

An Apology Liturgy to LGBTIQ People

inspired by Pope Francis' call for an apology by the church

THEME:

To cry to God to be with us and strengthen us in a time that continues to silence those affected by hatred, misunderstanding, bullying and oppression of human rights. As people of the christian church, we say sorry for our part in the silencing and for our failure to speak out against bigotry and vilification that fuels violence and fear toward 'the other'.

SUGGESTED BLURB for ADVERTISING

A Response to Pope's call for a church apology to LGBTIQ people

Recently the Pope said 'I believe that the Church ... should apologise to the person who is gay' and so we invite you to a community prayer where we can recognise the failure of the church, God's people, to keep LGBTIQ people safe from discrimination and hurt. Please join us, gay and straight together, on [*insert date and place*].

Setting Up: Paschal candle; 7 coloured candles; Clear glass Bowl; large glass jug full of water; blue cloths.

LEADER:

Welcome:

Acknowledgement of Country [or appropriate First Nations acknowledgement]

We acknowledge the [*Gadigal People of the Eora Nation*] on whose sacred space we meet.
Before our shoeprints trod, their footsteps were.
Before our buildings rose, their handprints were.
Before our violence and sorrows, their hearts loved and broke in this place.

OPENING PRAYER:

Why, O God, why?
we cannot understand why people suffer.
We do not believe that they deserve it
and we ask ourselves, like Job,
what you are doing to us?
We shout our own pain into the universe,
where we know it is joined
with countless people down the ages.
Hear us, O God.
Even if you don't give us satisfying answers,
please hear us, we pray.
Amen.

OPENING SONG: *God of Day and God of Darkness [M Haugen]*

The Paschal candle is processed with 7 coloured candles lit from the Paschal candle and then candle holders stand in the space

THEME Reading: The Light of Christ

I am the light of the world, the light that shines through the cosmos; if you walk with Me, you will thrive in the *nourishing* light that gives life and you will not know darkness. (John 8:12)

We Grieve

Read by candle holders who extinguish their candle after reading their statement of grieving and place extinguished candles on table or altar

1 When people choose violence,
and violate each other,
diminishing the dream
for the community of human life,
the light of God is hidden.

Extinguish Candle 1

2 We grieve all violence, O God,
the violence in which we participate
between the powerful and the defenceless,
the rich and the poor,
between men and women,
adults and children.

Extinguish Candle 2

3 We grieve the violence of religious hate,
in parts of all religions and any religions
and between people who hate others
simply because they are different.

Extinguish Candle 3

4 We grieve the violence
between people of political difference
and those whose only interest is their own power.

Extinguish Candle 4

5 We grieve the violence in humankind
which produces terrible weapons of destruction.

Extinguish Candle 5

6 We ask forgiveness for the physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual violence
inflicted upon God's children who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer by
what we have done and in what we have failed to do.

Extinguish Candle 6

7 As we come before you, we are aware
that we too participate in violence.
When we have remained silent in the face of hate
directed at someone else
and left in despair those who suffer devastation,
and when we have turned our eyes away
from violence close at hand:

Extinguish Candle 7

8 Forgive us, O God,
for we long to love our neighbours as ourselves
and build communities of kindness and trust.

READINGS and STORIES

LEADER introduces this section naming the importance of telling our biblical and personal stories to remind us we are in a time of lament feeling the pain of the violence done to our sisters and brothers while calling out to God to journey with us in our pain.

Reading A:

But as for me, I will look to the Eternal One, and my hope is in the True God
who will save me. My God will hear me.
Do not gloat at my fate, my enemy;
although I am down now, I will rise up.
Although I am in darkness now, the Eternal One will be my light.
I must bear His anger because I have sinned against Him
until He argues on my behalf and rights all my wrongs.
He will bring me out into the light,
and then I will see His saving justice.
When my enemies see that God has rescued me,
then shame will wash over them
Because they sneered to me, "Where is your God?" (Micah 7: 7-10)

Story A: When Danny came out to his family, they sent him to talk with their parish priest who told him to pray harder and go to therapy. He was sent to a Christian psychologist and prescribed electro shock treatment. After numerous sessions with no apparent changes, he sank further into depression, with thoughts of suicide. He was at his wit's end. His youth group leader in whom he confided, had confirmed that unless he changed, he would remain outside God's love and go to hell. The last straw was when he was told he should no longer serve at the altar nor lead the music ministry because he might influence others and bring shame on their church. He decided to leave both the church and his family.

Reading B:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem. You kill the prophets whom God gives you; you stone those God sends you. I have longed to gather your children the way a hen gathers her chicks under her

wings, but you refuse to be gathered. Surely you can see that God has already removed His blessing from the house of Israel. (Matt 23:37-38)

Story B: Liz was in her 3rd year of studying to be a teacher at a Catholic university when she was outed by a fellow classmate to the dean of studies. She was outed by her university when they informed her parents that she was no longer deemed suitable to study teaching as her character was deemed gravely incompatible with working with teenagers. She lost her part time job tutoring as a result. Her parents threatened to send her back overseas so the extended family could match her with a suitable husband.

Reading C:

So what should we say about all of this? If God is on our side, then tell me: whom should we fear?

