

**GENERAL SYNOD  
PRIVATE MEMBER'S MOTION  
CONVERSION THERAPY**

Jayne Ozanne (Oxford) to move that this Synod:

- (a) endorse the statement (see below) of 16 January 2017 signed by The UK Council for Psychotherapy, The Royal College of General Practitioners and others that the practice of conversion therapy has no place in the modern world, is unethical, harmful and not supported by evidence; and
- (b) call upon the Archbishops' Council to become a co-signatory to the statement on behalf of the Church of England.

**January 16<sup>th</sup> 2017 Statement**

We the undersigned UK organisations wish to state that the practice of conversion therapy has no place in the modern world. It is unethical and harmful and not supported by evidence.

Conversion Therapy is the term for therapy that assumes certain sexual orientations or gender identities are inferior to others, and seeks to change or suppress them on that basis.

Sexual orientations and gender identities are not mental health disorders, although exclusion, stigma and prejudice may precipitate mental health issues for any person subjected to these abuses. Anyone accessing therapeutic help should be able to do so without fear of judgement or the threat of being pressured to change a fundamental aspect of who they are.

*The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy  
 The British Association for Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapies  
 The British Psychoanalytic Council  
 The British Psychological Society  
 The College of Sexual and Relationship Therapists  
 GLADD – The Association of LGBT Doctors and Dentists  
 The National Counselling Society  
 National Health Service Scotland  
 Pink Therapy  
 The Royal College of General Practitioners  
 The Scottish Government  
 Stonewall  
 The UK Council for Psychotherapy*

**Summary**

1. The Bible teaches us that we are each fearfully and wonderfully made (Ps.139.14), and that we should praise God's gift of our creation. Thus, our diversity as human beings is a reflection of God's creativity and something to celebrate. The biblical concern is not with what we are but how we choose to live our lives, meaning that differing sexual orientations and gender identities are not inherently sinful, nor mental health disorders to be "cured".
2. Academic studies show that exclusion, stigma and prejudice may precipitate mental health issues for people subjected to these abuses, often sadly perpetrated by religious groups.
3. To help address this, the UK therapy professional bodies have united to speak out against the dangers of conversion therapy. Their concern is that this practice assumes the client

has a mental disorder and so starts from a pre-conceived view that they should try to change their sexual orientation – which is a discredited and highly damaging practice.

### **What is conversion therapy?**

4. Conversion therapy, also known as “reparative therapy” or “sexual reorientation therapy”, is designed to change one’s sexual orientation from non-heterosexual to heterosexual.
5. However, as the sexual orientation of an individual is based on their sexual attraction or innate desire - which medical professionals agree cannot be changed - conversion therapy looks instead to focus on changing a person’s *sexual behaviour* and *sense of identity*.
6. Conversion therapy is also increasingly used as a term to try to convert a transgender person’s gender expression to match that of the sex they were assigned with at birth.
7. The term covers a wide array of approaches designed to change a person’s sexual behaviour or gender identity. These can include talking therapies, prayer, deliverance ministry, hypnosis, aversion therapy – such as electronic shock treatment. In some cultures in the UK many young LGBT adults are threatened with “corrective rape” therapy.
8. People offering conversion therapy are rarely licensed mental health professionals. Many are in fact religious officials – such as church leaders or prayer ministry members, most of whom are self-taught advocates or people who claim to have changed their own sexual orientation using conversion therapy. They therefore have little or no training in this highly sensitive area. In a few cases conversion therapists may have originally trained in psychology and mental health, and so offer conversion therapy alongside other therapies.

### **Background**

9. There has been a long history of medical and psychological professions seeing homosexuality as a form of arrested sexual development. Up until 1974 the American Psychiatric Association classified homosexuality as a mental illness and it was only in 1992 that the World Health Organisation declassified homosexuality as a mental disorder.
10. It is now widely accepted, however, that conversion therapy suggests to vulnerable people that their sexuality is the root cause of their difficulties. Many have been misled into believing, often because of religious teaching, that being LGBT is wrong or sinful.
11. Whilst questions around sexuality and identity can be difficult and challenging, the medical profession deems it irresponsible and damaging to try to change sexual orientation. Instead they believe that the correct course of action is to provide gay affirmative therapy.
12. As Professor Helen Stokes-Lampard, Chair of the Royal College of GPs, has said:  
*“Being gay or trans is not a disease, it is not a mental illness and it doesn’t need a cure. Any proclamations to the contrary risk causing harm to our gay and trans patients’ physical and mental health and wellbeing, as well as perpetuating discrimination in society.”*

### **Academic & Scientific Evidence**

13. Various professional bodies have reviewed the evidence around conversion therapy and concluded there is no sound evidence that it works, while there is much evidence that it has the potential to cause harm. The most notable is the 2009 American Psychological Association Task Force on “Appropriate Therapeutic responses to Sexual Orientation”<sup>1</sup>:  
*“Given the limited amount of methodologically sound research, claims that recent Sexual Orientation Change Efforts (SOCE) is effective are not supported.....the results of scientifically valid research indicate that is unlikely that individuals will be able to reduce same-sex attractions or increase other-sex sexual attractions through SOCE.”*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/resources/therapeutic-response.pdf>

