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# *Pilgrims' Friend Society* **clarifications on marriage, same sex relationships *and* gender identity**

## *Introduction*

Pilgrims' Friend Society runs care homes and housing schemes, but our charitable objects and purpose is to advance the Christian faith. We do this by making sure that we provide communities, built around our Basis of Faith, which are for Christians seeking to follow Jesus and the Bible.

One of the ways we do this is to make sure that people who come to live or work with us want to be part of a Christian community and will enhance the life of the home, scheme, or support team. For certain roles within the charity, we have an occupational requirement (OR) that the postholders are Christians who base their lives on a relationship with Jesus and accept our Basis of Faith<sup>1</sup>.

Our Basis of Faith was adopted in the formative years of the charity, and it requires us to accept the authority of the Bible and follow biblical teaching. A few years ago, most people who accepted our Basis of Faith would have seen same sex relationships and sexual relations outside of heterosexual marriage as inconsistent with biblical teaching

and they would have worshipped in churches that taught the same. This is no longer the case, and neither is it the case when it comes to gender identity issues.

In 2022 we published our statements of clarification on marriage, same sex relationships and gender identity (clarifications) in response to significant changes in views on same sex relationships and gender identity within and without the Christian church. We wanted to be clear and transparent about Pilgrims' Friend Society's stance on these issues.

In 2025 we reviewed the statements to ensure that our position had not changed and that our communication was as clear as possible.

<sup>1</sup>This is legally appropriate and permitted under the Equalities Act 2010, bearing in mind our charitable objects which are to advance the Christian faith through the alleviation of poverty and sickness in older people. The Equalities Act 2010 also provides that religious belief can lawfully be taken into account in recruitment decisions when an Occupational Requirements applies to a role.

# *Our* approach

Our approach has been to make what Pilgrims' Friend Society believes the Bible says about marriage, same sex relationships and gender identity clear and transparent so that people are fully informed before they have made the significant commitment of coming to live or work with us.

**We recognise that these matters are deeply personal to many people and so we want to be clear that in our approach to this very sensitive area we seek to:**

- show grace and understanding to people
- outwork our values of compassion, community, transparency, and excellence in all that we do
- support people who are same sex attracted and who are seeking to live lives in accordance with biblical principles
- support people who are trying to live lives in accordance with biblical principles but for whom there is an incongruence between their biological sex and their sense of gender
- not be hypocritical by applying one standard to these matters compared to other matters that the Bible says are incompatible with being part of the Kingdom of God

## *Our* process

A group consisting of some members of the Executive Team and the Board met four times during 2022 to think and pray through these sensitive issues. We were determined to be supportive of Christians affected by these issues, and we were careful to make sure that we complied with our legal responsibilities as set out in the Equalities Act 2010. To this end we included in the process an employment lawyer, and a member of the True Freedom Trust team, a charity that provides pastoral care for Christians who are navigating same sex attraction and gender incongruence.

# Our values

Everything we do at Pilgrims' Friend Society is rooted in our values of compassion, community, transparency, and excellence. Our approach to navigating these sensitive issues, and the process we undertook to develop the clarifications was shaped by our desire to care for others, acknowledge that difference exists within a large group such as ours, be clear about the charity's position, and ensure that we are taking great care in addressing these matters.



## Compassion

Compassion is at the heart of how we interact with people. Having compassion helps us treat each individual person as unique and precious and as we would want to be treated.

This means that we offer loving care through relationships based on empathy respect and dignity, we get alongside people and show grace to those who are struggling, we do what we can to ease people's burdens, and we find new ways to care well for older people.

Ephesians 4:32  
2 Corinthians 1:3-4



## Community

We believe that all people are made to exist in relationship and that community is central to human flourishing. Working together in community creates a space of care, trust, and celebration, as well as support and helpful challenge.

This means that we are a community of people who share life together, celebrating victories and supporting each other during difficult times, committed to one another and seeking to give of ourselves and receive of other people.



1 Corinthians 12:26  
Philippians 2:3-4



# Transparency

We believe that being honest and open is crucial as this allows trust to be built in our communities. Truthfulness is important and helps us to do excellent work, learning and growing together as we go.

This means that we are honest with one another, asking for what we need and telling the truth. We avoid shame, are open about problems and mistakes, and seek to find solutions when the need arises. We listen respectfully to each other and when we disagree, we do so without conflict.



Ephesians 4:25  
Proverbs 28:13



# Excellence

As we care for others, it's important that we strive for excellence in our work. This means that we do the very best we can, being committed to each task and the best outcomes for people.

We aim for excellence in everything that we do, making sure that we are going above and beyond to support those in our care. We do things as well as we possibly can, not cutting corners or seeking an easier way out. We steward our resources faithfully and carefully, and we seek out opportunities to get better at the work we do.

