

HELD TOGETHER IN THE LOVE OF CHRIST: Pastoral Principles for living well together

Why?

As communities of Christians we are held together in the love of Christ. Our many differences are gifts that can build us up in trust and mutual affection ... or they can mar the image of Christ that we are called to reflect through our life together. LGBTI+ people in our churches have not always experienced this unconditional love of Christ and we need to admit and address this reality.

What?

These Pastoral Principles invite church communities to examine afresh their life together. The focus relates to LGBTI+ people, but they apply to all sorts of difference and diversity among God's people. The House of Bishops commends them to the dioceses and parishes of the Church of England.

How?

The Bishops' hope and prayer is that they will be used by clergy and laity with responsibility for welcome and pastoral care in the church and as a resource for discipleship and study groups in all churches.

Paying attention to them will help church communities to live out the good news of welcome to all people with its biblical understanding of new birth, the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, the common call to repentance and faith, and our new identity in Christ.



**The Church of England
Pastoral Advisory Group
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The quality of our relationships is diminished by six pervading evils. How are these at work in your own church community and how might your church address them? ...

acknowledge

PREJUDICE

cast out

FEAR

speak into

SILENCE

admit

HYPOCRISY

address

IGNORANCE

pay attention to

POWER

Fact: at least some of these evils will be at work in your church, even if not with respect to LGBTI+ people. Who is missing? Who is present? Who is silent?

Using the Pastoral Principles in your church

There are 6 cards. Why not use them...

- to reflect on your church's life together at your PCC meetings?
- on a parish weekend or a PCC away day?
- as part of a training session for people involved in pastoral care in your church?
- as a series of small group studies over several weeks?
- as a resource for teaching and preaching?

If your group is using them over a period of weeks, why not ask each member of the group to do some work at home? For example, invite everyone to look out for signs of a 'pervading evil' at work in the coming week, and then report back when the group meets.

Having conversations about things that matter is important. Here are some tips to make it a good experience for everyone:

- Agree that what is said won't be shared outside the room.
- Agree to avoid interrupting one another and to allow everyone to speak.
- Notice who is talking and make space for quieter people to contribute.
- Look out for people's feelings by noticing their body language.
- Sometimes invite people to reflect on their own before talking in pairs or sharing as a whole group.
- Take time out from time to time and offer people an opportunity to say if there is anything in the conversation they have found difficult but haven't been able to express.

Prayers

A prayer to begin

Heavenly Father,
you have called us as the Body of
your Son Jesus Christ
to continue his work of reconciliation
and reveal you to the world:
forgive us the sins which tear us apart;
give us the courage to overcome
our fears
and to seek that unity which is
your gift and your will;
through Jesus Christ your Son
our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

A prayer to end

Lord of the Church
forgive our failure to acknowledge and address
our prejudices:
open our hearts and minds to value those with whom
we disagree;
forgive the way we collude with silence
and imprison others in it:
give us courage to speak words that liberate and heal;
forgive our reluctance to address our ignorance:
lead us into the truth that will set us free;
forgive the cycles of negativity that trap us in fear:
cast out our fear with your perfect love;
forgive our failure to admit our hypocrisy:
give us grace to grow in self-awareness
and personal integrity;
forgive us when disparities of power undermine trust:
shape our conversations with humility and mutual respect;
that we may live well together
and rejoice to be disciples of your Son, Jesus Christ.

Amen.

PRINCIPLE 1

Acknowledge **PREJUDICE**

Because of our understanding that everyone is made in the image of God, we will receive our differences as 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.

We are all conditioned by our experience of life, positively or negatively. All of us must reflect deeply on our attitudes and behaviour. All are loved children of God. The cross of Christ is for all. The journey from **prejudice** to hatred is a short one.

Can it be right that any of us fails to explore our own prejudices?

Something to ponder

Central to our faith is a belief that each of us is unique: we rejoice that we are fearfully and wonderfully made by God. There is a sense of awe and mystery about each one of us – an element of ‘otherness’ – that cannot be reduced to something that we can fully grasp within our finite understanding.

