

It's Time to Embrace Us - Anglican LGBTI+ Voices Speak Out:

An Open Letter to the Anglican Church of Australia

We speak out today as deeply committed Anglicans who are also LGBTI+ (that is: Lesbian Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and other sexually and gender diverse) people. We speak out as your siblings who have personally suffered shame and silence because of our sexuality and/or gender. We speak out on behalf of so many other similar Anglicans who are still unable to speak due to fear and pain. We speak out of sorrow at the mistreatment of sexually and gender diverse people by the Church we love, but with hope and an invitation to renewed vision and relationships. We speak out so that everyone may at last be embraced with the love that God in Jesus Christ has for all of us.

For ***we grieve***. We grieve for the sins of homophobia and transphobia which continue to bedevil the Church, and in which we too, as members of it, are complicit. We grieve for so many lives which have been lost, hearts which have been broken, and precious souls which have been horribly marred. We grieve that the church is adrift in the midst of today's sea-change in societal understanding and affirmation of sexually and gender diverse people. We grieve above all that the love of Christ is obscured by so much Christian hardness of heart and slowness to respond.

We protest the silencing, repression and denial of our religious and wider freedom. Some parts of the Anglican Church of Australia appear actively hostile. We therefore vigorously protest the exclusion of debate, and the resistance to the removal of religious privileges which impact on the health and welfare of LGBTI+ children, families, teachers and other church staff. We protest the silence of so many parts of our church, the hesitant leadership that won't commit itself to us. Martin Luther King said that 'In the End, we will remember not the words of our enemies but the silence of our friends.' We feel this keenly. For whilst we give thanks to God for the wonderful examples of Australian Anglican inclusion – in the fine work of so many parishes, schools, welfare projects and individuals – we lament the profound corporate institutional inertia, and the pernicious silence and lack of empathy that persists towards us. 'Nothing about us without us' is a widely understood precept in our world today. Yet in our church 'almost everything about us without us' seems to be the rule. We therefore invite participation, the sharing of our experience and faith stories, and the development of affirming policies and education.

We profoundly respect difference, including the genuinely held views of other Anglicans who oppose us. We recognise that growth in theological understanding and change is complex. We approach with humility our common scriptures, tradition and reason. Yet, just as we cannot speak from the experience of others, we ask that we are heard, and our own difference valued. We ask that decades of affirming biblical interpretation and enquiry be honoured and options provided for liturgical blessings and for the sacrament of marriage for LGBTI+ people. We ask that we be given our place at the table and full opportunity to use our God-given gifts.

Above all, we demand address for the spiritual abuse faced by sexually and gender diverse people. The appalling revelations of child abuse in which our churches have been complicit should surely teach us about the horrific consequences of silencing and ignoring vulnerable people, and the vital importance of listening, transparency and restorative justice. Typically however, LGBTI+ Anglicans are ignored or kept at arms length, even when issues of huge

importance to us are discussed or determined. Due to overt hostility, covert disapproval and uncertainty, genuinely safe spaces are so often hard to find and many LGBTIQA Anglicans do not feel able to be themselves (the persons God loves so much) in church settings. Churches often talk about being 'welcoming' to us, but it is positive affirmation and empowerment - not mere toleration - at Christ's open table, that is required, for our sexualities and genders are not aspects of the Fall, but diverse expressions of the divine image and continuing divine creation and gifts to enlarge the life and freedom of all.

We speak out as faithful members of the Anglican Church of Australia. We speak out as Christians with different theological, ecclesiological and liturgical emphases, yet as one voice. We speak out with profound concern for the future of the Church whose credibility and mission are now at stake because of how it treats us and others on its margins. We believe the soul of Anglicanism is at stake in the way our lives and bodies are treated. For centuries, the best spirit of the Anglican tradition, being both Catholic and Reformed, has held profound differences in creative tension and approached new issues of human dignity (from the questioning of slavery to the emancipation of women) with attitudes of openness and reception. It is at the heart of the Anglican Reformation settlement that 'it is not necessary that Traditions and ceremonies be in all places one and utterly alike'. With such a spirit of generous love, the Anglican Communion has spread worldwide, taking different forms whilst holding to the essentials of faith. Today this is in jeopardy as a sectarian spirit of exclusion is among us, rejecting the fruitful developments of LGBTI+ affirmation in other parts of the Anglican Communion and leaving little or no place for differences among us in Australia. Like the Gentiles in the early Church, we wait in faith, hope and love for the recognition by others of God's equal calling to us, different in some aspects of lifestyle, but one in Christ. The Holy Spirit is doing great things among us and in the wider world through sexually and gender diverse people. We believe they can be sources of renewal to a weary and defensive Church. Like the Gentiles in the early Church, we therefore call today's Peter and Paul to account, that we may all join as one in the transforming love of God. May those who have ears to hear, hear.

We call for repentance by the Church for its part in the violence, abuse and lack of acceptance of LGBTIQA people. We call for a recognition of our full humanity and for equal participation in church and society. We call for a full gospel which embodies the good news Jesus brought to the poor and marginalised and which centres on God's grace, not narrow religious traditions of human law. We call for dignity, justice and renewal. May those who have ears to hear, hear.

Anglican LGBTI+ Voices is the confidential LGBTI+ network of Equal Voices-Anglicans associated with Equal Voices (the national movement of LGBTI+ Christians and allies)

Contact:

The Revd Dr Jo Inkpin (0488 333 169)

Steff Fenton (0431549947)

equalvoicesanglican@gmail.com

www.equalvoicesanglican.org

<https://equalvoices.org.au>

