



Rainbow Faith  
and Freedom

**WORSHIPPING  
WITH LOVE**

FINAL REPORT

Exploring experiences of religious-based  
homophobia & transphobia  
in places of worship.



Women and Gender  
Equality Canada

Femme et Égalité  
des genres Canada

Canada



Rainbow Faith  
and Freedom

THIS RESEARCH PROJECT IS FUNDED BY WOMEN AND GENDER EQUALITY CANADA.

# Acknowledgement

**LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT:** This report engages the people who reside on the land on Turtle Island that is now referred to as Canada, a name likely derived from the Huron-Iroquois word “kanata.” We at Rainbow Faith and Freedom (RFF) acknowledge the land on which we operate and the ongoing struggle for Indigenous sovereignty. Tkaronto, under Treaty 13, is the traditional territory of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca, and the Mississaugas of the Credit River. In a spirit of reconciliation, RFF prioritizes and honours the long history of Indigenous sexuality and gender expression, which colonizing religious institutions continue to suppress.

## THE REPORT:

This research was generously funded by the Women and Gender Equality Canada, executed by Kayla Musyj and Gabriele Praise-Forester, written by Kayla Musyj and supervised by Dr. Stephen Low and Rev. Brent Hawkes. Special thanks to the other team members who made this work possible, Nashwa Khan, Sarah McClark, Allyson Louie, and Dr. Melissa Ptok.



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**LANGUAGE:** The acronym ‘2SLGBTQ+’ refers to people who identify as Two-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or queer, and the plus sign recognizes the identities or experiences unaccounted for in the acronym. Over time, various terminologies have been reclaimed from their original derogatory contexts, most prominently the word ‘queer.’ 2SLGBTQ+ community members sometimes use ‘queer’ to signify the entirety of identified communities. As a shorthand, this report uses the acronym ‘2SLGBTQ+’ and “queer” interchangeably to refer to the aforementioned community.



# Rainbow Faith and Freedom

WORSHIPPING WITH LOVE

## RAINBOW FAITH AND FREEDOM & WORSHIPPING WITH LOVE:

**Rainbow Faith and Freedom (RFF) is a Toronto-based charity that directly confronts and ends religious-based discrimination to make the world safer for 2SLGBTQ+ people and their allies. To do this, RFF advocates to change the hearts and minds of religious communities to be affirming and inclusive of 2SLGBTQ+ people and their allies.**

RFF is a unique Canadian organization because it recognizes that religious-based discrimination is a significant problem in Canada that warrants urgent attention. RFF, in contrast to most other 2SLGBTQ+ human rights organizations, does not believe that religious beliefs can be ignored any longer in the fight to end homophobia and transphobia. Because religious institutions continue to weaponize belief to perpetuate discrimination of 2SLGBTQ+ people, and because religious belief is a human right, religious-discrimination must be confronted from a religious perspective that both affirms and is inclusive of 2SLGBTQ+ identity and faith.

Worshipping with Love is a research project Rainbow Faith and Freedom developed to create a safer place for 2SLGBTQ+ people everywhere, but specifically for 2SLGBTQ+ people of faith in Ontario. Worshipping with Love is a 2-year, Ontario-based research project funded by Women and Gender Equality Canada.



**Imagine a world where religions  
don't see gender identity,  
so all people can practice their  
faith free from discrimination.**



**Rainbow Faith  
and Freedom**

# THE PROBLEM

Although Canada is a leader in 2SLGBTQ+ legislation, many people in different sectors of Canadian society still experience homophobia and transphobia. Equality in law does not mean equality in lived experience. 2SLGBTQ+ discrimination in Canada exists despite progressive legislation. This has led to higher rates of suicide, addictions, and mental health issues in these communities[1]. It has also led to higher rates of unemployment, hate crimes, and marginalization[2]. 2SLGBTQ+ discrimination is often justified by religious belief by different faith traditions in communities. RFF is a unique Canadian organization because it recognizes that religious-based discrimination is a problem and is the most powerful and influential source of homophobia and transphobia in Canada.

# THE PURPOSE

Though RFF has a global mandate to end religious-based discrimination, this particular research project is focused on Ontario, Canada and achieving inclusion and equality for 2SLGBTQ+ people in Ontario. As part of this research project, over 3,000 Ontarians were surveyed and 12 were interviewed about their experiences with religious based homophobia and transphobia in places of worship. This report outlines those findings.

[1] Heather Gilmour, "Sexual Orientation and Complete Mental Health," Statistics Canada, last modified November 20, 2019, accessed March 25, 2023, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/82-003-x/2019011/article/00001/abstract-resultat-eng.htm>.

[2] Statistics Canada, "Labour and Economic Characteristics of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual People in Canada," last modified October 4, 2022, accessed March 25, 2023, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/89-28-0001/2022001/article/00003-eng.htm>; Department of Justice Canada, "Disproportionate Harm: Hate Crime in Canada," last modified April 4, 1995, accessed March 25, 2023, [https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/csj-sjc/crime/wd95\\_11-dt95\\_11/p3.html](https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/csj-sjc/crime/wd95_11-dt95_11/p3.html);





# KEY FINDINGS



The lived experience for most 2SLGBTQ+ folks in Ontario is one of **exclusion** as many places of worship fail to allow same sex marriage, ordination, welcome the queer community into the space and at their worst engage in explicit homophobia and transphobia.

## 54%

2SLGBTQ+ folks have experienced homophobia or transphobia in their places of worship.

## 39%\*

2SLGBTQ+ folks who do not currently practice but have in the past have personally experienced or witnessed homophobia from their former place of worship.

