

# EXPLORING THE UNMET NEEDS OF LGBT+ CHRISTIAN LEADERS IN THE UK

**Author: Dr Diego Garcia Rodriguez**

*Leverhulme Early Career Fellow, University of Nottingham*



OneBodyOneFaith



University of  
Nottingham

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# EXECUTIVE

# SUMMARY

## INTRODUCTION

This report explores the challenges faced by LGBT+ religious leaders in the United Kingdom, with a particular focus on their experiences within faith institutions. Based on nine in-depth interviews and a survey of 49 participants, the research explores systemic barriers, personal challenges, and the support needs of LGBT+ leaders, offering actionable solutions to create more inclusive religious spaces.

## FINDINGS

### ORGANISATIONAL BARRIERS

Data gathered highlights the significant organisational barriers LGBT+ leaders face, with 21.95% of respondents citing discriminatory behaviour as the main challenge. Additional issues include pressure to conform to heteronormative norms (12.2%) and a lack of inclusive policies and practices (9.76%). These barriers create environments where LGBT+ leaders feel undermined and excluded from key decision-making processes.

### PERSONAL AND EMOTIONAL STRUGGLES

Participants reported unmet needs in terms of emotional, spiritual, and practical support. Many leaders described enduring discrimination and the emotional toll of hiding their identities. One respondent shared their struggle: *“Despite being in an affirming parish, I cannot take on additional responsibilities unless I pretend to be straight.”* This secrecy not only limits professional growth but also contributes to feelings of isolation and vulnerability.

## REPRESENTATION AND SUPPORT GAPS

Survey data reveals that 61% of participants felt their needs as LGBT+ leaders were not adequately met, with many expressing dissatisfaction regarding their ability to be open about their identities. Only 17.1% of respondents agreed that their needs were sufficiently addressed, highlighting the urgent need for greater representation and support systems.

## MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES

Over a third (36.73%) of participants reported facing mental health stigma, exacerbated by the discrimination and pressures to conform within their religious communities. One participant recounted: *“I developed a phobia of being in the same room as bishops, having had traumatic experiences dealing with leadership.”* These challenges underscore the need for targeted mental health support.

## INTERSECTIONAL BARRIERS

LGBT+ religious leaders also face compounded challenges related to race, gender, and socio-economic status. While racial discrimination was less prevalent (10.2%), gender-based discrimination affected 40.82% of participants, and many described difficulties accessing leadership roles due to both their gender identity and sexual orientation.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### ADVOCACY AND REPRESENTATION

OneBodyOneFaith and partners should focus on creating legal advocacy roles within the Church to address discrimination and advocate for systemic change. Increased representation of LGBT+ leaders in decision-making processes is also crucial to fostering a more inclusive religious environment.

### EMOTIONAL AND MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

Providing mental health resources, peer support groups, and access to queer-friendly therapists can address the emotional and psychological toll experienced by LGBT+ leaders. Trauma-informed care should be prioritised, especially for those dealing with discrimination from senior leadership.

## **TRAINING AND LOBBYING**

Mandatory inclusivity and anti-discrimination training for clergy and staff are essential to combat homophobia and transphobia. Participants also recommended lobbying towards policy changes to allow same-sex civil marriages within church settings, enabling LGBT+ leaders to fully participate in leadership roles without fear of losing their positions.

## **ADDRESSING INTERSECTIONAL CHALLENGES**

There is a need for more comprehensive resources that consider the intersection of race, gender, and socio-economic status within the LGBT+ community. Promoting racial diversity and offering financial support programs could help bridge existing gaps in representation and opportunity.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

In conclusion, this report highlights the persistent challenges LGBT+ religious leaders face in the UK and the urgent need for systemic reforms within religious institutions. Addressing these barriers through advocacy, mental health support, and inclusivity training will not only support current leaders but also pave the way for future generations of LGBT+ individuals in faith leadership.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>1. Introduction</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>2. Methodology</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>3. Needs and barriers</b> .....	<b>13</b>
3.1. Main organisational barriers .....	13
3.2. Unmet needs of LGBT+ religious leaders .....	14
3.3. Main personal challenges faced .....	15
3.4. Addressing personal challenges .....	15
3.5. Further barriers faced by LGBT+ religious leaders .....	17
3.6. Specific areas where support is needed .....	20
3.7. Role models .....	24
3.8. Pressure to conform .....	24
3.9. Lack of formation and education .....	25
3.10. Navigating leadership as an LGBT+ religious leader .....	27
3.11. Impact of denominational stances on equal marriage .....	28
3.13. Conclusions and recommendations .....	29
<b>4. Spaces</b> .....	<b>31</b>
4.1. LGBT+ community spaces .....	31
4.2. Quality of existing spaces .....	32
4.3. Preferred support in community spaces .....	33
4.4. Conclusions and recommendations .....	36
<b>5. Intersectional experiences</b> .....	<b>38</b>
5.1. Understanding and support for intersectional identities in religious communities .....	38
5.2. Racial discrimination .....	39
5.3. Gender-based discrimination .....	40
5.4. Discrimination related to sexual orientation .....	41
5.5. Socio-economic challenges .....	42
5.6. Accessibility issues .....	42
5.7. Mental health stigma .....	42
5.8. Impact of intersectionality on experiences as LGBT+ religious leaders .....	43
5.9. Intersectional issues that require more attention .....	44
5.10. Conclusion and recommendations .....	45

<b>6. Conclusions .....</b>	<b>47</b>
6.1. Lobbying and advocacy for institutional change .....	47
6.2. Support for mental health and wellbeing.....	47
6.3. Professional development and mentorship.....	48
6.4. Intersectionality and representation .....	48
6.5. Creating and promoting safe spaces.....	48
6.6. Final reflection .....	49

# 1. INTRODUCTION

This report explores the experiences, challenges, and potential solutions for the needs of LGBT+ religious leaders based in the United Kingdom, who navigate faith institutions and leadership roles. The project involved nine in-depth interviews and a survey of 49 participants. The overall aim was to examine the barriers that LGBT+ leaders face in their religious communities and institutions and propose actionable steps to address these challenges.

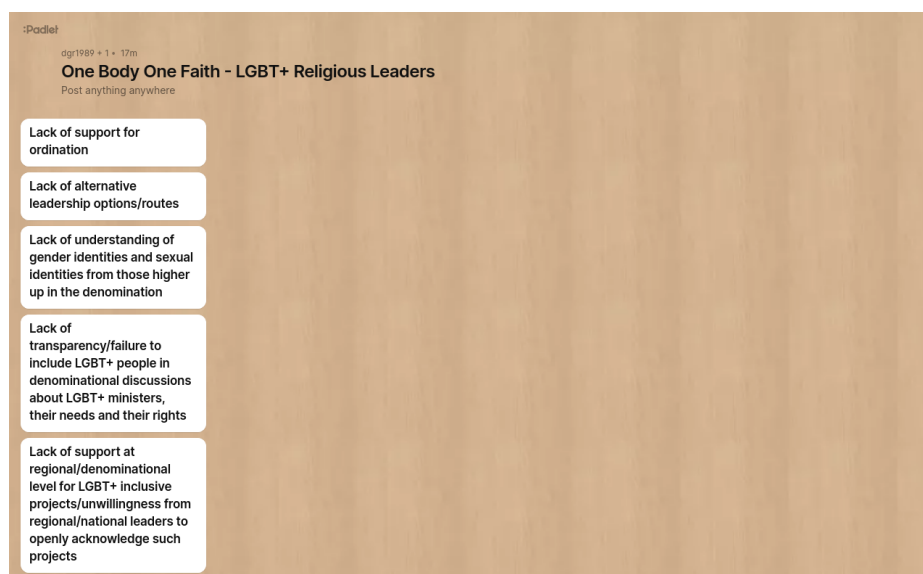
LGBT+ religious leaders are often faced with unique challenges, including, among others, exclusion from leadership positions, prejudice based on their diverse gender and sexual identities, and the lack of institutional support. The experiences of the participants in this research reveal a persistent struggle with homophobia, transphobia, and inadequate representation in denominational decision-making processes.

This study was commissioned by OneBodyOneFaith and conducted pro bono by Dr Diego Garcia Rodriguez through a partnership with the University of Nottingham.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

This study is based on a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative data from nine semi-structured interviews and quantitative insights from a survey completed by 49 LGBT+ religious leaders in the United Kingdom. The interviews explored personal experiences, focusing on unmet needs and the barriers faced by these individuals in accessing leadership positions. The survey further complemented these insights by capturing a broader quantitative perspective on the systemic issues impacting this community.

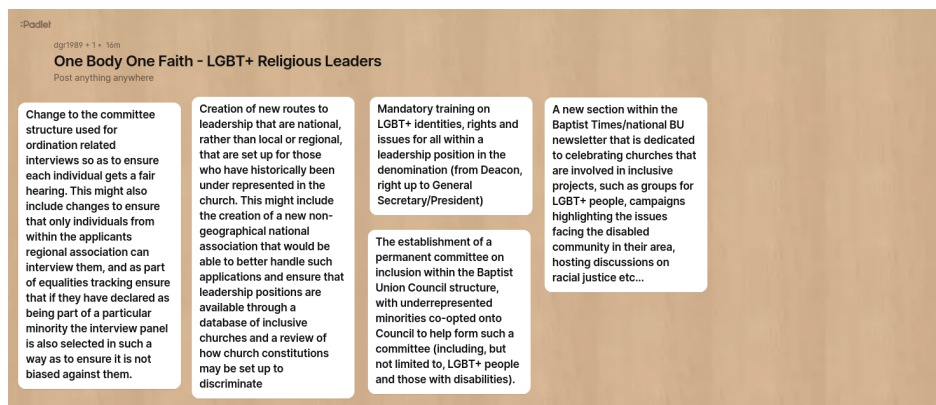
The nine participatory interviews, based on the cultural domain analysis (CDA) method, were conducted with a range of LGBT+ leaders from various denominations. Cultural domain analysis (CDA) is an approach rooted in cognitive anthropology, designed to capture and understand the structure and content of knowledge within specific, organised spheres of experience (Gravlee et al., 2018)<sup>1</sup>. This method uses various techniques to elicit terms and concepts from informants about a specific cultural domain (Brooks, 2016)<sup>2</sup>, helping to map out what is important to people within a particular context. CDA allowed participants to engage deeply with the challenges they face and propose potential solutions. By using a participatory method, specifically through the digital platform Padlet, the power dynamic was shifted away from the researcher and placed into the hands of the participants. This strategy empowered them to lead the discussion and reflect creatively on their experiences. The screenshots below demonstrate how this method enabled a participant to articulate their challenges in one instance and their solutions in another, showcasing the flexibility and depth of the CDA approach.



<sup>1</sup> Gravlee, C. C., Maxwell, C. R., Jacobsohn, A., & Bernard, H. R. (2018). Mode effects in cultural domain analysis: comparing pile sort data collected via internet versus face-to-face interviews. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 21(2), 165-176.

<sup>2</sup> Brooks, B. B. (2016). Using cultural domain analysis to examine Andean social roles. *Anthropology–Open Journal*, 1(1), 11-14.

### Screenshot of challenges shared by a participant.



### Screenshot of solutions shared by a participant.

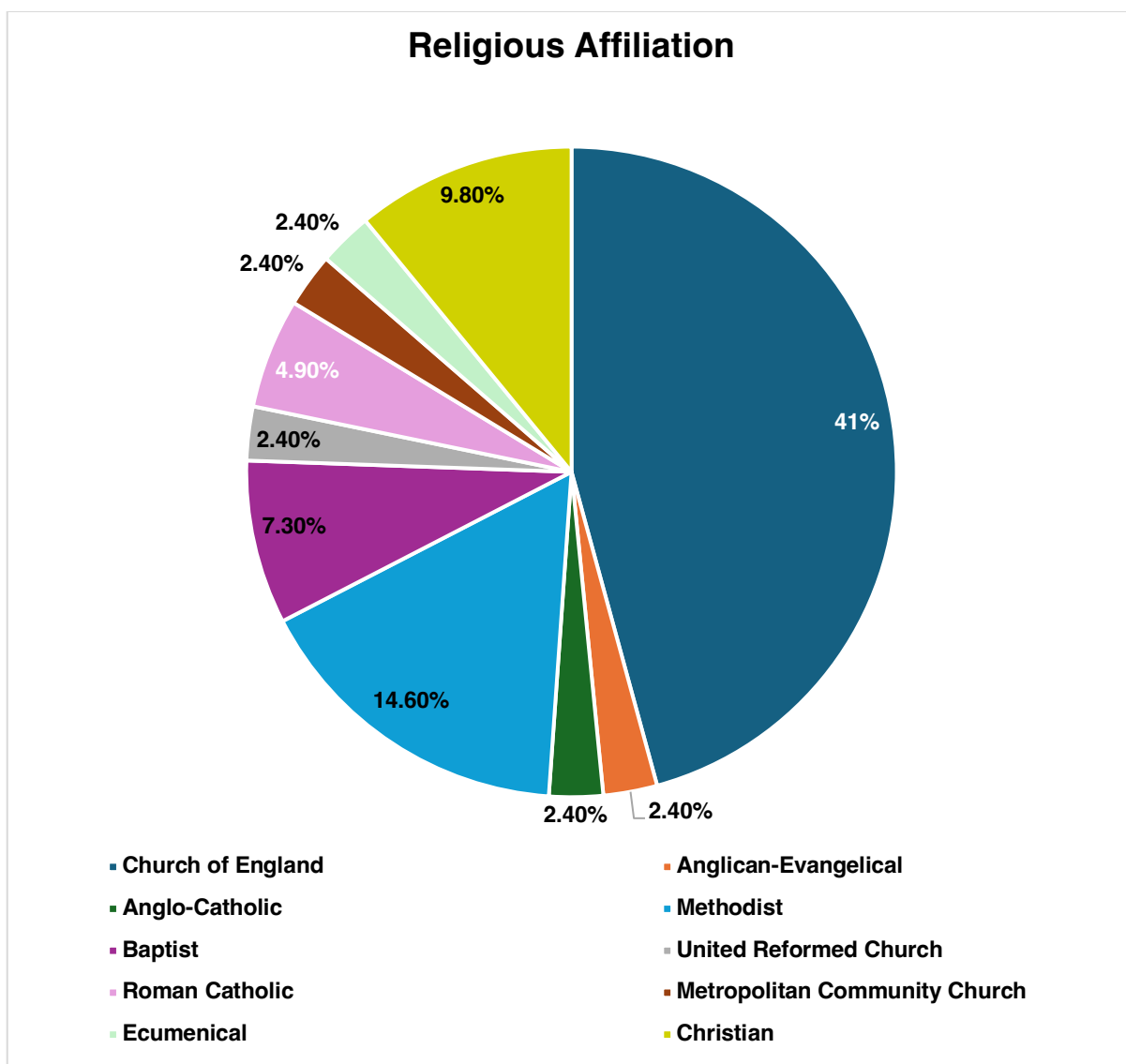
The table of participants in CDA sessions is included below.

