



christian role models

FOR LGBT EQUALITY

Special thanks to the MB Reckitt Trust & the Edith Maud Ellis Trust.

Thank you to all those who gave their time and personal stories for this publication.

The photos in this booklet do not in any way reflect the place of origin or place of residence of the interviewees.



‘Please tell me if I’m reading the wrong Bible, because the Bible you’re reading is totally different from the one I’m reading.’

This is the story of a Christian from the Pacific Region whose gender identity transcends male/female. She established an LGBT association in the 1990s (with other members of her community) and volunteers at her local church.

I was the first one to wear a dress to church. I still remember that blue pleated dress I wore, with my hair slicked back. I was 14 years old.

I walked into the church with my grandma. Mass had already started, but instead of everybody watching the priest, they were watching me. And of course, my grandmother sits at the very front! It was like the biggest floorshow, everyone’s head was turned. I had a bit of fear, a bit of insecurity, but at the same time I said to myself: I am what I am, and no-one’s going to change that. This is the life I want to live; I feel comfortable as a female and no-one’s going to take that right away from me.

There’s a lot more acceptance nowadays in 2015. The law still criminalises us, but it’s not a law that’s applicable to our everyday lives. It was a law brought in by the British and we’re stuck with that, but things are totally different than what the law says. If my country was to go by the law, I would be in jail already – a long time ago!

I don’t tolerate negativity. Every now and then I’ll come across someone who is negative, but they can never say it to your face, that’s the thing. Attitudes are a lot easier now, the younger generation are a lot more comfortable with us, but I cannot say that it’s all good. Some families still stigmatise us.

We started an association for our LGBT community in the early 1990s and our first workshop was with church leaders. On the first day of our workshop, one of the older presidents of the Church said to our founder ‘You’re a sinful woman, why do you gather and encourage these people?’ He went on and on – I was ready to explode! Our founder stood and said ‘I’d like to ask you, which Bible are you reading? Because the Bible I’m reading says love one another, and I think it means to love whoever – everyone. These kids are my neighbours. My neighbour is not the person who brings me food, or lives next to me, or those I work with every day. My neighbours are these people, and I’m bringing them here so they have a sense of belonging, to support them, for them to know that they belong and they have a right to be whoever they want to be. Please tell me if I’m reading the wrong Bible, because the Bible you’re reading is totally different from the one I’m reading’. Everyone applauded!

A few years ago, one of our parish fathers was interviewed, and he spoke about me, saying, ‘What he does in his private life is not our business. Our business is encouraging his life to balance. And what he has given back to our church and our community is more important than what he does elsewhere’. This felt so lovely, I had such a sense of belonging. It encouraged me to do more and to accept the Church, the religion I’m in, and to be proud of it. If there are people that sit there and hate you, I think they shouldn’t sit in the church at all!

We work closely with the head of the Church, our bishop; he’s one of our biggest supporters. He blessed our new office a few years ago. Many people ask him, ‘Why are you always involved with these people?’ He said, ‘We church leaders should take what the Lord has taught us and, if we see a soul that has been lost from our church, he should be the one to whom we give our all, to bring him back and make him feel he belongs. We cannot drive him away just because of who he is, because then he’ll do worse things in life that will affect everybody else, his roots, his family. We should be the Good Shepherd and go do likewise’. So I’m proud of our bishop. The last three bishops have been our biggest role models.

A lot of us are very involved in our churches. Some of us are youth leaders, some are choirmasters. I must say, as a Catholic, I’m very comfortable with my church. Some other churches accept us if we dress as a man, but as for the Catholic churches, generally you see all the trans people in dresses; you don’t see them in men’s clothes!

When I visit the UK, I always attend church. Last time, I stayed with my cousin in Surrey and went to a local chapel. It felt like they were all looking at me. I don’t know if they could tell that I’m trans or just think I’m different, but it felt very tense and brought back memories of being 14 and starting to wear dresses. I’ve learned to keep all of that away – I walk in with a wall around me. Whatever negativity comes from whoever is sitting there, I bounce it back to them. I shield it away. When I walk into church, it’s just between me and God.

I thank God every day. There’s never a moment when I don’t thank Him for the life I have, what I have experienced and what I’ve got. I appreciate everything that my community has given me. Everybody should accept and feel good about whatever they are; celebrate the life that God has given you. You would not have come to this world if it was not for His creation. It was His plan, and everybody should respect that.