



Being Together:

An inclusion and respect dialogue resource for parishes and ministries

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Message from the Regional Bishops

This resource forms part of our response to the Anglican Church of Australia's 'Being Together' statement. 'Being Together' is about honouring the wellbeing, safety, dignity and giftings of others. It is about encouraging one another; listening to one another; being honest, caring and respectful; acting with integrity; and, being discerning about what we say and do.

A hallmark of 'Being Together' is the way we respectfully welcome and include people. We understand that people each bring unique gifts, and that a community can only flourish if people are embraced and their gifts enabled.

This was, for example, demonstrated at our 2019 Diocesan Synod during the open space sessions. Following this Synod, participants reported that they really valued the collaborative conversations, the opportunity to share stories, and the building up of one another even when there was disagreement. One of the key themes that emerged from the open space discussions was how our Church could be more inclusive of a wider range of people.

The various talking circles (or 'listening circles') that we are holding across our Diocese emerged from these Synod open space sessions. Talking circles are intentional gatherings where people share and listen with a focus on respect and belonging.

During a lengthy 2020 COVID-19 'lockdown' period, an online talking circle was held, during which participants shared about the personal impacts of being included and excluded in parish communities. The lockdown talking circle was the springboard for this dialogue resource, which has been developed by our Parishes and other Mission Agencies Commission.

Nearly 30 Australian Anglicans have contributed to this resource by sharing personal stories about exclusion and inclusion within parish settings. We would like to thank these fellow Anglicans for their courage and generosity. This resource was only made possible because of their unique contributions.

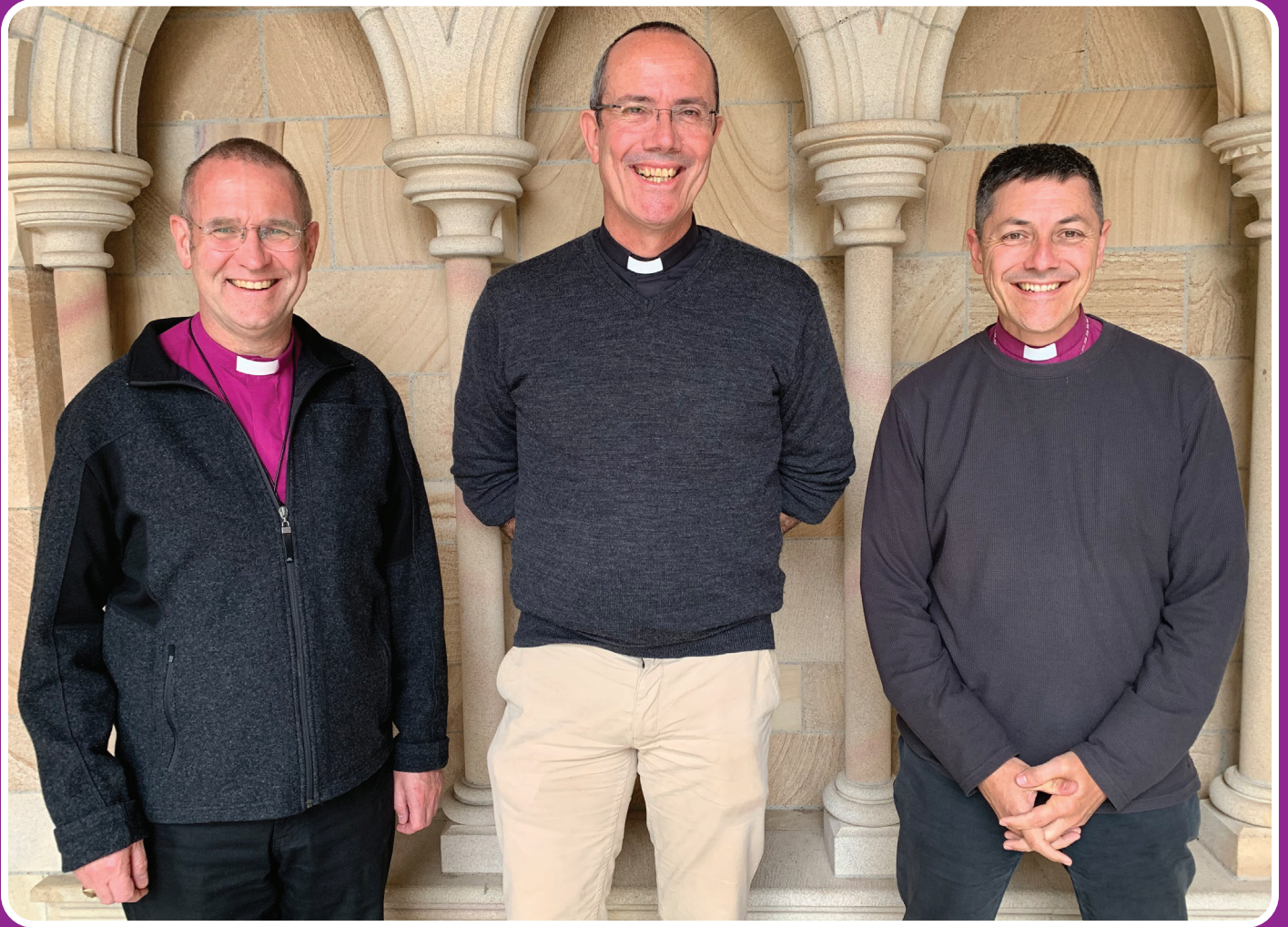
We look forward to hearing about the ways your parish or ministry continues to create communities of care, respect and inclusion as a result of your engagement with this resource.

Yours in Christ Jesus,

The Right Rev'd Bishop Cam Venables (Bishop for the Western Region)

The Right Rev'd Jeremy Greaves KCSJ (Bishop for the Northern Region)

The Right Rev'd John Roundhill (Bishop for the Southern Region)



"We understand that people each bring unique gifts, and that a community can only flourish if people are embraced and their gifts enabled"
(Bishop John Roundhill, Bishop Cam Venables, Bishop Jeremy Greaves)

Welcome and acknowledgements

Welcome!

We begin by Acknowledging Country.

Our Diocese is blessed with large numbers of culturally distinct First Nations peoples, including people from various Aboriginal Countries across the geographical regions of South East Queensland, Darling Downs South West and Wide Bay-Burnett, as well as people from other Aboriginal Countries across Australia and from the Torres Strait Islands. With this in mind:

We acknowledge the First Peoples of the land we live and work on. We acknowledge their ongoing connection to Country and surrounding land, sky, water and sea. And, we pay our respects to their Elders past and present.

Thank you for picking up this resource. We hope your community finds it life-giving.

Jesus of Nazareth called his followers to love one another just as he loved them. Two thousand years later, he still calls us – his people, his Church – to do the same. Importantly, Jesus tells us that everyone will know we are his if we love one another.

During his ministry, Jesus of Nazareth told stories and asked questions when conversing with people. So always seeking to be inspired by his example and legacy, this parish and ministry resource draws upon stories and asks questions.

This resource was developed by us in collaboration with nearly 30 Anglicans who have shared stories about their parish experiences for reflection and discussion. Dozens of other Church folk have provided biographies for activities, shared session feedback or participated in a session test run. We sincerely appreciate the critical contributions of all these people.

We hope you join us in this prayer for all the faith communities who use this resource:

Lord Jesus,

*You commanded us to love our neighbour as we love ourselves,
and taught us that all are our neighbour, loved and cherished by God.*

*Help us to see your face in all those we meet,
empower us to show your hospitality,
welcoming all so that we may build places of belonging
where everyone may love and learn together.*

Amen.

Dr Stephen Harrison (Executive Director)

Michelle McDonald (Director of News and Special Communications)

Parishes and other Mission Agencies Commission



Dr Stephen Harrison and Michelle McDonald from the Parishes and other Mission Agencies Commission consulted with numerous Anglicans in the development of this resource, including ICU doctor, priest and former Paralympian, The Rev'd Dr Gemma Dashwood OAM TSSF

How to use the 'Being Together: An inclusion and respect dialogue resource for parishes and ministries'

Whom is this resource for?

This resource is designed for Anglican parishes and ministries; however, other groups are very welcome to use this resource for non-commercial purposes.

What is the purpose of this resource?

This resource is a response to the Anglican Church of Australia's 'Being Together' statement. The resource's purpose is to encourage parishes and ministries to explore how they can be increasingly more welcoming, inclusive and respectful.

It is hoped that a 'What would Jesus of Nazareth do?' approach is taken during the course of the resource's engagement. This is why the resource's scripture readings are sourced from the Gospel writers.

During his ministry, Jesus of Nazareth told stories and asked questions when conversing with people one on one and when gathering in groups. So the backbone of this resource is the personal stories shared by Australian Anglican community members, along with reflection and discussion questions.

How may the resource be used?

This resource may be used in a variety of ways. For example, while the resource is presented in eight sessions (or modules) and may be used as a course, your parish or ministry may wish to:

- change the order of the sessions
- use only a selection of the sessions (although it is recommended that the 'Introduction' session is among those selected)
- use parts of the resource for the foundation of other group discussions or other (non-commercial) activities.

What themes does the resource cover?

The sessions cover the following themes:

- Introduction
- Disability, impairment and neuro-diversity
- Age and life stage
- First Nations and cultural and linguistic diversity
- Gender
- Major unexpected life events
- Sexuality
- Socio-economic situation.

What elements are included in the resource?

Each session follows a similar format, with an opening prayer and scripture, an activity, personal stories shared by Australian Anglicans, a discussion time and a closing prayer.

Each session in this resource includes the following elements:

- scripture (NRSV)#
- prayers*
- activities^
- reflection and discussion questions
- personal stories from Australian Anglican community members.

How long does it take?

If the contents of this resource are used as a course, then spreading out the sessions over a period of months is suggested.

If only a small number of sessions are undertaken, then the time it takes will depend on the number of sessions selected.

Each session (module) takes approximately 90 to 120 minutes.

Tips for facilitators

- Print handouts of the required session content for participants (e.g. prayers/scripture, activity, questions and personal stories).
- At each session, ensure that participants know each other, with any newcomers introduced.
- Agree to group 'rules', including regarding level of confidentiality about what is shared, listening compassionately and respectfully, and allowing people to share or not share as they wish.
- If a brief break is needed during the sessions, then please allow for this.
- Encourage 'owning' statements (e.g. "I believe that..." or "It seems to me that...") to help open up dialogue and to avoid a situation where people are pressured to agree.
- We encourage facilitators to help participants to keep their focus on Jesus who welcomed all.

Focusing on Jesus of Nazareth

The creators of this content have intentionally focused on the actions and words of Jesus as found in the Gospels. Here we find Jesus breaking barriers to include those who are excluded, outcast or looked down on by the society of his day. We find Jesus eating with tax collectors, touching lepers, commending Roman soldiers and engaging with women in profound and compassionate ways.

We believe we are called to follow Jesus' example and to create communities that are open and welcoming to all. Sometimes this means putting our own concerns or discomfort behind us. So we encourage facilitators to help participants to keep their focus on Jesus who welcomed all.

How can the sessions be facilitated?

It is recommended that the resource's content be delivered via small groups.

Given that group participants may share personal stories during the course of the sessions, it is recommended that group members at the start of each session agree to:

- listen to each other compassionately and respectfully
- the level of confidentiality that will be kept regarding what is shared
- allow group members to share or not share as they wish.

As noted in the introduction, this resource forms part of our Diocese's response to the Anglican Church of Australia's 'Being Together' statement. 'Being Together' is about honouring the wellbeing, safety, dignity and giftings of others.

The following resource outlines the Anglican Church of Australia's "Expectations of behaviour in our church community", which you may find useful in the facilitation of your small groups.

[Scripture quotations are from] New Revised Standard Version Bible © Copyright 1989. By the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. All rights reserved.

* From *A Prayer Book for Australia* (Complete Text Edition) © Copyright 1995 Broughton Books.

^ Thank you to The Methodist Church in the United Kingdom who generously gave permission for activities in their *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Toolkit* to be reproduced or adapted for this resource (methodist.org.uk/).

Being Together

Expectations of behaviour in our church community



Jesus told us to love one another as he loves us. As Christians we know our life together is strengthened when our behaviour is consistent with our faith.

However, our experience of being together can be difficult, particularly when there are differences. So, it is important to be clear about how we will behave towards each other.



Being a community

- ✓ We will value the wellbeing and safety of others, especially children and other vulnerable people.
- ✓ We will encourage each other to participate in the life of the church.
- ✓ We will consider the impact of our behaviour on others.



Relating to each other

- ✓ We will protect the safety of all, especially children and other vulnerable people.
- ✓ We will treat each other with respect and dignity, irrespective of ability, gender, sexuality, race, age or contribution to the church.
- ✓ We will act with integrity and honesty in our interactions with each other.



Communicating with each other

- ✓ We will communicate respectfully with others, and not in a way that threatens, belittles or humiliates.
- ✓ We will speak with integrity and honesty, and refrain from speculation and gossip.



Acknowledging difference

- ✓ We will respect those who are different from us and not isolate or ridicule them.
- ✓ We will listen to and seek to understand the beliefs, opinions and practices of others, even when we do not share their views.



Responding to conflict

- ✓ We will accept responsibility for our part in a conflict.
- ✓ We will be willing to play our part in resolving a conflict.



ANGLICAN CHURCH OF AUSTRALIA

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Pray

Opening prayer

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good.

His steadfast love endures for ever!

(APBA p.22)

Almighty God,

in Christ you make all things new:

transform the poverty of our nature

by the riches of your grace,

and in the renewal of our lives

make known your heavenly glory;

through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

(APBA p.488)

Jesus Visits Martha and Mary

Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her." (Luke 10.38-42)

Holy Spirit, sanctifier, cleanse us from all hypocrisy, unite us to one another in the bonds of peace and love, and confirm us in holiness, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

(APBA p.417)

Begin

Introduction

Welcome to the first session as we gather to discuss and explore what inclusion and respect look like as Anglicans.

During his ministry, Jesus of Nazareth told stories and asked questions when conversing with people one on one and when gathering in groups. So always seeking to be inspired by his example and legacy, this parish and ministry resource draws upon stories and asks questions. Nearly 30 Anglicans have contributed by sharing personal stories about exclusion and inclusion within parish settings.

This resource is a response to the Anglican Church of Australia's 'Being Together' statement. In summary, 'Being Together' is about honouring the wellbeing, safety, dignity and giftings of others. So it is about encouraging one another; listening to one another; being honest, caring and respectful; acting with integrity; and, being discerning about what we say and do.

A hallmark of 'Being Together' is the way we respectfully welcome and include everyone, as we understand that every single person has something that only they can contribute. The whole can only be whole if everyone is embraced and enabled to engage and participate.

Each session follows a similar format, with an opening prayer and scripture, an activity, personal stories shared by Australian Anglicans, a discussion time and a closing prayer.

This session will focus on the interconnected themes of fairness and unconscious bias.

'Fairness' is not about 'everybody being the same'. Fairness is about respecting that every person is different and acknowledging the needs that arise from difference. This is important so that nobody is excluded based on unconscious biases about 'sameness' or what is considered to be 'normal'.

Activity: Same – different – fair – equal?

Working in pairs or small teams, consider the questions below. Someone from your pair/team will need to provide feedback to the whole group. Remember that confidentiality is important. You need to agree in your pairs or teams what is to be shared with the wider group.

