

Should Chester Road register for equal marriage?

Summary

- We are an inclusive church: ability, age, ethnicity, gender, neuropathways, sexuality...
- We confirmed this again when we collectively decided to align with the Inclusive Church Network.
- We are growing numerically and spiritually because of our inclusive ethos.
- We are now access-all-areas for our LGBTQ+ attenders/ members: e.g. infant dedication; baptism; church membership; volunteer in any role; preach/service lead; be on staff; be a trustee/deacon...
- We are so blessed by our growing community of LGBTQ+ brothers/ sisters-in-Christ.
- The one thing we have not yet done is register for equal marriage, so that marriage is open to all couples, whatever their sexuality, be they opposite-sex or same-sex.

We are an inclusive church. It's part of our spiritual DNA.

In Nov 2018, we adopted our values, including #Inclusive. We said: ChesterRoadBaptist.org.uk/values

- *We strive to be as welcoming, generous and life-changing as Jesus Christ.*
- *Because God is Love, we welcome all those we meet, whatever their story, beliefs or lifestyle (without undermining safeguarding responsibilities).*
- *We champion all regardless of ability, age, ethnicity, gender, religion, or sexuality.*

In Nov 2023, we voted decisively in the BUGB MinRec consultation for Accredited Ministers in a same-sex civil partnership/ marriage to no longer be subject to 'gross misconduct' and so lose their Ministerial Accreditation.

In Jan 2025, we voted decisively to join the Inclusive Church Network. We said: Inclusive-Church.org

- *"We believe in inclusive church – a church which celebrates and affirms every person and does not discriminate.*
- *We will continue to challenge the church where it continues to discriminate against people on grounds of disability, economic power, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, learning disability, mental health, neurodiversity, or sexuality.*
- *We believe in a Church which welcomes and serves all people in the name of Jesus Christ; which is scripturally faithful; which seeks to proclaim the Gospel afresh for each generation; and which, in the power of the Holy Spirit, allows all people to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Jesus Christ."*

We have become/ are becoming one of the most diverse churches in north Birmingham. We are growing numerically and spiritually because of our inclusive ethos.

Now, at Chester Road Baptist Church if you are LGBTQ+ you can already:

- Have your child(ren) dedicated.
- Be baptised as a believer into Christ and Church.
- Become a Church Member.
- Serve in any/ all volunteering roles.
- Lead/ preach in Sunday services.
- Work for/ be employed by the church.
- Be on the Leadership Team (Trustee/ Deacon).

Our only remaining *policy barrier* for our LGBTQ+ siblings relates to marriage: we have not yet registered for equal marriage. Currently, we are only registered to marry opposite-sex couples, not same-sex couples. We marry 'straight' couples, whether they have faith or not/ attend our church or not/ live together or not/ have been divorced or not... If we believe in/ value marriage, we should want marriage to be open for all couples, not just for those who are straight.

Just to be clear:

- This is *not* about should Chester Road be an inclusive church. We have already settled that one (on three separate occasions.) It's rather, given that we already are an inclusive church, should we remove the one remaining restriction that only affects those who are LGBTQ+?
- We would continue to marry straight couples. Believing in marriage, we would also marry gay couples.
- In accordance with the Baptist Declaration of Principle, every Baptist church has liberty to interpret and administer Christ's laws; on this, and other issues, as they (we) believe right for their (our) mission.

It's not just about principle/ policy, it's also about people – our people

An engaged 'straight' couple who were worshipping with us opted to get married at Wylde Green URC (registered for equal marriage) because, for integrity, they didn't want to get married in a church that wouldn't offer the same for their gay friends. Now married, they are regulars in one of our small groups, but no longer attend on Sundays. This is as issue for straight people too.

A gay couple, who'd had rough past experiences with two other non-inclusive Baptist churches, with understandable trepidation, attended our Christmas Eve Late Night Communion Service. Since then, they have found much healing through our inclusivity. Having come back to church, they are now regular Sunday worshippers, completed the Start > & Alpha courses, are regulars in a small group, and in May 2025 became Church Members. You'll often find them on the Host (Welcome) Team or Refreshments Team. Back in 2007 they entered into a Civil Partnership, and in December 2024 (before coming back to church) converted this into a Register Office marriage. Now that they are part of a supportive church, they want to have their legal marriage *blessed* – a recognition that God is part of their relationship. Why wouldn't we?

