Discernment Group’s Combined Facilitators Feedback

Discussion on Same Sex Marriage

There is no proposal being brought forward from this discussion.

All the feedback that has been provided by Discernment Groups will be gathered to help the general Secretary to compose a response from the Synod to the Assembly.

Four themes and several questions have emerged from the feedback provided.

Overall the question is about how we live together with our differences. It is not about who is right or wrong about the understanding of marriage. We are one Body of Christ regardless and we are called to reconciliation.

1. Unity of the Church:
   - There is concern for our unity and fear of fracture or division. It is important that we have options for how we move forward no matter what decision is made in civil law or by the Assembly in July.
   - Some expressed the need to bring the conversation away from the Yes or No, away from the extremes and towards the middle ground.

2. Pastoral Concerns:
   - There is a need for a decision to be made for the wellbeing of our people. The question is what decisions needs to be made? How/what about? We need wise and careful discernment about how we will care for one another regardless of which decision is made.
   - There is a strong sense that a decision needs to be made by the Assembly. Silence is a costly option because of the hurt caused to the very being of our LGBTIQ brothers and sisters. This is more than a doctrinal argument.
   - There was a suggestion that an apology be made to our own LGBTIQ community for our failure to be supportive of them.
   - We could fulfil our pastoral role more effectively if we informed ourselves of alternative views and sought to understand them more deeply.
   - This is about love and being the body of Christ and living kindly with each other despite our differences.

3. Education and Support:
   - There is a need for communication and education – throughout the Synod, in Presbyteries and Congregations, and also within schools and into the wider community. Personal stories are important in the communication.
   - Support, resources, supplies, materials and facilitation are all required throughout the deliberations - before, during and after the Assembly meeting.
   - We need to understand the history and the development of our understanding of marriage.
4. **Communication:**
   - We need to communicate to all congregations and presbyteries so that they are able to have resourced and facilitated conversations; to be able to respond adequately to any decisions and the conversations that happen at Assembly. There are already resources available but they need to be publicised and shared.
   - There was support for the Uniting Church to make a public statement.

**Other Questions:**

- Should we consider separating civil and religious celebration of marriage, as is the case in some countries.
- What guidance can we provide to Ministers as they face the possibility of changes to changes to the law and confusion about how to respond and remain within the doctrinal requirements of the Uniting Church.
- Younger members of our church are tired of explaining to their non-church friends why the UCA has not made a statement affirming their support for same-gender marriage.