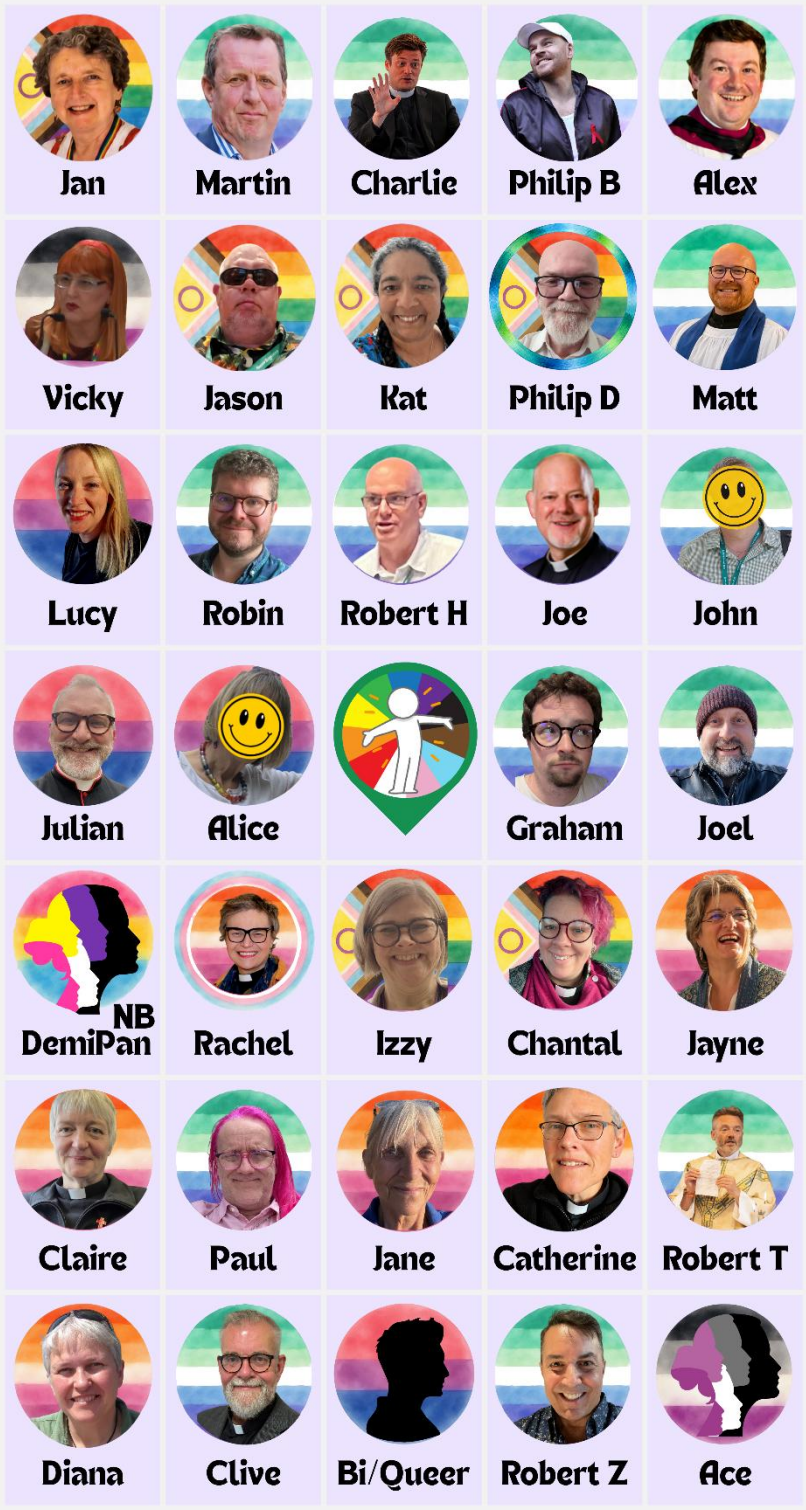


A narrative report on the lived presence, witness, and commitment of LGBTQIA+ Anglicans in the Church of England.

