



Sexuality

DISCUSSION SESSION 1
Why This, Why Now?



Note to Discussion Sessions

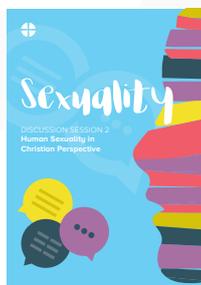
The following discussion session is part of a 4 series programme which has been designed to be used in a group from a local congregation or circuit. You can decide how much or how little of the suggested format to use. You know your context best. Please, modify or adapt the sessions as you see fit for the comfort level of your participants. If the full plan is followed, you should allow an hour to an hour and a half for each of the four sessions, which might easily be scheduled one night a week for a month.

The session guides are complements to and assume that participants will have read 'Sexuality – Developing Good Conversation on Difficult Questions' or the relevant sections of the document for each session prior to attendance. If your group does not wish to work in this way, you may plan to have some copies of the document on hand for people to review the relevant sections over a cup of tea/coffee prior to the start of the session.

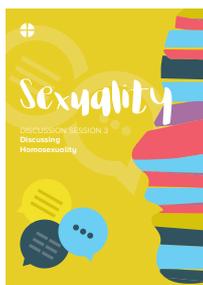
Session 1 Why This, Why Now



Session 2 Human Sexuality in Christian Perspective



Session 3 Discussing Homosexuality



Session 4 What Should We Do next



🌐 All of these can be downloaded from www.irishmethodist.org/WPHS

Sexuality

DISCUSSION SESSION 1
Why This, Why Now?



You Will Need:

- ✓ A copy of 'Sexuality – Developing Good Conversation on Difficult Questions' for each participant
- ✓ A Bible for each participant
- ✓ Handout 'Challenges Facing Christianity' for each participant
- ✓ Handout 'Four Wesleyan Sources' for each participant
- ✓ Handout 'William Gouge: Of Domesticall Duties' (to be distributed to read in advance of next session) for each participant
- ✓ Flip chart, white board or power point and projector

Open the Session with prayer.

PRAYER

Creator God, in your wisdom and love you made human beings in your own image. You created us as whole people: bodies, minds, and hearts. You made us able to be in relationship to you and to one another. We thank you for all our fellow believers gathered here this evening and for the Christian community that we share. As we enter into these discussions, please guide our speaking and our thinking. Help us to appreciate and learn from one another and from your word. May all that we think and do together be useful for the purposes of your kingdom. In the name of Christ we pray. Amen.

ICE-BREAKER

 10 mins

To the leader: The purpose of this activity is to get the group talking and thinking about the church's place in broader society and to recognise that there are a range of things that need to be addressed in order for the church's witness to be improved.

Instructions: Distribute print copies of the handout 'Challenges Facing Christianity' to each participant along with a pen/pencil. Ask each to rank the listed concerns one to 7 with one being the most significant challenge. After participants have done this paper activity, invite them to gather into groups that listed the same #1. Invite volunteers from each group to express why they think what they named is most significant. Encourage participants to talk about how they feel about the church's place in broader culture at the moment. Was this task easy or hard? Are some things much more concerning than others?

ESTABLISHING A GOOD BASIS

FOR DIALOGUE

 10 mins

To the leader: This section invites participants to set their own ground rules for the discussion and introduces the 'Wesleyan Quadrilateral' as a frame for theological thinking and decision making in Methodist communities.

Instructions:

1. Invite participants to chat to their neighbour for two minutes about 'What would a good discussion in the church look like?' Then, invite sharing. Take notes on a piece of chart paper of important features of good, Christian discussion.

2. Distribute the Handout – Four Wesleyan Sources. Describe each section as an important part of how we, as Methodists, think through issues. You may wish to paraphrase the quotation on the handout about the Wesleyan Quadrilateral. Inform participants that each session will incorporate Scripture, Reason, Tradition and Experience and that we will value the contributions that each of these make. Invite each participant to think about which of these are most important to them in their decision making. Invite responses, questions or comments.

