

**Human sexuality and relationships**  
**Common statement of the Ministerium**  
**Lutheran Church in Great Britain**  
**4 March 2023**

The *Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act*, which came into force in 2014, allows same-sex couples to be legally married in England and Wales. In light of this development, the Ministerium of the LCiGB met on 20 July 2013 to give further consideration to issues of sexual orientation and same-sex relationships.

In 2008 the Ministerium thoroughly studied the biblical and theological background of Christian attitudes to homosexuality and agreed a common statement. On 20 July 2013 that statement was reviewed, several other papers and documents were considered and the following revised common statement was agreed, which is being presented to congregations of the LCiGB for consideration. The Ministerium asked the Council of the LCiGB to consider the matter and, in due course, the Synod. On 7 October 2022 the Ministerium highlighted the 2013 Common statement of the Ministerium, and decided that a group will be established, to review and renew it, ready for submission to the Council of the LCiGB before the 2023 synod meeting. On 4 March 2023 the Ministerium reviewed and accepted the changes, and sent the following statement to the LCiGB Council to take the next steps.

**COMMON STATEMENT**

All branches of the Christian church face the question of how they should minister to LGBT+<sup>1</sup> people and same-sex couples, and whether such persons and persons in such relationships can be called to the ordained ministry. Responses to these questions have been varied and have often resulted in polarisation and tension within churches. Although in some denominations the ‘homosexual issue’ has become a touchstone for determining orthodoxy and heresy, the LCiGB asserts unequivocally that these questions are not ones by which the church stands or falls. All that is necessary for church unity, according to Lutheran teaching and tradition, is agreement about the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments<sup>2</sup>.

The LCiGB welcomes into its fellowship all who repent and believe in the Gospel, irrespective of gender identity or sexual orientation, and, by the church's preaching of the Word, the right administration of the Sacraments and the pastoral ministry, encourages them to live a life that is firmly rooted in God's gracious forgiveness through Jesus Christ. God's unconditional acceptance of us, despite the sin that dwells in each and every person, is the heart of the Gospel and the centre of our proclamation. The LCiGB seeks to help everyone to grow in understanding themselves and in knowledge of the riches of the Gospel, which is the true treasure of the church.

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<sup>1</sup> LGBT is an abbreviation and umbrella term for sexuality and gender identity, the letters that stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender. There are several variations of this initialism, therefore + (plus) represents the many other related terms, (such as intersex, queer, asexual, non-binary, pansexual) which refer to identities of human sexuality and may be expressed in consensual relationships of adult people.

<sup>2</sup> The Augsburg Confession, article VII: “The true unity of the Church it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments. Nor is it necessary that human traditions, that is, rites or ceremonies, instituted by men, should be everywhere alike. As Paul says, “One faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all,” etc Eph 4:5-6.”

Human sexuality is part of the richness of God's creation. An individual's sexual orientation is a deeply personal matter. The church does not have the right to enquire into the sexual orientation of any individual and it strongly discourages its members from speculating about the sexuality of particular individuals, or from indulging in innuendo or gossip.

The church condemns sexual behaviour that disregards the dignity and integrity of another person as a beloved child of God and preys on the needy, weak or vulnerable, regardless of sexual orientation, and the Church encourages everyone to live responsible, wholesome and God-fearing lives.

## **Ordination**

Christians are children of God because God, in Christ, forgives them their sins and invites them to follow him, revealing in their own lives the mercy and generous love that God has shown them. Being a child of God is as a gift in baptism, through which all Christians share in the priesthood of all believers. The public ministry of the LCiGB is open to any baptised and called Christian, irrespective of sexual orientation, gender or gender identity, provided that they fulfil all the legal and academic requirements that the church prescribes, seeks to live a life characterised by faithfulness in relationships, openness and sound teaching, and is willing to undertake a ministry that is available to all, irrespective of ethnicity, colour, language, cultural background, gender, gender identity, or sexual orientation.

## **Marriage and blessings of relationships**

The LCiGB recognises that, for the majority of people, sexual love will be expressed within the context of a covenant between two people of the opposite gender. This should normally be within the institution of marriage and the church affirms its belief that marriage is ordained by God. In accordance with the teachings of scripture and the confessions and practices of the church, it offers services of blessing in church to those who enter into matrimony. It encourages men and women to live in permanent, stable, loving and equal relationships, and to raise any children they may be blessed with in the love and fear of God. The church also acknowledges that, because of sin, inter-personal relationships can often be strained, and, as part of its pastoral ministry, it seeks to give support, help and encouragement in times of difficulty.

The LCiGB recognises that, for a minority of people, human fulfilment will be found in relationship with a person of the same gender. It acknowledges that the law of the land allows same-sex partners to have legal recognition of their relationship through registering it as a civil partnership or by marriage. The LCiGB sees no justification for barring persons who have entered into such a partnership from participating in the full communal life of the church. It is indeed fitting that the church should offer prayers for God's blessing on those who enter into covenants that bind them together in mutual love and support, asking that God, in his mercy, will strengthen that love and bind them ever more closely in love, mutual respect, and faithfulness to God. Just as the church encourages heterosexual couples to live in relationships that are loving, faithful and permanent, so it also encourages couples living in a homosexual partnership to be loving, faithful and permanent in their relationship. At times when such a relationship is under strain, the church pledges itself to provide the same level of pastoral support as it does to heterosexual couples.

The church acknowledges that some individuals, for whatever reason, wish to abstain from marriage and feel called to live a celibate life. The church recognises that such people may face their own particular strains and stresses and encourages them to find support within the community of the church.

The Ministerium of the LCiGB is well aware that there are persons, both lay and ordained, whose theological and/or cultural views mean that they are unhappy with any recognition of same sex

relationships as valid expressions of human sexuality. The Ministerium recognises that there are different ways of interpreting the biblical evidence concerning homosexuality, but reiterates that these are not grounds for a breakdown of fellowship, as the church's unity in Christ rests solely on agreement about the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments.

If a pastor, based upon thorough and thoughtful study of biblical evidence, feels unable for theological reasons to offer a marriage ceremony, or a blessing service<sup>3</sup>, or prayers to same-sex couples, then that pastor will refer such enquirers to the Bishop of the LCiGB, who will ask another pastor to provide pastoral support to the couple and, if mutually agreed, to preside at a service of blessing or wedding service. The LCiGB as a whole considers itself bound by the Gospel to ensure that all people, whatever their sexual orientation, receive appropriate pastoral support, in good times and in bad.

The LCiGB Statement of Faith, to which all congregations subscribe, says: *'This Church affirms the God-given human dignity of all people, rejoicing in the diversity of God's creation'*. The LCiGB will not tolerate derogatory, discriminatory or prejudicial words or actions from pastors or other church leaders, lay or ordained, in relation to anyone's sexual orientation, gender, or gender identity.

## Conclusion

The Ministerium strongly encourages congregations to study seriously and prayerfully the perspectives presented in this common statement, pondering the relevant Bible references with care and openness of heart and mind. Martin Luther wrote: *'One must deal cleanly with the Scriptures. From the very beginning the word has come to us in various ways. It is not enough simply to look and see whether this is God's word, whether God has spoken it; rather, we must look and see to whom it has been spoken, whether it fits us. That makes all the difference between night and day.'* (Luther's *'How Christians should regard Moses'* (1525), LW Vol.35: 'Word and Sacrament I', p. 170.)

Most Christians have applied this principle in various ways as they have sought to interpret the Bible in light of the particular circumstances of their own time. Certain expectations of persons and behaviours in biblical ages no longer 'fit us'. Thus, the clear prohibitions in the New Testament against women speaking in church or assuming leadership roles, the approval of slavery, as well as restrictions about dress, appearance or diet, are disregarded by many Christians, as we do not understand ourselves as being the same people to whom such passages were directed. Interpreting the meaning of biblical texts in order to understand how the Bible speaks into our context today requires careful hermeneutical and exegetical study, allowing Scripture to be interpreted by Scripture and seeking to hear in all of Scripture its true centre, the voice and Good News of Jesus Christ.

*Soli Deo Gloria*

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<sup>3</sup> Martin Luther rejects the sacramental status of marriage, and is adamant that legislation around marital and family matters rightly belongs to the civil authority, not the church (Jane E. Strohl 2009 'On Marriage and Family', *Journal of Lutheran Ethics*, vol 9, no 2). In England and Wales it's possible to have religious or civil marriage ceremonies. A religious wedding can take place at any registered religious building, same-sex couples can get married in a religious building if it has been registered for the marriage of same-sex couples. Civil ceremonies must not include anything that's religious, therefore a couple may ask for a religious blessing of their marriage after a civil ceremony.