



Living with Integrity in the Church

Rev Elisabeth G B Spence
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As the phrase goes, I hadn't "come out" to myself when I became a candidate for the ministry and, in time, a minister of the Church of Scotland, but when I did realise I was gay I knew that life couldn't be the same again.

The church, because of some of its ministers' and members' views on homosexuality, has sadly made me into someone I am not. The church has made me into someone I have no wish to be. The church has caused me, a person struggling to be honest in all I do, into a person prepared to embrace dishonesty at the heart of my life. I have had to hide who I am.

Obviously I don't agree with those who interpret scripture in a way that allows them to conclude that homosexuality is something God declares sinful. I don't believe for one minute that God has anything but love for me and for the way I live my life in all its aspects. I have come out to myself, to my family and friends, but each and every day I have to stuff myself back in to the closet when it comes to the church.

As I read articles, such as the ones on this website, where gay people talk of their experience of living in the church I am often moved to tears by what I read of their experiences. I am also brought to tears by the fact that nearly always the article is anonymous. I understand fully for I too have written anonymously. This is not out of lack of courage but out of a desire to protect those we love.

There are many in the church who know I am gay but they are more concerned with what sort of qualities and gifts I have to offer the church than anything about my sexuality. Indeed there are those who recognise that my sexuality is part of the gift I bring to the church.

However, they also know the risk I run if I am more open about my sexual orientation. Some of them would tell me that I am foolish to be more open. I know they would say this out of love for me, but with the constant debate and furore around this issue I am now being that foolish.

As the church debates in each presbytery the issue of a minister's freedom of conscience with respect to the marking of Civil Partnerships I anticipate that it may not be as gracious as the debate I listened to and took part in at this year's General Assembly. LGBT¹ people in many of our Presbyteries may be hurt and made to feel beyond the love of God. Mothers and fathers may be broken hearted as they listen to their son or daughter being judged and condemned.

I am not sure what I will do in the debate but I know I cannot and will not sit back and allow untruths and prejudice to be tolerated or made to seem acceptable.

Some of my friends may still counsel me to keep quiet but it is now no longer tolerable to do so. The time has come for me to be the woman God has called me to be as I try to live my life with integrity.

I do it knowing my value and worth in Jesus Christ: which is all that matters to me. So when I am made to feel of no value and worthless by many in the Church I remain as committed to Jesus Christ as he does to me.

The time has come for me to proudly pen my name to the bottom of this letter.

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¹ Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered.