

Webinar: “Safeguarding people who are LGBT+ within the Methodist Church”

Tuesday 24 January, 11am – 12:30pm

The webinar is now available online here:

www.methodist.org.uk/safeguarding/webinars/lgbtplus-safeguarding-webinar-24-january-2023/

If you view it on You Tube, the description includes Chapters so that people can skip straight to the speaker whose section they would like to view:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=XUIGNXJWxPY

A. Answers to the Questions posed in the Q&A or Comments during the webinar

1) “It would be helpful to understand the current, correct ‘reference’ or ‘name’ used to identify such minority groups. Already, the three speakers so far have referred to the group differently.”

Answer provided by Revd Jill Marsh, Inclusive Church Implementation Officer:

“There is a Methodist Inclusive Language Guide if that would help anybody in relation to learning about language:

<https://www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/the-methodist-church/the-inclusive-methodist-church/resources-events-and-support/resources/the-methodist-inclusive-language-guide/>

Also... there is a new EDI toolkit module about welcoming, Module 5.2 Including Transgender, Intersex and Other Gender-diverse People in Church Life:

<https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/27279/edi-toolkit-52-0922.pdf> ”

2) What is the reason for using the term 'people who identify as' LGBT+? My experience suggests this is problematic as it gives room for those who don't accept our identities to question them. For example, we wouldn't say 'people who identify as' disabled, black, etc.

Answer by Kate Little, Safeguarding Casework Supervisor, Connexional Safeguarding Team:

“I chose this term as I was trying to be careful not to use “LGBT+ people” in case that was seen as identifying someone by that one characteristic alone (in the same way as you should not say “a demented person” but rather “a person with dementia”). I see that “people who are LGBT+” is a better way of expressing this. Thank you for taking the time to point this out.”

Answer by Sarah Hagger-Holt:

“As we said many times in the talk, it's really hard to get these things right, language has different meanings for different people and changes all the time!”

3) “Thank you for pointing out that enabling same-gender marriage is just a beginning. This may enable some LGBT+ people to celebrate their relationships in our churches, but how are we communicating this? How are we reflecting on church culture to enable LGBT+ individuals & couples to feel welcome at any time, not just on their wedding day?”

Answer by Sarah Hagger-Holt:

“This is really important. I'd want to refer to the points I made in my section, and also Karl's slide.”

4) “A rhetorical question but how sad that this Webinar did not go out before the *God In Love Unites Us* Report - maybe then we would not have lost so many of our Church members?”

5) “We've tried to badge the church outside- with rainbows and prominent use of the inclusive church logo and we are on the Inclusive Church website as registered and also clearly display a badge on our own website but again not everyone looks online. Also we acknowledge that not everyone will recognise these logos. Do you have any advice?”

Answer by Sarah Hagger-Holt:

“This is a brilliant starting point, well done. Talking specifically about HOW you welcome LGBTQ+ people on your signage or website is helpful too, eg. 'We offer weddings to same-sex and opposite-sex couples' or 'We have an LGBTQ+ fellowship group' or 'We aim to be a church that welcomes and includes LGBTQ+ people and their families'.”

6) “Thank you, Delyth, for describing the vulnerability when walking into a Methodist Church. In view of the Methodist Church definition of what is not homophobic, how do we therefore protect LGBTQIA people from

things they may overhear that are deeply hurtful? For instance, generalised statements that are not directed at them personally, or micro aggressions which refute the image of God in that person to which they are (often unintentionally) directed.”

Answer by Revd Delyth Liddell:

“I don’t think there is an easy answer to this. I think that Sarah is answering some of this in her presentation. Perhaps it is being aware of those who are around you when such conversations are happening and checking in with them if you think they may have been hurt by the conversation. But conversation is important, it is how we all learn and change and grow. I would encourage conversations in churches on how we can welcome LGBTQI folks and be aware of our own language, and use the Methodist church resources in churches - the toolkits are particularly good at looking at case studies that can get people thinking. There is a saying ‘nothing about us without us’, but it is important to realise that LGBTQI people, in a context where others are talking about them, will be deeply vulnerable and will need support. I hope some of this helps!”

