

Gifts for Leadership

“The Uniting Church will therefore provide for the exercise by men and women of the gifts God bestows upon them, and will order its life in response to God’s call to enter more fully into mission.” (Uniting Church in Australia, The Basis of Union, Paragraph 13)

Gifts

One of the strengths of the Uniting Church is the call to all members to exercise their gifts in ministry both for the Church and the world. Everyone has a place, a gift, an opportunity to contribute to the Body of Christ and to express their life and faith in the community in which they live. It is a gift to the Church that LGBTIQ people are willing to bring their particular histories and strengths in adding to the diverse and rich expression of hospitality offered by the Church to the world. I want to explore this gift from my own experience as an ordained minister who is openly gay, and as a pastor of many years’ experience who has found the Church to be a place for every person to find a larger sense of purpose and passion for living out their faith.

There was time in my early ministry when the visibility of people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, Intersex or queer were met with discomfort and embarrassment. These were seen as people needing pastoral support as they came out and realised they were loved by God, or in some situations as people who needed to be changed or healed. Thankfully we have moved on in our understanding to find that such people need a place to grow and develop who they are, rather than to fix anything up. I like the recent response by Tim Cook, the 58 year old CEO of Apple Inc, one of the largest corporations in the world. He said; **“Being Gay, is God’s greatest gift to me.”** Here is a person who has received his sexuality and identity as a gift from God and is looking for that to be part of how he grows as a person, both in public and in private. There is no embarrassment here, but a loving and joyful reception of the gift of his own identity, both for himself and for others that he serves.

In my pastoral experience I have found LGBTIQ people will often have a deeper and kinder experience of themselves as complex human beings. They will often exhibit a profound sense of personal integrity simply because they have had to negotiate the mixed messages and expectations of their upbringing and come to a deeper sense of self- acceptance and honesty about who they are. The experience of **‘Coming Out’** is a profound journey that knocks you around, but deepens your understanding of God’s love for all creation. This process brings personal maturity and self-knowledge that makes LGBTIQ folk a lot less shockable, more flexible and able to provide a listening ear to those undergoing big changes or dealing with intense pressures. It is a great gift to a community to have people who know why they are, who have an accurate measure of their ability and their limitations, and who participate fully with all their wisdom.

Part of the gift of these journeys is that LGBTIQ folk tend to be a little more creative, able to think beyond the square, because they have had to find new solutions beyond the ones their family and their social setting offered. This means LGBTIQ folk are sometimes a bit more edgy. They feel quite comfortable and know what it’s like to be on the edge of things. They are often more tolerant, forgiving and compassionate because these are the qualities that they have had to offer themselves in such places. Here are resources for coping with life’s big ups and downs. Queer folk make good companions for the journey of life, especially if you want to get off the well-worn track and explore the uncomfortable edge. If your local church wants to reach out and face some new challenges then here is a **rich human resource** for such a journey!



This reality also encompasses a more generous attitude to those who live on the edge, those who are different, or those shunned by societal values. This is having a sense of justice, not just as an abstract value, but as a more embodied sense of kindness towards those who inhabit the marginal spaces of our society. LGBTIQ people know what it is to be **harassed, marginalised and pushed to the edge** and will often have a particular sensitivity to those in that position. Injustice has no respect for hierarchies. If one suffers then all suffer. This is the kind of experience that come with compassion, being able to walk in the shoes of other people, being able to find empathy and share the burden of others. This is such an important resource for the Church when it seeks to walk on new pathways and respond to new situations.

Justice and compassion are the marks of the Church's work in the world as we follow Christ on the way.

A sense of integrity, an ability to live on the edge, a sense of justice and compassion are all qualities that deeply enhance the work of the Church in the world. These qualities move us from being an institution to living as a body of people, expressing the grace of God. As LGBTIQ people become more visible in the life of the Church, and as they speak and step up to get involved in the local Church, this is a reminder to **receive their lives as a gift to the Church**. These gifts help us live out our calling to be the body of Christ, a sign of God's radical hospitality and welcome to all human kind.

Rev Dr Rod Pattenden is Minister of Adamstown Uniting Church, Newcastle.

