



StMARY *with* StALBAN

www.teddingtonparish.org

Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Policy

1. Introduction

The Church of St Mary with St Alban (SMwSA) community is committed to treating all people with love, dignity, and respect. We will attempt to promote equal opportunities across all activities and look to create an environment in which all can flourish, where everyone is treated equally, diversity is encouraged, and none is excluded.

This Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Policy is written in the context of both the theological context described below and the current Equality Act, October 2010. The Act provides a legal framework to protect the rights of individuals from unfair treatment, and advance equality of opportunity for all.

The purpose of this policy is to provide a basis for understanding and engagement, and to develop and encourage attitudes and behaviours that support equality, diversity, and inclusion. As with any process of change, this will require time and explanation within our congregation, and at times will feel uncomfortable as we seek to chart the best course in a sometimes polarised social and cultural context.

This policy document is owned and managed by the SMwSA Diversity and Inclusion Group on behalf of the Parochial Church Council (PCC).

2. Definitions

The definitions below are taken with some minor changes from the Equality and Human Rights Commission, except where indicated.

<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/secondary-education-resources/useful-information/glossary-terms>

1) Equality:

Equality is about ensuring that every individual has an equal opportunity to make

the most of their lives and talents, believing that no one should have poorer life chances because of their starting point in life and individual characteristics. Equality also recognises that historically certain groups of people have experienced discrimination.

2) Dignity

A value owed to all humans, to be treated with respect.

3) Direct discrimination

This refers to less favourable treatment against an individual because of that person's protected characteristic.

4) Disability

A person has a disability if they have a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on that person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. The charity Scope distinguishes between social disability where people are disabled by barriers in society; and the medical model of disability which says that people are disabled by their impairments or differences.

5) Diverse

Widely varied. In the sense of a diverse population, people are from a range of backgrounds, ethnicities, and cultures.

6) LGBT+ (not defined by Equality and Human Rights Commission)

LGBT is an acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Trans. The definition has been augmented by the + symbol to indicate that there are more ways to identify and describe gender and sexuality beyond the acronym.¹

7) Racism

Treating someone unfairly because of their race, colour, nationality or ethnic or national origins.

8) Transgender

An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from their birth sex. They may or may not seek to undergo gender re-assignment, including hormonal treatment and/or surgery. Often used interchangeably with 'trans'.

3. Theological Context

The SMwSA church community holds to the belief that every human being is made in the image of God and is valued as being part of God's creation. Jesus was sent to break down all the barriers that divide us from that love and our love for each other. Love is therefore the key to our understanding of how we relate and behave towards one another. As God loves all people unconditionally so SMwSA will seek to live out that unconditional love in every part of Church life.

SMwSA will continually seek to find the most loving way in all its operations. Issues of equality, diversity and inclusivity will be critical in the search. The Church community

¹ *Explanation of definition taken from the website of the charity "Opening Doors"*

<https://www.openingdoorslondon.org.uk/lgbt-glossary>

LGBTQ is an acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Queer. The definition has been augmented by "IAP" which includes Intersex and Ace (asexual and aromantic), Pansexual (attraction to people regardless of gender). The symbol + indicates that there are more ways to identify and describe gender and sexuality beyond the acronym.

will seek guidance from scripture, tradition, reason and experience. The handling of the Bible and the challenges of interpreting scripture will be vital. Inappropriate use of scripture can lead to discriminating attitudes and practices. As the body of Christ here on earth, we are called to live in a way which emulates the love God has shown us in Jesus, with all people.

SMwSA will recognise the rich resources the Bible provides but will be aware that it is not specific on matters of equality and contains stories of discrimination. It will also be aware of the need to take into account the cultural context in which the scriptures are written.

The Church's liturgy and especially the sacraments are special channels where God in Christ meets his people. Sometimes they have acted as barriers and not bridges to God's love. SMwSA will be a church where all people can experience that love through worship and sacrament.

4. Legal Context

The main legal context is provided by the current Equality Act, October 2010. The Act provides a legal framework to protect the rights of individuals from unfair treatment, and advance equality of opportunity for all.

It prohibits direct and indirect discrimination, harassment, and victimisation of people on the grounds of protected characteristics including:

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- marriage, civil partnership, single status
- pregnancy and maternity
- race
- religion and belief
- sex
- sexual orientation.