Part 1 (of two parts)

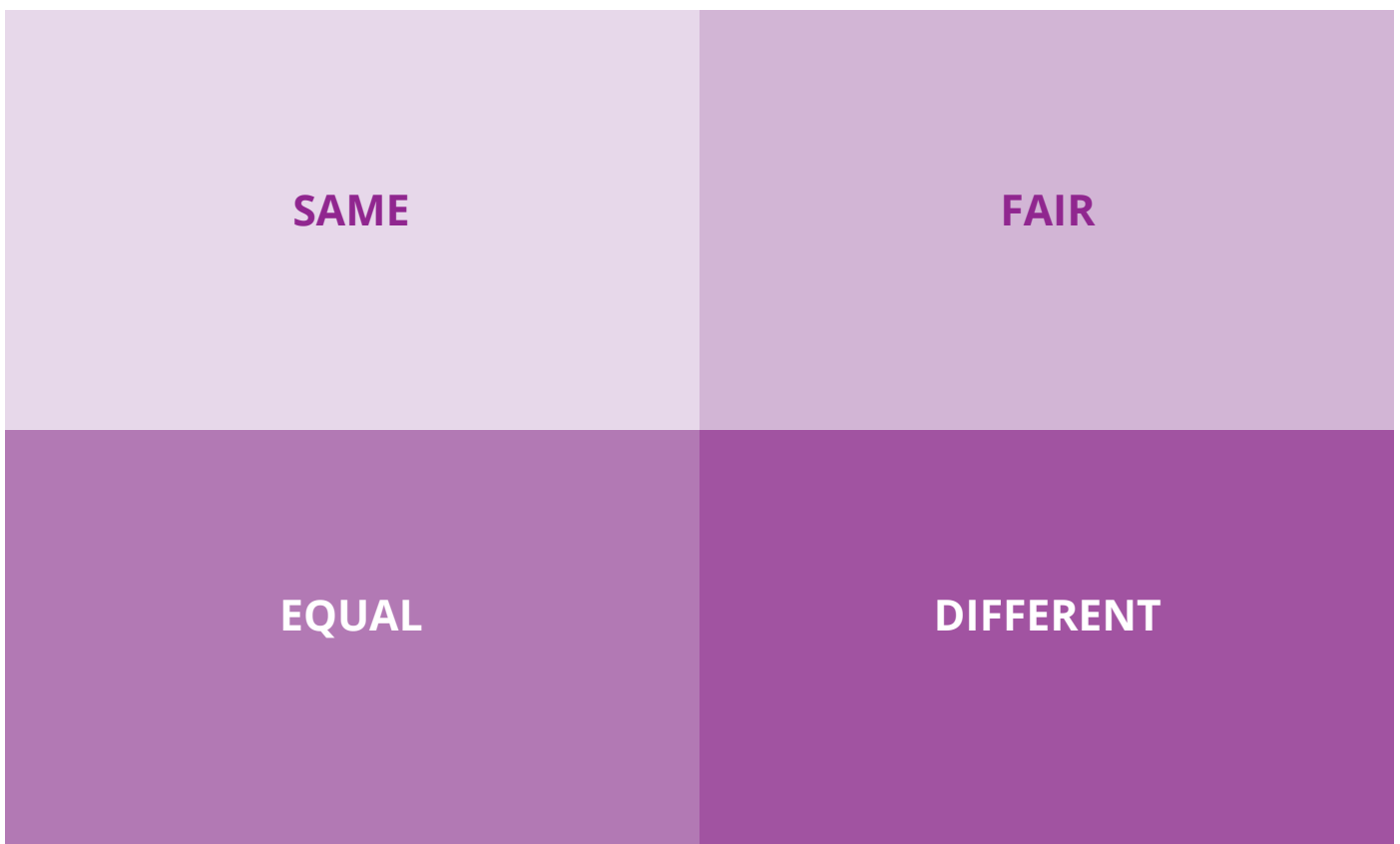
Think of the four words: SAME, DIFFERENT, FAIR and EQUAL. Imagine you have been asked to rewrite the dictionary and lose some words. If you had to choose just two of these four words, which would you choose to keep in the dictionary and why?

Note: group members can have different answers.

Part 2 (of two parts)

Look at the following diagram. Can you think of at least one circumstance/scenario that could fit under each heading (note: these circumstances/scenarios do not have to be church-related and may be recent or from your past)? For example:

- Under 'SAME', can you think of a time when you (or another person) were treated the same?
- Under 'DIFFERENT', can you think of a time when you (or another person) were treated differently?
- Under 'FAIR', can you think of a time when you (or another person) were treated according to your (or their) specific needs, which meant that you (or they) were treated differently?
- Under 'EQUAL', can you think of a time when you (or another person) were treated the same despite having different needs?



Feedback to the whole group

Part 1 questions:

- a. Which words (SAME, DIFFERENT, FAIR and EQUAL) did you decide to keep?
- b. Why were the words you chose important?

Part 2 summary:

Give a brief summary of what your pair/team suggested for Part 2.

Brief overview of unconscious bias

Unconscious biases are among the barriers we need to recognise and address so that we can include and respect people and treat them fairly. Psychologists tell us that our unconscious biases are simply 'people preferences' that we have developed. Some people are more familiar to us, which can lead us to unconsciously prefer people who look like us, speak like us, behave like us and share our interests. Our life experiences, socialisation and values subtly shape how we think and feel, thus contributing to unconscious bias.

As a result, our unconscious biases can sometimes lead us to be less empathetic toward people who are different. It can also lead to unintentional discrimination, which can even be passed down from one generation to the next.

However, our desire to be fair helps us to challenge and change the way we think, and consequently how we behave. This leads to fairer decision making and better problem solving, especially in new or unusual situations.

For this shift to happen, we need to be aware of our biases and associated habits, and unlearn these so we can become more inclusive and accepting. In church this is critical because in order to love Jesus, we need to love all God's people, which means ensuring that all God's people feel welcomed, safe, respected and included.

In summary, it is important to remember that our unconscious biases:

- are part of how our brains commonly work
- are unintended
- impact the choices we make
- can be 'unlearned', so all people can be included and respected.

Explore

A personal story about unconscious bias

Depending on the size of your gathering, in pairs, small groups or as a whole group, read the story below.

The story provided is a true account of some of the storyteller's parish experiences. A pseudonym has been used and any identifying details have been omitted to ensure anonymity. The terms and descriptors used are those preferred by the storyteller.

Questions for discussion

After you read the story:

1. Reflect on the questions that are written below the story.
2. Discuss your reflections in pairs, small groups or with the whole group.
3. Share your reflections with the whole group if you have worked in pairs or small groups.

Close

Closing questions for consideration as a whole group

What learning or new insight will you take away from today's session?

How can you implement or apply this learning/insight to help foster a more inclusive and respectful faith community?

Pray

Closing prayer

Lord Jesus,

**You commanded us to love our neighbour as we love ourselves,
and taught us that all are our neighbour, loved and cherished by God.**

**Help us to see your face in all those we meet,
empower us to show your hospitality,
welcoming all so that we may build places of belonging
where everyone may love and learn together. Amen.**

A personal story about unconscious bias

Anglican community member, Scarlett

I have been connected to a large Anglican Diocese for more than six years, including as a staff member and as a church volunteer. In these roles I have directly experienced the impacts of unconscious bias and become aware of my own unconscious biases, and their impacts.

For example, I recall a work meeting with a parish priest and a Parish Council member. Upon finding out that I had an adult child, the two men seemed quite taken aback, with both asking me in unison, "How old were you when you had him?" I wanted to respond with, "Why does it matter?", but instead said, "I was nearly 27 when I had him." They then commented on how young I look for my age and that they assumed that I must have been in my mid-teens when my son was born. I have reflected on this conversation since. I wonder whether it would have been more helpful for them from a pastoral perspective if I had politely responded with, "Why does it matter?" However, even though I was embarrassed and a little annoyed, I felt compelled to be 'professional' because I was 'on the clock'. I think the men demonstrated an unconscious bias about motherhood, which manifested in their obvious surprise and asking what was quite an impolite question.

An unconscious bias that I regularly witness in Anglican churches is the way in which people of Anglo-Celtic descent tend to be appointed to upfront parish roles, including during services (such as liturgical assistants, crucifers and readers), at parish events (such as emcees or panelists) and as Synod Representatives. This seems to happen even when there is an obvious cultural mix in the congregation, thus possibly reflecting an unconscious bias on behalf of Anglo-Celtic priests, Parish Councils and those who elect Synod Representatives. As a churched woman of mixed ethnicity and as a mother of a son whose skin colour is brown, I find this disappointing and discouraging. When I see a parish that fully includes culturally and linguistically diverse peoples in services and on their Parish Councils, I tend to see a flourishing parish.

My experience in the Anglican Church has also revealed to me unconscious biases that I was unaware of, and which I have really needed to address so I am more open-spirited, caring, respectful and fair.

For example, several years ago I gathered with a large group of parish congregation members, clergy and staff at a key event. In a spirit of transparency, I commented that, "I am not a parish community member" in response to a question asked by a staff member. I said this because I was not on their parish roll. The people in the group who know me all seemed surprised by my response – probably because of the amount of time I had spent volunteering with them. One of the parish community members replied in a caring and clear tone, "We would see that differently." His words profoundly impacted me, revealing an unconscious bias about 'belonging' that I had developed since childhood. This bias led me to view a discrete parish's community as essentially those who are 'official' members and who attend their church every Sunday (that is, someone *like me* who has been attending the same parish for over 20 years).

There was also an occasion when I visited another Anglican parish that an unconscious bias of mine led me to unfairly judge the pastoral capabilities of a young priest. As we processed out of the church following the service, I heard a number of much older women briefly share matters of a pastoral nature with the priest. I remember thinking to myself something along the lines of, "How could such a young priest offer you any worthwhile advice or comfort with such little life experience?" I was quite surprised by my unwarranted negativity and have sought to address this bias since. As I have come to know her, the young priest has shown herself to be very wise and measured, with healthy boundaries. This experience has taught me to be aware of my own biases and to avoid judging people's capacities based on their age.

Questions for discussion (allow enough time for reflection and give everyone who wishes to speak the chance to share with the whole group)

1. What struck you about the anecdotes in this story?
2. What unconscious biases are identified by the storyteller?
3. What are some of the impacts of these unconscious biases?
4. What are some of the ways such unconscious biases can be recognised and unlearned?

Session: Disability, impairment and neuro-diversity

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Opening prayer

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

This is the message we have heard from Christ:

**that God is light, in whom there is
no darkness at all.**

(APBA p.407)

O God,

whose Son Jesus is the good shepherd of your people:

help us when we hear his voice

to know him who calls us each by name,

and to follow where he leads;

who with you and the Holy Spirit

lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

(APBA p.510)

The Word Became Flesh

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it. There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came into being through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God...who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. (John 1.1-14)

Creator Spirit, Advocate promised by our Lord Jesus: increase our faith and help us to walk in the light of your presence, to the glory of God the Father; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

(APBA p.391)

Begin

Introduction

This session will explore the impacts of parishes including and excluding people who live with disability, impairment and/or neuro-diversity in parishes. In this session you will be invited to participate in a group activity and read the personal stories of Australian Anglicans who have experienced being included and excluded in parishes. These Australian Anglicans include people who live with disability, impairment and/or neuro-diversity and their loved ones who help care for them. Each personal story will be followed by a time of discussion and reflection.

Activity: what people say and do matter

Using the 'think/pair/share' approach, consider the following speech bubble comments.

Think

In silence, individually reflect on the following speech bubble comments by pondering these two questions:

1. How would you feel if these comments were made about/to you as a parishioner or about/to a loved one whom you accompany to church initiatives?
2. What needs to change in these situations and conversations?

Pair

Then gather in pairs to:

1. Share your responses.
2. Decide what key insights your pair will highlight to the rest of the group.

Share

You may then choose to share your insights about these speech bubble comments with the broader group.

I know your assistance dog is working right now, but can I pat her anyway?

I know you rely on the microphone that connects with your hearing aids, but I feel more natural giving my sermon without a mike. So my administrator will email you the sermon text or the YouTube video link after the service instead.

Priya wants to contribute a post to the parish blog, but she's dyslexic. Can you ask someone else to write it instead?

I've had a complaint that Sam's tics and other fidgeting are distracting for some parishioners. So can you please sit at the back of the church when you bring him and your other kids?

Even though Deng is sick, we really need him for music ministry. Can he drop a unit of study so he has more energy to help out?

We would ask her if she wants to volunteer with the others, but her wheelchair gets in the way and her church attendance isn't reliable enough.

People on anti-depressants or Ritalin should just pray and trust in God more.

Can I pray with you because I really believe that God wants to heal your blindness?

We've got a Bishop visiting over the next month and we don't want him worrying about parking, so we are going to free up the disabled car park for him. Can you ask disabled parishioners to get dropped off at the door instead? It's only for the next four weeks though.

The new parishioner with a wheelie walker was a Liturgical Assistant in her previous parish. She wants to be an LA here, but I can't see how she can give out communion on the sanctuary.

Brief overview of disability, impairment and neuro-diversity

The people who provided personal stories for this resource requested that the terms 'disability', 'impairment' and 'neuro-diversity' be used. While those who developed this resource acknowledge that different contexts and paradigms use different terms, for the purposes of this resource:

- 'disability' may include, for example, acquired or genetic physical disabilities, illnesses, balance disorders, learning disabilities, neuro-diverse conditions and intellectual disabilities.
- 'impairment' may include, for example, vision impairment, speech impairment, mobility impairment and hearing impairment.
- 'neuro-diversity' may include, for example, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), autism, dyspraxia (which impacts coordination), Tourette syndrome and dyslexia.
- 'a mental health condition' may be considered a disability, an impairment or a neuro-diverse condition, depending on the experience and perspective of the person who lives with the condition.

This list is not exhaustive. It is important to acknowledge that many disabilities, impairments and neuro-diverse conditions may not be obvious or openly spoken about by the respective parishioner and may intersect with other challenging aspects of their life (e.g. socio-economic situation and gender).

Explore

Personal stories sourced from Australian Anglicans

Depending on the size of your gathering, in pairs, small groups or as a whole group, select at least one story (see below) that shares a negative experience and one story that shares a positive experience. Read the two stories in pairs, small groups or as a whole group.

Each of the stories provided is a true story of a parish experience shared by an Australian Anglican. Pseudonyms have been used and any identifying details have been omitted to ensure anonymity. The terms and descriptors used are those preferred by the storytellers.

Questions for discussion

After you read the stories:

1. Reflect as an individual on the questions that are written below the stories.
2. Discuss your reflections in pairs, small groups or with the whole group.
3. Share your reflections with the whole group if you have worked in pairs or small groups.

Close

Closing questions for consideration as a whole group

What learning or new insight will you take away from today's session?

What opportunities do you see for implementing some of the actions you have discussed for making your church more inclusive and respectful for people living with disability, impairment or neuro-diversity?

How can you meaningfully involve people living with disability, impairment or neuro-diversity in this implementation?

What 'next steps' can you take with regard to the above (note: any decisions should involve people with lived experience and/or their carers or loved ones)?

Pray

Closing prayer

Lord Jesus,

**You commanded us to love our neighbour as we love ourselves,
and taught us that all are our neighbour, loved and cherished by God.**

Help us to see your face in all those we meet,

empower us to show your hospitality,

welcoming all so that we may build places of belonging

where everyone may love and learn together. Amen.

Personal stories sourced from Australian Anglicans

1.A

Negative experience/story option 1: Young autistic parishioner, Ava

I am a young healthcare professional who uses an assistance dog to help navigate my disabilities, which include autism, postural orthostatic tachycardia syndrome (POTs), Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome and post-traumatic stress disorder.

In my parish, I assist with a number of lay leadership roles. My church community generally has a welcoming and inclusive culture. However, I am regularly frustrated by the behaviour of many parishioners when they ignore my reasonable requests.

My assistance dog wears a blue vest with "Assistance Dog" written clearly on it. He helps me by alerting me when my heart rate escalates, when I become anxious and by positioning himself between me and others to enable the space I need as an autistic person. Nearly every time I attend church activities, including services, Bible studies, meetings and morning teas, I am asked by parishioners if they can pat my dog. When I say "no" politely and explain that he is working and that patting him will distract him, around half the time parishioners pat him anyway.

