Religion & LGBT Inclusion

Religion and LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender) issues are too often thought not to mix. It seems not a week goes by without media attention to the issue. Whilst debates continue to rage, many LGBT people of faith are left confused and concerned about the relationship between their sexual and gender identities and their religious beliefs. For some individuals and religious institutions/organisations, there are issues surrounding “sin” or forbidden thoughts and acts. For many others however, all people are welcome and embraced into a religious community.

The LGBT committee are a representative committee within Students’ Union at the University of Sheffield, who provide representation for all LGBT students at the University. We have written this document to help all LGBT students of faith to find and belong to their own inclusive and tolerant religious communities and places of worship.

To research for this document, we emailed every religious place of worship in Sheffield that was listed on the Multi-faith Chaplaincy’s website.

Places of worship/Organisations were asked two questions:

1. How would you and your organisation/place of worship react to an openly Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Transgender individual in your congregation?
2. How would you advise an individual (more specifically, a student) who was confused or struggling with their sexuality or gender identity if they came to you and organisation/place of worship for advice?

This document directly quotes from all the replies we received (see box at the end of the document for more information).

Useful links:
http://lgbt.union.shef.ac.uk - Sheffield LGBT
http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssd/chaplains - University of Sheffield’s Multifaith Chaplaincy

http://www.lgcm.org.uk - Lesbian & Gay Christian Movement
http://www.keshetuk.org - Forum of the British Jewish LGBT community
http://www.imaan.org.uk - British LGBTQI Muslim Support Group
http://gaybuddhist.org - Gay Buddhist Fellowship
http://www.sarbat.net - LGBT Sikhs
http://www.galva108.org - Information and support for LGBTI Vaishnavas and Hindus
Christianity

Anglican/Church of England
St Columba’s, Crosspool
“We are a church that sets a high value on hospitality and welcome to all, reflecting the welcome which Christ extends to us… I am confident that any of those people with whom your organisation is in touch would receive the same welcome in Christ that we extend to any who walk through our doors”

St John’s, Ranmoor
“My personal attitude towards LGBT individuals and couples is extremely positive and would see the church as a place in which their relationships can be affirmed and celebrated. I have had experience in the past of helping gay and lesbian Christians to find their faith once again – sometimes after extremely destructive and distressing experiences at other churches… I would certainly not suggest (to people) that they repress their sexual identity as a requirement of faith. Whilst I cannot speak for every individual in the congregation at St John’s, the congregation as a whole is a strongly welcoming community many of whom I know explicitly are supportive of the LGBT community. St John’s is not a church that has felt called to campaign explicitly on LGBT issues but, I am confident, would offer a warm welcome and a supportive environment for anyone, of whatever sexuality, who wants to join us in working out what faithful Christian discipleship means for each of us.”

St Mark’s, Broomhill
“St Mark’s, within the liberal Anglican tradition, seeks to be an inclusive church where all can find a welcome and acceptance. A number of lesbian, gay and bisexual persons already worship here and, as I understand it, find St Mark’s a safe place to be – a diverse community of persons seeking truth, about themselves, about others, about God.”

St Mary’s, Walkley
“We already have/had gay people in our congregation… The congregation is amazingly good with everybody. Friendly and accepting, I do not think anyone would be judged or turned away… The advice I would give or encourage if approached by someone struggling with sexual identity, would be that we are all unique and fully loved by God.”

St Matthew’s, Carver Street
I think that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people are welcome at St Matthew’s which is an incredibly open and welcoming congregation. As far as I am aware, we have openly gay members who, as far as I am also aware, are never discriminated against but welcomed as part of the diverse family who come along. Should someone approach me who was confused about their sexuality, I would explore their feelings with them, especially any of guilt and exclusion, and stress the importance of looking at Scripture as a whole, and not taking single verses out of context, and stipulate that Jesus was to be found with all, especially those
ostracised by the religious leaders of his day. All therefore are incorporated and welcome within the Christian community.

St Timothy’s, Slinn Street  
“(We are) open evangelical, open to gay couples who are in lifelong covenant relationships... We consider sex outside a covenant relationships to be potentially harmful and actively encourage those who wish to be active sexually - whether gay or straight - to be committed... We have 3 lesbian couples at St Tims that I know of - 2 couples in covenant relationships and the other couple likely to commit soon. There are other gay and lesbian singles at St Tims.”  
“God wants you to reserve love-making until you find a lover who you are safe with – for life!”

