



Join this Chariot

Christian Schools Supporting
Rainbow Students' Wellbeing

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| Foreword

'Christian Schools Supporting Rainbow Students' Wellbeing' - this carefully and very lovingly crafted theologically grounded educational resource is indeed a taonga!

Comprehensive in its coverage of so many of the critical concerns arising for rainbow young people in Aotearoa New Zealand, this resource is an absolute stand out not only in its uniqueness but especially in its profoundly compassionate narrative style.

Comprehensive also in its reach across the glorious diversity of ethnic, religious and gendered difference the authors demonstrate acute sensitivity in attending to the dynamic complexity, the often deeply intense personal challenges and the unending delights inherent in navigating and in claiming the fullness of one's human identity.

For Aotearoa's precious rainbow rangatahi, for their teachers and parents, siblings and friends, this resource will provide reassurance, insight, wisdom, guidance into the myriad issues arising for those still unjustly rendered vulnerable in our schools and communities. Any and all acts of prejudice, bigotry, exclusion, discrimination, cruel judgement, humiliation, shaming and exclusion ought to have no place in any decent society. Certainly, they ought to have no place in the lived experiences of young rainbow people.

What this precious resource provides is an exemplary reading of the Gospel text, *'I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly . . .'* For just as Jesus is rebuking the Pharisees for not taking care of those for whom they are responsible, for instead acting as those who bring fear and potential harm into the lives of those most vulnerable, he is also insisting it is the human right of all to choose if they so desire, to *'come out [sic] and to go find abundant pasture'*!

Jesus wants that everybody has access to those resources and opportunities, which enable all and not just some to make life enhancing choices and to live in peace with justice and security. *'Christian Schools Supporting Rainbow Students' Wellbeing'* is indeed one such timely and very welcome enabling resource.

Dr Jenny Te Paa Daniel

Te Mareikura

National Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies

Otago University

He mihi

He mihi ki ngā tāngata whenua o Aotearoa. Mai rā anō, he ringa hora ngā hapū Māori kia hanga ai ngā āhuru mōwai mō te hunga takatāpui. Nā rātou i whakatakoto tēnei tauira tika mō tātou katoa.

He mihi mā koutou ngā taiohi e aratakina ana ai te mahi a Kōaro. Ko koutou ngā kaihautū e whakatika ana i te aro o te waka.

He mihi ki ngā kaiwhakapono takatāpui, nā koutou te ara i whakatakoto mā takatāpui o nainei, nā ta koutou tauira i mohio mai kāore te whakapono me te takatāpuitanga e taupatupatu ana.

He mihi ki a koutou ngā kaiako, ngā poutokomanawa kia tautoko ai ngā taiohi. Mā koutou ngā taiohi e whakaruruhau, e taurima, e akiaki. Kei te rere atu te mihi aroha.

Ka mihi nui mā koutou e ora ai te rito o te harakeke, ko te rauemi nei hei tautokona koutou i ā koutou mahi nui.

We acknowledge those Māori communities of Aotearoa, who from the earliest times have provided places of unconditional safety and aroha for rainbow people. This is an example for Aotearoa.

We acknowledge the young people that lead our organisation and help set the course.

We acknowledge our elders who are rainbow people of faith, whose courageous example has shown that rainbow identities and faith are not contradictory.

We acknowledge you, the school staff members, who create space for young rainbow people. We also acknowledge all who enable our youth to thrive. You protect, care for and encourage them. Thank you. This resource exists to support you in the important work that you do.

Introducing InsideOUT

Development of this resource was led by InsideOUT, a national charity that works to give rainbow young people in Aotearoa New Zealand a sense of safety and belonging in their schools and communities. These are the goals to which we aspire, and the beliefs that sit beneath them.

Our vision

All rainbow young people in Aotearoa New Zealand have a sense of safety and belonging in their schools and communities.

Our mission

To work with youth, whānau, schools, community groups, youth services, government agencies and other relevant organisations to provide safer schools and communities for rainbow young people.

To foster the building and provision of resources, education, information, hui and relevant tools which work to improve the health, wellbeing and safety of rainbow young people.

Our kaupapa

These fundamental beliefs and assumptions sit beneath all of these resources, and all that we do in our work with schools.

- Being trans, gender diverse, intersex, or having a diverse sexuality is a natural, positive expression of human diversity. A person's sexuality, gender or body is not up for debate.
- A person's gender or sex may be an important part of who they are, but it is not the only part of their identity; identity can also be shaped by their culture, ethnicity, socioeconomic background, religion, or disability.
- The adults within a school community are expected to respect all students' right to safety, privacy, and inclusion within their whānau, school, and wider community. These obligations are enshrined in the Education and Training Act 2020, National Administration Guidelines (NAG 5), and Our Code, Our Standards | Ngā Tikanga Matatika, Ngā Paerewa.
- Respecting students' rights upholds their mana motuhake (self-determination) and mauri (energy, life force).
- Being proactive about creating welcoming learning environments, rather than waiting to react to students' needs or challenges, will make it easier for students to learn and thrive. When all students belong, it makes teaching and learning easier.

Kupu whakataki



Then an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Get up and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is a wilderness road.) So he got up and went. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over to this chariot and join it."¹

– Acts 8:26-29

The Ethiopian Eunuch was a gender minority person. According to his traditions (Leviticus 21:16-23; Deuteronomy 23:1), Philip should have considered him unclean and unworthy of worshipping God. But God told Philip to join his chariot, and then to invite him to belong. Rainbow people have often been excluded or harmed in religious contexts. We have created our 'chariots', or communities of safety. We invite you to join us, learn about what support we need, and take steps to ensure we can belong with you.

If rainbow young people experience belonging in their schools, homes, churches and communities, they can 'have life, and have it abundantly' (John 10:10). If rainbow young people face discrimination and exclusion, remaining strong emotionally, physically and spiritually can be a challenge. Rainbow young people in faith-based environments need to be able to be their full selves, to thrive, to learn, and -if they choose- to flourish in their faith.

This resource aims to support schools with a Christian special character to be welcoming and safe for rainbow rangatahi. While we acknowledge other faith-based schools, InsideOUT's work has so far only been with schools associated with Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian, and other Christian denominations, and we wish to share what we have learnt with you. We hope this resource will also be useful for mainstream schools in communities where a significant proportion of the community holds Christian beliefs.

We hope that rainbow young people that are part of faith communities can feel welcome in those communities, and thrive, as whole beings. We also hope that all rainbow young people, regardless of their culture and spiritual belief, can feel welcome, and thrive, in faith-based schools.

¹ Unless otherwise stated, all Bible quotations are from the NRSV, accessed from www.biblegateway.com

This resource is in three parts;

- **Part one, 'Background'**, introduces the intersection of faith communities and the rainbow community, especially in relation to the wellbeing of young people.
- **Part two, 'Faith-based schools'**, focuses on information and advice for schools.
- **Part three, 'Resources and Stories at the rainbow-faith intersection'**, is a collection of profiles, stories, theology and Biblical interpretations about rainbow-affirming Christianity.

We find that young people in faith-based schools are hungry for this information, and hope it will be useful for chaplains, Religious Instruction or Religious Education teachers, and other staff.

| Nā wai tēnei?

This resource is a collaborative effort, bringing together the knowledge and experiences of rainbow young people currently studying in faith-based schools, school staff, InsideOUT staff, affirming church leaders, and rainbow Christians. It comes from kōrero with people of a range of rainbow identities and allies, as well as people from various cultures and spiritual beliefs.

The resource was collated by Bronwyn Kerr, our former Wellington Schools Coordinator. She holds theology and social work degrees, is part of the rainbow community, and is a Christian, having been part of Baptist, Anglican and Japanese Russian Orthodox communities.

Many other people with experience at the rainbow-faith intersection have also generously contributed their time and knowledge. We'd like to thank Dr.s Jenny Te Paa Daniel and Peter Lineham, Rev. Apelu Tielu, Jeremy Faumuinā, Compass Wilts-Ramsay, Ponsonby Baptist, Lucy, and Sacred Heart College, especially the QSA. We'd also like to thank the Stillwaters community, especially Emma Osbourne and Caleb Day.

We would also like to thank James Kuek for designing this resource, Jaye Barclay for your illustrations and students at Sacred Heart for the illustrations accompanying their profile. We thank Tabby Besley and Alex Ker for their feedback and coordination.

Ngā mihi nunui ki a koutou katoa.

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Part one: Background

The purpose of this resource

The purpose of this resource is to support Christian faith-based schools to be safe and welcoming places for rainbow students. We recognise the diversity of people involved in faith-based schools. Students, staff, and school board members may or may not personally hold religious beliefs. Some will be members of the rainbow community, some will be allies, and some may struggle with the notion of including the rainbow community. Many different cultures are represented in the student and staff bodies of faith-based schools.

We hope that all rainbow people can feel welcome, and thrive, in faith-based schools, regardless of their cultures and spiritual beliefs.

For communities to be safe for rainbow young people, they need to be fully included in all aspects of community life. In faith-based schools, this includes the spiritual aspect of school life. While traditionally there has been tension between church and rainbow communities, we find that young people on all sides of this divide have an admirable generosity. Young people in faith-based schools, whether or not they personally hold religious beliefs, are often very interested in hearing about ways faith communities, and the Bible, can be understood in rainbow-affirming ways. For this reason, this resource covers both direct advice for schools, and information about people and communities that walk the tension between Christianity and rainbow or ally identities. We hope this will help young people feel less isolated, and be useful as a resource for school staff.

A message to rainbow young people in faith-based schools

We see you, you are not alone! If you are just getting through the day, you are awesome. If you are working to help your school be more rainbow-friendly, you are awesome. If you are religious, spiritual, not sure, or definitely not, you are awesome.

InsideOUT is here to support you and other rainbow students in your school. Please reach out to hello@insideout.org.nz, or to your regional Schools Coordinator (you can find them on the InsideOUT website).

A message to supportive staff

If you are supporting young people, regardless of the environment you're working in, thank you! Please know this is appreciated.

If your school has rainbow young people that are out², consult with them on what needs to happen in your school. You won't be able to change everything overnight,

but they will have priorities of what will make the most difference for them.

We have found that in really unsafe environments, rainbow young people might be too scared to come out generally, even if they are out to some people. When the whole environment feels unsafe, it can be hard to articulate what should change, it can even be hard to even think that change and safety might be possible. In this case, you might have to follow your own instincts, or outside advice, for the early work. Here are some initial ideas:

- Talk with other staff, see if there are other rainbow-affirming staff in your school
- Test the water with school leadership, to see how much room there might be for talking about the wellbeing of rainbow students
- Share information with students about rainbow youth groups outside the school
- Put up rainbow symbols in your class, e.g. print out a small rainbow flag and put it by your desk
- Include rainbow topics in your curriculum subject
- Challenge homophobic, biphobic and transphobic language (e.g. the use of 'gay' as an insult). You can challenge insulting language regardless of your personal beliefs about rainbow identities. 'A wholesome tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit' (Proverbs 15:4, NRSV)



There are a couple of English teachers who have really helped me. Helping me write my proposal to start a rainbow students group, and giving me advice on how to deal with discrimination from the senior leadership team.

– Grace, Year 13, queer female student

A message for chaplains

In our experience, having the chaplain's support for rainbow students is invaluable. Chaplains can include supportive and anti-bullying messages in school chapel services. A chaplain's involvement can make other staff feel confident expressing support for rainbow students in the context of a faith-based school. Faith-based schools are generally protective of their special character, and staff may not feel confident doing something they worry might go against this. This is especially true for staff who are not personally religious, as they often feel like they have signed up to work in a school where the institutional beliefs do not fit their personal beliefs, and they are respectful of this. Having the chaplain's support can give these staff confidence that supporting rainbow students is not inherently anti-religious, or against the special character of the school.

The third section of this resource contains information about the cross-over of Christianity and rainbow people. If you are a chaplain, please feel free to use this information in your mahi. If you want to be linked up with another school chaplain who is doing work supporting rainbow rangatahi, please reach out to InsideOUT, we will try and make that connection for you.

Rainbow youth and Christian faith communities

Historical background

Relationships between people of the same-sex were accepted in traditional Māori society³. According to professor Ngahuia Te Awekotuku, 'sexuality was enjoyed in many forms. People chose partners of either sex for pleasure, and same-sex love was not condemned or vilified. Continuing one's line – having children – was nevertheless a priority. High performance and erotic skill were greatly admired, and accomplished individuals, both male and female, feature prominently in the chant poems of their time, their physical attributes and relevant behaviours fondly detailed'⁴.

Colonisation imposed British norms on Aotearoa, including suppression of takatāpui identities and histories. 'Takatāpui is a traditional Māori term meaning 'intimate companion of the same sex.' It has been reclaimed to embrace all Māori who identify with diverse sexes, genders and sexualities'⁵. Takatāpui have experienced an 'intersectional oppression' from 'puritanical and colonial history which has included the subjugation of Māori women, the suppression of gender and sexual fluidity, and the criminalisation of same-sex attraction and gender non-conformity'⁶.

Groups such as Tīwhanawhana, and scholars such as Professor Te Awekotuku and Dr. Elizabeth Kerekere are looking under colonial suppression to find and share traditional stories and tikanga which can inspire takatāpui folk today.

Negotiating the co-existence of Christian faith and takatāpui identities within te ao Māori is an ongoing process. For more on the impact of this tension on takatāpui, see 'Reclaiming the past to inform the future: Contemporary views of Māori sexuality'⁷. To quote Elizabeth Kerekere, 'religious beliefs do not excuse you from your absolute whakapapa obligation to care for your tamariki'⁸. We hope that takatāpui Christian youth, and takatāpui youth from Christian whānau and communities, will have pakeke that will support them in all aspects of who they are.

3 Aspin, C., & Hutchings, J. (2007). Reclaiming the past to inform the future: Contemporary views of Maori sexuality. *Culture, health & sexuality*, 9(4), 415-427.

4 Quoted in Starzecka, D. C., & Davidson, J. E. (Eds.). (1996). *Māori: Art and Culture*. Trustees of the British Museum.

