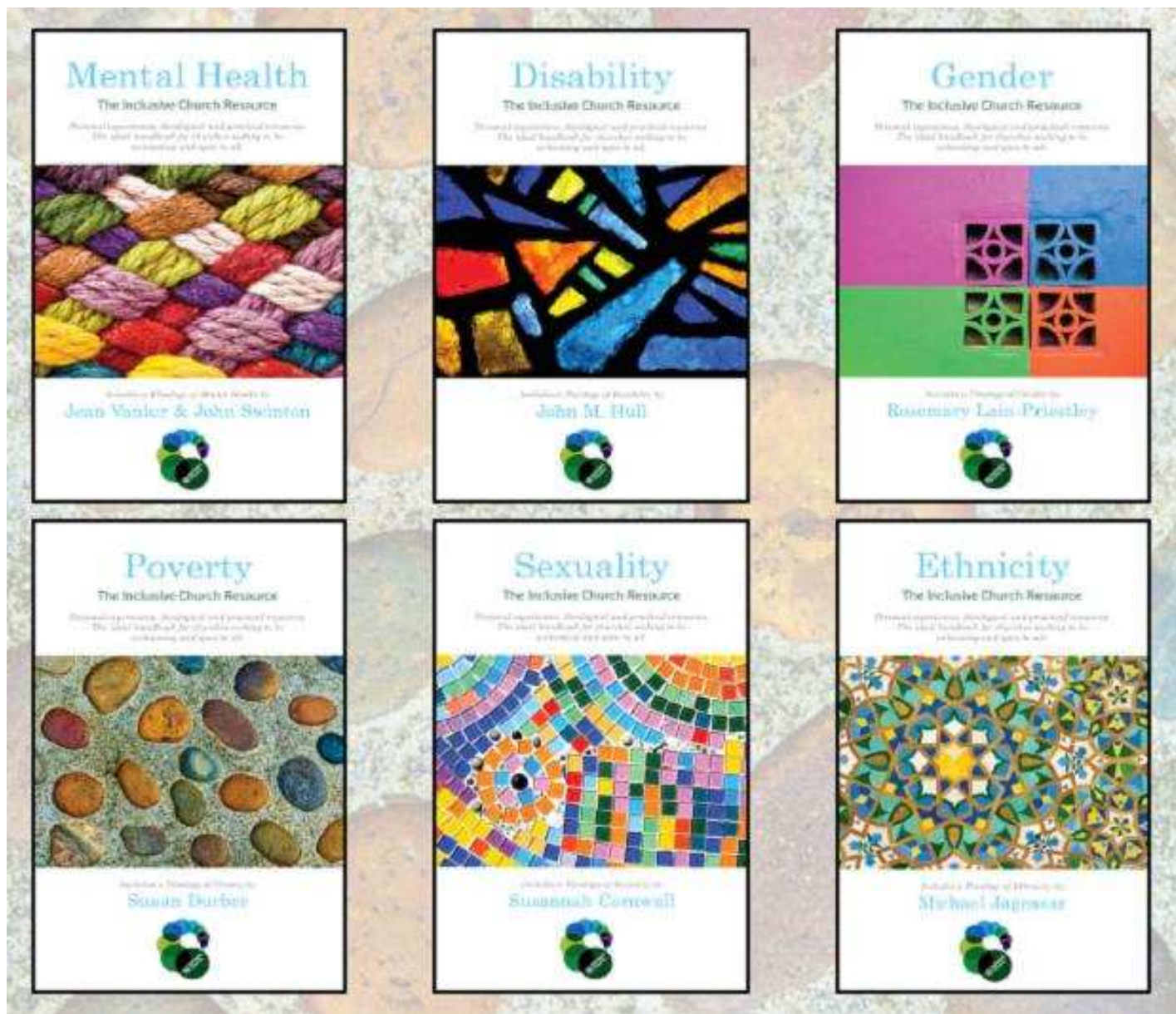




Inclusive Church Small Group Study Resources: Sexuality



DARTON · LONGMAN + TODD *The Jerusalem Trust*

Small Group Study Resources



Outline & Acknowledgements

Outline

The Inclusive Church Resource series is published by Darton, Longman & Todd. The series comprises 6 titles: Disability, Mental Health, Gender, Poverty, Sexuality and Ethnicity.

