

If only

Home & Overseas paper: November 2025

I am sure that during our lives we have each been in a situation when we felt like an outsider, not welcome or involved. It can hurt and leave a harsh memory for years. As members of the Moravian Church it is our responsibility to ensure that everyone we meet can sense that we genuinely welcome folk and include many different people.

'If only' is a powerful play capturing the voices of Afghan girls and women talking about the awful restrictions they face under the Taliban. They speak of losing the right to education, to work, to feel the wind in their hair and so much more. In our country exclusion can be less obvious but painful for those who feel excluded.

God created a great world full of differences and so surely we should seek to respect and engage with all types of difference. Often welcoming differences means we have to change: change our views, beliefs, language or the way we think.

Before 1967 homosexuality was illegal in the UK. However, before then my parents regularly welcomed same-sex couples into their home. The challenge for my father was having to stop using the word 'gay' to mean 'happy'. This did not please him. I face a similar challenge with the pronoun 'they/them' for trans individuals. I fully respect their gender choice but my brain still thinks 'they' is plural.

Above I have offered examples at a social level. Equally there are differences at a personal level. I suffer with visual hyper-sensitivity so at Christmas when I attend services there will be no flashing Christmas lights at Fulneck ... I am grateful that people have accepted my needs.

Differences come in all shapes, sizes, colours, beliefs: ensuring our churches are physically accessible and people can hear are important areas to consider. As an inclusive church we must continually challenge ourselves to welcome all differences and make it easy for people to join us. Are our churches and events welcoming to all? If we did things differently would more folk wish to get involved? How do we change while respecting our traditions? Tricky questions.

Recently on the Moravian Fellowship Facebook page I read: *Diversity is God's creation: Equity is God's justice: Inclusion is God's family.* Let me close with the chorus from a song by Elbow¹, spoken at the recent MWA Retreat:

*We got open arms for broken hearts
Like yours my boy, come home again
We got open arms for broken hearts
Like yours my boy, come home again.*

Let us each ensure we have open arms for all and that we are inclusive in a way that celebrates the many differences that God created in this wonderful world.

Sr Mary Holmes (she/her)

¹ Elbow - an English rock band formed in Bury, Great Manchester, in 1990.