5 <https://takatapui.nz/#home>

6 Kerekere, E. (2017). Part of the whānau: The emergence of takatāpui identity-He whāriki takatāpui.

7 Aspin, C., & Hutchings, J. (2007). Reclaiming the past to inform the future: Contemporary views of Maori sexuality. *Culture, health & sexuality*, 9(4), 415-427

8 Pers. comm., (2016).



To go deeper into traditional and current knowledge about takatāpui, we recommend:

- <https://takatapui.nz/>
- Honour Project Aotearoa <https://tewhariki.org.nz/article/health-research/takatapui-health-and-wellbeing/>
- Kerekere, E. (2017). Part of the whānau: The emergence of takatāpui identity-He whāriki takatāpui. <http://researcharchive.vuw.ac.nz/handle/10063/6369>
- Te Awekotuku, N. (2005). He Reka Ano: same sex lust and loving in the ancient Maori world. *Outlines: Lesbian & Gay Histories of Aotearoa. Wellington: Lesbian & Gay Archives of New Zealand.*

Pasifika communities have also experienced the suppression of traditional attitudes towards gender and sexuality through colonisation. Many Pacific societies have terms for gender identities outside of 'male' and 'female'. The expression of these genders has been impacted by Westernisation⁹, especially for Pacific diaspora in Aotearoa. Churches have been a part of this process, although there are Pacific leaders and

rainbow Christians who see reclaiming traditional ideas about sexuality as part of the process of decolonising Pacific expressions of Christianity¹⁰. For example, see Rev. Apelu Tielu's thoughts in part three of this resource.



For more on the impact of colonisation on Pacific identities, and to explore contemporary Pacific rainbow identities, we recommend:

- Suaalii-Sauni, T. M., Wendt, M. A., Fuamatu, N., Va'ai, U. L., Whaitiri, R., & Filipo, S. L. (Eds.). (2014). *Whispers and vanities: Samoan indigenous knowledge and religion*. Huia Publishers.
- Seuta'afili Patrick, S. T. (2019). *Samoan Queer Lives*. The Journal of New Zealand Studies, (NS29).
- Thompson, P. K. (2017). *Saili Le Tofa: A Search for New Wisdom" Sexuality and Fa'afafine in the Samoan Context* (Doctoral dissertation, Union Theological Seminary).

For many Pasifika communities in Aotearoa, the church is a centre of community and the maintenance of culture and tradition¹¹. Young people who are in churches which do not accept rainbow identities can feel torn between respect for community and other aspects of their lives. It is important that well-meaning people outside the church community don't represent Christian belief as irredeemably homophobic or assume that all rainbow young people will want to leave non-accepting churches, as this minimises the tricky reality that many young people navigate.

9 Schmidt, J. (2016). *Migrating genders: Westernisation, migration, and Samoan fa'afafine*. Routledge.

10 Thompson, P. K. (2017). *Saili Le Tofa: A Search for New Wisdom" Sexuality and Fa'afafine in the Samoan Context* (Doctoral dissertation, Union Theological Seminary).

11 Seiuli, B. M. S. (2012). *Uputaua: A therapeutic approach to researching Samoan communities*.

In Pākehā culture, it is harder to find historical and cultural forms of rainbow identities before the post-World War Two LGBT rights movements. People lived rainbow identities in Europe in various ways in both the pre-Christian and Christian eras, though this was often in underground ways only partly available to recorded history.

Homosexuality was common in ancient Celtic societies, and various homoerotic relationships existed in ancient Greece and Rome, ranging from patriarchal sexual exploitation to the egalitarian love between women on the island of Lesbos¹². Many ancient and pre-modern societies recognised minority sex/gender identities often called 'eunuch' or 'hermaphrodite' in historical sources. People have always had sex with people of the same sex, with varying degrees of social tolerance in different times and places in Europe. There has also always been social and legal discrimination, culminating in 'anti-sodomy' laws implemented in Britain and its colonies in the 16th and 19th centuries. Until activism such as the Stonewall uprising, led by trans women of colour in 1969 New York, and legal reforms such as New Zealand's 1986 Homosexual Law Reform Act, Pākehā and Western rainbow culture largely developed in secret. Laws preventing discrimination and granting equal rights are even more recent.



For an understanding of the history of Pākehā rainbow identities, and their European origins, we recommend:

- Dynes, W. R., Donaldson, S., & Dynes, W. (Eds.). (1992). *Homosexuality in the ancient world* (No. 1). Taylor & Francis.
- Boswell, J. (2015). *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century*, 35th Anniversary edition. Chicago, IL/London: University of Chicago Press.
- Nanda, S. (2014). 'Sex/Gender Diversity in Euro-American Cultures' in *Gender Diversity: Crosscultural Variations*, Second edition. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press.
- Marcus, S. (2007). *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Brickell, C. (2008). *Mates and lovers: A history of gay New Zealand*. Auckland, New Zealand: Godwit.
- Todd, M. (2019). *Pride: The Story of the LGBTQ Equality Movement*, Updated edition. London: Welbeck Publishing.

For all of these cultures, Christianity, especially the Victorian interpretation of it, has had a negative impact on rainbow people. However, the Bible itself is not nearly as squeamish about sex, sexuality and relationship diversity as it has sometimes been interpreted. The descriptions and 'pick-up lines' of Song of Solomon may be from a different era, but the characters in that story are definitely

¹² Dynes, W. R., Donaldson, S., & Dynes, W. (Eds.). (1992). *Homosexuality in the ancient world* (No. 1). Taylor & Francis. *Handbook of Religion in Global Society*, 155

not shy! Some rainbow people that have experienced harm from people quoting the Bible choose to have nothing more to do with it. Others choose to reclaim the Bible, and cultural traditions, to form a new relationship with faith.

For young New Zealanders of Asian descent, the relationships between religious faith, rainbow identity and culture are complicated and diverse¹³. For rainbow youth with a connection to Christianity, this relationship is affected by traditional cultural attitudes towards sexual and gender diversity, denomination, family attitudes, and -in some cases- by particular colonial legacies. We could not find specific research on religion and rainbow identity for Asian New Zealanders, the research quoted here either focuses on Asian American diaspora experiences, or on rainbow Christian experiences in Asian countries.

For rainbow Christians in Asian countries, how they are perceived by their communities is affected by the pathway of Christianity into their society, and sometimes the ongoing impact of Western (especially American) churches. For example, in Korean churches both anti-gay and affirming Christian perspectives from the USA are highly influential in local discussions¹⁴. Attitudes towards rainbow people are also influenced by other ideologies, such as confucianism¹⁵, and by the geo-political realities of the countries they live in¹⁶. For example, Taiwan's support of LGBT rights and non-discrimination is seen by some as a way to be distinct from other Chinese societies¹⁷.

Rainbow people in Asia also navigate the wider religious contexts of their societies, especially when religious faith and national identity are deeply connected. For example, the Philippines is a country where religion, especially Catholicism, plays a significant role. Religious belief is associated with anti-rainbow ideas¹⁸. In this context, the idea of 'religious freedom' had been used by both sides of the debate about legalising same-sex marriage¹⁹. Of course, the 'conservative' interpretation has a wider platform, which can leave rainbow people feeling the national influence of religion is weaponized against them. Despite this, religion remains important to many rainbow people in the Philippines. More specifically, private belief and rituals are key for rainbow people, but they might not attend church as much as non-rainbow people, negotiating a tension between personal faith and institutional discrimination²⁰.

13 Tong, J. K., Kang, S., Lee, P., & Lim, H. S. (2020). Asian Christian LGBTQs coming out to parents. *Routledge International*

14 Yi, J., Jung, G., & Phillips, J. (2017). Evangelical Christian discourse in South Korea on the LGBT: The politics of cross-border learning. *Society*, 54(1), 29-33.

15 Tong, J. K., Kang, S., Lee, P., & Lim, H. S. (2020). Asian Christian LGBTQs coming out to parents. *Routledge International Handbook of Religion in Global Society*, 155.

16 Lee, P. H. (2016). LGBT rights versus Asian values: de/re-constructing the universality of human rights. *The International Journal of Human Rights*, 20(7), 978-992.

17 Lee, P. H. (2016). LGBT rights versus Asian values: de/re-constructing the universality of human rights. *The International Journal of Human Rights*, 20(7), 978-992.

18 Reyes, M. E. S., Ballesteros, K. C. A., Bandal, P. A. A., Jimenez, K. A. H., & Malangen, S. D. R. (2019). Religiosity, Gender Role Beliefs, and Attitudes Toward Lesbians and Gays in the Philippines. *North American Journal of Psychology*, 21(3).

19 Cornelio, J., & Dagle, R. C. M. (2019). Weaponising Religious Freedom: Same-Sex Marriage and Gender Equality in the Philippines. *Religion & Human Rights*, 14(2), 65-94.

20 del Castillo, F., del Castillo, C. D., Ching, G., & Campos, M. S. (2021). Centrality of Religiosity among Select LGBTQs in the Philippines. *Religions*, 12(2), 83.

Rainbow people that are Christian in India are navigating a different situation, where the faith(s) associated with national identity are not their faith. The legalisation of homosexuality in 2018 has been seen as a 'decolonial act', since anti-rainbow discrimination came with British colonisation. However, decriminalisation has also been associated with Hindu nationalist ideas, where rainbow identities can be used as tools of Islamophobia²¹. This can leave rainbow people of non-Hindu faiths in a precarious position, navigating the meanings attached to different aspects of their identities by different groups.

The lack of research and visibility for rainbow Asian Christians in western societies means young people often have to navigate one of two inaccurate assumptions, either that their experience is the same as that of white rainbow Christians, or that they will certainly face homophobia and exclusion from their families²². In the USA, some conservative churches deliberately pit rainbow communities and communities of colour against one another as a political tactic, leaving rainbow Asian Christians feeling caught²³. Many rainbow Asian Christians do feel not fully welcome in at least some of their religious, cultural and/or rainbow communities²⁴. In Western societies, Asian churches can be important sites of connection and cultural maintenance, with young people who attend cultural churches being more likely to feel connected to traditional cultural values. This can be tricky for rainbow young people to navigate, however values of family unity and Christian empathy can be motivators for previously non-affirming parents to work to understand their children's rainbow identities²⁵. For young Christians from confucian cultures, gaining academic and/or career success can be an important precursor to feeling able to come out at home²⁶. Where appropriate, schools can support rainbow students by assuring families that there are no sanctions for being rainbow, and by prioritising rainbow students' academic success.

Anecdotally, we find that some rainbow students come to New Zealand on exchange to find freedom and safety to explore their identities. Depending on media and academic freedoms in their home countries, access to cultural knowledge about rainbow identities may paradoxically be more accessible in New Zealand. This includes faith-based information. You can support exchange students by protecting their privacy, and by having conversations about safe and age-appropriate ways of navigating dating in New Zealand. You could also point them towards culture and language-specific rainbow media, through platforms such as Netflix.

Indigenous peoples in various Asian societies sometimes have different relationships to both Christianity and rainbow identities, than do the non-indigenous people of the

21 Upadhyay, N. (2020). Hindu nation and its queers: Caste, Islamophobia, and de/coloniality in India. *Interventions*, 22(4), 464-480.

22 Tong, J. K., Kang, S., Lee, P., & Lim, H. S. (2020). Asian Christian LGBTQs coming out to parents. *Routledge International Handbook of Religion in Global Society*, 155.

23 Cheng, P. S. (2013). *Rainbow theology: bridging race, sexuality, and spirit*. Church Publishing, Inc..

24 Cheng, P. S. (2013). *Rainbow theology: bridging race, sexuality, and spirit*. Church Publishing, Inc.

25 Tong, J. K., Kang, S., Lee, P., & Lim, H. S. (2020). Asian Christian LGBTQs coming out to parents. *Routledge International Handbook of Religion in Global Society*, 155, and Pak, J. (2020). Korean Americans, the Protestant Christian Church, and the Future of Asian American LGBTQ Rights. *Hastings Race & Poverty LJ*, 17, 553.

26 Tong, J. K., Kang, S., Lee, P., & Lim, H. S. (2020). Asian Christian LGBTQs coming out to parents. *Routledge International Handbook of Religion in Global Society*, 155.

societies they live in. For example, Christianity is an important marker of identity for some indigenous groups in Taiwan²⁷. Christian churches have played an important role in helping preserve indigenous languages, while simultaneously affecting change in those languages²⁸. Understanding the specific culture a person comes from can sometimes be more important than which country they are from, in terms of understanding the terrains they are navigating in regards to faith and rainbow identity.



To gain a greater understanding of the lived experiences of Christian rainbow people from Asian cultures, we recommend:

- Chu, J. (2014). Does Jesus Really Love Me?: A Gay Christian's Pilgrimage in Search of God in America
- Cheng, P. S. (2013). *Rainbow theology: bridging race, sexuality, and spirit*. Church Publishing, Inc..
- Goh, J. N., Meneses, K. C., & Messer, D. E. (2019). An ecclesiological praxis of inclusivity toward sexual diversity and HIV: Learning from Singapore and the Philippines. *International Journal of Public Theology*, 13(2), 163-184.
- Tong, J. K., Kang, S., Lee, P., & Lim, H. S. (2020). Asian Christian LGBTQs coming out to parents. *Routledge International Handbook of Religion in Global Society*, 155.

Current situation

Faith communities are still often difficult places for rainbow young people. A 2007 New Zealand study found that rainbow New Zealanders are disaffiliating from Christianity at 2.3x the rate of the general (non-rainbow) population²⁹. The same study showed that LGBT people are more likely to consider religion a 'difficulty' than a 'support'³⁰. The 2019 'Counting Ourselves' survey on transgender and non-binary people's wellbeing in New Zealand found that more than a quarter of participants had left a faith community because of rejection or fear of rejection³¹. Rejection of rainbow people is also 'the main blocker (i.e. barrier) to Kiwis engaging with Christianity'³².

Rainbow young people often struggle with mental health issues as a result of discrimination, with those facing multiple forms of discrimination carrying the heaviest burden³³. Rainbow young people are 5 times more likely to attempt suicide than their cisgender heterosexual peers³⁴. There is no New Zealand research exploring the connection between religious exclusion and suicidality, but those of us who are part

27 Yang, S. Y. (2008). Christianity, identity, and the construction of moral community among the Bunun of Taiwan. *Social Analysis*, 52(3), 51-74.

28 De Busser, R. (2019). The influence of Christianity on the indigenous languages of Taiwan: A Bunun case study. *International Journal of Taiwan Studies*, 2(2), 341-363.

29 Hendrickson, 2007

30 Hendrickson, 2007

31 Veale, et. al., 2019

32 McKrindle Research, 2018

33 Cormack, Stanley & Harris, 2018

34 Lucassen, et. al., 2014

of both the rainbow and faith communities have generally known or heard of young people who could not bear the pressure of believing that their selves and identities were offensive to God. International research shows that rainbow young people in faith communities have much better mental health if they are able to see their rainbow and spiritual identities as supporting each other, rather than being in conflict³⁵.