Each book contains stories from lived experience, a theological reflection and resources for further information. We recommend that each church/group using these study resources obtains a set of the Resource Books.

These small group study resources provide additional material to supplement the books. They have emerged as a result of churches using the books creatively for small group study. These study resources can be used in any order. Each study guide contains the outline, introduction, protocols, and liturgies, as well as the core study material

Acknowledgments

Inclusive Church is grateful to the generosity of the Jerusalem Trust for a grant that has enabled these materials to be drawn together. This grant was match-funded by Inclusive Church supporters and members.

Inclusive Church would like to express its gratitude to Darton, Longman & Todd for its continued support of the Inclusive Church Resource Series.

The material has been written and compiled by Jeremy Pemberton.

Jeremy has been a priest of the Church of England for thirty-four years. He has worked in parishes in the North and East of England, as a Mission partner in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and in theological education. Latterly, he has been Senior Chaplain and Bereavement Services Manager for a large NHS Trust in Lincolnshire. He now works as a cathedral lay clerk, a civil celebrant and a consultant specialising in spiritual care and equality and diversity relating to sexuality and religion. He is married to Laurence Cunnington, and they live in Southwell.

Small Group Study Resources

Introduction & Protocols



Introduction

These study materials are designed for use by a group of up to twelve or so people. If you have more people who want to use them, we recommend that you split into two groups.

Each session is designed to last for an hour and a half - but you can shorten or extend that as you choose.

The sessions have deliberately been designed to be very simple. They do not require extensive preparation by "leaders"; anyone can lead each session. It can be shared by two people if that helps, with different people leading different sections.

The aim of the material is:

- to provide enough material on each topic to stimulate people's thinking
- to structure the time so that everyone has a chance to speak and express themselves
- to link to Bible material that may be helpful in considering each topic
- to encourage reflection on how the group/church may better include the subject of the study
- to frame the time with prayers that can be led by anyone

To use these materials with a group you will need:

- A place to meet and enough chairs or cushions for everyone to sit comfortably
- A candle which is lit at the beginning of each meeting and extinguished at the end (this is not essential - if you don't have one it doesn't matter)
- Copies of the opening/closing liturgy for people to share in. In addition to being included in the study material, the liturgies have also been included as separate pages at the end of the study material for ease of printing.

- Bibles for everyone (or printed off copies of the Bible resource passages for each session)
- And that is it!

These are the skills that the person/people leading needs:

- Confidence to be able to draw the group together and help people find their way through the material
- An eye to make sure that everyone has a chance to speak and be heard
- The ability to discourage those who talk too much and encourage those who are reticent
- The ability to keep an eye on the clock and to work out roughly how to move from section to section so that you finish on time

If someone would like to try leading but has not done so before, why not let them try sharing the leadership that week with someone more experienced.

It should be noted that, as with all group work of this kind, there are no right answers. This is not about finding answers, it is about expanding our thinking, and listening for God's voice. We support one another in a group and hope that we can learn to be better disciples together. When we approach sessions prayerfully and thoughtfully, ready to learn, then we find that we are surprised by the new things that we discover working together.

Please remember too, that not everyone may be very comfortable doing lots of reading silently or aloud. You may need to find some people in your group who would be happy to read some of the materials aloud to the group, so that everyone can participate equally having listened to the material under discussion. Be careful of asking someone in front of the group if they would read aloud. Better to ask for volunteers.

Sessions include links to short YouTube videos. These can really make an impact if you have access to a computer and the internet so that you can play them to the group. If you have the capacity to link up to a TV or a larger screen that is very helpful, but even playing them on a laptop is very helpful. But the sessions work without them; they are not essential.

In particular, we hope these sessions can make us long for God's church to become a place of greater awareness and greater action towards including everyone. If they help us notice where people have been invisible, or where

their gifts have lain unused because they did not fit a particular mould, or where their needs have been ignored, then they will have fulfilled their purpose.

