

Why do we stay?

Gay and lesbian Anglicans are often asked why we remain active members of and attend the Anglican Church. Why do we stay when the church has caused us such pain? How can we continue to associate with an organisation that is ambivalent about our belonging?

Most of us were active and committed in our parishes before coming to a full awareness of our sexual orientation. This "coming out" can often provoke a personal crisis. It is difficult to come to terms with being gay or lesbian in a homophobic society. We should be able to come to our church for love and support, but too often we meet criticism, condemnation and rejection.

Some people do leave. They can't stand the tension created by un-welcoming churches. They drift away because the church has never addressed their real humanity. They have been hurt by their churches and refuse to be hurt any more. Christ remains a real part of their lives, but their contact with other Christians is limited.

So why do WE stay? It's not just that we have a taste for good liturgy. Many of us have been Anglican from the cradle. The

church has been our home and the centre of our faith. Many love the Anglican prayer books. We need the sacraments. We need fellowship.

There are many reasons for staying. Some relate directly the Gospel. We believe in God and we believe in God's all-sufficient grace. In our baptism we were made full members of the Body of Christ. God created us in the womb, and declared us acceptable. No one has the right to deny us our full inheritance as children of God, or to make our membership provisional.

The church is made up of many parts, but is one body. In the body of Jesus, women and men of differing backgrounds come together, bearing witness that, in the unity of Christ, all are free to find their unique identity. We believe that a church which excludes gay people lacks the full richness which God intended for it.

We are determined that the church should not become a place of exclusion and rejection.

We are committed to creating an environment in which gays, lesbians and bisexuals, together with all Christians, can discover the riches of Christian spirituality and faith without fear. It has been said that as long as we have a gospel of exclusion, we have no gospel at all.

Many of us stay, expecting the members of the Church to live up to Christ's teaching of mutual acceptance.

If we leave the church and do not speak out, we promote hypocrisy and dishonesty in ourselves and in the church. If we return to the "closet", we are lying about who and what we are. If the church asks us to lie in this way, it undermines the gospel and truth it proclaims on Sunday morning. By remaining silent, we allow the church to accept our gifts and our ministries, without extending to us the ministry of hospitality. It is this same inability to extend hospitality which was responsible for the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Besides, to whom else should we go?

To the "gay ghetto"? While it provides an essential support and focus for our communities, the "ghetto" can also isolate us and set us up for persecution. It is important for lesbigay people to be at home in mainstream society as well. The church is one of the places where the whole diversity of human communities should be able to intersect and celebrate in mutual respect and understanding.

To gay-positive denominations, like the Metropolitan Community Church, or the Unitarians? That has its attractions. Within such an organisation, our gifts would be used and celebrated. We could be honest about our lives and our relationships.

Our determined choice, however, is not to isolate ourselves, or to go to another denomination, but to stay and to work to gain acceptance in the Anglican Church.

In 1995, the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada said: *"[we] affirm the presence and contributions of gay men and lesbians in the life of the church, and condemn bigotry, violence and hatred directed toward any due to their sexual orientation."*

In 2004, General Synod spoke about couples, when they *"affirm[ed] the integrity and sanctity of adult, committed same-sex relationships."*

We pray and work and wait for the Anglican Church of Canada to make this a reality.

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