Despite the rejection rainbow young people often experience from churches, many are interested in faith and spirituality. In the Youth2001 and Youth'12 surveys, a higher percentage of sexual minority New Zealand students said religion or spirituality was important to them, compared to their heterosexual peers³⁶. Some rainbow youth raised in Christian churches persist with their faith despite the difficulties, others may explore different spiritual paths.



I used to lead my school's QSA [Queer Straight Alliance] and Christian groups. Queerness and Christianity aren't at odds - I've found my gender identity and sexual expression provide a new depth and appreciation for my spirituality. Being in both groups provided me with a community that validated and supported me - and it's so important faith and queer spaces incorporate all aspects of diversity.

– Andie, recently graduated secondary student

Denominational attitudes

Many Christian denominations are still not openly affirming of rainbow people, although this is on a spectrum. Within denominations, specific congregations/parishes and individuals have widely varying views. Some churches are openly affirming, others are 'underground affirming', where individual churches are welcoming, while also navigating denominational restrictions.

Groups associated with a church, for example youth groups and community ministries, can also have different attitudes from their parent church. If you are a school staff member or social service worker helping rainbow young people navigate this difficult terrain, we recommend you ask a local rainbow (or ally) Christian for 'on the ground' advice about safe spaces.

³⁵ Ream & Savin-Williams, 2005

³⁶ Lucassen, et. al., 2014

Scapegoats of ideological difference

In the ongoing discussions within faith communities about the acceptance of rainbow people, young people can easily become casualties of adults' ideological differences. Arguments about acceptance of rainbow people are sometimes more about understandings of authority³⁷, how to understand the Bible, or religious groups' identity markers³⁸ than actually about rainbow people. Rainbow young people often get torn in these disputes. Rather than being seen as young adults finding their way, they are seen as representing larger questions and disputes. Rainbow young people get seen as symbols, not as people.

We hope to carve out spaces for them, where they can just be, without people projecting adult arguments onto them. Where they can have a crush, experiment with their look, figure who they are, without adults around putting expectations on their identities and experiences. If there are ongoing discussions in a school or organisation you're in, please remind those who might have forgotten that being a teenager is a vulnerable time, and that adults need to make sure there are safe spaces for them.



³⁷ Hendrickson, 2009

³⁸ Vasey-Saunders, M. (2015). *The scandal of evangelicals and homosexuality: English evangelical texts, 1960-2010*. Farnham; Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing.

Multiple voices

In mainstream society, both rainbow and Christian communities can be somewhat underground. Both rainbow and religious people might be open about their identities in some settings, and keep quiet in others. When asking rainbow Christians to be involved in this resource, several said 'you want me to be out about both things?!' Some rainbow people and people of faith also speak different languages, or hold different cultural viewpoints. Given these multiple perspectives, a brief introduction to some of the communities involved may help you navigate the discussion. This is only a (very) brief summary, we encourage you to look up the suggested resources for fuller information.

Rainbow language

There are a lot of terms and slang used by the rainbow community. If you are not part of the community, or familiar with these terms, it can be helpful to learn the basics to be able to support rainbow young people.

Throughout this resource we use the term 'rainbow' as an umbrella term to describe people of diverse genders and sexualities, and variations in sex characteristics (also known as intersex). This is also known as LGBTQIA+. Language around gender, sex, sexuality is constantly evolving. Everyone has a unique relationship to the words they choose to use to define their gender, sex, or sexuality. One word, such as 'trans', might mean something slightly different to each person using this word.

The term sex generally refers to our bodies' characteristics, while gender refers to the social and cultural roles and expectations that have traditionally been based on a person's sex. When a baby is born, they are designated a sex, usually by a medical professional, based on the external appearance of their body. The baby is then socialised into the gender roles and expectations associated with that sex. People typically assume that a person's sex assigned at birth and their gender always align.

Although sex is often thought of as binary (i.e. female/male), it exists along a spectrum. Around 2.3% of the world's population is born with variations in sex characteristics (VSC) such as chromosomes and hormones that do not fit neatly into 'male' or 'female' categories. This is commonly known as intersex. The term endosex refers to people who are not intersex. Transgender (trans) and gender diverse are umbrella terms for people whose gender is different from the one they were assigned at birth. Although some trans and gender diverse people see themselves as changing their sex or gender when they transition, many have always seen themselves as the gender or sex they are now, even if they were assigned a different one at birth. While some trans people are also intersex, being trans and being intersex are different things. The term cisgender refers to someone whose gender aligns with the one they were assigned at birth (i.e. not trans or gender diverse). Between 1-2.5% students in Aotearoa secondary schools report they are trans, gender diverse, or questioning their gender³⁹. There are lots of words people use

³⁹ This statistic comes from the Youth12 and Youth19 surveys, both in which around 1% of secondary school-aged young people reported they were trans or gender diverse, and a further 0.5-2.5% were unsure if they were trans.

to describe their gender including trans, non-binary, genderfluid, genderqueer, agender, demigender, and more.

Gender expression is how we present ourselves through things such as clothing, speech, and mannerisms. A person's gender expression does not always align with their gender identity. For example, someone's expression might conform to their birth-assigned gender in situations where they do not feel safe enough to express their actual gender. People of all genders can express their gender differently during their lives. The terms gender expansive or gender nonconforming are sometimes used to describe people who may not necessarily be trans, but express their gender in different ways.

Sexuality is an umbrella term that refers to a person's sexual behavior, the gender/s a person is attracted to (orientation), and how they identify in relation to their sexuality. A person's sexuality can stay the same throughout their lives, or it can be fluid. Sexuality and gender are different aspects of a person's identity.

Rainbow students who belong to diverse ethnic or cultural groups might also use culturally specific language to describe their gender and sexuality such as takatāpui, whakawahine, or tangata-ira-tāne (te ao Māori), fa'afafine or fa'atama (Samoa), hijra (India), or kathoey (Thailand). Students' cultural identities are often understood through their cultural worldview, rather than in the same way as Eurocentric identities such as 'gay' or 'trans'.

For an introduction to the lived experience represented by some rainbow language, InsideOUT's video series <http://insideout.org.nz/more-than-four/> is a good start. Understanding the basics of rainbow terminology is also included in the professional development workshops we run for school staff - email hello@insideout.org.nz

Rainbow identities in other religions

While this resource is focussed on the intersections of Christian faith and rainbow identities, we acknowledge that there are rainbow people in all faiths. If you know a rainbow young person who has a faith, or has a faith background, it's good to learn a little about their religion.

No religion is a monolith, so a good step is to ask someone what form of a faith they practise. If Muslim, are they Sunni or Shia? If Buddhist, what school of Buddhism? Then read up a little about the basics before looking for information about rainbow people in that faith. To understand the basics, Wikipedia, and the 'X for Dummies' series is a good place to start.

Some specific resources on rainbow people and religion we recommend include:

- Trans Buddhists <https://transbuddhists.org/>
- Global Interfaith Network: For people of all sexes, sexual orientation, gender identities and expressions. <https://gin-ssogie.org/>
- Allah, Liberty and Love, by Irshad Manji <https://irshadmanji.com/allah-liberty-love-learn/>

You can also check out our booklist at <http://www.outontheshelves.insideout.org.nz/titles/> and use the word 'religion', or something more specific, in the keyword search bar.

Christian language

Churches also have a lot of language that can be hard for people unfamiliar with it to understand. We presume that staff at faith-based schools will know some of the basics, but if you are a teacher at a school where a lot of students are religious or come from religious families, and you want to be able to support rainbow young people to thrive, it can be worth gaining a little cultural knowledge. Ask a friend for help! If you have a friend who has spent a bit of time in church, they might be willing to help you decode things your students might be saying.

To get you started, a 'denomination' is a type of church, e.g. Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, Baptist etc. Different denominations have different names for similar roles. Catholics and Orthodox call their spiritual leaders 'priest' or 'father', Anglicans use 'priest' or 'vicar', others (Protestants) tend to use 'minister' or 'pastor'. The group of volunteers who help run a church might be called 'vestry', 'deacons', 'elders' or 'board'. These differing terms represent underlying differences in belief and custom. For Catholics, Orthodox and some Anglicans, tradition and the views of denominational leadership carry weight, and may be barriers to accepting rainbow people. For other Protestant denominations, 'what the Bible says' is by far the most important consideration, and thus so are discussions about rainbow-affirming ways of viewing the Bible, also called 'Scripture'.

Christians and denominations approach moral questions in different ways. Some phrases you might hear (from affirming or non-affirming Christians) are 'natural law', 'virtue', 'trajectory of Scripture', 'what would Jesus do', etc. All of these phrases are loaded with meaning for people for whom they are everyday language, but may be confusing if they are not part of your vocabulary.

There are also cultural differences between how various churches express their faith. In particular, Pacific churches may be sensitive about ideas imported from Pākehā denominations.

Christian rainbow language

Rainbow community members who are also Christians tend to be fluent in both 'languages'. Ideally, you would find someone like this to help support your school's journey towards supporting

Is 'being on a journey' wrong?

No community group becomes safe and welcoming for rainbow people overnight, it is always a journey. However, some rainbow Christians are allergic to the phrase 'we are on a journey'. Why is that?

Some churches and denominations have been known to use 'journey' language as a way to avoid being upfront about their anti-rainbow beliefs or practices, while never actually making progress on accepting rainbow people. The phrase 'it's a journey' can also be used to minimise harm to rainbow people, which often happens during discussions on this topic.

If your school is taking tangible steps on a journey towards providing safety for rainbow students, then that is great! Keep going.

rainbow young people! Christian rainbow people have also developed some language of our own. The term 'affirming' means a church, or individual Christian, who welcomes rainbow people as we are, without a hidden hope that we will eventually change.

Coded Christian language about rainbow people

“ There are lots of things churches might say that seem welcoming, but actually are polite covers for discriminatory attitudes. It's important to find out what is really meant.

– Sarah, church youth worker

There are terms that churches might use which in effect reject or discriminate against rainbow people, but seem polite. Rainbow Christians know to look behind these words to what they actually mean, but people less familiar with this dynamic might not.

'Love the sinner, hate the sin' is a classic example of this, as it presumes that being rainbow is a (bad) action, rather than an integral part of someone's being. Churches that say they are 'welcoming' and 'accepting' of rainbow people might mean it, or they might mean 'people who are currently rainbow are welcome here, but we hope they will change, and if they don't, we'll eventually move them on'. 'Discerning' is a word that means 'we are still deciding whether or not we affirm rainbow people'. If the church is actually putting time and prayer into forming their position, that is fine, but some churches have been 'discerning' for decades, and the term becomes a way of avoiding having to state their actual position. In secular society 'diversity' is a generic term covering gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, etc. In churches this can sometimes mean 'all diversity except rainbow', or 'diversity in theological opinion'.

This language can lead to harmful situations, especially for young rainbow people who might join a faith community, feel fully accepted, only to find out thereafter that the acceptance was conditional. It is the reason many rainbow Christians are wary of general 'diversity' statements and need to see specific information about rainbow issues before getting involved in a faith community or faith-based organisation.

Ask for help with translation

Yes, this is a lot to navigate! If you are working on rainbow inclusion within a faith-based school and are not fluent in one of these 'languages', we recommend you find someone to help you with cultural decoding. They don't have to be involved in the school community. For example, if you are a non-rainbow teacher supporting a rainbow group, you might have a friend who can help you with the language the young people might be using. If you are not Christian or from a Christian background, a friend who goes to church (ideally the same denomination as your school) might be

able to help you navigate religious jargon and culture. Please also feel free to reach out to InsideOUT for introductions.

Wellbeing regardless of religious belief

The fourth (oral) article of Te Tiriti o Waitangi promises religious freedom, and protection for Christian denominations, Māori custom, and other religions. At InsideOUT we hope that members of our rainbow community will be welcome if they choose to participate in a religious community. We hope that rainbow young people will be able to feel safe and to belong in faith-based schools, regardless of whether they personally hold the beliefs associated with that school. We hope that staff feel empowered to support rainbow young people, as an integral part of the practice of their faith or personal ethics, and (where relevant), to feel safe in their own rainbow identities.

Understanding more about Christian denominations

If you are in a school where a number of people come from a particular denomination, it could be useful to learn more about their beliefs, culture and practices. Official websites are a good place to start. We've listed some websites below for denominations and churches that have links with Christian schools, or with faith-based youth work providers that have links to schools.

<https://www.catholic.org.nz/>

<https://www.anglican.org.nz/>

<https://www.presbyterian.org.nz/>

<https://www.baptist.org.nz/>

Reformed Churches of New Zealand <https://rcnz.org.nz/>

Assemblies of God New Zealand <https://agnz.org/>

<https://www.elim.nz/>

<https://www.vineyard.org.nz/>

Another good source of New Zealand specific information is <https://teara.govt.nz/en> Māori faiths, such as Rātana, Ringatū and Pai Mārire often do not have official websites, so Te Ara is a good place to learn some basics. To go a bit deeper, the specific episodes on <https://www.taringapodcast.com/> are great.

Part two: Faith-based schools

This section offers advice to help faith-based schools support and affirm rainbow young people. Doing this work can have some particular tensions, and we hope this guide will help you to navigate them. In our experience, change is safer and more sustainable if students and teachers, rainbow people and allies work together, so this section is aimed at all those groups.

This section may also help schools who serve communities with significant Christian influences, who wish to interact respectfully with both the religious and/or rainbow people in their community.

For more general resources about rainbow young people and schools, have a look at our other resources at <http://insideout.org.nz/resources/>

Students' experiences

Rainbow students' experience of faith-based schools



Most students are supportive and all teachers are acceptive and supportive

– Alfie



I think in general, people at my school tend to just ignore what they don't understand, and the 'queerness' of queer students (or at least the very few that I know of) is generally just ignored or not talked about. There aren't any groups for rainbow people to congregate and 'queerness' is generally considered a 'controversial issue'. The majority (or at least the loudest people) are openly unaccepting towards the rainbow community, however, there are many students and a few teachers who are accepting or supportive. This leads to a neutral, leaning towards negative experience for rainbow students.

– Luke

Rainbow students have widely different experiences of attending faith-based schools. Some feel supported by staff, and are able to attend thriving QSAs. Students have told us that events like a pride day in the students' common room, or messages of

support for the rainbow community in chapel services, have meant a lot. Others have more negative experiences, such as being told that 'being gay is a sin, and that LGBTQ+ people are going to hell'. One student said 'The chaplain says he's "supporting righteousness" alongside mentioning "gay people" as code to let us know he doesn't approve'⁴⁰. Students have been seen as in need of fixing after coming out, 'I was told "that's something to speak to a counsellor about"'.

