

Here is one possible process for churches that desire to have a conversation about sexuality with the goal of learning from scripture, the Christian tradition, and one another. (The end goal is NOT a policy statement.)

Raleigh First Baptist Church (FBC), over a period of four weeks (on consecutive Sunday nights), conducted a series of conversations about sexuality. Theologians and pastors presented each week, church members had dinner together and then then divided into small groups for a facilitated, in-depth discussion. The final evening concluded with worship. Members generally reported gratitude for the chance to think about sex from a Christian perspective. Some participants were surprised at the range of opinions that existed in the congregation. While a few members found the conversations disturbing, the vast majority appreciated the opportunity to learn together and to talk about faith and sexuality in a safe setting.

Here are the key steps in the process:

**Clearly Define the Purpose** – Raleigh FBC articulated it this way: “This is an educational event. It’s simply a conversation. The purpose is to grow in our understanding of scripture and these important issues surrounding sexuality. No votes, no resolutions, no declarations- just lots of prayer, listening, thinking, and sharing.”

**Select Presenters for the Conversation:** - Raleigh FBC utilized some of the videos from a recent conference on sexuality conducted by the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. Those videos can be found here: [www.thefellowship.info/conference](http://www.thefellowship.info/conference). Raleigh FBC viewed videos by Dr. Coleman Fannin, Dr. Melissa Browning, and LeDayne Polaski. Dr. Chris Chapman gave the introductory first talk which can be found *here* [would Dr. Chapman be open to having this document available online?]. The speakers covered the following topics: a) How do we interpret scripture, especially regarding sensitive subjects? b) What does scripture say about various types of covenants and relationships and how does this impact our understanding of sexuality? c) What are the different ways the church has viewed sexuality over the last 2000 years? d) How do we deal with challenging topics such as homosexuality and co-habitation? and e) Knowing that we will not necessarily agree on every detail, how do we move forward as a church in a Christ-like manner?

### **Conduct Pre-Event Publicity**

Publicize the event with the pertinent information concerning dates, times, cost (for dinner), how to register and child care. The promo letter from Raleigh FBC can be found here [is it okay to include this?].

For each person who registers, follow up with a letter that clearly states expectations. Raleigh FBC’s letter can be found *here* [permission?].

**Select facilitators and conduct a training on how to facilitate small groups.** Ideally, each of the facilitators would have previous facilitation experience. The training should include the following:

- Encouragement to pray for each participant and the whole conversation

- Have the facilitators watch the videos in advance, or review the content from those who are going to present live
- Teach the principle of being a non-anxious presence
- Teach the skills needed to guard the following ground rules (drawing out those who tend to be quiet; reigning in those who tend to dominate, etc.):
  - When we learn together we treat each other in a Christ-like manner.
  - No one has a monopoly on understanding or truth.
  - We must listen to one another with respect so that everyone has the opportunity to share.
  - No one is forced to share anything he or she chooses not to share.
  - We must assume every Christian has integrity and treat each other accordingly.
  - We assume that we will sometimes disagree and that is OK.
  - We accept our differences with each other as friends and strive to learn from each other.

***Delegate responsibility for the logistical aspects of the conversations.*** This may include setup, dinner crew, clean-up, worship team, etc.

***Assign registrants to small groups.*** Raleigh FBC chose to form groups of eight (including the facilitator). One question was whether to keep the groups the same each week (thus helping members get to know each other well) or to switch group members each week (thus helping each member get to know the breath of opinion and perspective in the congregation). The organizing pastor chose the latter and reports that this seemed to yield good results. The pastor knew each of the registrants and was able to bring together a range of ages, genders, and theological perspective in each group, each week.

***Develop open-ended questions for each talk.*** Print these out for the facilitators in advance.

***Conduct the meetings.***

***Solicit feedback from congregational members, facilitators, and church leaders.*** Use this process to identify further needs for teaching, preaching, and formation around the topic of sexuality. What in the process went poorly and needs to be addressed? What can be celebrated?