



CNI

PRESS WATCH - The Christians we dare not ignore

In 2014 Lizzie Lowe took her own life on wasteland near the Mersey river in Manchester. She was 14 years of age. Nobody in her family or the church they attended knew that Lizzie was gay, writes Gordon Linney in The Irish Times...

... but it became clear from the coroner's hearing that her sexuality and her perception of faith were at odds with one another. She was convinced that God couldn't love her the way she was, a feeling she had expressed by text message to friends prior to her fateful decision.

Her story was publicised at the time of the recent meeting of the general synod of the Church of England (C of E) at which the bishops sought approval for a report prepared by them on homosexuality which banned same-sex church marriages while encouraging parishes to be more welcoming to gay people.



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It is worthwhile acknowledging the openness of the debate within the C of E given that this is a live issue for Christians of all denominations as they struggle to see a way forward consistent with the mind and spirit of Jesus Christ. The report was supported by the bishops and the laity voting in orders but rejected by the clergy who felt it did not go far enough in affirming gay relationships. This is perhaps understandable for it is clergy who are more likely to face the issue in real life through pastoral ministry.

This is what happened the Rev Nick Bundock, rector of the church which Lizzie Lowe and her parents attended. He has spoken about the impact of her death on him personally and on his parish. "It's not that we were ever 'hard line'. Actually, we've always been a pretty broad expression of evangelicalism. But like many similar churches we've largely avoided the topic of homosexuality in order to preserve the peace. I now realise, too late, that ignoring the topic of sexuality is by definition exclusive and very unsafe for people who are gay. In the months following the coroner's report St James and Emmanuel (church) has been through a revolution. It started with a decision to adopt a statement of inclusion...We lost some members during the turmoil of 2015 (and) that was immensely painful as a vicar. Personally, I've crossed the Rubicon, there is no way back."

The bishop of Liverpool Paul Bayes has called for change in the church's attitudes to lesbian and gay people and a meaningful welcome to Christians in same-sex relationships. He has been "profoundly changed" by encounters with lesbian and gay Christians, including within his own family. He advises those debating the issue: "Too often it seems easier to speak, and if necessary to shout, until people say they agree

with me. Without careful listening we're left with raw contention.”

In a recent interview, international rugby referee Nigel Owens spoke of the struggle gay people have coming to terms with who they are. Having attempted suicide, he sought medical help, willing to submit to extreme medical procedures, because he did not want to be gay. He said he would have done anything “to be ‘normal’ in people’s eyes”.

In tomorrow’s readings we find examples of key people being asked to take a fresh look at where they are in their faith journeys. In the Old Testament reading, Abraham is in a state of confusion, concerned that he has no heir. God intervenes promising a future full of promise but Abraham must move on from where he is. He responds and is not disappointed. In the gospel reading Nicodemus is invited by Jesus to take a step, to be born “from above”. He doesn’t get the message at that time and disappears from the text but re-emerges later to play a key role after the death of Jesus. In each case we are shown that spiritual progress means moving on from where we are, settled and secure, and no one finds that easy in any walk of life. As Tolstoy observed “Everyone thinks of changing the world but no one thinks of changing himself.” –

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