Students also report significant bullying in some faith-based schools, including personal questions, harassment, name calling, being told to 'go and die', and physical violence. Some have felt that the school considers them at fault for the bullying because of their identities, being told 'it's because you let people know you're gay'. For others, their experience of bullying is minimised with comments such as 'everyone is entitled to their opinion'. Some students from secular schools have reported online bullying from students of faith-based schools, for example having comments like 'you're going to hell' posted on their social media.

We have heard from some takatāpui students that they experience different pressures in Christian schools with a strong kaupapa Māori style. These schools may be heteronormative rather than overtly homophobic. While students might not experience overt homophobia, there is a complete silence about the existence of rainbow identities. Other students tell us they feel experimentation and diversity is allowed, although it is seen as secondary to the continuation of whakapapa through heterosexual relationships. The increasing availability of fertility treatment may be shifting that. The assumption that everyone is cisgender and straight, or that straight is best, can be very confusing and restricting for takatāpui youth, leaving them feeling torn between their Māori and rainbow identities. Each student's experience is different according to their relationships with their kaiako, the attitudes of their kaiako, and the openness of their friends.

Ways to approach rainbow topics

It can be challenging in any school environment to raise awareness of the need for greater support and welcome for rainbow young people. The person doing this work will always get at least some backlash, and this can be stronger in faith-based schools.

Below are a few strategic ways to raise the topic of support for rainbow young people. In general, there will always be some people who feel that rainbow identities are wrong and inherently at odds with Christian beliefs. We recommend not making them feel backed into a corner, as if they're being forced to go against their beliefs. Can they step back and let people who do feel comfortable supporting rainbow young people do so?

Legal rights and responsibilities

The 2020 Education Act states that State and State-integrated boards have primary objectives, including ensuring that the school is a 'physically and emotionally safe place for all students and staff'. School leadership must take 'all reasonable steps to eliminate racism, stigma, bullying, and any other forms of discrimination within the school'⁴¹.

⁴⁰ From InsideOUT's survey of student experiences.

⁴¹ s 127 Education and Training Act 2020

Research shows that rainbow young people, if they feel welcome as rainbow young people, have better mental health and academic outcomes⁴². A school which does not take action to ensure it is a safe and inclusive environment for rainbow rangatahi, and/or which keeps silent about their existence, is unlikely to be meeting this primary objective.

For other information about the legal frameworks which provide backing for the proactive inclusion of rainbow students, see our 'Legal Rights' resource at insideout.org.nz/resources.

Information is healthy

Another way of framing rainbow inclusion is the 'right' to information. Rainbow young people need information that supports their wellbeing, including information about safe sex, mental health support, and transitioning. Those that have religious beliefs should have the knowledge that there are rainbow-affirming Christians out there. Sharing this knowledge does not necessarily mean you are promoting one interpretation of faith or scripture, it just means you are ensuring young people have access to the breadth of Christian tradition.

As an expression of faith

My (Bronwyn's) church's junior youth group is leading the charge for our church to be openly welcoming to rainbow people. To them, it's unthinkable to be part of a faith community that excludes rainbow people. More and more young people of faith feel that the social justice beliefs that are part of our traditions also include an obligation to be active in defence of rainbow people's rights. Just as some peoples' faith and conscience leads them to be wary of rainbow folks, other peoples' faith and conscience leads them to welcome us.

While discussing another issue over which believers had strong disagreements, St. Paul said 'Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To their own master, servants stand or fall. And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand. One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind' (Romans 14:4-5, NIV). We hope that those who take action for rainbow people from a place of faith won't have their faith questioned by others.

Celebration – Acceptance – Tolerance – Silencing – Condemnation

Currently faith communities' attitudes to rainbow people fall somewhere on this continuum. Celebration means that rainbow people are seen as part of the beautiful diversity of God's creation, with gifts to contribute to the community. Acceptance means it's fine for rainbow people to exist in the community, but their identities, culture and history aren't really discussed. Tolerance means rainbow people can be in the community, but with limits e.g. they might not be allowed in leadership roles, and being in a rainbow relationship might be frowned upon. Silencing means any mention

⁴² Fenaughty et al, 2019

Celebration

Rainbow culture and identity are visible and established in the school, including in its spiritual life. Rainbow students know that they can express their identities and be safe.

There are comfortably out rainbow people in the school community.

- Rainbow content is taught in curriculum subjects, not as an 'issue' or 'topic for debate'.
- The leadership of rainbow students is celebrated.
- School policies are in place to care for rainbow students.
- The school actively prevents homophobia, biphobia and transphobia.
- Rainbow students are supported to form a QSA, which is given the same support and freedoms as other student groups.

Acceptance

Rainbow culture and identity are visible in some aspects of school life, and the school is working to make this more established.

There are some out people in the school community, but this still feels like an act of courage.

- Staff are beginning to include rainbow content into the curriculum, not as an 'issue' or 'topic for debate'.
- School policies are being put in place to care for rainbow students.
- Some staff actively prevent homophobia and transphobia
- Rainbow students are permitted to form a QSA, which is given the same support and freedoms as other student groups.

Tolerance

The school permits some visibility of rainbow identities and discussion of rainbow culture, but there is an assumption that that being cisgender and heterosexual is best.

It is likely that most rainbow students only come out in the last years of school, and doing so is scary.

- If there is a QSA, it might not be allowed to advertise, and is more strictly monitored than other clubs in the school.
- Asking for policy changes or support feels tricky. Students/staff that do so feel they are 'being difficult'.
- Homophobic or transphobic bullying is just dealt with as 'bullying', there is no specific prevention of 'phobias'.

Silencing

In theory the school is 'OK' with rainbow identities, but there is a veil of silence over the topic. There are no policies covering the needs of rainbow students, and rainbow history and culture is not taught.

Rainbow students may feel that they can be rainbow, but they shouldn't express it or discuss it.

- Phrases like 'it's just identity politics', 'we don't believe in separating people out', and 'we have to make sure that everyone is safe' make it hard to raise the specific needs of rainbow rangatahi.
- Rainbow identities of youth are seen as 'just a phase'.
- Staff may not say homophobic, biphobic or transphobic things, but allow bullying by students to continue.
- Policies to support rainbow students are 'being considered', but are not actually written.
- Students coming out are treated as if they are disclosing 'risky' or worrying behaviour.

Condemnation

The school actively or indirectly teaches that rainbow identities are wrong.

Rainbow students may feel that they are inherently wrong or sinful. They either hide their identity, quietly disappear, or pay a huge price for coming out.

- Staff state or imply that Christianity and rainbow identities are mutually exclusive.
- Ideas from conversion therapy may be put onto rainbow young people.
- The school may believe 'there are no rainbow students here'.
- Suggestions of policies to support rainbow students are shut down.
- Students coming out are treated as if they are disclosing 'risky' or worrying behaviour.

of rainbow topics is not allowed, and rainbow people have to keep their identities hidden. Condemnation means members of the community are actively involved in promoting prejudice against rainbow people.

The table below applies this to faith-based schools. Of course, we would prefer that young members of our community, if they are also part of faith communities or faith-based schools, would be in places which celebrate them. Our experience and the research mentioned above indicate that celebration is ideal and acceptance at least is necessary to ensure the safety and wellbeing of rainbow rangatahi. However, anything from tolerance up at least gives our young people a space to be, as long as there is change in a positive direction. We recommend that you look at where your school community is on this spectrum, and try and move it towards celebration. It won't happen straight away. Slow, doable steps are most likely to help create a safe journey for rainbow people and allies, both staff and students.

Young people need adult support and input

“It's been really isolating, as a queer student and as a non-Catholic. I often feel like the school doesn't want students like me there because we make too much trouble and don't fit in.”

– Grace, Year 13, queer female student

Young people need adults in their life that they can be open with, that can listen non-judgmentally, and can provide support and advice in hard times. Only 15% of rainbow young people feel they can talk to their parents about topics connected to their rainbow identities⁴³, making supportive school staff all the more important.

InsideOUT hears from staff at faith-based schools who are distressed because they are being blocked from supporting rainbow young people. Giving these staff permission to follow their conscience does not mean other staff are forced to do the same. Also, students who are able to be open with adults in their life are more likely to feel able to reach out if they experience a crisis or are unsafe in any way.

General measures

“Show your allyship! Be open about it! Make it obvious that queerphobia will not be tolerated!”

– Keifer, Year 13, student in a mainstream school in a religious community

⁴³ Lucassen, et. al., 2014.

Other InsideOUT resources have more thorough guides to what is needed to create rainbow inclusive schools. For comprehensive information, we recommend:

<http://insideout.org.nz/resources>

<https://www.inclusive.tki.org.nz/guides/supporting-lgbtqa-students/>

<https://health.tki.org.nz/Teaching-in-HPE/Policy-Guidelines/Relationships-and-Sexuality-Education>

We include a brief list here. A school that is safe and fully accepting for rainbow students needs to have:

- Ability for all students to wear the uniform options appropriate for them, ensuring there are clothing options available suiting all genders
- Access to gender neutral bathrooms and changing rooms
- Rainbow content in the school's sexuality education curriculum
- Rainbow content in the rest of the school's curriculum
- Anti-bullying policies and kaupapa that specifically protect rainbow students
- Permission and support to form rainbow diversity groups
- Planning to ensure extra-curricular events, such as camps and sports, are inclusive and safe for rainbow young people.



It would be good to know that more teachers are supportive, without having to out yourself and ask.

– Fern, student in a faith-based school

Inclusion of gender diverse students



Being a traditional Catholic school ... there are no options for people who would want to present more masculinely, and I for one feel very dysphoric in the uniform

– Kylo, age 14, trans male student

Gender diverse students face 'considerable mistreatment and discrimination' in some school environments. As a result, they also suffer higher rates of mental distress than non-gender diverse students⁴⁴. In society there is often less understanding of diverse gender identities than there is of sexual minority ones. An exception to this is Pacific communities, where there are strong cultural precedents for diverse gender identities such as fa'afafine, māhūkāne, akatane, māhū, and many others. However, there might not be an accepting cultural construct for sexual minorities. Gender diverse students

⁴⁴ <https://www.fmhs.auckland.ac.nz/assets/fmhs/faculty/ahrg/docs/Youth12-transgender-young-people-fact-sheet.pdf>

from faith-based schools have told us about difficult experiences, such as being told ‘there’s no such thing as transgender’, and being kept away from other students. Transgender students have told us about their identities being confused with sexual minority ones, for example a teacher calling a trans male student a ‘lesbian’.

It is important to make sure gender diverse students are welcome and supported. Do this by using the student’s preferred name and pronouns, respecting their choices around clothing and bathrooms, and respecting their privacy. Students that come out at school as gender diverse should not be forced to tell anyone they don’t want to, including their family. For more about supporting gender diverse students, take a look at our resource *Making Schools Safer: for trans, gender diverse and intersex youth* at insideout.org.nz/resources.

How do I balance rainbow inclusion with inclusion of students from religious communities?

It can be difficult for staff to ensure all groups of students feel welcome in school, especially when it may seem as if their needs clash. Here are some tips some schools have found useful:

Remember that there are students who have multiple identities

Sometimes inclusion of rainbow students and religious students is framed as either/or. In your teaching use examples that acknowledge that people are both. For example, a scenario in health education could include a character who is Catholic and bisexual.

Don’t let inclusion be a competition

Sometimes minority groups need to compete for resources, which sets up the belief that they are against each other. Don’t let someone’s inclusion be at someone else’s expense. For example, if Christian students feel uncomfortable in sexuality education, instead of removing rainbow content, include cultural and/or religious content. This could include adding faith-based resources and quotes to what you use in class, and acknowledging the pivotal role that God, faith and community can play in some people’s decision-making around relationships. People are less likely to be sensitive about others being included if they see themselves represented in the curriculum.

Consider getting together!

If you are a student from one minority group in the school, for example a QSA, consider reaching out to students from other groups and see how you can back each other up. You’ll probably have a lot of experiences in common. In one school, the leaders of the QSA raised with school leadership the ways they had seen racism impact Māori students. The leaders of the Kapa Haka group attended a training on rainbow identities, and brainstormed ways they could help prevent bullying and make kapa haka safe for gender diverse students.

Religious Instruction and Religious Education



Our religious education teacher said that homophobia is wrong and explained why.

– Sarah, student



I've learnt a lot about Christianity and it has opened my mind a lot. My school is also really small, like a lot of faith-based schools, and I like that a lot.

– Grace, Year 13, queer female student



My Religious Studies teacher has been very supportive and helps me with the group me and some friends started. Along with him, our school counsellor and head of Religious Studies have all been very supportive. All we need now is our school heads to approve.

– Germaine, student

Ideally, rainbow theologies and stories of rainbow people of faith would be integrated into the religious education curriculum. If you are a RE teacher or religious instruction leader whose context allows this, then that is wonderful! The third section of this resource is a collection of stories, profiles and resources about the crossover of faith and rainbow identities. Please feel free to use these in your classes. We have also included links to online resources and a book list. Depending on the denomination your school is associated with, you might be able to access support through there. (Extra for experts: if you can't access LGBT-supportive materials through your church, advocate for them to create some!)

- We know this might invite push-back from some students, which may create an environment that is very unsafe for rainbow students, especially those just coming into their identities. No one should have to sit and listen while other people debate whether God accepts them or not! If you are worried about this, here are a few ideas:
- Include rainbow content as a special topic that students can choose. This could be as part of a human rights series, where students can choose from a range of topics. If students present back to the class, put limits on what is acceptable. Students should not be allowed to present views which are harmful to others in the class.

- If you are working with an older class, or a class with confident rainbow students, check first with them how they would like the topic covered.
- Offer a separate session that students can opt into. If you have these connections, you could invite someone who is both rainbow and person of faith to speak to the group. The benefit of playing that role as an outsider is that we get to leave afterwards. So a person that is invited in might (or might not) be open to fielding difficult questions. Another idea could be to host a faith and pride panel and invite a range of Christian rainbow people to share their views and experiences.

Inclusion across the curriculum



I have had positive discussions about spirituality and the LGBTQ+ community with a teacher at my school. This was helpful as it reinforced that I was able to hold my own in a conversation about these topics and that people in this environment could listen to, and discuss with me respectfully.

– Luke, student

As with all schools, InsideOUT recommends that faith-based schools include rainbow content across the curriculum. This could be as a stand-alone topic, such as doing a segment on Stonewall in History or Social Studies. Or it could be through inclusion in other ways, such as choosing titles for students to read in English that have rainbow characters. Language teachers can talk to students about the cultural framing and words used for rainbow identities in that culture.

Rainbow inclusion does not have to mean a big stand-alone topic. Small things, like a teacher putting a rainbow flag by their desk, or using a hypothetical family example with same-gender parents, or not assuming a male student will want a girlfriend, will make a huge difference for any rainbow students in your class.

