



Queer Young People

A letter from a Queer Young Person

Hello! I am Emma Jackson, I grew up in Darwin, part of Nightcliff Uniting Church, and am currently a mission worker at Macquarie University.

I remember when I was young, there was a lesbian couple who worshipped with us for a few years, and one Sunday morning they stood up in front of our old Yamaha electric piano and thanked our congregation for being so accepting of them. Little me was somewhat confused as I didn't quite see what the fuss was over; God loved everyone, and loved all the best bits, and a clearly happy and loving relationship was obviously a best bit.

I was very privileged to grow up in a community that fostered respect for everyone's story and experience, especially those whose stories put them in the margins of society and in the case of queer people, faith. Warmth and acceptance were visible to me in many ways throughout my childhood and empowered me to explore my faith deeply. **I was shown that my queer identity was a part of God's vision for the world**, and so I was able to develop a faith that called me to be a conscious, caring member of that world.

When I moved to Sydney for my study, having just finished theology classes for my confirmation, I was determined to find somewhere to worship. When looking for a new church community to join, there are always many things to consider, and for me, the stakes of 'compatible theology' went beyond whether the language of prayers suited me. Every time I would walk through the door I would have to gauge whether my identity would be up for 'debate' or assessment.

My experience growing up in an affirming church meant I know how to look for signs that a community is affirming. For me, step one to finding an affirming church is recognising that **welcoming and affirming are not the same thing**. Communities that welcome LGBTIQ people but still exclude us from theology and leadership, do not provide a place for us to engage deeply with our spirituality nor enable us to live out full lives. **My church role-modelled affirmation of my**

queer identity from before I understood my identity. The lesbian couple I mentioned before lead the music in worship, placing them squarely with the leadership and theology of my church. Inviting queer people to be involved in church leadership easily and clearly demonstrates affirmation.

Once I began engaging theologically in my teens, the conscious language around how my community spoke about families, gender and relationships seemed subtle but had a huge effect. **Opening out language to be inclusive opens out conversation and ideas**, allowed me to hear affirmations in every sermon, not just ones specifically about me. Specific discussion about the place of queer identities and families in the church is important, but equally important is ensuring that the way we speak about the church in the everyday remains inclusive by not reverting to heteronormative, patriarchal patterns of speech.

For young people who are beginning a lifetime of faith and service, **a safe base in which to explore their ideas, spirituality and the Bible, is essential**. Without the voices and experiences of queer Christians beyond 'queer issues', the church's reading of the Bible, picture of God, and vitality of the community are incomplete, short-changing our discipleship and witness. An affirming church isn't just a nicer church, it is a transformed church, filled with new gifts and stories.

I hope that your community can take inspiration from hearing my story, and see that being an affirmative church takes small, important steps that reap bountiful rewards.

Emma Jackson is part of the Macquarie University Tertiary Ministry team as Mission Worker. As part of her ministry she co-ordinates the student group Christian Students Uniting, and is passionate about building connections and supporting other student groups including the MQ Women's Collective and Queer Collective.

