

**Uniting Church in Australia – Assembly
Apology to LGBTIQ Australians Task Group**

Resolution from the Assembly Standing Committee, July 2022

“How have other faith-based organisations across the world apologised to LGBTIQ communities?”

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Introductory notes:

1. This is not a comprehensive survey but identifies what is readily available online in English.
2. With the exception of one interfaith statement, apologies from non-Christian faiths have not been identified.
3. In each case significant research needs to be undertaken to establish the context, and thus to some extent, the relative credibility of the words of the apologies, responses from LGBTIQ+ communities, and follow-up actions. A recent example is the Church of England. Days before the 2023 General Synod decided to *not* permit marriage for same-sex couples (though civil marriages by same-sex couples could be blessed in Anglican churches) the bishops issued an apology to “LGBTQI+ people – both those who worship in our churches and those who do not” (see below).
4. A further important point about context is that most mainline Protestant churches, as with the Uniting Church in Australia (UCA), have been undertaking studies into human sexuality and gender identity for some years. When an apology has been offered, it has been one step in a longer journey. That journey has shaped responses. To use the 2023 Church of England example again, there have been two broad responses from those who would support an apology. Many LGBTIQ+ people have responded negatively particularly in light of the decision about marriage made only days later. The suggestion is that the apology is hollow. Others argue that it is a step in a more positive direction, setting a tone for future conversations and decisions. They also argue that the decision to bless civil marriages is a step towards marriage equality and that local churches will have opportunities to become more accustomed to and get to know openly LGBTIQ+ individuals and couples.

Church of England (in England)

Open letter from the bishops, Church of England, prior to General Synod January 2023

“We want to apologise for the ways in which the Church of England has treated LGBTQI+ people – both those who worship in our churches and those who do not. For the times we have rejected or excluded you, and those you love, we are deeply sorry. The occasions on which you have received a hostile and homophobic response in our churches are shameful and for this we repent.

“As we have listened, we have been told time and time again how we have failed LGBTQI+ people. We have not loved you as God loves you, and that is profoundly wrong. We affirm, publicly and unequivocally, that LGBTQI+ people are welcome and valued: we are all children of God.”¹

Anglican Church in Aotearoa/New Zealand

In 2014 the General Synod decided to commence of study of blessing same-sex unions and supported the following Preamble to the decision:

“Over many years, our church has become increasingly aware of the pain of the LGBT community. All too often our church has been complicit in homophobic thinking and actions of society, and has failed to speak out against hatred and violence against those with same-gender attraction. We apologise unreservedly and commit ourselves to reconciliation and prophetic witness.”²

New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference

In 2018 the Catholic Bishops issued a statement that referred to LGBT people in the context of other areas where they stated they had “fallen short”.

“[The nation’s bishops] humbly acknowledge our shortcomings, especially with regards to particular groups in society, such as the LGBT community who have felt a very real sense of rejection through the Church, or perhaps in falling short in fully meeting the needs of our recent migrant communities. . . We hear too the call of those who want to see our actions speak louder than our words, by living out the values that Jesus represents.”³

Methodist Church of New Zealand N

Nothing identified yet. (They ordain openly LGBTIQ people and permit both same-sex marriage and same-sex civil unions.)⁴

United Reformed Church (UK)

Nothing identified.

Methodist Church of Britain

Nothing identified.

United Church of Canada (UCC)

In 1988 the UCC made a historic decision to explicitly welcome gay, lesbian and bisexual people in the membership and ordained ministry. The decision was welcomed by many and clearly placed the UCC as a leader in support for LGBTIQ equality in all areas of church and society. A significant minority of individuals and congregations left the UCC at the time due to their disagreement with the inclusive policy, though some have returned.⁵ In 2015 the national Assembly of the UCC established The Iridesce Project, which is also referred to as the Living Apology project. This work is described as follows:

“The Iridesce Project aspires to be a community movement of reflection and reconciliation as we approach the 30th anniversary of the vote of The United Church of Canada not to reject gay and lesbian people from membership and eligibility for ordination... and as we reflect on

the past 30 years of welcome, inclusion, and affirmation of LGBTQ+ and Two-Spirit people, their family, friends, and allies in our churches.

The whole church is invited to participate in this process of sharing and hearing, acknowledgement, lament, celebration, and healing. Iridesce invites many voices, and many perspectives, and hopes to move at a pace that gives time and space for these to be heard.

