

St Mark's Church,

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ST MARK'S
CHURCH HAYDOCK

Vicar: Rev Dan Leathers

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Knowing Jesus – Loving Each other – Caring for our Community

2nd February 2023

“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.” (John 17:20–21, NIV 2011)

Dear Church Community

I write to you off the back of many conversations this week. Some in person, some over the phone and many over email.

The topic of sexuality and relationships is particularly close to home for many of our church family who are supporting and loving loved ones who have chosen not to marry but cohabiting instead, some family members and friends who are wrestling with their sexual orientation and others who live at peace with their same-sex attraction. While it is a separate area of life, gender identity sometimes overlaps with the lived experience of many church members' families. Whenever we speak about human sexuality, we need to do so lovingly, compassionately and with care and where we have got that wrong, I am deeply sorry.

At St Mark's we are all about Knowing Jesus – Loving Each Other – Caring for our Community.

On our webpage about sexuality I've written - <https://stmarkshaydock.org/sexuality/>

“Human sexuality is such a deep part of each of our lives that we tread carefully when we explore how Jesus wants us to live as sexual beings.

We believe God loves each and everyone of us, that he created us and affirms our humanity.

We also believe that humanity get things wrong, and as disciples of Jesus we are called to follow His way, as the best way.

The resources below have been compiled by Rev Dan who has his own story and experience, and these are some of the best resources he has found helpful in his own study and wrestles with this subject.

Everything here is offered, and as always, if you would like to explore, question, or comment on any of these then please do reach out to Dan and the clergy team.”



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Ahead of this week's General Synod debate (on Wednesday) I have updated the above page with a few extra articles which I hope you may find helpful.

In Church we hold together Christians with differing viewpoints on how to approach scripture and what scripture says about our sexual ethic and my hope is that we can find a way of walking together amidst our difference. I also want us to work harder on being a place where all can feel truly welcome, particularly those who identify as LGBTI+.

For me as your minister, after many years of wrestling with scripture, and after years of study, I remain convinced that our life-giving God has drawn out his design for sexual relations in scripture, to be between one man and one woman for the rest of their lives. I believe the culture and philosophies of the day are drawing us away from Jesus rather than toward him, particularly in the sexual openness prized by our media and which I believe has led to so much brokenness in family life. You may disagree with me, and I want you to know that I respect you as a brother and sister and I would love us to continue walking together in this.

My deep concerns next week are similar to Richard's in that I am concerned that the Church of England is looking to undermine God's design for marriage as found in scripture, the knock-on effect being a downgrading of scripture in the eyes of the church. As an evangelical church, St Mark's has always had a high view of the Bible as the primary way God speaks to us.

That is my concern as a teacher of the word of God, but as a pastor, I deeply care about how you are feeling, and how you are wrestling with belonging to a church where the Vicar and a number of the regular bible teachers within church, deeply believe something perhaps different to you. My main message to you, **you are loved and welcome**. I am grateful to all who have joined me for coffee or a pint to discuss matters across the spread of sexuality and for the openness and honesty of my brothers and sisters. You have helped me understand more, we've been able to delve into the bible together and even where we disagree, we have been committed to walking this road toward Jesus together. I believe I am a better pastor because of these conversations, and also for the listening we did together with 30 individuals through the Living in Love and Faith course.

After discussion with Alison and James, we will commit to letting the church know in advance when the annual sermon on sexuality will be preached each year, to enable you to prepare yourself for the sermon, and to enable you to bring seekers and friends to other services in the knowledge that this deep subject will be discussed once a year, and all others will be focused on the many other areas of God's salvation plan and his grace which he shows his children.



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Whatever your position on what scripture says around matters of human sexuality, can I ask for you to pray for the mind of Christ to be known in General Synod next week. That the debate happens honestly and lovingly, and for all those affected by the outcome of next week's debate.

I am on a residential training week next week followed by half term, and so am deeply grateful to offer James and Alison as listening ears in my absence. Please do reach out to them if you would like to speak in person.

With much love for you, for who you are in Christ and for all you bring to our Church community.

Yours faithfully



Rev Dan Leathers

Vicar of St Marks

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