

So, governing body, Gregory Cameron, bishop of Saint Asaph, ex officio member. I personally think the chair should have asked the archdeacons present to break out ice creams in the intermission. But, instead, you've got my answer. Now this is, I'm afraid to say, a fairly long answer. Geraint, articulates an important question, and it deserves an answer in full, and that is what I'm going to offer.

I'm going to suggest that the secretariat can make copies, of the answer and make those available to members of governing body should you wish them. The April 2022 statement to which Geraint refers in his question actually included a reiteration of the bench's statement from a year previously, which was responding to the then conservative government in Westminster who had first announced that it was considering legislation on conversion therapy. In it, I think the position of the bench is very clear. We said, anything which seeks to suggest that there is something inherently wrong or sinful in those who are non heterosexual or which seeks to force people to try and change their sexuality is we believe wrong. It is both abusive and traumatising as those who have experienced such test therapy can testify.

We join our voices with the Royal College of Psychiatrists and other health care professionals in asserting that the practice of gay conversion therapy inflicts lifelong damage on those who are forced to undergo it and has no place in the modern world. We understand that the senate will also consider this matter and urge the senate to bring in robust legislation that will ban conversion therapy in all its forms. Thereby offering protection to LGBTQI plus people in Wales from this abusive and damaging practice. Following that statement, we received correspondence from the Evangelical Fellowship of the Church in Wales who asked for clarification, and we further wrote this. You asked the bishops what we mean by opposing gay conversion therapy in all its forms.

Again, we believe this to be straightforward and plain. Any supposed therapy which purports or claims to convert a person's sexuality is in our opinion abusive and should be banned. You ask whether quotation "open discussion, and grace filled prayer with someone who wants to explore biblical teaching on the issue of sexuality should, in the opinion of the bishops, fall under such a ban". Sadly, this positive sounding phrase leaves far too much to individual interpretation. These seemingly innocuous words can be used to disguise practices in which pressure is brought upon vulnerable LGBTQIA persons to submit to efforts aimed at the conversion of their sexuality including attempted exorcisms and worse.

Such practices can be designed consciously or unconsciously to play on people's sense of shame or anxiety and signal that unless they conform to a heterosexual norms, they can neither be true disciples of Jesus nor accepted members of the congregation with which they wish to become associated. A toxic mixture of motivation to avoid embarrassment, to please a revered spiritual leader, to assuage long standing guilt or shame can be triggered, which we as bishops believe would be abusive. Our advice to members of EFCW, and I may had add here today to you, by extension, all ministers of the church in Wales, is that they were to avoid any practice which comes close to being capable of being interpreted as abusive in this way. Indeed, given the deep psychology of human sexuality, we believe that it should be left to the specialist to intervene if indeed that is necessary. The church's role is to offer welcome, acceptance, and friendship.

And if requested, prayer that God's grace can be operative in the situation and that a person would know God's guidance and blessing without a defined outcome. Furthermore, as you've heard already today, the bench is currently in the process of undertaking 2 important pieces of work. 1st, it is working with the safeguarding service of the Church in Wales and the doctrinal commission to explore, define, and respond to the issue of spiritual abuse within the church. That's the report, that was mentioned this morning. Conversion therapy clearly falls within the ambit of this work.

Secondly, the bench is currently reconsidering the statement of 2002 concerning the position of the Church in Wales on the matter of sexuality and seeking to update it for the contemporary context. It would not be wise in this answer to anticipate the outcome of these two pieces of work, but the reverend Geraint John can be assured that all four of the proposals in his question are broadly consonant with the direction of the work which is being undertaken. His suggestions will assist us in defining the clarity which is required in these pieces of work, and full answers will be forthcoming in the near future. It is a work in progress. Finally, as far as potential legislation is concerned, I'm reliably informed that the Welsh government is putting its own work on hold in order to develop a joint 4 nations approach in conjunction with Westminster.