



## **LGBTQ+ Pride Vestry Papers May - June 2023**

### **Begin with Love**

Bishop Deon Johnson

“My prayer, my hope, my dream for us as a church is that we are, in the words of [former] Presiding Bishop Edmond Browning, a place where there are no outcasts.”

In this brief but powerful video in English with Spanish subtitles, Bishop Deon Johnson of the Episcopal Diocese of Missouri speaks of the Christian call to affirm the dignity of all those whom we encounter at church and in our communities – not just to welcome people, but actually to invite them in, to sit with them, converse with them and learn who they are, to celebrate their worth even when we fear what they think or say, how they look or what they represent. “No matter who walks into our doors, we will love them with the love of Christ. And that makes a difference.” For in so doing, we widen the circle of those we know as beloved of God.

View Bishop Johnson’s video [here](#).

*The Rt. Rev. Deon K. Johnson became the 11th Bishop of The Episcopal Diocese of Missouri on June 13, 2020. He is the first openly gay, first black, and first immigrant priest to lead the diocese. Johnson was born and raised on the Caribbean island of Barbados and came to the U.S. at age 14. He is a graduate of Case Western Reserve University in Ohio and The General Theological Seminary in New York. Johnson is a creative and compassionate leader, often focusing his ministry on the underserved and marginalized in our community. He encourages us all to take our ministry outside our church walls and serve Jesus in our everyday lives. Johnson is married to Jovanny Osorio and has two children, Lilohalani and Ja'Lon.*

Resources:

- [Risking Authenticity](#) by Lauren Kay, an ECF Vital Practices blog, June 4, 2019
- [Vocation in an Unsafe World](#) by Diana Wheeler, Vestry Papers, May 2022

### **Gifts of Queerness**

Hannah Wilder

I'm a queer priest pastoring a community known for its conservatism. We're in the process of organizing a Pride parade and festival, the second one of its kind in our town. The main organizer is a young queer man named Welyin who grew up in Ramona, an unincorporated area just outside of San Diego. Welyin says that all his life he knew he was trans, and all his life he was waiting for someone to start a Pride celebration in his town. He was waiting to join his people and finally feel accepted, since his own family had rejected him. When no Pride parade had started in Ramona by the time he turned 18, he decided to start one. Last year 50 people turned up. This year we're hoping for 100. It's a peaceful gathering with a short walk on Main Street and a picnic lunch in the park afterward.

[St. Mary's in-the-Valley](#) will support Weylin and the Ramona Pride event with everything we have. Meeting space anytime they need to plan. A table at the park with information. Free hugs. Big signs that say "God loves you just as you are!" and "You are safe here" and even "We're sorry! The church has made deeply harmful mistakes. We recognize it, own it and are here to say there are some Christians who are trying not to suck."

The wisdom the queer community brings to the church lies in its power as a voice from the margins. The foundational tenet of Judaism is to care for the stranger, and the foundational tenet of Christianity is to love our neighbor. Almost all queer folks over the age of 30 can tell you what it's like to be marginalized, ostracized, rejected, and shamed just for being themselves – in church, no less.

### **Not yet to the promised land**

It was only 50 or 60 years ago that the church supported the practice of slavery, and did so with biblically based ideas. Pastors stood in front of churches and lined their members up to keep out people with black and brown skin. We have made a little progress since then, but we are not yet to the promised land.

As women have taken on leadership roles in the church, and finally became clergy in the 1970s, we have had to prove over and over again that we can speak with authority about scripture, and that we can lead faith communities. We continue to struggle for the top-paying positions in the church. But we're making progress.

Since 2003, the Episcopal Church has welcomed openly gay clergy at all levels. Bishop Gene Robinson, the first openly gay person elected to the episcopate, says that one gift the queer community brings to the church, and to society in general, is of discovering the full range of diversity within our own community. LGBTQIA+ stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, intersex, asexual, plus, plus, plus. As a queer person, I've learned about the diversity within my own community. What about the so-called straight community? I don't think it's one big monolith of heterosexuality. There are many different ways to be straight, too!