Jeremy Pemberton

Group Protocols

You will need to agree these at the start of the first session. Some people like to write these up and display them so that they are there for future reference. The best way to get a group to agree to protocols is to ask them to devise them themselves. Here are some suggestions of the kinds of things that you might like to consider including:

- Commitment to meeting - groups work best when everyone agrees to come to the sessions
- Commitment to participating - groups also work best when everyone there contributes
- Not interrupting or speaking over people - it helps everyone participate if their contributions are listened to by all
- No side conversations - people agree not to have whispered conversations with their neighbour while others are talking
- Confidentiality - what is said in the group stays in the group. We want people to feel safe. Some people will never have disclosed anything personal in a group before; confidentiality helps them feel safe
- Consideration in speaking - people who are confident about speaking in groups should not hog the time by talking too much
- Respecting people - there may be many different views expressed. It helps our learning if we don't rush to judgement.
- Gentleness in challenge - if someone says something we disagree with, then we agree to find a way of expressing that without aggression. "I don't see it quite that way...", "I look at that differently...", "I wonder if you have thought about..." can all be ways to do this
- Keeping to time - a group that always overruns can be off-putting for people who have to get home, catch a bus, get to something else etc. Good time-keeping is important in maintaining group loyalty
- Praying for each other - a group whose members commit to praying for each other through the week quickly builds a sense of group solidarity and care

Small Group Study Resources



Sexuality

1. The welcome

Welcome everyone to the venue. If you are offering refreshments, then the beginning of the meeting is a good place to do so. When everyone has settled you can begin. Timings against the different sections are only suggestions.

2. The Opening Liturgy (3 minutes)

Use the opening liturgy to start your meeting. You will have decided whether or not you wish to light a candle, and if so, have that ready.

In addition to being included here, the opening and closing liturgies have been included as separate pages at the end of the study material for ease of printing

[One voice leads the liturgy. The parts in bold are for everyone to say together. Don't be afraid to hold the opening silence for a minute or two.]

A candle is lit.

May the light and peace of Jesus Christ
be with you.

May the divine Presence bless you.

We say together:

**In silence we come to God.
We lay aside the burdens of the day,
the demands of others,
and our own preoccupations;
we ask forgiveness for our sins and omissions;
we long for God, and we listen:-**

We keep silence

Come to us, liberating Love,
forgive us and free us to hear your life-giving voice.

Send your Spirit to lead us into all truth,
for the sake of your wonderful name. **Amen.**

(We say together a version of the Lord's Prayer)

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
Your Kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins,
as we forgive those who sin
against us.
Lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom,
the power and the glory are
yours.
Now and for ever.
Amen.**

**Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come.
Thy will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass
against us,
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the
power, and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.**

The Lord be with you.
And also with you.

3. What do we understand by sexuality? (10 minutes)

This is a subject that affects everyone personally. Like gender, but unlike all the other Inclusive Church resources, sexuality is part of all our lives. Your experience of your own sexuality may have been uncomplicated and happy. But for many people this is an area where they have been hurt or disappointed or unhappy. Be gentle with each other as you talk about the material of this meeting.

If you can, look at this short video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=al-Ojb1zOpY>

Talk together about your reactions to this video.

Are there any surprises in it for you?

How do you find yourself responding to the people?

Note any questions that you would like to ask or any comments that you would like to make.

4. The experience of different sexualities (30 minutes)

These extracts from the Inclusive Church Resource Book give a flavour of how two different people experience their own sexuality in society and/or church. Read them aloud or silently and then consider the questions below.

Claire is a male/female transsexual who has a PhD in transsexual transition and its effect upon familial intimates. She writes:

"They say when you transition as transsexual it's as if you are reborn. I was born in 1949, so that makes me legally 64. But, socially and emotionally, I feel like 14, the time since I metamorphosed into Claire. Everyone thinks that being transsexual is all about sex and the erotic; that's probably due to the fact that the sexual bit of the word itself is confusing. The muddle also arises because historically transsexuality and homosexuality were assumed to be the same and were often referred to as strange and queer. Sex is not my prime motivation because for me loving must be passionate, warm and a weaving of the mind, body and spirit...The twenty-first century brought divorce and estrangement from my children and extended family. Retreats into the Jesuit community helped me to live on the edge while at sea in the storms."

Martin Hazell is a United Reformed Church minister:

"Being gay has always been a part of who I am; I have always known it. When I was 40, my mother said she had recognised it in me when I was two years old; and that was the first time we had ever spoken about it. In my first church, I imagined no one knew I was gay; after all no one mentioned it to me directly. But a lot of people assumed I was and spoke among themselves. My moderator thought it appropriate to inform my colleagues in other denominations; he never spoke to me, nor did he ask permission to tell other people.