Sarah: “This is a great answer. I would add, where it feels safe to do so, gently challenging any statements you think would be hurtful, whether or not you are aware that an LGBTQ+ person is there or not.”

7) “If we are striving to bring equality to all, especially through same sex marriage, then why, when you originally authorise a church for traditional marriage, do you not go through the same amount of paper work as you do for authorisation of same sex marriage? This can and could make an impact on how many churches do go down the path of opening its church to all, and for all.”

Answer by Revd Dr Karl Rutlidge:

“I found the local Registry Office very helpful; being dyslexic, paperwork is not my strong point!”

Answer by Revd Delyth Liddell:

“There are also grants available from Dignity and Worth for those churches who are finding the fee for registering for same-sex marriages a barrier.”

8) “Some of the stuff that happens to me as a gay minister might not reach the homophobic standard but it is definitely rude and lacks care. We put up with it because they are allowed to be rude to me and my partner won’t go anymore, not because they said homophobic things but because over 3 ½ years, he isn’t ever spoken to. I expect better. We need to, even if we disagree, relate to each other as kind people.”

Answer by Revd Ashley Cooper:

“I agree we need to be better and I am sorry that is your experience.”

Answer by Revd Delyth Liddell:

“I’m sorry. It really hurts doesn’t it.”

9) “I just watched the video from "The Gathering". How lovely to see that. Thank you. It looks so affirming. I wish I lived in Cardiff.”

Answer by Revd Delyth Liddell:

“You don’t have to live in Cardiff to join the Gathering - we meet every week in hybrid - on zoom and in person.”

Answer by Sarah Hagger-Holt:

“I would also like to highlight the work of Open Table and Two:23 who also have LGBTQ+ affirming congregations in other places too (see resources below).”

10) “The best worshipping community that I have ever attended, as a straight person, was Inclusive Mosque, the diversity was like paradise. I have yet to attend this kind of Christian church.”

Answer by Revd Delyth Liddell:

“Dignity and Worth have started a list of those Methodist Churches that have signed up to do marriage of same-sex couples. You can find it on the website. If your church is not on the list and you would like it to be, you can also find a form there so you can sign up.

<https://dignityandworth.org.uk/resources/>”

11) “Apologies if this was addressed earlier, but I think what the previous speaker said about what is "not homophobic" is a bit reductive. Somebody who doesn't affirm same sex marriage might not feel homophobic themselves, but from my point of view there is a clear correlation between homophobic views and that historic interpretation of scripture. I don't necessarily *blame* those people for holding those

views, if it comes from a position of some form of respect, but I do not think it is wrong to still identify those views as rooted in homophobia.”

Answer by Kate Little, Safeguarding Casework Supervisor, Connexional Safeguarding Team:

“In my short presentation about what the Constitutional Practise and Discipline of the Methodist Church says about homophobia, I just outlined what is recorded in the CPD. A lot of people would share your views, but I felt it was important that we were all clear what is the “law” of the Methodist Church with regard to this issue.”

12) “Would a church refusing to have an openly LGBTQI preacher be homophobic?”

Answer by Kate Little, Safeguarding Casework Supervisor, Connexional Safeguarding Team:

“Yes, this would be homophobic under the Methodist Church definition. This would be “den[y]ing] the image of God in another person due to their actual or perceived sexual orientation; which is, treating someone in a discriminatory manner because of their actual or perceived sexual orientation”...Part 15 Homophobia: Definition and Guidance, Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church. Please could you provide me (littlek@methodistchurch.org.uk) with more details and we will look into this situation?”

13) “Our church has registered for same sex marriage. It’s no problem for us but we have had people coming into church - just when people are there doing the flowers etc - and being quite aggressive about our registration. Any thoughts as to how to respond to comments from others on this matter?”

Answer by Sarah Hagger-Holt:

“This is such a shame, sorry to hear this. I wonder as same-sex marriage becomes more usual, people will get used to the idea and find something else to worry about (that’s my hope!).”

