



Honest Church
Toolkit ●

#HonestChurch

The problem

Lots of churches don't let on whether they are affirming and welcoming of LGBTQ+ people. Some churches say everyone is welcome, but then turn out to have hostile theology that comes as a surprise. Some churches are largely affirming, but don't feel they are doing enough to warrant putting a rainbow on their website so they might get overlooked. (LGBTQ+) people and their staunch allies exist in churches of all kinds, but everyone needs to be able to find the right place to worship and grow as a Christian in safety. Honesty is the beginning of being able to do that.

The campaign

(Honest) Church is a campaign of the Student Christian Movement designed to encourage greater honesty about the true welcome that LGBTQ+ people receive in a church.

The aim is to enable and prompt churches to be more specific in their description of their welcome, both in their publicity and when students, graduates and others come and ask questions about the inclusiveness of the welcome.

The Toolkit

This toolkit is for people who are wanting to broach the topic of LGBTQ+ welcome with a church leader but might not know where to start, and for church leaders who want to consider their LGBTQ+ welcome and improve on it. Inside you'll find suggested questions to ask a church leader, questions for church leaders to contemplate, the Honest Church Spectrum of LGBTQ+ Welcome, and some suggestions of how to improve your church's welcome. We hope you find this resource empowering and helpful!

Here's to being honest.

Questions to ask as a newcomer

This is by no means an exhaustive list of questions, but we recognise that this process can be hard for both sides and so have kept the list simple. We believe these questions will give you a strong indication of what kind of welcome is honestly offered, so that you can then decide whether you're happy to attend the church, and how to take the conversation forward if you wish to.

If asking these questions in person is too hard you could email the church leader the list, or ask people in the congregation where they think the church is at in welcome of LGBTQ+ people.

- Do you have a policy about inclusion, in particular thinking of LGBTQ+ people?
- Are there any openly LGBTQ+ people in the church at the moment?
- Would you marry same-sex couples? If not allowed yet in your denomination, would you if it was allowed?
- What is said about LGBTQ+ relationships from those in positions of leadership? Are they affirmed and celebrated?
- Do you think people in the church are generally supportive of Trans people and their right to live as their authentic selves (for example by transitioning)?

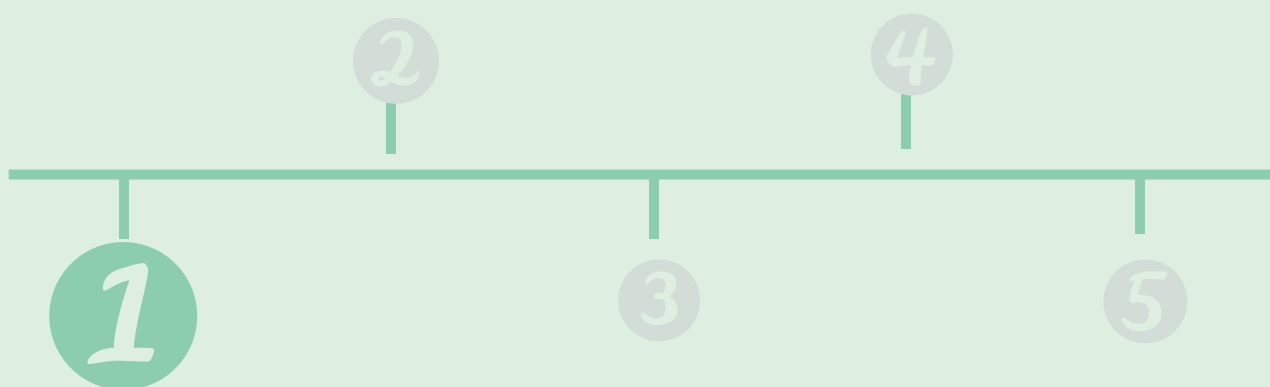
Questions for church leaders to consider

Again, this is not an exhaustive list but we think it is a good place to start. Once you've considered this list check out the Honest Church Spectrum of LGBTQ+ Welcome below.

- What would people outside your church say has been the core message about LGBTQ+ people from your congregation?
- Does your public communication (newsletter, noticeboards, website) make a statement of inclusion?
- Do you have any LGBTQ+ people in leadership? Would you?
- When teaching / preaching about relationships, are all relationships brought into the conversation?
- When was the last time LGBTQ+ people were mentioned in sermons or other teaching? What kind of welcome did it imply?
- Does the church highlight and respect people's preferred pronouns?
- Have you ever been asked to have a service to mark a trans person's transition? Would you if you were asked?
- Is the church supportive of a trans person coming to the church, or coming out as trans in the church?
- Would your church support a trans person while they transitioned?

Honest Church Spectrum of LGBTQ+ Welcome

Now that you've considered some questions about your church, it's time to see where you fall on the Spectrum of LGBTQ+ Welcome! Have a read through our descriptions of the churches below and think about which church sounds most like yours. It's likely that none of them will be a perfect fit, but it will hopefully give you an idea of where you're at. Then read our suggestions of how you could improve your welcome for LGBTQ+ people.



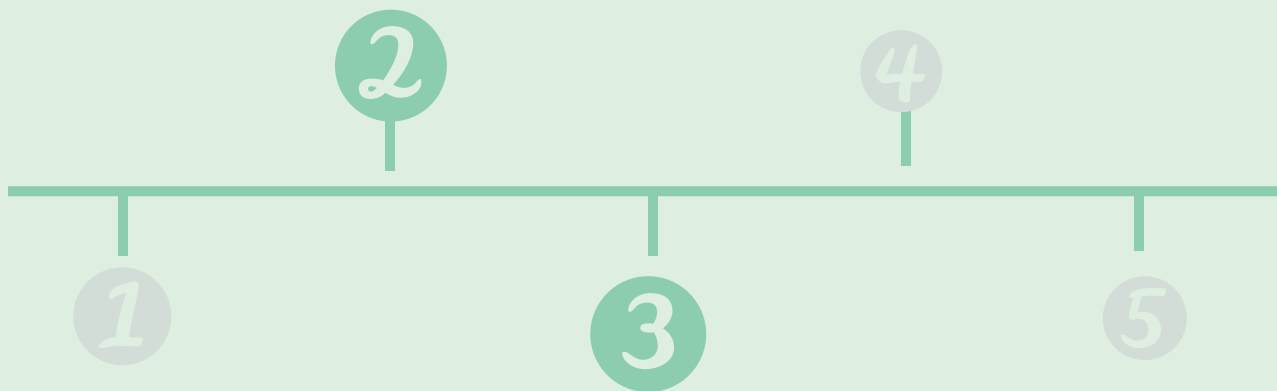
1

This is probably a church where there is public teaching calling homosexuality sinful. It is also likely that trans and non-binary people are not openly affirmed. You might find people in this church who would express a 'love the sinner, hate the sin' approach. There may be people attending this church who would describe themselves as same sex attracted and celibate. LGBTQ+ people may be asked to repent of any relationships before becoming members of the church. Heteronormativity is likely to be seen as the only life sanctified by God.

2



In this church diversity of sexuality is probably rarely mentioned. A heteronormative approach to life is likely to be emphasised with cis male/female marriages celebrated as community events, and illustrations from cis and straight family life being the norm. When pressed, leaders are likely to say that they have 'orthodox views' on sexuality by which they probably mean non-affirming of LGBTQ+ relationships, though they may affirm the existence of LGBTQ+ people. There is often an emphasis on welcome in the church, but LGBTQ+ people may find that that welcome does not extend to their queer identity or their relationships. There is an expectation that LGBTQ+ people will either live quiet celibate lives or will change to develop heteronormative/cis gendered relationships and identities. There are probably affirming people within the congregation. No openly LGBTQ+ people are in leadership unless they are publicly celibate.



