

“The Episcopal Church Welcomes You!”

We’ve all seen the signs - a statement that everyone is welcome in our parish communities.

But for too long, LGBT persons (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) have not believed that the welcome extended to them — with some reason.

“Believe Out Loud” is a trans-denominational brand that’s being established as an identifier for people and churches that are willing to be vocal about their inclusive beliefs.

In The Episcopal Church, Believe Out Loud Congregations are parishes that make their welcome for LGBT persons explicit and public. Read on to see how you can join the growing throng!



For more information and resources, contact Integrity USA.



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*Your Parish
is invited
to become a...*

Believe **(((+)))**
OUTLOUD™
Episcopal Congregation

Many unchurched lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender [LGBT] people in your community are spiritually searching. They are looking for a faith community where they will be welcomed and affirmed as beloved children of God.

You can encourage them to visit and join your parish by becoming a Believe Out Loud Episcopal Congregation.



Becoming a Believe Out Loud Episcopal Congregation means following six steps. Depending on how your parish currently understands its position, these steps can be easily accomplished in a couple of months, or they might take a year or two.

It is a process of discernment, as well as welcome. Neither LGBT people nor your parish community will be well served by advertising your welcome before you're ready to fully include new and different people into the life of the church. Please take the time you need, and ask for resources and advice when necessary.

Step 1: Assess

Does your congregation already have a history of publicly welcoming and affirming LGBT people? If yes, this can be a simple step of confirming your welcome with other church leaders.

Step 2: Engage

Parishes that are not 100% sure that they're "welcoming" will want & need to discuss things further. This may be a short process among the vestry and clergy, or it may be a process of many months.

To have a thorough conversation with the congregation, we recommend "Building an Inclusive Church" from the Institute for Welcoming Resources. You can download this for free from www.WelcomingResources.org.



Step 3: Adopt

Adopt a Welcoming Statement that explicitly welcomes LGBT people and/or mentions sexual orientation and gender identity.

There is often resistance to adopting an explicitly welcoming statement. The justification is often "We welcome everybody - why single people out?"

Unfortunately, the Christian church is THE institution that has done the MOST harm to the LGBT community in America, and it's specifically excluded LGBT persons for many decades (if not longer). A *specific welcome* is needed to counteract that *specific exclusion* that so many have experienced. Here's a sample welcoming statement:

"Our membership and leadership is comprised of the young and the old, the old-timer and the newcomer, married, partnered and single, gay and straight, rich and poor, native Tejanos and Texans by adoption and grace. We represent and celebrate the wonderful diversity that makes South Texas what it is, and we seek to do that in faithfulness to the baptismal command to respect the dignity of every human being. We strive to include a place for everyone around God's table and believe there should be no outcasts in the Episcopal Church."

— St. Paul's Episcopal Church, San Antonio TX

Step 4: Register

Go to www.IntegrityUSA.org and register your church and its welcome statement. Your parish will soon appear on our list and map, so seekers can find a welcoming home with you!

Step 5: Publish

It's important that the statement be public. Visitors and potential visitors need to be able to see a clear sign that they will be welcome and comfortable in this church.



We recommend that the statement may be found easily on your website, a common "first stop" for potential visitors. Other common places will be newsletters, Sunday worship bulletins, brochures, and advertising.

Many LGBT people are looking for a welcoming and affirming faith community. Your inclusive congregation is good news!

Step 6: Continue...

Continue to find ways to make your parish more welcoming. You may want to provide educational opportunities for parishioners about local or regional issues affecting LGBT people. The Episcopal Church is still deciding policies that affect them as well, and they need your voice.

Educating yourselves on transgender issues can be a fruitful area to explore. These and other issues are addressed in curriculum and resource materials that are readily available.

Thank you for your interest in inclusion!