Sexuality education

InsideOUT consistently receives feedback from rainbow people that they want access to relationships and sexuality education that reflects them. They want information about sexuality and gender, healthy relationships, and safer sex.

Three great resources that incorporate Christian beliefs and acceptance of rainbow people into discussion about healthy sexual ethics are:

- ‘Love does no harm: Sexual Ethics for the Rest of Us’ by Marie Fortune.
- ‘Just Love’ by Margaret Farley.
- ‘Shameless’ by Nadia Bolz-Weber.

None of these books assumes a 'wait until marriage' approach. However rainbow young people can also be included in curricula that encourage young people not to be sexually active. Rainbow people are no more or less likely to be sexually active than their peers, and some rainbow people choose to be abstinent until marriage for religious reasons, including some of the authors of books in the list provided in Part Three.

It is important that rainbow students are not put on the spot in class to speak to rainbow topics, or feel spotlighted. If you have questions about sexuality education and rainbow people, please feel free to contact InsideOUT, another rainbow organisation, or Family Planning. InsideOUT can offer tailored training for health and sexuality teachers. We acknowledge that many teacher education programs do not adequately cover rainbow issues, putting teachers in a tricky position.

“Last week we had a session from the ‘Living Life to the Fullest Program’ and the teacher kept repeatedly talking about boys and boyfriends. She then looked directly at me and quickly added ‘or partners!’. It was incredibly embarrassing and made me feel super isolated.

– Grace, Year 13, queer female student

Prevention of bullying

General anti-bullying policies often fail to prevent the specific homophobic and transphobic bullying that happens to people from the rainbow community. All schools need to have a specific plan to counter bullying against rainbow young people. This should include setting a culture where it is known that bullying of rainbow people is unacceptable, teachers are trained and empowered to respond in the moment if they hear offensive comments, and a process to respond if bullying is reported. For help with developing and implementing a policy about bullying towards the rainbow community, please see our comprehensive anti-bullying resource at insideout.org.nz/resources

Faith-based schools need to be prepared for the possibility that faith may be used as a cover or excuse for bullying rainbow people. Making someone feel backed into a corner and forced to change their views on rainbow people is only likely to be effective when the teacher is in the room. A more effective approach could be to talk about how bullying itself goes against core Christian principles of aroha, humility and generosity. Regardless of identity or belief, no one can use Christianity as a cover for harmful behaviour without betraying the tenets of their faith.

“Pleasant words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the body

(Proverbs 16:24).

FAQ

As InsideOUT, when we are advocating for rainbow inclusion in faith-based schools, we come up against some common objections. We summarise our answers below.

Aren't LGBT+ identities separatist/divisive?

No, they're not - rainbow people play sports, find exams hard, have crushes, and want good friends just like everyone else. However, given the discrimination rainbow people still face, we sometimes need our own safe places to recover and support each other. Christians gather in groups to support each other too, to pray and to talk about topics that interest us. That's why we have faith-based schools!

Isn't pride a sin?

We think there's a difference between pride as in 'arrogance', and pride as in 'self-esteem'. Rainbow people often experience discrimination, so focusing on self-esteem and community strength is about countering that and feeling good and healthy.

The Bible is against arrogance, 'When pride comes, then comes disgrace; but wisdom is with the humble' (Proverbs 11:2). However, it is supportive of healthy self-esteem based on who we are, not on what others think of us, 'All must test their own work; then that work, rather than their neighbor's work, will become a cause for pride'. (Galatians 6:4). Pride is not so much about the individual as feeling good about the community as a whole. The Bible also teaches that God loves and values everyone. Sometimes people from marginalised communities have to pause and remember that we are valuable too. Rainbow people often do this through pride festivals. That being said, if you prefer to use the language 'rainbow celebration' instead, go for it!

But we don't want to encourage children to be gay/trans

Just as you can't convert someone to being straight or cisgender, you can't make someone transgender, gay or bisexual by talking about rainbow topics. What you can do is give young people information about the range of identities, and support them to feel okay with themselves, leading to better mental health and academic outcomes⁴⁵.

We don't want to sexualise young people

Rainbow identities aren't inherently sexual. Depending on the individual, a young person realising they have a rainbow identity is often about feelings - 'I feel like I don't fit being a girl', 'I think I have a crush on a girl', 'I don't think I'll get a crush on anyone'. Respecting young people's rainbow identities does not mean young people are more likely to begin sexual behaviour, but it does make it more likely that if/when they start having relationships they'll have adults who they feel comfortable approaching for advice if needed.

⁴⁵ Factors Associated with Academic Achievement for Sexual and Gender Minority and Heterosexual Cisgender Students: Implications from a Nationally Representative Study (Fenaughty et al, 2019) a secondary data analysis of Youth'12

Rainbow youth are often uncomfortably aware that adults sexualise their identities. Please speak up if you hear adults talking about rainbow young people in ways that make assumptions about their behaviour. You have the opportunity to show them that not everything rainbow is adult/sex related, nor do all adults perceive it that way! 'Rainbow' can mean playing with outfits or gender-affirming make-up, baking pride themed cupcakes, or learning about famous rainbow people.

Our community won't like it

You might be surprised! One of the chief issues many New Zealanders have with churches and faith-based institutions is their negative treatment of rainbow people⁴⁶. You might find more support amongst your parent body than you think.

However, it is possible you'll get some push-back. Behind the push-back is likely to be one of the myths above, or a fear that the school is starting to lose its special character. If you can guess the concerns behind the push-back, answer those concerns, and assure people that affirming rainbow students does not mean the school is turning its back on its traditions, its special character, or faith. When dealing with concerns from your school community you can make use of the law, a focus on student wellbeing, and the Ministry of Education's Relationships and Sexuality Education Guidelines to explain why you're supporting rainbow young people in your school.



⁴⁶ McKindle Research, 2018.

Rainbow groups in faith-based schools

E kore e ngawhere, he maire tū wao, mā te toki e tua

It will not give way easily, it is the forest-standing maire, which requires an axe to fell it



A QSA is a place where you don't have to pretend to be less eccentric than you are

– Year 13 student

What is a rainbow group?

A rainbow diversity group, or Queer⁴⁷ Straight Alliance (QSA), is a school-based group that is open to all students. Groups focus on supporting and creating space and inclusion for rainbow people and issues. As the group gains in confidence, they might also advocate for change within the wider school community. Students may join a group for various reasons, such as to seek support, to meet like-minded people, to learn how to support their friends/family, or because they are passionate about human rights and equality.

Further resources on this can be found at insideout.org.nz/resources

These groups are called 'queer straight alliances' to emphasise that you don't have to be rainbow to attend. This allows students to come along with their mates, gives non-rainbow students the chance to show support, and means that rainbow students aren't necessarily outing themselves by coming.

In faith-based schools, it's important to make sure your QSA is safe for people of the faith of the school, other faith backgrounds, or none. In our experience, rainbow young people are good at navigating this tension. Ideas to help include considering the spiritual aspect of safety in your group kaupapa, inviting rainbow elders of various faiths and spiritualities to visit and speak about their experiences, and letting people know in advance if potentially sensitive topics will be discussed so they can opt out if they want.

High-school QSAs should be open to students of all year groups, and students should

⁴⁷ 'Queer' is a term that was originally used as an insult, but has been reclaimed by some of the rainbow community. If your school/community prefers not to use this word, that's ok.

be allowed to advertise the group (as long as they follow the rules which apply to all groups). It is important that schools do not attempt to divert students by suggesting they start a general 'diversity group', rainbow students need a space in which they can prioritise their own needs and support each other. However if this idea comes from students, then great.

Common activities for QSAs to do include

- Having casual hang-out time
- Having kai and playing games
- Watching rainbow media together
- Learning more about various identities under the rainbow umbrella, including the various cultural expressions of rainbow identities
- Talking about mental health and self-care
- Coming up with strategies to deal with issues of common concern. For example, if rainbow students are experiencing bullying, the QSA might nominate some students to talk to school leadership about it.

Some people worry that a QSA will be a dating group, with inappropriate behaviour. If a group meets at lunch-time, with teacher supervision, informing people about that should allay this concern. There may well be dating within the group, but that is the same with any other school activity. Moreover, if young people are not forced to date in secret, their relationships are more likely to be healthy, and they are more likely to be able to access help if they have difficulties, and emotional support in the event of a break-up.

Primary and intermediate learners

InsideOUT also supports primary and intermediate schools, which of course is a very different context! Our work with primary and intermediate schools involves supporting schools to be safe for three main groups; rainbow families, gender diverse children, and 'future rainbows', or children that are not aware of a rainbow identity yet, but may discover it at a later stage. Work that supports these children also improves things for children that aren't rainbow but don't fit standard norms, for example a boy who loves both sports and sewing.

Some children are aware of their gender diverse identity at a very young age, consistently telling the adults around them through language, dress or play 'I'm a boy', 'I'm a girl' or 'I'm neither/both'. Other kids explore gender through play and dress-up, before finding a more permanent identity which may or may not be a rainbow one. We want all children to be free to be who they are, to be able to explore, and to be able grow healthily into their future adult selves free from restriction or shame. Contrary to myths about organisations like InsideOUT, we do not believe in sexualising children or imposing permanent labels on them, nor do we promote irreversible medical choices for them.

Our professional development workshops with primary and intermediate staff involve understanding age appropriate ways to support rainbow children and to give all children understanding that rainbow people are just part of the diversity that makes up our world. For faith-based primary and intermediate schools we hope that rainbow children will receive the message that God loves them, that it makes God sad if anyone is mean to them, and that they are created good.

Rainbow youth and mental health

Rainbow young people in Aotearoa face significant mental health challenges as a result of discrimination and exclusion⁴⁸. According to the Youth '12 survey, 41% of students with minority sexualities experienced major depressive symptoms, as opposed to 11% of their heterosexual peers⁴⁹. Similarly, 40% of transgender students had major depressive symptoms, and nearly half had self-harmed in the survey year⁵⁰. For more on rainbow people and mental health, see 'Lucy's story' in part three of this resource, or go to <http://www.rainbowmentalhealth.nz/>

For rainbow young people in contact with faith communities, it is important to have spaces where they can be their full selves. Having a QSA at school can be an important protective factor. For young people that need to access counselling, or other mental health services, it can be very difficult to find a professional that understands, and is comfortable talking about, both rainbow identities and Christian faith.

If you are a young person in this situation, you might need to consider what is most important to you. Would it be better to have a counsellor with a solid understanding of your faith, who is willing to learn about rainbow culture, or vice versa? You might need to shop around a bit, even though that's hard! If you feel like the professional has bias against any part of your identity, if you have the ability to question them, do so. If they don't engage with you on this, they are probably not safe for you. If you have any choice in the matter, trust your gut and find someone else.

Conversion practices

Conversion practices are any form of religious or secular 'treatment' or 'counselling' which aims to change someone's sexuality or gender identity. In New Zealand, conversion practices are unlikely to be the dramatic 'exorcism' style event that is sometimes represented in the media, it is more likely to involve someone being sent to a pastor for prayer 'to help them'⁵¹, or being told that enough fervent participation in spiritual activities will stop them from being rainbow. There is no evidence that conversion practices work, and substantial evidence that it is harmful, leading to negative mental health outcomes, including suicidality⁵².

48 <http://www.rainbowmentalhealth.nz/>

49 Lucassen, M. F. G., Clark, T. C., Moselen, E., Robinson, E. M., & Adolescent Health Research Group. (2014). Youth'12 The health and wellbeing of secondary school students in New Zealand: Results for young people attracted to the same sex or both sexes.

50 <https://www.fmhs.auckland.ac.nz/assets/fmhs/faculty/ahrg/docs/Youth12-transgender-young-people-fact-sheet.pdf>

51 https://www.nzherald.co.nz/lifestyle/news/article.cfm?c_id=6&objectid=12267906

52 Mallory, Brown & Conron, 2019

Conversion therapy has been banned in several countries. It has been declared harmful by the American Psychological Association⁵³ and the New Zealand Association of Counsellors⁵⁴. Leaders of Exodus International, once a prominent 'ex-gay' group, have since publicly acknowledged that their work had been harmful, and apologised⁵⁵. At InsideOUT, we unequivocally believe that conversion therapy is harmful. This is now widely accepted even by non-affirming Christians, who increasingly reject it⁵⁶.

If you discover that young rainbow people are being encouraged to 'try and change' please do all you can to prevent it! This could be through 'softer' measures such as helping the young person find the words to say 'no' to conversion therapy, and supporting them in the aftermath of taking this stand. If the young person gives permission, you could talk directly to the adults involved about the harms of conversion therapy. If there is concern that a young person is being harmed, a referral to Oranga Tamariki may be necessary.

Further support

There are a range of resources and projects available through www.insideout.org.nz

Other schools have been on this journey too. If you want the chance to talk informally with staff in a similar role in other faith-based schools, contact us at InsideOUT and we should be able to make contact with someone.

Many regions have a local InsideOUT Schools' Coordinator, whose job is to support schools as they take steps to be more welcoming and safe for rainbow students. We prioritise work with schools that are just getting started, and schools that are in the process of setting up a QSA. Go to <https://insideout.org.nz/our-team/> to find the contact details for the coordinator in your region.



53 American Psychological Association, 2009.

54 <https://www.nzac.org.nz/about-us/nzac-policies/>

55 <https://edition.cnn.com/2013/06/20/us/exodus-international-shutdown/index.html>

56 Hill, Wesley. 2018. 'Gay Boys and Their Evangelical Parents'. Spiritual Friendship (blog). 3 December 2018. <https://spiritualfriendship.org/2018/12/03/gay-boys-and-their-evangelical-parents/>; Writes, Emily. 2020. 'Parenting Place Charity Cuts Ties with Counsellor over Sexuality Conversion Therapy'. The Spinoff, 10 October 2020. <https://thespinoff.co.nz/society/10-10-2020/parenting-place-conversion-therapy/>.

School relationships with faith communities

There is a spectrum of how connected faith-based schools are to their parent denominations. Some schools are intricately connected with their denomination or local church, whereas for others, the faith-based aspect of the school is more of an historical connection, part of the school's tradition. How connected your school is to the denomination it is part of will of course affect how you go about supporting rainbow rangatahi. For schools with a strong diocesan, parish or church connection, involving church leaders or chaplains in the journey will help significantly. For schools where faith is just one ingredient in an overall school tradition, let the community know that the school's support for rainbow students can be an expression of that tradition, rather than undermining it. For example, schools which value student leadership or social justice, can encourage students to utilise these values in the formation of the QSA.

