



A Different Conversation Surry Hills, Australia 27 Feb to 01 Mar 2014

<http://diffcon.org>

A ministry forum on authenticity, pastoral care, biblical faithfulness, and same sex attraction.

She asked me, "How do the gay people in your church know that it's safe to come and talk to you?" – Rev Matt Glover

A safe space for a ministry conversation about same sex issues and pastoral care.

Do your conversations about God and church and same sex issues go in circles? Can you have those conversations, or are the subjects just too volatile? Do you get to speak with many gay, lesbian or transgender people – and can you express what you want to say? Do you hear what their experience of churches like ours have been? Is it time to have these conversations?

A Different Conversation is not for the faint hearted. It will provoke your thinking and challenge you at a heart level. It isn't a disinterested or disembodied exchange, it's a rare opportunity to sit and listen to the people most affected by the issues themselves. The aim is not to change your mind, it's to expand it. This isn't recommended – it's essential.

– Jon Owen
Urban Neighbours of Hope, Mt Druitt

What can you expect?

- Hear the experience and perspectives of same sex attracted and transgender Christians.
- Share experiences and ministry insights with a

spectrum of pastors, practitioners, educators and Christian thinkers.

- Participate in honest, candid and confidential peer discussions.
- Bring your ministry team; students, interns; counsellors, teaching staff.

Forum Standards

When registering please consider the following:

- Am I able to respectfully listen to people's perspectives that are different to my own, and respond in a respectful manner?
- Some of those who will be sharing their experiences will be taking a risk by speaking, often for the first time, to an audience containing Christian ministers, who they may have no reason to trust. Am I able to give them that reason by putting myself in their shoes and feel what they feel?

This is an opportunity for Christians to reconcile these tensions through relationship and thoughtful discussion.

I was invited to A Different Conversation in 2011. I wasn't sure what to expect but arrived as a young man was being interviewed about his life, the abuse he suffered and his struggle to be disciplined and learn how to live like Jesus as a young gay man. I found the discussions, speakers and topics highly informative and challenged many of the Evangelical norms I had never thought through. The space was safe for conversation and really honoured everyone's viewpoints. Furthermore it highlighted the many pastoral care concerns and issues present and how we as Christian leaders need to take Christ's message of inclusiveness to the multitudes of people, both LGBTIQ and friends and family, that are affected.

– Rev. Steve Turner
National Director, Forge

More information

Web <http://diffcon.org>

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See over for forum topics...

Forum Topics (Provisional)

Lists of participants will appear here when we are confident we have a balance in each area.

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|-------------------------|---|
| Thursday Evening | The experience of growing up same sex attracted in church – and the problem of talking about it. |
| Friday Morning | Welcome, prayer and worship. |
| Friday Morning | Same sex orientation, celibacy and reparative therapy. |
| Friday Morning | Same sex marriage, and Christian community and mission. |
| Friday Afternoon | Biblical morality and same sex intercourse. |
| Friday Afternoon | Reflection, meditation and discussion time. |
| Friday Evening | Same sex marriage, Christian politics, and the common good. |
| Saturday Morning | Same sex issues, crisis moments, and ministry families. |
| Saturday Morning | Cross-cultural perspectives, esp. of transgender. |
| Saturday Lunch | Reflections and close |
| Saturday Evening | Guided experience of the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras (optional, conducted in small groups). |

Recommendations of panellists in each area are invited. We will try and use the best from each major perspective.

A Different Conversation has borne immeasurable fruit in my ministry, preparing and equipping me to have safe and meaningful dialogue that had previously been a source of fear and anxiety. It had supported me to begin a journey of understanding with the GLBTI community and reflect and repent of my own bigotry and prejudice. It will create a space in your heart and mind to explore and discuss, in a safe way, the complexity and richness of human sexuality and Christian sexual ethics. A must for any Christian leader or pastor in this time.

– Nathan Moulds, Salvation Army
Surry Hills and now Macquarie Park

Questions

What's our agenda?

- The position of Surry Hills Baptist Church on several issues is well known. We helped organise 100Revs, when Christian ministers marched in the Mardi Gras as an apology for how gay and lesbian people have been treated

by churches, and we testified at the federal and state inquiries in support of marriage equality. However, we don't run this conference to talk about that. We run this conference because Baptist, Anglican and Pentecostal ministers and churches often do not have the opportunity to listen to the experience of our gay, lesbian and transgender neighbours, Christian and often ex-Christian. Only listening allows us to develop understanding and empathy: that is what we want to see grow.

Will this be a real 'conversation'?

- It's not a free-for-all, which would work against having a conversation. We will not allow any person present to be treated without respect or dignity, especially those who share their stories with us (see 'Forum Standards', above). But equally, we will not be glossing over questions. There will be extended sessions on the Friday in particular for a no-holds-barred discussion of the biblical and theological questions, and we will encourage and facilitate pre-reading to maximise the benefit from these. But those sessions will only follow after respectful and active listening. That's the kind of conversation we'll be having.

Will this actually resolve anything?

- You probably won't walk away thinking, "It's all so simple now!" But if past experience is any guide, this will go a long way toward building understanding and empathy with people who have grown up same-sex attracted in Evangelical and Pentecostal churches. We suggest that this is a necessary starting point for resolving any of our other questions in a Christlike way. If the topic seems wearying or draining, it is worth remembering that same-sex oriented Christians, to whom we have a duty of care, never get a day off from these questions.

How can you be involved?

- Get the latest info → diffcon.org
Subscribe to the newsletter to stay updated.
Follow us on Facebook or Twitter → @diffcon
Share this page in your ministry circles online.
- Register as an individual.
Register as a ministry team or college (ask about student group discounts).
Make it part of a training program for ministry.
- Partner as a ministry organisation.
Become a sponsor (provide facilities, PR, transport).
Provide testimonials or endorsements of previous @diffcon experiences.
Recommend speakers and panelists.