Queer folks have had to talk about sexuality to survive, and that example can help heterosexual people talk about themselves. We've learned a few things by talking about our sexualities – like how much of a spectrum sexuality, gender, sexual identity, and gender expression really are. If we all had to sit with our sexuality, and really ponder it and what it means, we all would be infinitely better humans – more self-aware, and more in touch with our own issues and needs. Normalizing conversations about sex is a gift from the queer community to the church, which has been repressed for so long. It's time to step into a new understanding of sexuality. Sexual pleasure is a gift from God. It's a part of being fully human. The church still has a long way to go toward embracing a healthy sexual ethic that honors the dignity of every human being and that is more realistic than abstinence until marriage.

**We are all beloved children of God – no exceptions**

Queer theology presents stimulating and important ideas about scripture. Every passage in scripture about homosexuality (amounting to less than one percent of the Bible) actually condemns sexual violence, rape, exploitation and abuse, not the loving relationships of two mutually consenting adults. Queer Christians living their lives out in the open and worshiping God in a faith community are living proof that John 16:13 is true. The Holy Spirit *will* lead us into all truth, for there is much more to be revealed than what people knew 2,000 years ago. God is working through queer people, and especially through trans people, to lead us into the truth that two boxes of male and female are not enough for all our resplendent diversity. People can learn more by listening to the podcast "[Queer Theology](#)."

Pride parades and gay and lesbian bars are great examples of how queer folks create safe spaces for people to be vulnerable. In these spaces, people are encouraged to show up authentically. Ninety percent of the discrimination that queer people face is from the church. How interesting that bars and parades are where queer people feel most at home, accepted and celebrated. As Bishop Robinson says, "Young people who wouldn't be able to find the book of Leviticus if they were hard-pressed still knew that God hated them. It's in the air and the church put it there." The church has much for which to atone.

Recently I had lunch with another pastor in my town. He leads a mainline congregation with an active youth group. I asked him if his church openly affirms queer people, and he said that he fully supports queer people, but that no, his church isn't ready for a public statement of inclusion. I shared with him that for me, being an out and proud bisexual woman is a matter of survival. So many queer people kill themselves because they never experience acceptance. The less painful option is to take their own lives.

Supporting queer people vocally and actively is one way everyone can help queer people survive. We all need to work to ensure that everyone has a safe space to be themselves, to feel acceptance, and ultimately to live into their identity as a beloved child of God. For the truth is

that nothing – not even homophobic churches and small-minded Christians – can separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

***The Rev. Hannah Wilder** has served as the vicar of St. Mary's in-the-Valley Episcopal Church in Ramona, California, since November 2022. She graduated from the San Diego theological training program in 2019 and holds an English degree and a writing emphasis from Westmont College. For more than 13 years she served as the communications officer for the Episcopal Diocese of San Diego. A board member for Episcopal Communicators, Vida Joven de Mexico, and Episcopal Community Services, Hannah has a strong network throughout the Episcopal Church. She lives in Julian with her wife, Kathy, the executive director of the diocesan Camp Stevens, and they have one son, Owen, who attends university. They also have three dogs, Sadie, Bear and Coco, and one cat called Kitten. In her downtime, Hannah enjoys people, poetry, sewing and Marco Polo.*

#### **Resources:**

- [Discipleship from the Margins](#), an ECF Vital Practices webinar presented by Dr. Sandra Montes, David Patiño and Atticus Zavaletta, June 12, 2019
- [Pronoun Buttons: A Sign of Welcome](#) by Lisa G. Fischbeck, an ECF Vital Practices blog, April 5, 2019

#### **Silent No More**

Craig Bossi and Matt Foreman

*This brief piece is the result of conversations between friends Craig Bossi and Matt Foreman. Matt is a respected leader and accomplished advocate for meaningful change for LGBTQ+ people in areas ranging from anti-violence to nondiscrimination to marriage equality. Craig*

*served on the board of directors for two organizations Matt led as executive director. What follows is a distillation of their extended and ongoing dialogue. Matt and Craig hope that by sharing, they will encourage spiritual reflection about the growing challenges that target many vulnerable individuals – including LGBTQ+ people, family and friends – in the current political environment.*

Since January, more than 400 bills have been introduced in state legislatures across the country targeting LGBTQ+ people. These include measures outlawing gender-affirming care for transgender people young and old, forbidding any mention of sexual orientation or gender identity in public schools through 12th grade, banning books with gay characters, and prohibiting drag performances. Dozens of such bills have been signed into law. Along the way, LGBTQ+ people and the parents of trans youth have been demeaned and devalued by bizarre claims and bogus science.

