

## **Guildford DEF Guidelines for LGBT+ welcome and best practice**

This document is written with a desire to work towards being a generous, hopeful, and loving Church, which affirms the welcome implied in the Gospel, and calls all Church members to a life of God-focussed, God-directed, Holiness.

We are aware of two key challenges in this regard: the rapidly changing climate in the culture around us, which has often resulted in a perception that churches are closed to LGBT+ people and, the challenge of the Church to speak compassionately and relevantly into today's culture. We are particularly grateful for the Pastoral Advisory Group, working in conjunction with the Living in Love and Faith working group, and welcome the House of Bishops recent commendation of the Pastoral Principles, which we summarise at the end of this paper.

With them, we too believe that in order to be truly welcoming as a church, we need to work hard to overcome perceptions, and actively seek to be genuinely inclusive. We also believe that it is essential that Churches model our Lord and Saviour, who John affirms as being "full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). We hope that we can follow Christ's incarnational model – the word becoming flesh – truly dwelling among lost humanity, and, at the same time, speak the truth in a winsome and engaging way, holding out the Gospel offer to our needy world.

### **A. Welcome and Inclusion**

Every person demonstrates, imperfectly, but nevertheless truly, the image of God. Thus, all people should be treasured and treated with respect. There is no place for ridicule, rejection, or exclusion. The church should repent of hypocrisy, and the tendency to highlight certain sins as if they are more sinful than others.

#### ***i. Christian Welcome***

We hope that common ground is found across Churches as to how LGBT+ seekers and church members may find affirmation and welcome in our Diocese.

This is not straightforward given that, whilst the language of "welcome" is common in the bible, "affirmation" and "acceptance" are more nuanced categories.

For example,

*"Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes a little child like this in My name welcomes Me. But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea...."* (Matt 18:4-6). Jesus' commendation of an unhindered welcome is matched by a severe warning of judgement for any who fail to watch out for the vulnerable, or cause them to stumble.

Similarly, Jesus says that feeding, caring for, clothing, and visiting any needy person who comes to us, is to be seen as doing these things as if for Jesus himself (see Matt. 25:34-46)

*“And they too will reply, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?’ Then the King will answer, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for Me.’” (Matt. 25:44-45)*

## **ii. Inclusion and Affirmation**

These terms imply that: we look for the affirmation of the person; their acceptance into the worship life of the Church; and inclusion in the worshipping community of God’s people.

Writing to the notoriously troublesome community in Corinth, Paul lists the types of sinners who make up this congregation, e.g. the sexually immoral, adulterers, male prostitutes, homosexual offenders (1 Cor 6:9), and we are left wondering: why is my church not reaching these people with the Gospel? He then goes on to include, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, slanderers and swindlers. His point being, that if their *behaviour* does not change, they too will be excluded from the Kingdom of God.

However, all these sinful people have been included in the Church, and in Christ, because they have been washed, sanctified and justified in the Lord Jesus and by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:11).

Free and generous welcome also comes with an expectation of change. This applies equally, to all Christians, leaving a life of sexual immorality, of swindling, drunkenness, etc.

There is a fuller expectation that leaders are called to adhere to doctrine of the Church and to be above reproach.

A Church should be a safe place, that is, it should be a place where love, forgiveness, friendship, community, and corporate worship, are freely offered and received.

## **iii. Call to Holiness**

In calling men and women, LGBT+ included, to a holy life, we need to speak with the balance of our Lord.

God freely accepts us, but He also expects change.

In John 8, when all the accusers of the adulterous women have slipped away, Jesus says “Neither do I condemn you”, (John 8:11). He offered free, unconditional forgiveness to a sexual sinner.

However, these are not his final words. He then says, “go and leave your life of sin” (John 8:11b). The apostle Paul says something similar in Ephesians 5:5, “For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person--such a person is an idolater--has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.”

The call to discipleship is a call to recognise Jesus as LORD and SAVIOUR. He rescues us from our sin and our self. In so doing, He calls us to submit to Him as our ruler and guide. This radical call to follow Christ includes the demands of holiness, applicable to everyone in the Church, and expectation that all sins and failings are brought to the foot of the cross – whoever we are; whatever we have done.

Perhaps, the biggest challenge to the Church in this regard relates to being authentically accessible, loving communities. For too long, the Church has perceived “family” to be “nuclear family”, whereas the biblical view of household often included wider kinship (Grandparents, near relatives, single, widowed etc.). If the Christian Church is to help all people to flourish, and to find a home in God’s family, we need to offer more than Sunday worship services: we should be genuinely family to one another. Here should be the place for deep friendship, for genuine affection and affirmation, and places where we truly feel “home”; a place where we no longer feel alone. The relationships which the Bible commends between Ruth and Naomi, and David and Jonathan, for example, show deep commitment to one another and before the Lord. Recognising the genuineness of such deep relationships within the Church is to be commended.

**Principle One** – *God loves us enough to welcome us as we are, but he loves us too much to leave us as we are. He calls each one of us to a life of Christ-shaped holiness.*

## **B. Christian Teaching and dealing with difference**

Whilst there is a common perception that the Church is embroiled in a battle over the issues of LGBT+ identity, and their place within the Church of England, we also recognise that it remains a challenge to speak and teach the Scriptures related to these matters, in a way that seeks fully to understand the Biblical text. Moreover, the challenge of identity and belonging comes to each and every person.

In part, this means that the Church needs to overcome prejudice and fear of any who are different to ourselves. There is some catching up for the Church with respect to how we use language, and how we perceive one another.

We absolutely agree that acts of violence, or hostility directed at people because of who they are, or who someone thinks they are, are always wrong. Moreover, verbally abusing someone because of his or her disability, sexuality, gender expression, race, and so on, is also always wrong. This is recognised in law, in the Criminal Justice Act 2003.

It is commonly assumed that to show love towards someone means that you will not disagree with a position which they hold. It is also commonly assumed that holding differences of view, and teaching such differences of view in the context of Christian worship, could be deemed to be a Hate Crime under UK law. However, freedom of speech is protected in law, so long as such speech is not hateful.

The Church should teach the “full counsel of God”, which includes the full biblical perspective on humanity made in the image of God, the impact of the fall upon every area of our humanity, the expectations which come from redemption and new birth in Christ, and the ultimate hope of a new heaven and a new earth, along with a fully human and fully holy body. In an increasingly post-Christian culture, we will find that the biblical teaching on marriage and human identity will be in sharp tension with the prevailing culture.

We also recognise that the Church has traditionally believed that the biblical design for marriage is primary – in part because of the function which it plays in family and childrearing, and in part, because of the biblical paradigm of Christ’s relationship with the Church (see Genesis 2:24, Ephesians 5:21ff.). Although we might want to explore the BCP ordering of the priorities for the reason for marriage (see Simon Vibert, *Till Death Us Do Part, The Solemnization of Marriage, Latimer Study*) we still recognise the prime place of marriage for procreation and nurture of children, the holy and right place for sexual intercourse, and the prime social benefit of stable marriage.

**Principle Two** – *Christian Leaders have a duty to teach the entire bible, recognising the sufficiency of Holy Scripture for our salvation (Article VI), even when this might be in sharp contrast to the prevailing culture.*

## **C. Pastoral Practice**

### ***i. Safeguarding and Vulnerability***

Churches must always be careful in setting the boundaries of pastoral care. Due consideration must be given to matters of confidentiality, to prayerful support, and to the realisation that there may be many people in our congregation who are vulnerable to coercion and persuasion. We should be aware of such risks, and safeguard against abuse.

However, we also recognise that there are men and women in our congregations wrestling with unwanted same-sex attraction. We affirm that it is right to provide pastoral care and prayer for such people.

We recognise the breadth of understanding of LGBT+ identity, and the changing nature of the conversations, as society wrestles with an emerging awareness of people’s self-understanding. For example, transgender questions are often very different to questions surrounding same-sex attraction. To take but one example, many who are Same Sex Attracted will point to their biological makeup, or, perhaps orientation, as directing and determining who they are attracted to and who they love. Whereas, increasingly, those who are talking about transgender issues, tend to understand who they are, not according to biology, but, rather, according to self-identification.

Wider Diocesan assistance is welcome – both for the clergy and leaders in the Church – and for congregation members who need confidential support. This assistance could be in the form of teaching and understanding for congregations and Church leaders. It could also be in the form of a safe-space in order to discuss issues which are troubling particular leaders or congregational members.

Safeguarding issues are broad and complex. They are largely being dealt with in other departments within the Church of England structures. There remains a challenge for the Church to be:

- The Body of Christ (where every members plays a part, and all are interconnected);

- The Bride of Christ (being prepared, and perfected, for a heavenly marriage with our Lord Jesus Christ at His return);
- Christian extended family (where all find a place of genuine warmth, welcome, security, and hospitality); and
- A building, where Christ is the foundation, and all are built up in Him.