I find this so frustrating, annoying and upsetting. This behaviour also sometimes triggers my anxiety.

In my experience, this tends to be an issue with older parishioners. I am young and I also don't 'look' like I need an assistance dog. Because of these factors I think older parishioners are more inclined to dismiss me.

My parish priest is very supportive and has spoken to the congregation during the notices several times about this issue. Fellow parishioners also step in sometimes when my dog is patted to politely call them out.

If I am having a bad day with my health, I avoid going to services and other church activities because I know I won't cope with people patting my assistance dog when I have asked them not to. This behaviour also makes me avoid certain people during fellowship times, in the foyer of the church and in the car park, which is disappointing.

Questions for discussion (allow enough time for reflection and give everyone who wishes to speak the chance to share with the whole group)

1. What struck you about how Ava felt in this story?
2. What actions or attitudes helped and/or hindered Ava?
3. If this was your parish, how do you think Jesus would want to see Ava treated?
4. What could you and others in your parish do to make your community more inclusive for people like Ava?

1.B

Negative experience/story option 2: Intermittent parishioner living with a spinal injury, Lucas

I am a husband, father and academic professional who uses a wheelchair for mobility due to a spinal injury.

I have been attending the same Anglican parish intermittently for over 25 years. Our family has strong multi-generational links to the parish – my in-laws were married in the church, I was married in the church and my daughter grew up there.

There were many times upon my arrival at services that a church volunteer asked whether I would like the priest to administer communion to me in the aisle because I am unable to access the rail at the sanctuary. I always declined the offer because I wasn't comfortable with the feeling of all eyes being on me. Each time, the priest processed down the aisle with communion and offered it to me despite my request.

When this happened I accepted communion. However, I felt unheard and that my wish for 'privacy' was not treated with respect.

In order to avoid this happening again, I exited the church at the start of every communion time to avoid the unwanted attention. This experience didn't put me off going to church, but communion time became a part of the service that I was never comfortable with and so I disappeared.

I am unsure why I was repeatedly not listened to. It's possible that either the volunteer didn't listen to me properly or that the message was passed on to the priest who chose not to act on my wishes.

My wife wanted me to have the most positive experience of church as possible, and this situation undermined that. Such experiences also had the potential to draw unwanted attention to my family members, including to my child.

Questions for discussion (allow enough time for reflection and give everyone who wishes to speak the chance to share with the whole group)

1. What struck you about how Lucas (and his family) felt in this story?
2. What actions or attitudes helped and/or hindered Lucas?
3. If this was your parish, how do you think Jesus would want to see Lucas treated?
4. What could you and others in your parish do to make your community more inclusive for people like Lucas and his family?

2.A

Positive experience/story option 1: Parishioner and mother of a child with a disability, Rosa

When I was young, my grandmother took me to an Anglican church. I came back to the Church in my 20s and quickly became engaged in lay leadership. I have a healthcare background.

Before my sons started school, we moved house and consequently shifted from a large parish well-equipped for young families to a small parish with no children and no allocated kids' play area or Sunday School.

Prior to our first service in the new parish, the priest organised activity bags for my kids. By our second service, a pew had been moved to create space for a play area, with foam mats, books, crayons, puppets and quiet toys. As one of my sons has autism, he would lie under a pew during services to limit the sensory exposure. Parishioners would pass him a cushion for his head and then 'pass the peace' to him by bending down and greeting him with a smile. Sometimes he would commando crawl under the pews to the sanctuary to receive communion, which worried me at first. However, the parishioners were unperturbed and assured me that they would just move their feet to create space for him.

For the first time in a church, I felt that my family was completely included, accepted and valued just as we are and that we didn't have to be anything else. We are in a different church now due to a career shift.

The small welcoming congregation, the calm pragmatism of the parish priest, and the whole community's willingness to be flexible with the space and their practices helped us feel included. The overwhelming impression I got was that the parish community members were there for the common good rather than for their individual needs.

As a result of their experience, both my primary-aged children understand church and want to go to church. My son often says, "I miss that church and being under the pews."

Questions for discussion (allow enough time for reflection and give everyone who wishes to speak the chance to share with the whole group)

1. What struck you about how Rosa (and her son) felt in this story?
2. What actions or attitudes helped and/or hindered Rosa and her son?
3. If this was your parish, how do you think Jesus would want to see Rosa and her son treated?
4. What could you and others in your parish do to make your community more inclusive for people like Rosa and her son?

2.B

Positive experience/story option 2: Parishioner with a hearing impairment, Nisha

I am a young woman who joined the Anglican Church around 2014. I grew up in a Christian environment in a regional area. I was born with hearing loss, which runs in the family.

I have belonged to one Anglican parish. My parish community has always been a place of belonging and acceptance – my hearing impairment has never been an issue.

My parish's willingness to make adjustments for people who live with impairments was demonstrated to me in my early years of attending when a young deaf father came to our church. The clergy, lay leaders and parishioners actively sought ways to make all elements of services accessible to him as soon as they became aware that he was deaf, doing so of their own volition. For example, the sermon was printed and handed to him on his arrival so he could read it while it was being given. Parishioners asked around to see if anyone knew Auslan (Australian sign language) – a few community members did know basic Auslan and so they connected with him.

These initiatives helped to ensure that he felt comfortable, included and welcomed.

It is part of our church culture to be welcoming. We have a real desire to see new people feel comfortable. Our inclusive approach also reflects our strong missional focus, which we express in our engagement with other community members who may experience language challenges, including refugees.

While the young father didn't stay with our parish long term, it is my hope that because of his positive experience with our community that he knows that he can walk into other churches and feel included. For us as a community, our encounters with him reminded us that we need to be sensitive to the needs of others to ensure that they can feel fully part of the Body of Christ. For me as a parishioner with hearing loss, I felt affirmed being part of such a loving community.

Questions for discussion (allow enough time for reflection and give everyone who wishes to speak the chance to share with the whole group)

1. What struck you in this story about how Nisha feels when she sees others with impairments being included?
2. What actions or attitudes helped and/or hindered Nisha and the father she mentions?
3. If this was your parish, how do you think Jesus would want to see parishioners with sensory impairments like Nisha and the father treated?
4. What could you and others in your parish do to make your community more inclusive for people like Nisha and the father?

Session: Age and life stage

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The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

O sing to the Lord a new song:

sing to the Lord all the earth.

(APBA p.399)

Everliving God,

whose Son Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life:

give us grace to love one another,

to follow in the way of his commandments,

and to share his risen life;

who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,

one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

(APBA p.513)

Jesus Blesses Little Children

People were bringing children to him in order that he might touch them, and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the children come to me; do not stop them, for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them. (Mark 10.13-16)

May the God of peace equip us with everything good so that we may do his will; and may he work in us that which is pleasing in his sight; through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever. **Amen.**

(APBA p.409)

Begin

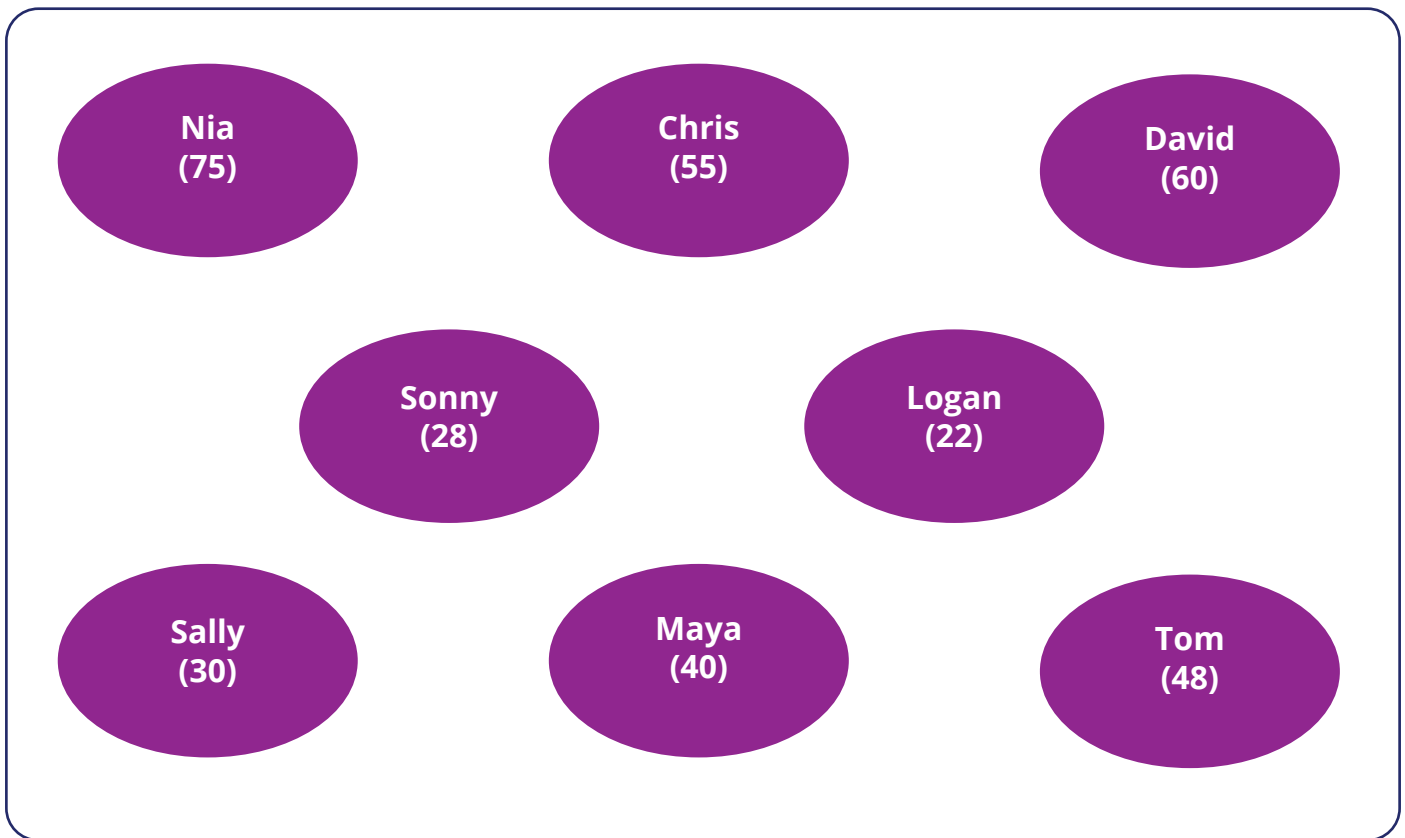
Introduction

This session will explore the impacts of parishes including and excluding people of different ages and life stages. In this session you will be invited to participate in a group activity and read the personal stories of Australian Anglicans who have experienced being included and excluded in parishes. These Australian Anglicans are people of various ages and life stages, and some of these include people who are caring for or being cared by Anglican family members. Each personal story will be followed by a time of discussion and reflection.

Activity: guess who?

Part 1 (of two parts)

In this activity (see below) you are given the names and ages of eight people. Below these name/age details are 12 statements, each of which applies to at least one person. Depending on the size of your group, working on your own, with the whole group or in a small group, consider matching the statements to the person, inserting the statement number (numbers 1-12) into the respective oval.



Think about your *reasons* for matching the statements to the person.

1. Has worked as a computer programmer (one person)
2. Cannot remember a time before the Internet (three people)
3. Is an experienced research scientist (one person)
4. Has osteoporosis (one person)
5. Struggles with using PowerPoint (one person)
6. Has memory loss problems (one person)
7. Highly-experienced project manager (two people)
8. Never gets asked to do anything technological in church (three people)
9. Often feels treated like a child (four people)
10. Strongly feels called to youth work (three people)
11. Is in a band (three people)
12. Is a grandparent (one person)

Part 2 (of two parts)

Now look at the answers below, which give you a paragraph of further information on each person.

Does this new information challenge or confirm what you thought?

Consider:

- What surprised you?
- How do you think people's assumptions about age might affect these eight people?
- Has anyone made assumptions about you because of your age? How did that feel?

Activity answers

Nia (75)

Nia studied mathematics at university in the 1960s and worked for a computer technology developer as a computer programmer in the 1980s. She has kept up to date with technology since. Despite this experience, she is never asked to do anything technological in church. She often feels that she is treated as a child by church members.

Chris (55)

Chris trained as a sound engineer, but is now a project manager for a small manufacturing business. She has been highly successful in that role for 20 years. A highly-organised person, she likes to keep up to date with technology, maintains a blog and designs her company's website. Despite this, she never gets asked to manage the IT in church. Chris feels that some of the older members of the church – her parents' generation – still treat her like a child.

David (60)

David is an architect by profession. Retired in his 40s due to a site accident, he is an artist and musician. He feels the IT revolution is irrelevant to him and he lets everyone know it. He is never asked to do anything technological for the church. As a musician who plays regularly in a band, David feels he is very much suited to working with young people.

Sonny (28)

Sonny works for a large construction company as a project manager. He is highly successful in this role, even though he has problems with memory loss, resulting from an illness he had as a teenager. He cannot remember a time before the Internet, which he jokes about sometimes. Sonny is meticulous with written work and his record keeping helps him to deliver first-class projects.

Logan (22)

Logan cannot remember a time before the Internet and is very familiar with 21st-century technology. The stewards asked Logan to help with the technology in church, to which he reluctantly agreed. Logan is more of an outdoors person, who struggles with PowerPoint, which he considers to be a 20th-century technology. He does not speak up about his feelings on the matter. This is partly out of politeness, but also because he feels he is still treated as a child. Almost everyone at church remembers him as a baby.

Sally (30)

Sally is a research scientist for a multi-national company. She studied chemistry and became a researcher in pharmacology. Although the Internet emerged in her lifetime, she has used it so much as a study and research aid, that she cannot remember a time before it. Sally has very little interest in working with children or young people, but is always being asked to get involved in church youth work. She feels it is because she looks younger than she is and often feels treated like a child.

Maya (40)

Maya is a busy woman, although she has no paid employment due to very significant caring commitments. She has three children, aged between 17 and 22, and her eldest daughter has recently had a baby. In the last few months Maya's caring responsibilities have become less time consuming, and she has joined a band – something she previously did when she was a student. Maya is a qualified youth worker, but does not talk much about her education and very few people ask. She would love to serve in youth work again, even in a voluntary capacity.

Tom (48)

Tom loves music and still performs with a band on the local folk circuit. He is a fully-qualified sports coach and rugby referee, but has recently decided to change careers after being diagnosed with osteoporosis. Tom did not know that it could affect men, let alone someone of his age. However, he is otherwise fit and really wants to use his coaching skills as he gets enthusiastically involved in church youth work.

Learning points

This exercise is to help you explore some of the common assumptions made about people based on their age. Some of the personal profiles may come as a surprise. As a Church (as in the wider community), we sometimes underestimate and under-engage people's talents because of what we assume people can or cannot do.

Brief overview of age and life stage

Healthy parishes typically include people of different ages and life stages. Anglican faith communities may include newborns to centenarians, and people of various life stages across this age spectrum. Some common life stages encountered in church communities include adolescence, early childrearing years and retirement – and everything in between.

Different ages and life stages present benefits and challenges – both to the respective parishioner (and sometimes their families) and to the wider faith community.

It is important to acknowledge that the age and life stage of a given parishioner may intersect with other aspects of their life. For example, a young parishioner in their 20s may be experiencing economic challenges if they are juggling study and part-time work, and an elderly retiree may live with a physical impairment that impacts their mobility.

Explore

Personal stories sourced from Australian Anglicans

Depending on the size of your gathering, in pairs, small groups or as a whole group, select at least one story (see below) that shares a negative experience and one story that shares a positive experience. Read the two stories in pairs, small groups or as a whole group.