Colossians 3:23  
Titus 2:7

*From these values we have built the four pillars of our work: **The Way We Care, The Way We Live, The Way We Work, and The Way We Lead.***



# Our Basis of Faith

As a Christian organisation we base all that we do on the teachings of the Bible. Our Basis of Faith<sup>2</sup> sets out what we believe and informs how we live out our faith, including as we create communities which support older people to flourish in their later life, motivated by our love for God, His love for His people, and His love for the world.

- We believe that the teachings of the Bible are our sole and final authority
- We believe that there is one God in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- The good news of the gospel is that, although men and women are sinners, God has taken the initiative to save people from every tribe, tongue, and nation. We believe that God will bring about the redemption of all things
- God sent Jesus Christ, His Son, to be our Saviour. Jesus became fully human and, at the same time, remained fully God
- Jesus came to buy us back from sin and death by living a perfect life, having no sin, and dying in our place on the cross
- But God's grace did not stop there. When Jesus ascended to heaven, the Holy Spirit was given by God to continue His work on earth
- It is this Holy Spirit who gives us new birth and brings us to repentance and faith in the Son. When the Spirit has begun such a good work in someone, He will bring it to completion
- At the time appointed by God, Jesus will return to earth in glory. He will raise the dead and judge all people. He will banish those not known to Him and He will take His people to be with Him in eternal glory in the new heavens and earth

<sup>2</sup>Our Basis of Faith is derived from the original Doctrinal Basis which was set in place at the founding of the organisation in 1807. The Basis of Faith was created in order to modernise the language of the Doctrinal Basis but there is no discrepancy in meaning between the two documents.



# *Our understanding* of biblical teaching

Following from the first point of our Basis of Faith – that the teachings of the Bible are our sole and final authority – we lay out here the organisation's view on marriage, same sex attraction, gender identity, and our failures to live to God's standard. We address this last issue as we are clear that while sexuality is the matter at hand here, there are many ways in which all of us have fallen, and continue to fall, short of God's perfect standard.

## *Marriage and sexuality*

Marriage in the Bible reflects the relationship between Jesus and His church. It is the one-flesh union of one man and one woman for life (Genesis 2:24 and Matthew 19:5). Based on the Bible, we believe that God intends all sexual relations to only be expressed lovingly within this covenant bond. Christians are called to be set apart and, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to live a life in obedience to God.

Same sex practice is just one of a number of sexual behaviours and attitudes that fall outside the biblical mandate for marriage, such as lust, sexually degrading treatment, and adultery. We recognise that no adult is without sin in this area.

The Bible makes it clear that our sex (whether we are male or female) is not a matter of choice but is determined by our creator (Genesis 1:27 and Matthew 19:4).

## *Failing to live to God's standards*

The Bible teaches that we are all sinners, meaning that we all fail to live up to God's standards. We have a hope of heaven, not because of any merit of our own, but because whilst we were still sinners Jesus, the Son of God, died on the cross to pay the price for our sins and make us acceptable to God.

In seeking to live by God's word, and encouraging others to do the same, we recognise the need for love and compassion as modelled by Jesus in John 8:3–11. In this story Jesus, the only one who was without sin, did not condemn the sinner and He did not condone the sin, but He showed love and compassion to the sinner, was clear about the need for repentance, and put to shame those who hypocritically sought to be judgemental.

The apostle James makes clear there is a distinction between being tempted by desire and sinning by gratifying that desire (James 1:12–15). This is true for all people. We desire that, whilst holding to biblical principles, we might show Jesus' compassion to all who may have fallen into sin but seek to be reconciled to God, and to come alongside others in their struggle to resist temptation having been recipients of this grace in our own struggles with sin. Biblical teaching is that we should repent and turn from sin, and it teaches us that if we do that God will forgive us.

Given that Pilgrims' Friend Society upholds that all have fallen short of God's standard, we have tried to approach the issues at hand here from a place of repentant humility, not judging others who hold different beliefs.



# Our Clarifications

Our Clarifications both flow from, and sit alongside, our Basis of Faith. They are based on our understanding of biblical teaching and set out as clearly as we can what we believe our Basis of Faith means for the way that we live and work with others.

Following our Basis of Faith and our understanding on biblical teaching regarding marriage, same sex relationships, and gender identity, our statements of clarification are:

1. We affirm God's love and concern for all human beings made in His own image.
2. We repudiate all attitudes and actions which fail to recognise that all are made in the image of God.
3. We recognise that all of us sin and fall short of the glory of God.
4. We rejoice that God showed His love in that, whilst we were sinners, Christ died for us – so that if we repent, we might be each reconciled to God despite our fallen state.
5. We accept that the only true hope for any of us is through faith in Jesus Christ. Unable to save ourselves, our hope must not be in "religion," our own works or how we believe we compare to others.
6. Our earnest ongoing prayer is that the Holy Spirit will change us to be more like Jesus, and that Jesus' mercy, love, truth, and grace would characterise how we engage with other people.
7. Someone who fails to show the love of Christ towards others is acting in a way inconsistent with our Basis of Faith and we repudiate any such behaviours.
8. We affirm that marriage is an institution created by God in which one man and one woman enter an exclusive relationship for life. Marriage is the only God-ordained place for sexual relations. We therefore believe that to condone sexual relations outside such marriage would be to reject our position on the authority of the Bible.
9. We affirm that at the moment of conception God created each person male or female and that we are called to live in our created state. We therefore believe that to condone rejection of that created state would be to reject our position on the authority of the Bible.

