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## A big challenge

### A big challenge for a little church!

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[ashley wilson](http://inclusive-church.org/sites/default/files/images/Ashley%20at%20All%20Saints.jpg) Sunday 16th August our little country parish, whose congregation is mainly both past middle age and conservative in outlook, welcomed Ashley Wilson, the Inclusive Church Ambassador for the Diocese of Durham, to speak to us about homosexuality and the Church.

For historical reasons the 'H-word' is never mentioned in our church. Some of our older members are known to be very 'anti', the rest tend to keep their opinions to themselves, so we were not really sure what reaction to expect from the congregation.

Immediately after the service a choir member vented her fury that such a topic had been the focus for a service, saying that it should have been discussed in a small group.

'People come to church for comfort and solace', she hissed, 'not to be made uncomfortable by stuff like that!' She had seemingly forgotten that Jesus often challenged people and made them feel uncomfortable!

Other people gave much more positive feedback. I'll let them speak for themselves:

'I very much enjoyed the service on Sunday and thought Ashley did a great job in all respects. For me personally I couldn't really fault the way he handled the service and the people. A very good speaker with an easy confident manner and expressing himself carefully and clearly. All you could want of someone handling a difficult topic.'

'Ashley has started an enormous task at our morning service. Good, kind hearted people had certain long held beliefs challenged and found others had a different view of marriage and who should be allowed to marry. Even that marriage is not only about procreation but has many fundamental benefits that should be available to all. Including gay Christians. The fact that our congregation has no openly gay members says much about how inclusive we are at All Saints.'

'The reactions varied enormously. Some quietly withdrew from discussion. Others voiced concerns but were open to discussion. A few found the honesty a refreshing relief. It was rather like addressing the elephant in the room and at last admitting it was there.'

Let us pray that Ashley has indeed started something 'and that we can keep the momentum going.

*Sue Whitlock, All Saints Hurworth*

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