A young adult gay couple, who have been together for 3.5+ years, are now engaged to be married! They've been part of Chester Road for 12 & 8 years respectively. They are both worshippers and active volunteers with Chester Road; one is a Church Member, the other on our payroll (bank Café Worker). Like most church couples, they ideally want to get married in church – their church, our church. Why wouldn't we?




Thinking wider, do we say to our church members who are LGBTQ+, just because of your sexuality:

- We as Chester Road Baptist Church won't marry you?
- You'll have to get married in another church that *is* registered for equal marriage (e.g. Wylde Green URC; Erdington Methodist; Chelmsley Wood Baptist Church...)?
- You'll have to have a secular wedding service at a Register Office?
- Don't get married, just live together?
- But do remain part of our inclusive church community.

Has the time now come to register Chester Road Baptist Church for equal marriage?

What does the law say?

The Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013 provides a triple-lock. A place of worship can only conduct same-sex marriages when three 'green lights' are showing:

1. The denomination's Governing Body must have opted-in by giving its explicit consent to the principle of same-sex marriages. In our case, that's the Baptist Union of Great Britain and, because of our Baptist way of being/ doing church (the Baptist Declaration of Principle), the Union's position is always to defer to/ support the local church's decision. If we want it to be yes, then it's a yes from the Baptist Union!	
2. The presiding Minister must have opted-in. In our case, that's Rev Danny Brierley. And he's a yes! (Carole Turner, our other Registrar, is also a yes.)	
3. The local congregation must have opted-in. In our case, that's the decision of our Church Members' Meeting. If a majority at the Church Meeting say yes, then that's the three green lights.	

An historical perspective

When Chester Road Baptist Church was established in 1905, only men were allowed to be Deacons. But then the 1928 Equal Franchise Act gave women the same right as men to vote in general elections. A few months later (Feb 1929), Chester Road Members voted, radically for its time, to allow women to become Deacons. Back then, for a few this might have been contentious; now it seems a 'no brainer'.

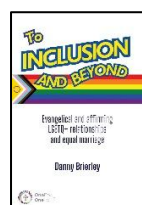
Our Brigades, in its own way, helped pioneer inclusion. We were one of the first churches in the UK to combine together our Boys Brigade and Girls Brigade companies into one. Again, at the time, for a few this would have been contentious; now it's just 'how things are'.

Three months after the church sanctuary was opened in Feb 1913, Chester Road Baptist Church registered to conduct weddings. Back then, the law only permitted opposite-sex couples to marry. Now that the 2013 (Same Sex Couples) Act has also recognised same-sex marriage, given our radical roots and our clear inclusive ethos, we can give all people, whether straight or gay, the opportunity to be married.

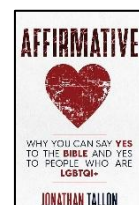
What about those who disagree?

Like all large and diverse member-based organisations, we don't all agree on everything. Being a genuinely inclusive church is important, messy, complicated, beautiful, frustrating... It means, whilst we're clear about what we collectively stand for as an inclusive church, we create space and grace for all, including for those individuals who think differently to the majority. They matter too!

It's important to recognise, we include some who are enthusiastic supporters of inclusion on grounds of ability, age, ethnicity, gender, and neurodiversity, but who do not yet (as yet) feel able to include LGBTQ+ in this. Their interpretation of the Bible leads them to conclude sex is only permitted between a man and a woman, and only then when they are united faithfully together for life through marriage. Anything outside of this is sin e.g. co-habiting, divorce... They believe marriage can, and must, only ever be between a man and a woman. Therefore, sex between two people of the same sex is always sin. This interpretation is argued for by American conservative evangelical Darrin Snyder Belousek in his book, [Marriage, Scripture and the Church](#).



Yet it's *because* of the Bible, not *despite* it, that other evangelical Christians, with a high view of Christian marriage, *affirm* LGBTQ+ relationships/ marriage. It's about God's Creation, Covenant with the Church, justice, and consenting, monogamous, loving relationships that symbolise the relationship Christ seeks with each of us as the Church, whether we're male or female, young or old, straight or gay etc... The sin is in the exclusion and oppression. Read/ borrow Danny Brierley's book¹, [To](#)



[Inclusion and Beyond: Evangelical and affirming LGBTQ+ relationships and equal marriage](#) or UK Baptist Theologian, Rev Dr Jonathan Tallon's book, [Affirmative: Why You Can Say Yes to the Bible and Yes to People Who Are LGBTQI+](#).

