

HOW DO WE WELCOME EVERYONE WITHOUT NECESSARILY ENDORISING THEIR BELIEFS OR CHOICES?

The church is called to welcome everyone, just as God welcomes every one of us 'while we were still sinners' (Romans 5:8).

As mentioned in the previous article, it is essential to welcome same-sex couples and single gay people who are not already signed up to the biblical teaching about sex in exactly the same way we would welcome anyone else. Most church leaders minister frequently amongst couples who are cohabiting and, especially if one or more of the couple are Christians, there will come a point for a gentle but honest conversation about how this relates to their following of Christ. But it is not the first or the dominant topic of conversation! The first priority is to ensure that they are welcomed, and treated with love and respect. This is what they need first and foremost, in order that as they meet with God, receive good teaching and grow in maturity, they will surrender their lives more fully to him.

Jesus obviously held his moral convictions consistently, yet he did not hesitate to respond differently to different individuals according to what they needed (needed, not in the sense of what they thought they needed, of course, but in the sense of what he could see they truly needed). One response for the rich young ruler (dramatic challenge to sell everything), another for the woman caught in adultery (saving her life and pronouncing forgiveness before enjoining her not to sin any longer), yet another towards the men who brought the woman to him (exposing their own adultery). Holding our convictions without compromise doesn't automatically imply pronouncing them at every opportunity.

So, if a gay person or same-sex couple are part of a church or start attending a church, their immediate need is almost certainly not to be confronted personally with the biblical teaching about sex (although it is something that church leaders should regularly teach on publicly). Because of media coverage, they will almost certainly be perfectly well aware of what most Christians believe and churches teach about sex! What they will primarily need is to be welcomed warmly, loved and accepted just as they are, and offered a safe environment in which to grow in their faith – not because we don't want them to live according to biblical teaching, but precisely because we want this for them.

See also:

How can we ensure LGBT+ people feel welcome in our churches?