Code	Age	Gender identity	Sexual orientation	Pronouns	Ethnicity	Country of origin	Religious denomination
1	23	Gender queer	Bisexual	Her/his/they	White British	England	Baptist
2	37	Gender queer and nonbinary	Lesbian	They/them	White British	England	Christian
3	42	Cisgender man	Gay	He/his	White British	Scotland	Anglican
4	48	Cisgender man	Gay	He/his	White British	England	Anglican
5	48	Cisgender male	Gay	He/his	White British	Australia	Anglican
6	59	Cisgender man	Gay	He/his	White Irish and Scottish	Scotland	Catholic
7	33	Cisgender man	Gay	He/his	White British	England	Anglican
8	31	Trans man	Lesbian	She/he	Black British	England	Christian
9	33	Cisgender man	Gay	He/his	Black British	England	Christian

The survey respondents represent a wide geographic distribution across the UK, including cities, regions, and dioceses. Below is a summary of the locations, which are not included in the table above due to space limitations:

- **Regions/Counties:** Essex, Northeast England, West Midlands (Coventry), Lincolnshire, East Durham, Buckinghamshire, Kent, Hertfordshire, Derby, Cornwall, Norfolk
- **Cities/Towns:** London, Liverpool, Sheffield, Nottingham, Oadby (Leicester), Cambridge, Reading, Leeds, Manchester, North Shields (Tyne and Wear)
- **Dioceses mentioned by participants:** Blackburn, Winchester, Oxford, St Albans
- **National contexts:** Scotland, Wales, England.

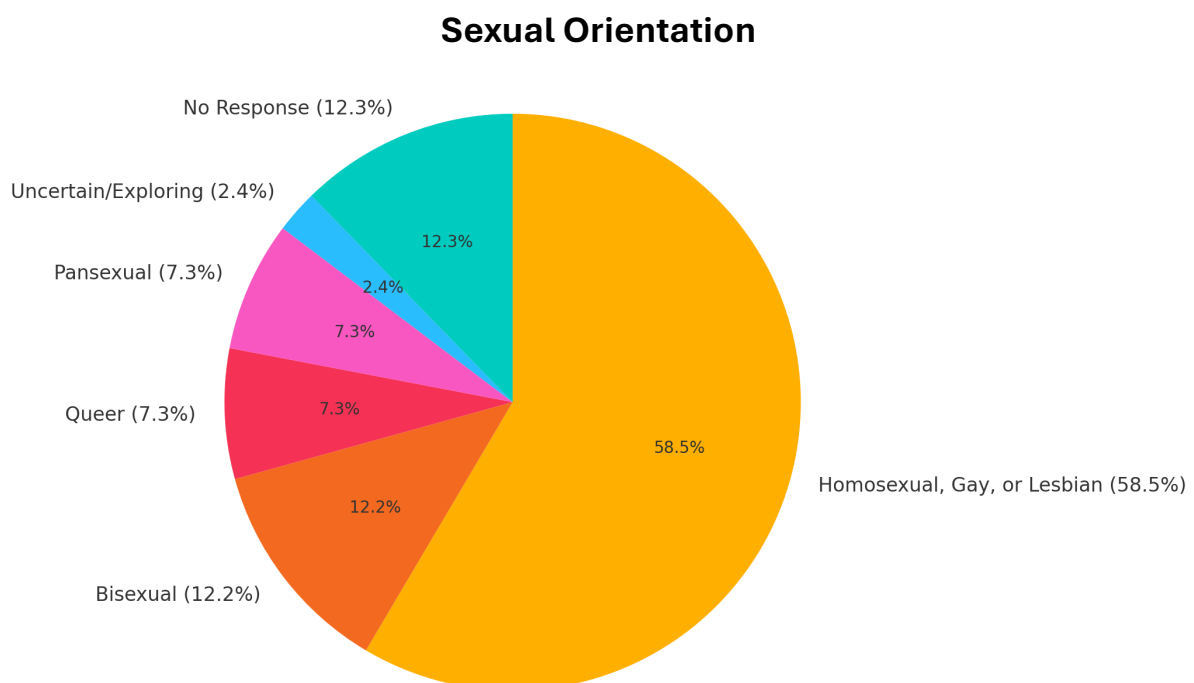
Survey data reveal a predominant affiliation with the Church of England (41%), followed by notable groups identifying as Methodist (14.6%), Christian without specifying a denomination (9.8%), and Baptist (7.3%). Smaller proportions of respondents are affiliated with the Roman Catholic Church (4.9%), Anglican-Evangelical (2.4%), Anglo-Catholic (2.4%), United Reformed Church (2.4%), and Metropolitan Community Church (2.4%). Additionally, one participant identifies as Ecumenical (2.4%), indicating a cross-denominational engagement.



**The ethnicity data shows a significant majority of respondents identifying as British, accounting for 80.5% of participants (33 people).** There are a few individuals representing Black ethnicities, including Black British (7.3%, 3 people) and individuals from other Black/African/Caribbean backgrounds (2.4%, 1 person). One respondent identified as Irish (2.4%, 1 person), and another described their background as “born and brought up in the Far East, technically white British” (2.4%, 1 person). This suggests that while the group was predominantly White British, there was some ethnic diversity present, particularly in the representation of Black British identities.

**Most respondents fall within the age brackets of 41-50 (31.7%, 13 people) and 51-60 (29.3%, 12 people),** reflecting a relatively older demographic. A smaller proportion identify within the age ranges of 31-40 (19.5%, 8 people) and 21-30 (12.2%, 5 people), showing a moderate representation of younger adults. Meanwhile, 9.8% (4 people) are above 60. This distribution indicates that the respondents are predominantly middle-aged, with fewer younger and older participants.

**A significant proportion of respondents identified as homosexual, gay, or lesbian, representing 58.5% (24 people).** Bisexual individuals account for 12.2% (5 people), while those identifying as queer make up 7.3% (3 people), with 7.3% (3 people) identifying as pansexual. A small number (2.4%, 1 person) expressed uncertainty or are still exploring their sexual orientation. The remaining 12.3% of participants did not provide a response, accounting for the difference from 100%. Overall, the data suggests a predominantly gay or lesbian group, with some diversity across other orientations like bisexuality, pansexuality, and queer identities.



**The majority of respondents identified as men (including trans men), accounting for 46.3% (19 people), followed by women (including trans women) at 34.1% (14 people).** A smaller proportion identified as non-binary (7.3%, 3 people) and genderqueer (2.4%, 1

person). Additionally, one person (2.4%) identified as a demiboy. There was also an outlier who did not believe in the possibility of gender transitioning (2.4%, 1 person). 5.1% did not answer this question. The data shows a diverse range of gender identities, though most respondents aligned with either male or female gender categories.

**Most respondents (70.7%, 29 people) indicated that their gender identity was the same as the one they were assigned at birth.** In contrast, 19.5% (8 people) indicated a difference between their current gender identity and their gender assigned at birth. Additionally, 9.8% did not provide a response to this question. This suggests that while the majority identified as cisgender, there was a significant minority of respondents with a trans or non-cisgender identity.

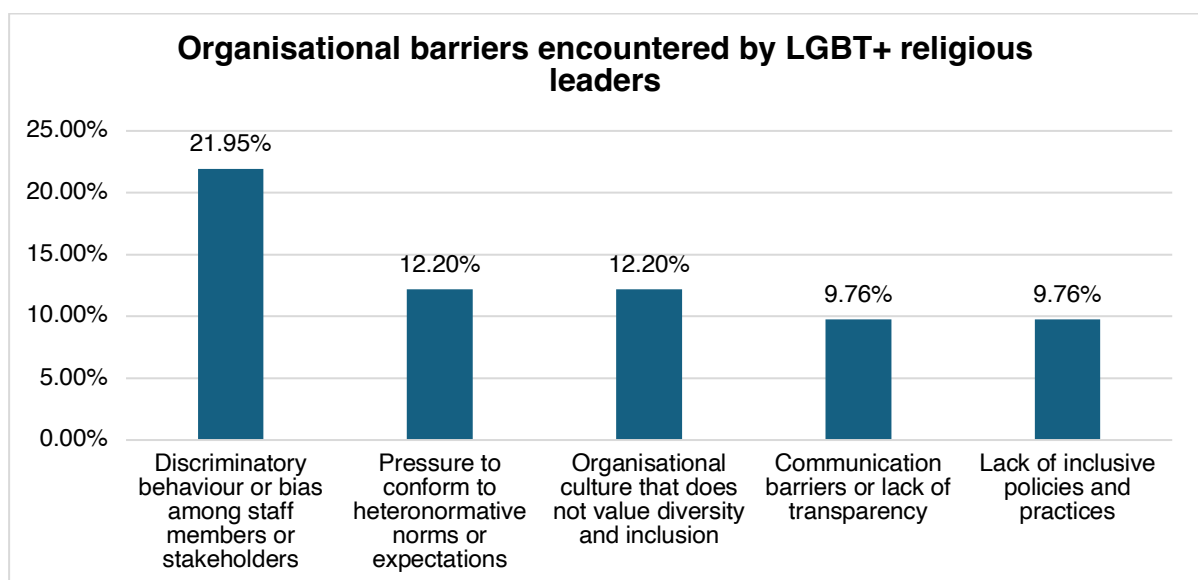
## 3. NEEDS AND BARRIERS

LGBT+ religious leaders in faith communities face diverse challenges, often stemming from both organisational structures and personal experiences. This chapter delves into the key organisational barriers that hinder the effective leadership of LGBT+ individuals in religious spaces. Drawing on survey data and personal testimonies, it also highlights unmet needs, personal struggles, and systemic issues that prevent their full inclusion and support within their respective denominations.

### 3.1. Main organisational barriers

The analysis of survey responses to the organisational barriers encountered by LGBT+ religious leaders reveals several key findings:

- The most frequently mentioned barrier was “Discriminatory behaviour or bias among staff members or stakeholders”, with 9 respondents (21.95%) identifying this as their main challenge.
- “Pressure to conform to heteronormative norms or expectations” and “Organisational culture that does not value diversity and inclusion” were each selected by 5 respondents (12.20%).
- Other significant barriers include “Communication barriers or lack of transparency” and “Lack of inclusive policies and practices”, each identified by 4 respondents (9.76%).<sup>3</sup>



<sup>3</sup> The remaining 34.13% reflects respondents who did not provide an answer.

The findings suggest that discriminatory behaviour and bias among staff or stakeholders remain a significant barrier for LGBT+ religious leaders, indicating that institutional attitudes may still favour heteronormative frameworks. This could manifest as subtle or overt exclusion, impacting the ability of LGBT+ leaders to function effectively in their roles. When leaders face such discrimination, it can lead to an environment where their authority is undermined, and their contributions devalued. This has broader implications, not only for these individuals but also for the inclusivity and diversity of religious organisations as a whole, ultimately perpetuating exclusionary practices.

Furthermore, the pressure to conform to heteronormative norms and the lack of diversity in organisational culture are particularly concerning. These barriers suggest that even when LGBT+ leaders are present in religious settings, they are often expected to downplay or hide their identities. Such pressure suppresses authentic leadership and contributes to a culture where diversity is not genuinely embraced. It also highlights the challenges these leaders face in advocating for policy changes or inclusive practices, as their experiences may not be adequately recognised or valued in decision-making spaces.

### **3.2. Unmet needs of LGBT+ religious leaders**

Our survey asked LGBT+ religious leaders to share any unmet needs in their leadership roles, with responses highlighting a significant lack of emotional, spiritual, and practical support. **A common theme was the emotional toll of enduring hate and discrimination, both online and in person, without adequate backing from church leadership.** One respondent specifically mentioned the absence of clearly defined policies regarding how to handle situations where families refuse their services due to their gender identity, illustrating how organisational structures fail to protect or support LGBT+ leaders. This neglect of institutional backing creates an environment where LGBT+ leaders feel unsafe, isolated, and vulnerable.

