



CHURCH OF NORWAY

Apology to the LGBTQ+ Community

Presiding bishop, Olav Fykse Tveit. London Pub, Oslo, Norway. 16.10.2025

Dear all

We are gathered at the London Pub, a place rich with symbolism. For nearly fifty years, it has served as a safe space for LGBTQ+ individuals. It was here that terror struck during Oslo Pride on June 25, three years ago. Thank you for allowing us to be here.

In 2022, the bishops of the Church of Norway acknowledged that the institution we lead has inflicted pain and harm upon LGBTQ+ people. It is only right that we, as a church, take responsibility and offer our apology.

Some may think it is too late, while others may feel it is too early. We believe it is right not to wait any longer.

Today, we, the bishops of the Church of Norway, do not regard this as a starting point, nor an end of a process. Nevertheless, this is a notable day. In recent years, we have held numerous meetings and conversations with LGBTQ+ individuals and their various advocacy organisations. It is an act of generosity that those who once felt condemned by the church have welcomed us with open arms. That is grace.

I am grateful for this, and I look forward to further encounters.

Many have shared and articulated their stories, allowing us to take part in them. Listening to fellow human beings' experiences and life stories makes a profound impression. For many, it has taken great courage to share and to make themselves vulnerable in this way. Thank you to all who have shared their story.

We have heard what the church has meant to people—for better or for worse, but mostly for worse in this context. This concerns attitudes towards LGBTQ+ people and their lives. It is about the church's practices, both in formal and informal meetings and conversations – in everything that has been said or everything that has been left unsaid.

This has had serious negative consequences for many:

- The church refused to employ lesbians and gay, even when they were qualified.
- Volunteers were denied the opportunity to participate or contribute within the church community—because of their sexual orientation or relationships.



CHURCH OF NORWAY

- HIV and AIDS were referred to as God's punishment upon homosexuals. This legitimised the stigmatisation and condemnation of people living with HIV. Their loved ones still carry the wounds from this.
- For a long time, the church refused to offer blessings for same-sex couples or to marry same-sex couples in church.
- Church spaces are still not safe enough for transgender people.
- Many who defied the norms regarding gender and relationships were excluded from church communities.
- In conversations, church representatives have reduced LGBTQ+ love to mere emotions, as if it could be turned off like a light switch.

These are just a few examples, and we know there are more examples of discrimination, unequal treatment and harassment.

This has led to feelings of shame among LGBTQ+ people, resulting from a prevailing narrative about what kind of love is right or wrong, and pressure from the church to hide or deny their true selves.

Many feel there is no place for them. Some have renounced their church membership and some say that they have lost their faith. This has been a great strain – for those affected, as well as for their families and friends.

God creates us all in His image, with the dignity and worth that entails. The Bible tells us of people who got to meet Jesus. He lifted them up, and he shows us all what community means.

That is also our mission as Christians. However, as we have acknowledged, we have failed time and again: words, attitudes and actions have stood in the way. Many have witnessed what has happened, without allowing for a change.

For decades, pastors and deacons have listened to the life experiences of LGBTQ+ people in pastoral care and confidential conversations. About loss, about pain, but also about faith, hope, and love. For many, these have been good conversations, but the church's voice in the public space has often said something different.

In 1954, the Bishops' Conference described LGBTQ+ people as "a social danger of global dimensions," and in the 1980s and 1990s, the condemnation of people living with HIV went unchallenged within the church. Yet, change has taken place in recent decades. In 2007, the Church Synod permitted "homosexuals living in same-sex partnerships" to be appointed to church positions. In 2016, the Church Synod decided that same-sex couples could marry in the church. And rightly so.

To apologise is a commitment. It is about how we now meet one another.



CHURCH OF NORWAY

Whenever LGBTQ+ issues are discussed publicly in relation to the church, it is a strain for the community—especially for LGBTQ+ employees. In 2020, a report entitled “Being an Issue” highlighted the significant burden experienced by LGBTQ+ staff in the Church of Norway. It created minority stress and made it difficult for individuals to perform their jobs. This situation cannot continue, and the church as an employer must take responsibility.

Last Monday, we were presented with a report on how transgender people experience the church as a safe or an unsafe space. On this point, too, we still have much to learn, such as how important the rainbow flag can be for creating safety.

Today, we see that people with an LGBTQ+ identity are losing their basic rights in many parts of the world. They face violence and stigmatisation, often justified by religious arguments, including in the name of Christianity. We must all take responsibility to counter this, not least the church.

Faith in God can give us the courage to be ourselves; courage to stand up for others and for ourselves. Many LGBTQ+ people have been courageous and have done so. Thank goodness!

Slowly, step by step, they have contributed greatly to a new understanding and new attitudes. Some have stood alone in battles and stormy weather, while others have united and organised themselves alongside supporters. This gives hope that change is always possible, and that we must never give up.

Changes have taken time. It has been challenging for many. Some simply could not endure. Some who should have heard our apology are no longer with us.

Changes have taken time, and indeed, some things have changed. A society in which you can love whom you wish, and be who you are, makes Norway and the world a better place.

Therefore, it is also appropriate today to say: Thank you!

Thank you to everyone who has put their experiences into words.

Thank you to all who have fought for themselves and for others.

Thank you to you who fought alone, and to you who fought through organising yourself. Thank you to you who raised the flag, awaiting new decisions in the church. Without you, we would not be here today.

Thank you for fellowship at the rainbow worship services.

Thank you for allowing the church to participate in Pride parades, side by side. Thank you for allowing us to walk forward together.



CHURCH OF NORWAY

Thank you to you who spoke out about what you experienced, even if it was easier for you to keep your distance. Thank you to you, who despite the oppression, did not give up on faith and the church.

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to the church being in a different place today than we were before.

The Church of Norway has caused LGBTQ+ people shame, great harm and pain. This should never have happened.

Therefore, today I say:

My sincere apologies!