For most of my growing up I never tried to fight the fact but I longed to meet someone else who was gay and 'normal' and who wanted to build a relationship with me.

Arriving at a church with that sort of baggage is a vulnerable experience. I was ashamed and feared people's judgement and rejection of me. I chose to deny who I was; others act out with bad behaviour and some with anger. Those who knew and talked openly with me in my first church helped me to find some strength to face others. Through their love and care of me, I learned to accept myself and become a better minister.

My greatest challenge has been my time working in the URC's Church House. Based in London's Kings Cross the 60 or so workers brush up against a multicultural and thriving Somali community around the building on a daily basis. It is not the sort of where one might think people would have a problem with homophobia.

On one occasion I read in an email what one colleague had written about me - I was not meant to see it. Apparently my 'campness' had offended a whole group of people during an important meeting. The person who was so angry with me had travelled and worked with me for another week without mentioning it to me directly. The message I took away from this exchange was: it was fine for me to be gay so long as I didn't act gay - don't be yourself, it seems to say.

In 1998 I applied for a job in Australia... for a minister to lead (a church) in their ministry to the gay community in Sydney. I applied and was interviewed twice, then, without feedback, I was dropped. Sometime later...I discovered I was not appointed because the church could not cope with me being gay - how they thought they could minister to the gay community when they couldn't even accept a gay minister made me wonder."

How do you react to *Claire's* story? Have you any personal experience of meeting trans people? Claire's journey towards a sense of personal integration has clearly cost her a great deal. What gifts do you think trans people might bring to the church?

Martyn's mother said that she recognised him as gay at the age of two. How do you respond to that? Is that possible?

He says that he was self-aware and self-accepting all his life - except in church. How do you think Martyn has been treated overall by the church? How easy do you think it is for people with non-standard sexualities to be themselves in church communities? In your church community?

5. Theologies of Sexuality (40 minutes)

Think about the theology of sex and sexuality that you have learnt. What does it consist of? Where did it come from? What are the messages about sex that you have learnt at church over the years?

Christian sexual ethics have mostly been duty based - in other words, sexuality and its expression is all directed towards a particular end, procreation. All sexual activity has, historically, been judged by whether it aided or avoided this end. Add to this a strong tendency to regard sexual desire as dangerous and sinful, and a consequent elevation of the virtues of chastity and abstinence, and you have what has been a long story about no sex, or if sex, then with a huge list of dos and don'ts attached.

Talk together about this and make a list of the dos and don'ts that you are aware of, and see if you can work out why they might appear in the list. Here is one to get you started:

Masturbation (male - no one in ancient times ever thought about female self-pleasure) - it is a no, because, self-evidently, it is non-procreative.

But this approach to sex and sexuality, which still dominates the teaching of most churches, neglects all that we have learnt about sex over the centuries. The Christian history of sex and sexuality is mostly about men's sexual lives. Women are dangerous (Eve), or an unattainable sexless ideal (Mary). In between lie the risky women of the Bible (Mary Magdalene, Ruth, Bathsheba) who epitomise temptation. Falling into sin was about (men) transgressing one or more of the dos or don'ts. The most striking image of Israel's unfaithfulness towards God in the work of the Old Testament prophets was that their tendency to worship other gods was like visiting prostitutes.

What do we know about sex and sexuality that the Bible and the early Christian centuries never did?

Talk together about things that give a rather different picture. These might include: sex for pleasure not just procreation, contraception, women's control of their fertility, the capacity to manage sexually transmitted diseases, the reality of homosexuality in humans and animals, recognising and not criminalising sexual minorities, extended human life expectancy and population growth.

If this picture is the reality we live with, what kind of theology of sexuality will help us honour God and each other? Look at this short video:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U_TgFQ1pM6c

If Christian sexual ethics are no longer about codes to control sex, then what can replace this? Some Christian ethicists now want to place the emphasis on the development of virtuous character lived in community. Virtue ethics, as it is called, is not an abandonment of the older tradition, but it does suggest that the end towards which we should be working is a community of love, within which is enfolded, desire, sex, and sexuality.

Think back to the people you saw on the first video clip. Could you imagine them with their very diverse sexualities finding a place as faithful Christians, growing in holiness? Or does faithfulness and holiness demand that we conform to particular constructions of sexual identity and behaviour? What are the limits and what are the things we should prioritise?