## Position of HM Government

14. There have been two debates in the House of Commons regarding the dangers of gay-straight conversion therapy. The first was led by Labour MP Sandra Osborne (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) on November 20<sup>th</sup> 2013 and the second by Conservative MP Mike Freer (Finchley and Golders Green) on November 3<sup>rd</sup> 2015. Both sought to focus on the dangers of conversion therapy and whether the NHS should pay to provide it to clients.
15. During the 2013 debate, Health Minister Normal Lamb MP confirmed that he found the practice “*abhorrent and that it has no place in a modern society*”. He committed to write to NHS England to ensure that NHS money should not be used in this way. This assurance was echoed by Health Minister Jane Ellison MP during the second debate in 2015.
16. Making good on his commitments, the Health Minister held a meeting in April 2014 of professional associations, statutory and voluntary regulators, government departments, NHS England and campaigning groups concerned about counselling intended to help or persuade people to bury or eradicate their feelings of attraction to those of the same sex.
17. The Department of Health commissioned the UK Council of Psychotherapy to produce a public information sheet<sup>2</sup> on conversion therapy, which it published in June 2014.
18. This set out why therapy professionals consider conversion therapy unethical, stating: “*The major therapy professional bodies in the UK have been united in speaking out against conversion therapy. This is because this particular approach is based on the assumption that homosexuality is a mental disorder, or begins from the pre-conceived view that the client should change their sexual orientation. As homosexuality is not an illness, it is both logically and ethically flawed to offer any kind of treatment.*”
19. In an interview<sup>3</sup> in May 2017 the Prime Minister, Theresa May, confirmed that she would keep the issue of whether to ban organisations from offering conversion therapy “*under close review*” and stated that “*being gay or trans is not an illness, and shouldn’t be treated as such – young people should be protected from attempts to change who they are.*”

## Position of Medical Professional Bodies

19. The UK Council for Psychotherapy states:  
*‘It is exploitative for a psychotherapist to offer treatment that might ‘cure’ or ‘reduce’ same sex attraction as to do so would be offering a treatment for which there is no illness.’*
20. The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy says:  
*‘There is no scientific, rational or ethical reason to treat people who identify within a range of human sexualities any differently from those who identify solely as heterosexual.’*
22. The British Psychoanalytic Council states:  
*‘The BPC does not accept that a homosexual orientation is evidence of disturbance of the mind or in development. In psychoanalytic psychotherapy, it is the quality of people’s relationships which are explored, whether they are heterosexual or homosexual.’*
23. The Royal College of Psychiatrists states:  
*‘The RCP believes strongly in evidence-based treatment. There is no sound scientific evidence that sexual orientation can be changed. Furthermore, so-called treatments of homosexuality create a setting in which prejudice and discrimination flourish.’*

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.psychotherapy.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/ukcp-conversion-therapy.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.pinknews.co.uk/2017/05/18/qa-prime-minister-theresa-may-answers-all-your-lgbt-questions-ahead-of-the-general-election/>

## 2015 Memorandum of Understanding

24. In November 2015 an MoU<sup>4</sup> was signed by 17 organisations based on their common understanding that efforts to try to change or alter sexual orientation through psychological therapies were unethical and potentially harmful. They committed to ensuring that all members of the public could confidently access safe and high-quality psychological therapies, and that the evidence and risks of conversion therapy would be made known.
25. The list of professional signatories are: *NHS England, NHS Scotland, the Scottish Government, Association of Christian Counsellors, British Association for Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapies, British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy, British Psychoanalytic Council British Psychological Society, College of Sexual and Relationship Therapists, Gay and Lesbian Association of Doctors and Dentists, National Counselling Society, PACE, Pink Therapy, Royal College of General Practitioners, Royal College of Psychiatrists, Relate, UK Council of Psychotherapy.*
26. On January 15<sup>th</sup> 2015 the General Medical Council confirmed their support for the MOU.

## Position of Christian Practitioners

27. As noted above the Association of Christian Counsellors agreed to sign the 2015 Memorandum of Understanding and as such have discredited the practice of such therapy.
28. In July 31<sup>st</sup> 2014 nine ex-gay leaders from around the world united to sign a letter<sup>5</sup> denouncing the dangerous practices of conversion therapy, in which they candidly said:

*“The majority of those who practice this “therapy” often do so with little or no formal psychological training, operating instead from a strict religious perspective, believing homosexuality to be a “sin.”*

*“At one time, we were not only deeply involved in these “ex-gay” programs, we were the founders, the leaders, and the promoters. Together we represent more than half a century of experience, so few people are more knowledgeable about the ineffectiveness and harm of conversion therapy. We know first-hand the terrible emotional and spiritual damage it can cause, especially for LGBT youth.*

*As former “ex-gay” leaders, having witnessed the incredible harm done to those who attempted to change their sexual orientation or gender identity, we join together in calling for a ban on conversion therapy. It is our firm belief that it is much more productive to support, counsel, and mentor LGBT individuals to embrace who they are in order to live happy, well-adjusted lives.”*

## Conclusion

29. Conversion therapy is condemned by professionals as being harmful to LGBT people as it is based on a misguided belief that being lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender is wrong. This leads to increased mental health problems for LGBT community due to stigmatisation.
30. Given that many practitioners are non-medically trained religious leaders, it is imperative that the Church of England is unequivocal in its condemnation of such harmful practices.

*Ms Jayne Ozanne (Oxford)*

*June 2017*

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.psychotherapy.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Memorandum-of-understanding-on-conversion-therapy.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.nclrights.org/former-ex-gay-leaders-unite-in-opposition-to-conversion-therapy/>