

Church For Everyone – Autism Community

Community Review

September 2023

Agenda

1. Introduction (5 min)
2. Review and Way Forward (40 min)
3. Schedule of discussions (5 min)
4. AOB (10 min)

(Optional) Social Time (30 min)

2. Discussion: Review and Way Forward

My thoughts as a prompt: Stewart Rapley
(Please challenge or add!)

OUR JOURNEY SO FAR

We started ...
September 2020
Group of 8



Many
discussions,
website created,
and Discord
account started

CFE DISCUSSION SCHEDULE 2023

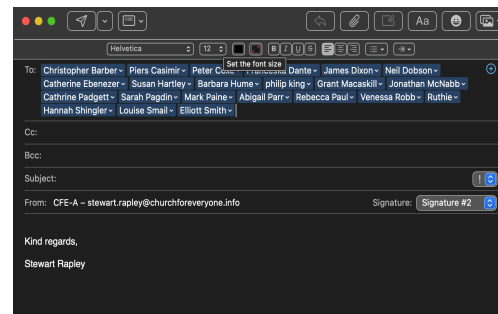
DATE	CFE-Autism DISCUSSION TOPIC	LEAD	STATUS
15-Apr	Autism, faith and Church—a younger person's perspective	Den	Confirmed
20-May	Forgiveness	Anthony	Confirmed
17-Jun	Gender	Stewart	Confirmed
15-Jul	Private prayer: what works for you?	Sue	Confirmed
August	No session—summer break		Confirmed
16-Sept	Improving our community: email, Discord, WhatsApp—review	Stewart?	TBC
21-Oct	Different autism models	Stewart?	TBC
18-Nov	Autism and co-morbidities	Thc?	TBC
16-Dec	Accessing healthcare	Sue?	TBC
2024	Living with other autistic people	Thc?	TBC
	Friendship	Thc?	TBC

May 2023

Biblical Interpretation Workshops & Conversations

2

Now ...
September 2023
List of 20+!



Special
contribution—
online service
Nov 2022



SOME QUESTIONS ARISING

At one level – good news!
Especially good to note autistic women coming forward.

But – raises questions:

1. About the 'community dynamic'
2. About the 'community purpose/function'
3. About the 'community coordination'
- and
4. ... *What questions do you have?*

A REMINDER OF OUR MISSION

Creation of a community of Autistic Christians within which participants are equipped to:

- 1. Develop understanding and confidence in terms of their distinctive personal identity, value and credibility as autistic Christians;*
- 2. Develop increasing confidence and ability to identify and make their contribution to the spiritual communities within which they belong and participate.*

Q1: THE COMMUNITY DYNAMIC

The Challenge

We have seen a number of new people joining. This is positive, but it does disrupt the established relationships. It risks people losing the sense of feeling safe and confident to share as they are not sure of the group. Is this putting some people off (some have stopped participating)?

Some Thoughts

Would it be better to ***create sub-groups of about 6-8 people, each with a 'host'?*** We could all meet for our monthly sessions, but for the 'discussion time' split into our sub-groups. Hosts could either chair, or arrange for another sub-group member to chair. Hosts could agree with their sub-group on additional get-togethers, WhatsApp group etc. should they wish to do so, or simply stick with the monthly sessions.

Individuals requesting to join in could be introduced to a sub-group, where they could sit in and subsequently join – or find another sub-group.

It is possible that sub-groups may form on a number of bases: relationships, subjects of interest, age, date of 'joining' the community, level of 'autistic maturity' (newly diagnosed etc).

This would give each individual a stable small group to which they can 'belong' and a low-impact way to introduce new people.

Q2: THE COMMUNITY PURPOSE/FUNCTION

The Challenge

Our Mission requires us to tackle 'issues of substance and significance'. Are we, perhaps, covering too many topics too superficially? Are some members finding that their questions are not being addressed at an appropriate level?

Do we want to become a 'tea shop' (discussing only 'safe', but inconsequential, issues), or a 'workshop' (where we risk disagreements, challenge and offense)? Do we have the courage and security to deal with opinions which we find disagreeable or offensive?

In order to function as a community, rather than just 'meetings', we need to have a way (or ways) of building relationships beyond our 'meetings'. How effective have we been at this?

Some Thoughts

Should we ***shift our focus from topics of relevance to our personal faith to more about how we make an impact in our communities?***

Should we develop a simple '***ground rules***' to help us understand how to discuss issues where there might be controversy, differences of opinion, or the possibility of offense?

Should we ***re-visit our discussion about Discord***, WhatsApp etc with a view to improving?

Q3: THE COMMUNITY COORDINATION

The Challenge

We are all busy. We are all looking for support and understanding. We are also a community of individuals who, by our nature, need things to be done 'my way' to some extent. Whilst growing numbers is an indication of the need, it does raise practical questions in terms of resourcing and coordinating the community.

I can no longer do it all alone without becoming a bottle-neck.

Some Thoughts

The idea of 'sub-groups' requires a number of the community to act as 'hosts'. This can mean no more than chairing a discussion of the sub-group in the monthly gathering (or arranging for someone else to chair) - but could expand, if so desired, to include actions beyond the monthly session.

There is a growing need for some **'admin support'**: liaising re web-site updates, circulating notes/chat files after meetings etc.

IN SUMMARY

1. Establish a number of 'hosts', so that that community participants can 'belong' to a small group for discussion times (and whatever other activities they wish outside meetings).
2. Discussion topics to focus more on 'influencing' where we are (case studies?).
3. New participants to be introduced as individuals to a small group initially.
4. Simple 'ground rules' to help us discuss 'tricky topics'.
5. Consultation on use of Discord etc.
6. Someone to work with me on admin support – c0.5 days per month.

Q4: WHAT QUESTIONS OR THOUGHTS DO YOU HAVE?

CFE DISCUSSION SCHEDULE 2023-24

DATE	CFE-Autism DISCUSSION TOPIC	LEAD	STATUS
16 Sept	Review and Way Forward	Stewart	Confirmed
21 Oct	Different autism models	Stewart	Confirmed
18 Nov	Accessing healthcare	Sue	Confirmed
16 Dec	Christmas, Church and Autism?	TBC	TBC
Jan	Autism and co-morbidities?	Neil?	TBC
Feb	Autism, relationships and friendships?	TBC	TBC
March	Handling competing sensitivities?	TBC	TBC
May	Autism & Housing?	TBC	TBC

NB: This slide was updated to reflect ideas from the discussion

AOB

1. BBC R4 Autism-themed Sunday Service for Aug 2024.
Needs a small team to brainstorm
Additionally: do we want to produce another online service (like Nov last year)?
2. Possible CFE conference:
Integrated – to include autism? (my vote!)
Separate CFE Autism conference?
3. CFE review with SJE 29 Sept
Let me know if you want any issues raised (I can circulate agenda)
4. CFE – Church leaders – reviewing approach
Meeting 3-4pm on 19 Sept if you want to join (let me know)