Each of the stories provided is a true story of a parish experience shared by an Australian Anglican. Pseudonyms have been used and any identifying details have been omitted to ensure anonymity. The terms and descriptors used are those preferred by the storytellers.

Questions for discussion

After you read the stories:

1. Reflect as an individual on the questions that are written below the stories.
2. Discuss your reflections in pairs, small groups or with the whole group.
3. Share your reflections with the whole group if you have worked in pairs or small groups.

Close

Closing questions for consideration as a whole group

What learning or new insight will you take away from today's session?

What opportunities do you see for implementing some of the actions you have discussed for making your church more inclusive and respectful?

How can you meaningfully involve people of different ages and life stages in this implementation?

What 'next steps' can you take with regard to the above (note: any decisions should involve people with lived experience and/or their carers or loved ones)?

Pray

Closing prayer

Lord Jesus,

**You commanded us to love our neighbour as we love ourselves,
and taught us that all are our neighbour, loved and cherished by God.**

Help us to see your face in all those we meet,

empower us to show your hospitality,

welcoming all so that we may build places of belonging

where everyone may love and learn together. Amen.

Personal stories sourced from Australian Anglicans

1.A

Negative experience/story option 1: Mother parishioner, Sara

When my child was close to three years of age she started attending a new parish with my family. She is now a young adult.

The new parish my family started attending was a medium-sized church in a busy regional city.

At our first service in the new church, my young daughter crawled under a pew and then stood up and silently smiled at the parishioners and then crawled under another pew and stood up and silently smiled. When it came to the greeting of 'peace', a parishioner turned to me and said, "That child needs a good tap." So, the following Sunday, I brought some quiet activities for her to do. When she dropped a jigsaw piece, several heads turned and I received disapproving looks.

I felt ashamed and judged and that my child and I were not welcome. A few years later, I asked my daughter why she crawled under the pews to stand and smile at parishioners, and she said, "I just wanted to make them happy." This response made sense to me given my child's friendly and sensitive nature.

I think the underlying problem is that some people can be selfish when it comes to their experience of church – they don't like anything changing. Change can be seen as an interruption by some to their 'God time', impacting their ability to welcome and accept newcomers and give them a sense of belonging.

As a result, I started making excuses to avoid attending church and so my husband went without the kids and me. When a child-friendly service began in the hall sometime later, I started attending church with my children again. Years later, I still remember how unwelcome I felt in the first two services I attended.

Questions for discussion (allow enough time for reflection and give everyone who wishes to speak the chance to share with the whole group)

1. What struck you about how Sara felt in this story?
2. What actions or attitudes helped and/or hindered Sara?
3. If this was your parish, how do you think Jesus would want to see Sara treated?
4. What could you and others in your parish do to make your community more inclusive for people like Sara?

1.B

Negative experience/story option 2: Parishioner in her early 20s, Miriam

I am a cradle Anglican in my mid-20s who recently graduated from university. I have a background in parish youth ministry.

As part of my first youth ministry role, I was the youth representative on Parish Council. I would engage young people during youth group about their ideas ahead of Parish Council meetings and then pass these ideas on to Parish Councillors.

During one Parish Council meeting I shared about fundraising ideas that the kids had come up with, including car boot sales, car washes and trivia nights. Even though these are common ways of raising money, the ideas were consistently shut down by a few other Parish Council members because of my age. In the following Parish Council meeting, a middle-aged parishioner offered similar fundraising suggestions and, in contrast, he was taken far more seriously, including by one of the Parish Council members who had shut me down. Many of the other fundraising options that were taken seriously were events that young people and their friends would not want to get involved in or could not afford or would not be invited to, such as fancy dinners and wine tasting tours. Parish Council members also sometimes tried to push outdated fundraising ideas onto the young people based on ways they had raised money during the war years.

This Parish Council experience made me feel voiceless and unappreciated. I also felt frustrated for the young people in our parish because speaking through me was their only opportunity to contribute to their Parish Council.

Part of the issue is that the parish had very few kids for a long time. Once young people started coming after I started up the youth group, the Parish Council didn't know how to include them effectively.

As a result, I accepted another youth minister role – this time in a parish that was much more family focused. After I moved on, many of the young people in the youth group that I had formerly led also moved on to other parishes.

Questions for discussion (allow enough time for reflection and give everyone who wishes to speak the chance to share with the whole group)

1. What struck you about how Miriam felt in this story?
2. What actions or attitudes helped and/or hindered Miriam?
3. If this was your parish, how do you think Jesus would want to see Miriam treated?
4. What could you and others in your parish do to make your community more inclusive for people like Miriam?

2.A

Positive experience/story option 1: Parish priest and First Nations community leader, Charlie

I am an Anglican parish priest in my late 60s, who was ordained late in life. I am married and have three children and seven grandchildren.

Every day in my parish, people look to me for leadership. My life experience and maturity that come with age mean that I am often invited into people's homes or to hospital bedsides when their lives are at the lowest. This often involves saying little and just being present. At other times this means engaging in conversation to share stories and hear stories, which the Murri side of me likes.

Recently, I was called to keep vigil with a parishioner and sit with her at her octogenarian mother's hospital bedside. The parishioner is usually together about things and so it was out of the ordinary to see her so upset. As we sat, we chatted about her mother because she had led an interesting life here and abroad, including as a committed volunteer in the Anglican Church.

It is always an honour to be able to share such moments. The end-of-life stage is often one of the most private times of our lives. Because I came late into ministry, I bring much life experience. I do not bring much of an academic background. However, the skills and qualities I developed in my working life, as a parent to adult children and as a grandparent help me to meet people where they are at. This not only helps the family members, but also the dying person who hears the gentle murmur of the voices.

Because I am part of a parish community, I am not pushed aside as many are when they get to my age and life stage. My parish community needs and wants me, and my age, experience and maturity are deeply valued.

Questions for discussion (allow enough time for reflection and give everyone who wishes to speak the chance to share with the whole group)

1. What struck you about how Charlie felt in this story?
2. What actions or attitudes helped and/or hindered Charlie?
3. If this was your parish, how do you think Jesus would want to see Charlie treated?
4. What could you and others in your parish do to make your community more inclusive for people like Charlie?

2.B

Positive experience/story option 2: Parishioner who “drifted away” from church as a teenager, Kim

I am a parishioner, wife and mother who drifted away from church in my teenage years while going through a very rebellious and angry phase.

My mum had heard good things about a local church youth group and offered to take me. Even though I agreed to go, at the youth group gathering I stood stiffly at the back of the hall with my arms folded trying to look tough. I wore a scowl on my face, big chunky boots and a long knee-length black cardigan. After the gathering at a fellowship barbeque, I was approached by a fellow teen despite doing my best to look disinterested and angry. She was very easygoing, kind, unphased by my demeanour, relaxed and non-judgemental.

Her kindness and openness melted me. I let down my guard within a few minutes and accepted her invitation to meet some of her friends at the barbeque. I gave a talk about her kindness at a youth camp a few years later and eventually became a camp leader. At one of the youth group Bible studies, I met my husband.

A number of intentional things created a safe space for youth and young adults at that parish. The youth group was a mix of ages, as there were also young adults in the youth group. They were role models for us and willing to answer our gritty questions about life. Importantly, it was ok for us to disagree while still being included. Being able to ask gritty questions and disagree helped me to grow in trust and to address what had pulled me away from my faith. The older adults in the parish gave the youth group a fair amount of autonomy, which helped foster a happy, open and relaxed culture among the youth.

I have since told the girl who reached out to me that if she hadn't taken that step, that I may not be a Christian now. My young family goes to church, where my husband and I are very engaged as volunteers. That one person's kindness changed my life.

Questions for discussion (allow enough time for reflection and give everyone who wishes to speak the chance to share with the whole group)

1. What struck you about how Kim felt in this story?
2. What actions or attitudes helped and/or hindered Kim?
3. If this was your parish, how do you think Jesus would want to see people like Kim treated?
4. What could you and others in your parish do to make your community more inclusive for people like Kim?

Session: First Nations and cultural and linguistic diversity

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Opening prayer

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Rejoice always; pray without ceasing;

in everything give thanks

for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus.

(APBA p.401)

Loving God,

the light of the minds that know you,

the life of the souls that love you,

and the strength of the hearts that serve you:

help us so to know you

that we may truly love you,

and so to love you

that we may faithfully serve you,

whose service is perfect freedom;

through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

(APBA p.531)

Jesus Calls Levi

Jesus went out again beside the sea; the whole crowd gathered around him, and he taught them. As he was walking along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax-collection station, and he said to him, "Follow me." And he got up and followed him. And as he sat at dinner in Levi's house, many tax collectors and sinners were also sitting with Jesus and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. When the scribes of the Pharisees saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, they said to his disciples, "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?" When Jesus heard this, he said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have not come to call the righteous but sinners." (Mark 2.13-17)

Almighty God, who wonderfully created us in your own image and yet more wonderfully restored us in your Son Jesus Christ: grant that, as he came to share our human nature, so we may be partakers in his divine glory; who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

(APBA p.408)

Begin

Introduction

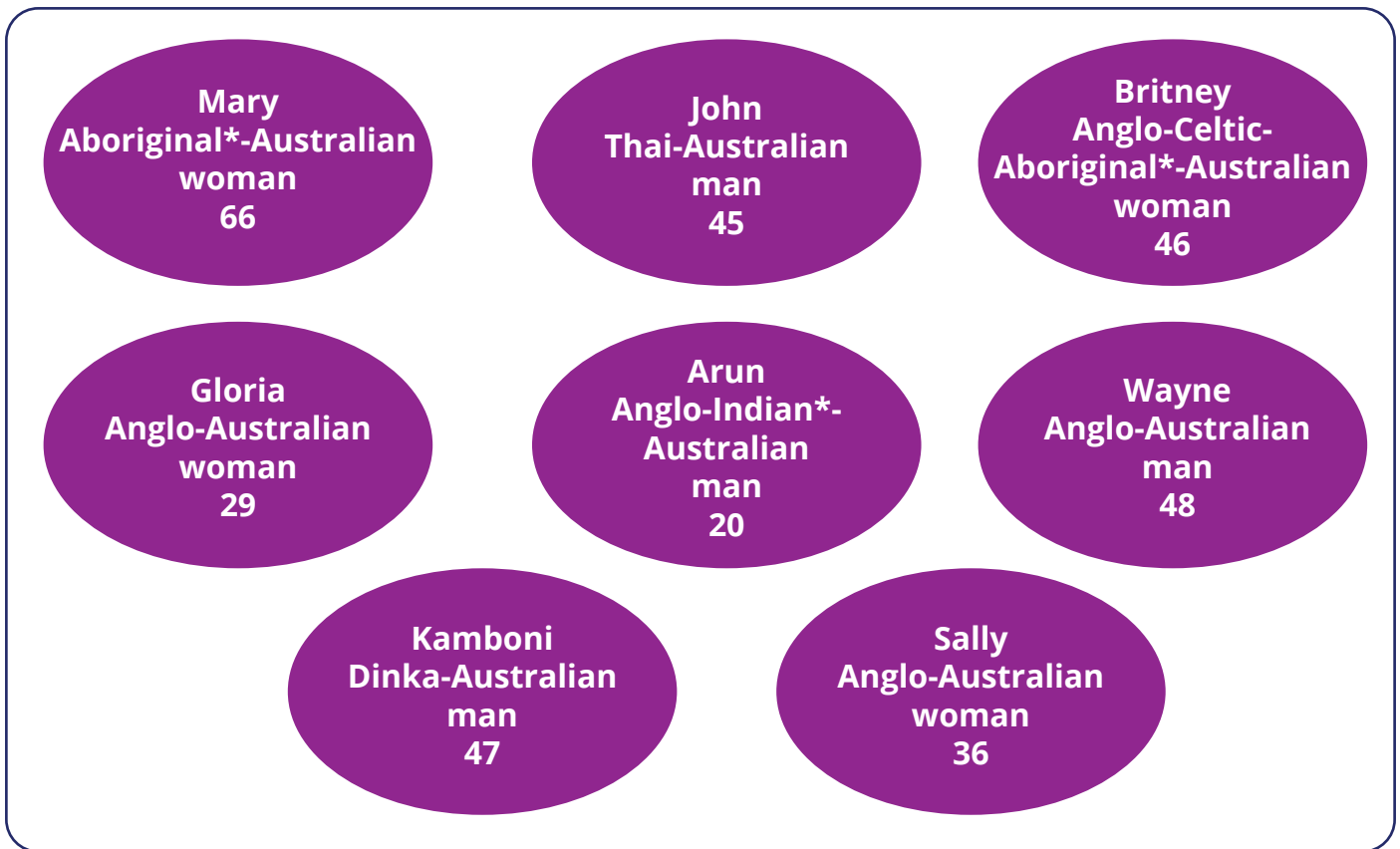
This session will explore the impacts of parishes including and excluding people from First Nations and of different ethnicities and linguistic backgrounds. In this session you will be invited to participate in a group activity and read the personal stories of Australian Anglicans of different First Nations, ethnicities, cultures and linguistic backgrounds, who have experienced being included and excluded in parishes. Each personal story will be followed by a time of discussion and reflection.

Activity: exploring assumptions

Part 1 (of two parts)

In Part 1 of this activity (see graphic below) you are given the names, sexes and ages of eight people connected to the Anglican Church Southern Queensland, together with a very broad description of the way they identify ethnically/culturally in oval frames.

There are eight statements, each of which applies to at least one person. Depending on the size of your group, working on your own, with the whole group or in a small group, consider matching the statements to the person, inserting the statement number (numbers 1-8) into the respective oval. If you consider matching the statements to the people, think about your reasons for doing so.



* These people have avoided using their preferred, more specific descriptors (i.e. identifying their Aboriginal Nation or Indian language group) in order to ensure their anonymity

1. Speaks two or more languages (4 people)
2. Has personally experienced racism in Australia (5 people)
3. Has been followed by staff in shops as an adult – not trusted around groceries/merchandise in Australia (1 person)
4. Particularly likes spicy hot food (6 people)
5. Is never asked where they come from when they are in Australia (4 people)
6. Is a priest (2 people)
7. Has a degree in community welfare (2 people)
8. Is a big fan of hip hop music (5 people)

Part 2 (of two parts)

Part 2 of this activity provides a paragraph of biographical information for each person who contributed to Part 1. Many biographical aspects of these people have been omitted to protect their anonymity. The brief biographical paragraphs are then followed by questions.

Biographical information

Mary, Aboriginal*-Australian woman, 66:

Mary is a well-respected First Nations Elder. She has had success in a range of careers. Since her teens, she has been regarded with suspicion while shopping, especially in clothing or jewellery shops, and is subsequently followed and watched by retail staff. Her family experiences inter-generational trauma because of government policies that forcibly removed

Aboriginal children. She often encounters racism. When she expresses an opinion, it is usually assumed that all First Nations peoples hold the same view. She is often asked what country she is from because of her skin colour, with many enquirers assuming that she is African-American. She is a grandmother who loves hip hop music and spicy food.

John, Thai-Australian man, 45:

John is a medical professional, Church worker and father. He was born in Australia and grew up in Bangkok. He speaks two languages – Thai and English. He is often asked what country he is from. He regularly experiences what he describes as “casual racism” in conversations with people he meets, such as general comments like “Asians are coming here to take our jobs”. When he expresses an opinion, it is often assumed that all people of Thai descent or those of other “Asian” ethnicities hold the same view. He is a big fan of hip hop music. He loves spicy food.

Gloria, Anglo-Australian woman, 29:

Gloria is a student and Church worker who was born in Australia. Until she contributed to this resource Gloria said she had never thought about her or her family's ethnicity, only ever considering herself to be “Australian”. She has never experienced racism. When she expresses an opinion, people do not assume that others of her ethnicity think the same way. She is never asked what country she is from. She loves spicy food. She avoids hip hop music.

