



Growing Faith Foundation: Listening to LGBTQ+ young Christians

Final report

Description of project

This research proposal sought to amplify the voices of young LGBTQ+ Christians, specifically 16 -18-year-olds in England. Where we had heard of LGBTQ+ teenagers in the Church of England coming to and journeying in faith, we wanted to listen to their stories and understand more about their experiences in church, in school and at home.

Initially, we proposed a two-stage process of 1) one-to-one or group Zoom interviews to construct individual timelines of milestone events in their faith journeys followed by 2) workshops where groups of young people could reflect together on the anonymised faith journey data collected, noting commonalities, differences, and distilling main themes. Dissemination was to include audio and video recordings of the young people telling their stories as part of a suite of resources to help teachers, chaplains, vicars, parents, guardians support LGBTQ+ young people coming to faith and journeying in faith.

Timeline of progress achieved

Sept/Oct 2022: Consultation with GFF. Adjustments made to research design.

Nov/Dec 2022: Design of documentation and QR code to recruit participants. Due to wider ethics process, advertising was timed for the New Year.

Ethics process: form received 22 November 2022; form submitted 6 December 2022; approval granted 30 January 2023

Jan/Feb 2023: Research design amended in light of consultation with CofE's Ethics Committee. Research launched including email requests to gatekeeper contacts to advertise locally with their young people.

March/April 2023: Pilot conducted with a young person known to a researcher. Further push on advertising. Two more researchers recruited and trained to help with potential participants should they be needed.

May/June 2023: Aware of clash with exams so advertising paused. Concern expressed about timing with General Synod LLF decisions.

July/August 2023: Colourful bookmarks and business cards printed and distributed in the under 18s venue at Greenbelt. No take up.

September 2023: Project closed.

Perceived reasons for lack of participants

- As researchers working at a national level, we were reliant on local gatekeepers to help us recruit 16-18-year-old participants that they knew, and to encourage them to explore taking part. **This is an age group not used to contributing to national church research, certainly not without a relational contact to encourage them to take part.** We think it is significant that the participant who took part in the pilot was someone one of the researchers knew.
- Our gatekeepers said they were happy to advertise our research, but we do not know to what extent they made it a priority. Where we knew they had done so, still no young people contacted us. One of our key contacts with LGBTQ+ young people moved ministry jobs mid project and was no longer able to advertise the research among their youth group. **In hindsight, these local gatekeepers were more crucial than we anticipated** but there was a limit to how many times we could prompt them.
- **Timing of the General Synod debates meant the LGBTQ+ debate was still 'live' and the topic sensitive.** One diocesan contact asked us further questions in deciding whether they would advertise our research in their diocese.:
 - *How will the materials reflect/challenge the current CofE doctrine on marriage?*
 - *Will the research consider negative experiences of young LGBTQIA+ people in their faith journeys?*
 - *Will the research and materials be published after July Synod (and therefore reflect revised pastoral guidance)?'*
- Despite taking great pains to explain our research as having no agenda other than to listen objectively to the stories told by the young people, one gatekeeper *still* anticipated a **degree of suspicion** about *any* research into LGBTQ+ Christians and asked for more information so they could vouch for the integrity of the research before sharing on social media.
- Despite asking 16-18 year old members of our families to give us feedback on materials and taking on board their advice, it is possible **we did not use sufficiently age appropriate advertising** - either in content (participant recruitment information) or platforms (social media). Given the age group of participants and the sensitivity of the research topic, information sheets had to be detailed which might have been off-putting.
- A 16-18 age gap is relatively narrow and **timing recruitment** around mock exam and exam periods and summer holidays proved more difficult than expected.