Process

To decide, we'll follow the same 'slow wisdom' approach we've used with previous decisions:

- 22nd March 2026 Church Members Meeting – discover
- 17th May 2026 Church Members Meeting – discuss (+ 14th May evening – not designated a CM)
- 12th July 2026 Church Members Meeting – decide

If you (and/or others you engage with) would like a 1:1 with Danny Brierley, just say.

e: DannyBrierley@ChesterRoadBaptist.org.uk m: 07840 046020.

Alternatively e: ChurchSecretary@ChesterRoadBaptist.org.uk

¹ All profits from Danny's book go to Chester Road Baptist Church. So far, a very low 4-figure sum!

FAQS

How will the decision be made?

Will the decision on 12th July be made by secret ballot?

- **Yes**, as with previous Church Member Meetings when we've dealt with potentially sensitive policy issues (e.g. the BUGB MinRec Consultation & joining the Inclusive Church Network), it'll be a secret ballot. It's important a) Members can respond freely, and b) afterwards, we can remain in fellowship with one another, whatever the outcome/ however people vote.

Will the 12th July meeting be an Ordinary Church Meeting?

- **Yes**, as with previous Church Member Meetings when we've dealt with policy issues (inc the BUGB MinRec Consultation & joining the Inclusive Church Network), in accordance with our CIO Constitution, it'll be an Ordinary Church Meeting. [A Special Church Meeting is specifically for appointing (or dismissing!) a Minister; buying/ selling/ leasing property; changing the Constitution.]
- We will register for equal marriage if a majority of the Church Meeting support this. Whatever the outcome, it will reflect the decision of the majority. That's how we roll as Baptists! Constitutionally, it will be based on a simple majority from the participating Church Members present (a minimum of 25% of Church Members must attend to be quorate.) This is likely to be a well-attended Meeting!

Is there anything in our founding Trust Deed or CIO Constitution that could question or even prevent us registering for equal marriage?

- **No**. Being a *Baptist* church (who's CIO follows the agreed BUGB template), like other Baptist churches that have already registered for equal marriage, the decision is for us to make. Given that equal marriage was not a legal option back when Chester Road was constituted but is now, it's not surprising our Trust Deed doesn't mention anything. All it says is that our building will be used as a place of worship and be listed with the Register General for England (today's Register Office) for births, deaths, and marriages. The HEBA Administrator/ Company Secretary has confirmed as a statement of fact that there's no other reference in the Trust Deed to marriage/ weddings.

Do Heart of England Baptist Association (HEBA) know we are consulting

- **Yes**. We notified Rev Dave Ellis, our HEBA Regional Minister, on 25th January 2026.

Would registering for equal marriage change our relationship with our wider Baptist family?

- **No**. We will still be enthusiastic/ active members of both BUGB and HEBA. Being Baptists, our unity is in Christ, not in us all agreeing uniformly with each other on everything. Some (not many) Baptist churches, nationally and within HEBA, have already registered for equal marriage. Some, like us, are at varying stages towards this. Others never will. Nevertheless, we are all Baptists together.

Will the listening space on 14th May include different perspectives?

- **Yes**. It's important we listen to one another and the Holy Spirit.

Will registering for equal marriage make us a gay church?

- **No!** We are becoming a beautifully diverse and balanced church across ability, age, ethnicity, gender, neuropathways, sexuality... Good prep for Heaven's "great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people, and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb." Revelation 7:9. We want ALL people to come to know Christ, whoever they are.
- Many 'black churches' exist today because people of colour in the 1950s/ 60s were treated as 'less than' by 'white churches'. Registering for equal marriage would demonstrate to LGBTQ+ Christians, here at Chester Road, there is no more 'less than'/ 'yes, but..'

Will registering for equal marriage make it harder, when the time comes, to recruit a new Minister?

- **No**. Whilst many Baptist churches in vacancy are currently receiving few expressions of interest, those that are publicly inclusive appear to be attracting many more candidates. If in the future, Chester Road chose to appoint a Minister who wouldn't conduct same-sex weddings, then, because of the 'triple lock', they wouldn't have to conduct such services. Saying yes to equal marriage today does not tie the hands of future generations.