3



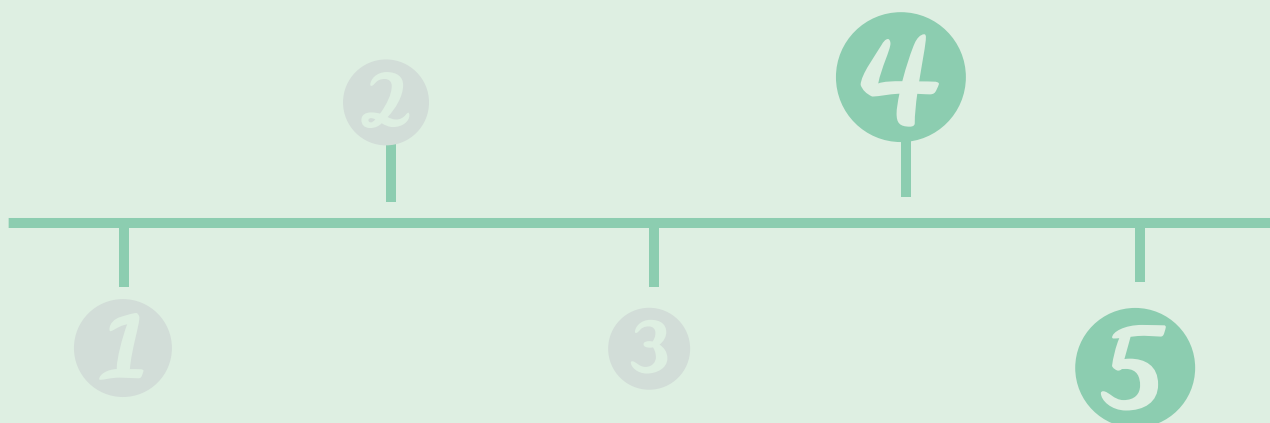
In this church it is likely that sexuality and relationships of any kind are not mentioned, although heterosexuality and cis gendered experience is the passively assumed norm. The minister may be personally either unsure of their theological stance on matters relating to LGBTQ+ people or they may be personally affirming when asked but disinclined to speak publicly about it. Individuals or couples who are LGBTQ+ are likely to be welcomed personally, some members of the congregation will particularly welcome them with enthusiasm. There may be individuals who complain to the minister about their presence or make it known they have a problem. It is unlikely the congregation will be generally au fait with current inclusive terminology but there will generally be no intent to cause offence. There may be other LGBTQ+ identifying people in the congregation or there may not. There is nothing preventing access to leadership, but it is unlikely a newcomer will see LGBTQ+ people in such roles.

4



This is a church where there is at least some public support for LGBTQ+ people and probably a specific public welcome. Leaders are likely to be prepared to voice their affirmation and they may occasionally preach or write a blog or magazine article to explain their theological position.

There may well be LGBTQ+ people in the congregation and in positions of leadership. Agencies and resources which offer LGBTQ+ people support and allyship may be linked to and promoted. There may also be members of the congregation or assistant leadership who are unsure or non-affirming. This church may specifically welcome them as part of the diverse family of faith. This means that an LGBTQ+ person or couple may occasionally meet opposition or comments that are uninformed, but the culture of the church as a whole is welcoming from a theological and personal standpoint. Illustrations and modelling may still tend towards heteronormativity but will be likely to be consciously minimised.



5



This is probably a church which has internalised a queer identity, it may be that a large number of LGBTQ+ people attend or even that they started or lead the church. Straight and cis people attend as part of the diversity of the church rather than the assumed norm. If someone were to speak against inclusivity, others would be very likely to defend it.

LGBTQ+ relationships and milestones are publicly celebrated. Agencies and resources which offer LGBTQ+ people support and allyship are almost certainly linked to and promoted. Modelling of including behaviours and language is normative.

A few ideas to consider if you want your church to be **more welcoming of LGBTQ+ people**

Put specific words of welcome on your website. Don't be afraid to be honest that this is a journey for your church. Feel free to use words from this campaign and, wherever your church is on the spectrum at the moment, use our logo on your website and ask us for a poster for your noticeboard that says 'Committed to an honest church: ask us about our LGBTQ+ welcome'.

Sign up to the [Inclusive Church directory of churches](#), which is endorsed by LGBTQ+ organisations such as Affirm: Baptists Together for LGBTQ+ Inclusion, Dignity & Worth, OneBodyOneFaith, Open Table Network and Quest.

Offer education to your congregations around inclusive language and pronouns. Be wary of asking an LGBTQ+ person to do this as it might make them feel vulnerable but obliged to do it anyway. It can be a great thing to ask a straight/cis ally to organise.

Consider what you are doing to make leadership in your church more accessible to those often excluded. Making a point of saying you'd be glad to have leadership interest from under represented groups is a good way of signalling that you are a church who are open to growth in inclusion and broadening the voices of leadership in all areas.

