

Accepting Evangelicals - Newsletter

January 2013

Dear Friends

As I write there has been a significant event in the evangelical world as Steve Chalke has gone public about his support for same-sex partnerships for the first time...

Steve Chalke calls for full inclusion...

Steve Chalke is a leading evangelical, writer and broadcaster, founder of the Oasis Trust and 'Stop the Traffik', a Guinness World Record holder, MBE, and church leader.

He is also the senior minister at Oasis Waterloo Church in London, which has been quietly welcoming LGB&T Christians in an open inclusive way for some time. Last summer Steve Chalke joined Accepting Evangelicals as an Open Member and he has conducted at least one service of blessing after Civil Partnership. But he has not felt able to speak publicly about it - until now.

In an article published today in [Christianity Magazine](#), Steve Chalke has called for an open conversation on how the church can truly welcome gay and lesbian people and give them the same support and guidance as heterosexuals.

[Tony Campolo](#) has already responded saying that "The significance of what Steve - a Baptist Minister - has done cannot be overstated... Steve's public declaration in support of Civil Partnerships will cause reverberations far and wide. His statement represents the first time that a major evangelist and leader in the Evangelical community has come out in support of same-sex relationships. Discussions about what he has done will reverberate from churches, youth groups, seminaries, Bible schools and denominations. Both those who support same-sex partnerships and gay marriage as well as those who oppose such developments will look upon Steve's declaration as a watershed."

In the article entitled 'A Matter of Integrity', Steve writes:

"I feel both compelled and afraid to write this article. Compelled because, in my understanding, the principles of justice, reconciliation and inclusion sit at the very heart of Jesus' message. Afraid because I recognise the Bible is understood by many to teach that the practice of homosexuality, in any circumstance, is a sin or 'less than God's best'.

"Some will think that I have strayed from scripture - that I am no longer an evangelical. I have formed my view, however, not out of any disregard for the Bible's authority, but by way of grappling with it and, through prayerful reflection, seeking to take it seriously."

He argues that churches are failing homosexual people by making them feel that there is something wrong with them.

"I believe that when we treat homosexual people as pariahs and push them outside our communities and churches; when we blame them for what they are; when we deny them our blessing on their commitment to lifelong, faithful relationships, we make them doubt whether they are children of God, made in his image"

Instead he calls on Christians to enter into compassionate, respectful, honest conversations, and calls on churches to “find ways to formally support and encourage those who are in, or wish to enter into, faithful same-sex partnerships, as well as in their wider role as members of Christ’s body.”

The article would be significant on its own, but Oasis Waterloo has also launched a new section on their church website, to encourage those conversations to take place. There is a teaching video, helpline and signposting to other resources, with Accepting Evangelicals at the top of the list. There is also an evening event planned on the 6th March as a way of encouraging people and churches to find a new approach and there are plans to publish a liturgy for blessing same-sex partnerships. <http://www.oasisuk.org/inclusionresources>

You can also comment via Twitter #MOI or #inclusion and via a new blog “[A Matter of Integrity](#)”

We hope that AE members will actively support Steve and Oasis in their courageous honesty.

Steve Chalke’s article can be found at:
<http://www.oasisuk.org/article.aspx?menuId=31973>

For background information on Steve Chalke:
<http://www.oasischurchwaterloo.org/who/about-steve>

CofE says “Yes but ...” to Bishops in Civil Partnerships.

Following the House of Bishops meeting late last year, the Church of England has announced that it is lifting its ban on clergy in Civil Partnerships being put forward to be Bishops. The ban was introduced 18 months ago while a review group on Civil Partnerships chaired by the Bishop of Sodor and Man looked again at the church’s position on CP’s.

While this should sound like a step in the right direction, it has actually upset both conservatives and those calling for change.

First, the timing was very insensitive so soon after legislation for women bishops was defeated in General Synod.

Secondly, there was no clarification on the terms which any priest in a Civil Partnership will have to agree to. [The Bishops’ statement](#) simply said that they must abide by the Church’s teaching (which means a celibate Civil Partnership) but there was no indication of what assurances might be required or if any public repentance of past sinfulness would be expected.

But most importantly, the report which the House of Bishops commissioned on Civil Partnerships appears to have been suppressed by the same Bishops who set it up. There are no plans to publish the report which also considered the possibility of Services of Thanksgiving being offered to same-sex couples, and the Bishops statement in January has said that there will be no further statement on Civil Partnerships until yet another review group finished its work at the end of this year.

Both conservative groups like [Fulcrum](#) and pro-gay groups like [the LGB&T Anglican Coalition](#) have called for the report to be made public.

Recent speaking engagements:

We have had a variety of invitations to speak at events over the last few months including the following:

At **Bournemouth University Chaplaincy** it was great to meet members of the Christian Union as well as those involved in the Chaplaincy Team. We had a good lunch-time meeting with opportunity for questions and answers after a short talk.

At **Trinity College Bristol**, Jeremy Marks spoke of the unnecessary pain which many evangelical Christians have suffered when struggling with their sexuality, and Benny Hazlehurst presented an evangelical inclusive theology of sexuality. The day was balanced by speakers from a more conservative viewpoint before students went into small groups to discuss what they had heard.

Finally, it was good to be invited to **St Edyth's in Seamills** this month to talk about same-sex marriage. Around 50 people gathered for an informal evening service with food and an opportunity for discussion and questions. Although they were predominantly traditional in their beliefs on sexuality, they felt it important to hear another view at first hand.

If you would like to have a speaker from Accepting Evangelicals come to your church or group, please email benny@acceptingevangelicals.org We need to ask for travelling expenses but nothing else.

God Bless and Keep You...

[Accepting Evangelicals](#)