**Another significant unmet need expressed by respondents was the inability to be open about their sexuality or gender identity within their church communities.** Several leaders indicated that they had to hide their identities to maintain their positions or move forward with ordination training. The fear of losing their roles due to their sexuality or relationship status, coupled with a lack of pastoral care from senior leaders, exacerbates feelings of isolation. One leader even noted that despite being in a locally affirming parish, they could not take on additional responsibilities due to diocesan restrictions unless they pretended to be heterosexual. This lack of transparency and open dialogue within church institutions marginalises LGBT+ leaders and limits their professional growth.

The consequences of these unmet needs are important. LGBT+ leaders feel demoralised and unsupported, with many indicating that their faith and leadership potential are undermined by the institutions meant to support them. To address these issues, churches must acknowledge and address the challenges faced by LGBT+ leaders. Without systemic changes, LGBT+ leaders will continue to struggle with isolation, limited opportunities, and fear for their security within their roles.

### **3.3. Main personal challenges faced**

When asked about their **main personal challenges faced** as LGBT+ religious leaders, several recurring themes highlighted their struggles. A significant number of respondents identified **discrimination and bias within the organisation or from external stakeholders** as a key challenge, which is related to the organisational barriers noted above. This discrimination often manifests in various forms, from outright bias in institutional policies to subtle pressures that undermine their leadership. The prevalence of this challenge reflects the continued barriers to equality that LGBT+ leaders experience, suggesting that religious institutions still lag in creating inclusive environments for their leaders.

**Maintaining authenticity and managing the pressure to conform to heteronormative norms** is another widespread personal challenge. Many LGBT+ leaders face the internal conflict of being true to their identity while working within organisations that often expect them to align with traditional or heteronormative standards. This tension hinders their personal authenticity and affects their ability to lead effectively, as they are forced to navigate a leadership role where they must suppress important aspects of their identity. For leaders who cannot be open about their sexuality or gender identity, this burden is especially difficult and can result in long-term emotional and spiritual strain.

**Social isolation** was another frequently mentioned personal challenge, with many LGBT+ religious leaders expressing feelings of loneliness due to the lack of other LGBT+ leaders in similar positions. This isolation amplifies the personal and professional pressures they already face, as they lack supportive peers who share their experiences. The absence of mentorship or support networks, which this report will explore later, compounds this issue, making it more difficult for these leaders to access guidance or affirmation from others who understand their unique challenges. This isolation not only affects their wellbeing but also undermines their confidence and limit their opportunities for growth.

Lastly, **mental health issues** such as anxiety, depression, and imposter syndrome are significant challenges for LGBT+ leaders. The constant pressure to conform, coupled with discrimination and isolation, contributes to deteriorating mental health for many. These personal struggles impact their ability to lead and their broader wellbeing, demonstrating the urgent need for institutions to provide better emotional, psychological, and spiritual support.

### **3.4. Addressing personal challenges**

After describing their main personal challenges, survey participants were asked to elaborate on how those challenges further contributed to any unmet needs in their role and suggest potential measures that could be implemented to address them. **A recurrent theme was the emotional toll and fear of discrimination that leads to extreme risk aversion.** Many leaders feel unable to take the necessary steps to advance their ministry due to a lack of protective policies. As one respondent pointed out, there is

a pressing need for policies that both support their ministry and enforce consequences for senior leaders who engage in discriminatory behaviour. Without these protections, LGBT+ leaders remain vulnerable to bias, limiting the impact of their leadership.

**Another critical issue is the lack of mental health support, exacerbated by feelings of isolation and loneliness.** Several respondents shared how the absence of mentorship or regular professional support has led them to internalise organisational problems, making them question their abilities and role in the church. This isolation, together with the need to hide their sexuality or relationship status, contributes to a profound sense of invisibility. Many LGBT+ leaders feel they cannot be their authentic selves, which in turn impacts their ability to fully engage with their congregation or fulfil their vocational calling. Mentorship programmes and peer support networks were suggested as potential solutions to help LGBT+ leaders navigate these challenges and maintain their emotional wellbeing.

**The fear of losing their positions due to their sexuality was another challenge that came up repeatedly.** LGBT+ leaders often feel they are on precarious ground, as their positions could be jeopardised by changing leadership or increased scrutiny from conservative figures in the church. One respondent described being in a constant state of “*fight or flight*” due to the immense pressure to prove themselves beyond reproach, knowing their queerness could be used against them. This overwhelming pressure is intensified by a lack of formal support systems that check in on their mental health or help them manage the unique stressors they face. Regular mental health check-ins, along with institutional support structures, could help alleviate some of this burden.

**Lastly, respondents pointed to the need for better educational initiatives within the church to encourage respect for LGBT+ leaders.** Addressing unconscious bias through training and developing a culture of respect for different viewpoints could mitigate the hostility and alienation experienced by many LGBT+ leaders. Additionally, some respondents called for a more inclusive representation of LGBT+ experiences in leadership training and development, which would allow future leaders to understand and respect the contributions of LGBT+ colleagues. Overall, the responses suggest that without systemic changes—such as policy enforcement, mental health support, and educational initiatives—these unmet needs will continue to limit the participants’ ability to thrive in their roles.

**In response to the statement “*My needs as an LGBT+ religious leader are adequately met*”, the largest proportion of respondents expressed dissatisfaction.** In fact, 61% disagree with the statement, with 36.6% (15 people) strongly disagreeing and 24.4% (10 people) disagreeing. 14.6% (6 people) remained neutral. In contrast, 17.1% (7 people) agreed that their needs were adequately met, and a small percentage of 2.4% (1 person) strongly agreed.

**This indicates that nearly two-thirds of respondents (61%) are dissatisfied,** either disagreeing or strongly disagreeing, about their needs being met, while only 19.5% feel positively about the support they receive. A notable portion of the participants (14.6%, 6 people) did not respond to the question, leading to a gap in the total percentages. Overall,

the data highlights significant dissatisfaction among LGBT+ religious leaders regarding the adequacy of support for their needs.

**Participants were asked if they had sought tools to overcome their personal challenges, and 70.73% (29 individuals) indicated that they had engaged with external resources.** This includes 39.02% (16 individuals) who mentioned using a range of strategies, such as attending leadership courses, psychotherapy, joining Facebook groups or LGBT+ charities, and seeking spiritual direction. Additionally, 31.71% (13 individuals) explicitly answered “Yes”, confirming their reliance on external support. **This shows that many LGBT+ leaders turn to outside services to address their needs, reflecting gaps in institutional support.** In contrast, 29.27% (12 individuals) reported not seeking external resources, possibly due to lack of access, awareness, or perceived relevance. These findings suggest that while many LGBT+ religious leaders seek external resources, there remains a considerable number who either do not engage with available services or face barriers in accessing them.

### **3.5. Further barriers faced by LGBT+ religious leaders**

Survey participants were asked to provide further details on how the barriers they face might affect their role and the broader effectiveness of their activities. The responses to this question highlight the problems they face in navigating their roles within religious institutions. **Once again, fear of discrimination and lack of support from senior leadership** were recurring themes, creating an environment where LGBT+ leaders feel unsafe or unable to be fully authentic in their ministry. A survey participant explained that:

*I am frightened of my senior leadership because I don't feel like they face any consequences for direct or indirect discrimination. I don't feel like senior leadership have my back and so I am less likely to take risks in my ministry.*

Another participant mentioned their attempt to explore further vocational roles, only to be met with a firm refusal: *“The response from the bishop was an unequivocal no... There's an active resistance to the idea of openly gay and married individuals exercising any form of licensed ministry.”* This rejection not only represents a failure of leadership but also illustrates the reluctance within the Church hierarchy to challenge the status quo. The bishops, in many cases, seem to “close ranks” against any push for more inclusive policies. This experience reveals the broader resistance faced by LGBT+ individuals seeking leadership roles, particularly in dioceses where more progressive perspectives are not supported.

In relation this, **one of the key unmet needs raised by participants revolves around restrictions on leadership roles for openly gay and married individuals within the Church of England (CoE).** One of the interview participants shared his personal experience: *“I'm openly gay and I don't hide my sexuality from anyone in the church, and I'm married... But if I wanted to, for example, become a licensed minister, a reader, or a*

*member of the clergy, it's been made clear to me that that's not an option.*" This reflects the Church's ongoing expectation for gay ministers to remain celibate if they wish to advance into clergy roles. The participant explained the offensiveness of being subjected to intrusive questioning about the nature of their relationship, such as whether it is sexual or celibate. These restrictions have created a "brick wall" for many gay individuals in the Church, limiting their potential and reinforcing discriminatory practices. During an interview, another participant described the lack of support in relation to his ordination:

*With this, my experience has been I wanted to go for ordination and still want to go for ordination, but it has been made very clear to me that with the way that the ordination and interview process is set up, that it would be a safeguarding failure for someone who is openly LGBT+ to go through the process because of the views of those involved in such a process. Basically, a complete unwillingness from those who could put me forward for ordination to do so based upon these facts. And then, you know, there's kind of no other room really into ordination that they have listed that would be safe and no particular desire for people to do that to start a route to do so or challenge the way the system has been set up.*

In relation to this, the same participant raised a consequential challenge:

*There is a lack of alternative leadership options and routes, this relates to the previous challenge because you can be a minister of a church without having been ordained most churches have signed constitutions saying you have to be accredited and ordained by the denomination and so there's a real lack of alternative leadership options.*

This results in a reluctance to take risks or advocate for more inclusive practices, as respondents expressed concerns about potential retaliation or being marginalised for their identity. The **absence of robust anti-discrimination policies** that are actively enforced exacerbates this issue, leaving many leaders feeling isolated and vulnerable. As a respondent noted, "*More robust anti-discrimination policies should be in place and the policies themselves should be actually enforced.*" In fact, one of the key unmet needs expressed by interview participants was their inability to be ordained as priest due to their marriage to someone of the same sex. Reflecting on their journey, a participant shared, "*I started to feel a vocation to the priesthood when I was about 16... I didn't come out until I was 20 because I didn't think gay people could be priests... It wasn't until I was 20 where I just couldn't hold it back anymore and I came out.*" The conflict between their calling and their sexuality has had a critical impact on their life. The decision not to claim celibacy, which is required for gay clergy in the Church of England, meant that their journey toward priesthood came to an immediate halt. Although this limitation has shaped the trajectory of their ministry, the participant found blessings in different areas of service, including work as an LGBT advisor. However, the sense of being unable to fulfil their initial calling remains unresolved and is a constant presence in their life.

Moreover, several responses point to the systemic nature of discrimination in religious institutions, where heteronormative norms are deeply entrenched. The fear of openly

identifying as LGBT+ is, as noted before, linked to **policies that prohibit same-sex relationships or maintain outdated theological views on sexuality**. A participant referred to this stating that there is “*a theology which prohibits homosexual practice and requires mission members to sign a code of conduct agreeing not to engage in homosexual practice, in addition to other behaviours and actions. I cannot be out as a gay person in my work or church.*” Another said that “*Heterosexual relationships and marriage are seen as the norm and safe, any variation is viewed as complex and potentially offensive to some members*”. Another added that, “*The Church of England continues to apply discriminatory approaches in clergy formation, training, selection, and other processes based on a policy which is outdated and would be illegal in any other organisation.*” In some cases, even leaders who are part of the LGBT+ community but not publicly open about it unintentionally contribute to an atmosphere where these issues are not addressed transparently. As a participant said, “*LGBT staff members at national church level are often told to keep their opinions to themselves.*” In relation to this, an interview participant said:

*There’s a lack of transparency and a failure to include LGBT+ people in denominational discussions about LGBT+ ministers, their needs and their rights. Our denomination is about to make a decision about whether or not LGBT+ ministers can enter same sex marriages. And they heard from three gay men about their lived experiences for about 10 minutes each, and that is the only input that has been put in in the whole process. And obviously, you know when it comes to other things relating to the needs of LGBT+ ministers and leaders... you know, work-related rights that they should have there’s just a complete lack of transparency, we don’t know what is going on and what is being said.*

*And there’s a complete failure to include those who do any form of meaningful work, or to be honest, to add any form of diversity of view or diversity of needs, because all they’re listening to is cisgender gay men who are middle-aged, so, there’s, you know, they’ve not heard anything from any lesbian ministers or any trans or genderqueer ministers or bisexual ministers, they’ve kept it as a very limited pool of people that they listen to.*

This lack of visibility and representation in leadership roles reinforces a glass ceiling for LGBT+ leaders, limiting their career progression and reducing the overall effectiveness of their ministry. In relation to this, interview participants expressed the need to reform the Church of England’s Synod, to better reflect societal values rather than obstructing change. One participant critiqued the structure, stating, “*The way the synod is structured... allows for all of these conservative interest groups to kind of exert their influence and to try to pack Synod with their members.*” They highlighted that the Synod’s structure often allows conservative voices to dominate, leading to a disconnect between the church and the wider societal values, making the church appear out of touch. The participant further noted that even Members of Parliament (MPs) have started questioning the Synod’s behaviour, indicating the need for a structural shake-up to better represent the diversity of views within the Church.

