

# LGBTQ+ History Month

## Spirituality and LGBTQ+ People by Rev'd Ruth Harley

“In the Spirit which draws us into honest engagement with one another, including those who may be very different from us in various ways, God calls us to wake up and learn how to love and respect one another, period.”

These are the words of Carter Heyward, feminist lesbian theologian and priest in the Episcopal Church. Heyward was ordained as a priest in 1974 as one of the Philadelphia Eleven – the group of women who were ordained two years before the church allowed women's ordination. Ordained alongside her was another great LGBTQ+ theologian and prominent civil rights activist, Pauli Murray, whose life was the subject of the recent film “My Name Is Pauli Murray”.

The stories of LGBTQ+ people and our allies in the history of the church and other faith organisations are often hidden, but they are there to be uncovered. From Church of England bishops speaking in the House of Lords in the 60s in favour of decriminalising homosexuality, to people of all faiths within and beyond the LGBTQ+ community caring for the dying at the height of the Aids crisis, to the historic decision of the Methodist Church just last year to embrace equal marriage in its churches, the story of LGBTQ+ people of faith is one of the rarely told strands of LGBTQ+ history.



**(St Mary's Church, Shenley Church End, 2021)**

Spirituality and spiritual wellbeing is an important issue for everyone, whatever their sexuality or gender identity, and whether or not they practice a faith. Understanding our own identity and how we relate to the world around us is a core part of what it means to be human. Seeing ourselves in relation to something greater than ourselves – whether or not we name that as God – is for many of us an important part of our self-understanding.

Not everybody chooses to wrestle with those questions of identity and belonging in the context of a faith community, but for those who want to it is important that welcoming, inclusive and affirming communities of faith are able to support LGBTQ+ people on their spiritual journey. Great strides have been made in this area in recent years. Locally, we have the Faithfully LGBTQIA+ MK group, which organises regular inclusive and affirming church

services, and a prayerful, joyful and loving Christian presence at MK Pride. Nationally, there are LGBTQ+ organisations run by and for members of every major faith group.



**(Freeman Memorial Methodist Church, Bletchley, 2021)**

Every LGBTQ+ person deserves the right to explore and develop their spiritual life and wellbeing in a supportive and affirming context. As a Christian minister and a lesbian, I believe that every person's sexuality and gender identity is part of their God-given self, and all of us are loved beyond measure by the God in whose image we are made. I continue to work and pray, inspired by LGBTQ+ activists of

faith throughout history, for the time when that belief will be joyfully and affirmingly lived out in every community of faith and beyond.

Revd Ruth Harley is an ordained minister in the Church of England, and Curate of the Watling Valley Ecumenical Partnership in Milton Keynes. Watling Valley Ecumenical Partnership is proud to be a member of Inclusive Church – church which celebrates and affirms every person and does not discriminate (<https://www.inclusive-church.org/>).