This wave of legislative and rhetorical attacks against LGBTQ+ people is unprecedented. Why is it happening now? And why has there been near silence from those who side with LGBTQ+ people in their struggle for equality? Has “mainstream” society become inured to the pain and misery inflicted by this raft of initiatives so hostile to LGBTQ+ wellbeing and security?

Ongoing opinion research shows that public acceptance of bellwether issues such as marriage equality and military service is actually growing, not declining. And a recent Associated Press analysis of the current surge of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation concludes that it does not appear to be based on grassroots initiatives, but is rather the product of special interest groups, well-financed and often with close ties to so-called evangelical communities.

The exploitation of “Christian” and “family” values to promote anti-LGBTQ+ legislation only serves to divide communities. It taps into people’s lack of awareness about the realities of gender and sexuality, while fanning fears about changing “the way things are and always have

been.” Anti-LGBTQ+ initiatives embody a lack of true care and compassion that echoes other prior and current legislation, including bills that provide no meaningful help to a mother forced to bear a child or to a gay widower after his partner of 40+ years dies.

The Episcopal Church has historically been at the forefront of embracing LGBTQ+ people with “the love, acceptance, and pastoral concern and care of the church” for decades. The church has taken fundamental and decisive action, including updating strictures regarding the sacraments of Ordination and Holy Matrimony. And while detractors cite this open support as a prime reason the Episcopal Church has lost congregants and congregations, they do so without acknowledging that attendance in almost all Christian churches – including white evangelical congregations – is also declining.

Decades ago, the Episcopal Church followed Jesus’ commitment to pursue justice for the marginalized. The work is not yet complete. We must continue to pursue the path of God’s love. We must follow Jesus’ righteous anger and start throwing over the tables of those persecuting LGBTQ+. We must employ the same avenues of expression and action that Episcopalians have used before – going to rallies, writing op-eds, taking a forceful position in social conversations, and yes, when need be, turning over tables. Our faith demands it, and our church will be enriched as we act with greater purpose in support of the LGBTQ+ community.

***Craig Bossi** serves as Vice President of Finance and Chief Operating Officer for ECF. Prior to joining ECF, he served as comptroller at The General Theological Seminary. He also spent more than 10 years on Wall Street as a managing director in corporate finance, specializing in mergers and acquisitions, and served as a director of financial and business planning for a satellite communications company and a computer hardware company. Craig received his bachelor’s from Haverford College and his master’s in business administration from Yale University.*

**Matt Foreman** is a nationally recognized LGBTQ+ leader with a background in political advocacy, civil rights, and grantmaking. He is a senior program director at the Evelyn & Walter Haas, Jr. Fund, one of the largest foundation funders of the LGBTQ+ movement. He served as co-chair of the Civil Marriage Collaborative, which coordinated over \$163 million in funding to support the freedom to marry, and as the executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (2003–2008), the Empire State Pride Agenda (1996–2003), and the New York City Gay and Lesbian Anti-Violence Project (1990–1996). A graduate of the New York University School of Law, Matt is a founder of Heritage of Pride, which organizes New York City’s annual LGBT Pride events, and a former member of the New York City Human Rights Commission.

#### **Resources:**

- [I Want to be Like Bean Blossom](#) by Anna Olson, an ECF Vital Practices blog, November 16, 2016
- [7 Steps to Prepare for Hate Attacks](#) by Tom Ehrich, an ECF Vital Practices blog, July 31, 2015

#### **Do We Actually Want to Be Inclusive?**

Keith Voets

Several years ago, my husband (also a priest) and I were traveling overseas in a different Province of the Anglican Communion. We attended Holy Eucharist at the local cathedral on Sunday morning and afterward joined the congregation for coffee hour, where we met another clergy couple. This couple, heterosexual and older, were thrilled to welcome two gay priests who were married to one another, and we engaged in a conversation regarding everything from seminary training to the struggle their Province was having over human sexuality. When we began to discuss the sermon of the day, however, which was focused on one of the healing



miracles of Jesus, they appeared shocked that we had enjoyed what we had heard that morning. The conversation shifted into a very dark place. While I will spare you the details, this pair of priests made it clear to us that they could not believe that “people like you” could believe such “outdated and old” theology. The conversation did not end well, and we quickly made our escape and headed toward the great cathedral doors.

