

## **The Benefice of Wollaston, Easton Maudit, Bozeat & Strixton beliefs on Human Sexuality**

The whole area of human sexuality is becoming more diverse than ever before. There are strong opinions, convictions, and beliefs that need to be listened to and acknowledged. Our hope is that no matter what we currently think and believe, we are able to find common ground, and where we can't, our over-riding desire is that we are able to disagree well.

### **The Church Hasn't Consistently Represented Christ Well**

We believe that every person has been made in the image of God and therefore has an equal intrinsic value. For those who identify as LGBTQ, we want you to experience the love of God and our love expressed in honour, compassion, respect, and safety. We deeply regret that throughout history, both secular society and the Church at large have often participated in, been silent about, or purposefully ignored significant injustices against those who identify as LGBTQ. In any area where we, or our predecessors, have participated in such behaviour, turned a blind eye, or failed to speak up on behalf of your safety, dignity, and justice, we ask for forgiveness—and seek to be a better example of God's love. In both our private conversations and public discourse, we want to have a radical inclusion that expresses the loving kindness that God has for all people.

### **Scripture Contains the Meaning of Life**

The Bible is a book that tells the story of God and His people. It tells us who God is, who we are, and what our purpose is. We believe that the God of the Bible is a good and loving Father who wants the very best for humanity—and He is that best. Our understanding of the Bible leads us to believe that men and women have fundamental and essential distinctions. We believe that God intentionally created humanity *"in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them"* (Gen. 1:27 NIV). We believe that God knew exactly what He was doing when He created our sexuality and called it good. We therefore seek to live in full agreement with His original design, acknowledging in a world that is broken, this is a complex issue for some in terms of their gender and/or their sexual attraction. As a church, we seek to have empathy with those in this position.

We believe that the Bible, and Jesus himself, teaches a sexual ethic that is fundamentally different from modern society—that we are more than our desires, questioning, or attractions. In Matthew 19:4-6 NIV, He reaffirmed the Genesis 1 view of sex, gender, and marriage:

*"Haven't you read," He replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."*

Twice Jesus added "two" to His quote of Genesis 2:24, emphasising the truth that marriage was always intended to be a lifetime covenant between one man and one woman, and the only context in which sexual behaviour is blessed. Following Jesus is a call to a radical holiness that includes human sexuality.

We believe the current discussions happening within the Church of England are leading to a change in this doctrine of marriage which the Church has held since its beginning. We are therefore unable at this time to support the use of the Prayers of Love and Faith for the blessing of same-sex couples, either within a Sunday morning service, or as a separate service on another occasion.

We believe that God designed us with a free will and that he deeply values our ability to respond to His invitation. Jesus never forced people to follow Him nor even into change, but He invited them to enter into a new way of life. As His followers, we are called to treat all people in the same way, with the utmost respect, dignity, compassion, and love, even if we adamantly disagree with them on any issue.

### **Conclusion**

We want to provide a church environment where everyone is welcome, valued and included. We recognise that we have all fallen short in the past and we, the Church, still have some way to go to ensure those who are same sex attracted and all those who identify as LGBTQ, experience a positive welcome and feel valued and included. We also recognise that this statement of belief will, for some, be received as a rejection. Our hope, as stated at the beginning is that we are able to find common ground, and where this is not possible, our over-riding desire is that we are able to disagree well.

For those who want to find a local church that thinks differently and has come to a different conclusion, then we suggest you contact our local Rural Dean, Jenny Bland at [thevicar.earlsbarton@outlook.com](mailto:thevicar.earlsbarton@outlook.com) who will be able to help you.