

Inclusive Church

How inclusive is the Church? How inclusive should she be? Do we welcome everyone regardless or are some people beyond the pale? Can anyone be a Priest or a Bishop or should certain people be disqualified from the start?

Big questions!

A new organisation called "Inclusive Church" thinks it has the answers and it has developed a website and a declaration of belief to which people who share its views can sign up if they wish. Individuals can sign up; organisations can sign up and PCCs can sign up to show their agreement to the answers offered. Our PCC recently had a preliminary discussion of the "Inclusive Church" statement of belief and we plan to set up an opportunity soon for the congregation as a whole to join in the debate. At some point in the future we'll bring it back to the PCC to decide whether we at BPC agree with what "Inclusive Church" is saying.

Inclusive Church really began life after the debacle surrounding the appointment of Dr. Jeffrey John as Bishop of Reading. Those who set up the organisation (led incidentally by Giles Fraser, Vicar of Putney who writes regularly in the Church Times) were appalled at the way Jeffrey was treated and wanted to invite as many people as possible to declare their view that ministry in the Church should not be closed to people of homosexual orientation. It's important to note that the statement speaks very clearly about homosexual orientation and not about homosexual practice. This is an important distinction.

Inclusive Church is not, though, only about homosexuality. Women are currently unable to be Ordained as Bishops and this might suggest that although we have welcomed them as Priests they're still a bit second class. Inclusive Church also wants to see all ministries opened to women.

By the time you read this we shall have marked "Inclusive Church Sunday" in a rather low key way on 20 June and soon we shall arrange an opportunity for us all to have a thorough discussion of the issues raised.

Finally... here is the "Inclusive Church" declaration of belief. Have a look and see what you think.

"We affirm that the Church's mission, in obedience to Holy Scripture, is to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ in every generation. We acknowledge that this is Good News for people regardless of their sex, race or sexual orientation. We believe that, in order to strengthen the Gospel's proclamation of justice to the world, and for the greater glory of God, the Church's own common life must be justly ordered. To that end, we call on our Church to live out the promise of the Gospel; to celebrate the diverse gifts of all members of the body of Christ; and in the ordering of our common life to open the ministries of deacon, priest and bishop to those so called to serve by God, regardless of their sex, race or sexual orientation." The website is at www.inclusivechurch.net

Michael

If you can't sleep, don't count sheep. Talk to the Shepherd.