

Coming out. A time of great rejoicing on one hand but also a risk of rejection and loss. My own coming out was challenging not the least because I was attending and held a leadership role in a charismatic church.

I had started going to this church following conversion at a Billy Graham crusade in the 1980s. I was invited by a friend who was concerned about me following the death of my father. I have to say I have no regrets in my decision to become a Christian that night, My faith has always been very important to me.

I digress, I knew deep down that I had felt several same sex attractions in my life but had never crossed the line to express them. I knew what others had said about "Gays" as I was growing up, but I could fight it no more, I prayed please God if this is real then bring someone to speak to me. To my surprise the next week I got chatting to a patient (I'm an optometrist) and she came out to me, she said she felt that I needed to hear it. I went home that night praying that God would give me courage to seek His will in my life. It was a revelation. It felt like the light had been turned on, no longer searching in the dark, so amazing but also terrifying!

I first shared my secret with a trusted friend who invited me round to chat. She asked me if we were talking about sexuality! I was shocked by her remark. How did she know? She said she had always thought it was the case. I felt more confident now and shared with two church friends. They too weren't surprised but without asking, mentioned me to the church minister. I was called to a meeting at the manse and was told I needed prayer for healing. I said no. Why would I want to go back into the dark? After much discussion I was asked to leave the church.

It was a really painful time for me. These people who had been like family to me were now walking on the other side of the road, ignoring me, ignoring my children! It was at this point that I started to look for other Gay Christians. I contacted an organisation called LGCM (formerly the Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement now OneBodyOneFaith) and I was sent a bundle of information.

With courage in my heart and hope for something new I went along to a couple of things, a gay Christian group in Manchester, I was the only woman, nevertheless, they put me in touch with a couple of women and through them I went along to MCC, Metropolitan Community Church, also known as "the gay church". Those first courageous steps set me on the path to discovery of being an "out and proud" Lesbian Christian with a deep and meaningful relationship with God.

Several of us went along to a conference in Germany of EFLGC (The Evangelical Fellowship for Lesbian and Gay Christians) groups, known affectionately as FORUM. Here Gay Christian priests and lay people from all denominations meet each year for an annual meeting. There were 30+ gay Christian organisations from all over Europe West and East. Our common goal was equality and acceptance in the church.

I met, and continue to meet, remarkable people at these conferences, including my future civil partner who was elected as woman co president. Back home in the UK, I joined an organisation called The Evangelical Fellowship for LGBT+ Christians affectionately called EF. EF held two weekend retreats each year, Here we would have a speaker, would hold services and also have fellowship. For many at the weekend retreats this would be the only “church” they would have now.

It's tough being an Evangelical Gay Christian. Over the years I've held office in EF and with the Forum I have attended several Pride marches in and around Europe. One notable event was in Riga Latvia. The marchers were protected by armed police in the streets but as we stepped out of a church service the priest was pelted with urine and faeces. One woman leapt forward and hit him on the head with a Bible... It was a very scary time.

As the years pass I have witnessed many changes for the good, Improved attitudes to LGBT+ folk. Churches becoming Inclusive and welcoming and others agreeing to same sex marriage. It is really encouraging but there is more to be done. Gay Christians are still in danger around the world and lives are at risk. I have met and worshipped with LGBT activists from some of these places and admire their courage and determination.

Equality is not reached until everyone is included. Brothers, sisters carry on.

*Pam Gold*