I wish I could tell you that this was an isolated incident, but sadly it happens on a regular basis. We are welcomed into places with open arms, with smiles and acceptance, when people find out that we are married to one another – but the moment they realize we trend orthodox in our theology, we are boxed out and treated as an unwelcome nuisance in their mission to be “inclusive.” Over the years I have wondered a great deal about this and have attempted to understand the source of what can only be described as hostility. It seems to me that we have created an environment for ourselves in which we want to be “inclusive” only if those we welcome fit the idea of what we think they should be, feel, think, and believe. The couple that morning truly believed the only option for LGBTQ+ married priests was “progressive” theology, and any other position was simply a betrayal.

### **What does inclusion mean?**

In the quest for inclusivity, the church has in fact created an environment of exclusivity in which we reject marginalized people who do not fit the prototype we have created in our heads. This phenomenon is not exclusive to the LGBTQ+ community, of course, but is frequently also targeted at people of color, women, the poor, and a host of others. When those whom the church takes great pride in welcoming turn out to be the “wrong kind” of LGBTQ+ person, or woman, or person of color, the hostility we are faced with is quick, intense, and painful. This is not inclusion, but the very definition of exclusion, and it needs to change.

No subculture is monolithic. Every group of people is made up of individuals who come with their own experiences, memories, beliefs, and unique perspectives. So perhaps rather than creating a culture in which we try to place marginalized people into neat boxes, we should seek to see all of God's people as beloved individuals created in God's own image.

The LGBTQ+ community includes orthodox and progressives, evangelicals and ex-evangelicals, Republicans and Democrats, pro-life and pro-choice, some who voted for Joe Biden and, yes, even some who voted for Donald Trump. Some deeply desire prayer book revision and others of us wish to retain the 1979 BCP – or even to reclaim the 1928 BCP. Some of us believe strongly in substitutionary atonement theology, while others embrace liberation theology. If the church is to preach inclusion, we must all actually be included, not cast into the shadows or ignored when we do not fit the ideal created for us by the great powers of the institutional church.

### **There are many members, yet one body**

In St. Paul's first letter to the church in Corinth he famously writes, *"If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you', nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.'"* This description of the Body of Christ has inspired generations of Christians to strive for a more inclusive church, and we cannot lose sight of that goal. But if we are to be inclusive, we must seek to recognize the uniqueness of each person baptized into Christ's Body. And that includes those who threaten our own vision of the ideal we strive to meet.

Twenty-five years ago when I first became an Episcopalian, I was warned not to disclose I was gay because it might hurt my chances of being ordained. Today, on more than a few occasions, it has been suggested that I keep my more orthodox theology silent so as to not create unnecessary roadblocks in my career. Having had both experiences, I look at any proclamations

of inclusivity within the Episcopal Church with great suspicion. It is time for us to have a real conversation about what it means to be the Body of Christ – not an *orthodox* Body of Christ or a *progressive* Body of Christ, but *the* Body of Christ, made up of many parts but working together to proclaim the Gospel.

I live in hope, however. I live in hope because we are all sinners saved by the amazing grace of Jesus Christ, and he continues to renew his church and is constantly calling us to strive for that inclusion that we are always talking about. The church is a holy institution, full of sinful people, but with the guidance of the Holy Spirit we can truly be a house of prayer for *all* people, not just those who fit our preconceived notions and ideals. This is holy work. It is messy work. It is the real work of the Gospel.