Words without actions can be empty. The Iridesce Project was voted for, is supported by, and has been put into action by people in a grassroots way in churches across The United Church of Canada. It is the hope of the Iridesce Project that through this process of being present with each other, sharing our stories and experiences, listening and hearing each other with compassion and care, and dialoguing together in fellowship with the Holy Spirit, we can know how to not only speak the words of apology, but how to live into better relationships with each other and with God.”⁶

The UCC has not issued a specific apology, but the concerns which have motivated discussion of an apology in other churches has been a significant motivation in the UCC providing national resourcing for the Iridesce Project.

Anglican Church in Canada

Nothing identified.

United Church of Christ (USA)

The UCC (USA) has developed the most comprehensive suite of policies to guide national, regional and local action in support of LGBTIQ people of any Christian denomination in the English-speaking world.⁷ It is not surprising given that they ordained the world first open gay man in 1972. There is no ‘apology’ statement as such, though a 1983 statement on institutional homophobia indicates a clear recognition of the church’s engagement in practices which exclude LGBTIQ people. Using the formal language of language of resolutions, the General (national) Synod declared that:

“Whereas, lesbians, gay men, and bisexual persons suffer from institutionalized homophobia through isolation, devaluation, and discrimination to such an extent that they lead lives that are either hidden or ridiculed within the institutional church; and

Whereas, such treatment fosters emotional strain, alienation, a lack of self-worth, and, in some cases, a life where suicide appears to be the only option; and

Whereas, the United Church of Christ has, at times, demonstrated to lesbians, gay men, and bisexual persons, lay and clergy, that they are not persons of equal worth in the life of the church by turning these persons away from access to jobs, decision-making processes, and other aspects of institutional life which are available with little constraint to those who are heterosexual;

Therefore, Be It Resolved, that the Fourteenth General Synod denounces institutionalized expressions of homophobia in all its forms, and calls upon all levels of the United Church of Christ to expose, to address, and in the light of the Gospel, to transform institutionalised homophobia eliminating its effects within the church.”⁸

Presbyterian Church (USA)

In 2016, the Presbytery of New York City presented the following overture (proposal) to the General (national) Assembly which was *not* agreed to in 2016. A part of the overture includes:

“Followers of Jesus Christ know that no person can claim divine favor through personal merit, but only by the grace of God. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) acknowledges that actions we and our members have taken over the years have at times led God’s beloved children who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning to feel that they stand outside the grace of God and are unwelcome in the PC(USA). We deeply regret that, due to human failings, any person might find cause to doubt being loved by God. We affirm the God-given dignity and worth of every human being, and renew our commitment to ‘welcome one another, as Christ has welcomed [us], for the glory of God.’ [Romans 15:7]”

Expresses the deep sorrow of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) about all individuals and congregations who have left our fellowship, affirms our commitment to continue to pray with them, and acknowledges our sincere appreciation for those who have maintained relationship despite profound disagreement.

Challenges all Presbyterians to reflect upon, and repent of, the ways we have mistreated one another, and to seek reconciliation.⁹

In 2018 a detailed statement celebrating the gifts of people of all sexualities and gender identities included the following lament:

3. The assembly laments the ways that the policies and actions of the PC(USA) have caused gifted, faithful, LGBTQ[IA]+ Christians to leave the Presbyterian church so that they could find a more welcoming place to serve, as they have been gifted and called by the Spirit.”¹⁰

The above overture was *not* passed, but the following expression of regret was.

“Declining a proposal to admit to and apologize for harming the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning community, commissioners to the [222nd General Assembly](#) of the [Presbyterian Church\(U.S.A.\)](#) instead opted to express deep regret for ways that those minorities of “God’s beloved children” have been led to feel that they stand outside the grace of God and are unwelcome in the denomination.

At the same time, the resolution expresses the deep sorrow of all in the PC(USA) who have left the fellowship of the church, and expresses appreciation to those who have maintained relationships despite profound disagreement.

Calling for deeper conversations about theological differences, the resolution adopted Thursday by a 463-51 vote calls upon Presbyterians to seek reconciliation and to reach out to those who have been marginalized across the spectrum of theological understanding.”¹¹

The following were agreed by the General Assembly in 2018. (Their General Assembly meets every year, meaning that contentious issues are re-visited annually!)