Britney, Anglo-Celtic-Aboriginal*-Australian woman, 46:

Britney is a fair-skinned woman of Aboriginal descent who was born in Sydney. Her family experiences inter-generational trauma because of government policies that forcibly removed Aboriginal children. She has experienced racism from ‘white’ Australians who dismiss her Aboriginal descent because her skin is fair. She also experienced racism from ‘white’ Australians while holding hands with her southern Indian husband in public when she was noticeably pregnant. She speaks two languages. She has never been regarded with suspicion by retail staff or followed while shopping. She is never asked what country she is from. When she expresses an opinion, people do not presume that others of her assumed Anglo-Celtic ethnicity think the same way. She enjoys eating spicy food daily. She dislikes hip hop music.

Kamboni, Dinka-Australian man, 47:

Kamboni is a prominent community leader and senior priest. He speaks three languages and has a degree in community welfare. He was born in (now) South Sudan and is a father. He became an Anglican while living in a refugee camp as a child. He has experienced racism in Australia, including a time when his car was ‘egged’ and the car windows smashed. His children have encountered racism in public, including being physically threatened. He has also encountered racism in the workplace. When he expresses an opinion, it is often assumed that all South Sudanese people or people from other countries in Africa hold the same view. He is regularly asked what country he is from. He is a big fan of hip hop music. He dislikes spicy food.

Arun, Anglo-Indian*-Australian man, 20:

Arun was born and raised in Brisbane. He speaks one language – English. The Hindu family of Arun's father is from southern India. His mother is a Christian Anglo-Celtic-Aboriginal-Australian. While he occasionally identifies as Aboriginal in some contexts, he finds people's persistent questions about “what country he is really from” enough to manage without bringing in this additional complexity. He has experienced racism, albeit not from people of his generation. When he expresses an opinion, it is often assumed that all people of Indian descent hold the same view. He loves hip hop music and spicy food.

Wayne, Anglo-Australian man, 48:

Wayne is a senior church worker with several degrees, including a degree in community welfare. He was born in Brisbane. He is a cradle Anglican and a father of two. When he expresses an opinion, people do not assume that others of his ethnicity think the same way. He has not experienced racism, although he has witnessed racism towards people of colour. He is never asked what country he is from. He is a big fan of hip hop and spicy food.

Sally, Anglo-Australian woman, 36:

Sally is a priest and mother who was born in Australia. She speaks English and Solomon Islands Pidgin (Pijin). When she expresses an opinion, people do not assume that others of her ethnicity think the same way. She is never asked what country she is from. She has never experienced racism, although she has witnessed racism towards people of colour. She dislikes spicy food and hip hop music.

Discussion questions

What struck you while reading these brief biographies?

Does this additional information confirm or alter your assumptions? Why?

How do you think assumptions, based on these people's ethnic/cultural/national origins, might affect these eight people?

Learning points

Hopefully, you have had an opportunity to explore the kinds of assumptions that are made about people based on their ethnicity, culture or national origin. Such assumptions are often deeply set within our own cultural context (whatever culture we come from) and are often incorrect – so it is important to get to know people, hear their stories and learn from them.

Brief overview of First Nations and cultural and linguistic diversity

Before colonisation the lands now known collectively as 'Australia' were hundreds of distinct Nations. The deleterious impacts of colonisation are well documented, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples continuing to experience racism, including 'casting' (for example, derogatory terms like 'full-blood' or 'half-caste'). Casting is a legacy of assimilation policies, which many churches supported historically, such as by collaborating with governments to forcibly remove particularly fair-skinned Aboriginal children from their families. These children are known as the 'Stolen Generations'.

Australia's population includes many people who were born overseas or have parents who were born overseas and speak a variety of languages. The descriptor 'culturally and linguistically diverse' is a broad term used to describe those with diverse languages, ethnicities, nationalities, traditions and customs, family and community structures and faith expressions.

For the purposes of this resource, the experiences of parishioners from First Nations and culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds will be collectively explored in this session. This is because conscious or unconscious racism towards both First Nations and culturally and linguistically diverse peoples remains in our churches, including casting (as noted above), discrimination and prejudice.

It is important to acknowledge that a First Nations or culturally and linguistically diverse parishioner may live with challenges that intersect with other aspects of their diversity. For example, a former refugee from South Sudan may live with the health or mobility constraints of being an older adult.

Explore

Personal stories sourced from Australian Anglicans

Depending on the size of your gathering, in pairs, small groups or as a whole group, select at least one story (see below) that shares a negative experience and one story that shares a positive experience. Read the two stories in pairs, small groups or as a whole group.

Each of the stories provided is a true story of a parish experience shared by an Australian Anglican. Pseudonyms have been used and any identifying details have been omitted to ensure anonymity. The terms and descriptors used are those preferred by the storytellers.

Questions for discussion

After you read the stories:

1. Reflect as an individual on the questions that are written below the stories.
2. Discuss your reflections in pairs, small groups or with the whole group.
3. Share your reflections with the whole group if you have worked in pairs or small groups.

Close

Closing questions for consideration as a whole group

What learning or new insight will you take away from today's session?

What opportunities do you see for implementing some of the actions you have discussed for making your church more inclusive and respectful for First Nations peoples and those from culturally and linguistically diverse communities?

How can you meaningfully involve First Nations peoples and those from culturally and linguistically diverse communities in this implementation?

What 'next steps' can you take with regard to the above (note: any decisions should involve people with lived experience and/or their carers or loved ones)?

Pray

Closing prayer

Lord Jesus,

**You commanded us to love our neighbour as we love ourselves,
and taught us that all are our neighbour, loved and cherished by God.**

Help us to see your face in all those we meet,

empower us to show your hospitality,

welcoming all so that we may build places of belonging

where everyone may love and learn together. Amen.

Personal stories sourced from Australian Anglicans

1.A

Negative experience/story option 1: Parish priest born in a Majority World (developing world) country, Adeel

I was born in a village in a Majority World (developing world) country. I have been a parish priest since the 1990s, serving in Australia since the early 2000s.

I am currently a parish priest in an Australian metropolitan church. The parish is thriving with a large number of volunteers engaged in ministries connecting the community to the church.

About six months after I commenced in my role as parish priest, I overheard a long-time parishioner speaking about me in a racist way on the church grounds. She told another parishioner that, "I don't trust these black people. We should not give the collection money to him." Alarmed and angry, the other parishioner asked her in response what her problem was and then later took me out for a coffee to ensure I was okay. During our coffee, she told me that she had followed up with the parishioner, but that she was unwilling to listen to her.

I felt shocked when I heard the parishioner make this racist remark, especially as she was an active volunteer in official roles. I had never experienced anything like this before. I felt supported by the other parishioner who immediately stood up to her and then met with me for coffee a few days later.

The day following this incident when the parishioner was dropping something off at the church, I approached her and politely explained that I am trustworthy with money and that I felt called by God to serve in our parish. She walked away from the conversation without saying anything and then moved on to another Anglican parish.

Since this happened, I have been more sensitive to racist or otherwise prejudiced behaviour directed toward me or others. I hope that by telling this story that Christians understand the importance of accepting everyone the way they are.

Questions for discussion (allow enough time for reflection and give everyone who wishes to speak the chance to share with the whole group)

1. What struck you about how Adeel felt in this story?
2. What actions or attitudes helped and/or hindered Adeel?
3. If this was your parish, how do you think Jesus would want to see Adeel treated?
4. What could you and others in your parish do to make your community more inclusive for people like Adeel?

1.B

Negative experience/story option 2: Formation student and former refugee from South Sudan, Deng

I came to Australia nearly 20 years ago after spending 15 years in a refugee camp where I joined the Anglican Church. I am now a proud father, husband and formation student.

Overall my experience in the Anglican Church has been very positive and I have not experienced racism on a one-to-one level.

However, one time during a presentation after a service, a fellow parishioner who belonged to an Anglican fundraising organisation said to my Dinka community and me in a mocking way, "Sudanese people don't know how to fundraise money and need to be taught." He was angry because he had invited Dinka congregation members to his house a number of times in order to recruit people for his organisation and nobody had turned up.

At first I was impressed by the way he wanted to include us by inviting us to his house and to join his organisation. However, during his presentation I was a bit offended by the way he spoke about my people. I also felt a bit humiliated by his facial expressions and the way he laughed in a mocking way about us.

Instead of asking why nobody had turned up, he instead judged us. I think the main problem is that he didn't know how to engage people from a different culture. He didn't take the time to build rapport and trust with my community and understand our limitations, instead expecting people to show immediate interest in his fundraising projects and do things his way.

Another Dinka community member in a parish lay leadership role stood up and politely explained to him during his presentation that our community members are very busy with work, family, parish and wider community commitments. While the lay Dinka leader was very respectful, I could tell that the parishioner speaker was still unhappy.

After the presentation he didn't speak to us again. And, nobody from our community joined his organisation.

Questions for discussion (allow enough time for reflection and give everyone who wishes to speak the chance to share with the whole group)

1. What struck you about how Deng felt in this story?
2. What actions or attitudes helped and/or hindered Deng?
3. If this was your parish, how do you think Jesus would want to see Deng treated?
4. What could you and others in your parish do to make your community more inclusive for people like Deng?

2.A

Positive experience/story option 1: Young parishioner of Gubbi Gubbi heritage, Peter

I am a young artist of Gubbi Gubbi heritage and an active Anglican parishioner who was raised in the Anglican Church.

In 2020 I was invited by a different Anglican parish to the one I then attended to provide an artwork that reflected on the recent bushfires. I was paid for my artwork because I am an emerging professional artist.

The parish asked me to create the artwork in large part because of my Gubbi Gubbi heritage, as First Nations peoples in Australia have specialised knowledge of land and fire management. I am a fair-skinned person and since my childhood some church people have often struggled to recognise or understand my Aboriginal ancestry. For example, parishioners from a former parish often asked my mum, even into my teen years, whether I was an “eighth cast”. It is common for light-skinned Aboriginal people and their families to be asked these kinds of offensive questions because of stereotypes about what an Aboriginal person looks like.

When I was invited by a lay leader of the other parish to create an artwork for her church, I experienced a kind of healing and greater self-acceptance after the insecurity I felt following offensive questions asked about my cultural identity. The opportunity also strengthened my resolve as an artist and helped to foster my faith and made me feel more accepted in the Anglican Church.

The parishes that I have had positive experiences with as a Gubbi Gubbi artist are very engaged in Reconciliation efforts. They are also committed to educating themselves about the historical experiences of First Nations peoples and the associated impacts on their identities and cultures. I have close older relatives who were traumatised by government policies and made to feel ashamed of their Aboriginality and afraid, and consequently they did not talk much about their Aboriginal heritage until their later years.

My initial positive parish experience led to more opportunities for me within the wider Diocese, as I was invited to write about my art, heritage and faith and to create an artwork for another parish who also respected my culture, knowledge and identity.

Questions for discussion (allow enough time for reflection and give everyone who wishes to speak the chance to share with the whole group)

1. What struck you about how Peter felt in this story?
2. What actions or attitudes helped and/or hindered Peter?
3. If this was your parish, how do you think Jesus would want to see Peter treated?
4. What could you and others in your parish do to make your community more inclusive for people like Peter?

2.B

Positive experience/story option 2: Clergy couple of mixed cultural heritage, John and Chén

We are a married clergy couple in the Anglican Church. We were married in the 1990s and have children together. We are a multi-cultural couple because one of us is of Chinese descent and one of us is of Anglo-Celtic descent.

We ministered in a parish together for nearly 10 years. The parish was very welcoming right from the start. When we started attending the parish, we were both very skinny; however, due to the generosity and hospitality of parishioners as we ministered to them, we gained quite a few pounds.

One of the ways the parish supported us as a multi-cultural family was to hold a Chinese New Year celebration annually, even though we were the only family with Chinese heritage in the parish. Lay leaders organised the event for us every year, with parishioners enthusiastically joining in the festivities. Depending on the year, the celebration was either held at a restaurant or in a parishioner's home.

By embracing our family's culture, the parish felt like an extended family. The congregation's openness, understanding and kindness of heart showed that they genuinely cared. What really struck us was that they were generous even though we lived in a struggling regional farming community.

The parish community was an emotionally and spiritually mature congregation that valued and wanted ministry. They had been through many difficulties together and we think these experiences strengthened their relationship with each other and with God. There was also a strong sense in the rural community, especially with banks and businesses closing, that they had to rely on each other to survive.

As a family we look back on our time in the parish very fondly. Our children were very happy in the parish and are very grateful that they were able to grow up among such a loving and accepting congregation.

Questions for discussion (allow enough time for reflection and give everyone who wishes to speak the chance to share with the whole group)

1. What struck you about how John and Chén felt in this story?
2. What actions or attitudes helped and/or hindered John and Chén?
3. If this was your parish, how do you think Jesus would want to see people like John and Chén treated?
4. What could you and others in your parish do to make your community more inclusive for people like John and Chén?

Session: Gender

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The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

May the God of hope fill us with all joy and peace in believing,

so that by the power of the Holy Spirit we may abound in hope.

(APBA p.393)

Living God,

in Christ you make all things new:

transform the poverty of our nature

by the riches of your grace,

and in the renewal of our lives

make known your glory;

through Jesus Christ our Lord,

who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,

one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

(APBA p.533)

A Woman Healed

As he went, the crowds pressed in on him. Now there was a woman who had been suffering from a flow of blood for twelve years, and though she had spent all she had on physicians, no one could cure her. She came up behind him and touched the fringe of his cloak, and immediately her flow of blood stopped. Then Jesus asked, "Who touched me?" When they all denied it, Peter said, "Master, the crowds are hemming you in and pressing against you." But Jesus said, "Someone touched me, for I noticed that power had gone out from me." When the woman realized that she could not remain hidden, she came trembling, and falling down before him, she declared in the presence of all the people why she had touched him and how she had been immediately healed. He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace." (Luke 8.42-48)

God of all power and might, the author and giver of all good things: graft in our hearts the love of your name, increase in us true religion, nourish us with all goodness, and of your great mercy keep us in the same; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

(APBA p.405)

