

Accepting Evangelicals - Newsletter

June 2014

Dear Friends

It has been a busy few weeks so this newsletter is a bit longer than usual - but read on - there is lots of exciting news to share...

Announcing our 10th Anniversary Celebrations!

We are very pleased to announce details for our 10th Anniversary Celebration this year!

It will be on Saturday 18th October 2014 at St John's Church Waterloo, London, and our speakers are **Steve Chalke and Vicky Beeching**.

When we launched Accepting Evangelicals 10 years ago, the phrase 'pro-gay evangelical' was seen as a contradiction in terms. Yet today, Evangelical Christians are increasingly open to an accepting or affirming theology of sexuality.



We have come a long way – but there is still a long way to go. So as we celebrate 10 years, we will be looking forward with excitement and hope for the future and we are delighted to have Steve Chalke and Vicky Beeching as our speakers - see more on Vicky Beeching below.

The Celebration starts at 2pm but the church will be open from 12:30 for fellowship – just bring a picnic lunch – and our members are also invited to a brief Annual Meeting at 11:30am to do our charity business for the year.

Full information and tickets are available from [Eventbrite – follow this link](#). Tickets are free but please register for yours so that we know how many people are coming – and know when the event is full.

Please also click on the Event post on our [Facebook page](#) to say that you are going – and to invite your friends as well.

Please also pray for our event for Church of England General Synod members at York in July. Bishop and David Gillett and Rev David Runcorn will be speaking on the title "**A Change in the Tide?**" and we can accommodate up to 40 members of Synod. We launched Accepting Evangelicals 10 years ago in a meeting at General Synod at York, and it will be good to be back.

Welcome to our new Patron - Vicky Beeching...

[Vicky Beeching](#), Oxford-educated theologian, writer and broadcaster specialising in religion, feminism, ethics and technology, has accepted an invitation to be a Patron of Accepting Evangelicals.

In April she published a [blog post](#) on 'My Support of Same-Sex Marriage' and following an overwhelming response from readers, she says 'Thanks to all who engaged with my last post, My Support of Same-Sex Marriage. Over 20,000 views, 1,900 shares and 300+ comments in six days made me realise that it's a conversation that many of you are willing – and wanting – to enter into online'. She has also begun to post an ongoing blog series called "[LGBT Theology](#)" to explore how Christians approach the topic of gender, identity and sexuality.



Accepting our invitation Vicky said,

"Accepting Evangelicals has been a powerful presence within evangelical Christianity for the past 10 years. A prophetic voice ahead of their time, they elevated the conversation long before many were even willing to engage. I'm delighted to be one of their patrons, partnering with their vision to see the Church accept faithful, loving same-sex partnerships and develop a meaningful theology for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people. AE represents a healthy, bright future for the Church, with God's inclusive love at the centre."

You Tube Channel for Accepting Evangelicals...

We are also delighted to announce the creation of an [Accepting Evangelical YouTube Channel](#).



Follow the link and you will find our first 2 videos featuring Martin, Ian and Sigrun. The videos are designed to stimulate discussion and include suggest questions for discussion at the end. They are ideal for home groups, or small fellowship meetings and were very well received at a day we led for ordinands and ministers in training recently.

News from the USA...

Vineyard megachurch leader, **Ken Wilson** of Ann Arbor, Michigan, has recently written '[A Letter to my Congregation](#)' to explain his journey to an affirming position.

'Ten years ago, as an evangelical pastor I didn't know gay people and a lot of the people in my congregation would have said they didn't know gay people—but that has shifted dramatically. Now, most people say they have at least one gay friend. And, even more importantly, for young people this is a non-issue. Of [Millennials](#) who leave the church, a large number leave over the church's exclusionary stance on LGBT people. Young people just can't understand that exclusion. They know plenty of LGBT people personally and they don't want to be part of a church that excludes their friends'. An interview with Ken Wilson can be found [here](#).

The United Methodist Church's Connectional Table commit to drafting legislation to change position on sexuality. One of the United Methodist Church's governing bodies, The Connectional Table (composed of 59 members, both ordained and lay people) has recently [decided to draft legislation](#) that could change church law "to fully include LGBTQ persons in the life and ministry of the church." Any drafted legislation would be submitted to the denomination's General Conference for action in 2016.