14) “Delyth, how do you/would you handle the definition from the Methodist Church that it's okay to express your views about same sex relationships in church to people, when we are trying to create safe space for people who are LGBT+? We have created a boundary understanding in our LEP and encourage church folk to point any queries about inclusion towards clergy, who ARE okay about having

those discussions, but our boundary is that we don't want individuals, whoever they are, to have to defend their own or the church's understanding of God's inclusion and our church's response to that. If people are happy to say 'this is my view/understanding' and hear 'oh okay, this is our view/understanding', that's OK. But not if they want people to defend their position – that doesn't feel like 'safe space'."

Answer by Revd Delyth Liddell:

"I think the reality is that we can't. We have to live with a situation where some churches will be able to be safe space and others won't. We can only work towards being an inclusive Methodist church but we are not there yet! One of the things that the Gathering does is support those who feel called by God to stay in their traditional church contexts to be a LGBTQI Christian witness within those communities."

15) "What's a "trope"?"

Answer by Kate Little, Safeguarding Casework Supervisor, Connexional Safeguarding Team:

"The dictionary says "trope" is "a significant or recurrent theme; a motif as in the sentence:

"she uses the Eucharist as a pictorial trope". A different dictionary online said "a common or overused theme or device" i.e. a cliché as in "the usual horror movie tropes"."

16) "What is "dead naming"?"

Answer by Revd Dr Karl Rutledge:

"Dead-naming is using the name a trans person used to have before coming out as trans. In other words, refusing to use the name by which a trans or non-binary person wishes to be called."

Answer by Kate Little, Safeguarding Casework Supervisor, Connexional Safeguarding Team:

"An example would be if someone assigned as a girl at birth and given the name Kate, grows up to feel they had been assigned the wrong gender and wants to be called John; however someone they know at church insists on continuing to call them "Kate" and will not call them "John". That is dead-naming."

17) "I am friends with a number of women priests in the Cof E. They have lived with dual positions - women can be priests but others can

refuse to accept their ministry. After 30 yrs of living in this situation, many women have spoken about the harm this duality has had upon their ministry. I know the Methodist Church is trying to avoid this harm, by explaining and showing good practice - which is what this webinar is doing. But is the very practice of allowing contradictory convictions in the way the Methodist Church is doing actually harming people in Same Sex relationships?”

Answer from Revd Dr Jonathan Hustler (Secretary of Methodist Conference):

“All Churches live with contradictory convictions to some degree; the key pastoral question is how to handle them. In accepting the recommendations of God in Love Unites Us, the Conference continued practices that it has had for many years in relation to the remarriage of divorced persons. No one has a right to be married in any particular building or by a particular minister but the Methodist Church will do all it can to enable the celebration of the marriage of a couple who come in good faith whilst at the same time recognizing that the conscience of some people in the Church might not enable them to participate.”

18) “We hear a lot about the positive things we have in common: one Creator, the offer of one Saviour, and in particular language around 'made in God's image', which is open to many definitions or understanding. We hear less about the negative we all have in common: being sinners, original sin, falling short, and all being in need of recreation or being born again [the poem shared by Delyth about there being no need for a heart to be healed seemed in contradiction of this.] Is the conversation about what we all have in common as human beings helped by emphasising one aspect of that commonality and not both? This is not to attempt to define certain things as 'in God's image' and others not; nor to define some things as sin and others not; but to ask “Is there a mix of good and bad in all of us, a need for change in all of us, things to celebrate in all of us and we all have this in common yet are individual?” I'd value your thoughts.”

Answer by Revd Dr Karl Rutledge:

“One of the things I've tried to incorporate into how I lead worship is what I've called Prayers of Renewal, which try to find words to acknowledge how we are both sinners and people who have been sinned against. We

are all messy and in need of God's restoration to wholeness in the widest possible sense. I hope that helps!”

