

Unitarians are opposed to discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation in all walks of life

Blessings of Unions

Some Unitarian and Free Christian ministers and lay people are called upon to officiate at services of blessing or affirmation for same-sex couples, either following a Civil Partnership ceremony, or as an independent act of commitment. Such celebrations are opportunities for the persons concerned to give thanks for the love that has grown between them, and to make public statements of commitment to one another. It is a matter of personal conviction as to whether a minister or a lay person will conduct such a ceremony, and the matter should always be discussed with the appropriate person before making any assumptions about her or his willingness to conduct such a service.



Campaigning & Information

Unitarians and Free Christians participate in the many different LGBT Pride festivals and parades that are held across the United Kingdom each year, often marching with a banner, and staffing a stall with informational literature. There is an informal group of LGBT people who have gathered during their Annual Meetings and which maintains contact throughout the year via an email chat list. It calls itself *Unipride*.

Early in 2010 Unitarians worked with members of other liberal religious groups, such as the Quakers and Liberal Judaism, to lobby Parliament to support the amendment to the Equality Bill proposed by Lord Waheed Alli that would allow Civil Partnership ceremonies to take place in religious premises. We were successful in achieving this legislative change. We continue to work to secure the rights of LGBT people in many spheres and to present a faith-based objection to often strident demands from some Church leaders for the right to discriminate.

If you would like to communicate with a minister or lay person who is involved with the issues raised in this leaflet, please make contact through the details below.

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Where We Stand

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender People & The Unitarian & Free Christian Churches

A Unitarian Information Leaflet

Promoting Justice & Equality

Unitarians and Free Christians in Great Britain have a rich heritage of commitment to equality in many spheres of public life. In the nineteenth century, Unitarian preaching of the social gospel drew individuals and congregations into areas of reform, which included the abolition of the slave trade, the emancipation of women, the provision of state education, universal suffrage, penal reform and public health.

This passionate concern for social justice and participation in efforts to eliminate inequalities have been manifested in recent years in among other causes, a desire to achieve full legal and social equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. The organisation, Integroup, was founded in 1971 as a church-based body. It was one of the first grassroots church initiatives in Great Britain to provide people of differing sexual orientation with experience of and information about one another. Both the Lesbian and Gay Switchboard and the Lesbian and Gay Bereavement Project (founded by Unitarians) can trace their origins to this group.

The General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches, has articulated its tradition of support for LGBT equality in various resolutions at its Annual Meetings:

1977 - That the ministry of the denomination be open to all regardless of sex, race, colour or sexual orientation and expresses an abhorrence of discrimination solely on the basis of sexual orientation.

1984 - That the age of consent for homosexuals should be the same as that for heterosexuals.

2000 - Supports the repeal of Clause 28 of the 1988 Local Government Act . . . believing that this clause, proscribing the promotion of homosexuality in schools, in practice encourages homophobia. Further, it calls upon the General Assembly Council . . . actively to work for the equal acceptance of lesbians and gay men in all walks of society.

2008 - Calls upon HM Government to introduce relevant legislation permitting ceremonies for Civil Partnerships to be performed in any place of worship or other premises . . . licensed for the celebration of marriage.



Welcoming LGBT People

Unitarianism and Free Christianity is a non-creedal religious movement that seeks to unite persons in fellowship, in a spirit of freedom, reason and tolerance. This liberal approach to building a community means that Unitarians value diversity, and recognise that congregational members can learn from one another's perspectives. LGBT people are called to contribute their unique talents and views to the wider religious community.

LGBT people have made major contributions to the development of professional Ministry at local and national level within the Unitarian Denomination and LGBT lay persons hold positions of responsibility – paid and unpaid - within the Movement. There is no “pink ceiling” for openly gay people.

Unitarians stress the importance of pursuing one's life quest which often resonates with the journey to acceptance of many LGBT people. Being open to change is something that is highly valued within Unitarianism.

Such has been the pace of social change in Great Britain that it would be unrealistic to expect every member of every Unitarian and Free Christian congregation to agree on matters relating to sexual identity. Individual prejudice does still exist and attitudes vary among congregations. The challenge is to put our principles into practice and work together to break down any remaining barriers.