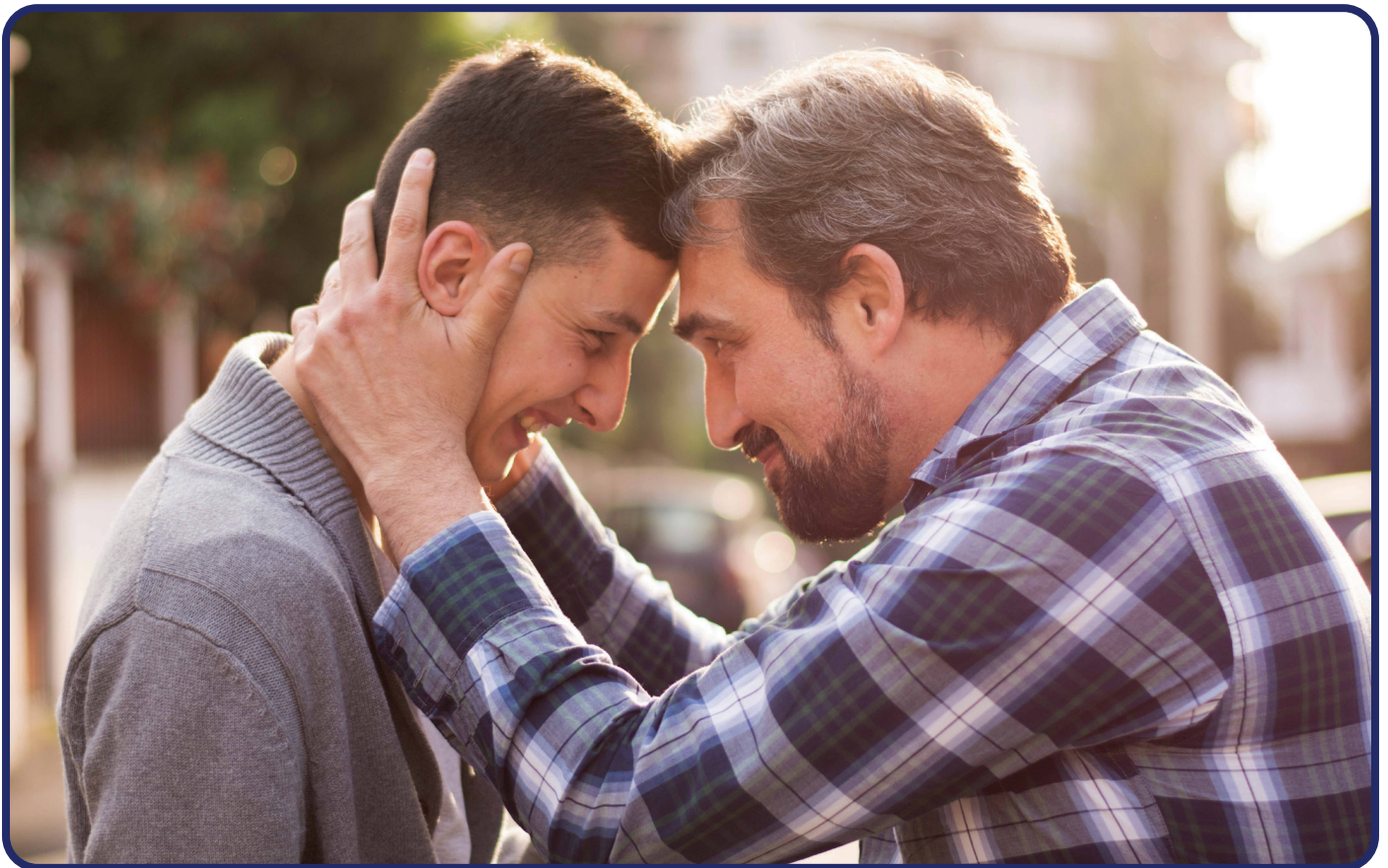
Begin

Introduction

This session will explore the impacts of parishes including and excluding people from different gender backgrounds. In this session you will be invited to participate in a group activity and read the personal stories of Australian Anglicans, of diverse gender backgrounds, who have experienced being included and excluded in parishes. Each personal story will be followed by a time of discussion and reflection.

Activity: images of God

As a whole group consider the four images and scriptures below.



“But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him.” (Luke 15.20)



"How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings..." (Luke 13.34)



"...wisdom is vindicated by all her children." (Luke 7.35)



“...and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.’” (Luke 3.22)

Discussion questions

What do these scriptures and accompanying images say about how the Gospels use metaphors of different genders, or references to different genders, to describe God?

This ‘images of God’ exercise may encourage you to think about some of the different ways the Gospels help us to imagine and understand God, and how Gospel images of God are diverse.

Consider as a group then:

- How have these images emphasised familiar ideas about God?
- How have these images encouraged new ways of thinking about God?

Brief overview of gender

Depending on the given parish or those engaged in conversations, the topic of gender can be contentious, a non-issue or mixed.

This session will explore the interactions of people of different genders as they respond to behaviours expected of them, or questions asked of them, because of their gender, as well as how modeling respect for gender can be fruitful and healing.

It is acknowledged that gender is a complex area and that these complexities cannot be fully explored in a single session. It is also important to acknowledge that a parishioner of any gender background may live with intersecting challenges. For example, many trans people encounter socio-economic constraints if they find it difficult to secure employment due to workplace prejudice.

Explore

Personal stories sourced from Australian Anglicans

Depending on the size of your gathering, in pairs, small groups or as a whole group, select at least one story (see below) that shares a negative experience and one story that shares a positive experience. Read the two stories in pairs, small groups or as a whole group.

Each of the stories provided is a true story of a parish experience shared by an Australian Anglican. Pseudonyms have been used and any identifying details have been omitted to ensure anonymity. The terms and descriptors used are those preferred by the storytellers.

Questions for discussion

After you read the stories:

1. Reflect as an individual on the questions that are written below the stories.
2. Discuss your reflections in pairs, small groups or with the whole group.
3. Share your reflections with the whole group if you have worked in pairs or small groups.

Close

Closing questions for consideration as a whole group

What learning or new insight will you take away from today's session?

What opportunities do you see for implementing some of the actions you have discussed for making your church more inclusive and respectful for people of diverse gender backgrounds?

How can you meaningfully involve people of diverse gender backgrounds in this implementation?

What 'next steps' can you take with regard to the above (note: any decisions should involve people with lived experience and/or their carers or loved ones)?

Pray

Closing prayer

Lord Jesus,

**You commanded us to love our neighbour as we love ourselves,
and taught us that all are our neighbour, loved and cherished by God.**

**Help us to see your face in all those we meet,
empower us to show your hospitality,
welcoming all so that we may build places of belonging
where everyone may love and learn together. Amen.**

Personal stories sourced from Australian Anglicans

1.A

Negative experience/story option 1: Parishioner (now ordained) single woman and healthcare professional, Nicole

I am an independent and strong female who once hoped to be married and have a family. I now enjoy the freedom and flexibility that being single allows me, especially as an honorary ordained person and a healthcare worker.

When I moved interstate more than five years ago, I joined my local Anglican parish. The parish is small and semi-rural.

At the end of the first service I attended, a parishioner approached me. The first thing she said to me was, "It is great to see you here. Do you have a husband?" I replied, "No. It's just me." She then asked, "Oh. Any kids?" I said again, "No. It's just me." She looked at me with pity and said, "That's a shame. We prefer to have families here." This is a common conversation that I continue to have. In the same parish, a very well-meaning and kind couple approached me and said they had lined up a potential suitor for a blind date. Because I am a single woman and don't have children, I am also told that people gossip and speculate about my sexuality.

When clergy and parishioners express pity at my single status, seeing me as incomplete, I feel as though I will never be enough. I also feel disappointed that they can't appreciate what I have to offer. When people speculate about my sexuality just because I am single, I find it curious that my situation can't be accepted for what it is and that an alternative has to be manufactured for it to make sense to people. It has also been suggested to me that married women may see me as some sort of threat to their marriages because I am 'available'.

To me, the underlying problem is a narrow-minded view of what a Christian woman's life should look like, and associated theology. Outdated expectations of women's contributions to society are still pervasive in the Church.

Despite that negative first experience, I stayed in the parish and took on lay leadership roles. However, I continued to battle with their lack of acceptance of me.

Questions for discussion (allow enough time for reflection and give everyone who wishes to speak the chance to share with the whole group)

1. What struck you about how Nicole felt in this story?
2. What actions or attitudes helped and/or hindered Nicole?
3. If this was your parish, how do you think Jesus would want to see Nicole treated?
4. What could you and others in your parish do to make your community more inclusive for people like Nicole?

1.B

Negative experience/story option 2: Parishioner and retired professional, David

I am a husband and father who was born and raised in the Anglican Church. I have been a member of my parish since childhood. I am engaged in a range of ministries, including spiritual initiatives.

I attend a medium-sized 'middle way' suburban parish. Over the years, fellow parishioners have often commented in disbelief about my involvement in more spiritual aspects of Anglicanism. Some parishioners seem to find my enthusiasm for meditative practices incongruent with my gender, particularly given my professional background and perceived 'bloominess'. I was once even 'disinvited' from joining a Bible study because I was the only male who expressed interest in the study.

A parish priest once pulled out some meditation resources in my presence for a meditation session, commenting that they were for women and would not be relevant or useful to men. In response, I asked the priest for a copy of the resources. Despite his assumptions, I found the material accessible and helpful, regardless of gender. After sharing my thoughts with the priest, to his credit it was agreed that we would distribute the material to all parishioner participants, which was welcomed.

Whilst I find these gendered comments surprising, they don't offend me. But I wonder whether other men who overhear such remarks find them a discouraging obstacle for their own exploration of spirituality.

As I grew up in my current parish, I have a uniquely long-term view of its development. Looking back, it wasn't until the mid-2000s that our parish was first exposed to more spiritual practices, such as meditation. This shift came gradually, with the encouragement of the then Bishop and successive parish priests, along with the support of some lay leaders.

Despite this shift, I still receive negative comments from time to time about my engagement in spiritual practices. I try and use these comments as a springboard for conversations about what a rich spiritual life looks like for all genders.

Questions for discussion (allow enough time for reflection and give everyone who wishes to speak the chance to share with the whole group)

1. What struck you about how David felt in this story?
2. What actions or attitudes helped and/or hindered David?
3. If this was your parish, how do you think Jesus would want to see David treated?
4. What could you and others in your parish do to make your community more inclusive for people like David?

2.A

Positive experience/story option 1: Parishioner and trans man, Cameron

I have known that I was a boy since I was two years old. When I got my first period, I went into a deep shock even though my mother told me it was going to happen. I was told by people that I was a girl because I had breasts, but my brain always told me differently.

I have only had positive experiences being a trans man in Anglican parishes. I currently attend a medium-sized parish where I am involved in lay leadership.

A few years ago, I was invited to give my testimony to the parishioners. I spoke about my faith journey and how my relationship with God was impacted by feeling unsafe in the churches of other denominations. One of these pressured me into undergoing a 20-week 'conversion therapy' course. The response of the Anglican parishioners to my testimony was healing – so many people came up to me afterwards and thanked me for my courage and said they felt encouraged in their own faith.

After I gave my testimony, I was on tenterhooks for weeks, anxious that parishioners would gather to gossip and then gang up on me, but this didn't happen. There is a difference between mere acceptance and inclusion. Being included made me feel embraced and valued and this healed me. There is a minority of people who are ok with me being trans, yet who have asked scrutinising questions about my sexuality – I wish that people understood that gender and sexuality are different.

I think the reason why the priest and the parishioners are so inclusive is because they are a good fit for each other – they focus on loving respect. Unlike other churches I have belonged to, my church doesn't treat me like a 'trans trophy' pretending that they accept me or ask me totally offensive questions about what's in my pants and whether I have had surgery.

The outcome of feeling so included in my parish is that I feel safe volunteering in senior roles. I am also considering studying theology and pursuing some form of ministry.

Questions for discussion (allow enough time for reflection and give everyone who wishes to speak the chance to share with the whole group)

1. What struck you about how Cameron felt in this story?
2. What actions or attitudes helped and/or hindered Cameron?
3. If this was your parish, how do you think Jesus would want to see Cameron treated?
4. What could you and others in your parish do to make your community more inclusive for people like Cameron?

2.B

Positive experience/story option 2: Young woman who is a parishioner and staff member, Rebecca

I have been worshipping in the Anglican Church for nearly five years. I also work part-time in parish ministry.

I grew up in another denomination, but left my Christian faith for a time. During this period, I struggled with my mental health and abusive relationships and worked in an industry that dehumanised women and treated their bodies as commodities. When I moved on from that life, I focused on healing and came back to God. I started off with the denomination that I knew, but felt confronted by the gender disbalance in that Church (for example, women couldn't be ordained), which was triggering for me given my background and therefore stunted my healing process.

While intentionally exploring and researching other denominations, I attended an Anglican Church service with a friend that was unexpectedly officiated by a woman priest. Even though we did not speak to the priest in person, my friend and I walked away from her services pleasantly surprised that women could be ordained in the Anglican Church. In the services, the woman priest shared about normal things, including the fact that she was recently married and expecting a baby. This made her seem humble and relatable to me – she lived in the real world.

I am grateful to all the people, especially the women, who fought for women to be ordained in the Anglican Church. I ended up joining the Anglican Church because I wanted to be part of a denomination that offered pastoral care by women priests. I felt much more comfortable talking to women, especially with my relationship and work background.

I have found worshipping in the Anglican Church healing because I feel more respected, included and as though I am seen as more of an equal.

Questions for discussion (allow enough time for reflection and give everyone who wishes to speak the chance to share with the whole group)

1. What struck you about how Rebecca felt in this story?
2. What actions or attitudes helped and/or hindered Rebecca?
3. If this was your parish, how do you think Jesus would want to see people like Rebecca treated?
4. What could you and others in your parish do to make your community more inclusive for people like Rebecca?

Session: Major unexpected life events

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The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

We will proclaim the name of the Lord

Ascribe greatness to our God.

(APBA p.396)

God of compassion,

you have shown us in Christ

that your love is never ending:

enable us both to love you with all our heart

and to love one another as Christ loved us.

Grant this through our Lord Jesus Christ,

who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,

one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

(APBA p.534)

Jesus and the Woman of Samaria

But he had to go through Samaria. So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life."

The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water." (John 4.4-15)

Lord Christ, eternal Word and Light of the Father's glory: send your light and your truth that we may both know and proclaim your word of life, to the glory of God the Father; for you now live and reign, God for all eternity. **Amen.**

(APBA p.423)

Begin

Introduction

This session will explore the impacts of parishes including and excluding people who have experienced major unexpected life events. In this session you will be invited to participate in a group activity and read the personal stories of Australian Anglicans who have experienced being included and excluded in parishes after being impacted by significant life events. Each personal story will be followed by a time of discussion and reflection.

Activity: historical family events

While reflecting on their family history, many people can recall events that impacted the way individual family members or their whole family coped with life and how they engaged with the wider community. These experiences could include things like job loss, marriage separation and divorce, an unplanned pregnancy, a mental health diagnosis, a criminal conviction, a car accident or the death of a loved one.

Sometimes major unexpected life events can evoke strong emotions and may be kept secret by families or spoken of in hushed tones, particularly if there is concern about shame or stigma in social settings.

Using the 'think/pair/share' approach, consider engaging in the following activity.

Think

In silence, can you recall a story in your family's history that caused social anxiety or stigma?

Pair

Gather in pairs to (optionally) share your story and to reflect on:

- What happened?
- How did your family deal with what happened?
- How did the event impact family members' engagement with wider society?

Share

If you feel comfortable doing so, share your story and reflections (on the above questions) with the broader group.

Brief overview of major unexpected life events

Everyone experiences significant and unexpected life events during the course of their lifetime. However, some life events continue to be stigmatised, including in church circles. How we respond to those who are impacted, including those experiencing stress, anxiety or trauma, can make all the difference to their faith and church experience.

Major unexpected life events can include job loss, marriage separation and divorce, an unplanned pregnancy, a mental health diagnosis, a car accident, the death of a loved one, domestic and family violence, among many others.

It is important to acknowledge that when a person experiences a significant and unexpected crisis or turning point that their whole life can be impacted, including marriage, family

relationships, work and finances, and physical and mental health. Thus, it is common for other challenges to emerge that compound the impacts of the unexpected life event.

Explore

Personal stories sourced from Australian Anglicans

Depending on the size of your gathering, in pairs, small groups or as a whole group, select at least one story (see below) that shares a negative experience and one story that shares a positive experience. Read the two stories in pairs, small groups or as a whole group.

Each of the stories provided is a true story of a parish experience shared by an Australian Anglican. Pseudonyms have been used and any identifying details have been omitted to ensure anonymity. The terms and descriptors used are those preferred by the storytellers.

Questions for discussion

After you read the stories:

1. Reflect as an individual on the questions that are written below the stories.
2. Discuss your reflections in pairs, small groups or with the whole group.
3. Share your reflections with the whole group if you have worked in pairs or small groups.

Close

Closing questions for consideration as a whole group

What learning or new insight will you take away from today's session?

What opportunities do you see for implementing some of the actions you have discussed for making your church more inclusive and respectful for people experiencing an unexpected crisis or other major life event?

How can you meaningfully involve people who are experiencing unexpected and significant life events in this implementation?

What 'next steps' can you take with regard to the above (note: any decisions should involve people with lived experience and/or their carers or loved ones)?