Collated by Rev'd Chantal Noppen

We Are Here

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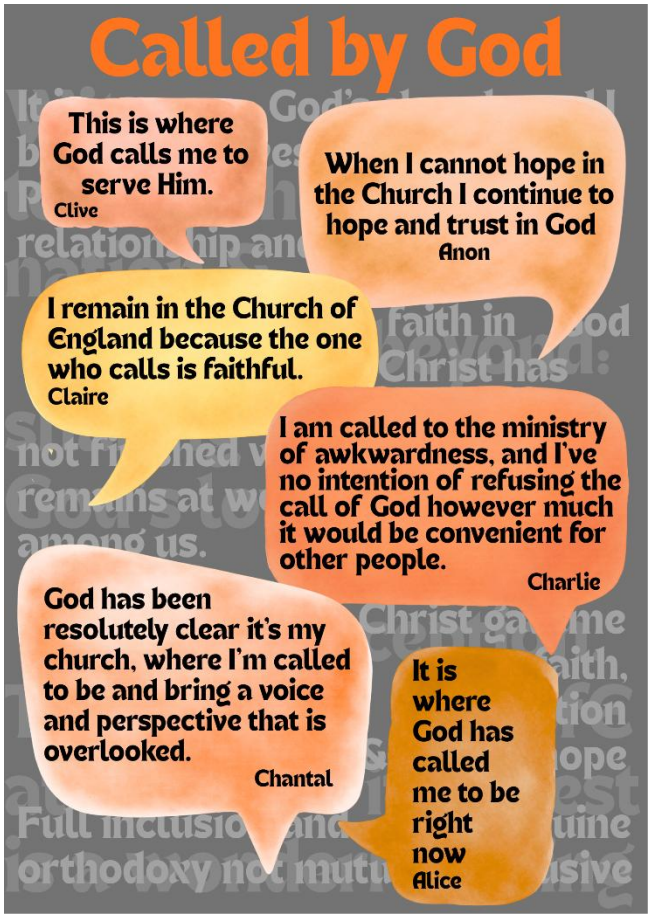
For too long, LLF debates and Synod discussions have spoken about LGBTQIA+ Anglicans as if we were not in the room. But we are here.

We are not abstract concepts, theological problems, or hypothetical case studies. We are real people with faces, names, and stories. We have always been here.

And we are not few.

This summer, at the final sitting of General Synod, there was an opportunity for a pastoral response and acknowledgement of LGBTQIA+ people: a response that sought to recognise our worth and affirm our existence. It didn't seek to discuss, determine or define sex, marriage or relationship status. Yet it was insinuated that this would be the inevitable consequence and there was a distinct air of fear that a simple affirmation might cause no end of problems.

We have sat and been discussed like animals, as a problem to be solved. We have been told that we are disgusting and shameful. The deep-seated incongruence between affirming everyone as made in the image of God, blessed and loved, and then, within a breath, applying restrictions and exceptions to that statement, is rarely acknowledged. Yet it is a recurring chorus.



Being LGBTQIA+ is only one aspect of our identity; it is not the full story. It is not all of who or what we are, nor is it meant to be the only thing that matters. The Gospel imperatives we are given for how to live apply far more widely than who we are attracted to or how we understand our gender. Our faith informs, inspires and directs huge facets of our lives. For some of us, serving as a member of General Synod is one way we have followed that calling.

Being 'out' in the Church of England is not a decision to take lightly. Many of us have experienced abuse, vitriol and aggression

as a result of being honest about our sexuality or gender identity, which is a long way from the example Jesus set us.

Yet many of us have learned that choosing love over hate, and faith over fear, can save lives.

When we stand in Synod to speak up for our rights, we do it not just for ourselves, but for those who have not yet heard that they are not alone, hated or despised. For those who have not yet heard that God still loves them and has a place for them, just as they are. For those who need to know that there is nothing that can turn God's heart to stone when it comes to the offer of grace we are given. For those at home, the young people, and wonderers who need to hear what we were never told.



The Church may continue to be reluctant to accept and affirm us, but God's love is steadfast.

While many of us remain disappointed that further progress has not been made towards full LGBTQIA+ inclusion and equality, we have made progress and we're not giving up. We don't want you to either.

Despite the risk and pain it can bring to be open about our sexuality or gender identity, LGBTQIA+ people are present in *every* house of General Synod, across every tradition. We are not all out. We are not all in agreement about relationships, celibacy, sex or gender. We do not all share the same theology or the same experience of the Church. But we exist, and we are here.

Which is even truer outside of Synod, where the real work of Church goes on: in our parishes, hospitals, universities, pubs, shops and towns.

Over the last five years, LGBTQIA+ people have served on General Synod in many different roles and from many different contexts, speaking, voting, hoping and praying.

These are some of us.

This report is based on responses from 34 people who served on General Synod during the last five years. Thirty-two were diocesan elected members – which alone indicates a level of commitment and respect among peers, alongside a Cathedral Dean and a representative of a Religious Community.

Twenty-two of us were lay people and 12 were clergy.