To address these challenges, several strategies could be considered. First, religious organisations could implement and enforce anti-discrimination policies that protect LGBT+ leaders from bias and ensure accountability for senior leadership. Training programmes on inclusivity, diversity, and safeguarding could be made mandatory for all clergy and staff, creating a safer and more supportive environment. Participants mentioned that bishops must take their safeguarding responsibilities seriously, especially when dealing with homo- and transphobic behaviours, particularly on social media. One participant shared: *“There were people taking to social media very publicly making statements that crossed the line, homo- and transphobic... and these were members of the clergy, some quite senior members... The comments made were absolutely outrageous, and these were the comments that were actually having an impact on people's mental health.”* The participant emphasised that there was almost complete silence from most bishops, except for a few more liberal-minded ones.

There is a clear need for bishops to respond more strongly to such incidents, ensuring that clergy members who engage in discriminatory rhetoric are held accountable and that the wellbeing of the LGBT+ community is prioritised. Additionally, participants noted that institutions could provide **platforms for open dialogue** where LGBT+ leaders can voice their concerns and experiences without fear of reprisal. By increasing visibility and representation of LGBT+ leaders in key decision-making positions, the wider church community would benefit from a more inclusive and diverse leadership structure, allowing for more authentic expressions of ministry and spirituality.

One recommendation highlighted by participants involves **making churches visibly supportive of LGBT+ inclusion**. This can be achieved through signage and other visible markers that clearly communicate a church's stance on inclusion. As one participant shared, *“I remember I went to a Baptist Church probably 6-7 years ago and they just had a little square sticker in the window next to the door... It wasn't particularly big, but it just kind of let people know... they weren't going to get abused.”* This small gesture created a welcoming atmosphere and sent a clear message that LGBT+ individuals were safe and accepted. Visible markers such as these help not only the LGBT+ community but also signal to non-supportive individuals that discriminatory views are not welcome. By being more public about their inclusive stance, churches can create spaces where LGBT+ members feel seen and supported from the moment they walk through the door.

### **3.6. Specific areas where support is needed**

The analysis of responses to the question *“Which statement best reflects your experience in relation to being supported by your denomination on LGBT+ issues?”* reveals several key insights:

- **The majority of respondents (16 individuals, 40%) indicated they were “Partially supported but with limitations”.** This suggests that while some support is available, it is often restricted or conditional, and many LGBT+ leaders still face significant barriers in fully expressing their identities within their denominations.

- **“Actively opposed or discriminated against”** was selected by **10 respondents (25%)**, highlighting that a quarter of participants experience direct opposition or discrimination from their denomination, indicating a hostile environment for LGBT+ religious leaders.
- **Another 25% of respondents (10 individuals)** stated that they were **“Not supported but tolerated”**, reflecting a passive acceptance where LGBT+ leaders are neither actively supported nor fully included.
- **Only 2 respondents (5%)** felt **“Fully supported and accepted”**, suggesting that unconditional support for LGBT+ leaders remains rare within most denominations.
- **Additionally, 2 respondents (5%)** selected **“Unsure/Prefer not to say”**, which may indicate uncertainty or a reluctance to disclose their experiences, potentially reflecting discomfort or ambiguity in their denominational support.

**Survey findings highlight a general lack of comprehensive support for LGBT+ religious leaders, with most experiencing either limited or no support at all.** Based on their experiences, participants were asked to indicate the specific areas they felt require the most support as LGBT+ religious leaders. Considering their responses, the following hierarchy of key needs can be identified:

1. **Advocacy and representation:** This was the most frequently selected area, with **58.5% (24 people)** indicating that as LGBT+ religious leaders they require **significant support in terms of advocacy and representation**. This suggests a strong need for more visible and active representation within both religious and public spheres to ensure their voices are amplified and acknowledged. A critical need highlighted by some participants was the creation of dedicated legal advocacy and campaign roles, aimed at addressing the discrimination and harmful behaviour experienced by LGBT+ clergy. As one interviewee noted, *“I guess it’s having almost like a legal advocate that you could contact for individual stuff, but also someone whose job it is to collect together stories of things happening and presenting them to the church.”* This would provide individuals with a resource for addressing specific incidents of discrimination while also allowing the Church to compile evidence of systemic issues and advocate for institutional changes. Such a role would serve both as a support mechanism for individuals and a tool for broader reform.
2. **Emotional support:** Emotional support was highlighted by **48.8% (20 people)** of respondents, indicating that almost half of the participating LGBT+ religious leaders struggle with emotional challenges and would benefit from structures offering psychological or pastoral care to help them navigate the challenges faced.

3. **Faith-based guidance:** Faith-based guidance was identified as a need by 39% (16 people), showing that a considerable number of respondents require specific religious or theological support to align their identities with their spiritual leadership roles.
4. **Professional development:** Professional development needs were recognised by 29.3% (12 people). This reflects a desire for growth opportunities and further training, enabling leaders to advance their capabilities and feel more equipped in their roles.
5. **Community engagement:** Only 19.5% (8 people) selected community engagement as a key need. While important, this suggests that other areas such as advocacy and emotional support take precedence for most respondents.

A small proportion of respondents (7.3%, 3 people) mentioned additional needs like social media training, understanding scripture, equality and inclusion training, or felt unqualified to provide a definitive answer, yet acknowledged that this may indicate a lack of clarity in support areas.

Complementing the findings above, interview participants offered a series of concrete recommendations to improve their experiences within religious leadership structures, drawing attention to key changes that could be implemented to foster greater inclusivity. One participant noted, *“There has to be an overhaul of the current system to be totally dismantled...the current system means that two associations are paired off with each other and that’s where the problem lies.”* Participants also noted the need for a more equitable ordination interview process. This improvement includes reworking the committee structure to ensure unbiased and fair hearings.

Another key recommendation was to establish national, non-geographic routes to leadership, particularly for underrepresented groups. A participant articulated this need by explaining, *“We need to create one [association] that is non-geographical and national, aimed at LGBT+ inclusion and other under-represented groups...it’d be better placed to review the barriers that are currently in place in terms of creating leadership positions.”* Such an initiative would address current regional limitations and ensure leadership opportunities are available for historically marginalised individuals. Creating a national platform could also facilitate tracking and dismantling discriminatory barriers within existing church constitutions.

The importance of mandatory training on LGBT+ identities and rights within the denomination was another crucial area for improvement. One participant observed, *“In terms of training, there’s none really within the denomination...it’s just a discussion of views on sexuality and gender and how to pastorally cope with those...but I suspect there would be significant resistance to such training.”* Despite the introduction of racial justice training in response to movements like Black Lives Matter within some denominations, there is no precedent for similar training related to gender and sexual minorities. A mandatory, denomination-wide training program could significantly increase awareness

and foster a more inclusive environment, ensuring that all leaders are equipped with the knowledge to support LGBT+ members.

The need for comprehensive media training and support was highlighted by another participant's experience. They described the lack of guidance from their diocese when dealing with media inquiries:

*One of the things I found is, you know, existing as a non-binary priest, people wanna ask you about it and papers and stuff get involved... Diocese have a press officer, but if you talk to them, everything gets treated like a problem, like you're a problem rather than it being an opportunity for mission and ministry.*

This illustrates the broader issue of institutions perceiving LGBT+ clergy as a potential PR risk rather than embracing media opportunities to promote inclusivity and mission. Instead of receiving supportive advice, the participant felt that the diocese's focus was on damage control, stifling any chance for positive engagement with the public.

The participant's experience with a local newspaper interview that spiralled into international attention further underscores the importance of media training:

*I did an interview with a local paper in Liverpool... it got picked up by a bunch of news agencies around the world. Even now, more than a year on, I am still getting people writing ridiculous things on the Internet about me... My face got put on a poster that people were in a protest about.*

Despite these challenges, the participant expressed a desire to engage with the media positively, emphasising the need for training that both protects the individual and enables them to handle public exposure effectively. They felt unsupported by their diocese, which offered advice geared towards suppression rather than empowerment, including recommendations to "close all your social media, hide everything that makes you you."

This lack of proactive support not only obstructed their ability to engage with the media but also had a serious impact on their mental health. As the participant explained, "I had like two months off work with anxiety... some of that was having to deal with thousands of people going out their way to say mean things about me." The participant sought therapy, but the limited options provided by their diocese, which did not include access to queer therapists, made it difficult to find adequate support. This further highlights the need for a more tailored approach to mental health support, particularly for LGBT+ leaders who face public scrutiny and media pressure.

Lastly, participants called for the establishment of a permanent committee on inclusion within the Baptist Union Council. As one participant explained, "There's absolutely nothing on wider inclusion including LGBT+ people and those with disabilities...but at the moment they're not co-opting people from other under-represented areas like LGBT people." This committee would provide a formal platform for addressing the needs of

underrepresented minorities, such as LGBT+ individuals and people with disabilities, and ensure these groups have a voice in decision-making processes.

### **3.7. Role models**

The analysis of responses to the question, “*How important is it for you to have role models within your faith who are also LGBT+?*” reveals the following insights:

- **An overwhelming majority of respondents (36 individuals, 87.80%) indicated that having LGBT+ role models within their faith is “Very important”.** This reveals the critical role that visibility and representation play in supporting LGBT+ individuals in religious contexts, highlighting the need for role models who can inspire and guide them.
- **“Somewhat important” was selected by 3 respondents (7.32%),** suggesting that while representation is valued, it may not be essential for everyone in their spiritual journey or leadership development.
- **Only 2 respondents (4.88%) selected “Neutral”,** indicating that for a small portion of participants, having LGBT+ role models within their faith is not a significant concern.

These results indicate that role models who share their identity are highly valued by most LGBT+ religious leaders, as they provide affirmation and support within faith communities where they may otherwise feel underrepresented. This topic also arose during individual interviews, where the importance of having visible LGBT+ individuals in church spaces was emphasised by participants. Representation in both leadership and congregational roles can have a profound impact. One participant reflected, “*It’s about them just being there and being able to be seen and heard... it was one of the reasons that I chose to be more open and public about my sexuality.*” Seeing LGBT+ individuals openly participating in church life can offer comfort and solidarity to those who may still be grappling with their own identities.

### **3.8. Pressure to conform**

**Participants were asked if they feel pressured to conform to heteronormative or monogamous expectations within their faith community. A majority of respondents (22 individuals, 56.41%) answered “Yes”,** indicating that more than half of LGBT+ religious leaders feel a clear and consistent pressure to conform to heteronormative or monogamous expectations within their faith communities.

“*Sometimes*” was selected by 13 respondents (33.33%), reflecting that a significant portion of participants experience occasional or situational pressure to conform, depending on the circumstances or the specific context within their faith community. Only 4 respondents (10.26%) answered “*No*”, suggesting that for a small minority, these

pressures are not felt, and they are likely in environments that are more accepting of diverse expressions of identity and relationships.

**Most participants described significant pressure to conform to heteronormative and monogamous norms within their faith communities.** One individual, who identifies as polyamorous, shared the fear of having to hide their love for their partners indefinitely, while another expressed how their relationship with their wife was treated as problematic due to assumptions about their assigned gender. Several respondents also discussed the expectation to keep their queer identities hidden, with one noting the pressure to ensure that their church is not “*too LGBT-friendly*” to avoid alienating others. This pressure not only affects their personal lives but also creates internal conflict between their queer identity and their calling as religious leaders, as one respondent described their lifestyle being seen as contradictory to their faith.

In some cases, the pressure is explicitly tied to the risk of losing leadership roles or facing consequences within the church. One respondent mentioned that they could be expelled from their church leadership if they were to live openly as a gay person. Another highlighted the difficulty of navigating assumptions about their marriage, where they are constantly faced with questions about their “*wife*” due to their wedding ring, leading to moments of deciding whether to disclose the truth about their same-sex marriage. Others discussed feeling compelled to “*mask their sexuality*” or conform to traditional expectations regarding gender roles and relationships, even when these norms felt misaligned with their authentic selves. This pressure creates a complex and often painful dynamic where participants feel forced to choose between their personal integrity and their roles within faith communities.

### **3.9. Lack of formation and education**

Participants mentioned the lack of adequate religious formation that takes their sexuality seriously. They described a disjointed approach to faith formation in England, Scotland, and Wales, where LGBT+ individuals often must navigate their spiritual development on their own. As an interview participant explained, “*We don’t form the faith of Catholic adults very well... and it feels like certainly as a gay man, and I know this is the feeling for others too, we almost have to do all entirely for ourselves without much support from the church.*” Participants called for more holistic faith formation, which incorporates theological, ethical, and spiritual elements, and is inclusive of LGBT+ experiences. This need extends beyond clergy, as participants noted that laity are often left without resources for spiritual education, leaving them to manage their discipleship journey independently.

Additionally, the lack of supportive communities where religious LGBT+ people can engage in meaningful faith formation is a significant challenge. One of the participants praised initiatives like Positive Faith (formerly Catholics for AIDS Prevention and Support), which provides hospitality, community, and theological discussion, but they lamented that such initiatives are scarce: “*Your average LGBTQ+ Catholic in England and Wales are left to get on with it in some ways.*” Most participants considered that religious institutions have become ineffective at supporting adult faith development, leaving

many feeling isolated. This issue is particularly problematic for those seeking to integrate their faith with their professional and personal lives, as they struggle to find guidance that aligns with their experiences. Participants called for a renewed focus on faith formation that not only serves priests but also addresses the needs of LGBT+ laity and other marginalised groups within religious bodies.

In relation to broader training and development opportunities for LGBT+ leaders, interview participants reflected on how limited access to professional development is a form of ongoing marginalisation, with one stating, *“We are always neglected in conversations because of our sexual and gender identities... opportunities are denied from us due to our sexual identity.”* This exclusion both reduces their personal growth and perpetuates a culture where LGBT+ individuals are not seen as valuable contributors within the church. Another participant emphasised how conforming to heteronormative expectations diminishes their opportunities for professional advancement, explaining how, *“People try to force us to transform ourselves back to heteronormative norms or expectations, and they are always neglecting us from various opportunities.”* This lack of support for personal and professional development exacerbates feelings of isolation and neglect, demonstrating the need for religious institutions to open development opportunities for all individuals, regardless of their sexual and gender identity.

One of the key solutions proposed by participants is the development of a formation approach that is co-produced and incorporates spirituality, ethics, self-care, and faith education specifically for LGBT+ people. One of them explained that *“The formation approach is the spine that the other three things hang off... there’s a whole website of people who are visible, and there are books and articles.”* This highlights the importance of creating systematised resources where religious individuals in ministry have been given visibility. This kind of structured formation would not only provide theological reflection but also allow participants to engage deeply with their faith, moving beyond fragmented efforts that exist in isolation.

Another solution focused on the life course development of LGBT+ religious people, where resources are needed to understand their faith journey in relation to their identity. Focusing specifically on the Catholic Church, a participant noted that *“we haven’t really got anything like that”* in terms of books or resources that help LGBT+ Catholics or those in ministry understand and support people across different life stages. Drawing on interdisciplinary work such as psychology and theology, they proposed developing resources that guide LGBT+ individuals—and those supporting them—through the process of integrating faith with identity across their life course.

Finally, another participant called for a reframing of spirituality to help LGBT+ people thrive through training and formation. As the participant said, *“There’s something about when people feel they need to go into Buddhism or alternative spirituality... that’s a sign of failure of the Church.”* The participant advocated for leveraging Catholic traditions like Benedictine hospitality and Carmelite contemplation, which offer resources for navigating challenging times. This approach could bridge the gap between traditional Catholic spirituality and the unique needs of LGBT+ individuals, helping them find a

deeper sense of belonging and spiritual growth within the Church, rather than seeking it outside.

### **3.10. Navigating leadership as an LGBT+ religious leader**

Participants were asked to explain how they navigate their role as LGBT+ leaders in terms of their sexuality and gender within their faith. Their answers reveal diverse strategies and experiences, ranging from openness and confidence to fear and isolation. Many described an ongoing tension between their personal identity and the expectations of their faith communities. For some, this tension has led to feelings of burnout and consideration of leaving leadership roles altogether, as one participant mentioned they are *“burnt out and exhausted”* from facing repeated discrimination. Others, however, have found ways to reconcile their sexuality with their faith, viewing the challenges as primarily coming from the church institution, rather than a conflict between faith and identity.

**A notable proportion of respondents reported being fully open about their sexuality and gender, believing it is important to be visible as LGBT+ leaders within their faith communities.** For these individuals, being open is an essential part of their leadership, especially for younger or vulnerable members of the church who may need role models. However, this openness comes at a cost, as many participants noted the toll it has taken on their mental health and personal wellbeing. Others continue to navigate these tensions more privately, hiding aspects of their identity or carefully choosing when and to whom they disclose their sexuality or gender. This balance of visibility and protection is influenced by the leadership’s acceptance level, the broader church culture, and the leader's personal support systems.

Some respondents described navigating their roles by finding alternative supportive faith communities or organisations where they feel more accepted. This includes denominations such as the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC), which is proudly inclusive, allowing LGBT+ leaders to *“flourish as whole people”*. For others, like those in the Church of England, navigating their roles involves *“playing cards carefully”* in interactions with senior leadership to avoid jeopardising their positions. Many participants also highlighted the importance of supportive networks, whether through allies, supportive congregations, or organisations like LGB Christians, to provide encouragement and solidarity in the face of institutional barriers.

During an interview, one of the participants proposed the provision of leadership within dioceses that are openly supportive of LGBT+ people. This could include appointing an LGBT+ chaplain or a designated liaison within the diocesan office to whom LGBT+ clergy can turn for support. As this participant noted, *“It’s about having somebody appointed... who LGBT+ clergy can go to and know that they’re going to be supportive of them as a person.”* This formalised role would offer a safe space for LGBT+ clergy to discuss issues related to their identity without fear of judgment. Some dioceses have already taken steps in this direction by establishing LGBT+ chaplaincy roles, but more widespread

adoption of this practice could provide essential support for LGBT+ leaders facing challenges in their roles.

A few participants expressed discomfort not with their sexuality but with current trends within LGBT+ discourse. One of the participants voiced concerns about being pressured to conform to the broader “*TQI+ agenda*”, feeling that this focus does not represent their identity or beliefs. In what unfortunately comes across as a transphobic statement, a participant said that “*I do not think that people are capable of changing their biological sex (...), I think LGB people are suffering greatly by having had our community, values and freedoms coopted by a wholly different agenda, namely the ‘trans rights’ one*”. This illustrates a growing complexity in how LGBT+ leaders relate to both their faith and the LGBT+ community, as they navigate evolving social, theological, and identity-based dynamics within their religious spaces. Overall, these responses reflect a broad spectrum of experiences, from those finding empowerment in their openness to those carefully managing their roles in challenging and sometimes unsupportive environments.

### **3.11. Impact of denominational stances on equal marriage**

Participants were asked regarding how their denomination’s stance on issues like equal marriage affect their role as LGBT+ leaders. For some, the denomination’s opposition to equal marriage has reduced their ability to serve openly or pursue leadership roles. One respondent expressed feeling like a “*strange anomaly*” because their marriage appeared heterosexual before their gender transition, and despite this, the church still made them feel like a problem. Others echoed this sentiment, with one individual stating that they refrained from pursuing relationships altogether due to their church’s opposition, while another expressed distress over not being able to marry their partner and maintain a leadership position.

On the other hand, for those in denominations that do recognise equal marriage, such as the Methodist Church or the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC), the impact has been largely positive. One respondent described how being able to marry their partner in their church gave them confidence and a sense of personal affirmation. However, even in these more supportive environments, challenges remain. One leader from MCC pointed out that while their church recognises and supports equal marriage, opportunities for wider community work or ecumenical support are limited due to broader negative perceptions of LGBT+ relationships across Christian spaces. For some leaders, the mixed acceptance of equal marriage within their denominations creates a complex dynamic where they sometimes feel supported by their local communities but excluded or marginalised by the wider church structure.

For those in unsupportive denominations, the stance on equal marriage often creates practical barriers to leadership. One respondent stated they avoided licensing as a lay leader to maintain their relationship, as marrying their partner would mean losing their leadership role. Others described how their inability to marry affects their financial and retirement plans, causing additional stress beyond the emotional rejection. In some cases, leaders feel unable to serve openly, and one individual shared that they could

never reveal their sexuality due to the risk of being silenced or removed from good standing within their church. This precarious position is a recurring theme; with many participants feeling they are “*second class*” or “*rejected*” by their institutions despite their ongoing commitment and passion for ministry.

Overall, the responses show that denominational stances on equal marriage significantly affect LGBT+ leaders’ roles, both positively and negatively. For some, these stances provide confidence and affirmation, while for others, they create emotional distress, professional limitations, and a sense of exclusion from the broader church community. The disparity in experiences shows the ongoing need for churches to address equal marriage and provide a more inclusive and supportive environment for LGBT+ leaders.

### **3.13. Conclusions and recommendations**

The findings indicate that LGBT+ religious leaders face significant organisational barriers, including discriminatory behaviour and pressure to conform to heteronormative norms. These obstacles are intensified by a lack of institutional support, both in terms of policy and practical measures, leading to isolation and emotional strain. The absence of inclusive policies and the persistence of bias within religious institutions hinder the leadership potential of LGBT+ individuals, limiting their ability to advocate for change and contribute fully to their communities. Personal challenges such as mental health issues, social isolation, and the pressure to hide one’s identity further exacerbate these difficulties, creating an environment where LGBT+ leaders often feel unsupported and marginalised. Considering these findings, it is recommended that OneBodyOneFaith:

**Work with religious decision-makers towards the implementation of anti-discrimination policies:** Religious institutions should adopt and enforce robust anti-discrimination policies that protect LGBT+ leaders from bias. These policies should include clear consequences for discriminatory behaviour by senior leadership or other stakeholders.

**Design and implement campaigns intended to increase representation and advocacy:** This could lead to the creation of formal structures within religious organisations to ensure that LGBT+ leaders are represented in decision-making processes. Advocacy roles could be created to address incidents of discrimination and work towards systemic change.

**Develop peer support and mentoring networks:** Establish peer support groups and mentoring programmes specifically for LGBT+ leaders, particularly those who are trans and non-binary. These networks could provide spaces for mutual support, professional growth, and emotional wellbeing.

**Enhance mental health support:** Provide tailored mental health services, including access to queer-affirming therapists, for LGBT+ religious leaders. Regular mental health check-ins and institutional support structures should be in place to address the unique pressures they face.

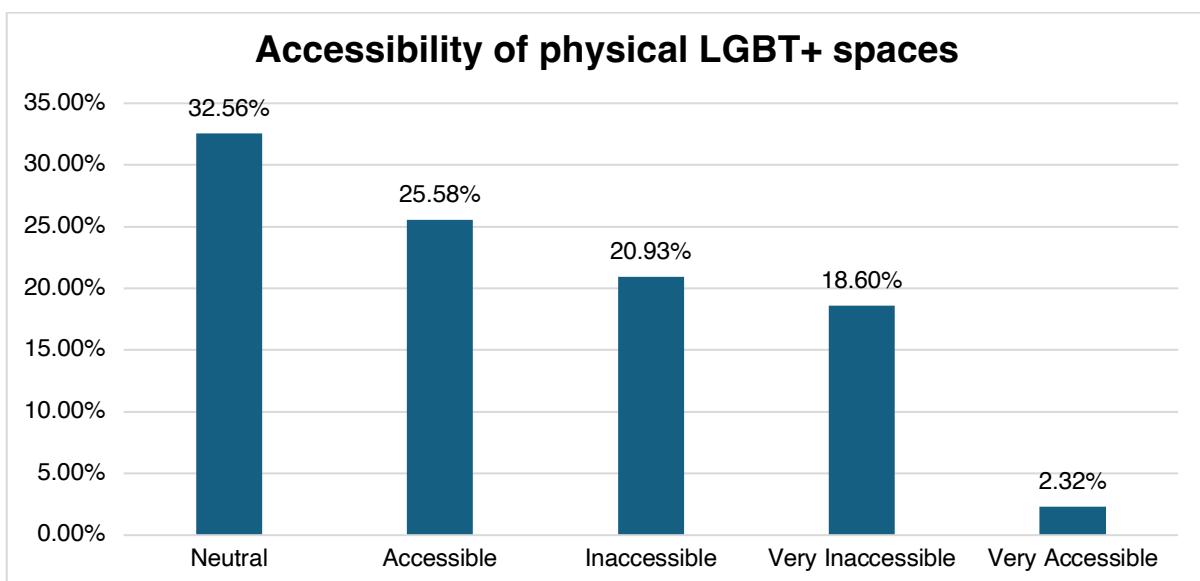
**Encourage inclusive theological education:** Develop educational programmes that incorporate LGBT+ experiences into theological training and faith formation. These programmes should offer holistic support, addressing the spiritual, ethical, and emotional needs of LGBT+ leaders.

## 4. SPACES

In this chapter, we explore the significance of LGBT+ community spaces for religious leaders. Section 4.1 delves into the availability of these spaces, based on participants' ratings, revealing a landscape where access varies considerably across communities. We then turn to the quality of existing spaces in Section 4.2, examining how these environments serve the needs of LGBT+ individuals within religious settings. Finally, Section 4.3 investigates the preferred forms of support that participants seek within these spaces, including peer support, advocacy, and social gatherings. By engaging with participants' personal experiences and survey data, this chapter sheds light on the gaps and successes in the provision of LGBT+ community spaces, offering recommendations for future development.

### 4.1. LGBT+ community spaces

When asked to rate the availability of supportive LGBT+ community spaces that are not online, a significant portion of participants expressed that they have limited access to such spaces. “*Neutral*” was the most common response, with 13 participants (32.56%) indicating mixed experiences. “*Accessible*” was selected by 10 respondents (25.58%), highlighting that a quarter of participants feel they have adequate access to supportive LGBT+ spaces outside of the online environment. On the other hand, “*Inaccessible*” and “*Very Inaccessible*” together accounted for 17 responses (39.53%), demonstrating that for a substantial number of participants, these spaces are either difficult to find or unavailable. Only 1 respondent (2.32%) rated these spaces as “*Very Accessible*”, indicating that few participants experience ease of access.



Participants emphasised the need for more widespread provision of services focused on LGBT+ inclusion. One of the participants described their involvement in an Open Table service as a vital space for LGBT+ individuals to be themselves: “*It’s specifically for them*”

*[LGBT+ people] to come and be themselves and talk about themselves without fear of judgement.*” Although the participant expressed hope that such services would eventually become unnecessary, they acknowledged that, for now, these spaces serve as crucial stepping stones toward full inclusion. By providing more inclusive services and spaces within the church, LGBT+ individuals can engage with their faith in a supportive environment without feeling the need to hide their identity.

During interviews, participants emphasised the lack of spaces for LGBT+ Catholics to come together for theological reflection and worship. One of the participants highlighted the absence of sustained opportunities to explore their faith collectively, explaining: *“There’s something about a place... where Catholics could come sit with each other and reflect theologically... rather than just being tacked on the end of a parish as a monthly mass kind of thing.”* This emphasises the need for spaces that go beyond the occasional inclusion of LGBT+ individuals in existing church services, creating sustained communities of reflection and theological engagement. The participant suggested that such spaces would not only cater to their spiritual needs but also provide formation in ways that are currently missing within broader structures, especially for those who may not feel welcome in regular parish settings.

Finally, the need for greater visibility and support for inclusive churches as safe spaces for the LGBT+ community was a major point raised. One of the interview participants explained: *“Churches that have actually gone through the process of applying to join networks like OneBodyOneFaith, the Inclusive Church network, or the Open Table network... are putting in the effort to really understand the issues that members of the LGBT+ community are facing.”* These churches, by aligning themselves with such organisations, provide safety and refuge for LGBT+ individuals. The participant added that inclusive churches need much more visibility so that LGBT+ people can easily identify places where they will be welcomed and free from prejudice, explaining that they themselves deliberately sought out an Inclusive Church for this reason. Increasing the visibility and awareness of such spaces would ensure that more LGBT+ individuals feel safe and supported within their religious communities.

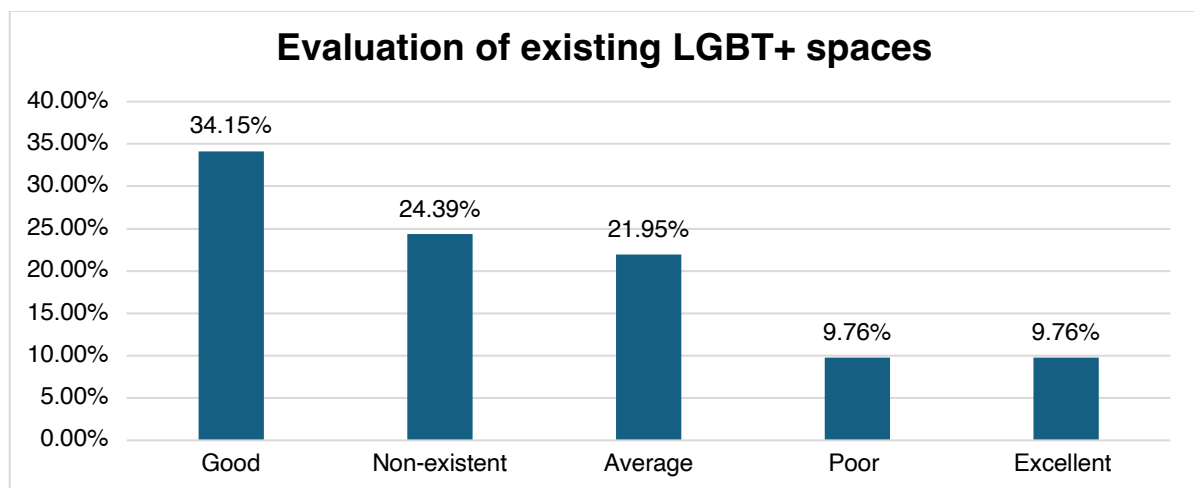
The need for spaces that could maximise the visibility of LGBT+ people of faith was another crucial area identified by participants. One of the interview participants suggested a website and series of life stories from LGBT+ religious people, designed to help people reach self-acceptance and reflect on their own journeys. Drawing inspiration from the German *Out in Church* programme, the participant stressed the importance of having *“a website and a programme of articles”* that offer lived experiences as examples. This kind of visibility would help normalise LGBT+ identities within religious institutions, while also serving as a resource for those struggling with self-acceptance and inclusion in their religious communities.

#### **4.2. Quality of existing spaces**

The analysis of responses to our survey question on the quality of LGBT+ friendly spaces within religious communities reveals varied experiences. The most common rating was

*Good*, chosen by 34.15% of respondents (n=14), indicating that many participants find supportive spaces within their communities, although there is still room for improvement. However, 24.39% of respondents (n=10) indicated that such spaces were *Non-existent*, highlighting a significant gap in the availability of supportive environments for LGBT+ individuals in many religious contexts.

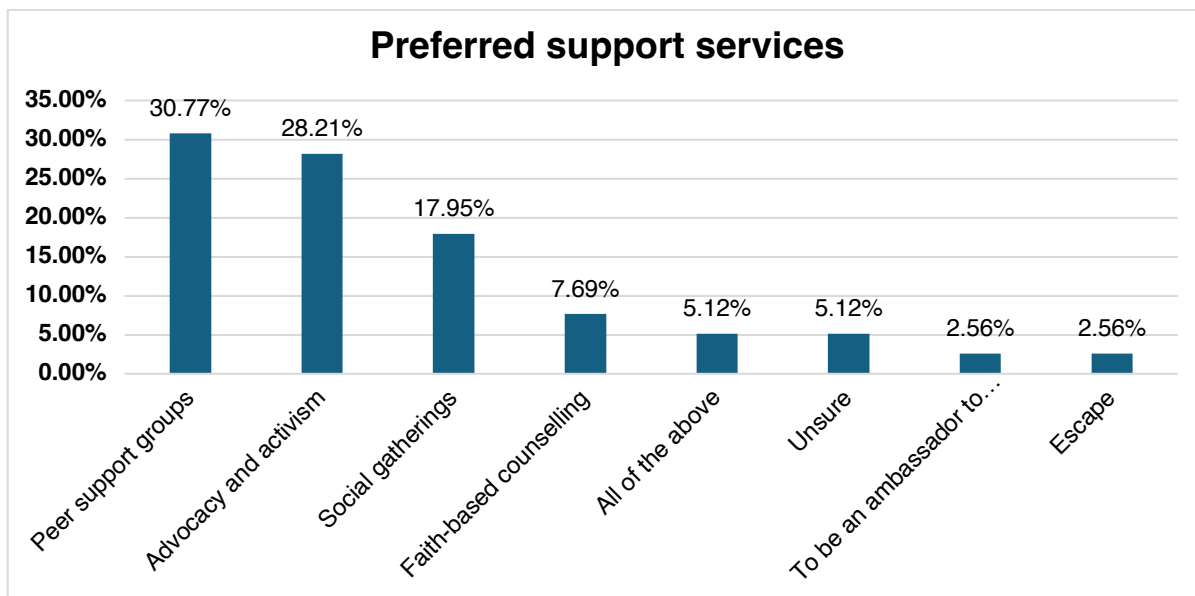
An additional 21.95% of respondents (n=9) rated the spaces as *Average*, suggesting that while these spaces exist, they may not fully meet the needs of the LGBT+ community. Smaller groups of participants rated these spaces as either *Excellent* or *Poor* (9.76% each, n=4), showing that while some individuals experience very supportive environments, others find them severely lacking. Overall, the data reflects a broad range of experiences, with many LGBT+ leaders encountering limited or no support in their religious communities.



### 4.3. Preferred support in community spaces

When asked regarding the kind of support preferred in a community space, the most popular form was “Peer support groups”, chosen by 12 respondents (30.77%). This highlights the importance of mutual support and shared experiences in navigating challenges within religious spaces. “Advocacy and activism” was the second most common response, selected by 11 participants (28.21%), suggesting that many LGBT+ leaders value proactive efforts to change policies and challenge discrimination within their faith communities.

“Social gatherings” were preferred by 8 respondents (17.95%), indicating that spaces for informal connection and community-building also play a key role in providing support. “Faith-based counselling” was selected by 3 respondents (7.69%), pointing to a smaller but notable need for spiritual and emotional support grounded in faith. These findings highlight a diverse range of preferences, with many leaders valuing both relational support and advocacy for systemic change. A minority of participants selected “All of the above” (5.12%), or were unsure (5.12%), while two proposed alternative activities as the chart below shows.



Complementing the question above, the responses to the open survey question, “*What types of community spaces (physical or online) would benefit you as an LGBT+ religious leader?*” highlight a variety of needs and preferences that are in line with the options participant were provided before. Many respondents expressed a desire for peer support groups and spaces where they could openly share their experiences and challenges without fear of judgment. Others emphasised the importance of social gatherings, mentoring, and safe spaces to discuss issues specific to their role as LGBT+ leaders. During an interview, a participant got deeper into the need for safe spaces stating that:

*There’s a lack of safe spaces where I can talk and live openly within the church. Obviously, my job is prison-based most of the time, but I do go out and I’m in churches a bit of my time as well and I rarely know before I go to those churches whether I would be safe to mention the fact that I’m married to a man. The fact that you know, even before that, when I was dating or seeing people, there was always things that I had to be very, very careful about mentioning or not mentioning.*

*And then obviously, as a Christian, I would like to be able to take my husband with me sometimes when I go to places and actually knowing that’s not a possibility a lot of the time... So, in terms of what safe space looks like, it would be somewhere that I wouldn’t be self-conscious about being gay, a space where I’d feel welcome. It would be in some way obvious that, you know, LGBT people are welcome in that space.*

*And with that obviously comes the fact that you’d be free from any negative comments or abuse or any of those things, if you didn’t start talking about those things or I did take my husband with me. Yeah, a place where I’d be able to just be myself and not have to sort of over analyse everything that I’m saying or doing.*

For some, these spaces could be online, providing the benefit of accessibility, especially for those wary of participating in physical gatherings. Others mentioned the need for more in-person opportunities to meet and support one another, suggesting that a mixture of physical and online spaces would be beneficial.

As noted above, many participants highlighted the need for mentoring. In relation to this, an interview participant explained that:

*We need more mentoring from other leaders. I was the first non-binary person to be ordained in the Church of England so I'm on my own professionally, and I sort of tried to reach out and talk to other trans colleagues but not everything was the same and part of the problem was that the people I spoke to were more further on in their transition so you forget some of the stuff that goes through your mind early on. I remember going to see someone who is a fairly well-known trans woman in the Church of England and being like, "I don't know what dressing professionally looks like in this job. And I don't know how to, you know."*

*And she was just like, "Well, you just, you just sort of do it, it doesn't really matter and you just get on with it", and all this kind of stuff. And I was like, it was like 10 years, maybe since she transitioned. And so, I don't think she even remembered the thoughts that had gone through her head as she was trying to work out, like, how to dress like a vicar. And you know, stuff like that. So, that's definitely one of the things, yeah, having people who understood my experience and remembered what it was like, I guess.*

One of the key recommendations that emerged from the interviews is the need for community-building and mentoring opportunities specifically for trans and non-binary individuals working. As one participant explained, *"I don't even know how many trans, non-binary people there are working in the Church... but also a more formal kind of mentoring thing would be really useful... To have some sort of community-building around trans and non-binary ministers would be really helpful."* This demonstrates the need for both formal and informal networks that provide support, mentorship, and connection among LGBT+ religious leaders. Establishing such a community would allow individuals to share experiences, offer advice, and build solidarity in what can often feel like an isolating environment.

Some participants have already taken action to support the LGBT+ community within their religious institutions. Some described their role as LGBT advisors to their bishops and their work in starting an LGBT chaplaincy in their dioceses, which provides pastoral care for LGBT+ individuals and their allies. As one of them explained, *"I was the first one in the Church of England [to start an LGBT chaplaincy], and now I've started a national network of people who have similar roles across the Church of England."* Through this work, they are creating positive change within the church, building networks of support, and fostering a more inclusive environment.

Additionally, some participants pointed out the necessity of specialised support, such as faith-based counselling, professional development, and retreats. A few respondents envisioned the establishment of dedicated hubs or centres for LGBT+ ministry in central locations, such as London, where they could connect, share resources, and collaborate. Others expressed the need for spaces that offer safety and anonymity, given personal circumstances that make participation risky. Overall, the responses reflect a strong desire for diverse, supportive spaces that can address both social and professional aspects of being an LGBT+ religious leader; while also catering to the varying levels of comfort participants have with visibility and openness.

#### **4.4. Conclusions and recommendations**

The findings from this chapter highlight the significant challenges faced by LGBT+ religious leaders in accessing supportive spaces. Many participants reported difficulties in finding accessible and inclusive physical spaces where they can openly express their identities without fear of judgment or exclusion. The data shows the importance of creating both physical and online spaces where LGBT+ religious leaders can connect, reflect, and receive emotional and spiritual support.

The need for theological reflection spaces was emphasised as a crucial gap within the current religious landscape. The demand for inclusive spaces like the Open Table service highlights the role of such environments in encouraging acceptance and community for LGBT+ individuals. Additionally, the visibility and promotion of inclusive churches remain key factors in ensuring LGBT+ individuals can identify safe and welcoming spaces in their religious practice.

Furthermore, mentoring opportunities were identified as critical in overcoming feelings of isolation and supporting professional growth. Establishing formal and informal networks would significantly contribute to the development of a stronger, more connected LGBT+ religious community. Considering the themes explored in this chapter, it is recommended that OneBodyOneFaith works towards the following objectives:

**Expand physical LGBT+ community spaces:** Efforts should be made to increase the availability of accessible, inclusive spaces for LGBT+ religious leaders. This could involve encouraging more churches to align with organisations such as OneBodyOneFaith and inclusive churches, ensuring they provide safe, affirming environments for LGBT+ individuals.

**Work towards increasing visibility of inclusive churches:** Churches that openly support LGBT+ inclusion should be better promoted, making it easier for individuals to identify safe spaces within their communities. This could be achieved through campaigns, online directories, and partnerships with advocacy groups.

**Create peer support and mentoring networks:** Establish more formal and informal peer support groups and mentoring opportunities. These networks would provide spaces for sharing experiences, offering support, and fostering professional and personal growth.

**Develop LGBT+-centric faith-based programmes:** More faith-based counselling, retreats, and professional development programmes tailored to the needs of LGBT+ religious leaders should be developed. These services should help address the spiritual and emotional needs of individuals navigating leadership roles in faith communities.

**Promote inclusive theological reflection:** Support the creation of sustained spaces for LGBT+ theological reflection and engagement. Such initiatives could allow individuals to explore their faith in a welcoming, inclusive environment, addressing their specific spiritual needs and creating community connections.

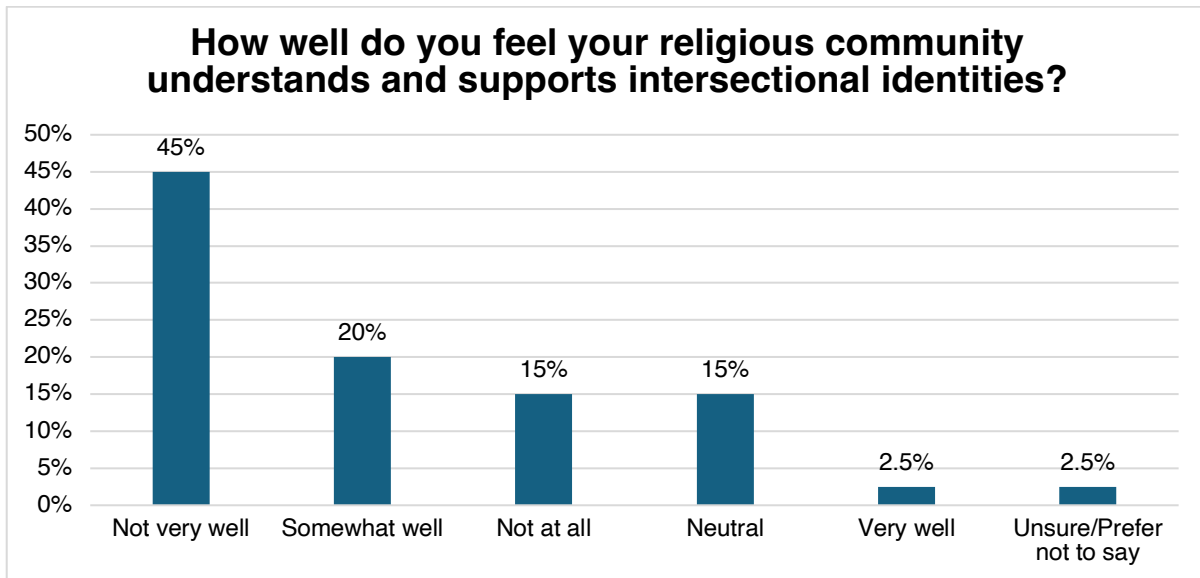
## 5. INTERSECTIONAL EXPERIENCES

This chapter shifts focus to the intersectional experiences of LGBT+ religious leaders, addressing the complex ways in which identities such as gender, sexuality, race, and socio-economic status intersect and shape individuals' experiences within religious spaces. Section 5.1 begins by exploring how religious communities understand and support intersectional identities, revealing significant gaps in awareness. Section 5.2 examines racial discrimination, while Section 5.3 focuses on gender-based challenges, offering personal testimonies that highlight the barriers faced by LGBT+ religious leaders. Section 5.4 turns to sexual orientation discrimination, followed by an analysis of socio-economic challenges (5.5), accessibility issues (5.6), and mental health stigma (5.7). The chapter culminates in a reflection on the broader impact of intersectionality on the lives and roles of LGBT+ religious leaders (5.8), before concluding with a discussion of key intersectional issues that require more attention in religious communities (5.9). Through this exploration, the chapter aims to provide a deeper understanding of the compounded challenges these leaders face and offer strategies to create more supportive religious environments.

### ***5.1. Understanding and support for intersectional identities in religious communities***

When asked how well participants felt their religious community understands and supports intersectional identities, the answers reveal a significant gap in awareness and support for intersectionality within religious communities. Nearly half of the participants (45%) feel their religious community does not understand and support intersectional identities very well. This significant portion suggests a prevailing sense of inadequacy in the way religious spaces engage with and accommodate the complexities of intersecting identities, such as gender, sexuality, race, and socio-economic status. This high percentage of individuals who selected “Not very well” indicates that, while some engagement may exist, it is far from sufficient in addressing the specific needs of individuals with multiple, overlapping identities. This is reinforced by the 15% of respondents who feel their communities do not support these identities at all.

On the other hand, 20% of participants believe their community provides “Somewhat well” support for intersectional identities, showing some progress, albeit inconsistent and limited. A further 15% chose a “Neutral” response, which may indicate ambivalence or uncertainty about the extent of support. The smaller percentages who chose “Very well” (2.5%) and “Unsure/Prefer not to say” (2.5%) suggest that only a minority of participants experience positive or well-understood intersectional support, reflecting the broader gaps in inclusivity within religious settings.



## **5.2. Racial discrimination**

The analysis of responses to the question of whether racial discrimination had acted as an intersectional challenge for LGBT+ religious leaders reveals that a vast majority of participants (44 respondents, 89.8%) have not faced racial discrimination in their role. However, a notable 10.2% of respondents (5 individuals) reported experiencing racial discrimination. While this data indicates that racial discrimination is not a widespread issue for most LGBT+ religious leaders in this sample, the fact that around 1 in 10 respondents have encountered it highlights the importance of addressing racial bias as part of broader intersectional challenges. These findings suggest that while race may not affect every LGBT+ leader, those who do face racial discrimination experience heightened difficulties in navigating their roles within religious communities.

The unmet need of receiving support when facing racial discrimination within the LGBT+ religious leadership space arose during interview conversations. As a participant explained, they have encountered multiple layers of discrimination not only based on sexual and gender identity but also on race. This participant described the experience as pervasive, *“Especially racial discrimination has been a key thing for me, people discriminating us so much because of our sexual and gender identity, but also our race, and this has been a terrible barrier among us to connect with people.”* This intersectional discrimination has had a profound impact, leaving them feeling alienated and marginalised.

One of the primary examples given was the lack of representation in decision-making processes. BAME participants felt excluded from critical discussions and decision-making within the church, explaining that decisions are often made without the input or consent of LGBT+ individuals. One said that *“There’s no representation in policies... we are not allowed to make any decisions, some of the decisions are made without our consent or our input.”* This lack of inclusion highlights the urgent need for more diverse representation within church leadership to ensure that policies reflect the needs and

perspectives of all individuals, particularly those who face intersectional forms of discrimination.

### **5.3. Gender-based discrimination**

The survey analysis reveals that 20 respondents (40.82%) have encountered gender-based discrimination. This suggests that a considerable proportion of participants face difficulties related to their gender identity in their religious roles, even if they are not. A majority. Conversely, 29 respondents (59.18%) reported not experiencing gender-based discrimination. While the majority do not face these challenges, the fact that 4 out of 10 participants have encountered discrimination reveals the importance of addressing gender bias and fostering more inclusive environments for LGBT+ leaders within religious communities.

An interview participant's experience illustrates the lack of advocacy and clear procedures when dealing with transphobia within religious leadership. The participant recounts the struggle of raising a grievance against their bishop after coming out: *"I don't know how to put this... when I have problems with people in senior leadership, it wasn't super clear where to go and also like who would advocate for me... I actually raised a grievance against my Bishop when I first came out, and it just sort of disappeared into the ether."* This highlights a recurring issue within religious institutions where formal grievance procedures either lack transparency or fail to address cases effectively, leaving individuals without resolution. The absence of any follow-up on the participant's complaint reflects a deeper systemic problem where, even with formal processes in place, the mechanisms do not always function as intended, particularly when it comes to issues surrounding gender identity.

The participant's account demonstrates the importance of establishing robust support systems, not just for reporting grievances, but for guiding individuals through the process and ensuring that their concerns are properly addressed. They recall how, after submitting a detailed grievance to the HR department of their diocese, the process quickly became muddled. *"I had a contact from the HR department... I raised it against my Bishop and also against my vicar... they said, 'Oh, have you also raised it against the Bishop...?' And then they just never did."* This breakdown in communication left the participant feeling unsupported and discouraged from pursuing further grievances. The lack of clarity, legal advice, and follow-up not only compounded the emotional strain of the situation but also perpetuated a sense of futility: *"It made me not want to bother raising anything else that happened subsequently because... if it's not going to make any difference, then there's not much point."*

The participant's story highlights the urgent need for clearer grievance mechanisms, better legal support, and active advocacy for LGBT+ individuals, particularly those facing transphobia in senior leadership. Religious institutions must not only provide formal avenues for raising complaints but also ensure these processes are accessible, transparent, and effective. As participants' experiences show, the failure to follow

through on such grievances can have long-lasting repercussions, leading individuals to disengage from the system entirely and feel isolated in the face of discrimination.

#### **5.4. Discrimination related to sexual orientation**

The analysis of survey responses regarding discrimination related to sexual orientation shows that 28 respondents (57.14%) have experienced this type of behaviour in their roles as LGBT+ religious leaders. This indicates, therefore, that most participants face challenges related to their sexual orientation within their religious communities. On the other hand, 21 respondents (42.86%) reported not facing discrimination based on their sexual orientation. While this group does not encounter such challenges, the fact that more than half of participants do experience discrimination underscores the need for greater support and inclusivity for LGBT+ individuals in religious settings.

In relation to this type of discrimination, a pressing issue is the experience of professional exclusion due to one's views or sexuality. One of the interview participants detailed a situation where they were disinvited from a professional event due to their views on reproductive health: *"I was due to speak at the National Conference for the Catholic Medical Association... and got a letter from the president disinviting me because of my views on reproductive health."* This type of exclusion reflects broader cultural tensions within religious institutions, where people are penalised for holding views that deviate from traditional teachings. This creates a toxic environment where open discussion and mutual respect are lacking, hindering the possibility of genuine dialogue and inclusion within these spaces.

During an interview, a participant reflected on the lack of understanding regarding gender and sexual identities, which subsequently leads to discrimination. As he said:

*One of the particularly odd things is that, again when I've tried to go for ordination, and even outside in my general experience of others within the Baptist church, there's a general expectation that anyone who's bisexual is inherently unfaithful to their partners and even just without me doing anything just by my identity, regardless of what relationship I am in there's an expectation that I'd act like this... And if I get a partner they therefore use that as a reason to dismiss me from conversations or put that as a barrier for me trying to go for leadership positions and so on and so forth so there's a real lack of understanding of what bisexuality really is and not a willingness to understand what it is instead of using a quite homophobic understanding as a means to creating barriers, and the same with gender identities.*

Additionally, participants shared the difficulty of working alongside colleagues who believe they should not be holding positions of power due to their sexuality. For example, one of the participants explained that while their own church is inclusive, working at higher levels such as the deanery exposes them to people who do not accept their ministry. *"It's hard to be effective in those places because they don't want you there and*

*they're doing everything they can to stop you",* the participant explained, drawing a comparison to the experiences of women priests facing similar opposition. This kind of passive resistance from colleagues makes it challenging for LGBT+ ministers to engage fully with their peers, further adding to the stress of fulfilling their role in a hostile environment.

### **5.5. Socio-economic challenges**

When asked about socio-economic challenges, survey data reveals that the majority, 37 respondents (75.51%), reported not facing socio-economic challenges in their roles. However, a notable 12 participants (24.49%) indicated that they do experience socio-economic difficulties.

This data highlights that while most LGBT+ religious leaders in the sample do not encounter significant socio-economic barriers, nearly a quarter face financial or socio-economic challenges that may impact their ability to lead or participate fully in their communities. These findings show the need for further support and resources to address socio-economic disparities within religious settings among those in need.

### **5.6. Accessibility issues**

When asked about physical or digital accessibility issues the majority, 41 respondents (83.67%), indicated that they have not encountered such challenges in their role as LGBT+ religious leaders. However, 8 participants (16.33%) reported experiencing accessibility issues. While most participants do not face significant barriers related to physical or digital accessibility, a notable minority still struggles with these challenges. Therefore, there is a need for more inclusive approaches to ensure that all leaders have equitable access to both physical and digital spaces within their religious communities.

### **5.7. Mental health stigma**

18 survey respondents (36.73%) indicated that have faced stigma related to their mental health in their roles as LGBT+ religious leaders. This highlights that more than one-third of participants experience challenges related to mental health perception within their communities. On the other hand, 31 respondents (63.27%) reported not facing mental health stigma. While the majority do not encounter these issues, the significant portion who have faced stigma shows the need for greater mental health awareness and support within religious communities, especially for those in leadership roles.

Despite the number of participants affected by mental health stigma being a minority, the need for mental health support specific to the unique challenges faced by LGBT+ religious leaders was highlighted, particularly considering the trauma experienced by many when interacting with senior leadership. One participant shared their experience, saying, *"I've essentially developed a phobia... full on phobia of being in the same room as bishops... people have had some really traumatic times."* This points to the need for

trauma-informed care, mental health resources, and a supportive environment where LGBT+ clergy can process and heal from negative experiences. Ensuring access to queer-friendly therapists and creating a culture that recognises and addresses the mental health impact of discrimination should be an essential step forward.

