During the year since our last Assembly we have encouraged conversations around our responses to sexuality and relationships – especially in the light of the government introducing the Same Sex Marriage Bill 2013…

We’ve seen those conversations happen:

In churches…

In associations…

In Colleges…

In gatherings of ministers…

Some have not welcomed the conversations because they say that you want us to converse because you want us to change our view…

Others have not welcomed them because they say that they have been talking for ages and nothing has changed…

It’s important to remember that the focus of those conversations has been to try to understand and appreciate why others, who read the same Bible, think differently to me… or you… And to recognize where our shared values lie…

To recognize and appreciate all that is held in common and to celebrate our unity as brothers and sisters in Christ…

These are not issues that can be understood in sound bytes… They are issues that on both sides are too often dealt with in terms of judgment and prejudice…

And they are issues that the media love to stir up and use against us…

I want us to rise above all that…

In terms of the ‘new law’ and the consequences for churches there are details on our website…

We know from ‘the conversations’ that there is a breadth of opinion in our union – There is a breadth of understanding and interpretation when we go to the resources of faith to consider issues of sexuality and faithful relationships…

But let’s be confident that the absolute authority in all matters is the person of Christ – as he is revealed in scripture, interpreted in the community of the local church, through the power of the spirit…

I am pleased to say that in all the conversations that I have been involved in have been conducted in very gracious ways…

This years Whitley Lecture by Helen Dare seems timely and is a reflection on Baptists and the hermeneutical task: ‘Always in the fray and on the way’ – and I recommend that as a further resource for Baptists – available through the BUGB website

So following the conversations and consideration at Council and through the Baptist Steering Group comes the following – to express where we are up to on the journey - which will serve as a backdrop to our continuing conversations and the way we will seek to behave….

This will be posted on-line on Monday – but they are:

As a union of churches in covenant together we will respect the differences on this issue which both enrich us and potentially could divide as we seek to live in fellowship under the direction of our Declaration of Principle ‘That our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, God manifest in the flesh, is the sole and absolute authority in all matters pertaining to faith and practice, as revealed in the Holy Scriptures, and that each church has liberty, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to interpret and administer His Laws.’

Upholding the liberty of a local church to determine its own mind on this matter, in accordance with our Declaration of Principle, we also recognise the freedom of a minister to respond to the wishes of their church, where their conscience permits, without breach of disciplinary guidelines.

We affirm the traditionally accepted Biblical understanding of Christian marriage, as a union between a man and a woman, as the continuing foundation of belief in our Baptist Churches.

A Baptist minister is required to live and work within the guidelines adopted by the Baptist Union of Great Britain regarding sexuality and the ministry that include ‘a sexual relationship outside of Christian marriage (as defined between a man and a woman) is deemed conduct unbecoming for a minister’.

This is not intended as our last word – But it’s something of where we are – and where we would like to be next… It is making a determined effort to keep the unity of our union which is founded on the person of Christ….

It seeks to be true to our declaration of principle… and above all, our ecclesiology…

It seeks to reflect the overall direction of the Futures process that rightly acknowledges the local church meeting as the place of discernment as it seeks the mind of Christ in all things.

Please continue to talk… and use the email address:

talkingtogether@mail.com