Together, we bring 214 years of General Synod experience and 674 years of church leadership, with a quarter of those having given 30 years or more. Of the 34, 24 people chose to be named in full, 7 chose to only use their first name and 3 opted for full anonymity. And for some it was simply too soon after the latest Synod vote to re-engage.



We have experience across parish, diocesan and national church life, including clergy, churchwardens and PCC officers, finance and music leadership, licensed lay ministry and chaplaincy, diocesan advisers and support staff, cathedral and archidiaconal leadership, lay governance roles, and national and ecumenical leadership.

During the collation and analysis of responses for this report, we considered the entire membership of Synod. Currently, there is no official data collection done about sexuality of Synod members. This is particularly interesting when we consider the stated intention of the CofE wanting to be more diverse. If data isn't tracked and taken, any conclusions are guesswork and have to be based on assumptions, which is less than reliable. There is a reluctance to collect this data and ask these questions. Whether people would feel able and comfortable to be honest if these questions were asked, is a question to be explored and considered elsewhere. But we were interested to consider the numbers in a broader context, so we analysed the list of synod members and our personal knowledge and insight of members. From this we are able to say that we estimate

around 15% of Synod, in every house, that are LGBTQIA+. Half of whom responded to the invitation to contribute to this report. 80% of those who are 'out' replied.

These numbers are not insignificant. But numbers are not the point of this report.

People are. Because each number, each year, tells a story. Behind each number a life has been given to the Church. There are faces, names and stories behind those numbers. Stories of time, gifts and commitment given to the Church we are called to serve, and strive to love.

A Church We Love - and a Church That Has Hurt Us

Many of us speak of the Church of England with profound affection.

It is our spiritual home. It is where many of us first encountered God. It is a community in which we have found friendship, vocation, belonging and purpose. Some of us have given twenty, thirty, even fifty years of our lives to the Church.

We have preached and taught, led worship and walked alongside the most vulnerable members of our communities, in the most challenging times of their lives. We chair committees, contribute to musical life, mentor young people and lead outreach.

We remain in the Church of England, stubbornly, because we love the people and communities to which we belong, and are called to serve. Our identity is grounded in the Church of England. We feel we belong here. We believe that God is not finished with the Church of England, and that God is asking us to stay.



Yet alongside this sits a deep pain.

Some could only respond to this invitation anonymously. Some are too hurt, too angry or let down to speak openly, or even speak at all on this topic. Some have stepped back from ministry because the cost became unbearable. Some have left the Church of England entirely.

The fact that people who have given so much to the Church can reach a point where they feel unable to remain is significant.

Our stories reveal a contradiction the Church can no longer ignore:

General Synod has stated that homophobia is wrong, and that disadvantaging people because of their sexuality or gender identity is unacceptable. Yet many of us continue to experience exclusion, rejection, and harm, on a regular basis.

Some of us have been repeatedly bullied, sidelined, denied ministry, silenced or treated as lesser. Several of us describe being traumatised by Synod itself. For many of us, the behaviour of the bishops has been experienced as a profound betrayal, a failure of pastoral care at the moment it was most needed. Which would have cost them little, but made a huge difference to so many.

The pain is real. The harm is real. And it has to stop.

One of the things we want to be clear about is that we honour genuine diversity of opinion within the Church.



We have long lived, worked, and ministered alongside people whose theological convictions differ from our own. We do not seek uniformity. We do not demand that everyone agree with us. Or that all LGBTQIA+ must seek romantic relationships. We value the breadth of the Church of England, and we want a Church in which people of different convictions can flourish and belong.

But we are also clear that diversity cannot be honoured when it becomes a justification for harm.

Honouring difference does not mean tolerating discrimination.

Honouring conscience does not mean allowing harm.

The pain caused by actively diminishing people's humanity is not equivalent or as valid as being put out that someone might be allowed to exist and make choices you don't like. Respecting another person's theological conviction does not require us to surrender our own dignity, freedom or safety.

The 34 of us who responded to this project are only a portion of the LGBTQIA+ people who have served on General Synod. There are more of us, and there are far more LGBTQIA+ people across the Church more widely.

But there are also many who have left. People whose voices we do not, and cannot, hear. Some have slipped away quietly; too tired, hurt, damaged to stay any longer. Some have given up on the Church. Some have not given up on God, but some have. Their absence matters too.

