

The Development of our Inclusivity Statement

During 2023 the church had a number of conversations around creating an inclusivity statement which can be displayed on our notice boards and website. These conversations happened in both Deacons and Members meetings.

The motivation for creating such a statement is rooted in several strands.

Biblical imperative

Genesis 1:26 says:

“Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness”.

We are all made in the image of God, we all bear the spark of divinity. This means that no one should be excluded from the things of God, the blessings that God bestows, and the sacred places where God meets us.

Mark 12:18-31 says:

One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, ‘Which commandment is the first of all?’ Jesus answered, ‘The first is, “Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.” The second is this, “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.” There is no other commandment greater than these.’

Jesus commanded us to love God, and love others as though they were ourselves. The law of Christ is love. An outworking of this is to state clearly that we as a church are working towards loving all, including all, and ensuring that everyone has access to church life in its fulness.

I Corinthians 12:12-14 says:

Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.

We all belong. It is not our task to decide who belongs and who doesn't. It is not our task to welcome others as though they were outsiders because they are as much in the centre as we are. We all belong, and we all have a part to play.

History of Thomas Helwys

Thomas Helwys Baptist Church has a background of working towards inclusion. Some of the ways that it has undertaken this include:

- Purposefully working to be a community church and running/being involved in open groups such as Toddlers, Friday Youth Club, The Girl's Group, Monday at 2.30 (?), Tommys, Tasty Tuesdays, and Warm-up-Wednesdays.
- In its 50-year history it has supported women's ordination by calling four female ministers and recommending three women for ministry training.
- Taking part in Reverend Robert Beckford's work in the city, with local Black Baptists, to mentor leadership and involvement.
- Supporting asylum seekers and students from overseas.
- Working through the 'Making Moral Choices' study and exploring matters around sexuality, culminating in a church members decision to be an inclusive church with all roles and holy things of God open to anyone regardless of their sexuality and living arrangements.
- Addressing some (but by all means not all) accessibility issues in the church.

The church profile

Quite recently all church members were consulted on a profile for the settlement process for identifying a new minister. This profile was discussed and agreed at a church meeting.

At that meeting we agreed that:

“Thomas Helwys is a friendly, welcoming church seeking to include people from a wide variety of nationalities, cultures, classes and sexualities; all exploring different ways of prayerfully connecting with God. Our diversity challenges us to find different ways to communicate with each other and to do our best to nurture the unity which only the Spirit can give.”

And

“We value our diversity, and want to encourage as many people as possible to be involved in leading worship. Our broad theology is rooted in the Bible and in real life.

And

“We are a diverse church that ticks many boxes, and fits into none! The diversity of our fellowship can be challenging in trying to bring together all the threads for a coherent vision. However, we do agree that we are a part of our local community, and feel that we need to be involved and relevant to that community.”

These three threads identify our motives in seeking to be clearer about inclusion and diversity and the importance of agreeing an inclusivity statement.

It is important to note that this is not the end of the process but a step along the way towards a Christ-filled church that expresses the love and acceptance of God.