School boards and parent community

Schools are required to consult with their communities about their health and sexuality curriculum and teaching. The 'Health and Sexuality Education Guidelines' encourage schools to 'Allow their ākonga [students] freedom of expression in relation to their gender identities and sexual orientation, including the right to determine their own identity and name' and 'Include content on the diversity of sex characteristics, sexuality, and gender identities in their curriculum programmes'⁵⁷. These two tasks can leave faith-based schools caught between a rock and a hard place. There is definitely a tension here!

We recommend:

- Considering carefully how to consult with your community, especially when it comes to how rainbow issues are framed. Some conservative Christian groups use misleading language about rainbow issues, for example implying that groups such as InsideOUT are giving hormones to young people. Giving factual information about what you are considering can help allay fears.
- Don't assume your community will be against inclusion of rainbow topics, and challenge others that make that assumption.
- Try to prevent rainbow young people being seen as on the other side in a 'Jesus versus "the world"' kind of debate. As this resource shows, rainbow people are not inherently anti-Christian.
- Give staff and board members that will lead consultations a chance to practise talking about rainbow topics in a safe environment, and to ask any questions they might have, so that fear and awkwardness doesn't colour how the rainbow community is referred to.

⁵⁷ <https://health.tki.org.nz/Teaching-in-HPE/Policy-Guidelines/Relationships-and-Sexuality-Education>

The tensions in consulting on sexuality education can be exacerbated by the lack of contact between school boards and the student body. School staff generally have a relationship with students, and an awareness of their needs. School board members and the parent community may have a stronger connection to the school's traditions and special character, and may not be strongly connected to current students outside their own families. They may not be aware of how important active support is for rainbow wellbeing. Rainbow alumni of faith-based schools may have had negative experiences, and are less likely to maintain an ongoing relationship with the school, such as joining a board.

It might be important for the school board to have training on rainbow communities, and/or to hear from rainbow rangatahi, potentially via teachers that support them. If you are a rainbow student, and you're pretty confident in yourself and your identity, would you be willing to go to a board meeting and talk to them about why this is important, or send a letter? A staff member you trust might be able to help you prepare, or you could ask InsideOUT for help.

Denominational leadership

If you are a member of a denominational leadership team, you have probably been involved in discernment processes around rainbow people's participation in the church. Change in the church may take generations, but we don't get another chance of growing into adulthood without internalising stigma and shame - please support schools in your denomination to affirm and uplift rainbow rangatahi.

Regardless of your stance, please consider accessing training in understanding the rainbow community, and the issues our young people face. Schools where you have influence need the freedom to support rainbow young people in ways that allow them to thrive and be all that God intended, rather than shutting them down.

If you're a school staff member who is supporting rainbow youth, and are frustrated that the church or the school system as a whole isn't there yet, we get it! Please be aware that we, and the young people you support, value your commitment, advocacy and aroha. If focussing on supporting the young people around you is as much as you can do, please keep doing that! Other people can work on systemic change. Your mahi may well keep some young people alive.

Church communities

The role of church communities in supporting rainbow people (including youth) is a huge topic! InsideOUT can provide professional development for staff on working respectfully with the rainbow community. For further information see the links and resources section towards the end of this resource.

Youth advocacy

Rangatahi are often politically engaged. If you are a student in a faith-based school, you could consider finding out the school's denomination's stance on rainbow identities and rainbow people living full lives. For example, can people in same-gender relationships join the church? Can they get married in the church? Could a person in a same-gender relationship, or a gender minority person fulfill a leadership role in the church?

If you want, you can advocate for change. Religious education or social studies teachers, this could be a class project. Support your students by showing them how to advocate for change. Given the generational attitudinal change on these topics, young people are sometimes shocked to find out their church's official stance.



Part three: Resources and stories at the rainbow-faith intersection

There is no escaping the fact that most churches have traditionally been harmful to rainbow people and communities. However, rainbow Christians have always existed, having our own relationships with God, and creating our own theologies, exploring between the official stances of our communities and the realities of how God cares for rainbow people.

In this section we share a range of stories, profiles, and ideas at the faith and rainbow intersection. Feel free to use these as inspiration, in class, or as a discussion-starter in your QSA or youth group.

Karakia, inoi and prayers

This section contains a selection of karakia and prayers that chaplains, RE sessions or RE classes, QSAs and individuals can use if they wish. We include both karakia and prayers so groups have a range of ways of caring for the spiritual well being of the group. We acknowledge that karakia are not inherently religious.

InsideOUT's karakia

This karakia was written by Jaye Barclay, InsideOUT's former chairperson.

E ngā rangatira, ngā tūpuna, ngā tuākana uenuku
Whāngaihia ō tātou wairua hei mahia te mahi nui.
Nā rātou i whakatakoto te ara
kia māmā ake te haerenga mā tātou ngā mokopuna.
Kia kī ō tātou manawa i te aroha o te hapori uenuku.
Mā ngā rangatahi e ārahi
Kia tau te wāheke
mā te tika, me te ora, me te pono, me te aroha
Koia rā e Rongo whakairia ake ki runga kia tīnaTīna
Haumi e, hui e,

Tāiki e

To the leaders, the ancestors, the rainbow elders
Nourish our spirits so that the important work may be done
It was them who laid down the path
To make the journey easier for us, the descendents
May our hearts be filled with the love of the rainbow community
It will be the youth who lead
so that the future may be calm/peaceful
For the correctness, the wellness, the faith, and the love
Rongo, suspend high above us
Draw together, affirm!

Te reo Māori karakia Karaitiana (Christian)

E te Atua kaha rawa,

Nāu mātou i whai ahua ai,
no roto mai anō i te kōpū

Whakatōria tōu aroha i ō mātou ngākau
Kei pāiriiri mātou i te kōrero a te tāngata
Whakatakotoria te ara mā mātou,
Āwhinatia mātou kia ū ki te pai

Ko koe hoki tō mātou piringa ?piranga.
Kahore he kino e pā ki a mātou

Āmine

O God,

You formed us while we were in the womb.

Plant your love in our hearts, that we might be strong in the face of discrimination. Lay
a path for us, help us to stay strong.

You are our shelter, protect us from harm.

Amen

English prayer

This simple prayer comes from All Hallows' Church in Leeds⁵⁸

God of love
may we always be your rainbow people,
glorying and rejoicing in our
God-given variety and diversity,
passionate for justice,
trusting in your grace,
always journeying in hope.

Amen

⁵⁸ <https://allhallowsleeds.org/rainbow-people-prayer/>

A prayer to process anger or harm, from the Bible

If you have been harmed by homophobia, biphobia or transphobia in the church, this passage from the Bible might help you express your feelings. Jeremiah (6:13-14) is talking about how religious leaders can act in harmful ways, and can minimise the troubles that people go through. Sound familiar?

For from the least to the greatest of them,
every one is greedy for unjust gain;
and from prophet to priest,
every one deals falsely.
They have healed the wound of my people lightly,
saying, 'Peace, peace,'
when there is no peace.

A prayer for protection, from the Bible

If you are suffering bullying or discrimination, this passage from the Bible might help you express your feelings.

I come to you, Lord, for protection; never let me be defeated. You are a righteous God; save me, I pray! Hear me! Save me now! Be my refuge to protect me; my defense to save me. You are my refuge and defense; guide me and lead me as you have promised. Keep me safe from the trap that has been set for me; shelter me from danger. I place myself in your care. You will save me, Lord; you are a faithful God. (Psalm 31:1-5)

There are plenty other psalms about being treated unfairly, and about bullying violence.

Rainbow affirming culture, theology and faith

A Sāmoan theological reflection: Christianity, sexuality and marginalisation

Rev Apelu Tielu

Minister at the Canberra Wesley Uniting Church

It is OK to be Rainbow and Christian

Is it OK to be rainbow and Christian, and why? There are two questions in the above question. And it should be clear from my title that the answer to the first question is, yes, it is absolutely OK to be rainbow and also Christian. For the rest of this discussion, I will explain why. In doing so, however, some background would be useful. So I will first touch lightly on why the belief that being rainbow and Christian was not OK, before I explain why it is OK.

The long history of the church's teaching against homosexuality went hand in hand with its teaching against women holding church office and people of colour as not worthy of being human. These teachings reflect the dominant role that men played in life in ancient times up to now. I am sure we all know the aspects of life that men have controlled. It was only a few decades ago where all professions, other than teaching and nursing, were the preserve of men. And a lot of this domination of human life by men finds its origins in our understanding of God and our understanding of the sacred texts of the church, especially the Bible.

God, somehow, was always viewed as a male figure. Even in indigenous religions, God is usually a big and powerful man. For example, the main god of Polynesians is Tagaloa, who is a male figure. The God of the Bible is often referred to as a male figure, despite Genesis 1 referring to God as both male and female. Moreover, Jesus is also male and Jesus' recognised disciples were all men.

Another, and very important, factor that contributed to male domination and the downgrading of women, people of colour and people of the rainbow community, was

the way the Bible had been interpreted; it was interpreted to safeguard the dominant position of men in society, in the workplace, in the church and at home. When 'modern' colonisation emerged, people of colour were added to the ostracised groups.

But things are changing, even if we are still a long way from reaching a complete and true emancipation and elevation of women, people of colour and, of course, the rainbow community. But yes, it is absolutely OK to be rainbow and Christian. In fact, in some churches, like the Uniting Church in Australia where I am a minister, members of the rainbow community can become part of the clergy. Below are the three main reasons why it is OK to be rainbow and Christian.

First, our understanding of the Bible and the God that Jesus knew is a lot better now, because there are now women, people of colour and members of the rainbow community doing the scholarly work. We have finally accepted the Bible's teaching that everyone is created in the image of God. We tend to think of image as how we look, but God does not have a face nor body for God is spirit. So, all of us, in our diversity, reflect the diversity of God in the content of our characters.

Second, we now know the interpretations of the Bible that degraded women, people of colour and the rainbow community were all biased and wrong. They were interpretations to protect white men, especially in the colonial era. Some were just outright very poor. So we have rejected those flawed interpretations and replaced them with more accurate interpretations. This does not mean that we will not be hearing those flawed interpretations being discussed.

We will still be hearing them, because they had served a select group of society for a very long time. So the conservative mainstream media and social media will continue to try and to confuse people, but we can just ignore them. Be confident in who you are, as a precious child of God.

Third, we have a better understanding of the human body and human mind now due to advancements in science. We can now learn things to the very small size and we now know sexuality is not black and white. DNA, biological and psychological studies have shown that the human being is very complex.

Fourth, and finally, Jesus never said anything about our sexuality. That shows that it was something that he felt was between a person and God. For him, the most important thing is relationship; relationship between ourselves and God, our relationships with our partners, our relationships with our families, our relationships with our friends and our relationships with our 'neighbours'. Jesus wanted us to build our relationships based on compassion: that is, we should see others either as our child, or our sister, or our brother.

A Pākehā theological reflection: A Theology of Inclusion.

Peter Lineham PhD MNZM

Professor Emeritus of History at Massey University.

Christians have beliefs and values that fundamentally shape how they respond to the world and its pressures and opportunities. Understanding these can be very helpful for LGBT Christians. Firstly, we have beliefs about **creation**. I don't mean that we oppose evolution or science. That is really a minority view among Christians. God can use evolution. But we do believe that God and God's purposes lie behind the world as it is, and that creation was made by God to be good and harmonious, and humans were made to reflect the image of God in our sense of truth and goodness.

This was wonderfully affirming for me, when I came out as gay. Because when people said that I had chosen to be like this, or that it was a product of sin, I was emphatic that God has made some people with predominantly same-sex attraction. And even though the purpose of God is for a world where procreation takes place because of gender difference, in the way we are made, in the differences and the likenesses between men and women, and in the variety of sexualities, God has made our diversity to be part of creation. He made the rainbow!

But secondly, Christians acknowledge the presence of **sin** in the world, and the fall of humankind so that sin has destructive effects. This is all too true, and we see it repeatedly in the way people abuse and mistreat fellow-humans, and the rest of the created universe. The Christian faith has a very strong sense that God has placed awareness of right and wrong in the world, and holds us to account for our behaviour. But this does not allow us to see LGBT sexual and gender identity is something peculiarly judged by God. I have been told this so often, but in fact there is no hierarchy of sins, and sin at its heart is rejection of God, not particular acts. Rather, it is what we do with our sexual and gender identity that matters. When we use it selfishly, when we exploit others or abuse ourselves, then we dishonour the image of God within us.

And deep in the heart of our faith lies a conviction of **redemption**, that Jesus Christ, who is truly God in human form, not only showed us how to live, but through the cross absorbed our failures and gave us the power to live a new life. This new life restores us to our created purpose, and without removing our power to sin, gives us the power to live lives of hope because we have been forgiven. Don't let anyone deny your right to this, for remember that redemption is not selective, it is truly available for all, and it makes us strong.

So Christianity becomes a life of living the values of the **Kingdom of God**. One day, Christians believe that the world will be renewed as a whole to be transformed into

this, where God is over all, and humans and the universe have evil and all negative things done away. But in the meantime, we are invited as forgiven and redeemed people to live by these kingdom values, the values of loving our neighbour as ourselves, of doing to others as we would have done to us, of restoring creation and building a new community, and of standing up strong in the face of all that destroys our humanity. So there is a kingdom ethic, an ethic where we do not treat our relationships with others as opportunities for us to exploit or abuse. This is so helpful for LGBT people, for often we are called up to work very hard to practice these values in the face of hostility.

And finally Christian hope embraces now the reality of the Holy Spirit working in the lives of all believers, holding them in love, and helping them to relate to other believers. When you feel pressured or criticised by others, remember that you are held in the love of God, and God will renew you. And it is the purpose of God to build a church which is truly a community of God's chosen people – an assortment of all sorts of failing people who together express the way God is at work through our weaknesses.

So you can see that LGBTQI people can find at the heart of our faith wonderful beliefs that give us a sense of our purpose and our hope. Don't let anyone take these away by their narrow approaches.

| Looking at the Bible

Introduction

This section explores 'rainbow-affirming theology', an introduction to some of the ways that some rainbow Christians have understood God, the Bible, their faith communities, and themselves. Some of this theology is defensive, arguing against the belief that rainbow identities and Christian belief are contradictory. Some is creative: rainbow people finding inspiration on how to live our lives well.

We include this here as a kickstarter to your own thinking, not everyone will agree with everything we share here! However we believe that rainbow young people have the right to access this information, and to consider things for themselves.

