

## Safe Church for Rainbow Families

**Open and Affirming Congregations aim to encourage all Uniting Church communities to be safe and welcoming for rainbow families. However, we know that that has often not been the case. In acknowledging the hurt that the Church has traditionally engendered in the LGBTIQ Community, care and attention needs to be given to addressing the fears that a family coming into the Church may bring with them. A noticeably affirming welcome will bring grace, hope and challenge for broadening the faith and understanding of all the congregation.**

In the Journey of Grace, Rainbow families need to be actively welcomed by:

**Welcoming and Affirming Language** that addresses changes such as inclusive stories extending male/female imagery to gender diverse words and images. For example in the story of Noah each of the animals on the ark don't need a gender identification, just "two by two," so as to avoid defaulting to gender identification. Use of names, and phrases such as 'two people,' are great because they are not gender specific. Also books used during worship or education sessions can include images of diverse families. Attention needs to be given to documents, such as Sunday School forms, permission for excursions etc. to say parents and carers, not just mums and dads.

**Liturgy in church** can be inclusive by using gender diverse identification of God, and church events such as baptisms can use inclusive terms for parents and Godparents so gender diverse families and their friends are welcomed and affirmed by the inclusive language being used. This needs to be applied to the message, the choice of liturgical forms, i.e. communion, and choice of wording in the music.

**Leadership** in a safe church can visibly present diverse family models by inviting gender diverse people to be up the front and visible where possible. Consideration of the images on the pictures and advertising around the church space can also be actively affirming and inclusive. In creating a safe space Open and Affirming Church, there will be curiosity. This means responding positively to people's questions while encouraging people to pause before asking intrusive questions of gender diverse congregational members. Not every conversation needs to be about gender diversity! Some folk are not self-aware of how inappropriate their comments, questions and behaviours can be.

**The children** need to be considered for the fears that they also bring to church. The negativity and fears that they express of not being welcomed, or both their same gender parents not being accepted, need to be addressed - for example one child of a same gender family, said after a Sunday School session "That person doesn't like people with two Mums," even though



no words were said to that effect. It's not enough to just to keep quiet, what is not affirming is perceived to be negative.

Also kids are questions, and posing positive questions such as "Could there be an alternative?" and statements like "That's an interesting point of view," encourages positive curiosity and a more welcoming space to these leaders of the future. Kids raised to be negative about gender diversity, and are reiterating parents' viewpoints, also require respect and encouragement to expand their understanding of diversity in a quiet, nonjudgmental, and often non-verbal, affirmation.

**Presumed values and expectations** vary between all families at church. Therefore, it cannot be presumed that every same sex or gender diverse relationship and/or family holds to the same set of religious and moral values. For example, questions such as "Who is the birth mother?" might be celebrated in some families and cause division in others.

The church that affirms and welcomes the LGBTIQ community adds to its rich resourcefulness within the Uniting Church, offering a loving, caring, supportive and healing spiritual home for those who have been challenged or hurt elsewhere.

### Examples of affirming conversations with children

Kid's Questions	Suggested Adult Answers
But Jesus had a mum and dad... how come you don't?	Jesus had a birth mum and she married another person after she became pregnant with Jesus. So according to the bible, Joseph was not Jesus' biological dad. Mary and Joseph just loved one another and they got married.
Why aren't there any other Rainbow kids here? Why are they scared?	Lots of Rainbow kids and their families don't come to church because they are scared. Because in the past Rainbow families have not been welcomed and treated well.
I don't have a father, so how can God be my father?	God is both mother and father, God is parent of us all. Some kids have two mums, some have two dads and some have a mum and a dad, and some only have one parent or just grandparents.
Does your church believe that my family is going to hell?	No. God loves us all and we are all created in God's image. Some churches have misunderstood some of the stories in the bible and don't understand God's loving grace.
Are you a boy or a girl?	Does that matter? God is both male and female and you don't have to look masculine to be a man, or feminine to be a woman.

### Acknowledgement

Tori and Rev. Miriam Parker-Lacey, a Rainbow family of four who have journeyed, often painfully, with the Uniting Church as one of its own. The Parker-Laceys are one of the first same gender couples to conceive a child within their relationship in the Uniting Church NSW/ACT, and went on to adopt a second son and have continued to foster over the last decade.