*Fr. Keith Voets is Rector of The Church of St. Alban the Martyr in Queens, New York, having previously served curacies in Connecticut and New York. Before his ordination in 2012, he had a decade-long career in hospitality management. Fr. Voets is a 2012 graduate of The General Theological Seminary and received a Master of Science Degree in Church Management from Villanova University in 2021. He is married to Fr. Kevin Morris and they have a son, Robert.*

#### **Resources:**

- [Embodying Hope](#) by Ranjit K. Mathews, Vestry Papers, January 2023
- [Talk with Millennials Not About Millennials](#) by Br. Angel Gabriel, an ECF Vital Practices blog, May 17, 2019

#### **A God Who Loves Us Just As We Are**

Kim Jackson

The Rev. Senator Kim Jackson speaks with the quiet power of someone doing the work she was put on earth to do: pastoring those who are often overlooked, while holding them in the light to those who would rather not

see. It is a role to which she is uniquely suited. As a Black lesbian clergyperson elected to political office, she literally crosses the street from her unhoused congregants to her statehouse colleagues. And her experience as both person and priest gives her unprecedented credibility – as well as responsibility – in her mission to make real, positive change in the world. In this extended conversation, Kim shares the critical importance of seeing and of being seen.

“I believe that as Christians, we serve and love a God who loves us just as we are and says we are enough. And that’s what the world needs. The world needs people who are willing to stand up and show their authentic self and stand in the deepest conviction and knowledge that God loves us just as we are.”

For the interview with Kim Jackson, go to: <https://www.ecfvp.org/vestry-papers/article/1072/a-god-who-loves-us-just-as-we-are>

*Rev. Senator Kim Jackson has served as a college chaplain, a nationally renowned consultant and preacher, a parish priest, and a social justice advocate. In 2018, the Georgia House of Representatives commended her for her “tireless efforts on behalf of the disenfranchised, disenfranchised, and dispossessed” (GA House Resolution 1188). Now serving as the vicar at the Episcopal Church of the Common Ground, Kim co-creates church with people who are unhoused in downtown Atlanta. She and her spouse, Trina, live on a small farm in Stone Mountain with two Great Pyrenees dogs, goats, bees, ducks, chickens and a cat.*

### **Becoming the Person God Created Me to Be**

Freya Gilbert

*“I will bless you, and you will be a blessing.” – Genesis 12:2*

I’m standing in front of the altar, parishioners holding their hands over me in blessing. A former Presbyterian pastor and current postulant to the priesthood is intoning a blessing in Hebrew to honor my fifth anniversary of physical transition, and I am loving my church and my journey.

My heart thinks back to the fifth anniversary of my social transition at the diocesan convention where I was elected to the Standing Committee. Five years and one month before, I had come to self-realization as a transgender woman. And, feeling that I must be my authentic self to do the spiritual work of convention, I had thrown myself at the work of transitioning in order to appear at convention as the woman that I knew myself to be.

### **Blessing or burden?**

At convention, everyone I spoke with held me and supported me, from my bishop and regional canon to the many people I had worked with in the diocese. A beloved friend and priest told me how wonderful it was that I was becoming the person God had created me to be. That summed up how I felt too. But a couple of weeks later when I came out to my parish, I began feeling more like a burden than a blessing. I would sit in the church

parking lot screwing up the courage to walk through the red door. I felt that I was an embarrassment and that I should just go away and make things easier for everybody.

Ash Wednesday fell on Valentine's Day that year, and I was blessed to resume my ministry of lay preaching. I used the text from Amos where God asks us to rend our hearts and not our garments. I spoke of how coming out was like holding my broken and somehow still breaking heart in my hands, and how Lent should be a time where we come out to God in all our brokenness but also where we give God the space to come out to each of us.

### **Moments of grace**

I remember the joy and wonderment I felt that Easter. Wearing a beautiful new dress for the very first time, I knew that I was participating in a resurrection myself.

But resurrection is not a one-time event, rather an ongoing challenge to us to experience every day in ever new ways. My parish and I had to adjust to a new reality that was both a continuation and a break from our previous life together. It was a time to give and receive grace.

Patterns that had been etched into our way of being needed to change. I had a new name and new pronouns. Adjusting to the new reality was an ongoing process for all of us. Among other things, we had to work through and beyond moments of misgendering and the use of my birth name.

It still felt as if I were a burden when people struggled to acknowledge my “newness.” And it was challenging to deal with members of the parish who were perhaps careless, especially when that carelessness trended toward callousness and occasionally even cruelty.

