

Gays for God Clockwise – BMCF's Easter sermon; homemade Holy Communion used during the service; fellowship leader Pastor Silas Wong



Hail Mary, full of gays

Arthur Tam finds out how a Hong Kong church helps religious LGBTs to bolster their faith in Christianity

On the surface, homosexuality and Christianity seem like contradictions. Perhaps even enemies. There's more than just a little bit of history between the two (think 'God created Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve' for starters...). But one outwardly LGBT-affirming church in Hong Kong, the Blessed Minority Christian Fellowship, does things a little differently. It hopes to reconcile the conflict between being gay and believing in God. A noble mission, even if it is completely the opposite to other, more traditional sections of Christianity. But it's refreshing for those who are both homosexual and religious too.

BMCF, a non-denominational church, has a history of 20 years in the city, starting from a small group of gay believers and growing into today's congregation of more than 200 members. About 98 percent of the congregation is LGBT with 'straight allies' like resident pastor Silas Wong making up the remaining two percent. As with most churches, BMCF has study groups for new Christians, bible study, retreats and evangelistic camps.

Unfortunately, despite times a-changin', this is the only outwardly-affirming LGBT-affirming Christian church in Hong Kong as opposed to a dozen which denounce homosexuality. The most notorious of them, in our humble opinion,

is the Society of Truth and Light. In 2005, Choi Chi-sum, general secretary of the STL, expressed his opposition to anti-sexual discrimination legislation, stating that homosexuality is 'unhealthy and dangerous for society' and 'to equate gay rights and human rights is just wrong'. Today, Hong Kong still lacks a law protecting its LGBT citizens and the messages from STL and its proponents paint a harsh anti-gay picture: namely, LGBT members are not welcome within church walls.

The history of homophobia from certain churches in Hong Kong led Pastor Wong to re-interpret his divine teachings. He saw the light, in fact. "Can we interpret a few passages and condemn a whole group of people?" he says. "I don't think there is an absolute – and certainly the STL is not the whole truth. We need to embrace the gay community. We need to have a discussion."

Before joining BMCF, Wong used to be part of the Christian and Missionary Alliance Church, which had close ties with STL – but when the 'STL actively went out against the LGBT community, that was the last straw', he tells us. Wong severed ties with CMAC and began

preaching quarterly at BMCF before becoming their resident pastor in 2008. Now his goal is to work with the BMCF in sharing his faith with LGBT members.

BMCF offers what it calls a 'recovery group' for its members trying to find peace between their faith and their sexuality. "The recovery group seeks to undo the hurt and pain afflicted through spiritual and religious abuse internalised through misinterpretation from many of the congregants," says BMCF board member Paul Lucas. Lucas himself grew up in a fundamentalist Pentecostal home and claims he understands the process for many

LGBT members who are willing to re-interpret what they have learned their whole lives. The recovery group usually spans three months and involves discussion groups where Pastor Wong sends out the re-affirming message: "God does not give up. God loves you, so love yourself, so you can love others."

And for members who haven't been scarred but instead are seeking an accepting and non-judgemental space, BMCF allows for honest and open discussions. It's a place of shared experience for folks going through the same struggles.

It's perfectly okay to be Christian and gay

Church choir pianist Ezekiel Ng says: "BMCF has liberated my worship during its Sunday service. In the past, I carried a sense of guilt and shame to Sunday service. Now, at BMCF, I can be 100 percent open, honest, authentic – my true self at church." Like Ng, most members of the church have not come out to their families. Ng explains that it was important for him to have found this congregation because 'many gay Christians have been marginalised from the Christian community and the LGBT community. An openly-inclusive church sends a clear message to both communities in Hong Kong that it's perfectly okay to be Christian and LGBT'.

Pastor Wong has at least one piece of compelling evidence to support Ezekiel Ng's message. "The Bible really never states anything about homosexual relationships – only people that have exhibited homosexual behavior," says Pastor Wong. "They didn't know about love between same-sex couples back then and were basing their judgements on a narrow scope." Luckily for Hong Kong's LGBT population, the Blessed Minority Christian Fellowship is at least one place that's adopting a wider, perspective. We can only have faith that more places of worship are willing to open their gates.

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timeout.com.hk/gay-lesbian