3. Ask each member of the group to look at the chart from *The Magic of Dialogue in 'Sexuality – Developing Good Conversation on Difficult Questions'* (page 17). Explain that we are aiming for the dialogue column. Ask – which of these characteristics do you think is the easiest to achieve? Which is the hardest? Which makes you uncomfortable? Why?

4. Using the chart paper from earlier, invite the group to make its own 'Rules' for discussions for the remaining sessions. Save this for each session and bring it with you and hang it in a prominent place in the room each time.

DISCUSSION: CHURCH AND CULTURE

 35 mins

Read aloud or post on power-point or white board the following:

According to 'Sexuality – Developing Good Conversation on Difficult Questions' 'The Church is called to be counter-cultural; it should be ready to challenge and resist those aspects of society (like racism, for example) that distort God's vision for justice and joy. At the same time, a church always exists within a culture and needs to see God at work within it.' (page ?)

- » How do you respond to this statement?
- » What can we name about our own local culture where we see God at work? (list these)
- » What in our local culture do we need to 'challenge and resist'? (list these)
- » Can we name any guidelines for what makes something a positive or negative aspect of culture?

Ask for two volunteers to read passages from the Bible: John 17:11-18 and 1 Peter 2:9-17. Ask the group (you may decide to divide your group into three and ask each to address one question and report back):

- » How would you describe the relationship between the Christian and his/her culture based on these passages?
- » What is the purpose of the relationship between the Christian and his/her culture in these passages?
- » How is the Christian supported/nourished in these two passages?

Read or post for participants the following: 'It might be appropriate to call the missionary distance that 1 Peter stresses soft difference. I do not mean a weak difference, for in 1 Peter the difference is anything but weak. It is strong, but it is not hard. Fear for oneself and one's identity creates hardness ... In the mission to the world, hard difference operates with open or hidden pressures, manipulation, and threats. A decision for soft difference, on the other hand, presupposes a fearlessness which 1 Peter repeatedly encourages his readers to assume (3:14; 3:6). People who are secure in themselves – more accurately, who are secure in their God – are able to live the soft difference without fear. ... For people who live the soft difference, mission fundamentally takes the form of witness and invitation.' Source: Miroslav Volf, 'Soft Difference; Theological Reflections on the Relation Between Church and Culture in 1 Peter' *Ex Auditu* (1994), 24.

- » What characteristics do we need to develop as a group if we are going to embody 'soft difference' in our mission in this culture? What would that look like for us?

THE SEXUALISATION OF

WESTERN CULTURE

 25 mins

To the leader: This section of the session prepares participants for the sessions that follow, by giving them a chance to express their own sense of the importance/urgency of issues of human sexuality for the church.

Instructions:

Arrange a 'vote with your body' poll. Choose three areas of the room. One will represent 'Agree'. One will represent 'Disagree' and one will represent 'Undecided/unsure'. Read each statement and give people a chance to move to the place that represents their perspective. [If you think your group might be uncomfortable doing this activity by moving about the room, feel free to adapt it. For example, you might ask people to write down their responses.] If people feel comfortable explaining their response, welcome this. Alternatively, you can offer people a chance to reflect on the exercise afterwards.

1. Sexual images in media and advertising have a negative impact on our thinking about sex and our bodies.
2. The church needs to say more about sex.
3. Pornography is dangerous.
4. Sexual pressures from society on young people are higher than they used to be.
5. Technology is to blame for the increase in sexually explicit media.
6. Christians need to provide moral guidance about sex and marriage.
7. The change in young people's attitudes toward co-habitation and homosexuality is mostly about generational difference.
8. I am personally worried about the changes in our culture's attitudes toward sex.