The last General Conference in Tampa, Florida in 2012 maintained the United Methodist Church's position on sexuality and the Book of Discipline, the denomination's law book, states that all people are of sacred worth but "the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching."

During the meeting, retired Bishop, Daniel C. Arichea Jr made the point "Are passages on homosexuality in the Bible timeless or time bound?" he asked. "Put another way, are they gospel or are they culture?" He concluded by saying that he views human sexuality as "a gift from God" and that "people's ministries should be judged by their gifts, not their sexual orientation".

Jars of Clay start a storm in a teacup. Award-winning Christian rock band Jars of Clay from Nashville, Tennessee made the news when its lead singer, Dan Haseltine, found that comments he made on Twitter on same-sex marriage drew a flurry of critical responses from conservative Christians. Having recently watched "12 Years a Slave" he felt prompted to write "The treatment of people as less than human based on the colour of skin is crazy... Or gender, or sexual orientation for that matter," "Not meaning to stir things up BUT... Is there a non-speculative or non 'slippery slope' reason why gays shouldn't marry? I don't hear one" and "I'm trying to make sense of the conservative argument. But it doesn't hold up to basic scrutiny. Feels akin to women's suffrage."

Jars of Clay face a continuing backlash as several Christian radio stations are refusing to play their music and promote their work.

Negative article: <http://www.charismanews.com/opinion/in-the-line-of-fire/43686-jars-of-clay-one-week-later>

Balanced article: <http://www.thewire.com/politics/2014/04/jars-of-clays-christian-fans-lash-out-after-the-lead-singer-tweets-for-same-sex-marriage/361256/>

And in the UK...

Evangelical Alliance, whose tagline is "better together", has announced that it had "discontinued the membership of [Oasis Trust](#)". This was following Oasis and Steve Chalke expressing supporting for same-sex relationships and calling for an open conversation in the wider church.



Benny Hazlehurst, Director of Accepting Evangelicals said "The loss of Oasis and Steve Chalke will do more damage to Evangelical Alliance than to Oasis, and it seriously undermines their slogan and 'better together'. They can also no longer claim to represent the UK's two million evangelical Christians as there are clearly many evangelicals who they no longer represent, or who they are unwilling to represent."

Full story and links can be found on [the AE Blog here](#).

Meanwhile the **Baptist Union of Great Britain** held Baptist Assembly earlier this month and while maintaining its traditional theology on same-sex relationships, has now said that Baptist Ministers can bless same-sex partnerships without fear of disciplinary action.



[The official statement](#) from the Faith and Society Team says: *'Upholding the liberty of a local church to determine its own mind on this matter, in accordance with our Declaration of Principle, we also recognise the freedom of a minister to respond to the wishes of their church, where their conscience permits, without breach of disciplinary guidelines.'*

This is significant because it removes a barrier to individual Baptist ministers blessing same-sex partnerships, Civil Partnerships and Marriages if they and their congregation agree.

Progress for Transgender Christians in the CofE...

Just as we were going to press with this Newsletter, it has been a good weekend for Transgender Christians in the Church of England.

[Christianity Today](#) has published a very positive article on Rachel Mann, who has been made a Minor Canon at Manchester Cathedral.



Canon Mann, was born a boy, in the working class end of Hartlebury. She realised at just five that she had what is now called 'gender dysphoria' and has written eloquently about her journey to her true self, a trans lesbian, in her book [Dazzling Darkness](#), a best-seller in LGBT church circles. In her poetry book, [The Risen Dust](#), she also writes movingly about her spiritual journey.

And the [Church of England Newspaper](#) has published our latest article on Transgender entitled 'Listening to T'. Co-written by Benny Hazlehurst and Elaine Sommers, it appeals for churches and congregations to be more open to Transgender people in their midst.

Elaine writes, *"First of all, don't assume that there are no transgender people in your midst. If your church is of medium size, say 100-200, you probably have several already, but they are keeping quiet for fear of rejection or ridicule. The Church has become accustomed to hearing the voice of gay and lesbian people. Sexual orientation has been debated at length, but how often do we consider transgender?"*

'Listening to T' is available on the CEN website without subscription - [follow this link](#).

God Bless and Keep You

[Accepting Evangelicals](#)