

283 Gay marriage policies – implications

All churches have rules and policies and, over time, some of these rules change, such as on remarriage of divorcees, and women in leadership. Hopefully, decisions on these issues are based on biblical principles but, following Jesus' example, we need to consider the effect on individuals. To be fair, Jesus seemed more concerned about people than about rules.

The Church of England (CofE) will only allow the remarriage of divorced people 'in exceptional circumstances' but it does at least allow clergy to conduct services of blessing for people who have had civil marriages. As the CofE works towards clergy conducting services of blessing for gay marriages, this has human implications.

I have discussed this issue with a number of long-term friends, not all of whom share my view that gay Christians should be allowed to follow their consciences and form lifelong relationships (or not) as they feel God is guiding them.

If your church takes the view that any gay sexual activity is, by definition, a sin then clearly the church cannot be seen to condone such sin. So if you acknowledge gay marriage in any way, you are saying that sin doesn't matter, and that has implications for individuals. Any so-far-celibate gay Christians in your congregation could be led into sin, based on the example of other actively gay Christians. And Jesus has very strong warnings for 'anyone [who] causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin'.^{Matt18:6}

I have talked to friends in two CofE churches that are taking this very seriously. Their churches are saying that unless the bishops *reverse* their decision to bless gay marriages, they may withdraw finance from the central church, and may even consider pulling out of the CofE altogether.

One of those friends, who is in a large and well-known CofE church in London, said that they do have a number of gay couples within their church, and that some of them are in positions of responsibility. Now, when one of my non-CofE friends said that their church doesn't allow people in gay relationships to take any form of responsibility, I was deeply saddened, but maybe that is the more consistent approach.

We each need to consider how our views – and the actions based on them – affect other people, both those already within the church and those whom we long to draw into the love of God.

You well know my views about the damaging effect that the traditional view of gay activity has both on gay Christians and on many people outside the church, whether gay or not, who consider that view to be discriminatory and even offensive.

Please, we urgently need to discuss this within our churches and decide how we move forward and best reflect our Saviour's love to those around us.

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