I had to learn and relearn the grace of forgiveness, and I had to give myself the grace to be strong and courageous in claiming safe space for myself.

Those moments of grace took place within the larger context of the diocese as well. There were – and are – moments of pain, but ever so many more of joy and love.

### **Much work remains**

I appreciate how wonderful and precious my diocese is in its growing affirmation of my gifts and the gifts of my trans siblings. Which makes it that much more painful to realize that I would not have had the same experience in every diocese and parish of the church.

It causes me great sorrow to be unable unreservedly to recommend the Episcopal Church to my trans siblings throughout America. So much work remains to be done before the entire church can be safe space for trans people that allows us to be nurtured and transformed. But the creation of safe harbor for trans people creates space for the entire church to be nurtured and transformed.

### **What I have learned**

If my lived experience in the Episcopal Church teaches me anything, it is that my trans siblings and I are not a burden but entirely a blessing: We give voice to God's deepest longing for the church to seek out the lost sheep

and stand fearlessly alongside the least of these, to empty itself of prestige and power and to give voice to the voiceless.

And when the church empties itself, it opens itself to incarnation – an incarnation that embraces the messiness and confusion of our genderedness and our sexuality. And so it was that when I boldly and graciously asked for the blessing of my five-year milestone, I knew that I was blessing my parish as much as they were blessing me.

*Freya Gilbert has called four different countries home. She recently retired from a career in hotel management. She's been active as a lay leader in the Diocese of Northern Indiana and the dioceses of East and Western Michigan. At any given point she's reading at least 20 books and she loves spending quiet evenings with her two cats, who are named after the main characters in Finnegans Wake.*

#### Resources:

- [A Service of Renaming](#) from the Book of Occasional Services 2018, page 120
- [Discipleship from the Margins](#), an ECF Vital Practices webinar presented by Dr. Sandra Montes, David Patiño and Atticus Zavaletta, June 12, 2019

#### Do You Really Belong Here?

Isaiah “Shaneequa” Brokenleg

The Rev. Isaiah “Shaneequa” Brokenleg, a Lakota two-spirit and member of the Presiding Bishop’s staff, explores essential questions of belonging in this wide-ranging conversation on the intersection of race, culture, gender, faith, and identity in the Episcopal Church. Committed to serving in liminal spaces – at moments of transition, reconciliation, death, and discernment – Shaneequa encourages us to learn from the disparate voices and traditions within the church, placing relationships at the heart of our work. Both in her life and in her ministry, she provides a powerful example of what it means to honor difference and create a space that truly welcomes all.

“Remember that we are made in the image of God. And that means that God is not white. God is black, and brown, and tan, and everything. God is fat, and skinny, and everything. God is . . . cisgendered, and transgendered, and non-binary, and all those things. And we will never look into the eyes of someone that God does not love, even if we look in the mirror.”

For the interview with the Rev. Isaiah “Shaneequa” Brokenleg, go to: <https://www.ecfvp.org/vestry-papers/article/1071/do-you-really-belong-here>

*The Rev. Isaiah “Shaneequa” Brokenleg is an enrolled member of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe and a priest in the*

*Diocese of South Dakota. She is the Staff Officer for Racial Reconciliation for the Episcopal Church and works to bring an end to the structural violence and oppression that hurts us all. As a winkté (Lakota two-spirit) she believes that we are all related (Mitakuye Oyasin) and that she is called to move communities toward healing and positive change.*

## **Differentiating Between the What and the How**

Alan Yarborough

*“Fight for the things that you care about, but do it in a way that will lead others to join you.” – Ruth Bader Ginsburg*

I won three different strength-of-character awards in grade school, which has always fascinated me because during that time I was always lying. I lied to my dentist, my orthodontist, the mechanic and anyone grasping for human connection through small talk when they asked if I had a girlfriend. Despite living in a liberal town, with supportive parents, I lied in deeper ways to close friends, teachers, my parents and myself, all to hide and protect myself from a world that told me I did not belong.

Yet I remember how God reached me through the Episcopal Church, imperfections and inconsistencies aside, with a message of belonging. I do not remember what Father Bill said 20 years ago, but I most certainly remember how he made me feel when he supported the ordination of Bishop Gene Robinson. Father Bill ran toward dissent and confronted it, lovingly, on behalf of others. Since that time, the Episcopal Church has repeatedly reminded me that I belong.