In this section, we focus on the Bible, a central source of guidance and truth for all Christians. We do not have room to explore the full range of how Christians read the Bible alongside tradition, reason, and experience. For example, the natural law tradition is a rich theological and philosophical tradition of reflecting on what God has revealed about human nature and human flourishing in both the book of Scripture and the book of creation. This tradition has often been wielded against rainbow identities. However, many natural law ethicists, such as leading St. Thomas Aquinas expert Jean Porter, believe Thomistic natural law reflection now points to accepting rainbow relationships and identities, considering what we know of nature today⁵⁹. We encourage interested readers to explore further in the sources listed at the end of this section.

Looking at 'clobber verses'



Why do so many people in church judge people for sexual things, but we never talk about someone having too much money?

– Bronwyn's mum

Verses that are commonly used to argue that rainbow identities or relationships are wrong, are often called the 'clobber verses'. However, the interpretation of these verses is not nearly so clear-cut as some people believe. All of these (roughly 8 verses) are capable of other interpretations. If you want to look into this more, here are some online resources:

[Why do some Christians believe it's OK to be gay, when the Bible says it isn't? Clobber Passages – Queer Bible Hermeneutics](#)

⁵⁹ Porter, Jean. 2010. 'The Natural Law and Innovative Forms of Marriage: A Reconsideration'. *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 30 (2): 79–97.

There are also some book-length explorations of the biblical material in the Resources and Contacts list at the end of this section.

Deuteronomy 22:5 is the most-used 'clobber verse' against transgender people. For some information about the assumptions that go into reading this verse as 'anti-trans', and other interpretations, go to <http://queergrace.com/clothing/> There are about 7 verses that (can, possibly) refer to rainbow identities or relationships, and thousands that talk about protecting people who are oppressed, or warning against being rich! Remember that Jesus said if you have two coats, you should give one away. If anyone thinks being rainbow is sinful, they'd better have a small wardrobe! (acknowledgement: lots of queer folk also have fabulous coat and jacket collections ;-))

In the sections below we discuss why many Christians believe that clobber verses have been misunderstood, and share other possible interpretations.

Sexual violence is bad, not being gay

One common thread amongst verses that are used to say that same-gender relationships are wrong, is that they are actually about sexual violence being wrong. We can all agree on that! The story of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18-19) is one example of this. This story is sometimes interpreted to mean sex between two men is bad, but another interpretation is that it's about sexual violence, and violence towards guests not being okay⁶⁰.

Several verses in the Pauline Epistles (Romans 1:26-27; 1st Corinthians 6:9; 1st Timothy 1:10) are also often read as condemning sex between people of the same gender, especially men. However, the words that are often translated as meaning 'men sleeping with men' are notoriously complex to translate. What is widely agreed is that language like Paul's referred to unequal sexual relationships between a powerful adult man and less powerful people, often slaves, male or female, who may have been teenagers or even children. Condemning this is more about forbidding abuse than it is about the gender of the humans involved⁶¹.

In New Zealand, many organisations, such as Women's Refuge, that help people recover from domestic and sexual violence were started by queer women. Rainbow people often play a strong role in pushing for social justice. Rather than condemning us, it would be great if churches recognised the gifts we bring!

Rainbow-ish stories in the Bible

Rainbow people have been around forever, but the language we currently use to describe our identities is relatively new. The people in the Bible lived in ancient cultures very different to ours. If we look in the Bible for people who match how we think about rainbow identities now, we won't find them. However, there are stories that rainbow people have found inspiration in.

60 Waters SE. Reading Sodom through Sexual Violence Against Women. *Interpretation*. 2017;71(3):274-283.

61 Gnuse RK. Seven Gay Texts: Biblical Passages Used to Condemn Homosexuality. *Biblical Theology Bulletin*. 2015;45(2):68-87.

Life-long connections between people of the same gender

The story of Ruth and Naomi (in the book of Ruth), and David and Jonathan (in 1 Samuel) are both about life-long commitment between people of the same gender. Ruth and Naomi were not in an intimate relationship, but they had a deep commitment to each other. Ruth's decision to marry Boaz (a rich land-owner) was more about finding a way to provide for herself and Naomi than it was about being in love with Boaz.

Jonathan and David were in a committed relationship that may have been sexual⁶². Jonathan warned David that he was in danger from King Saul (Jonathan's father), because Jonathan 'took great delight in' David. 'Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul' (1 Samuel 18:3). When David and Jonathan have to part for safety reasons, they kiss, 'they kissed one another, and wept one with another, until David exceeded' (1 Samuel 20:41, KJV). The word here translated as 'exceeded' literally means 'become large', i.e. David had an erection. Many modern translations have hidden this, instead saying 'they kissed each other, and wept with each other; David wept the more' (NRSV).

<http://queergrace.com/david-and-jonathan/>

For rainbow people who respect these stories as part of their faith tradition, they can be an inspiration in creating and maintaining relationships that don't meet heteronormative expectations.

The story of the Roman Centurion and his servant (Luke 7:1-10) is also a story of care and devotion between two men. The Roman Centurion goes outside of his culture and status to ask Jesus to heal his 'pais', which Jesus does, praising the centurion's faith. The word 'pais' was commonly used at the time to refer to a younger person in a same-gender relationship. Of course, while being excited that Jesus helped people in a same-sex relationship, we can also feel uneasy at the power imbalance in the couple.

<https://qspirit.net/gay-centurion/>

Philip and the eunuch

This story, in Acts 8:26-39, is where the name of this resource comes from. It is about a person who is a gender minority becoming a Christian after a conversation with Philip. In this interaction, both people were changed: the eunuch became a Christian, and Philip's cultural prejudices about who is acceptable to God were challenged! Jesus broke a lot of the gender norms of his day, including accepting women as disciples. In this story, Philip learns to do the same. This fulfills Isaiah's prophecy of sexual and ethnic minorities being accepted by God (Isaiah 56:3-5, in contrast to Leviticus 21:16-23; Deuteronomy 23:1).

62 Horner, T. (1978). *Jonathan loved David: Homosexuality in biblical times*. Westminster John Knox Press.

Today's rainbow identities and relationships

But what would Jesus and the prophets and apostles have thought about, for example, transgender people or gay couples today within their churches? Biblical scholars can only speculate about what biblical authors such as St. Paul and St. Peter would have thought, said, and done⁶³. We do know that they did not witness the beautiful range of rainbow identities or relationships increasingly out in the open today. We also know that scientific knowledge of the nature of sex, reproduction, and gender has developed significantly since then. Finally, we know they were humble enough to change their minds when Jesus confronted them about harmful behaviours in the name of God, and when they witnessed the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on groups they had previously excluded (Mark 8:27-38; John 13:36-38; 18:25-27; 21:15-17; Acts 9-15; Galatians 2:7-16).

God loves diversity

Arguments against rainbow people often rely on fixed views about gender, that there are only two genders, and relationships between them must be orderly and regulated. But the Bible presents God as loving wildness and diversity. Creation involved millions of animals and plants of all sizes, colours and shapes, including some not mentioned in Genesis 1. In view of that, 'male and female God created them' (Genesis 1:27) could be another type of diversity, not a fixed list of possible identities⁶⁴. In the book of Job, God never answers Job's theological questions directly. The only answer Job gets is a series of poems on the power and range of creation. God's answer is to show the wildness and variety of God's world.

There is also diversity in the range of ways God is described in the Bible, including both male and female images for all persons of the Trinity, i.e. God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit⁶⁵. The wisdom of God is called 'she', and Jesus wanted to care for Jerusalem as 'a hen gathers her chicks under her wings' (Matthew 23:37). The Holy Spirit is grammatically feminine and neuter in the Hebrew and Greek of the Bible. Biblical symbols for God's people are also rather gender-fluid: we are Christ's (male) body and his (female) bride! The Bible does not have the fixed ideas about gender and relationships that modern Western Christianity often imposes on it.

God works with us

People know the word 'synergy' from business-speak, but it comes from Orthodox Christianity. Synergy means that God and people both have freedom, and that good things come from God and people working together. God respects our freedom,

63 Several biblical scholars who have slightly different interpretations of the biblical texts but all believe Christians today should affirm rainbow identities and relationships are James Brownson, Karen Keen, William Loader, Martti Nissinen, and Matthew Vines. Some of their books are cited in the Resources list at the end of this section.

64 DeFranza, Megan K. 2015. *Sex Difference in Christian Theology: Male, Female, and Intersex in the Image of God*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

65 Johnson, Elizabeth A. 2002. *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse*. 10th anniversary edition. New York, NY: Crossroad; Coakley, Sarah. 2013. *God, Sexuality, and the Self: An Essay 'On The Trinity'*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

and doesn't force things on people. Orthodox, Catholic and Anglican Eucharist⁶⁶ prayers say words to the effect of 'the bread we offer you: fruit of the earth and work of human hands' and 'the wine we offer you: fruit of the vine and work of human hands'⁶⁷ This is the classic example of how we take the raw material that God has given us and make it into something new.

This is an important principle for transgender and non-binary Christians. While some Christians say 'you shouldn't change the body God gave', trans people can point to synergy as saying that we are supposed to change things, improve things, and work with God to fulfill our potential. Just as we celebrate that humans have created the technology to turn grapes into wine, we can celebrate the transgender elders and medical experts who have made social and medical transitions possible.

Jesus-centred theology

Another way of looking at the Bible is to consider the whole of it through the lens of the story of Jesus. Eastern Orthodox theologians consider Jesus and the gospels⁶⁸ to be the center of Christian tradition, other parts of tradition and scripture forming concentric circles around that centre, which have greater or lesser authority.

Many rainbow Christians look at two things about Jesus. Firstly, he never said anything about people and relationships that we would these days consider rainbow, but he said a lot about justice, aroha and generosity. Secondly, Jesus spent a lot of time with people that were marginalised in his time, especially those the religious elite considered 'not good enough'. His anger was reserved for religious leaders who excluded vulnerable people, 'what sorrow also awaits you experts in religious law! For you crush people with unbearable religious demands, and you never lift a finger to ease the burden' (Luke 11:46b NLV).

Arc of justice

The theologian Theodore Parker first coined the phrase 'the arc of justice', which means God slowly directs humans towards more just choices and lives. He predicted that slavery would be abolished, saying 'the arc is a long one, my eye reaches but little ways; I cannot calculate the curve and complete the figure by the experience of sight; I can divine it by conscience. And from what I see I am sure it bends towards justice'⁶⁹. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr, drew on this, saying 'The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice'.

Inspired by these leaders, some Christians believe that God and the Bible lead us towards social justice, even though it can take people centuries. In the history of churches, economic justice, i.e. sharing resources and helping people in poverty was

⁶⁶ Also called communion, or hākari tapu. The bread and wine bit in church services.

⁶⁷ <http://www.diocesefwsb.org/Data/Resources/9a0592fcbdc6cce74f7bdf95c5415a85-Article-10-The-Liturgy-of-the-Eucharist.pdf>

⁶⁸ The four books in the Bible which are about Jesus' life

⁶⁹ Carson, Clayborne, & Block, Melissa. 2010. Theodore Parker And The 'Moral Universe'. NPR. <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=129609461&t=1614176390449>

taken seriously very quickly (Acts 2:44). The church as a whole realising that slavery is wrong took several centuries more. Some Christians used the Bible to argue for slavery, just as other Christians used the Bible to argue for ending it⁷⁰. Churches are still working on facing racism, colonialism, and sexism, and affirming LGBT+ people.

Everyone has biases, we can't read the Bible without our biases coming into play and colouring what we see there. We're not perfect: Christians have made plenty of mistakes before, and some of these have caused significant harm to people⁷¹. So, someone who takes an 'arc of justice' approach would argue that when in doubt, take the option that strikes your conscience as the most loving and just.

The most important thing is love

Jesus famously affirmed that God's two most important commandments, upon which all of God's revelation hangs, are to love God with all our hearts and to love our neighbours as ourselves (Matthew 22:34-40). Jesus continued a prophetic Old Testament theme of focusing on the deepest underlying principles of God's moral guidance, not the specific way it was expressed in specific situations (Amos 5; Hosea 6:6; Isaiah 58; Micah 6:8). He frequently criticised religious leaders who 'neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith' (Matthew 23:23). His practice, as well as his words, show that the most important thing is love, which is expressed in justice, mercy, and including the excluded.

From the beginning of the Christian movement, Jesus' followers understood the central importance of love. St. Paul affirms a similar theme in his beautiful passage on the importance of love: 'faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love' (1st Corinthians 13:13). St. John goes so far as to say that 'God is love' (1st John 4:7-21).

St. Augustine distilled this biblical focus on the centrality of love into a principle for interpreting Scripture. He said that Scripture is correctly interpreted only when the interpretation supports love of God and neighbour (De Doctrina Christiana 3.10.14)⁷².

Many Christians have come to a similar understanding of the importance of love when interpreting Scriptures on rainbow issues. We may not always understand all the specific linguistic and historical complications involved in interpreting biblical texts. However, led by the Holy Spirit to interpret Scriptures with attention to the 'weightier matters' and the underlying themes of love and justice, many rainbow Christians have come to be at peace with their rainbow identities as part of God's beautiful creation and part of how God calls them to serve God⁷³.

70 Noll, Mark A. 2015. *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis*. Reprint edition. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.

71 David Gushee, an expert on Christian responses to the Holocaust, compares the 'teachings of contempt' towards Jews and rainbow people throughout much of Christian history. The Reformation Project. 2014. Dr. David Gushee: Ending the Teaching of Contempt against the Church's Sexual Minorities. <https://youtu.be/G2o3ZGwzZvk>.

72 Augustine of Hippo. 397AD. 'On Christian Doctrine'. Georgetown University. <https://faculty.georgetown.edu/jod/augustine/ddc.html>

73 Lee, J. (2012). *Torn: Rescuing the Gospel from the Gays-vs.-Christians Debate*. Beeching, Vicky. 2018. *Undivided: Coming Out, Becoming Whole, and Living Free from Shame*. New York, NY: HarperOne..

Profiles of Rainbow and affirming Christians

This final section profiles individuals and groups at the intersection of Christian faith and rainbow identities. The Public Universal Friend and Madonna of Montevergine are historical examples of a non-binary religious leader and a miracle-causing ally. Ponsonby Baptist is a church which celebrates its rainbow members, and 'Sacred Heart Spectrum' is a thriving QSA in a Catholic school. The section concludes with stories and reflections shared by some rainbow people of faith and allies living in Aotearoa.

These are just a few stories to inspire you. There will be people in your communities who might be willing to share their experiences and insights.