Overture 11-12, On Affirming and Celebrating the Full Dignity and Humanity of People of All Gender Identities: Acknowledges the church's past mistake in being unwelcoming to transgender and non-binary individuals, encourages the welcoming and acceptance of all gender identities, and affirms their right to live free from discrimination in any arena; this overture also specifically mentioned the rights of transgender students. [Read](#)

Overture 11-13, On Celebrating the Gifts of People of Diverse Sexual Orientations and Gender Identities in the Life of the Church: Apologizes for the church's previous unwelcoming stance on LGBTQ parishioners, celebrates LGBTQ church pioneers, and states the church will welcome, lift up, and fight for the human rights of all people created in the eyes of God. [Read](#)

United Methodist Church, USA

Nothing identified.

Methodist Church of Norway

On 21 December, 2020, this historic statement was published on the Methodist Church's website: "The Methodist Church in Norway admits and apologizes for the condemning attitudes and actions that have inflicted insults, harm and suffering on LGBT+ people instead of dignity". It added: "This is contrary to the gospel of God's unconditional grace and love. Every human being is **created in the image of God** and loved by God". *[translated from Norwegian by KPK]*

The apology has been formulated by the main board of the Methodist Church in Norway after the Annual Conference decided that such a statement was appropriate.¹²

Global Interfaith Commission on LGBT+ Concerns¹³

The following statement "Declaring The Sanctity Of Life And The Dignity Of All" was issued by the above Commission in 2020. A service was held at Westminster Abbey and is available on their website.

- We come together as senior religious leaders, academics, and lay leaders from around the world to affirm the sanctity of life and dignity of all.
- We affirm that all human beings of all sexual orientations, gender identities and gender expressions are a precious part of creation and are part of the natural order.
- We affirm that we are all equal under God, whom many call the Divine, and so we are all equal to one another.
- We, therefore, call for all to be treated equally under the law.

We recognize with sadness that certain religious teachings have often, throughout the ages, caused and continue to cause deep pain and offense to those who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex.

- We acknowledge, with profound regret, that some of our teachings have created, and continue to create, oppressive systems that fuel intolerance, perpetuate injustice and result in violence. This has led, and continues to lead, to the rejection and alienation of many by their families, their religious groups and cultural communities.

- We ask for forgiveness from those whose lives have been damaged and destroyed on the pretext of religious teaching.
- We believe that love and compassion should be the basis of faith and that hatred can have no place in religion.
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We call on all nations to put an end to criminalisation on the grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity, for violence against LGBT+ people to be condemned and for justice to be done on their behalf.

- We call for all attempts to change, suppress or erase a person's sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression – commonly known as “conversion therapy” – to end, and for these harmful practices to be banned.
- Finally, we call for an end to the perpetuation of prejudice and stigma and commit to work together to celebrate inclusivity and the extraordinary gift of our diversity.

Anglican Church in Australia: Perth Diocese

At the 49th Synod of the Perth Diocese [October 2017], the membership passed a motion offering “a heartfelt apology” to “people who are bisexual, transgender, intersex or queer whom we have hurt by words and behaviour that have not displayed the love of God... We are deeply sorry for any harm we have done and repent of such ungodly behaviour,” the motion read. The Diocese also stated a “desire to be places where LGBTIQ+ people will feel safe” and encouraged its churches to “demonstrate repentance in changed attitudes and conduct”.¹⁴

Anglican Diocese of Adelaide

On 19 October 2019 the 165th Synod of the Adelaide Diocese resolved as follows:

We apologise to, and seek forgiveness from, people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex or queer whom we have hurt by words and behaviour that have not displayed the love of God. We are deeply sorry for any harm we have done and repent of such ungodly behaviour.¹⁵

St Marks Anglican Church, Fitzroy, Melbourne

In May 2014, St Mark's made the following announcement:

“We're lighting the steeple of Saint Marks Church, Fitzroy (Melbourne), in Bishop's colour purple as a SYMBOL OF APOLOGY to the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender community & for the sufferers of HIV/AIDS who have also been subjected to the same ill-informed stigmatisation by the church...”

The steeple will remain purple throughout the duration of the 20th INTERNATIONAL AIDS CONFERENCE to give hope to the international delegates that are often fighting an uphill battle against conservative Christian views - in the creation of beneficial policies.”

An “Apology Mass: Celebrate a new Beginning” was held on 19 July 2014.