Every member of our community matters. This includes all associated with SMwSA. As a Church we must have due regard to:

- eliminating unlawful discrimination
- advancing equality of opportunity
- fostering good relations between people from different equality groups.

5. Purpose of the Policy

The purpose of this policy is to provide a basis for understanding and engagement, and to develop and encourage attitudes and behaviours that support equality, diversity, and inclusion.

All those involved with SMwSA, whether members, employees, volunteers or those using its services will be treated fairly, equally and with respect. All will be helped and encouraged to flourish within the Church to their full potential as unique individuals.

This policy has been produced to:

- ensure that everyone in the community feels that the Church is open to their involvement
- ensure no person using or seeking to use the services and activities of the Church is unfairly discriminated against either directly or indirectly. However, the PCC reserves the right to refuse use of premises by any organisation deliberately opposed to the Church, or which would knowingly bring the Church into disrepute
- create an environment in which the attitudes and behaviours encourage full involvement with the Church.

6. Aims and Commitments

As a Church we will:

- be welcoming, reflecting our belief that every human being is valued
- demonstrate SMwSA's commitment to treating all who come to be involved with, attend or visit the church, however infrequently, fairly and with respect
- ensure equality, diversity and inclusion are fully reflected in its employment and volunteer practices and procedures
- work to ensure SMwSA attracts and retains diverse representation throughout the life of the Church in volunteering and other roles, to be reflective of the parish and wider community
- ensure that equality is given due regard from the outset of development of all policies and programmes and that the principles of equality and inclusion are understood by all
- aim to confront and eliminate discrimination in all its activities and encourage the involvement of everyone in the community¹
- promote a culture where all are treated with respect and dignity, and which recognises the value that a diverse Church can bring.

We will also ensure that we are aware and responsive to economic discrimination and the effect of lack of money or personal means which can lead to feelings of exclusion. This could be caused for example by setting the card reader for donations in the Church at too high a level or in the way that we request or manage collections.

As well as visible signs of disability or exclusion, we will need to be alert to invisible aspects such as mental health. Our welcoming and support within the Church will hopefully uncover these aspects over time so we can do our utmost to help people in this situation to feel included.

¹ *In the light of the Church's Christian purpose and ethos it reserves the right to exercise legal exemption where it is declared that Christian faith is integral to the individual in a specific work role and consequently requires membership of the Anglican Church or another recognised Church.*

We actively seek to meet these aims in all aspects of our services, community interactions and events, while improving our awareness of issues through linking into initiatives such as the Archbishops' "Lament to Action" report in 2020. We also refer to other resources such as the Pastoral Principles for Living Well Together to help us (see Appendix A).

While current doctrine in the Church of England is that same sex marriages cannot be conducted, the General Synod in 2023 proposed Prayers of Love and Faith to bless same-sex couples in Church. We will continue to look for ways as a Church to support and respond to those in the LGBT+ community who are living in Love and Faith².

7. Governance

The Incumbent, PCC, Church Wardens, Clergy and Safeguarding Officer all have a key role in monitoring and applying the Church's legal responsibilities for EDI.

SMwSA has put in place a Diversity and Inclusion Group to act as an advisory group and a focal point for the Church's initiatives on Diversity and Inclusion. The Group aims to ensure that the wider SMwSA community is made increasingly aware of the need for all of us to act in a way that promotes Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.

The Group's activities include helping to educate and improve the awareness of the Church community about Diversity and Inclusion issues, which can then have a positive impact on broader lives and relationships outside the Church.

The Group performs some audits and checks of the activities and imagery in the Church (for example its website, published materials, noticeboards, and Church environment). It also brings diversity and inclusion events to the attention of the community through prayers and intercessions.

The Contact Points within St Mary with St Alban are:

- Caroline Halmshaw – Associate Vicar
- Christopher Darling
- Malcolm Eady
- Anna Michel
- Cathy Randall.