Pray

Closing prayer

Lord Jesus,

**You commanded us to love our neighbour as we love ourselves,
and taught us that all are our neighbour, loved and cherished by God.**

**Help us to see your face in all those we meet,
empower us to show your hospitality,
welcoming all so that we may build places of belonging
where everyone may love and learn together. Amen.**

Personal stories sourced from Australian Anglicans

1.A

Negative experience/story option 1: Mother (now clergywoman) who raised a child as a young single mum, Michelle

I am a cradle Anglican with clergy parents. When I was 16 years of age, I had a child as a single mum.

While my son was still a baby, I joined a medium-sized metropolitan parish when I moved cities.

At my first Sunday service in my new church, a parishioner approached me and asked me if I was married. When I told him that I was unmarried, he responded with "I forgive you." At the same service, I received disapproving looks, but I am not sure whether it was because the clothes I was wearing, including ratty bike pants and a t-shirt, showed that I was poor or because I was a young mum, or possibly both. At the end of the service, I introduced myself to the priest, which took a lot of courage given the treatment of some parishioners.

The parishioner's unsolicited comment shocked me. In order to process the comment, I told myself that I didn't need his forgiveness. The disapproving looks made me feel very uncomfortable, especially because I couldn't engage with or respond to the behaviour, which also made processing the intention of the looks difficult.

I returned to the church because I knew there would be some welcoming parishioners there. I stayed at the parish for eight months, eventually leaving because the priest never remembered my name. I never felt welcomed as a whole, although there were individuals who were warm towards me and included me.

This experience put me off going to church for a few years. I am now a clergywoman and I find it telling that the people who once somewhat shunned me are now warm and welcoming toward me. It shouldn't matter what a person's station is – everyone should feel welcomed, respected and included in parishes.

Questions for discussion (allow enough time for reflection and give everyone who wishes to speak the chance to share with the whole group)

1. What struck you about how Michelle felt in this story?
2. What actions or attitudes helped and/or hindered Michelle?
3. If this was your parish, how do you think Jesus would want to see Michelle treated?
4. What could you and others in your parish do to make your community more inclusive for people like Michelle?

1.B

Negative experience/story option 2: Parishioner and mother who is divorced, Belinda

I am a cradle Anglican, descended from a long line of Anglicans. I grew up understanding that marriage is a lifelong commitment, “for better or worse”.

I separated from my husband many years ago while our children were very young. While I had been an active churchgoer since childhood, following my separation I was unable to attend church every week due to the pressures of being a single mum. As a result, I could only attend church monthly. My (then) church was a large parish.

A large number of other parishioners were also separated or divorced. Some of these parishioners were survivors of intimate partner violence. There were also married members of the congregation who were victims of intimate partner violence. Following my separation, whenever I attended Sunday services, the priest would preach about “turning the other cheek”.

I felt that this was incredibly insensitive given the situation of so many women (and children) in the congregation – both for those who had left their husbands due to violence and those who remained with abusive spouses.

For my own mental health, I felt that I couldn’t continue going to church because I felt so excluded by the messages of the sermons. I didn’t raise my concerns with the parish clergy.

I only started going to church again a few years later after a chance conversation with the new rector at a social event. His perspective on marriage commitment and “turning the other cheek” was different to that of previous priests. I accepted his invitation for a longer pastoral conversation with him. During our chat he explained to me that my husband was unable to properly consent or commit to the marriage and that without this capacity, I was not obligated to stay with him.

That conversation left me feeling comfortable to attend Sunday services with my children again.

Questions for discussion (allow enough time for reflection and give everyone who wishes to speak the chance to share with the whole group)

1. What struck you about how Belinda felt in this story?
2. What actions or attitudes helped and/or hindered Belinda?
3. If this was your parish, how do you think Jesus would want to see Belinda treated?
4. What could you and others in your parish do to make your community more inclusive for people like Belinda?

2.A

Positive experience/story option 1: Book worm who sleeps rough on the grounds of an Anglican church, Howard

I'm a former laborer who now sleep rough. I've always got my nose in a book – usually a biography about a rock star or a world leader. I also like listening to the radio, especially to the horse races.

When COVID-19 hit, I started sleeping rough on the grounds of an Anglican church. I have only ever had positive experiences with priests and parishioners there. I have shelter and access to a toilet and I help myself to blankets every night. People often bring me food. When I have already eaten I nicely say “no, but thank you” to people when they bring me food. Sometimes I feel bad saying this – I think about it a lot later and wonder if it would have been kinder if I had accepted the food someone had gone to the effort to cook for me.

I sleep in the same spot every night, and usually next to the same two other people. One night a car pulled up in the car park and a parishioner got out and walked over to us. He gave the three of us sleeping in the same sheltered area money each. He gave me \$10, another man about my age \$10 and the elderly man \$20. He put the money down beside us. I thought it was funny that the older man got more money. He thought it was funny, too. I am careful with my money and I usually say “no, thank you” when I am offered it. But this time I accepted it because he gave it to all three of us.

I have noticed that more and more people are finding themselves sleeping on the streets. Everyone has a different story. People are on the streets for lots of different reasons. Domestic violence, struggles with mental health, sudden life tragedies, floods, the cost of housing and unemployment are just a few reasons.

Clergy, staff and parishioners at the church have created a welcoming environment by always being up for a laugh and a good chat, so it's more than just a safe place to sleep.

I will keep sleeping outside the church as long as it remains as welcoming as it is.

Questions for discussion (allow enough time for reflection and give everyone who wishes to speak the chance to share with the whole group)

1. What struck you about how Howard felt in this story?
2. What actions or attitudes helped and/or hindered Howard?
3. If this was your parish, how do you think Jesus would want to see Howard treated?
4. What could you and others in your parish do to make your community more inclusive for people like Howard?

2.B

Positive experience/story option 2: Anglican woman and mother who is separated from her husband, Vanessa

I am an Anglican woman and mother who separated from her husband several years ago following more than 25 years of marriage.

I was received into the Anglican Church after being raised in another denomination. In the lead up to and following my marriage separation, I was supported by Anglican clergy, lay leaders and parishioners in my parish when things were distressing, both emotionally and financially.

One of the biggest hurdles for me in leaving my unhealthy marriage was being able to afford a safe place to live with my children. The ordained and lay leaders listened to my story without judgement and committed to supporting me emotionally and practically. One of the wardens at the time even offered to assist with moving tasks, which really meant a lot to me. A married couple in the parish donated the furniture and whitegoods I needed to set up a new home because I was unable to take anything with me. Parish community members also came to the blessing of my new home.

This practical and emotional support was so strengthening. I experienced the love of God through these good people, as they actively supported my flourishing. I had previously been part of another denomination where I was instead judged and not listened to when I raised my marriage struggles with the ministers.

My Anglican parish recognises the equality of men and women and the inherent dignity of both, including the right to safety. Their response to me flowed out of a healthy parish theology where the safety and wellbeing of women and children is paramount. Instead of being naïve, the parish's theology also had a clear understanding of the dynamics of control and abuse that can occur in marriage.

The impact of this support, love and acceptance gave my children a positive experience of church. My kids say that they know they will look back on these years as some of the best because of the stability they now have as we lay a new family foundation while they continue their education.

Questions for discussion (allow enough time for reflection and give everyone who wishes to speak the chance to share with the whole group)

1. What struck you about how Vanessa felt in this story?
2. What actions or attitudes helped and/or hindered Vanessa?
3. If this was your parish, how do you think Jesus would want to see people like Vanessa treated?
4. What could you and others in your parish do to make your community more inclusive for people like Vanessa?

Session: Sexuality

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The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Peace to those who are far off.

Peace to those who are near.

(APBA p.416)

Almighty God,

you have taught us through your Son

that love is the fulfilling of the law:

grant that we may love you with our whole heart,

and our neighbours as ourselves;

through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

(APBA p.540)

Jesus and Zacchaeus

He entered Jericho and was passing through it. A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today." So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. (Luke 19.1-6)

Creator Spirit, Advocate promised by our Lord Jesus: increase our faith and help us to walk in the light of your presence, to the glory of God the Father; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

(APBA p.391)

Begin

Introduction

This session will explore the impacts of parishes including and excluding people from different sexuality backgrounds. In this session you will be invited to participate in a group activity and read the personal stories of Australian Anglicans of different sexualities who have experienced being included and excluded in parishes. Each personal story will be followed by a time of discussion and reflection.

Activity: listening to each other

The purpose of this exercise is to develop listening skills rather than talking skills.

There may be differences of opinion, so please be mindful that we live with differences of opinion all the time. This is important because the Bible is interpreted and understood differently by people with respect to sexuality. As the Church engages in dialogue about sexuality, we are expected to listen and show respect.

Working in small groups, every member of the group needs to have time to speak if they wish to do so.

1. Individually, first think of a situation where you have encountered disagreement. This could be something you have experienced directly or observed.

Spend a few minutes reflecting on the experience by yourself. If it helps, jot down a few notes. Some examples of different points of view expressed between family, friends or fellow church members could have been about:

- Whether the chairs in church should be arranged in rows or in a circle.
- Whether children's ministry should be before, after or at the same time as the Sunday service.
- Whether there should be more wind farms.
- Whether everyone should recycle more.
- A political/ethical question like, "Should we close all coal mines?"

2. Then, in small groups, each person is invited to share about their encounter/experience – especially about how they felt about the disagreement and whether or not they could learn to live with such differences of opinion. Importantly, the other small group members need to listen and refrain from commenting while the story of the disagreement is being told.

Each person who tells a story then remains quiet while the other group members say in turn what struck them about the story and share any thoughts and questions that arose for them while they were listening. Other group members should avoid commenting while each person is giving their thoughts.

When everyone has spoken and shared their thoughts, the group then reflects together on the experience of the listening exercise. Talk about what you learned from it and how this might be applied positively in how you consider the rest of this session.

3. As a whole group, then try to identify two or three issues (e.g. in the church historically or in the wider community) where:

- Views once commonly held have changed over time.
- There is no agreement on what is right, so people have agreed to disagree.

Brief overview of sexuality

Like gender, the topic of sexuality can be contentious, a non-issue or mixed, depending on the given parish community or those engaged in the conversation.

As illustrated by parishioner and trans man Cameron in the session on gender, gender and sexuality are different. Sexual orientation is about whom you are attracted to romantically and sexually. Gender identity is not about whom you are attracted to, but about who you are.

This session will explore the impacts of including and excluding people of different sexualities in parishes, as well as the impacts on their loved ones.

It is acknowledged that sexuality is a complex area and that these complexities cannot be fully explored in a single session. It is also important to acknowledge that a parishioner of any sexuality background may experience intersecting challenges. For example, a gay man who is of South Sudanese descent may find that his sexuality, gender, ethnicity and language background intersect – in positive and/or negative ways.

Explore

Personal stories sourced from Australian Anglicans

Depending on the size of your gathering, in pairs, small groups or as a whole group, select at least one story (see below) that shares a negative experience and one story that shares a positive experience. Read the two stories in pairs, small groups or as a whole group.

Each of the stories provided is a true story of a parish experience shared by an Australian Anglican. Pseudonyms have been used and any identifying details have been omitted to ensure anonymity. The terms and descriptors used are those preferred by the storytellers.

Questions for discussion

After you read the stories:

1. Reflect as an individual on the questions that are written below the stories.
2. Discuss your reflections in pairs, small groups or with the whole group.
3. Share your reflections with the whole group if you have worked in pairs or small groups.

Close

Closing questions for consideration as a whole group

What learning or new insight will you take away from today's session?

What opportunities do you see for implementing some of the actions you have discussed for making your church more inclusive and respectful for people of different sexualities?

How can you meaningfully involve people of different sexualities in this implementation?

What 'next steps' can you take with regard to the above (note: any decisions should involve people with lived experience and/or their carers or loved ones)?

Pray

Closing prayer

Lord Jesus,

**You commanded us to love our neighbour as we love ourselves,
and taught us that all are our neighbour, loved and cherished by God.**

**Help us to see your face in all those we meet,
empower us to show your hospitality,
welcoming all so that we may build places of belonging
where everyone may love and learn together. Amen.**

Personal stories sourced from Australian Anglicans

1.A

Negative experience/story option 1: Lay parish leader who is a gay man, William

I was baptised and confirmed in a regional Anglican church as a child and have been a committed Anglican for over half a century. I came out as a gay man in my early 20s.

My parents came to accept my sexual orientation within a couple of years of me coming out, including my mother who was churched. Just over a decade ago, my parents received an email from their then parish priest asking all parishioners to campaign against any forms of equality for people who are diverse in gender or sexuality, including regarding choices about their superannuation and will beneficiaries and end-of-life care.

My parents forwarded her email to me. They shared how profoundly shaken and disturbed that their parish priest would be so unpastoral and insensitive by expressing such views and soliciting such public support from her parishioners.

I emailed the parish priest, whom I knew, and expressed my dismay at the contents of her email and informed her that it had caused my parents considerable distress. She gave a perfunctory "Thank you for your email" response, choosing not to engage me about any of my concerns. A couple of years later, I encountered her at an anniversary event commemorating the ordination of women at my own parish. She was visibly uncomfortable engaging me in her priestly role at the event when she gave me communion. When we spoke after the service, I shared with her that, "I stood with you and fought for your right to be ordained when others campaigned against you using similar language that you used in your email – why can you not offer me the same support I gave you?" There was still no understanding from her.

While my mother continued to attend church on a regular basis, she was very pleased when this priest moved on and when she was replaced by someone who was much more pastorally sensitive. It is distressingly common for parish priests to share personal views that counter the Gospel message of 'loving one another' and this continues to impact families and their ability to share in the life of the Church.

Questions for discussion (allow enough time for reflection and give everyone who wishes to speak the chance to share with the whole group)

1. What struck you about how William and his parents felt in this story?
2. What actions or attitudes helped and/or hindered William and his parents?
3. If this was your parish, how do you think Jesus would want to see William and his parents treated?
4. What could you and others in your parish do to make your community more inclusive for people like William and his parents?

1.B

Negative experience/story option 2: Active parish volunteer and openly gay man, Lachlan

I am a retired professional, a father, an active parish volunteer and an openly gay man.

I have a long-term connection to my parish, dating back to my childhood. Several years ago when I moved back to Brisbane after my retirement, I started attending the parish again. My church is known for being inclusive of people of all sexualities.

While my experience of the parish has been largely positive, I have had a couple of very bad experiences. For example, after one service a parishioner came up to me out of nowhere and said, "People like you have no right to be a member of this church."

I felt like someone had stabbed me. I was so hurt that somebody would say something like this out of the blue, especially given we had never shared a long conversation before. She didn't even know me. I can only presume that until then she didn't know that I am a gay man. Her comment left me crying and reeling.

A senior lay person of the parish approached me in the church upon seeing me so upset. She asked me what was wrong and I explained to her what had just happened. In response, she said, "That cannot happen in this parish." She then immediately informed the parish priest, who came to check on me. We sat together to talk through what had happened. The parish priest rang later to assure me that the matter would be addressed and that I was loved for who I am and appreciated for my service as a volunteer. The parish priest approached me a few days later to let me know that he had contacted the parishioner and told her that she was never to utter those words again in the church.

The parishioner greets me when she sees me now, but it took me a long time to shake off the homophobia she had expressed. Because the senior lay person and the parish priest followed up in such a meaningful way, I felt like a valued member of the community and safe.

Questions for discussion (allow enough time for reflection and give everyone who wishes to speak the chance to share with the whole group).

1. What struck you about how Lachlan felt in this story?
2. What actions or attitudes helped and/or hindered Lachlan?
3. If this was your parish, how do you think Jesus would want to see Lachlan treated?
4. What could you and others in your parish do to make your community more inclusive for people like Lachlan?