Equal Voices

In Australia several individuals from different denominations came together in 2016 to form a new organization, called Equal Voices. The organisation states their vision as:

“an equal place at the table. We are LGBTIQ+ people with our allies connecting, collaborating and advocating across Australia on matters of inclusion. We are supporting Australian churches and society in becoming fully affirming which means we acknowledge, respect, utilise and celebrate the gifts of all people, regardless of sexuality, gender identity or intersex status.”¹⁶

A public Service of “Prayers and Commissioning of a National Apology to LGBTIQ+ Australians” was held at St James Church, Sydney, in February.¹⁷ The liturgy noted that “in this building tonight there are those who need to receive and those who need to receive an apology and those who need to apologise.”¹⁸

The Equal Voices apology is headed “An apology to my LGBTIQ+ friends, and to all who have been adversely affected by the teachings and behaviour of Christians and their churches.”

“Considering the ways in which you have been hurt by me, and by other Christians and churches, I ask for your forgiveness:

For being too slow to acknowledge that we need to say sorry to you;

For not speaking up against the damaging, isolating, and often violent mistreatment you have been subjected to;

For speaking about you, without first listening to you;

For not creating safe environments within our churches where people can speak openly and honestly about their struggles and understandings;

For perpetuating stereotypes, and for not taking full account of your actual lived experiences;

For talking to you or about you in such a way as to suggest that sexual and gender differences are not part of your true identity as humans made in the image of God;

For perpetuating the mistaken belief that sexual orientation and gender identity should be treated, healed or changed;

For rejecting and harming people with intersex variations because we fail to understand or accept your non-binary biological sex characteristics;

For not acknowledging that Christians who are seeking to be faithful to their Lord and to the Scriptures are coming to different conclusions on matters of gender, sexual orientation, non-binary biological sex, and marriage.

I commit myself to:

honour and support you in every way I can;

be open to your correction and gentle guidance;

act in love to hold others to account for words, behaviour or practices which hurt, harm or exclude;

promote respectful, inclusive and informed discussion about issues of Biblical interpretation and application;

work with you to bring about transformative change within our churches.”

Interdenominational group – “100REVS”

“100REVS” was a group of 100 ministers who signed a written apology in 2008, and joined the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras that year to emphasise the apology. These were ministers from a spectrum of expressions of Christianity including mainline, evangelical and Pentecostal. The apology stated:

“As ministers of various churches and denominations we recognise that the churches we belong to, and the church in general, have not been places of welcome for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) people. Indeed the church has often been profoundly unloving toward the GLBT community. For these things we apologise, whatever the distinctive of our Christian position on human sexuality – to which we remain committed. We are deeply sorry and ask for the forgiveness of the GLBT community. We long that the church would be a place of welcome for all people and commit ourselves to pursuing this goal.”¹⁹

¹ <https://www.churchofengland.org/media-and-news/press-releases/draft-prayers-thanksgiving-dedication-and-gods-blessing-same-sex>

² Link lost, needs to be re-identified, and checked for later statements.

³ [New Zealand Bishops Acknowledge Church's "Shortcomings" on LGBT Inclusion - New Ways Ministry](#)

⁴ <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/406736/new-zealand-church-unaffected-by-us-methodist-schism-over-gay-marriage>

⁵ Check reference

⁶ <https://united-church.ca/blogs/round-table/let-us-story>

⁷ https://www.ucc.org/what-we-do-2/justice-local-church-ministries/justice/health-and-wholeness-advocacy-ministries/lgbtq-ministries/lgbt_statements/

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ <https://www.pc-biz.org/#/search/6335>

¹⁰ <https://www.pc-biz.org/#/search/3000313>

¹¹ <https://www.pcusa.org/news/2016/6/24/ga-expresses-regret-harm-lgbtqq-members-sorrow-tho/>

¹² <https://evangelicalfocus.com/europe/9545/norwegian-methodist-church-issues-historical-apology-to-the-lgbt-community>

¹³ <https://globalinterfaith.lgbt/>

¹⁴ [Perth's Anglican church offers 'heartfelt apology' to LGBT community | LGBT rights | The Guardian](#)

¹⁵ [Apology to LGBTIQ+ communities - Adelaide Anglicans](#)

¹⁶ <https://equalvoices.org.au/>

¹⁷ St James Church Sydney, Order of Service, 24 February 2017.

¹⁸ Ibid., 8.

¹⁹ See Anthony Venn Brown, St Marks