We recognise that cultural expression of Gender varies enormously (since the time of the Bible and today) and that the local expression of love and affection is in part shaped by culture (e.g. “greet one another with a holy kiss” (Rom. 16:16), vv handshaking in modern culture). But, we want to encourage all to find their identity in Christ, and find ways in the Church to build one another up in Him.

## **ii. Leadership and membership in the Church**

Traditionally, the Church has precluded unrepentant sinners from receiving the sacraments, and from holding teaching authority.

The Bible teaches that there are restrictions upon those who hold teaching/leadership roles in the Church, following the biblical requirements for leaders to have exemplary Christian lives (e.g. 1 Tim 3). We infer that all sin that is known to myself should be repented of, and amendment to life should be desired.

The Bible teaches that restriction on access to the Lord’s Table (for example 1 Cor 11:17ff.) is based upon the notion that those who “eat and drink unworthily” do so to their own spiritual harm, and that they should first seek to be reconciled to fellow humans, and to God, before bread and wine are received.

Whilst the Book of Common Prayer Holy Communion Service makes much of this need for careful and adequate preparation, modern liturgies tend to be more welcoming. The job of the clergy is to teach the Bible faithfully and to call upon all congregation members to examine themselves, and to repent. In practice, the Church of England has had an “open table”. We truly hope that all people find a welcome and a home among the Lord’s people, gathered around His table. Thus, access to Holy Communion is generally left to the conscience of the recipient, and many of us will welcome to the Lord’s Table all who are “in love and harmony with the Lord and with their neighbour”. It is in this welcoming community that we become more Christ-like and better connected with brothers and sisters.

Nevertheless, both these points (qualifications for leadership and access to the Lord’s Table) illustrate the point that, whilst the welcome to Church, and participation in the life of the Church, should be as broad and generous as is possible, we stray too far from biblical expectations, if we make membership of the Church unconditional.

As we have already noted, the free, welcoming, inclusive love of God includes an expectation that our lives will be transformed and reformed by the power of the Holy Spirit. So, though we “come as we are”, we do not “stay as we are”.

**Principle Three** – *We commend the “Living Out Church Audit” as a good way for a local congregation to review their pastoral practice and welcome. (See <http://www.livingout.org/resources/audit>).*

## **Conclusion: Some Pastoral Principles**

We await the publication of resources by the Living in Faith and Love group (June 2020). We are hopeful that their findings will provide a robust, biblical perspective on Human Sexuality, and Human flourishing in a modern Church of England.

We are grateful for the Pastoral Advisory Group’s work in seeking to give insight and guidance on the Church’s welcome of LGBT+ women and men. We are pleased to learn that at the House of Bishops December 2018 meeting, these principles were heard and commended. They provide a framework for how to live well within the current position on marriage in the Church of England. They help encapsulate some of our own desire that the church seeks to overcome all prejudice, ignorance, fear, hypocrisy, silence, and misuse of power. We agree that living well together includes these 6 principles:-

- Because of our understanding that all are made in the image of God, we will receive our differences as a gift, valuing all people, and seek to see Christ in all our neighbours. To help us do this we will acknowledge and address our prejudices.
- Because of our understanding of the Church as the Body of Christ, we seek to be a place of welcome, acceptance, challenge and hospitality.
- Because of our understanding that the Bible and the Church of England’s foundational documents are our authority, we will ensure that our theological discussions are conducted with respect for our inheritance and for each other.
- Because of our understanding that pastoral practice in the Church of England entails the Church being there for all, we will consciously demonstrate and live out what it means for perfect love to cast out all fear.
- Because of our understanding that all are valued and loved on the basis of Christ’s redeeming love, life, death and resurrection, we will be communities marked by attentive listening, courtesy, kindness and the absolute belief that nobody is outside the love of God.
- Because of our understanding that Christ calls us in humility to regard others as better than ourselves we refuse to exploit any perceived or real power over others. We will encourage our communities to be places where all seek to serve one another in the Spirit of Christ and to respond joyfully to his call to mutual submission. (The fuller text associated with these 6 principles may be found in the General Synod document GSMisc1200).

*Revd Dr Simon Vibert written for*

*Guildford Diocesan Evangelical Fellowship Exec*

*March 2019*