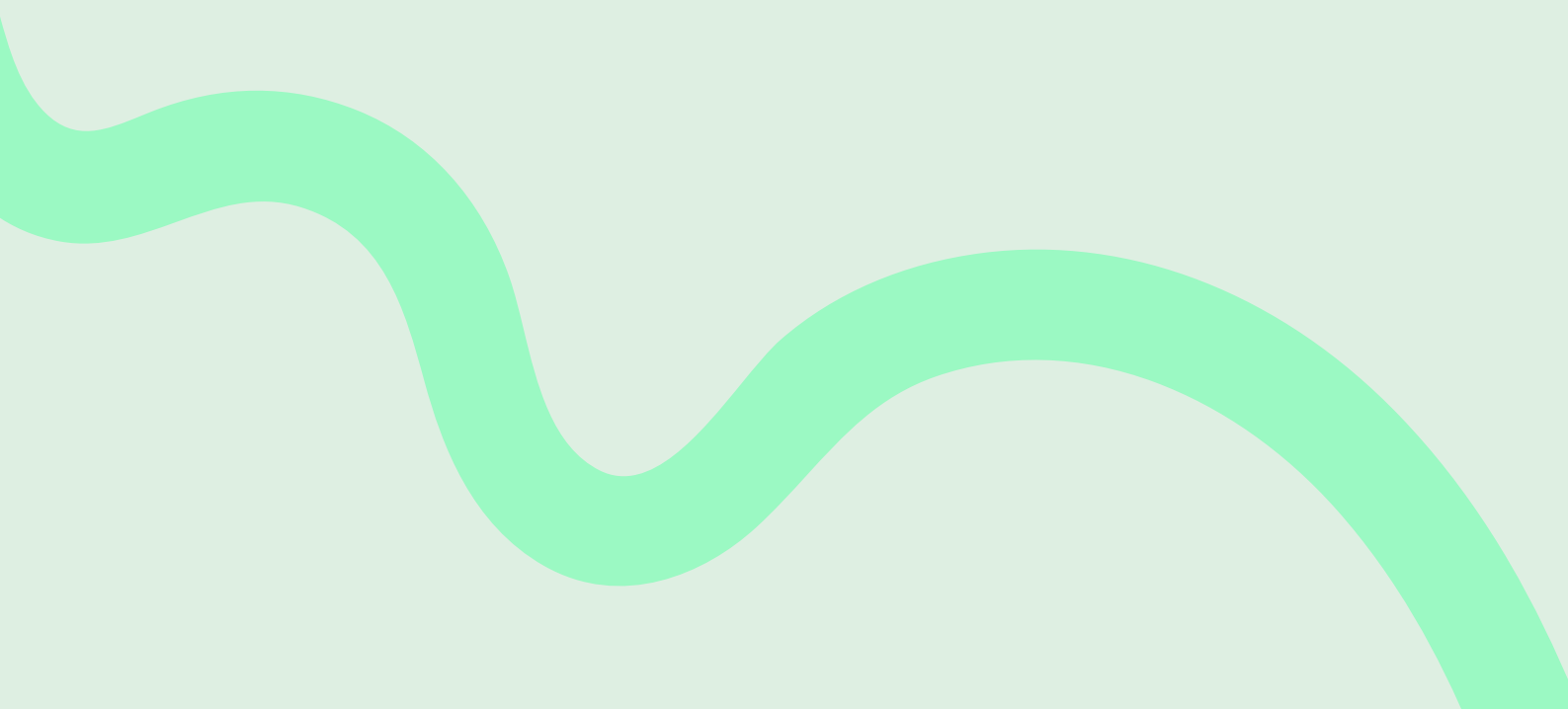
If you are the sort of church who provides or points to support groups, have you thought about networks for LGBTQ+ parents for example? If you have men's and women's groups, are they open and safe for Trans people? If not, think about how they could be. It would also be good to think about how nonbinary people might feel about the existence of these groups and be prepared to think about how to make welcoming and appropriate adjustments. This might be a bit of

a conundrum - there aren't always neat answers about these things.

Have you had any affirming scripture teachings on LGBTQ+ people and relationships? This can be a really powerful thing to do, even if you think there is no one LGBTQ+ in your congregation. We are working on some resources to help with this, so watch this space!

Include same sex partners and trans people in sermon illustrations and in intercessions. Look for places where your church drifts into assuming everyone is cis gendered and straight.

Try adding the word sibling to 'brothers and sisters' when you talk, and add your own pronouns to your email signature. This signals welcome and inclusion but it is also a good teaching tool to familiarise your congregation with the diversity of gender expression that they might encounter. If you demonstrate comfort and ease with this, it will really help others to do the same.



Further support and resources

If you are LGBTQ+ and looking for a church community, Inclusive Church has searchable directory of churches that is endorsed by Affirm: Baptists Together for LGBT+ Inclusion, Dignity & Worth, OneBodyOneFaith, Open Table Network, and Quest.

www.inclusive-church.org

If you are a student or recent graduate you can become a member of the Student Christian Movement and be part of a welcoming and affirming community. We also have a secret Facebook group for LGBTQ+ members where you can get to know other LGBTQ+ students and find support.

www.movement.org.uk/membership

Students can find welcoming student communities, chaplaincies and churches by searching SCM Connect, the Student Christian Movement's directory.

www.movement.org.uk/scm-connect

The Student Christian Movement also has a wealth of resources on a variety of topics for churches, chaplaincies and student groups which are free to use.

www.movement.org.uk/resources

