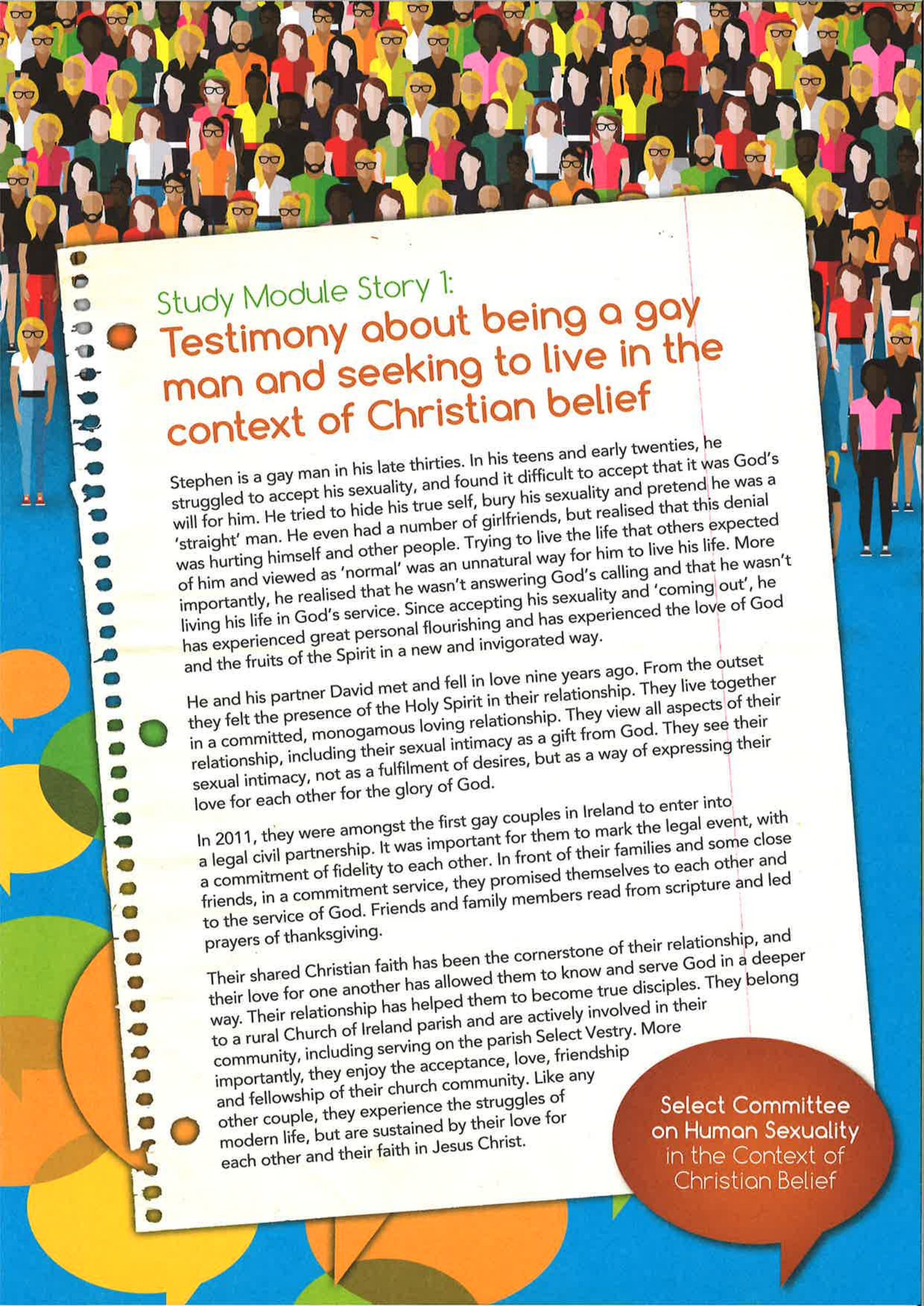




Study Module Story 1:

Testimony about being a gay man and seeking to live in the context of Christian belief

Stephen is a gay man in his late thirties. In his teens and early twenties, he struggled to accept his sexuality, and found it difficult to accept that it was God's will for him. He tried to hide his true self, bury his sexuality and pretend he was a 'straight' man. He even had a number of girlfriends, but realised that this denial was hurting himself and other people. Trying to live the life that others expected of him and viewed as 'normal' was an unnatural way for him to live his life. More importantly, he realised that he wasn't answering God's calling and that he wasn't living his life in God's service. Since accepting his sexuality and 'coming out', he has experienced great personal flourishing and has experienced the love of God and the fruits of the Spirit in a new and invigorated way.

He and his partner David met and fell in love nine years ago. From the outset they felt the presence of the Holy Spirit in their relationship. They live together in a committed, monogamous loving relationship. They view all aspects of their relationship, including their sexual intimacy as a gift from God. They see their sexual intimacy, not as a fulfilment of desires, but as a way of expressing their love for each other for the glory of God.

In 2011, they were amongst the first gay couples in Ireland to enter into a legal civil partnership. It was important for them to mark the legal event, with a commitment of fidelity to each other. In front of their families and some close friends, in a commitment service, they promised themselves to each other and to the service of God. Friends and family members read from scripture and led prayers of thanksgiving.

Their shared Christian faith has been the cornerstone of their relationship, and their love for one another has allowed them to know and serve God in a deeper way. Their relationship has helped them to become true disciples. They belong to a rural Church of Ireland parish and are actively involved in their community, including serving on the parish Select Vestry. More importantly, they enjoy the acceptance, love, friendship and fellowship of their church community. Like any other couple, they experience the struggles of modern life, but are sustained by their love for each other and their faith in Jesus Christ.

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Study Module Story 2: Testimony about the choice of celibacy

Helen is a believer and committed Christian who struggles with same sex attraction. This struggle has been a long process for her and she is learning the secret of being content in her circumstances through Christ's strength working in her. Christ's Word sustains her and is the final authority in her life. It has been her constant light and guide.

Helen says that all Christians are called to live holy, upright lives. Helen believes that there will be some people who struggle with same-sex attraction who God will transform and they will end up marrying someone of the opposite sex. There will be some who will choose to remain celibate, and, with God's grace, live only for Him. There will be some who will live a double life, with one foot in the Church and the other in homosexual practice. Helen has chosen the celibate life.

Helen says that she has been greatly blest to have a few friends with whom she can be real and with whom no masks are needed. She can share her heart with them, especially when she is struggling and feeling down. They pray with her and for her. Helen also says that she has found herself called by God to support other friends who have 'come out' to her, admitting that they were confused about their sexuality. Each of her friends deals with their same-sex attraction differently. One lives a celibate, Godly but lonely life. The other has a secret, same-sex partner whilst still attending church and living a double life. The other two dip in and out of homosexual relationships when the struggle becomes too much for them. Helen describes her own struggles to understand how God wanted her to help her friends and the eventual realisation that God was calling her to love them and to pray with them and for them and to trust that God himself would do the rest.

Helen believes that Church leaders should never compromise on the truth of the authority of God's Word in its teaching on homosexual practice and God's design for marriage. However, she also believes that the Church needs to edify those who struggle with same-sex attraction but who have chosen to remain celibate out of their love for Christ. She believes that the church body must display compassion towards those who are struggling in this area and draw alongside them. Church on a Sunday can be the hardest place to be for those with this struggle as it is full of families, couples and children, which is great but is also a reminder that this is something some people will never experience themselves.

Helen says that she is someone who struggles with same-sex attraction and also someone who supports other Christians with same-sex attraction. She feels that there is no support within the church which she feels has turned a blind eye to this growing issue. She has never heard a sermon on this topic nor has she heard any open discussion in her own experience of church about it. She also says that there is no support for people like herself who carry the burden of supporting others. However, she has a huge sense of trust in the love and support of God.