



KATE MOYNIHAN SPEAKS TO ACI, ON 28th OCT '21 & BEGINS TO EDUCATE US ON COMING OUT LOUD AND PROUD AS LGBTQI+ ALLIES

Why we needed Kate Moynihan to speak to us.



The ACI recognises that a good measure of how safe any community is for all its members, is how accepting it is of those with minority identities; not a 'putting up with' or 'patronising' sort of acceptance but a 'making a welcoming and equal space for' sort of acceptance, where everyone can experience a sense of wellbeing and belonging.

We know that pride / joy is cultivated in communities where negative attitudinal barriers are identified and actively dismantled so that we all have the freedom to be our authentic selves, whatever our minority identities are.

As a Christian organisation, the Jesus who inspires and motivates us, is a radical role model; he always made strong connections with people on the margins, whose identities were diminished by the dominant, privileged group of his time. He constantly turned the perceived social hierarchy of his day on its head. He challenged people to recognise their own prejudice and the power they wielded, simply by their status as part of a dominant, privileged group.

As a lay Catholic organisation we acknowledge with heartfelt apology the enormous injustice that our church inflicts on LGBTQI+ people. (Read our 2018 report [Future Families](#) and 2021 statement [Finding Grace in all Loving Relationships](#).)

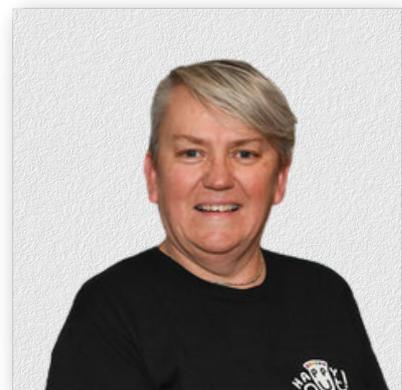
We want above all, to learn how to be allies to the LGBTQI+ community both within and outside our church. It is in this spirit that we invited Kate Moynihan CEO of LINC to speak to us about the lived experience of lesbian and bi-sexual women, especially those who are still members of the Catholic Church. We are privileged and grateful that Kate accepted our invitation.

Who is Kate ?

Kate Moynihan has been the CEO of [LINC](#) for the past 10 years. Founded and based in Cork, LINC is a unique organisation within the Republic of Ireland, committed to informing and impacting upon social inclusion policy and practice and providing peer support services to the lesbian and bisexual community.

LINC provides a safe haven / community for women who are at different points on their personal journey with their identity. It also reaches out to the wider community and offers vital education and awareness training on LGBTQI+ issues to organisations, groups and employers who wish to listen and learn how to create a diversity friendly culture.

Kate has a depth of knowledge, empathy and expertise on issues that impact on the wellbeing of lesbian and bisexual women and she is an advocate and advisor at a national level for societal and governmental initiatives that will help create a world where any young person who has an LGBTQI identity is more likely to feel safe and thrive.



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The ACI acknowledges that the Institutional Catholic Church has at best a patronising and conditional acceptance of Lesbian and bi-sexual women and at worst it has been a cold and hostile place, with official church teaching for instance, mandating that Catholics, outside an exclusively heterosexual, marital relationship should live a life of “chastity”. It is not surprising therefore that Kate was initially reluctant to accept an invitation to speak to the Association of Catholics in Ireland.

Why did Kate agree to speak to us ?

For Kate, speaking to a group, associated with an organisation that, in the words of Archbishop Diarmuid Martin, has made the lives of LGBTQI+ people miserable, has held its challenges. To be seen to engage with an organisation which uses words such as “intrinsically disordered” to describe LGBTQI+ people and which has airbrushed images of same-sex couples from its literature, could justifiably draw criticism from within the LGBTQI+ community.

After several invitations, Kate chose to speak as she is an advocate for all LINC members, including those women who identify as practicing Catholics and feel the weight of negative pronouncements on their sexual orientation and risk negative and homophobic responses from their faith community.

On 'being graced' by Kate's presence

It was within this context, that we can say we were 'graced' by Kate's calm and dignified presence and the clarity with which she spoke to us and responded to our questions. There was sense that this was a rare and precious opportunity for all present to learn directly from a leader of the Irish LGBTQI+ community.

There was also a sense of a pivotal shift in a power dynamic; here was someone from a marginalised, minority group that was historically oppressed in a society dominated by rigid Church teaching, speaking with clarity, composure and authenticity about the impact of this oppression, to representatives of that very organisation.

Kate could easily have chosen to dismiss any group associated with the Catholic Church. We are thankful to her for being willing to engage with us; for her ability to take a broad historical perspective and to inform and educate all those present, in order to help us reframe our own thinking.



Finding common ground

Kate who is no longer affiliated to the Catholic church herself, began her talk by establishing some common ground. She shared some fond childhood memories familiar to all of us who grew up in Catholic Ireland of the 60s or 70s, such as singing in the church choir and annual family pilgrimages to Knock which were the highlight of her summer holidays.

The loss in hiding a part of our identity and the gain in revealing it.

These happy childhood memories were overshadowed however by the dilemma Kate experienced, as a young woman, when she felt unable to reveal an important part of her identity to her parents, such as the negativity projected onto that part of her identity by the society of the time and a dominant Catholic church, which had such a powerful psychological hold over people.

Among the many poignant motifs of Kate's talk, was how many adults of all ages have hidden their LGBTQI+ identities from their own parents, not simply for fear of rejection but often due to empathy and concern for their elderly parents and the wish to protect them from the inevitable conflict and pain this knowledge might bring.

Like many others, as a young adult, Kate left a then oppressive and homophobic Ireland of the early 1980s to find a safer and welcoming culture abroad, where she had less need to hide her identity. She returned to Ireland in the mid 1980s and eventually came out to her mother who by then was able to reframe her own take on church teaching and accept Kate's identity.



Changes in the lived experience of LGBTQI+ Community in Ireland

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Kate spoke about how life has been difficult and still is for many people with a minority LGBTQI+ identity, in a culture where it was only as recently as 1993 that homosexuality was decriminalised.

She spoke about progress in the past decade such as Civil Partnership Legislation in 2011, followed by the Same-Sex Marriage Referendum in 2015, which was also a wonderful and liberating opportunity for the majority of the Irish population to show their solidarity with the minority LGBTQI+ population. **2.5% of all marriages are now same-sex.**

While this is indeed progress and many LGBTQI+ people report the same levels of wellbeing and life satisfaction as their non-LGBTQI+ peers, there is still much cause for concern.



The 2016 report “The LGBTIreland Report: national study of the mental health and wellbeing of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people in Ireland” found that there is still a considerably higher level of distress among younger LGBTQI+ people, compared to their non-LGBTQI+ peers. LGBTQI+ youth are twice as likely to experience self-harm, three times more likely to experience suicidal ideation, and four times more likely to experience extreme stress, anxiety, and depression.

Detailed information about the lived experience of LGBTQI+ people in Ireland today is contained in this report which Kate referred to. It is essential reading for anyone who wishes to fully empathise with and become an ally of the LGBTQI+ community. It provides many examples of the lived experiences of different generations of people with LGBTQI+ identities and how they navigate a predominantly non-LGBTQI+ world.

[\(Read full report here\).](#)

Being part of any minority group, even in the most supportive cultures, carries stress, particularly for a young person gradually recognising and acknowledging their minority sexuality or gender identity. Kate told us about the barriers that still exist in society for LGBTQI+ people which may prevent them from confidently self-disclosing. These barriers are mainly around fear of rejection and judgement and can come from many sources: from their peers; colleagues; parents; children or perhaps members of their religious communities.

We were told about the strong sense among many LGBTQI+ people of “sticking out” and not “fitting in” to the extent they would wish so that ultimately their identity is normalised and no longer a cause for a second thought by anyone.



The Experience of LGBTQI+ Catholics

This sense of “not fitting in” is especially true in any context associated with the Catholic church. Kate in her role as advocate has heard first-hand, the stories of Catholic women who despite much progress in wider society, continue to feel vulnerable and experience the considerable stress of concealing their identity in different contexts; including hiding their Catholic identity, from the members of the LGBTQI+ community and their LGBTQI+ identity from members of the Catholic community.

This feeling of vulnerability is particularly acute for teachers who are mostly employed in schools with a Catholic patronage and are the most likely group to hide their identity as LGBTQI+. In a survey commissioned by the INTO, it was found that fewer than 1 in 5 LGBTQI+ teachers is out to staff, parents and pupils



at school and that having secured a permanent job teachers are more likely to come out as they no longer fear encountering negative bias at a job interview. (Read INTO Report [here](#).)

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One member of LINC, who was unable to attend our meeting, sent an honest and open message to us via Kate, who read this message to us. This member told us that while she is still involved with the Catholic Church, she regards herself as a Christian first. She told us that her deeply religious, elderly parents know nothing of her lesbian identity.

The Hurt

This member also spoke to us about hurt; the hurt caused by the language used in official church teaching to describe her as “**intrinsically disordered**”; the damage caused to her and other LGBTQI+ individuals and their families by priests who used their Sunday homilies as a forum to advocate for a “no” vote during the Same-Sex marriage referendum. She also spoke about her own relationship with Jesus which she described as stronger than ever and she posed this question: “**Would Jesus condemn me?**”.

Fortunately she received pastoral support from a priest who reassured her that she is “sound” just as she is, and thereby affirmed her identity and “belonging” to her local faith community.

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She called for conversations about the hurt, trauma and shame experienced by LGBTQI+ Catholics to be spread far and wide within the Catholic Church.

LGBTQI+ Diversity Awareness and Training

Kate reinforced this call-out and spoke about the importance of undergoing education and training to develop awareness of diversity and issues affecting LGBTQI+ people, by individuals from any organisation, including the Catholic Church and local parish communities, if they wish to progress from a passive form of awareness, to a more active allyship that promotes justice and equality for LGBTQI+ people within their organisation or community.



Homophobia is not uncommon, it can be institutional, cultural and personal and can exist in both straight and LGBTQI+ people, such is the internalised stigma that exists among many people who have grown up in a society with prevailing homophobic attitudes and stereotyping of LGBTQI+ identities.

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It takes courage and honesty to approach our potential, latent and often subtle homophobia with a gentle curiosity and willingness to uncover, acknowledge and understand its origins. We can be supported in this process by engaging in vital LGBTQI+ education and awareness training that Kate spoke to us about.

As Kate recounted from personal experience, homophobia can be very subtle and may be embedded in patronising attitudes, language and contorted statements, which intend to offer support but succeed in diminishing the LGBTQI+ person by implying that they are disordered and to be pitied.

Kate recalled how, when campaigning during the Marriage Equality Referendum, a woman, wishing to offer support and empathy, stated that she would vote ‘yes’ and ended the doorstep encounter with the remark “sure couldn’t it happen to any of us”, thereby revealing an underlying assumption that being LGBTQI+ is an affliction to be born bravely perhaps, rather than a natural and valid human variation, just like any other.

Does the LGBTQI+ Community feel supported by any church ?

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Kate spoke about the open and inclusive atmosphere in St Anne’s Anglican church in Shandon, Co.Cork, which attracts many Catholics and where COI Bishop, Paul Colton is an advocate for LGBTQI+ Christians.

From our own experience in the ACI, we are aware that within the Catholic Church it can depend on the courage and vision of the local priest and community. Some priests, such as the late and much loved, Fr Tony Coote R.I.P. reached out to and welcomed the LGBTQI+ community with a proactive and inclusive pastoral care. We know there are other examples where priests and parish communities are quietly or not so quietly reaching out to the LGBTQI+ community, such as the parish community in Ballyfermot that flew the Pride flag recently and the Avila centre in Donnybrook which has held a monthly “All are Welcome Mass” to include members of the LGBTQI+ community and their families.

Kate spoke about the difference that blessings would make to same-sex couples and the sense of belonging and affirmation a blessing would bring to those women whom she knows personally who are members of the church. She quoted the words of Fr Paddy Byrne who spoke about the freedom to bless crops and animals but not same-sex couples ([read more here](#)) and the words of Bishop Paul Dempsey who acknowledged how the language used in a March 2021 judgement by the Vatican CDF on same-sex blessings ‘at best is experienced as cold and distant and at worst hurtful and offensive,’ ([read more here](#)).

A member of LINC, generously, accompanied Kate to our meeting and joined in the discussion.

This member gave a powerful account of her experience as a woman in a same-sex marriage, who is in active ministry in her parish. She spoke about the hurt and rejection she experiences because of official Church teaching and the how gutting it is to know that she is excommunicated, in the eyes of the institutional Church by virtue of her marriage. While she is accepted by her parish priest who has adopted an inclusive pastoral approach and never judges her or treats her differently, she remains in fear that she might be ‘called out’ for her identity and relationship by any member of her parish community who may have a rigid judgmental and negative view of same-sex relationships.



Poland

While the influence of Catholic Church teaching on secular Ireland is minimal today, in many other countries around the world, where the Catholic Church is expanding or still holds a dominant position, that influence still holds and homophobia is often rampant, overt and often dangerous.

Kate spoke about Poland as an example of a country where an influential, traditionalist and outspoken Catholic Church Hierarchy, along with an oppressively conservative government are driving homophobia and creating an extremely hostile environment for LGBTQI+ people.

We know that in August 2020 for example, the Polish Episcopal Conference released a document which recommended the creation of counselling centres '*to help people who want to regain their sexual health and natural sexual orientation*', thereby promoting 'Conversion Therapy' a harmful and abusive practice that is promoted by some evangelical Christian denominations and is soon to be prohibited in Ireland by the [Prohibition of Conversion Therapies Bill 2018](#).

On becoming an Ally

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As a lay Catholic organisation the ACI acknowledges the enormous injustice that our church inflicts on LGBTQI+ people & our historical complicity in their oppression, especially by our silence.

We recognise the importance for us to progress from a position of awareness and regret to allyship and solidarity.

Kate gave us the following advice on what we can do to show solidarity with LGBTQI+ Catholics.

-  Organise training in LGBTQI+ awareness and advocacy and promote this training in our faith communities.
-  Be willing to challenge our church leaders and clergy to join us in exploring and acknowledging homophobia which is intrinsic to the Catholic Church.
-  Be visible and vocal as a friend and invite LGBTQI+ people in.
-  Take part in events such as pride parades as an ally.
-  Challenge homophobic remarks and humour.
-  Advocate for awareness raising and support events for young people in local schools, such as [Stand Up Awareness Week](#), organised by [BeLonG To Youth Services](#), the national organisation supporting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex young people in Ireland.

Discussion and comments from attendees.

Attendees at the event demonstrated overwhelming solidarity and support for Kate and the LGBTQI+ community. These are some of the contributions from attendees.

A parent of a young LGBTQI+ person spoke about their sense of vulnerability as a parishioner with a ministry in their local Catholic church, they wished for more overt acceptance and clarity from their church community, which would help dispel this sense of vulnerability. They also asked:

“Would Christ condemn or welcome my child?”

They spoke about the conflict between official church teaching promoted by schools’ patron and the DES National Curriculum in schools, which promotes inclusion and equality for all minority groups.

They also spoke about their own sense of sadness and concern for the Church; that it risks dissolution over its teachings on LGBTQI+ people, which the majority of lay Catholics no longer accept, nor wish to collude with.

A family doctor spoke about the reality of life he encounters in his medical practice where they actively welcome LGBTQI+ patients. He appealed to the Bishop’s Conference to acknowledge and affirm the broad spectrum or continuum of gender identities and sexual orientations that exist, along with other human characteristics such as height or hair colour that are not simply chosen by individuals.

One of the bishops in attendance thanked Kate for her very insightful and helpful input and observed that there were six bishops in attendance, 25% of the Bishops’ Conference!

Another bishop also thanked Kate and asked for her advice on how his diocese could reach out and be more inclusive of LGBTQI+ people

Discussion and comments from attendees cntd.....

The problem of internalised homophobia and repression of LGBTQI+ identities among Catholic clergy was noted, which is particularly concerning; not just for the wellbeing of individuals affected, but for the Church itself, if it wishes to be more welcoming & inclusive.

One of the most effective ways of encouraging young LGBTQI+ people, is for an organisation to have a visible presence of confidently open LGBTQI+ people in leadership roles.

Sadly the Catholic church is devoid of this form of representation at this time.

An attendee spoke about the importance of all parishes proactively creating a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere, rather than designating a few churches as being welcoming and safe for LGBTQI+ Catholics and their families.

The question was posed: "Is it possible for the Bishops, as part of the synodal process, to engage in an apologetic, listening encounter with the LGBTQI+ community and their allies, that is conditional on an acceptance of traditional church teaching regarding same-sex relationships. "

To Conclude

From a Christian perspective, the life of Jesus and His suffering can be viewed as a radical act of solidarity with all who encounter stigma, oppression and injustice.

He calls all Christians to lives of solidarity with the oppressed. We are asked to free ourselves from internalised stigma that prevents us from recognising ourselves as unique "whole" and authentic beings that are "of God".

The ability to shed internalised stigma and feel joy in who we are, is especially difficult having grown up in a society or group which has traditionally viewed certain human variations and differences as 'defects'.

Advocating for and supporting women along this journey is what Kate Moynihan and LINC is about.

This is one of many faith-based reasons, for us as a group of lay Christians to explore our own experience of prejudice and learn to walk in solidarity with any minority group that is at risk of stigma... and to come out loud and proud as LGBTQI+ allies.