6. Silence and the Closing Liturgy (7 minutes)

Bring your conversation to a close and sit together in the peace of God's presence in silence.

We bring before God all we have heard,
Our thinking and speaking,
Those about whom we have talked,
The things that have challenged us,
And the ways in which we have heard the still small voice of the Divine:

(short pause for silent reflection)

Sexuality is completely about what it means to be embodied - so you may like to use this poem/prayer by Jim Cotter in that liturgy:

God be in my head and in my understanding.
God be in my eyes and in my looking.
God be in my mouth and in my speaking.
God be in my tongue and in my tasting.
God be in my lips and in my greeting.

God be in my nose and in my smelling/inhaling.
God be in my ears and in my hearing.
God be in my neck and in my humbling.
God be in my shoulders and in my bearing.
God be in my back and in my standing.

God be in my arms and in my reaching/receiving.
God be in my hands and in my working.
God be in my legs and in my walking.
God be in my feet and in my grounding.
God be in my knees and in my relating.

God be in my gut and in my feeling.
God be in my bowels and in my forgiving.
God be in my loins and in my swiving.
God be in my lungs and in my breathing.
God be in my heart and in my loving.

God be in my skin and in my touching.
God be in my flesh and in my paining/pining.
God be in my blood and in my living.
God be in my bones and in my dying.
God be at my end and at my reviving.

After this the candle is extinguished. Then the meeting may close with one or other of these prayers

**The grace of our Lord Jesus
Christ,
and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy
Spirit
be with us all, evermore. Amen.**

In our hearts and homes the love of
God,
**in our coming and going the
peace of God,**
in our life and believing the strength
of God,
**at our end and beginning the
welcome of God.**

Small Group Study Resources

Opening and Closing Liturgy: Sexuality



The Opening Liturgy

[One voice leads the liturgy. The parts in bold are for everyone to say together. Don't be afraid to hold the opening silence for a minute or two.]

A candle is lit.

May the light and peace of Jesus Christ
be with you.

May the divine Presence bless you.

We say together:

In silence we come to God.

**We lay aside the burdens of the day,
the demands of others,
and our own preoccupations;
we ask forgiveness for our sins and omissions;
we long for God, and we listen:-**

We keep silence

Come to us, liberating Love,
forgive us and free us to hear your life-giving voice.
Send your Spirit to lead us into all truth,
for the sake of your wonderful name. **Amen.**

(We say together a version of the Lord's Prayer)

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
Your Kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins,
as we forgive those who sin**

**Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come.
Thy will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass**

**against us.
Lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom,
the power and the glory are
yours.
Now and for ever.
Amen.**

**against us,
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the
power, and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.**

The Lord be with you.
And also with you.

Closing Liturgy

Bring your conversation to a close and sit together in the peace of God's presence in silence.

We bring before God all we have heard,
Our thinking and speaking,
Those about whom we have talked,
The things that have challenged us,
And the ways in which we have heard the still small voice of the Divine:

(short pause for silent reflection)

Sexuality is completely about what it means to be embodied - so you may like to use this poem/prayer by Jim Cotter in that liturgy:

God be in my head and in my understanding.
God be in my eyes and in my looking.
God be in my mouth and in my speaking.
God be in my tongue and in my tasting.
God be in my lips and in my greeting.

God be in my nose and in my smelling/inhaling.
God be in my ears and in my hearing.
God be in my neck and in my humbling.
God be in my shoulders and in my bearing.
God be in my back and in my standing.

God be in my arms and in my reaching/receiving.
God be in my hands and in my working.
God be in my legs and in my walking.
God be in my feet and in my grounding.
God be in my knees and in my relating.

God be in my gut and in my feeling.

God be in my bowels and in my forgiving.
God be in my loins and in my swiving.
God be in my lungs and in my breathing.
God be in my heart and in my loving.

God be in my skin and in my touching.
God be in my flesh and in my paining/pining.
God be in my blood and in my living.
God be in my bones and in my dying.
God be at my end and at my reviving.

After this the candle is extinguished. Then the meeting may close with one or other of these prayers

**The grace of our Lord Jesus
Christ,
and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy
Spirit
be with us all, evermore. Amen.**

In our hearts and homes the love of
God,
**in our coming and going the
peace of God,**
in our life and believing the strength
of God,
**at our end and beginning the
welcome of God.**