This principle applies to all our relationships with people who are different from us, whether as a result of sexuality, gender identity, ethnicity, age or any other characteristic. We believe that all of us need to reflect deeply on our attitudes and behaviour in order to extend a Christ-like welcome to all people in our midst.

Some questions to explore together

How do we ...

- welcome people as they are, rather than welcoming them in the hope that they will become and behave ‘like us’?
- love people unconditionally with a positive attitude that is without judgement or question?
- find out how the things we do and the language we use affect LGBTI+ people in ways that are harmful and we don’t intend?

PRINCIPLE 2

Speak into **SILENCE**

Because of our understanding of the Church as the Body of Christ, we seek to be a place of openness, acceptance, challenge and hospitality.

Good pastoral care of LGBTI+ people can never happen in an environment where their presence or questions are intentionally ignored by those in church leadership. **Silence**, when misused, can shelter abuses of power. People must be given space, permission and opportunities to speak if they want to – so that those who are vulnerable can hear and thus not feel that they are alone. If our church really believes that it wishes to welcome everyone, no matter their personal circumstances, then this welcome must be voiced in words that come from both head and heart.

Can it be right for our church communities to promote a conspiracy of silence – whether consciously or subconsciously – about matters relating to sexuality and gender?

Something to ponder

Central to our understanding of the Christian community is that we are the Body of Christ. We are called to relate deeply and openly with one another, sharing what is on our hearts as well as in our minds. We live and work together, offering and using our God-given gifts, blessings, insights and experience. Here mutual respect, accountability and responsibility play out in the context of the history and living tradition of our church's community.

Some questions to explore together

How can we ...

- explore together God's will for *all* aspects of *all* our lives as revealed in the Scriptures?
- be attentive and present to the other without a hidden agenda?
- have a quality and depth of relationships that means people are missed when they are not there?
- be open to growing and learning together in love and holiness as followers of Christ and members of his body, the church?
- be willing to respect difference so that all feel they belong?
- appreciate diversity in our church to such an extent that we miss people who embody particular kinds of difference when they are not there?

PRINCIPLE 3

Address **IGNORANCE**

Because of our understanding that the authority for the faith we profess is revealed in the Holy Scriptures and contained both in the creeds we say and in the Church of England's

Ignorance is inevitable, but **ignorance** about the experiences and perspectives of everyone in our church communities can and should be addressed and taken into account in our teaching and learning about the foundations of our shared Christian faith. Taking Scripture and our tradition seriously does not allow us to ignore these pressing pastoral issues.

foundation documents, we will talk to each other with respect and a desire to learn more about this inheritance and about each other's lived experiences and views.

Can it be right for people with pastoral responsibility to be ignorant of what it is like to be LGBTI+?

Something to ponder

Central to being Anglican is our call to be faithful to both Scripture and the Church's tradition, using God's gifts of reason and wisdom shaped by the Spirit. Another way of saying this is that the Church of England is both catholic and reformed. This can give rise to tensions and differences both within and across our church communities, but we see this as a sign of strength: God's church is diverse, welcoming the diversity of the people God calls.

The better we – both individuals and churches – have been able to acknowledge prejudice and speak into silence, then the better placed we are to respect and talk about difference as we study Scripture and pray together. This will enable us to address the more challenging questions of what it means to be faithful to Scripture and how the life of a disciple of Jesus Christ is to be characterised.

Some questions to explore together

In our preaching, Bible study groups, public prayer and praying in informal contexts, how do we ...

- ensure they flow from having established authentic relationships and exercised deep listening?
- avoid assuming that we know what a person's needs or situation are?
- resist labelling a person's physical difference, identity or sexual orientation in themselves as an illness, or as demonic or as sinful?

PRINCIPLE 4

Cast out **FEAR**

Because of our understanding that the Church of England is there to care for everyone in the community, we will consciously demonstrate and live out what it means for perfect love to cast out all fear.