Answer by Sarah Hagger-Holt:

“I would totally agree with this. But the problem is that some people believe that being LGBTQ+ is by definition sinful and needs healing. I have heard being LGBTQ+ equated with shoplifting, or gossip, as an example of 'how we are all sinful'. This is really unhelpful. This can be the subtext in a conversation about sin (and can be what an LGBTQ+ person will hear because of previously been told they are sinful because of the gender/sexual orientation), unless you are very specific otherwise. An LGBTQ+ affirming position would strongly refute this (hence 'no need for a heart to be healed'). I hope that helps.”

19) “I respect everyone's wishes but I am on my own spiritual journey. My question is, if God creates you one gender but you feel like the opposite gender, is that a mistake? Did God make a mistake? Especially considering the difficulties you end up facing from society and changing your body. Or is it like the question about the blind man in the Bible where the answer is, “it is for God's glory”? (John 9:3). I ask this so I can understand other people’s perspective.”

Answer by Revd Dr Karl Rutledge:

“I don't think God made a mistake because I am trans, any more than God made a mistake because my brother is autistic. The social model of disability and biblical reflections on that have a lot of overlap with trans experience, even as it is very important to stress that being trans is not a disability. Hope that helps.”

Answer by Sarah Hagger-Holt:

“Karl's answer sums it all up, but just to add I find the idea that God's revelation is ongoing is helpful for me - we change and develop and discover more things about creation (and God and ourselves) through science, psychology, prayer and the holy spirit, this can include our understandings of gender, relationships and our own identities too.”

20) “How can Churches have a balance between males who identify as women but have made no attempt to change gender using female toilets when this can prove traumatic to women who have been or are being abused and can prove a trigger? This is an emotive safeguarding dilemma where it is difficult to provide a safe space for all.”

Answer by Revd Dr Karl Rutledge:

“Single person gender-neutral toilets are the best solution in my personal opinion, but it is also worth noting that Rape Crisis Scotland, Women's Aid Scotland and all the other mainstream women's organisations in Scotland supported Gender Recognition Act reform. It is not easy to hold a safe space for survivors of abuse, and trans women are very vulnerable to sexual abuse, especially if pushed into male spaces. Building good relationships based on care and love for all is key. Hope that is helpful.”

21) “I am still pondering the message Ashley gave us earlier. Thank you Ashley. What I took from this was that many Christians who hold traditional views about the definition of marriage do so with integrity. In my experience, it's from reading Bible passages out of context, and/or from specific hermeneutical lenses. I wonder whether many traditional/conservative Christians understand that in holding the traditional view of marriage, it is only their theology that is being challenged, whereas for LGBT people, it is our identity. I am very grateful to all the organisations who are producing toolkits for welcome and inclusion.”

Answer by Revd Ashley Cooper:

“I totally understand your response - I seriously try to hold, what I believe to be a deeply held theological conviction and build relationships that also have integrity and openness - I don't find this easy and have further work to do in my own journey.”

22) “On a church visit in the stationing process, the first question from a local church steward was 'what is your viewpoint on same sex marriage?’ I was appalled at the asking of that question at the beginning of our interaction! What are your thoughts?”

Answer from Revd Dr Jonathan Hustler (Secretary of Methodist Conference):

“It is unusual for that to be the first question but it is now necessary that Circuits which are considering inviting minister to serve with them and ministers considering such invitations are clear about each other's positions (wherever they stand). Not having the conversation early on could lead to serious pastoral harm further down the line.”

23) “I wish I could believe that the church will take action against homophobia but experience tells me we won’t. I pray that things will change and that bullying and homophobia can be challenged and help offered those abused.”

Answer by Revd Delyth Liddell:

“The JDS strategy began that process with the Discrimination and Abuse Response System which is being piloted at the moment and is due to be rolled out across the Connexion. It enables someone who has been the victim of, say, bullying and homophobia (or any other abuse) to raise it, be pastorally supported and have an accompanist through a process of appropriately dealing with those who are perpetrators. So look out for it, if it’s not already in your district!”

