

HELD TOGETHER IN THE LOVE OF CHRIST

Pastoral Principles for living well together



Using the Pastoral Principles in your church

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

- as a means for reflecting 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?

For more information on the work of the Church of England's Pastoral Advisory Group – including a free downloadable version of these Pastoral Principles cards for local, non-commercial use – please visit:

www.churchofengland.org/pag

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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. They are commended by the House of Bishops for 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
January 2019**

The quality of our relationships is hindered by six pervading evils. You are invited to consider whether these are at work in your church community and how your church might ...

acknowledge

PREJUDICE

cast out

FEAR

speak into

SILENCE

admit

HYPOCRISY

address

IGNORANCE

pay attention to

POWER

Acting on these evils – which are applicable to all people – could be transformative for your church community and for the church as a whole. Together our church communities are called to LOVE:

Listen attentively and openly

Open your heart and mind without judgmentalism

Value everyone's vulnerability and perspective

Express concern and empathy.

PRINCIPLE 1

Acknowledge **PREJUDICE**

Because of our understanding that all are 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.

No one is unconditioned by their 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 her or his 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 how all manner of human differences are perceived and responded to. Although our focus in this document is specifically on LGBTI+ people, these principles apply to all our relationships. We believe that all of us need to reflect deeply on our attitudes and behaviour in order to extend a Christ-like welcome to LGBTI+ people in our midst.

Some questions to explore together

How do we ...

- welcome people as they are, rather than offering a welcome that is dependent on individuals’ willingness to conform to a way of thinking and being that is perceived as ‘the norm’: people ‘like us’?
- love others 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 welcome, 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 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 culture 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 the Body of Christ where our welcome must be voiced in words that come from both head and heart and lead into deep engagement and dialogue in community. 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 that community.

Some questions to explore together

How can we ...

- explore together God's will for all aspects of 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 difference is respected and all feel they belong?
- be open to growing together as disciples of Jesus Christ and to learning together what it means to grow in love and holiness as part of the body of Christ?
- acknowledge that the Church is composed of people who are different from each other, and people who embody particular kinds of difference are missed when they are not there?

PRINCIPLE 3

Address **IGNORANCE**

Because of our understanding that the Bible and the Church of England's foundational documents are our authority, we will ensure that our theological discussions are conducted with respect for our inheritance and for each other.

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 should not necessitate ignoring these pressing pastoral issues.

Can it be right that some with pastoral responsibility in the church are so often ignorant of what it is like to be LGBTI+?

Something to ponder

Central to our Anglican identity is our recognition that the Church of England is both catholic and reformed. We are called to attend faithfully to both Scripture and tradition, using God's gifts of reason and wisdom shaped by the Spirit. Whilst this can give rise to potential tensions and differences both within and across our church communities, we see this as a sign of strength rather than weakness in that it reflects our understanding that God's church is a diverse church, welcoming the diversity of the people God calls.

The more successfully we (both individuals and churches) have been able to embrace Principles 1 and 2 above, 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, do we ...

- ensure they flow from having established authentic relationships and exercised deep listening?
- avoid projecting presuppositions about a person's needs or situation?
- resist categorising 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 pastoral practice in the Church of England entails the Church being there for all, 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 one's personal circumstances are known then friendships may be affected or the validity of one's ministry may be called into question. There is fear among the clergy of how they may be held to account as they attempt to care. There is fear that a bishop's known views will colour her or his engagement with their people. These kinds of fear must be addressed because it can corrupt our life together and imprison individuals.

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. These are a means of God's grace in living lives of holiness in obedience to God's call. They are God's gifts, not ours, and we receive them at Christ's invitation and his alone. At the same time, 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 come, except through the mercy and forgiveness of God.

Tensions around difference and being faithful to Scripture can raise questions about what it means to be in right relationship with God before receiving these sacraments. The Book of Common Prayer (BCP), for example, helpfully exhorts everyone to examine their 'worthiness' before receiving communion. Issues of self-examination and conscience will always remain between a person and their maker, who knows all the secrets of our hearts.

Some questions to explore together

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

- the tensions between discipleship as a personal response to Christ that is shaped by conviction and conscience, and discipleship as a member of a church community seeking to live in the light of its historically received and understood traditions?
- becoming a church that exhorts *everyone* to examine their 'worthiness' in a meaningful and habitual way?
- avoiding the '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?
- repudiating pastoral practice that is coercive or abusive?

PRINCIPLE 5

Admit **HYPOCRISY**

Because of our understanding that all are 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 shining 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 who might wish to be open about their sexual orientation feel forced to dissemble, or where parishes find themselves evading issues of sexuality?

Something to ponder

Central to our faith is the belief that whilst 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. Furthermore, a key theme in Jesus' teaching and in the letters to the early Church is 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 and amongst 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, 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 no 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 refuse to 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 all seek 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.

Some questions to explore together

We need to look for ways to identify, acknowledge, dispel and dismantle the 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?
- become accountable to one another in relation to our perceived or actual power as a result of our role, social status, sexuality, gender, age or other characteristic?
- encourage vulnerability in our relationships and look for ways of modelling it appropriately?