

Is your church a welcoming and safe place for LGBTQIA and Same-Sex attracted people?

The basis of good pastoral care is our membership together of the Body of Christ, in which every member of the body is equal and our words and actions reflect St Paul's exhortation that all should be equally honoured and respected (1 Corinthians 12).

The following are characteristics of a church where people who are same sex attracted and celibate and people who are LGBTQIA can feel safe, fully welcome and free from fear; be open about their sexuality to the extent that they wish to be; explore their faith; and grow in relationship with God through the Lord Jesus Christ.

If your church is welcoming in this way the following will be evident:

Our relationship with God

- All in your church are encouraged to root their lives in their relationship with God, developing an identity based first and foremost on their union with Christ. From this relationship flow all others; by this relationship all others are shaped; and out of this comes the imperative that all should be welcome to hear the call of God on their lives.

Disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ

- Everybody in your church is encouraged to understand that to grow in holiness and grace as a disciple of Christ is an ongoing process of formation, which involves being shaped by God's word and God's Spirit in the life of the Church, as we live out our baptismal vows of repentance and faith.

'I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.' (Romans 12:1-2)

Our relationship with others

- People treat one another as made equally in God's image, honouring that image in each person and open to what we might learn about God as we listen together to scripture across our differences.

'So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them' (Genesis 1:27).

- People are careful about how they speak to, and about, one another. Derogatory language or stereo-typing attitudes are not used in the pulpit, in any area of congregational life or by those in leadership and are gently corrected, and if necessary rebuked, when used by anybody. The power of the tongue to wound or to bless is recognised and taken seriously.

'With (the tongue) we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse those who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this ought not to be so' (James 3:9-10)

- Acknowledging that we are all on a journey of discipleship, your congregation could include: people who describe themselves as LGBTQIA, who may be in sexual relationships with persons of the same-sex, and also those who describe themselves as same-sex attracted, who are celibate by conviction. If these people are not present, this may be because they do not feel that they would be welcome.

- Your congregational life is one where there is space for those who live alone or with others to 'do life together', creating a family which transcends the boundaries of individual friendships and the nuclear family and where deep friendships are fostered, encouraged, and grow.

I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. (Ephesians 4:1-6)

- In congregational life your church encourages biblical behaviours of honesty, openness and respect as described in the Pastoral Principles, which are a resource offered by the Church of England to assist us in working and living together well as the people of God. The Principles encourage us to: acknowledge prejudice; speak into silence; cast out fear; admit hypocrisy; address ignorance; pay attention to power. (See Appendix and <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/leadership-and-governance/general-synod/bishops/pastoral-advisory-group/pastoral-principles>.)

- Your congregational activities encourage people from different backgrounds, lived experience and life situations to relate well to one another in mutual support and friendship, reflecting the Kingdom of God in which all are brought to fullness of life and flourishing.

'The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.' (John 10:10)

- Your church will provide appropriate pastoral care for all, without pressurising anybody into levels of support with which they feel uncomfortable.

'Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. For with the judgement you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. Why do you see the speck in your neighbour's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye?' (Matthew 7:1-3)

Therefore, since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart. We have renounced the shameful things that one hides; we refuse to practise cunning or to falsify God's word; but by the open statement of the truth we commend ourselves to the conscience of everyone in the sight of God. (2 Corinthians 4:1-2)

The Church's teaching

- In preaching and teaching no sexual failing is mentioned in isolation from other sinful patterns of behaviour, or from the forgiveness offered to all through faith in Christ crucified. Teaching relating to all issues of sexuality is always rooted in the scriptures. All in your church are encouraged to hear and respond to the radical call to self-sacrifice and holiness in response to God's self-giving in Jesus.
- Your church communicates its understanding of the Bible's call to holiness and its expectations of all those in lay leadership clearly and consistently in its teaching, preaching and pastoral care: that held in grace and aspiring to holiness all will seek to shape their lives and relationships as disciples of Jesus in accordance with their faith and in obedience to scripture.

- All those in leadership, at whatever level, seek to be honest and transparent about the church's understanding of Scripture and expectations of leaders with those within and outside the church.

In all these ways and more, a welcoming and safe church will seek to live out the Great Commandments in accordance with Jesus's teaching.

'One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, 'Which commandment is the first of all?' Jesus answered, 'The first is, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." The second is this, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." There is no other commandment greater than these.'" (Mark 12:28-31)