Who has the authority to condemn? Jesus the Anointed who died, but more importantly, conquered death when He was raised to sit at the right hand of God where He pleads on our behalf. So who can separate us? What can come between us and the love of God's Anointed? Can troubles, hardships, persecution, hunger, poverty, danger, or even death? The answer is, absolutely nothing.

But no matter what comes, we will always taste victory through Him who loved us. For I have every confidence that nothing—not death, life, heavenly messengers, dark spirits, the present, the future, spiritual powers, height, depth, nor any created thing—can come between us and the love of God revealed in the Anointed, Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8: 31, 34-35, 37-39)

REFLECTION ON WELL OF TEARS

Leader invites people to reflect on the symbol at the centre of the space - the bowl and jug of water with blue cloths flowing toward the people which will become our well of tears shed over the pain our sisters and brothers have suffered through hurtful and damaging words and actions made by christians against LGBTIQ people, their families and friends.

Water is slowly poured into the bowl making sure it is heard as the water is poured to represent our tears flowing.

LEADER: O God, as you wept over Jerusalem, weep with us over our world and its peoples.

Silent moment till water is fully poured out.

In the centre of our gathering, we symbolically have the tears of pain and the flowing blue cloth of sadness. As we feel the pain of our community grief and hope that our tears will be part of the healing, let us come forward and touch the tears of grieving and lament in any way you wish.

As the people do so: Song: Well of Tears [Robert J. Dufford sj St. Louis Jesuits]

LEADER: *Invites reader to come to read the words of Pope Francis that inspire us to lament and apology*

Reading: Pope Francis' Call to Repentance from the Sins of LGBTIQ-phobia

“If someone is gay and he searches for the Lord and has good will, who am I to judge?”

Gays and lesbians "must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity."

"Religion has the right to express its opinion in the service of the people, but God in creation has set us free: it is not possible to interfere spiritually in the life of a person."

"Tell me, when God looks at a gay person, does he endorse the existence of this person with love, or reject and condemn this person?' We must always consider the person. Here we enter into the mystery of the human being."

"I say what I said on my first trip, I say what the Catechism of the Catholic Church says: That they must not be discriminated against, that they must be respected and accompanied pastorally"

"The Church must ask forgiveness for not behaving many times – when I say the Church, I mean Christians! The church is holy but we are sinners. Christians must say sorry for not having accompanied them, for not having accompanied many choices, many families."

“Christians must say sorry and not only for this. They must ask forgiveness, not just say sorry ... It is a word that we forget a lot today”

"I believe that the Church not only should apologise to the person who is gay whom it has offended but has to apologise to the poor, to exploited women, to children exploited for labour; it has to ask forgiveness for having blessed many weapons.

LEADER: *We now move to the apology to LGBTIQ people for the violence done by the homophobia and xenophobia that alienates, excludes and perpetrates violence. During this time the candles are relit as we hope the light will shine again after our time of awareness raising and lament. We will respond with the words 'We are sorry' after each proclamation of sorrow.*

READER: In the name of church leaders who have been complicit in the silencing of LGBTIQ people by not speaking out on their behalf.

ALL: we are sorry.

In the name of the community of faith that has often stood by while violent language has fuelled homophobia, exclusion and disrespect.

ALL: we are sorry.

In the name of those who fail to stand alongside sisters and brothers who are vilified and attacked, abused and afraid.

ALL: we are sorry.

To those who have suffered from rejection and marginalisation based on their sexual orientation, race, gender or socio-economic status.

ALL: we are sorry.

To those silenced by catechisms and religious texts wielded as weapons and who have felt the pain of religious homophobia and xenophobia.

ALL: we are sorry.

To those who carry marks on their bodies or spirits born of isolation, prejudice, victimisation, violence, ignorance or religious zealotry.

ALL: we are sorry.

A COMMISSIONING AND BLESSING

Seven coloured candle holders come forward and hold their candles ready to process out during final hymn.

LEADER: Let us carry the light of God into the world,
let us rebuild love and justice in the creative power of God.

May tonight be embraced with gifts from God,
the One who celebrates all creation
and gathers all people together in love.

May the Christ walk beside us all
adding to our lives the courage to believe
that we are called to be the beloved people of God,
facing each day with hope and grace.

And may the Holy Spirit,
the source of wisdom amid the flames of true life
lift our hearts with joy
and the wonder of Divine inspiration for our future.

God go with us in all that is gentle,
Christ go with us in all that is brave
and the Spirit go with us in all that is free and true.

Amen.

SONG: Gather Us In [*M Haugen*]
Procession of candles

This liturgy was prepared with the assistance of Rev. Dorothy McCrae McMahon (Uniting Church of Australia, Waterloo parish) and Francis Voon and Fr. Peter Maher (Newtown Catholic Church, Sydney Australia). It was first celebrated on August 13, 2016 at St Joseph's Catholic Church, Newtown, Australia sponsored by Rainbow Catholics InterAgency for Ministry, Australia; Newtown Catholic Parish and Acceptance Sydney. We encourage all to use it in this form or adapted to suit your own settings. There is no need to seek permission and if you wish to acknowledge the source please use any form that suits you. The liturgy is posted on PeterMaher.org