The mental health toll arising from homophobia and prejudice within the Church of England was also discussed, particularly in the context of the Living in Love and Faith (LLF) process. During an interview, a participant reflected on how social media became a hostile space during this time: *“Social media has been brutal... some of the comments that have been shared on social media have been really vicious.”* This period coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic, exacerbating feelings of isolation and distress. For many, the experience was so harmful that they began questioning their relationship with their religious institutions. Although some received kind responses from diocesan support staff, offering prayers and acknowledging their pain, it was clear that more needed to be done. *“Kindness and prayers... are nice enough, but there are big challenges facing the church”*, the participant explained, signalling the need to engage in deeper reflection and structural change to address these ongoing issues.

Adequate mental health provision for distressed individuals within religious institutions, especially LGBT+ people, was a key recommendation. One participant noted, *“I think at diocese level, there should be somebody who is trained and available to offer confidential emotional support, mental health support to people who are facing distressing situations, like many LGBT+ people have faced.”* They emphasised that the activities, such as the Living in Love and Faith process, had caused harm to some individuals, making mental health support all the more critical. The suggestion was that each diocese should have trained professionals capable of providing such support, particularly as many shared conversations within the Church have unintentionally caused harm.

### **5.8. Impact of intersectionality on experiences as LGBT+ religious leaders**

Completing the single-choice survey questions above, participants were also asked an open question about how different aspects of their identity, such as race, gender, and sexual orientation, interact to shape their experiences as LGBT+ religious leaders. Many expressed that their struggles, such as gender discrimination, disability, mental health issues, and socio-economic background, were compounded by their sexual orientation or gender identity, resulting in further marginalisation within their religious roles.

For some respondents, gender discrimination was again a persistent challenge. One participant shared how their sexuality was simultaneously *“visible and invisible”*, accepted in certain contexts but disregarded in others, which reflects the uneven nature of acceptance within religious spaces. Another leader highlighted how they were once introduced as *“our gay curate”*, demonstrating how being LGBT+ in a religious setting can lead to tokenisation or being defined solely by sexual orientation. This kind of treatment reduces the complexity of their identity to a single characteristic, impacting their professional and personal interactions.

Mental health and disability were also recurring themes. Several respondents noted that the stigma surrounding mental health within their religious communities exacerbated their struggles, creating a “*vicious circle*” of doubt and despondency. For some, their efforts to raise awareness about mental health or accessibility were dismissed or met with hostility. Resonating with the findings from previous sections, this indicates that within some religious communities, there remains a lack of understanding and support for leaders navigating multiple forms of marginalisation, such as being disabled, mentally ill, or from a working-class background, in addition to being LGBT+.

The responses also reflect the isolation that many LGBT+ religious leaders experience. One participant described feeling anxious about their transgender identity being exposed to parents in their youth work due to media-driven fears. Others mentioned the challenges of being an outsider in predominantly white, male-dominated, heterosexual spaces, with one respondent noting that a large part of the Church of England still prefers this demographic. These examples highlight the intersecting challenges these leaders face, where not only their sexuality or gender identity but also their race, class, or mental health status influence how they are perceived and treated in their religious communities.

### **5.9. Intersectional issues that require more attention**

Participants were asked to identify intersectional issues they believe require more attention within their religious communities. The responses highlighted a wide range of concerns, including race, gender, mental health, and socio-economic status. Many respondents expressed that their religious communities have not fully addressed the interplay between these identities, which leaves significant gaps in inclusivity and understanding.

Race and ethnicity emerged as a prominent theme, with several participants stating that racism and the experiences of LGBT+ people of colour are often overlooked. One respondent pointed out that the Archbishop of Canterbury has refused to acknowledge LGBT+ people of colour, suggesting that leadership in some religious institutions has yet to fully embrace racial diversity within the LGBT+ community. Additionally, classism was mentioned as an issue that is “*not given nearly enough attention*”, highlighting the socio-economic barriers that intersect with sexual orientation and gender identity to create further challenges for LGBT+ religious leaders.

Mental health, disability, and neurodiversity were cited as areas needing more focus. Respondents noted that the lack of resources and understanding around these issues makes it difficult for religious communities to offer adequate support. One participant mentioned that well-meaning volunteers often struggle to provide the best care due to limited awareness of neurodiversity and gender identity. This demonstrates the need for more comprehensive training and resources within religious settings to ensure that all members, especially those facing multiple forms of marginalisation, receive the support they need.

Overall, the data reflects a pressing need for religious communities to adopt a more intersectional approach that considers the challenges posed by the interaction of race, gender, class, mental health, and other intersecting identity factors.

### **5.10. Conclusion and recommendations**

The findings from our questions on intersectional issues reveal a significant gap in the understanding and support of intersectional identities within religious communities. Many leaders face heightened challenges related to gender, race, mental health, and socio-economic status, which are exacerbated by a lack of empathy and support from their faith environments. This highlights the urgent need for a more intersectional approach to inclusivity in religious spaces, with tailored support for LGBT+ leaders who navigate these overlapping identities. Based on the intersectional themes explored through this chapter, OneBodyOneFaith should consider:

**Raising awareness on intersectionality:** Prioritise educational initiatives that raise awareness of intersectionality within religious communities. This could involve hosting workshops, creating online resources, and offering training sessions that explain the unique challenges faced by individuals with multiple intersecting identities, such as race, gender, and sexual orientation.

**Expanding mental health support:** With more than one-third of respondents experiencing mental health stigma, OneBodyOneFaith should advocate for mental health awareness and provide targeted support for religious leaders. This could include mental health counselling services, peer support networks, and guidance on addressing mental health stigma in religious settings.

**Promoting racial diversity and inclusion:** As racial discrimination remains an issue for a notable minority, OneBodyOneFaith should work to ensure that racial diversity is prioritised within LGBT+ religious spaces. This could involve collaborating with organisations led by people of colour, addressing racism in religious institutions, and pushing for greater representation of LGBT+ people of colour in leadership roles.

**Tackling socio-economic barriers:** As nearly a quarter of participants face socio-economic challenges, OneBodyOneFaith should work to address the financial disparities impacting LGBT+ religious leaders. This could involve establishing financial support programs or collaborating with other organisations to provide resources and opportunities for leaders facing economic difficulties.

**Improving accessibility:** While a minority of respondents highlighted accessibility issues, it is crucial for OneBodyOneFaith to advocate for both physical and digital spaces that are fully accessible. This includes ensuring that all events, resources, and services are designed to accommodate people with disabilities or digital access limitations.

**Addressing gender and sexual orientation biases:** Given the significant number of respondents facing gender-based and sexual orientation discrimination,

OneBodyOneFaith should develop advocacy strategies to combat these forms of bias. Encouraging faith communities to adopt more inclusive policies and practices, particularly concerning gender identity and equal marriage, would create more supportive environments for LGBT+ leaders. The creation of enforceable ground rules for debates on same-sex marriage and other LGBT+ issues was a key suggestion provided by participants. While guidelines exist within many churches about respectful dialogue, participants pointed out that these rules are not always enforced. *“There are guidelines... but I’ve never seen anybody told off... for not following those guidelines”*, one participant observed. This lack of accountability has led to hostile environments, particularly in discussions surrounding same-sex marriage and gender identity. Enforcing guidelines and creating a culture of respectful disagreement would help mitigate the harm caused by heated debates and ensure that all voices are heard without resorting to insults or condemnation.

One of the primary solutions proposed by interview participants is to work on lobbying and advocacy efforts to allow people in same-sex civil marriages to become priests. Participants noted that this change would address the significant discrimination and imbalance of power that currently exist within religious spaces. One of the participants noted, *“I don’t have equal power in the church as somebody who’s heterosexual does because I can’t be a priest, my ministry could be taken away at the drop of a hat, so there’s an imbalance of power because I can’t be a priest.”* This difference in the power people hold, according to the participant, not only limits their ability to fully serve the church but also prevents them from being involved in governance and church activities that occur during the working day. By being able to serve as a priest, they would gain equal footing and the flexibility to attend these meetings, which would allow them to have a greater impact on church governance and decision-making.

Interview participants also emphasised the need for their churches to allow same-sex marriages to be performed within their walls. Some reflected on the lack of validation their own marriage receives, explaining, *“People who are against same-sex marriage do not view my marriage as being authentic and proper because it’s not a Christian marriage... it’s a civil marriage [which] is seen as less than in a church context.”* Participants found it painful to assist with church weddings for heterosexual couples, particularly those who are not actively involved in the church, while their own marriage is considered lesser. The ability to offer same-sex marriages in the church would not only validate these unions but also create a more inclusive and equal environment for all members of the community.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

This report has shed light on the multifaceted challenges faced by LGBT+ religious leaders in the UK, focusing on their experiences within religious institutions. The findings underline the urgent need for systemic changes to create a more inclusive environment.

These conclusions offer a thematic breakdown of the key areas for future action, proposing both lobbying and direct support strategies that can help LGBT+ religious leaders without necessitating a complete overhaul of the church's existing structures.

### ***6.1. Lobbying and advocacy for institutional change***

**Policy development and enforcement:** OneBodyOneFaith can effectively lobby for the creation and enforcement of anti-discrimination policies within faith institutions. Advocacy should focus on ensuring that these policies protect LGBT+ leaders from bias and provide clear repercussions for discriminatory behaviour, especially among senior leadership. Given the reluctance of some religious institutions to embrace full inclusivity, targeted advocacy efforts—such as those pushing for the recognition of same-sex marriages or non-celibate queer clergy—can incrementally shift attitudes within the church.

**Representation in decision-making processes:** There is an urgent need to increase LGBT+ representation in the leadership and decision-making bodies of faith institutions. Advocacy efforts should aim to create pathways for LGBT+ leaders to gain access to governance roles, such as church councils and synods, ensuring their voices are heard in decisions that directly affect them. By focusing lobbying efforts on the integration of LGBT+ leaders into these spaces, OneBodyOneFaith can create a more equitable structure within the church.

### ***6.2. Support for mental health and wellbeing***

**Trauma-informed care and mental health support:** The emotional toll of discrimination and social isolation is one of the most significant challenges faced by LGBT+ leaders. OneBodyOneFaith should dedicate resources to establish trauma-informed mental health support, including access to queer-friendly therapists and peer support groups. Regular mental health check-ins and confidential counselling services could provide support to leaders who feel marginalised within their faith communities.

**Peer support networks:** Creating and sustaining peer support networks where LGBT+ religious leaders can share their experiences and challenges is crucial. These networks should offer both emotional and professional support, allowing leaders to connect with others in similar positions. These spaces could provide solidarity, reduce isolation, and create opportunities for collaborative advocacy.

### **6.3. Professional development and mentorship**

**Mentoring and leadership training:** There is a critical need for mentoring programmes that cater to LGBT+ leaders, particularly trans and non-binary individuals, to help them navigate the unique challenges they face in faith institutions. These programmes should focus on building leadership skills and confidence and offering guidance on how to remain authentic while working within conservative religious environments.

**Inclusive theological education:** OneBodyOneFaith should support the development of theological training that incorporates LGBT+ experiences. This would not only equip religious leaders with the skills needed to challenge homophobia and transphobia within their institutions but also provide them with a more inclusive theological framework to support their spiritual and professional growth.

### **6.4. Intersectionality and representation**

**Addressing intersectional barriers:** The intersection of gender, sexuality, race, and socio-economic status presents additional challenges for LGBT+ leaders. OneBodyOneFaith can address this by advocating for a more intersectional approach within religious institutions, ensuring that policies and practices recognise and support the unique experiences of those facing multiple forms of marginalisation. Educational workshops and support groups could help leaders address these barriers.

**Visibility and role models:** Representation of LGBT+ role models within faith communities is essential to create inclusive religious spaces. OneBodyOneFaith should continue to highlight and promote the stories of LGBT+ leaders who have successfully navigated their faith journeys, offering visible role models for emerging leaders. Publicly showcasing these role models can challenge the narrative that LGBT+ identities are incompatible with religious leadership.

### **6.5. Creating and promoting safe spaces**

**Physical and digital safe spaces:** Given that many LGBT+ leaders report a lack of safe and accessible community spaces, OneBodyOneFaith should focus on expanding both physical and digital environments where LGBT+ religious leaders can gather, reflect, and engage in mutual support. Encouraging more churches to align with inclusive networks can increase the availability of safe spaces.

**Advocacy for inclusive church policies:** The visibility of inclusive churches needs to be amplified, making it easier for LGBT+ individuals to identify places where they will be welcomed. OneBodyOneFaith could lead campaigns to promote inclusive church environments, encouraging faith communities to openly support LGBT+ inclusion and align with established networks that advocate for such inclusion.

## **6.6. Final reflection**

While OneBodyOneFaith cannot change the structure of religious institutions overnight, it can play a pivotal role in advocating for incremental but significant changes through lobbying, advocacy, and direct support. By dedicating resources to mental health, professional development, intersectional advocacy, and the creation of safe spaces, the organisation can empower LGBT+ religious leaders to thrive within their roles. Through sustained efforts, these leaders could find support and help reshape faith communities to be more inclusive and welcoming for future generations.