## **Building a church – and a world – for all God’s people**

While there is much to admire in our church’s message of belonging, renewed homophobic and transphobic rhetoric and actions in our country are a chilling reminder that we cannot be complacent. We still have much work to do in building a world where all LGBTQ+ people can thrive.

And in a culture of hasty critiques, with myriad public audiences at our fingertips, we must take care not to tear each other down as we use different strategies to build more welcoming communities. To do this, we must differentiate between *what* and *how*.

The *what* is easiest. I can imagine most Episcopalians proclaiming, “Of course, we support LGBTQ+ people!” And yet we cannot stop at proclamations—we have to act. We also have to acknowledge the connection between politics and the individual—every political action impacts someone somewhere.

This makes the *how* less clear. Building a welcoming world can be tough, murky work, but it is work I have seen the church do well. In fact, I draw from experiences within the church as I write this very piece. With a better understanding of the plurality of approaches needed to succeed, we can become more adept at overcoming the challenges before us.

**The question is: How?**

***How do we add tools to our toolbox so that our actions fit the context where we live?***

May we explore our local town culture, learn about current *and proposed* state laws, and research our congressional representatives to examine any unique leverage they may have in Congress. May we not overlook the fact that the success of many who wish to silence LGBTQ+ voices comes from informed, detail-oriented, effective advocacy. May we [be savvier in leveraging systems](#) for justice.

***How can we help others learn just as we ourselves learn?***

I certainly was not born with the vocabulary to talk about being gay, much less lesbian, bisexual or transgender. I am still learning. May we take care to remain humble and distinguish between willful malignant ignorance and the ignorance that comes from lack of exposure and understanding. May our own vulnerability be the steel frame on which we can build lasting relationship, trust and reciprocity. May we understand the grace required from someone who takes time to educate us. May we seek to learn by reading, listening and watching queer-produced media and entertainment, so as to alleviate the burden on others to teach us directly.

***How can we take risks, leveraging our privileges for change?***

While I do not know if Father Bill used the word *privilege* at the time, I imagine he saw himself as someone in a position and of an identity likely to be listened to. I have tried to channel that approach as I've built an uncanny (if occasionally harmful) level of patience for talking to people with whom I disagree. May we be so bold as to avoid existing purely in echo chambers and instead be a presence in places where the gap between where we are and where we want to be is greatest. May those of us of identities less at risk understand our responsibility accordingly. In doing so, may we indeed leverage our privileges as the Episcopal Church to build stronger, more diverse communities.

***How do we measure success?***

Incremental progress is a reality of our world, yet when it comes to recognizing humanity, increments are particularly fraught to push for and celebrate. May we not allow perfect be the enemy of the good; may we maintain our focus on larger goals even as we take smaller steps to realize them.

***How do we consider differences in threats to and needs of each part of the LGBTQ+ family?***

We have greater knowledge today of the intersectionality of injustices, something that works in our favor, but only if we put that to use by being more proactive particularly for transgender people and others who face disproportionate discrimination. May we take care to listen to people within each identity and use this understanding for precise action.

***How do we consider international contexts, while respecting and heeding other cultures?***

May we hold progress on LGBTQ+ rights in the context of a global push for justice while remembering there may be other ways of understanding humanity unfamiliar to ourselves, but learned through genuine engagement with others.

**Hearing and being heard**

As difficult as it may be sometimes, making a statement is easy. What we say is important, but it is not a strategy for fostering genuine belonging. We [must also communicate in a way that is heard](#) by those who need to hear it, and we must act in a way that is effective. That's risky work, and it looks different depending on who we are and



where we are, but the reward is quite literally life-giving. May we first seek to ask someone why they take the approach they do, so that we may learn from one another.

***Alan Yarborough** is the church relations officer for the Episcopal Church's Office of Government Relations. He also conducts dialogue trainings through [Habits of Discourse](#). The views expressed are his own.*

**Resources:**

- [Advocacy Resources from the Office of Government Relations](#)
- [Make Me an Instrument of Peace: A Guide to Civil Discourse](#)