

Many themes have emerged during the last few months. Covid has drawn us together and driven us apart. The same is true of the American election. I am hopeful about the future but depressed about the way in which supporters of different approaches have been 'daggers drawn' against each other.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, who has just died, was a towering strength in ethics. He wrote passionately about learning to live together despite difference. Society, he wrote,

*is where Jew and Christian, Muslim and Hindu. Buddhist and Sikh, can come together bound by their commonalities, enlarged by their difference. It is where we join together in civilised conversation about the kind of society we wish to create for the sake of our grandchildren not yet born. It is where we share an overarching identity, a first language of citizenship, despite our difference second languages of ethnicity and faith. It is where strangers become friends.*

That approach is so needed in our world – as it is in our church. The Church is home to a great diversity of people. There are serious differences of opinion on a variety of things, including human sexuality. *Living in Love and Faith* resources, published today, engage with those differences. They are the product of three years' work by more than 40 people, led by the Bishop of Coventry. They include a 480-page book, a series of films and podcasts, a course and an online library of other publications. It represents the fruit of the most intensive research into the human person as a sexual person by any faith group in the world.

The hope is that we shall all engage in a period of engagement using the resources for open, honest and gracious listening, learning and discussion. It is intended that the period of engagement will lead into a time-limited stage of discernment, followed by the making whatever decisions are needed for the life and mission of the church. I emphasise that this will not be an exercise in kicking these questions into the long grass – there will be a meaningful process with a clear end-point.

The bishops recognise that there are deep and painful divisions within the Church over questions of identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage, stretching back over many years, and that a new approach is now needed. Those divisions are rooted in sincerely held beliefs about God's will but go to the heart of people's lives and loves.

There has been an absence of a genuine love for each other as God wishes for everyone. Our great desire is that the church will engage with these resources in all our parishes, all our dioceses and across all our differences, and that we will learn to walk together as the Body of Christ

This process will not succeed without love, grace, kindness and compassion of the sort commended by Rabbi Sacks. If you want to listen to an example of how that can be done, listen to with Giles Goddard and Andrew Goddard two clergy, members of the LLF group with very different views on these matters, on the Radio 4 Sunday programme yesterday, About 6 minutes in on BBC Sounds!

More of this later but now, on with to tonight's agenda ...

+John Wigorn: