

# Sexuality Series Evaluation 2014

## MYF Synopsis

### **What about this series helped you the most?**

It's done.

Marilyn's sermon on friendship & intimacy.

Sermons good but SS difficult.

We got to interact with some adults in a different way.

Topic needs to be addressed but we didn't get deep enough.

### **What about this series stretched you the most?**

I pulled a groin (Jacob RF).

Stretched my patience in group settings.

### **What about this series do you wish we had not done?**

Less intergenerational SS—maybe intergenerational is good, but it's difficult.

Do not like when one person dominates, but do not like forced sharing.

Questions were not well-formed for discussion.

### **If we have another sexuality series in the future, what topics do you suggest?**

Gender-transgender—understanding people of different gender orientation.

Sustaining relationships, conflict in relationships.

How to make marriages better.

### **If we have another sexuality series in the future, what do you hope might result from it?**

Some sort of statement about homosexuality.

## Individual Responses

### What about this series helped you the most?

#### Signed Evaluations Below

I appreciated the overall emphasis on the positive side of sexuality.

This series helped me to see that older people in the church have a hard time talking about the issues that are present today.

Just the opportunity to hear about wholesome relationships—sexual or not—and to discuss them together.

Discussions following messages—helpful to hear many perspectives. Appreciated Marilyn’s attempt at definitions—might have been more helpful at the beginning. Covenant emphasis was helpful.

I am proud of our congregation for taking on this typically avoided topic in our lives. It’s difficult, controversial, and intimate that touches on identity, experience, and evolving self-actualization. Well done! I have hoped for this to take place in the body for years.

Glad we had a chance to focus on a subject we do not often discuss.

Discussion about intimacy.

Margaret’s sermon on singleness. Sermon on friendship & intimacy.

I think it was great for opening a door to conversation and helping the congregation (both individuals and as a corporate body) get over some of the fear and anxiety around the topic.

Purely the fact that we came together as a unified church to talk about controversial topics, and opening up the opportunity for intimate conversation.

Willingness to speak openly & candidly about all aspects of sexuality in a safe space.

I think it was good to intentionally focus on this topic. I appreciated the careful way that the sermons and questions tried to honor people of difference perspectives.

Having real conversations about things that matter with people during Christian education. I sense we were asking questions that should be asked and wrestling with things the Church needs to face.

Bringing the topic to the fore in the context of worship.

I appreciate the leadership being willing to address these issues honestly and directly. There is risk involved in doing this, but I think it’s important to be able to do in our social context.

I really enjoyed the sermon preached on the singleness Sunday—it was very powerful—however, I think there is a different perspective that comes from someone who has never been married that is seldom heard. I suppose this comment fits under #4. What about those of us who have not set marriage as a life goal like so many of our peers? I think young people need to hear that life can be fulfilling even if marriage is not necessarily a part of the equation. Dan touched on this on the marriage Sunday, but would like to hear from someone who is living out a single life without the assumption that marriage is an eventuality or the lack thereof is a tragedy.

Opportunity to share.

The very act of discussing sexuality increased current intimacy and laid foundation for growth in future intimacy. Our sexuality is a place of vulnerability. The series was created with good boundaries for discussion which helped to build trust.

Rethinking some assumptions & ideas. Giving us a chance to talk about some things as a family.

Didn't help me much. Affirmed idea of marriage covenant. Affirmed intimacy is not the same as sexual. Affirmed lots of disagreement about homosexuality—not new—took safe mode but didn't really want to wrestle with this issue either.

I have significant issues with the entire series and how it was conducted. I not only have theological questions & differences, but do not agree with some of the processes used to communicate ideas.

#### Unsigned Evaluations Below

The marriage relationships

Singleness

Allowing these topics to be discussed; acknowledging the importance of intimacy and sexuality as part of a person's entire being

Reframing all the sexual energy in our culture

It created space & reason to discuss the issues

I really enjoyed hearing our congregation speak openly about sexuality; being able to hear others' views across the generations was especially helpful

This series didn't do much for me. I did attend all 6 & took part in all SS sessions, but they didn't do much for me.

Seeing intimacy/relationships from multiple perspectives

Redefining some of the terms that I have associated negative or taboo connotations with

I enjoyed the variety of SS groupings—getting to know some different people. Good opportunity to safely talk about things we usually don't discuss.

I enjoyed hearing from a wide variety of ages & generations during the various configurations of SS discussions. One story that really stuck with me throughout was from Marilyn on the first Sunday of a father helping his daughter was his face. I've thought how this can apply to me in many ways.

Learning that our desires can come from God. I think the intergenerational groups were very helpful; we should continue this for topics other than sexuality.

Openness to topics not usually discussed.

Sexuality can be talked about without being extremely descriptive.

Connecting our desire to be intimate with each other with the core of our deepest desire to be intimate with God.

It was good for the church to address a relatively taboo subject.

The importance of intimacy between people in a way that's not sexual. Also vulnerability when speaking with groups.

The explicit aspects of the approach used to deal with this subject.

Ability to talk with others about a topic that is often not talked about. Learning from others' point of view.

Nothing.

It was nice to be able to interact with people I generally don't talk to during SS—nice to hear other peoples' thoughts & opinions.

The overall openness to discuss the topic, from the pulpit as well as SS.

The forthrightness to deal with the topics related to sexuality as a matter of importance in church.

It got me thinking about myself and others.

It was helpful to hear issues addressed that aren't often discussed. I enjoyed hearing the perspectives of others. I also appreciated the intergenerational aspects.

I was happy to hear we would discuss what sexuality means for a single person & how those needs are addressed, but I was disappointed that sexuality was left out of that topic. As a single person, I felt like this series didn't offer much for me.

Opened up topics to talk about more freely.

### **What about this series stretched you the most?**

#### Signed Evaluations Below

Out of the fear of creating disunity, choosing to stay away from exploring a Jesus view of homosexuality. Not everyone in the church agrees with the church's position on war and peace, nevertheless teaching about it is given.

The singleness conversation was difficult. I felt like I did not have any place being a younger person not being in some of those situations yet. This was also true for the sexual intimacy topic.

The need to examine my relationships with certain people.

Singleness topic, because I have not been single as long as I've been married. It made me think of the benefits of singleness & how much I can learn from singles about relationships with others outside of my marriage that could potentially benefit my marriage.

How to define and get ahold of some of the concepts. Some imagery was a little jarring.

Sex as a spiritual practice in which we can experience the fullness of Christ. It's very hard to wade through the cultural messages that we are faced with from early on.

Understanding the breadth of the topic. Realizing that it is quite good and normal for relationships with people of the opposite sex.

Sex as a spiritual practice.

SS discussion following the homosexuality sermon.

I think the concept of sexual intercourse's purpose being to connect with God. Also in terms of singleness, what are the appropriate avenues for the "gift" of sexual expression.

Talking about body image and defining a covenant among friends (topics I hadn't previously discussed often).

The song "Good Is the Flesh"

Some of the topics were things I would not have deliberately thought much about.

Thinking about how to articulate the spirituality of marital sex.

I don't think stretched describes my participation.

I missed a couple of Sundays, but found myself affirming most of what I did hear.

Can't say I felt stretched.

All the topics had me thinking.

Idea-wise, probably the poem by Teresa of Avila. Process-wise, sharing across generations and gender.

Discussing private issues publicly.

Stated certain items as fact, as opposed to one way of looking at things.

### Unsigned Evaluations Below

The same-sex issue.

The last one

Talking with others about topics that are often ignored, especially in a religious context

Sex as a spiritual practice

I didn't really find it all that stretching

Thinking deeper & more broadly about sexuality & intimacy. I also thought it was very important to hear others' views on homosexuality.

Allowing the church to focus on such topics

The intergenerational Sunday school groups.

To be expected to be talk in a small group on a particular question, not just when I really feel like I have something to say.

Talk about sexual relations from the pulpit.

I have a problem with thinking about the church turning someone away because of their sexuality.

Thinking about intimate, non-sexual relationships between men and women who aren't here.

Becoming more aware of the needs and thoughts of others in the congregation.

I thought Margaret's sermon on the upside of singleness was interesting.

The importance of intimacy between people in a way that's not sexual. And view of singleness vs. marriage.

The nexus between sexual desire and the Spirit of God.

Getting out of my comfort zone with some topics.

Did not really feel stretched. Disagreed with the friendship and intimacy sermon, especially with the opposite sex and friendship. If I have extra time I would spend it with my spouse, not another male or friend.

I guess having to get out of my comfort zone and contribute to group discussions.

The LGBT issue always stretches me.

Thinking about subjects I normally avoid.

Sometimes it was a stretch to share with those we don't know.

Sharing in small groups—if you're not with people you are close to how do you feel comfortable sharing?  
I did not always feel the connection between what the sermon and SS.

### **What about this series do you wish we had not done?**

#### Signed Evaluations Below

Can't think of anything.

I wish we had not been in such drastic intergenerational groups.

None of it.

Time for us to confess, lay our burdens down, i.e., writing down an experience, choice, something that has seriously burdened us and physically nailing it/releasing it to the cross. Time focused on healing.

All of it was ok.

I don't think any part was inappropriate.

Limit the discussion of homosexuality to church history lesson.

It should all be addressed.

I wish we had done singleness differently. The sermon seemed to be about being forced into singleness and coping with that, not thriving that way. (Have a person who has spent majority of life single.)

Nothing. It was all good.

I valued it all in some way.

Nothing in particular. Taking as many weeks as were taken may have been a bit long for some people.

None—all were good & needed/helpful.

Nothing.

The singleness Sunday completely missed the mark.

#### Unsigned Evaluations Below

I think it was all valuable.

All of them

Providing time for mixed/intergenerational conversation was good, but I also would have appreciated more time to discuss with people I had relationships with

We were so clear about places we were not going to go that I think we lost opportunities to be vulnerable, to disagree, and to learn from people who may differ from us.

I enjoyed all of it.

It was hard because of time & differing views with the church, but I wish we could have dug deeper into some of the topics than we did.

I thought the small groups of 3 were a bit overdone.

Too many extras in the worship service left little time for Sunday school discussions.

I wish we could have been more direct about many of the subjects and not danced around the topic.

Constant change of SS teachers.

Nothing.

I think all of the topics were appropriate for this congregation.

Talk more about homosexuality. The sermon did not really address how we can respond to the issue.

Break up in groups—want more larger group discussions.

I don't know how well all of the sermons meshed together, especially the last one.

I felt a disconnect between the sermon topic and what ended up being discussed in SS.

Nothing.

If we are going to discuss homosexuality, let's discuss it. We never really got into the issue to move toward resolution. I think there's more willingness here than we give credit for.

I wish there had been more time for each topic instead of just one Sunday. It seems like we would just start to get going and then move on to something new. Will there be time to process topics more? I would be nice to talk about a topic, have the week to think about it, and then continue further or deeper.

### **If we have another sexuality series in the future, what topics do you suggest?**

#### Signed Evaluations Below

More detail on the gift of singleness & how one decides if one has that gift. A biblical (Jesus-centered) view of masturbation. The differences & similarities between male & female sexuality.

Sustaining healthy relationships, conflict resolution.

More depth on creating & sustaining positive & healthy intimate relationships with others besides our spouses. Especially developing healthy relationships with people of the opposite gender in a society where those relationships are nearly always portrayed as sexual—that it's inevitable. I would like these topics to touch on the benefits of these relationships, how to set/agree to boundaries, and how they can benefit the marital relationship.

Explore more about covenant. Putting the institution of marriage into historical, biblical perspective.

Sexual drive, rawness, healthy outlets, masturbation. Ways /alternatives/ideas about how we can be counter-cultural in addressing a huge sphere of our lives that is often hidden, isolated, in the dark. Form better patterns, individually and collectively.

More work on developing intimacy across various peoples in the congregation.

Abuse, trauma.

Different viewpoints on homosexuality.

We could go deeper with all the topics. It would probably be good to at least address sexual brokenness.

Talk about being in a committed relationship. For us youth, marriage is further away. Talking about marriage is good but it seemed to be either single or married, not other relationships between. And talk about healthy sexual outlets as a single person.

I felt like the topics were well balanced and broad. I can't think of another topic that was not included.

A Christian response to a very sexualized culture.

It seems we covered the bases pretty well. Other topics could be sexuality for people with disabilities or what to teach children. I liked Peter Shetler's suggestion in our class last week that we try rewriting the Mennonite statement on sexuality from 30 years ago.

I think it was important to have a series this time, but I wonder if it might in future be better to intersperse topics occasionally rather than to have a series.

Nothing specific at this point.

How the church deals with failures where sexuality is concerned: i.e., divorce, abuse, unwed pregnancies (the visible failures).

I appreciated the sermon on singleness as it spoke to many in the room. It would also be interesting to have a sermon about those who choose singleness rather than marriage as opposed to one who is single after being widowed or divorced. Also speaking about brokenness and Christ's healing for us within our sexuality.

We talked about singleness from a particular type of experience! Think the questions around sexuality for people earlier in life & for people who never plan on being married would also be helpful.

I agree sexuality and our bodies are gifts, but they also must be controlled because the propensity for sin is great as well. I do not remember any mention of sin at all and it is a huge part of these issues. Humanity is fallen as well.

Spiritual growth. This series did not produce that for me.

#### Unsigned Evaluations Below

Comparison to the rest of the animal kingdom.

None

Gender & spirituality; sexual violence, abuse, power in relationships; sexual health & wellness; pornography

I would like to see Berkey have a more prolonged, deliberate conversation regarding acceptance of our LGBTQ family

Sometimes the amount of discussion time felt short, so I wish we could have more time to process & work through the issues.

Time—we covered a lot of stuff in a short amount of time. I'm not sure I feel I have a greater understanding of the subject.

Addressing what it means to be in a relationship—not married, not single.

Love.



Conversation with my own SS class about topics, so that I can talk more in-depth about the content with people I feel more comfortable with.

I'm not convinced that homosexuality as an issue for discussion would be helpful at this time.

More on the future Mennonite church & gays-lesbians & their role in the church.

How do we address the shift of mores in the culture and discern which are good and less good; i.e., is premarital sex always wrong? Given tax law, etc., is living together as elders ok and is there a way to sanction it within the church? This series assumed pretty stable home lives. How do these conversations differ in a social context with hardly any norms about sexuality?

More topics regarding interpersonal relationships.

### **If we have another sexuality series in the future, what do you hope might result from it?**

#### Signed Evaluations Below

Better understanding of a Jesus view on sexuality.

Further discussion, open & healthy views of sexuality and us as human beings.

Can we have more discussion on homosexuality itself? Can we set it within a longer context of sexuality that picks up on the definitions offered by Marilyn this morning?

I still hope for more acceptance in our congregation for persons of different sexual orientation. Many thanks to the leadership group for taking on this topic.

Freedom, healing if not for all, for some.

A better understanding of our similarities and differences of understandings on homosexuality.

I appreciated the positive framework of the series—sexuality as a gift.

To keep these topics on our consciousness and keep openness as a church.

A statement from the congregation that we are open and welcoming of all, including LGBTQ people, and that we bless all covenanted relationships, including same-sex couples.

More intimacy in the congregation.

More intimacy within the congregation and helpful guidance for all who are making decisions about sexuality in one way or another. I would hope that gay & lesbian voices could speak for themselves safely.

I'm not looking for any particular outcome.

I appreciated the sermons. I also appreciated the clear objectives and goals for this series. I wasn't able to participate in many of the SS discussions, but liked the thought put into appropriate groupings while also keeping it intergenerational, when possible. For a potentially divisive topic for congregations, I think you did well. Thank you!

I'm not sure such series should be results-oriented. Having the dialogue and input are valuable in and of themselves. How often to do this is something I'm not clear about.

Growing understanding of each other and openness.

Greater levels of intimacy amongst our congregation. Thank you for being willing to broach these topics which can be controversial.

Continued communication & growth as a community.

The singleness topic was poorly constructed in my opinion. It is not real helpful to put all singles in one box—widowhood, age, and desire create very different issues.

#### Unsigned Evaluations Below

More education on the biblical texts that exist.

Nothing

Increased comfort level with the topic; “holy” sexuality

More time on each of the topics.

It would be thrilling if someday BAMF could be an openly affirming congregation for ALL

It might have been interesting & helpful to have people from the LGBT community share their perspectives on their journey.

A church statement on sexuality.

For several reasons I participated in only 2 sessions.

Older folks & younger folks could better understand each other on the topic of homosexuality.

More in-depth conversation on differing views of the issues discussed in this series.

A greater sense of comfort with this subject.

Sermons that are more focused and not so general & sweeping. They did not make me feel energetic about the topics.

It seems like actual issues and problems were skirted.

A survey of where members stand on various issues discussed. It would be interesting to see where percentages fall.

Better understanding about myself and how I relate and fit in with others. A continuation of this series.

More intergenerational relationship building.

Go further, be bolder. We are all human, doing & dealing with these things. We ought to get over our timidness & talk more about these things more often.

Talk about some topics more deeply.