2.A

Positive experience/story option 1: Anglican parishioner and rainbow community member, Loretta

I'm a member of the rainbow community and a city-based Anglican parishioner. I have a rural background and was raised in another denomination, both of which I found deemed same-sex relationships as unacceptable.

I'm now a member of an Anglican church community that accepts a wide range of people. I've been a part of this church community for four years, where I attend various groups and volunteer.

My first service in this church was on a Christmas Eve. I had tried a number of churches of different denominations and was unaware that this particular church included all people. Upon arrival, I saw the rainbow flags out front and thought, "Surely, they can't be the Pride flag because surely this church wouldn't accept gay people." I kept coming because I was really moved in the service. The next Sunday, I met some of the clergy with my partner, so it was pretty obvious that we were in a relationship. I immediately felt genuine acceptance and they didn't bat an eyelid.

I was more uncomfortable than they were because of my experience in other denominations, including when a priest said I shouldn't be my nephew's godparent, shouldn't receive communion and equated me with paedophilia and bestiality. Such experiences left me feeling excluded – not just from church, but from God.

In contrast, my current parish priest has spoken openly at Pride events and in the media in support of rainbow people and he intentionally creates an environment and an ethos that are welcoming.

I had previously been part of a solely rainbow church community. However, I wanted to belong to a community where I was accepted as a person, irrespective of my sexuality. I've found this in my current church, where I've gradually healed from the old hurts and the personal shame through the balm of acceptance. The community members would not have known that, to me, they were being the face of God confirming that I was loved and accepted.

Questions for discussion (allow enough time for reflection and give everyone who wishes to speak the chance to share with the whole group)

1. What struck you about how Loretta felt in this story?
2. What actions or attitudes helped and/or hindered Loretta?
3. If this was your parish, how do you think Jesus would want to see people like Loretta treated?
4. What could you and others in your parish do to make your community more inclusive for people like Loretta?

2.B

Positive experience/story option 2: Anglican priest who is also a gay man, Hugh

I'm an Anglican priest, who is also a gay man, serving in the Australian Church. Finding the right words to briefly introduce myself here is tricky because my sexuality is important, but other characteristics are more important to my identity, as in the case of straight persons.

Several years ago I was offered a ministry opportunity in another Diocese that is fully affirming of LGBTI+ clergy. I accepted the offer, in part, because I felt unsafe where I was then serving.

In my application for the new role it was clear that I'm a gay man. In an initial discussion with the Parish Council following confirmation of my appointment, a nonagenarian member gently and respectfully, albeit somewhat hesitantly, asked if I would be bringing "a friend" when I moved into the rectory. I knew that he was asking this to ensure that the rectory would be ready for two people.

This conversation affirmed that the faith community would be a safe place for me. I appreciated that the Parish Councillor was somewhat tentative when he asked this question out of respect for my privacy, rather than out of judgement.

The Diocese had undertaken intentional work reflecting on the Anglican pillars of scripture, tradition and reason. In this process, they reflected deeply on scripture, listened to the voices of people of our tradition and engaged with contemporary understandings of science and psychology. By doing so, they came to see that acknowledging the full humanity of LGBTI+ people is consistent with the heart and mind of Jesus, as revealed in the Gospels.

As a priest, I ultimately felt safe and it lifted burdens that may otherwise have stopped me from being fully engaged and authentic in forming relationships. LGBTI+ people are in Anglican congregations. We are already here, so space doesn't need to be created for us. We just want to be acknowledged, welcomed and fully included.

Questions for discussion (allow enough time for reflection and give everyone who wishes to speak the chance to share with the whole group)

1. What struck you about how Hugh felt in this story?
2. What actions or attitudes helped and/or hindered Hugh?
3. If this was your parish, how do you think Jesus would want to see Hugh treated?
4. What could you and others in your parish do to make your community more inclusive for people like Hugh?

Session: Socio-economic situation

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The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

This is the day that the Lord has made.

We will rejoice and be glad in it.

(APBA p.383)

O God,

your Son has taught us

that those who give a cup of water in his name
will not lose their reward:

open our hearts to the needs of your children,
and in all things make us obedient to your will,
so that in faith we may receive your gracious gift,
eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

(APBA p.557)

The Widow's Offering

He sat down opposite the treasury and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. Then he called his disciples and said to them, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For all of them have contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on." (Mark 12.41-44)

Eternal God and Father, by whose power we are created and by whose love we are redeemed; guide and strengthen us by your Spirit, that we may give ourselves to your service, and live this day in love to one another and to you; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

(APBA p.386)

Begin

Introduction

This session will explore the impacts of parishes including and excluding people whose socio-economic situation presents significant day-to-day constraints and challenges. In this session you will be invited to participate in a group activity and read the personal stories of Australian Anglicans encountering socio-economic disadvantage who have experienced being included and excluded in parishes. Each personal story will be followed by a time of discussion and reflection.

Activity: reflecting on poverty in Australia

A 2010 Salvation Army study* asked respondents to rank a series of seven statements about poverty and people experiencing poverty in order to gauge general attitudes toward poverty and those experiencing it.

These statements included both positive and negative viewpoints about poverty, and included:

- "I feel sorry for people who are living in poverty."
- "People who are living in poverty have generally brought it upon themselves."
- "In the long run, increasing welfare and other benefits actually increases poverty."
- "Just about anyone can find themselves living in poverty – all it takes is some bad luck."
- "There are plenty of opportunities in Australia – nobody needs to live in poverty."
- "Not nearly enough has been done to reduce poverty in Aboriginal or [other] Indigenous communities."
- "Nobody who has a job can really claim to be living in poverty."

The statement that received the strongest and most consistent level of support was, "I feel sorry for people living in poverty." While this response indicates a generally sympathetic attitude towards people experiencing poverty, the survey found that responses to the negative statements about poverty, "In the long run, increasing welfare and other benefits actually increases poverty" and "There are lots of opportunities in Australia – nobody needs to live in poverty", were quite evenly divided.

This indicates that there is a high level of polarisation in the community and suggests a lack of understanding about poverty's causes.

Using the 'think/pair/share' approach, consider engaging in the following activity.

Think

In silence, reflect on the following question:

"How might holding a negative viewpoint of poverty impact how you treat those who live in poverty?"

Pair

Gather in pairs to share your thoughts on the question.

Share

If you feel comfortable doing so, share your reflections on the question with the broader group.

(* Sourced from *Perceptions of Poverty: An Insight into the Nature and Impact of Poverty in Australia* © Copyright 2010 The Salvation Army)

Brief overview of socio-economic situation

One's socio-economic situation is often associated with a combination of factors, including education, occupation, employment security, income, family situation and inter-generational hardship. A person's socio-economic status or situation impacts their access to housing, financial loans and key resources (such as to the Internet), as well as their ability to influence and participate in regular everyday life.

It is important to acknowledge that a person's socio-economic status can change over time and may intersect with other aspects of their life, such as gender and age. For example, women over the age of 55 years are the fastest growing group experiencing homelessness in Australia.

Explore

Personal stories sourced from Australian Anglicans

Depending on the size of your gathering, in pairs, small groups or as a whole group, select at least one story (see below) that shares a negative experience and one story that shares a positive experience. Read the two stories in pairs, small groups or as a whole group.

Each of the stories provided is a true story of a parish experience shared by an Australian Anglican. Pseudonyms have been used and any identifying details have been omitted to ensure anonymity. The terms and descriptors used are those preferred by the storytellers.

Questions for discussion

After you read the stories:

1. Reflect as an individual on the questions that are written below the stories.
2. Discuss your reflections in pairs, small groups or with the whole group.
3. Share your reflections with the whole group if you have worked in pairs or small groups.

Close

Closing questions for consideration as a whole group

What learning or new insight will you take away from today's session?

What opportunities do you see for implementing some of the actions you have discussed for making your church more inclusive and respectful for people experiencing socio-economic constraints and challenges?

How can you meaningfully involve people who are experiencing socio-economic constraints and challenges in this implementation?

What 'next steps' can you take with regard to the above (note: any decisions should involve people with lived experience and/or their carers or loved ones)?

Pray

Closing prayer

Lord Jesus,

**You commanded us to love our neighbour as we love ourselves,
and taught us that all are our neighbour, loved and cherished by God.**

**Help us to see your face in all those we meet,
empower us to show your hospitality,
welcoming all so that we may build places of belonging
where everyone may love and learn together. Amen.**

Personal stories sourced from Australian Anglicans

1.A

Negative experience/story option 1: Parishioner who is unemployed and keen to volunteer, Henry

I moved to the Anglican Church from another denomination several years ago. It's important to me that I am an active Christian – in both my parish and the wider community.

After taking some time out, I recently joined an online church. One of the reasons that I took time out is because I felt excluded in my previous 'bricks and mortar' church. When I tried to volunteer for certain church roles, I would get passed over for people who had more influence because of their better socio-economic situation. Some of the roles I was excluded from include Liturgical Assistant and regular Crucifer. University lecturers, successful business owners and very wealthy retirees were given these kinds of up-front roles, as well as Parish Council positions. It all seemed like a closed shop and quite cliquey.

There was a large socio-economic gap in the church's area, with both Ferraris and rough sleepers around. I was unemployed, so I had time to contribute, including during mid-week services, but it seemed that wealthier parishioners were taken more seriously and that some were more welcome than others.

I found this very disappointing. One of the things that attracted me to the Anglican Church is because it's less hierarchical than the denomination I was raised in.

The parish priest knew that I wanted to volunteer more regularly in such roles. However, I didn't have the confidence to speak up more strongly because the voices of wealthier people were given more attention. The priest was very well educated and came from a professional background. So he was possibly out of touch with the realities of life for people who don't have the same education or career success.

Eventually I moved on. I didn't see the point in staying. Overall the Anglican Church is pretty good, so I have stayed Anglican. I have found an inclusive place in my current online church, where my willingness to contribute, spare time and skills are valued.

Questions for discussion (allow enough time for reflection and give everyone who wishes to speak the chance to share with the whole group)

1. What struck you about how Henry felt in this story?
2. What actions or attitudes helped and/or hindered Henry?
3. If this was your parish, how do you think Jesus would want to see Henry treated?
4. What could you and others in your parish do to make your community more inclusive for people like Henry?

1.B

Negative experience/story option 2: Parishioner, mother and community leader, Margaret

I have been an active Anglican parishioner and volunteer since my childhood. I am also a leader in my cultural community and my community work intersects with my parish volunteer work.

About five years ago I found out that a mother of around 10 children in my community had lost her husband suddenly to cancer. As well as grieving his loss and caring for her children who were missing their father, she was in a terrible financial situation. Her electricity was also cut off because the bill was in her husband's name. For nearly two weeks, she was unable to warm milk up for her babies or cook for her children. At the time I was also struggling financially to care for my children because my husband was serving in an honorary role and I was only able to work part-time.

I went to my parish priest asking for assistance for the mother, who was also a parishioner at his church. The priest knew about the father's passing because his funeral was held at the church. I told him about the mother and her situation. He gave me \$60 for the woman, but then told me in a rude tone, "Nothing is free, so don't come back here again asking for help for her."

I felt shocked and humiliated by what he said. Your church is the last place in the world that you should be told not to come back to, especially when you are trying to help a fellow parishioner.

He never apologised to me. I only ever told my husband about what happened because I didn't want the grieving mother to find out and become hurt.

Because of what happened, I no longer trusted the parish priest and I stopped volunteering in his parish. So my family and I now mostly go to another Anglican parish where I also volunteer. We only attend some services in my former parish – those that are said in my language.

Questions for discussion (allow enough time for reflection and give everyone who wishes to speak the chance to share with the whole group)

1. What struck you about how Margaret felt in this story?
2. What actions or attitudes helped and/or hindered Margaret?
3. If this was your parish, how do you think Jesus would want to see Margaret and her friend treated?
4. What could you and others in your parish do to make your community more inclusive for people like Margaret and her friend?

2.A

Positive experience/story option 1: Parishioner and mother of seven children, Elizabeth

I have been an Anglican since I was a child. I am now a proud mother of seven children and a wife. I also work and recently graduated from study. I am an active parishioner, volunteering with a number of different groups and ministries.

Two to three years ago, I was experiencing a financial crisis. I was working as a cleaner and struggling to pay the mortgage and the bills and to feed my children. At the same time, I was experiencing emotional hardship because I was being bullied by a friend. I really needed the Bible to feed me, so I enrolled in a Bible course that other parishioners were doing at the church.

The course cost money and I found it hard to pay the fees. Another course participant must have noticed that I was struggling emotionally and financially. This person went to the parish priest and anonymously offered to pay my fees for the remaining two years of the course. I received an unexpected email from a parish volunteer explaining that my course fees would be paid for.

By paying for my Bible study course fees, the person was feeding me with what I needed the most at that time – the scriptures. I still don't know who this person is. I feel that God was working through this person. I felt included by the person's generosity.

The whole parish is known for its generosity. I think the strong example of the clergy and lay leadership, who are big hearted, has made the whole community generous to each other.

I continue going to the parish because I feel supported spiritually and loved by the people there.

Questions for discussion (allow enough time for reflection and give everyone who wishes to speak the chance to share with the whole group)

1. What struck you about how Elizabeth felt in this story?
2. What actions or attitudes helped and/or hindered Elizabeth
3. If this was your parish, how do you think Jesus would want to see people like Elizabeth treated?
4. What could you and others in your parish do to make your community more inclusive for people like Elizabeth?

2.B

Positive experience/story option 2: Separated single mum with young adult children still living at home, Cheryl

I am a single mum and committed Anglican with a professional background.

Several years ago I separated very unexpectedly from my husband who was also a very active member of my church community at the time.

Looking back now, I can see that throughout my marriage I experienced 'gaslighting' and other controlling behaviours. I left my husband quite suddenly after I found out he was being unfaithful. Upon leaving him, I felt that I needed to leave our church community and decided to return to my former parish. Leaving my husband, I also needed to find alternative accommodation for myself and my young adult children and pets.

After a few weeks of 'couch surfing', wardens from my former parish generously offered me a lease on one of the church's properties at less than half the market rate. They also provided me with white goods and furniture and other items that made the space home-like. The wardens were very respectful of my privacy and there was no expectation that I start reattending church there.

Their respectful and discreet approach helped me and my children go through the grieving process. The accommodation they offered took the pressure off financially and gave us space to re-establish ourselves in the local community and at work.

I think good leadership over many years – from the priests, lay leaders and the respective Bishop – and their understanding that the Gospel is practical, helped bring the parish to a place where they could help a vulnerable person like me. They understood that being Christian is about being alert to the needs of vulnerable people around them and being willing to be part of solutions. They understood that God's kingdom is happening now, and as such we need to build the kingdom together now.

Being cared for in this way helped me to stay an Anglican. After I healed somewhat, I felt comfortable attending the church that had assisted me. I am grateful for their unconditional love, kindness and discretion.

Questions for discussion (allow enough time for reflection and give everyone who wishes to speak the chance to share with the whole group)

1. What struck you about how Cheryl felt in this story?
2. What actions or attitudes helped and/or hindered Cheryl?
3. If this was your parish, how do you think Jesus would want to see Cheryl treated?
4. What could you and others in your parish do to make your community more inclusive for people like Cheryl?

Additional resources

If your parish or ministry wishes to access additional resources:

- All Anglican Church Southern Queensland (ACSQ) community members may borrow from the Roscoe Library at St Francis College free of charge (visit: stfran.qld.edu.au/library).
- The ACSQ website offers 'Being Together: Building Healthy Church Communities' resources (visit: anglicanchurchsq.org.au/being-together).
- The FormedFaith website and team offer a range of options (visit: formedfaith.org/).
- The *anglican focus* news site regularly publishes 'Resources & Research' tips features (subscribe to the free fortnightly e-newsletter at: anglicanfocus.org.au/subscribe/).
- The faithful + effective website offers 'Parish toolkit' resources (visit: faithfulandeffective.com/toolkit/).



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