## *How the Clarifications work in practice:*

We require those who live with us or whose roles have an OR that they be a Christian to accept our Basis of Faith, therefore the primary bar to someone coming to live and work with us is a rejection of our Basis of Faith. In the context of marriage, same sex relationships and gender identity we have shown that we uphold a traditional view on marriage and sexuality as an outworking of point one of our Basis of Faith.

However, there are a number of important practical nuances which are outlined here:

- Experiencing same-sex attraction is not a bar to working for us or coming to live with us.
- A person's sexual past is normally not a bar to working for us or coming to live with us.
- Differences between a person's biological sex and their sense of gender is not a bar to working for us or coming to live with us.
- Holding a different viewpoint on certain beliefs is not a bar to coming to work with us but promoting these viewpoints and therefore disrupting or undermining our communities may be a bar to working for us or coming to live with us.
- Being unrepentant about a lack of grace towards others, for any reason, including relating to a person's same-sex attraction or their sexual past, would be a failure to live out biblical principles and therefore may be a bar to working for us or coming to live with us.
- Being unrepentant for any sin, (whether sins that are sexual or non-sexual – such as pride and hypocrisy), would be a rejection of our Basis of Faith and therefore may be a bar to working for us or coming to live with us.
- Hypocrisy regarding our own sins and those of others would be a failure to live out biblical principles and therefore may be a bar to working for us or coming to live with us.
- Undermining Pilgrims' Friend Society's commitment to being communities of grace in which all who seek to live faithfully in accordance with biblical teaching are welcomed and affirmed may be a bar to working for us or living with us.

## *Examples of how the Clarifications work*

The following examples illustrate how the Clarifications might be applied:

**A complaint from a family member (as we call those who live with us in our care homes) about a female carer talking about her wife:** here the Clarifications are not applied as they do not apply to roles without an OR.

**It is drawn to the attention of the leadership team that someone who is in a role which has an OR that they are a Christian and uphold the Basis of Faith is living with someone to whom they are not married:**

here we refer to the Clarifications and ask the person how their living arrangements are consistent with our Basis of Faith and the Clarifications. We look at the unique circumstances noting that unrepentant sexual sin would amount to a rejection of our Basis of Faith.

**At interview for a manager role someone discloses a previous relationship that they think might disqualify them from accepting our Basis of Faith:** here we look at the unique circumstances but we note that a person's sexual past is normally not a bar to working for us or coming to live with us whereas rejecting our Basis of Faith through ongoing unrepentant sexual sin would be.

To avoid being hypocritical we will apply the same enquiry and review processes as we would to other areas of belief and behaviour. So, for example, at a job interview we will ask about peoples' testimonies and whether they accept our Basis of Faith and the Clarifications.

## *Our approach in practice*

We seek to make sure that the outworking of these Clarifications will be characterised by grace and understanding and will demonstrate our values of compassion, community, transparency, and excellence.

We hope that being transparent by spelling out what we understand the Bible as saying, given that our Basis of Faith says that we base what we do on the Bible, will be a reassurance that we have carefully considered these issues.

We respect divergence in personal views and invite those who wish to discuss this further to request private conversations with members of the Executive Team.

People who want to live in one of our communities or apply to work for us in a position where we have an OR that the job holder is a Christian will be referred to these Clarifications alongside our Basis of Faith so they can assess whether this sounds like the kind of organisation within which they would be comfortable living and working. By bringing clarity, these Clarifications will serve as a reference point that

will help situations to be explored and decisions to be taken that are as supportive as possible of the people involved and are consistent with our Basis of Faith.

We recognise that each situation needs to be understood properly and that each situation will be unique to the people involved. So we will take care to find out the circumstances and therefore whether the Clarifications apply.

For people working with us and living with us prior to October 2022 we recognise and respect the fact that they made commitments to us before we outlined the Clarifications and we do not require them to agree with the Statements.

We do not require people working for us whose roles do not have an OR to accept our Basis of Faith and neither do we ask them to agree to the Clarifications.

As we have outlined, we are very aware that these matters are sensitive and deeply personal. If you have any questions or concerns about Pilgrims' Friend Society's position on any of these issues, please get in touch with Stephen Hammersley (CEO), Joshua Field (Director of HR) or Alexandra Davis (Director of Marketing and Communications), all of whom are very happy to listen to reflections and talk through the Clarifications further.

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*“Even to your  
old age and grey hairs  
I am He, I am He who  
will sustain you.”*

Isaiah 46:4



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