The main way of measuring progress in the implementation and results of this EDI policy will be as follows:

- Feedback from parishioners
- Conversations with those who classify themselves as socially or medically disabled about their experiences in SMwSA, whether progress is being made and how we can be more welcoming

² *Living in Love and Faith* was run by SMwSA as its Lent Course for 2022. [Living in Love and Faith \(churchofengland.org\)](https://www.churchofengland.org)

- Formal audits of our premises and processes such as Disability Access Audits
- Occasional Pulse surveys of those who come into contact with SMwSA in events or other interactions to check that our EDI approach is effective.

We are considering how to put in place a 'whistleblowing' mechanism to raise issues which breach the EDI policy, including reporting mechanisms and anonymity. This mechanism will need to align with that used for safeguarding policy.

8. Related Documents

- Pastoral Principles (Church of England, 2020)
- Living in Love and Faith (Church of England, 2020)
- Safeguarding Policy (St Mary with St Alban's)
- Employment Policies of the Diocese of London.

In putting together this document, the Diversity and Inclusion Group would like to acknowledge the helpful example EDI document provided by St George's Church Wash Common, Newbury, which has provided much of the underlying structure and content of this document for St Mary with St Alban's.

9. Date of Review

The Policy will be reviewed by the PCC every three years to take account of any legislative changes or national policy development.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1 Can unconfirmed children receive communion?

Yes, we have a policy which supports the sharing of Holy Communion with unconfirmed children. This is done in consultation with the parents of those children.

2 Are all roles within the Church open to people of all sexes, and is there fair representation in relevant governing bodies?

Yes, we make no distinction in terms of sex for any Church roles or for representation on governing bodies.

3 Is the Church prepared to welcome and accommodate those with disabilities – physical/mental/intellectual, or visible/invisible?

Yes, we actively seek to welcome and accommodate all those with disabilities and are seeking to make the Church premises as open as possible to them through changes and improvements to our buildings.

4 Do we actively encourage and embrace the involvement of people of all ages?

Yes, we invite people of all ages to join in our worship and become actively involved in the running of the Church and its services.

5. Can the Church baptise children of gay couples or unmarried couples?

Yes, the Church can baptise children of gay couples and of unmarried couples.

6. How does the Church welcome and recognise transgender people?

In July 2017 the General Synod of the Church of England voted unequivocally to both welcome and affirm transgender people and that is the basis for our pastoral practice. Trans people with gender recognition are already able to marry in our churches. Being transgender does not prevent someone offering themselves for ordained ministry and The Church of England has transgender clergy as well as laity.

7. Can the Church marry same sex couples?

While current doctrine in the Church of England is that same-sex marriages cannot be conducted, the General Synod in 2023 proposed Prayers of Love and Faith to bless same-sex couples in Church. We will continue to look for ways as a Church to support and respond to those in the LGBT+ community who are living in Love and Faith.

Appendix A: The Pastoral Principles for Living Well Together

https://lhf.churchofengland.org/pluginfile.php/13359/block_html/content/LLF%20The%20Course%20Downloadable%20Version.pdf

The Pastoral Principles for Living Well Together will help us

... to address ignorance

by learning together about identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage in the light of our call to be faithful to both Scripture and the Church's tradition;

by learning together with people who have different perspectives and lived experiences in relation to identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage.

... to acknowledge prejudice

by welcoming people as they are, loving them unconditionally and seeking to see Christ in them;

by reflecting deeply on our attitudes and behaviour in order to nurture understanding and respect between people who disagree.

... to admit hypocrisy

by not condemning certain behaviours and attitudes while turning a blind eye to others, remembering that we are all weak, fallible, broken and equally in need of God's grace;

by learning from one another about the challenge to holy living and the wideness of God's mercy as the Spirit moves within, among and between us.

... to cast out fear

by consciously demonstrating and living out what it means for perfect love to cast out fear even in situations of disagreement;

by modelling openness and vulnerability as each of us wrestles prayerfully with the costliness of Christian discipleship.

... to speak into silence

by remembering that we are the Body of Christ, called to relate deeply and openly with one another, sharing what is on our hearts as well as in our minds;

by practising deep listening without a hidden agenda that encourages conversations about questions of human identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage.

... to pay attention to power

by being alert to attempts to control others, remembering that God's Spirit alone can bring transformation into our lives and the lives of others;

by following Christ's example of service and compassion as we accompany one another in following the way of the cross.