Public Universal Friend

The Public Universal Friend, also known as the Friend, was an evangelical who lived from 1756-1819. Raised in a Quaker household, the Friend was always surrounded by and interested in religion, and their upbringing had very clear impacts on them for the rest of their life. After they fell sick in 1776, they said they had died and reanimated as a genderless evangelical. They led the Society of Universal Friends until they died. During that time they preached about the abolition of slavery, the fact that people of any gender could communicate with God, the importance of free will, hospitality and humility towards all people, and belief in universal salvation.

“The Friend resonates with me as a non-binary person because they were living proof that people with diverse genders could be and were listened to, and that they truly believed that all people can have a relationship with God. What we hear of their story is not them trying to conform and hating their gender but demanding respect and their followers giving them that. They also show that religion or religious figures can be a spearhead for progressive social change who exist within their rainbowness and their religion simultaneously without having to sacrifice one or the other.”

– Compass Wilts-Ramsay

If you want to find out more about the Public Universal Friend:

- Listen to the NPR podcast
<https://www.npr.org/2020/03/04/812092399/public-universal-friend>

- The Public Universal Friend: Jemima Wilkinson and Religious Enthusiasm in Revolutionary America, Paul Benjamin Moyer⁷⁴

Madonna of Montevergine

The Madonna of Montevergine is an icon of the Virgin Mary, in the Abbey of Montevergine, in the Napoli area of Italy. According to popular belief, by miracle she saved two male lovers from death by homophobic violence.

Tradition says that in the year 1256, two young men were caught together by nearby townspeople. They were going to be killed, but were saved by the miraculous intervention of the Madonna. The specific details vary between different versions of the tradition. The Madonna has become associated with the femminielli, people of a traditional gender and sexual identity associated with the Napoli region.

Nowadays, thousands of people annually make pilgrimage to the Madonna of Montevergine, especially on the feast of Candlemas, on the second of February. The pilgrimage is attended by femminielli, and has become a blend of religious festival and rainbow pride event.

If you want to find out more about Madonna of Montevergine, and the femminielli:

- <https://qspirit.net/madonna-montevergine-lgbtq/>
- <https://www.thewhitereview.org/feature/gay-madonnas-in-montevergine-the-feast-of-mamma-schiavona/>
- <http://www.montevergine1256.com/lang/en.html>

Archbishop Desmond Tutu

“To discriminate against our sisters and brothers who are lesbian or gay on grounds of their sexual orientation for me is as totally unacceptable and unjust as apartheid ever was.

– Archbishop Desmond Tutu⁷⁵

Archbishop Desmond Tutu is a South African church leader and human rights activist. He is of Xhosa and Motswana heritage. He became an archbishop during the apartheid era in South Africa, and was an activist for change. After apartheid ended, he became the leader of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which investigated atrocities that occurred under apartheid.

⁷⁴ Moyer, P. B. (2015). *The Public Universal Friend: Jemima Wilkinson and Religious Enthusiasm in Revolutionary America*. Cornell University Press.

⁷⁵ Tutu, D. (2011). *God is not a Christian: Speaking truth in times of crisis*. Random House.

⁷⁶ https://www.huffpost.com/entry/desmond-tutu-hell-homophobia_n_3661120

In later years, Archbishop Tutu became an out-spoken advocate for rainbow people's rights, both in the church and in society in general. In 2013, he spoke to the United Nations about LGBT rights, saying 'I would refuse to go to a homophobic heaven. No, I would say sorry, I mean I would much rather go to the other place'⁷⁶. Two years later he blessed the marriage of his daughter to her wife.

If you want to find out more about Archbishop Desmond Tutu:

- Tutu, D. (2011). *God is not a Christian: Speaking truth in times of crisis*. Random House.
- Allen, J. (2006). *Rabble-rouser for peace: The authorized biography of Desmond Tutu*. Simon and Schuster.
- http://www.huffingtonpost.com/desmond-tutu/religion-homosexuality_b_874804.html
- <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-23464694>

Ponsonby Baptist

About Ponsonby Baptist

Te Rimu Tahi is the original Māori name for Ponsonby, and refers to a lone rimu tree that stood on the ridge. Ponsonby is known now for being an inner city suburb with lots of bars and cafes, as well as being home to the Auckland Pride Parade.

Ponsonby Baptist Church has a long history with a radical edge. From an early Minister who was a strong trade union supporter, to the housing trust started to provide secure accommodation for people living with mental health issues, to our stance on same-sex marriage, we are committed to being a community of refuge and hope.

We're a fairly spacious congregation with a range of theological views. We do not have a party line approach – which can be hard work. But we value diversity, creativity, critical thinking, participation, inclusion, and the call of Jesus to love God and neighbour.

We want everyone to have a voice in our community, and we are learning to pay extra attention to voices that have traditionally been shut down and shut out. Having people tell their stories shapes us as the Body of Christ.

One couple's experience

We are Alex and Clarisse. We are two young women who identify as gay and Christian and have been in a relationship for the past four years. Clarisse grew up in a traditional Christian home, and her faith was always very important to her. She realised she was gay as a young adult. Alex was raised agnostic although her grandparents were Christian. She came out as gay at age 13.

We each had to find a balance between our sexuality and faith, and we have both experienced an “us and them” mentality between Christian and Rainbow Communities. Although we came from very different perspectives, navigating our faith and sexuality has been a journey that we have walked together.

We moved to Auckland for work in 2017 and it was very important to us to find a church community that could feel like home. We “shopped around” to find a church that would suit us best. Clarisse participated in an interview about her experiences as a Rainbow Christian and the interviewer asked her if she had visited Ponsonby Baptist. We learned that the leadership team at PBC had been champions of the Marriage Equality Bill 2013 and continued to advocate for, and support, their Rainbow parishioners. As Alex has a background in social justice this piqued our interest. The first service that Clarisse attended was Easter Sunday 2018 and the scripture reading was done by a Rainbow member of the congregation. For Clarisse, this showed a community that not only allowed Rainbow people to sit in the pews, but to be active and celebrated members of the community. The church not only tolerates diversity, but celebrates it, and recognises it as a strength, not a weakness.

We have now made this faith community our faith community. We actively participate in a wide variety of activities within the life of the church, and we feel so blessed to be able to serve God and our community in this way. We continue to be positively challenged, and because of the diversity within the church, we continue to grow and learn from one another. God’s presence in this small community of faith is almost palpable, and we have never experienced God’s love the way we have at PBC. Our hope is for all other Christians, or people interested in getting to know Jesus, to find a community where they are included, celebrated, and loved unconditionally.

Sacred Hutt College Lower Hutt

The Sacred Heart College rainbow group is called 'Sacred Heart Spectrum'. It has been going for one year, with the support of the principal and board. The guidance counsellor is the main staff member who offers support, and one of the religious instruction teachers also comes sometimes and helps out. Some of the group's members are Catholic, some are from Baptist churches or other Protestant denominations, some are from other religions, and some are not part of any religion.

Group meetings generally open with a round. People share how they're going, and answer the silly question of the week. They can also update the group if they are trying out a new name or pronouns. Some choose to talk about their level of 'outness', i.e. let the others know if they have particular safety or privacy needs around their identity. Group discussions are generally led by one of the older students, but a staff member is there for debrief or support if needed.

The group says a karakia or prayer before kai. Sometimes this is a traditional te reo Māori karakia, other times it might be a Catholic prayer. The intersection of faith and being rainbow is one topic that is discussed. The group has also done bake sales, invited guest speakers, and sometimes just hangs out and enjoys pizza. People can talk about their identities if they want, and share ideas about dealing with other people's prejudice, but there's no pressure to open up. As one student says, 'I'm questioning but that's okay'.

Group members say Sacred Heart Spectrum is a place where 'there's less stress over who you are', and where they can enjoy 'positive venting, just conversation'. A staff member says, 'it's a safe space, but it's also a space where we talk about a lot of issues relating to young people in the world, including faith, and relationship with God.'

The group has a simple kaupapa, or group agreement, that guides how they go about things. They share it here so other groups can use it as a starting point for developing their own kaupapa.



Kaupapa

- Putting others before yourself
- Everybody is a friend
- Anybody is welcome
- Understanding why people may/may not show up
- Listening when people talk
- Rant/vent space
- Confidentiality: What is said in here stays in here
- Supporting, understanding, feeling at ease
- Being open/accepting to and of other people's opinions and beliefs.

Some group members have chosen to represent themselves in this resource by sharing their art. Ngā mihi to them for brightening it up!



Jeremy Faumuinā – A former pastor's story

I have been married for over 26 years to Shelley and have five amazing children, two boys and three girls, all unique in their own ways. Over seven years ago our oldest boy Harrison came out to us that he identifies as being gay, which threw a spanner in the works of a world we had created in being very black and white. In between that is the grey that we never really spoke about, because we never understood it, and honestly never really tried to. We came to understand that grey area was the rainbow community. Because of our beautiful 25-year old boy Harrison, we are now weaved into this multi-coloured world and will be forever grateful and wiser for it. To gain the church and lose our son was not an option. If the church, the ecclesia, is to be the dream of God, His people, then we need to understand that all His people are invited to the table.

His journey now

Because of Harrison's story, this has led me into the work I do now. I am an advocate for the rainbow community and have worked alongside Q-Topia, and at present am partnering with InsideOUT. I was a finalist for Corporate Ally in the New Zealand LGBTI Awards in 2018, being nominated for the work I do in my school leading the SAGA Group (Sexuality and Gender Acceptance). This is the work I am really proud of! I get to journey with some amazing young people, helping them navigate life in school and find their place of standing and be proud of who they are. My wife and I have had the privilege of helping young people and their families navigate their journey of self-discovery and who they are called to be. No greater reward than being invited to be a part of their narrative. I am much richer in spirit for it.

Lucy's Story

This is Lucy's story. She is rainbow, Christian, and a mental health worker. We asked her about looking after your mental health when you live at the intersections of faith communities and being rainbow.

I was born in England but have been a proud New Zealander for over 20 years. I met my partner Jill in the 1980s, and we have three children, as well as chooks, a rabbit and a dog. I was raised in a large family, where Christianity was central. My parents had both lived through World War 2 – my mum nursed through the London Blitz and my dad was a prisoner of war for 14 months – their faith was grown in real hardship and meant everything to them, so they raised us in that faith.

I am queer. This is central to my identity. Coming to terms with this was hard but I see it as a gift from God, which allows me to serve my community better than if I had spent decades of my life trying to conform. 'Coming out of the closet' is a life's work – it requires being honest with yourself, and with those you love. Sometimes, scarily, it requires being honest with those who are hostile, and churches have earned a particularly bad reputation for being cruel to gay people. However, I've been blessed over the years to find inclusive church communities.

Homophobia is cruel, and hurtful, and, from my understanding, not consistent with a theology of grace and liberation. Homophobia is wasteful because it robs people of the opportunity to live life to the fullest, contributing all that they are to the commonwealth of God. Living in the closet robs the world of the unique gifts each queer person can offer their family and community by living to their potential. Homophobia is often based in fear and ignorance – my mother's initial resistance to me coming out was based in her fear that queer life would be lonely, unhappy and unfulfilled. My hope is that the young queer folk growing up currently are supported to navigate their path with love and acceptance.

My work in Canterbury focuses on promoting mental wellbeing in communities which have experienced multiple disasters and the terrorist attack. For people to be well, they need to be grounded in a sense of purpose and meaning, and the definition of spirituality which resonates best with me is around collectively making sense and meaning of the world around us.

The advice I would give young rainbow people to help them look after their mental health is:

- Know that God loves you deeply, exactly as you are. Prayer, or being present to God, takes many forms so experiment with the form which makes most sense to you, here and now.

- The simplest way to care for yourself is to practice 5 ways to wellbeing – they're simple and cheap, and since you are the expert in what makes you feel good and function well, you can practice them in ways which make sense to you <https://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/home/ways-to-wellbeing/>
- Don't feel like you have to come out to everyone all at once. Take it at a pace which feels safe to you – tell one or two trusted people, or test out talking it through with a helpline like OUTline <https://outline.org.nz/>
- Know there's a place for you to practice your faith, if that's what you want. It may take a while to find the right faith community, and some people in the rainbow community might not understand why your faith is so important to you, but stick with it. You could find a rainbow-friendly congregation here – <http://diversechurch.co.nz/community/churches/>
- There are lots of precious parts to who you are – make sure you celebrate and explore all of them, and don't get too caught up in being one part of your identity.
- Know that you are not alone in walking this journey of faith – across the world there are many, many people who are on your side, hoping and praying for you to fulfil your wonderful potential.

Further training and support

InsideOUT resources are constantly being updated. Please check the InsideOUT website for the latest information: www.insideout.org.nz

InsideOUT offers a range of professional development options, as well as consulting support for areas such as policy and school culture. Please contact your local Schools Coordinator or hello@insideout.org.nz for more information.

If something difficult comes up and you need support and a chance to debrief, please feel free to contact InsideOUT. You could also access support from PPTA⁷⁷ or NZEI Te Riu Roa⁷⁸, which both have rainbow groups, or from EAP Counselling Services⁷⁹.

Professional development that is not rainbow-specific but that could help you in this role, such as mental health first aid, may be of benefit.

Working with an InsideOUT Schools Coordinator

Many regions of Aotearoa have local InsideOUT Schools Coordinators, and we also have a National Schools Coordinator. We prioritise 'new' schools – schools that are starting to think about rainbow inclusivity and schools who are in the process of forming a new QSA. We are also very happy to help facilitate discussions if there are issues within a group.

InsideOUT's Schools' Coordinators are often working a small number of hours in large regions, so it can be hard for them to keep on top of what is happening in every school. Please reach out to ask for whatever support your QSA may need. The Schools' Coordinators might not be aware of what is happening in each school.

Learning from each other

InsideOUT is always interested to hear from schools about what has worked in setting up a rainbow diversity group, both general insights and in terms of the support we provide. It works two ways – InsideOUT offers advice on the basis of experiences schools have shared with us, and we use what we learn to inform future work with schools.

⁷⁷ Contact details for PPTA are here: www.ppta.org.nz/contact-us/

⁷⁸ Contact details for NZEI Te Riu Roa are here: <https://nzei.org.nz/contact>

⁷⁹ www.eapservices.co.nz/about/

Resources

Websites

www.queergrace.com

<https://www.queertheology.com/>

Queer Grace and Queer Theology are both accessible online portals for rainbow-affirming Christianity. They publish articles and blog posts, have links to videos, podcasts, and other resources. Queer Theology also offers various online courses.

<https://matthiasroberts.com/queerology/>

Queerology is a series of podcast interviews with rainbow Christians.

<https://www.intersexandfaith.org/>

Intersex and Faith contains links and resources about intersex people and Christianity.

Recommended Books

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