

# A message for you from Urzula Glienecke (she/her), Associate Chaplain and SPN volunteer

Dear Members,

Today we have an exciting and emotive message for you from Urzula Glienecke (she/her), Associate Chaplain and SPN volunteer:

*I'm delighted to share some great news from the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. Today it voted in favour of 'same sex' marriage. Many voices were saying: 'At last!' It has been too long and with much struggle heartbreak on the way, but it has happened now. It means that those ministers of the CoS whose hearts have been longing to conduct LGBTQ+ weddings now may do so – including me! And I would be more than delighted to!*

*This means a lot to me as I grew up under a system that was highly oppressive against LGBTQ people. My country Latvia was occupied by the Soviet Union, where being gay was not talked about and treated as a medical disorder. A lot of people couldn't be who they were, couldn't live the life they deserved. When the resistance movement I was part of (the Underground Church, the Barricades, the Baltic Chain) was successful in the end and the Baltic States became free and independent, many things changed for the better, but not enough. There is still a lot of discrimination and injustice, despite the fact that the countries have become part of the EU. Because of that I am involved in fighting for gender*

*justice, equality, inclusion and diversity – together with the Latvian Open Church Network and the Women Theologians' Association.*

*One of the best things that have happened recently as a result of this work is this:*

*Patvērums Baptist Church (The Refuge) is a small congregation in Latvia that is passionate about LGBTQ+ inclusion and empowering women for the glory of God. The church was founded in August 2021 and offers an alternative view for Latvian Christianity.*

*Our church was born out of a pressing need in the community. My wife and I were hearing more and more about our friends being isolated from their churches because of their sexuality and views. Our friends were being denied the opportunity to serve in the church in any capacity because of their same-sex relationship, and they knew that if they continued to attend church, they would keep getting angry emails from their brothers and sisters, and people would not even hide the fact that they were praying for their family to end in divorce.*

*My wife Kaiva was a member of a Baptist church, and while she still attended the church's youth events, there were many occasions when the organisers for their youth services could not find a preacher, a man who would preach. So my wife decided to come forward and preach, only to be told afterwards by a brother that "he couldn't hear a word because she is a woman".*

*Personally, I, a seminary graduate and worship leader, was*

told that I would no longer be invited to preach because I had dared to say publicly that I would vote for a party that supports LGBTQ+ rights in the upcoming general election. That was the moment I realised that I would be even more ostracised in the church if I had not been “lucky” – as a bisexual man I had fallen in love and married a woman. I experienced just a little of what my LGBTQ+ brothers and sisters in the church faced on a daily basis.

And so we got together and slowly started dreaming of an inclusive and affirming Baptist church here in Latvia. We contacted people in the much more experienced St Saviour’s Anglican Church in Riga for advice and felt that this is the direction God wants to take us. I also met with the Bishop of the Union of Baptist Churches in Latvia and he made it clear that there will be no relationship between our church and the Union.

At the moment we meet weekly for our services and most of us are still healing from the traumas we experienced in previous churches. We are working to create an environment where same-sex couples can be part of the church and serve without hindrance, and where their families are celebrated. And everyone has the opportunity to preach and lead – regardless of their gender.

We see that an inclusive, affirming and egalitarian Baptist church is a great need in Latvia. Currently, the Union of Baptist Churches in Latvia is campaigning for an amendment to the Latvian Constitution that defines a family as “one man, one woman and children”. The former bishop and the pastor of the largest Baptist church in Latvia have just been published in a political advertisement newspaper promoting a party that

*is also campaigning for this change in the constitution.*

*We plan to make our church more open to newcomers and to publish articles on our website about the Bible verses that are so often used against people from the LGBTQ+ community and women in leadership positions. We are only a small group of people, but I believe that God has called us to show His love for all people in a loud, meaningful and healing way.*

*(Jānis Uplejs)*

*There are many Christian churches which are inclusive and welcoming here in Edinburgh: Augustine United & Your Tribe: <https://www.lgbthealth.org.uk/lgbt-community-groups-scotland/trans-community-groups>, St Andrew's St George's West, Broughton St Mary's, Greyfriars Kirk and of course the Chaplaincy here at the University of Edinburgh, for all religions and none. Everybody is welcome, everybody is loved. You are wonderful just the way you are!*

*Urzula (she/her)*

*Associate Chaplain*

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# **Officially a proud member of the Rainbow Enterprise Network**

This is to certify that the University of Edinburgh is a proud member of the Rainbow Enterprise Network.

By joining, they have pledged to actively and positively promote equality, diversity and inclusion. Everyone is very welcome to use their spaces and services, including LGBTQ+ and intersectional communities. This is a safe place and they will treat all people with kindness while promoting the value of compassionate inclusion to others.

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## **Shared Parental Leave: Another Perspective**

IDAHOBIT 2022 (International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, & Transphobia) is coming up next week.

The Staff Pride Network are marking the date with an online event:

**IDAHOBIT: Becoming and Being Gay Parents**

**Tues 17 May, 17:30 – 18:30 BST**

**Register to attend via Eventbrite / find out more**

See below for a blog post from Nicola Osborne, Programme Manager in the Bayes Centre, with an important perspective of Shared Parental Leave.

