

Report on Faith and LGBT identity

The Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement (LGCM) has been in existence since April 1976 and has held the same aims throughout this time, except for the addition of bisexual and trans people to our remit. These aims are:

To encourage fellowship, friendship, and support among individual lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans Christians through prayer, study and action, wherever possible in local groups, and especially to support those lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans Christians subjected to discrimination.

To help the whole Church re-examine its understanding of human sexuality and gender identity, and to work for a positive acceptance of lesbian and gay relationships within the framework outlined in the Statement of Conviction, so that all homosexuals may be able to live without fear of rejection or recrimination, and that lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans Christians may be able to contribute fully to the life and ministry of the Church.

To encourage members to witness to their Christian faith and experience within the lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans community, and to witness to their convictions about human sexuality and gender identity within the Church.

To maintain and strengthen links with other lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans Christian groups, both in Britain and elsewhere.

LGCM currently has approximately 1000 members and many thousands more who receive information. Of our members almost 30% live in London or neighbouring suburbs.

The issues related to 'coming out' as a LGBT person are well known and documented¹ including those dealing with churches and other faith communities² but what is not spoken about are the issues related to 'coming out' as a person of faith within the LGBT community.

The media constantly portrays faith and sexuality as opposing forces and since the Equality Act (2010) this has become even more entrenched with the protected strands of faith or belief and sexuality being fought out in the courts, including the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). Cases such as *Ladele v London Borough of Islington* (2009) regarding the conducting of Civil Partnerships and *Mr and Mrs Bull* refusing a room to a gay Civil Partnered couple in their B & B have created an image that you can only be either LGBT or Christian and never the twain shall meet.

This was very evident in the recent hour long special of the programme 'The Big Question' where the assumption was that human rights and 'gay' rights were two different things and therefore in conflict with each other. The reality is that some LGBT people are people of faith and some people of faith are LGBT. As Stonewall would say 'Get over it!'

¹For a comprehensive reading list please see www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coming_out

²*Christian Homophobia*, report by the Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement, 2000 and *Love Thy Neighbour*, report by Stonewall, 2009

For LGBT people of faith and especially those who are struggling with either identity, this causes serious conflict and psychological trauma. The message is that we have to choose between our faith identity and our gender or sexual identity.

Many LGBT Christians end up living in the 'closet' – not being out about their sexual orientation or gender identity within their faith community and not being out about their faith identity with their LGBT community. This creates tension and fear as there is always the concern of meeting someone from one community whilst in the company of friends from the other community.

Relationships are always limited due to not being able to share freely and having to create stories or avoid questions that will 'out' the true you.

Throughout my work representing the LGBT community at faith-based meetings and the faith community at LGBT meetings I am very aware of the hostility in both camps towards the other. As a gender queer lesbian ordained minister I have been told in no uncertain terms that I was not welcome in as many gay bars as I have churches.

It is very hard to support LGBT people who have been excommunicated from their churches and thrown out of their home by their families due to their faith beliefs when I know they are likely to face just as much hostility within the LGBT community if they share their beliefs. It is also difficult to signpost people to other support agencies when the attitude is often one of scorn for the deeply held beliefs of the person in distress and the opinion is that they are better off leaving their faith behind. Genuine support to help a person reconcile both aspects of who they are is often difficult to find.

Another area of great difficulty in working across both faith and sexuality is in trying to secure funding for the work we do. Those organisations that are willing to fund faith based work will usually not fund anything related to LGBT issues and vice versa. This means that our work is dependent on the receipt of membership fees. This is very frustrating when the majority of homophobia, biphobia and transphobia across the world is usually faith inspired and/or supported.

One of the highly publicised examples of this is the recent passing of laws in Russia, Nigeria, and Uganda further criminalising homosexuality. This has resulted in a huge increase in our membership of asylum seekers all of whom are looking for safe spaces to be both Christian and LGBT.

Unlike the UK, much of community life across Africa revolves around the church. This means that for many asylum seekers they have experienced persecution from both the law and the church making them fearful about engaging with the church and so creating even further isolation. Receiving support from an organization that recognizes their sexual orientation/gender identity as a gift from God provides opportunities for healing and wholeness. However, that work can be easily undermined by negative statements and reports from the media and some Christian denominations.

Stonewall provide reports on the alarming number of suicides amongst LGBT teenagers in this country.³ Unfortunately, one major factor in this figure is the pressure from the

³ In *The School Report* (2012) it is stated that **Two in five** (41 per cent) have attempted or thought about taking their own life.

condemning religious beliefs they either hold themselves or have had forced upon them by their family.

More work desperately needs to be done to counteract the prevailing view that being a person of faith is not compatible with being LGB and/or T.

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