There is **fear** about 'breaking ranks' and speaking out. There is fear that if someone's personal circumstances are known then friendships may be affected, or their ministry may be called into question. Clergy may fear that if their views differ from their bishop's known views, this will affect their ministry. These kinds of fear can corrupt our life together, make individuals feel trapped and stop people from entering our churches.

Can it be right that people live in fear of one another in our churches?

Something to ponder

Central to our life as a Church are the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion. These are a means of God's grace to help us live holy lives that are obedient to God's call. They are God's gifts, not ours, and we receive them at Christ's invitation and his alone. We are mindful that we are all sinners and fall short of what God asks of us each and every day: none of us is worthy to receive, except through the mercy and forgiveness of God.

The Book of Common Prayer (BCP) helpfully exhorts everyone to examine their worthiness before receiving Communion. This can raise questions about what it means to be in right relationship with God before receiving the sacraments, accepting that only God knows all the secrets of our hearts.

Some questions to explore together

How can we encourage one another to wrestle prayerfully with ...

- becoming a church that exhorts *everyone* to examine their 'worthiness' in a meaningful and habitual way?
- discipleship as a personal response to Christ driven by conviction and conscience, and discipleship as a member of the church with its historically received and understood traditions?
- avoiding a cheap grace that denies the costliness of Christ's call to his disciples to take up their cross and follow him?
- discerning whether it is legitimate for Church leaders to seek to exclude people from sharing in leadership?
- rejecting pastoral practice that is coercive or abusive?

PRINCIPLE 5

Admit **HYPOCRISY**

Because of our understanding that everyone is 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.

We do not commend intrusive questioning. Rather, our aim is to shine a light on structures and practices that promote evasiveness that can be seen as **hypocrisy**.

Can it be right that there are situations where people feel forced to hide their sexuality or gender identity, or where parishes find themselves evading these matters?

Something to ponder

Central to our faith is the belief that while we were still sinners, Christ died for all. We remain fallible, weak and broken and yet are called to love one another as Christ has loved us. Jesus' teaching and the letters to the early Church warn us against judgmentalism. We journey together knowing that the poor in spirit and those who know their need of God are blessed.

Despite our deep disagreements about human sexuality, identity and relationships, we nevertheless know ourselves held in the love of Christ, all equally in need of his grace and called to live together in love. As we do so, we pray that we will learn from one another and discover more of the challenge to holy living and the wideness of God's mercy as the Spirit moves within us, among us and between us.

Some questions to explore together

As equal recipients of God's love and grace in and through the work of the triune God, how do we ...

- encourage one another to practise deep and care-filled listening, to what is said and unsaid?
- show heartfelt respect in the way we speak with one another?
- build open and trusting relationships in the face of disagreement?
- acknowledge that we are all children of God and not one of us is outside the love of God?

PRINCIPLE 6

Pay attention to **POWER**

Because of our understanding that Christ calls us in humility to regard others as better than ourselves we will not exploit any perceived or real power over others.

Inequalities of **power** have led to abuses in the past and will continue to do so unless all who exercise pastoral care reflect continuously on the power that they hold. Power must always be acknowledged.

We will encourage our communities to be places where everyone seeks to serve one another in the Spirit of Christ and to respond joyfully to his call to mutual submission.

Can it be right that pastoral encounters still take place without awareness of disparities of power?

Something to ponder

Matters relating to identity, sexuality, gender and relationships are deeply personal. Conversations relating to them must be carried out with utmost sensitivity to the real or perceived power that one may have over another. We need to learn to become more aware both of our own power and of our vulnerability to the perceived power of others, and to notice and call out when power is exercised inappropriately.

Some questions to explore together

We need to look for ways to identify, acknowledge, dispel and dismantle inappropriate power dynamics in our communities.

How do we ...

- minister to one another in the recognition that God alone, through his Holy Spirit, can effect transformation in our lives and the lives of others?
- help one another to recognise the different kinds of power at work in our church as a result of our role, social status, sexuality, gender, ethnicity, age or other characteristic?
- encourage vulnerability in our relationships and look for ways of modelling it appropriately?