Answer by Kate Little:

“As well as the Discrimination and Abuse Response System, you can report any concerns about discrimination to your local District Safeguarding Officer or directly to us at the Connexional Safeguarding Team. These concerns will be taken seriously and we will do what we can to ensure these are addressed.”

24) “Very helpful conversation, thanks everyone. I wonder if there's a way of getting the speakers’ contributions as stand alone videos?”

Answer by Kate Little:

“If you go to the You Tube page (see top of this document), there are ‘Chapters’ so you can click and skip straight to each speaker’s talk.”

25) Kate Little: “I wanted to close with this positive comment I noticed from a minister towards the end of the webinar: “The power of the Holy Spirit! Whilst on this webinar and asking questions, I have just received that one of my churches has been authorised for same sex marriage. Pray the others come through later today!” ”

B) Helpful Resources

Open Table Network (OTN)

The Open Table Network (OTN) is a growing partnership of ecumenical Christian worship communities across England & Wales which welcome and affirm people who are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer or

Questioning, Intersex, & Asexual (LGBTQIA), their families, friends & anyone who wants to belong in an accepting, loving community. OTN is run by, and for, LGBTQIA+ people, their friends and families. We meet, in person and online, hosted by inclusive churches. If you would like to find out more, please visit: www.opentable.lgbt or email OTN Coordinator Kieran Bohan: network@opentable.lgbt.

Stonewall

Stonewall runs an email service, providing information and signposting support to the LGBTQ+ community and allies, on a range of issues from mental health and wellbeing, discrimination at work, hate crime, marriage and civil partnerships, fertility and parenthood to immigration and asylum. They seek to enable LGBTQ+ people to remove barriers to accessing their potential and dealing with inequity through effective signposting for support and advice, providing options for them to consider as they move forward in their life or offer support to a member of the LGBTQ+ community, for example, a friend, family member or colleague.

Email address: Info@stonewall.org.uk

Mermaids

Mermaids has been helping gender-diverse young people up to the age of 20 and their families for nearly 30 years. Their telephone helpline is open 9am to 9pm Monday – Friday: 0808 801 0400

www.mermaidsuk.org.uk

Gendered Intelligence

www.genderedintelligence.co.uk

Gendered Intelligence, established in 2008, is a registered charity that exists to increase understandings of gender diversity and improve trans people's quality of life.

They run a support line via telephone (0330 3559 678), What'sApp chat (07592 650 496) and email (supportline@genderedintelligence.co.uk) open from 2-7pm on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays and from 10am to 3pm on Wednesdays and Fridays. The helpline is for anyone who is personally impacted (including family and friends) by the NHS gender care waiting list and is in need of support and information.

Two:23

www.two23.net

Two23 are a Christian LGBT+ group (the name is taken from a verse from the Old Testament prophet Hosea, who uses his own life as an allegory for God's promise of love to the outsider, the excluded, the person considered a 'nobody':

I will say to those called 'Not my people', 'You are my people'; and they will say 'You are my God'.

Hosea 2:23

They are a network of Christians, connected by LGBT (Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) issues, who meet five times a year in a central London location on a Saturday afternoon (also opportunity to join online). The meetings involve some prayer and worship as well as a talk, and of course creating lots of opportunities for people to connect with new people, as well as catching up with old friends.

Diverse Church

www.diversechurch.website

Diverse Church is a charity which provides pastoral care to support and encourage LGBT+ Christians to grow in their faith, as well as seeking to mobilise communities to act as local and online sources of peer support and encouragement for LGBT+ Christians to grow in their faith and promoting theological discussion in the wider church through enabling LGBT+ Christians to share their stories.

C) Notice

Solidarity Circles are being set up for 15 people with a shared protected characteristic to meet regularly online as "a way of the Methodist Church supporting people in different diversities of the Church's life through offering regular opportunities to meet, to support one another, and to raise with relevant Church leaders the concerns that need to be addressed." The Solidarity Circle for people who are LGBT+ will be starting as soon as we have appointed a Volunteer Co-ordinator. If anybody is interested in that voluntary post, please contact Revd Jill Marsh:

marshj@methodistchurch.org.uk