

If we believe all people are equal we must live this



Workplace diversity is critical to the mission of church-based community service organisations. *Photo: Supplied*

One of the greatest experiences of working in welfare is when the potential of another person is unlocked and they soar. I have seen that with one of our clients – a formerly homeless man who has now started his PhD.

Unthinking discrimination can condemn others to live their lives in accordance with the caricature we have assigned them. If we believe all people are equal in the sight of God then we need to live out our faith.

To build on the strengths of communities often requires alliance and engagement of people who do not share orthodox Christian beliefs.

The discussion about the federal government's draft Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Bill may have left members of the community with the impression that the majority of church-based agencies want to discriminate against non-Christians, gay and unmarried people.

In fact, Anglicare Australia – the national network of Anglicare agencies – supports simplifying Australia's anti-discrimination laws to make them clearer and more consistent.

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Every Anglicare organisation I am aware of rejects discrimination. We provide services to all people and seek to support the most marginalised in our society regardless of race, sexual orientation etc.

In our work at Anglicare SA, we follow the example of Jesus - he healed and served everyone, including those who were marginalised as sinners and the sick. He subverted the stereotypes of the self-righteous religious elite.

Jesus taught the Kingdom of God is for everyone, not just the pious, and He enjoyed the company of 'outcasts'

– publicans, prostitutes, tax collectors and other 'sinners'.

Our concept of who are outcasts and sinners may have changed but the principle remains: "All are welcome."

Anglicans around the world have adopted the five Marks of Mission to define how we should live.

The third Mark is "to respond to human need by providing loving service" which follows the example of Jesus who healed the sick (even on a Sunday) and restored them to community (John 9).

I believe that workplace diversity is critical to the mission of church-based community service organisations. God is not limited to only work through those who call themselves Christian.

The lived experience of the marginalised is invaluable in providing services in a relationship of love, respect and understanding. Anglicare SA's long-standing policy of non-discrimination makes us stronger.

To build on the strengths of communities often requires alliance and engagement of people who do not share orthodox Christian beliefs. Often employment is a way forward to enable members of our diverse multicultural community to contribute.

Engaging the Aboriginal community is a particular challenge for church-based community service organisations because of the history of the stolen generations. For example, while it is not yet sufficient, we have 40 staff who identify as Aboriginal, we actively encourage indigenous employment and our non-indigenous staff undertake cultural competency training so we are all better able to serve the first Australians.

As with other non-government organisations we follow proper security checks and our staff and volunteers must adhere to our organisational values, be skilled to support our programs, behave ethically and obey the code of conduct.

Our code of conduct requires all staff and volunteers to be respectful of differences and non-discriminatory on the basis of sex, race, sexuality, disability, cultural background, religion, marital status, age, union affiliation, political conviction or family responsibilities.

Our values and respectful behaviour guide are based on our Christian foundations but are expressed in secular terms so that all staff and volunteers of Christian and other faiths – or no faith – can understand and apply them.

In line with our values, our employment policy is non-discriminatory, other than those few positions which have inherent requirements of understanding and being of the Anglican faith. These positions are the chief executive officer and chaplains.

Jesus' ministry was also one of message as well as healing and the fourth Mark of Mission is to challenge unjust structures in society. This we must do regardless of the potential to offend the comfortable or the powerful.

Churches and church-based organisations are also charged to preach and teach the Gospel (the first and second Marks of Mission) and it is important to preserve this capacity as this is who we are and why we are here.

In a world seduced by material values, where worth is only measured in productive and reproductive capacity and many see themselves as failures, it is important that Christians proclaim God's love for all, the saving grace of Jesus and the inherent worth of every person made in the image of God.

But it is more important to also act out our faith:

"What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill', and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead." (James 2:14-26)

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