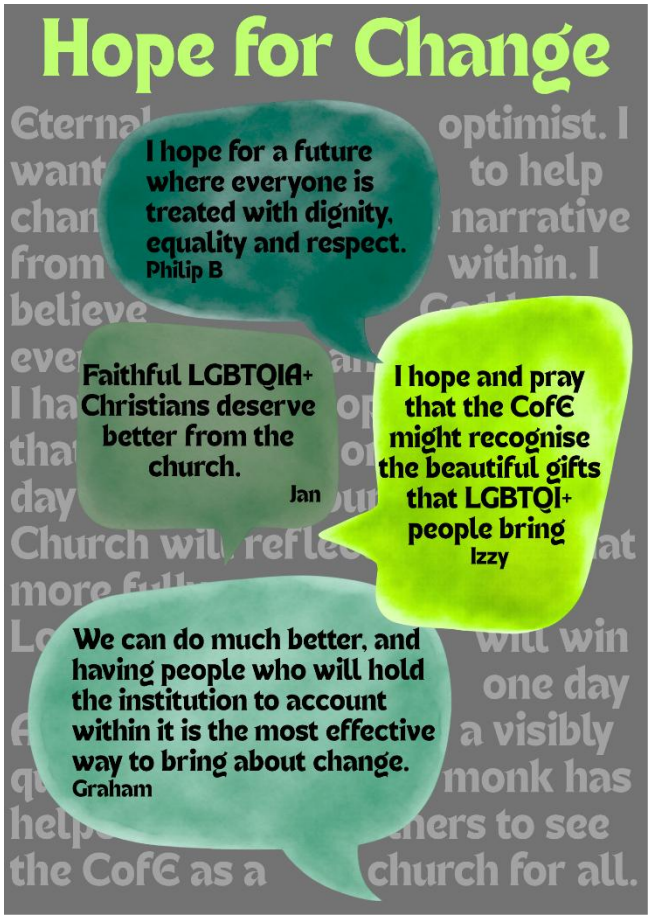
We cannot talk honestly about the Church we are building if we only count the people who have managed to remain, or those who shout the loudest.

We can disagree about theology but when theological conviction is used to justify restricting the lives, relationships or ministries of other people it must be called out. When conversion therapy perpetuates harm, and when homophobic behaviour is allowed to continue despite the lessons repeatedly identified through safeguarding reviews, this is not simply a matter of theological disagreement. It is a safeguarding issue. It is a matter of power. And it must be treated as such.

Hope, Optimism, and the Work of Inclusion

Despite everything, the dominant tone of the 34 who replied was not despair but hope.

We remain because we believe in a future where the Church of England fully reflects God's love for *all* people. We stay to work for change, to challenge injustice, and to help build a Church where LGBTQIA+ people are welcomed without hesitation or caveat.



But our vision of inclusion is not limited to ourselves. We care about the whole Church. We care about children and young people, about disabled people, about people living with mental ill health, about people with learning disabilities, about people experiencing poverty and economic injustice. We care about working class vocations. We care about racial justice, gender equality and identity, sexuality, and the many ways in which people's lives and experiences intersect.

We bring those concerns with us into our work on General Synod. We do not leave the rest of ourselves at the door when we enter Synod. Our experiences have taught us to notice who is missing, who is unheard, who is carrying more than they should

have to, and who is being asked to wait for justice. We bring that awareness with us too.

When we speak about inclusion, we are not simply speaking about who we are allowed to love. When we speak about justice, we are not only speaking about ourselves and demanding accommodation. When we ask the Church to be more compassionate, more equitable and more attentive to the dignity of every person, we are asking that of the whole Church, for the whole Church.

Our experience of marginalisation has taught us something about what happens when the Church fails to see the whole person. Jesus was always concerned with the wholeness of people, their community, their choices and their commitments.

Many of us emphasise that full inclusion and genuine orthodoxy are not opposites. We reject the false narrative that affirming LGBTQIA+ people requires abandoning Christian tradition. Instead, they see inclusion as a faithful expression of the Gospel, a calling rooted in Scripture, sacrament, and the life of Christ.

Our optimism is not naïve. It is resilient, hard-won, and grounded in decades of service.

We are here, because we believe the Church can be better, and we want to be part of making it better, we believe we are called to do this, not only for those like us, but for everyone.

Making It Personal. Making It Matter.

This report is titled *We Are Here* because visibility is transformative. When you see our faces, you see the people behind the debates. When you hear our stories, you hear a hint of the cost of exclusion and the strength of hope. When you recognise our names, you recognise the leaders, volunteers, and servants who make the Church of England what it is.

These photos are not decoration. Our names, our stories, our numbers. They are testimony. They are witness. They are truth.

We are here; in your parishes, your synods, your dioceses, your pews, your pulpits, your committees, your communities. We are here, deeply involved and invested in the life of the Church of England, not on the margins of it.

We are here because this is our home. We are here because God has called us. We are here because we believe the Church can be better, should be better. We are here because we intend to help build that future.

We are here. And we are not going anywhere.