Following discussion of this activity, prompt people to find a partner to discuss with. Ask each group to share with each other one thing that surprised them or stood out to them from the section 'The Sexualisation of Western Culture' in the 'Human Sexuality – Resources for Conversations in the MCI' document. Have groups report back as much as they are comfortable.

Remind your group of the discussion of 'soft difference.'

- » What would 'soft difference' from our culture look like in the issues of sexuality and sexualisation of culture?
- » What matters demand 'fearlessness' for us to embody soft difference?
- » In what ways do we need to resist 'hard difference' as we talk to and with our culture about human sexuality?

As a full group, create a brainstorming-style list of the specific issues related to Human Sexuality that your group is most concerned to discuss. Save these for your next session.

Ask participants to name one key thing they will take away from this session.

As you close the discussion, encourage everyone to look over the definitions of key terms in the section of the document titled 'Developments in Language and Understanding'. This will help with clear communication in the next sessions which will deal more directly with issues of human sexuality.

Distribute the handout 'William Gouge: Of Domesticall Duties' and explain that this will form a contribution to our discussion next time. Invite participants to read it and bring it and their questions about it with them to the next session.

Close the Session with prayer.

PRAYER

Everliving, everloving God, in Christ you have given us an example of self-giving love and taught us that perfect love casts out fear. As we face the task of talking about difficult things together, teach us to offer hospitality, concern and care for one another in imitation of Christ's self-giving love. As we address concerns about our culture and our church, teach us to rest in the promise of your love and enable us to live without fear. As we go out from this time of prayer and study, may we face the world you love and for which Christ died with prayerful care. In the name of Christ, who offered himself for our sakes, Amen.

Challenges Facing the Church

RANK THE FOLLOWING CHALLENGES FACING THE CHURCH FROM 1-6 WITH 1 BEING THE MOST URGENT/SIGNIFICANT.

DECLINING ATTENDANCE
a more secular Ireland



CHANGES TO SEXUAL PRACTICES AND ATTITUDES IN SOCIETY

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC PRESSURES
a more materialistic society



MISSIONAL APATHY

DIMINISHED BIBLE KNOWLEDGE



OTHER

**SOCIAL WITNESS/
LACK THEREOF**
(Homelessness, Refugees)



Four Wesleyan Sources for Theology



SCRIPTURE

What Does the Bible Say?

- » Interpreted by Reason
- » Received through Tradition
- » Engaged with in our own experience



REASON

Using the Minds God Gave Us

- » Shaped by our encounters with Scripture, our religious tradition and our experience.



TRADITION

What has the Christian Faith said?

- » Formed as interpretation of Scripture
- » Assumes the powers of reason
- » Involves the experiences of many prior Christians.



EXPERIENCE

What does my journey with God, and yours, teach us?

- » Values the individuals within the tradition
- » Highlights our own encounters with the God of the Scriptures

‘The phrase which has relatively recently come into use to describe the principal factors that John Wesley believed illuminate the core of the Christian faith for the believer. Wesley did not formulate the succinct statement now commonly referred to as the Wesley Quadrilateral. Building on the Anglican theological tradition, Wesley added a fourth emphasis, experience. The resulting four components or “sides” of the quadrilateral are (1) Scripture, (2) tradition, (3) reason, and (4) experience. For United Methodists, Scripture is considered the primary source and standard for Christian doctrine. Tradition is experience and the witness of development and growth of the faith through the past centuries and in many nations and cultures. Experience is the individual’s understanding and appropriating of the faith in the light of his or her own life. Through reason the individual Christian brings to bear on the Christian faith discerning and cogent thought. These four elements taken together bring the individual Christian to a mature and fulfilling understanding of the Christian faith and the required response of worship and service.’

Source: A Dictionary for United Methodists, Alan K. Waltz, Copyright 1991, Abingdon Press. Accessed online <http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/wesleyan-quadrilateral> 24.11.16

Which sources are you most drawn to?
Why?

How do you think Scripture, Reason, Tradition and Experience should relate to each other in Christian thinking?

