Affirming

We have had some questions through the feedback box for the Affirming process and want to respond. Some of the questions deal with the biblical understanding of homosexuality. There are injunctions in Leviticus 19 and Romans 4 saying that men should not lie with men as they do with women. Biblical scholars tend to respond to these references in one of three ways: 1. the issue of men lying with men was seen as a hedonistic experience outside of marriage and cannot be compared to a committee relationship between two same sex partners. 2. The rare mention of men lying with men indicates that it was not a significant issue (i.e. Jesus never mentions homosexuality), it was certainly of far less concern than following the Sabbath laws for example. 3. We have been able to contextualize many biblical injunctions that no longer seem true to God’s spirit, (stoning adulterers, not allowing women to speak at church, having wives be subject to their husbands, keeping slaves) and anti-homosexual references in scripture should be treated the same way.

One person cited Jesus’ invitation for “all” to come to him and wondered if this overrode injunctions such as “man shall not lie with man”. Jesus certainly welcomed into his company people others found objectionable (tax collectors, prostitutes, sinners, lepers). This put him at odds with strict religious groups such as the Pharisees. Our denomination has traditionally understood Christianity to be a welcoming faith that embraces all.

Finally there were questions about the nature of homosexuality. Is it chosen or a given at birth, for example. There is a strong understanding that gender and orientation are on a continuum. People are often not simply male or female and people are biologically attracted to different people on the continuum. It is overly simplistic to call orientation or gender a choice. We know that people who have not identified with traditional roles and categories have suffered ridicule and abuse. We think it more faithful to support such people with love and care.

Thanks to those who are asking questions and using the feedback box. Please continue to do so.