This blog was originally posted by the Bulletin staff newsletter – see the original post [here](#).

### ***Shared Parental Leave: Another Perspective***

I was so pleased to see Shared Parental Leave highlighted in the last issue of Bulletin, and it was good to see men's mental health month as part of the Shared Parental Leave experience, but I was disappointed that there were other parents who take Shared Parental Leave missing from the piece.

Shared Parental Leave isn't just for fathers, it's for partners of any gender whose partners are expecting a baby, or who have a child coming into their lives through adoption. Parents who benefit from SPL include all kinds of people including queer, lesbian, gay, trans, and non-binary people, not just heterosexual men and not just families with two biological parents.

I'm one of those whose experience wasn't captured in that piece: I'm the non-birth mum of our wonderful three-and-a-half-year-old daughter Carys. I am listed on the birth certificate of my daughter, because although I'm not her birth mum, I am in a civil partnership with her birth mum and UK law recognises me as her legal parent. The University also recognises me as her legal parent and eligible to take SPL, something I am delighted I was able to do – taking over her full-time care when my partner Heather curtailed her maternity leave after six months.

Like all couples looking at SPL, it was a joint decision with lots of factors coming into play. We wanted to be equal parents in our daughter's life, we both wanted to have time to spend with her in those early months, and we looked at the practicalities of our respective employers' policies. For us, the decision was financially simple: the University had an SPL period of 16 weeks full pay, whilst my partner's employer

offered statutory maternity pay (six weeks at 90per cent of pay then down to ~£145 per week). My partner did an amazing job of our daughter's first months, then after two weeks where we were off together, I took sole care of her until she started nursery at 10 months.

The world of parenting is often quite heteronormative – I remember cringing at NHS ante natal sessions at the highly gendered portrayal of roles and responsibilities. I rarely see representation of families that look like ours: our daughter has her two mums but also an extended family of people who care for her, whether their connection is biological or not. Making a non-traditional family takes time, planning and often complex communication and I think it is therefore not surprising that whilst I know many couples with children, my experience is that the queer families I know have all taken SPL under equitable terms.

When the University originally introduced and still when it talks about SPL and SPL experiences, a lot of that communication focuses on 'fathers' not 'parents' and that has always felt excluding for me. I know that men (across the UK) have been notoriously poor at taking SPL – when negotiating the terms of my own SPL (in 2018) I learned that the uptake had been terrible (both in terms of number of people and number of weeks taken). At that time the SPL policies at the University were well intended but problematic in terms of the timeline in which partners could take their SPL – making it difficult for partners to take fully paid SPL as full-time carer of their child, which meant it was being treated by many as an extension of paternity leave, taken only whilst the 'lead' parent was also on leave. That policy was, thankfully, changed in time for me to take the fully paid SPL entitlement when my partner returned to work after six months. I'm extremely pleased that non-birth parents (of all varieties) are now taking advantage of the University's generous SPL policy more often, and enjoyed reading those experiences

shared in Bulletin last time.

For me SPL was a wonderful and challenging time. I got to know and bond with my daughter intensely; I learned a lot about where my own parenting skills excel (memorising calming stories to recount at nappy changes) and where they are terrible (remaining calm in the face of crawling and climbing missteps). I particularly gained a new level of appreciation of just how amazing my partner had been in those first months and how hard that must have been whilst I was at work. I did also have a chance to step away from my day-to-day work – something that was both challenging and helpful for my own mental health, and which ultimately led to a change of role to my current (wonderful) job. It wasn't time off, but SPL was a rare opportunity to focus purely on being a parent for a while and I wouldn't have missed those months with my daughter for anything. I hope parents of all types remember that they have that same opportunity – fathers of course, but also all the other many diversities of parents eligible to take SPL to take care of their newly born or adopted children.

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## Colleague Heartstopper

## Review:

*Margaret Blake shares some thoughts on the new LGBT+ coming-of age series.*

Hi, I'm Margaret and I work at the School of Informatics.

I was just speaking with Jonathan (Staff Pride Network co-chair) about 'Heartstopper', a new series that is available



on Netflix, which I've been watching with my 14 year-old daughter. She'd mentioned it to me recently, as she'd binge watched it all in one night, has since watched it all again, and asked me to watch it with her.

It's a brilliant, feel-good teen drama. The story is set in two schools – an all-boys school and an all-girls school. The main character is Charlie, an openly gay teenager who has to sit next to Nick in his form class. Nick is an older boy, enjoys rugby, has a group of boisterous mates and lots of girls fawn over him. Charlie really likes Nick but thinks there is no chance of anything romantic happening, so makes do with becoming Nick's best friend, until a party changes all that.

Meanwhile, Charlie has a group of really good friends including Tao, Isaac and Elle. Elle is a trans pupil and has recently moved to the all-girls school. SPOILER ALERT: She has a positive experience at the all-girls school.

This is classed as a coming-of-age series, and that perfectly describes it. I've still got two episodes to watch and I'm really looking forward to watching them with my daughter. It makes me happy to watch, and I think it's brilliant that things have come on so far in television that such a series even exists, as it wouldn't have when I was growing up in the 80s.

*Did you enjoy Heartstopper? What other LGBT+ media are you enjoying? Let us know in the comments or via socials: Twitter | Instagram*

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