

SPEECH BY REV PETER W NIMMO

Rev Peter W Nimmo, was asked to give one of the speeches for the opening of the Proud Ness event in Inverness on 6 October 2018.

This is the speech he gave, at the Northern Meeting Park, following the parade from the city centre.

Good morning everyone- thank you having me. It's a joy and a pleasure to be here.

I was really surprised to be asked by Highland LGBT Forum to speak today- but I'm also honoured, and deeply grateful.

Inverness is a small city. And many of you will have come from even smaller places around the Highlands. So it's often hard to connect with the LGBT community in this part of Scotland.

Today is a chance to connect. There is lots of celebration going on. And there's a great programme of events and stalls here at Eden Court, on the issues LGBT folk face. Fun and educational- what's not to like about this event?

Compared to the past, we're living in a time when it's maybe a bit easier for people to be honest about their sexuality. Yet there are still taboos around sexuality and gender identity issues.

For young people in particular, it can be a struggle. Bullying, and a lack of understanding, can result in mental health problems and harmful behaviour. This is a challenge for schools and mental health services, but also for all of us.

Because young people, and people of all ages, need to have friends to speak to, friends to share their feelings with, friends who will listen, friends who will be kind, friends who will not be judgemental.

I hope today is a signal to LGBT folks in the Highlands that you do have friends who care, and who stand alongside you. Let's all pledge to be friends to those who need us!

Within the churches, there are folk who call themselves friends and allies. And LGBT Christians do find a home in some churches. But sadly, religious people are sometimes among those who are the least understanding.

Christians have misread the Bible, and used outmoded theology and attitudes, to hurt, discriminate and exclude. We have often acted judgementally and unlovingly towards our LGBT neighbours.

For this, we can only repent before God, apologise to those whom we have hurt, and try to learn how to do better^[1].

When I read about Jesus in my Bible, I find someone who challenges the tendency of religious people to make rules which exclude and discriminate. And Jesus assures even those who seem on the edges of respectable society that God loves them. He speaks about loving our neighbour, and not judging others. So, to be a follower of Jesus today is to show love, understanding and respect to our neighbours, whoever they are, whatever their gender identity or sexuality.

Today we are, rightly, focussed on respect for people, regardless of sexuality or identity. But in our world right now, there are loud voices trying to make all sorts of discrimination respectable again. Racism, sexism, bigotry of all kinds seem to be being talked about more and more. Minorities are anxious; hatred is becoming tolerated.

So it's really, really good to have, here in an Inverness, an event today which is uncompromisingly about inclusion, acceptance and love.

Thanks, again, for giving me the chance to speak today. Enjoy yourselves, everyone!

Rev Peter W Nimmo
Minister of Old High St Stephen's Church of Scotland, Inverness

[1] In the Church of Scotland, the General Assembly is the highest authority in the Church. The Assembly of 2017 passed the following deliverance (on the report of the Theological Forum):

3(b) Invite the Church to take stock of its history of discrimination at different levels and in different ways against gay people and to apologise individually and corporately and seek to do better.