Other  
Hope City Church, Bernard Road  
“As a church (and student team), we love and respect gay, lesbian and transsexual people, just as much as any other people group or people type. One of the strongest cultures in our church is one of acceptance; to love and respect all people, and not invade their private lives - and this love and respect most definitely extends to the gay, lesbian and transsexual community. So if you are looking for a church community that stand with arms wide open to such people, then look no further.”

Sheffield Central Quaker Meeting  
“There are many out lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans* and queer-identified individuals and couples in Quaker meetings in Britain...we decided two years ago to recognise same-sex marriages in exactly the same way as mixed-sex marriages, and to push for a change in the law to allow us to register all Quaker marriages in the same way, regardless of the sex or gender of the people entering the marriage”  
“Quaker acceptance goes back to the 1930s and 40s and more recently has been active in pressing for parliamentary recognition of gay couples”

Sheffield Citadel Corps of the Salvation Army  
“Overall the congregation would react positively to an openly gay, lesbian, transgender individual in the congregation... (however) If someone were to promote their orientation in an offensively overt manner, suggesting for instance that we should all openly celebrate homosexuality or attend gay marches then I cannot say they would remain welcome”

Sheffield Christian Science Church  
“The Christian Science view is, that we are all made in God's image and likeness - pure and perfect and complete. Everyone is welcome to attend our services, and if they should ask for prayerful help or advise it would be given with love and sincerity. They would be identified as god's beloved child”
St Andrew’s United Reformed Church, Broomhall
“I should personally welcome any LGB students who wished to attend St Andrew’s or to talk with me through issues of identity and faith. I understand sexuality to be a spectrum along which students find themselves...and wherever along that spectrum someone finds themself, I would still describe them as being made in God’s image. (This would also apply to trans-people, though I know far less about their situation.)...I would challenge and condemn any homophobia expressed by my congregation”

Upper Chapel, Norfolk Street
“Upper Chapel is a Unitarian chapel and you may be aware that the position of the Unitarian on issues is one of inclusivity... The welcome extended to everyone is an inclusive welcome. When we say 'all are welcome' we actually mean it.”
“Last night we had a discussion about same sex unions. Blessings, say, at the moment and perhaps in due course 'legal' to be held in the Chapel. The meeting last night was totally in favour. I mentioned your email too and your inquiry and approach was most welcomed”

Victoria Hall Methodist Church, Norfolk Street
“I would have no issues at all with LGBT inclusion in my congregation. The person would be welcomed and supported by me no matter what their race, disability or sexuality. I would and have encouraged my congregation to have the same attitude. I have been a long time supporter of the Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement”
Judaism
Sheffield Jewish Congregation and Centre (SJCC)
“We welcome anyone to our services who wish to come, and also anyone who wishes to take part in communal life”

Sheffield and District Reform Jewish Congregation (SDRJC)
“Reform synagogues tend to be very diverse and very open to diversity. We do have member from the LGBT community and have visiting Rabbis who are openly LGBT”

Islam
Madrasa Kasimyah Islamic School (Sunni evening school providing teaching in Islamic studies)
“Do not hesitate to contact Anas Choudhury (ch08rey@googlemail.com) for personal advice or guidance on this or any other matters”

Buddhism
Sheffield Buddhist Centre
“Buddhism regards sexuality as ethically neutral and the main ethical guideline on sexual activity is simply that it should not harm others or ourselves. We have many gay, lesbian and bisexual individuals in our Sangha (Buddhist community). It simply isn’t an issue for us”

The Samatha Association (weekly Buddhist meditation classes)
“On our adverts, we say “All Welcome” and we mean it!”

N.B.
This document is very much a work-in-progress. All quotes are taken from replies to our original emails sent out in July 2011. If you are a representative or a member of a congregation at any of the places of worship listed above and your experiences are different (good or bad) to what is written above, please contact the LGBT committee on the email address at the bottom of this page. If you feel that your replies have been misquoted, please email us to rectify this. All emails will be treated with the strictest of confidence.

Sadly, not all of the emails we sent were replied to. If you are a member of a congregation or work for any religious places of worship which aren’t listed above, and feel that your place of worship should be included in this document, please email the LGBT committee to let us know.

This document is intended as an unbiased resource for LGBT students of faith at the University of Sheffield. It isn’t our intention or in our interests to ‘name and shame’ any places of worship in Sheffield that do not have the same views on religion and LGBT identities and practices as the LGBT committee and the University of Sheffield’s Students’ Union.