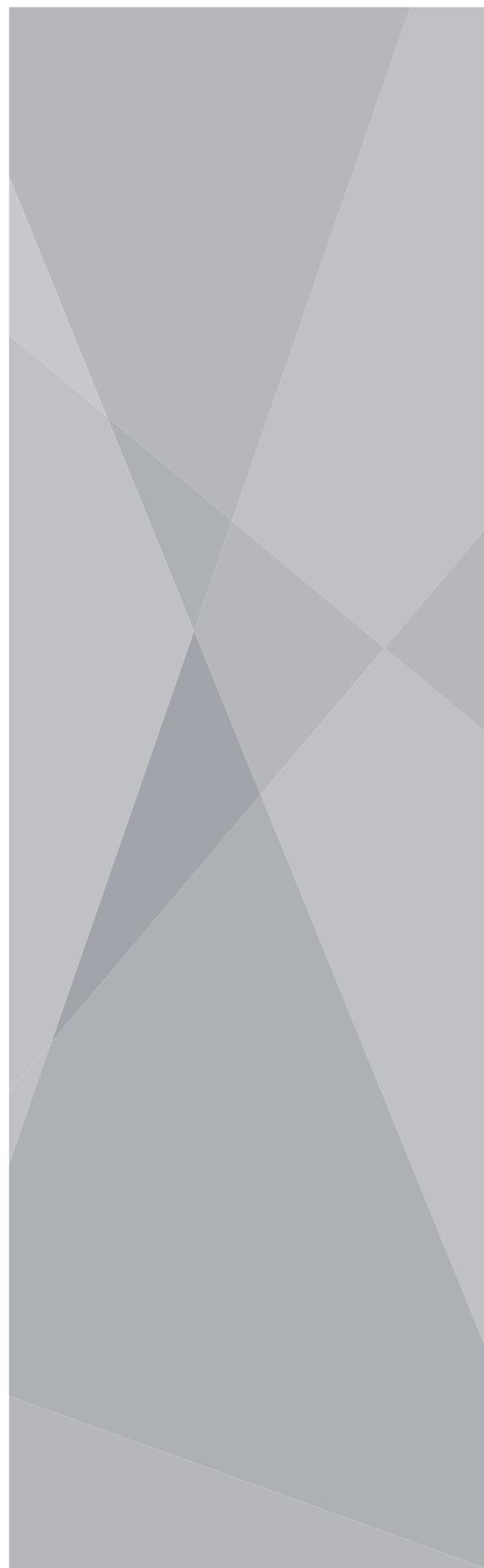
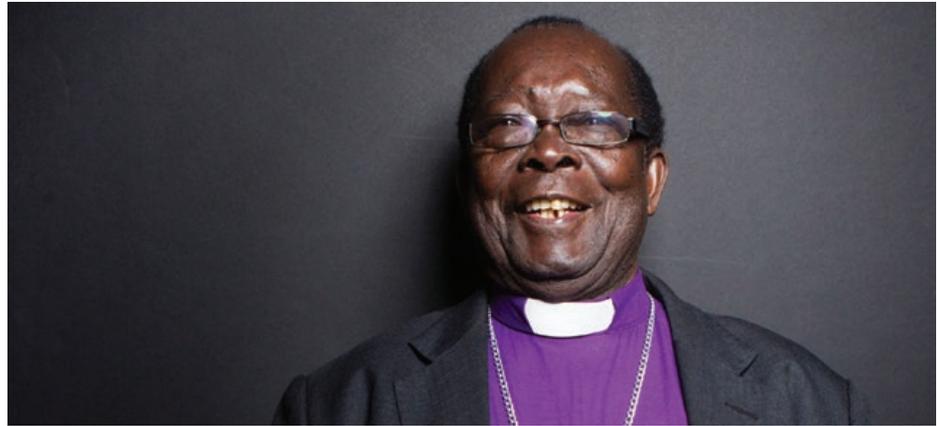


christian role models

FOR LGBT EQUALITY



foreword



Bishop Christopher Senyonjo is an Anglican priest and ally for lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) rights in Uganda. He continues to risk imprisonment and his safety by speaking out against homophobia, biphobia and transphobia, and preaching a message of acceptance and inclusion. He has starred in two documentaries, 'Call Me Kuchu' and 'God Loves Uganda', and runs an LGBT-supportive ministry.

Sometimes it can feel like we have much to wrestle with in a changing world. While some of us find it easier to embrace greater diversity, seeing it as a part of God's great design, others can find it confusing and difficult. But to turn away from the realities of some of our fellow men and women is to close the door of the church to them.

The path for many Christians who are LGBT, and those who support them, is rarely easy. Faced with judgement and persecution, LGBT people have often felt excluded from the church. Sadly, some have turned away from the faith as a means of self-preservation.

As Christians, we must learn to accept people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or trans (LGBT) as children of God. There have always been LGBT people in the Church, and there always will be.

The 20 stories in this booklet tell of LGBT people who have reconciled their sexuality and/or gender identity with their faith, and of non-LGBT Christians who believe that accepting and affirming LGBT people is the Christ-like response. They represent diverse voices from across the globe - from Africa, the Americas, the Caribbean, Europe, Asia and the Pacific. Individually the stories are inspirational, but together they tell an incredibly powerful story of a faith that has withstood trials many of us would find hard to imagine – a faith that can move mountains.

I welcome you to this collection of testimonies and pray that you will read with an open mind and gentle heart. Their enduring belief, their understanding of God's love and their courage offer all of us an opportunity to adopt a deeper meaning of fellowship and acceptance. And as we fully embrace and accept each other, it is my prayer that we know a deeper acceptance of God ourselves. Our God is compassionate and loves inclusively.

Bishop Christopher Senyonjo

foreword



It will come as no surprise to some, and as a huge surprise to others, that lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people exist in every community, in every workplace, in every region, from every ethnic background, and in every religion.

Religion is often the most sticky of these to reconcile. Some will say that LGBT people cannot possibly exist in faith communities; that faith communities do not accept same-sex relationships or those who transition; that LGBT people can be 'cured'. And of course these beliefs can, and do, exist. As a result, there are many LGBT people who reject their faith or feel an ever widening chasm between two parts of their core identity.

However, there are also many religious communities, groups and places of worship where these beliefs do not exist. This book focuses on the experiences of Christians from across the world. Their backgrounds and religious traditions are all different: some are priests, some are in relationships, some have been imprisoned. Some of the people in this book identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or trans, and others are the staunchest of allies. But what they all share is a belief that God is love and acceptance.

The people in this book come from 15 countries spread across six continents. In 12 of those countries, LGBT people are not protected under the law. When we began this project, our intention was to share the stories and experiences of a diverse range of participants, in order to demonstrate how the experiences of LGBT people of faith and their allies may differ, but also contain striking similarities.

However, as it progressed, we became acutely aware that publishing some of these experiences could provoke adverse reactions. The bravery and honesty of the people we interviewed was unwavering but, after much discussion, we made the difficult decision to anonymise stories from people who could not be guaranteed protection by the laws of their state. Others have chosen themselves to be anonymised. Our role is to empower others, but we must consider their safety as part of this process.

In 75 countries across the world being lesbian, gay or bisexual is illegal; in 10 it is punishable by death; and globally over 1,700 trans people have been killed in the last seven years. There is clearly still a long way to go before we can say that everyone, everywhere is free to be themselves, but that's certainly what we're working towards. We're looking to a future in which anonymity will no longer be necessary, and all people will be accepted - for their beliefs, their faith, their sexual orientation, their gender identity and everything else - without exception.

Ruth Hunt
Chief Executive, Stonewall