**\*3X MORE** than that of heterosexual identifying respondents (13% of whom have personally experienced or witnessed homophobia)

## 88%

2SLGBTQ+ folks who have never practiced religion, who believe either that faith communities are unsafe for the queer community (51%) or are unsure (37%). 85% of heterosexual respondents feel the same (includes those who are sure and unsure).

## 29%

2SLGBTQ+ respondents who say homophobia/transphobia has been directed at someone in their presence.

## 55%\*

2SLGBTQ+ respondents who have never practiced religion state that religion has been used as a justification for homophobia or transphobia directed at them or someone in their presence.

## 44%

18-to-24-year-old respondents report that religion has been used as a justification for homophobia or transphobia directed at them or someone in their presence.

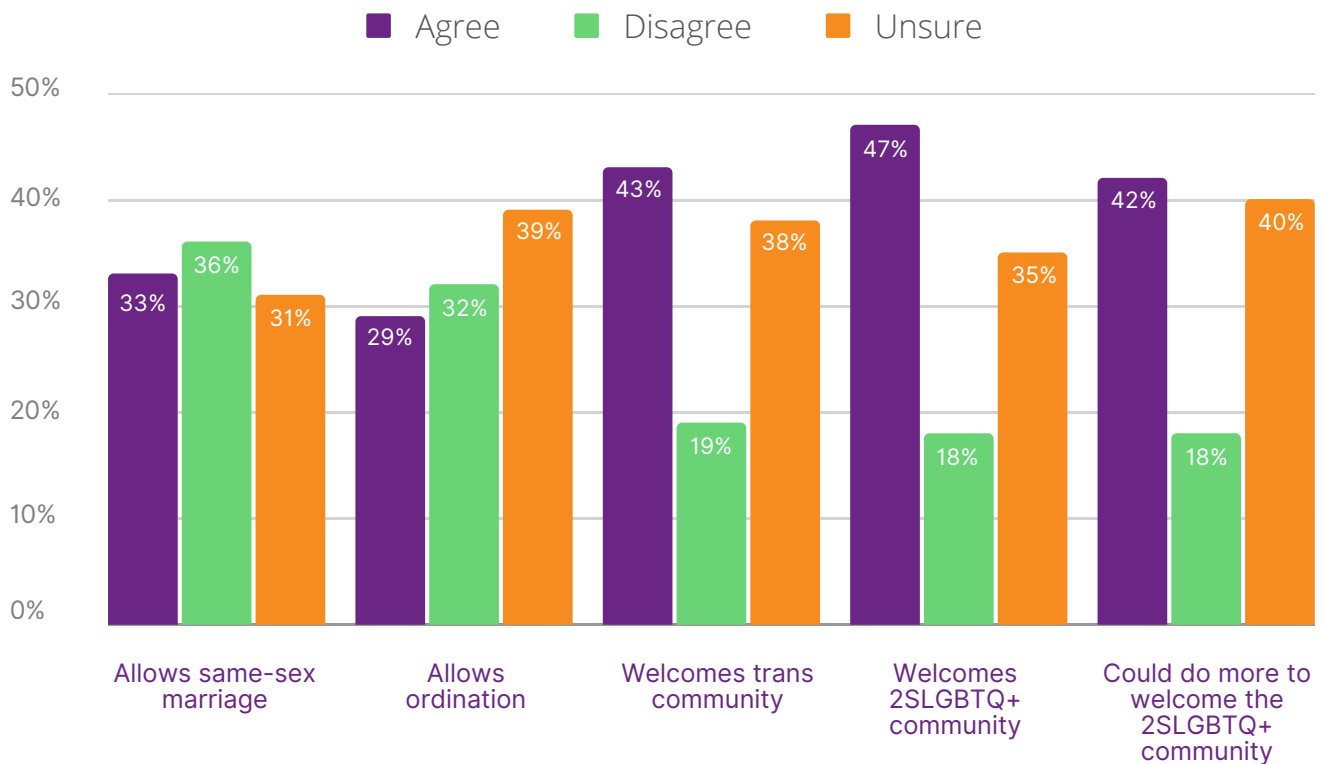
**\*This is nearly double that of heterosexual-identifying respondents** (15% say that religion has been used as a justification for homophobia or transphobia directed at someone in their presence)



# AT A GLANCE

## “MY PLACE OF WORSHIP”

The following chart outlines the % of respondents who attend places of worship that allow same-sex marriage, 2SLGBTQ+ ordination, welcome the 2SLGBTQ+ community, welcome the trans community and could do more to welcome the 2SLGBTQ+ community.



**There are high levels of uncertainty among respondents and due to the historical exclusion of the queer community from places of worship and religious based homophobia, uncertainty is dangerous and signals that a space is unsafe.**

To be safe, a place of worship needs to be explicit and clear in their stance and inclusion



# THE REPORT

This report is divided into **four sections.**

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This report argues that this uncertainty is stemming from:

1. Intentional ambiguity at the system level → non-affirming faith communities who use vague language and fail to specify their stance on homosexuality intentionally
2. Unintentional ambiguity at the system level → affirming faith communities who lack clear communication about their inclusion of the 2SLGBTQ+ community
3. Lack of awareness at the individual level → heterosexual identifying respondents who can be ordained and marry do not seek out information about queer inclusion because it does not impact them directly



## SECTION 1

### The Lived Experience

This section dives deep into the lived experience of the 2SLGBTQ+ communities and allies. It demonstrates that religious-based homophobia and transphobia remains widespread. It negatively impacts those who currently practice, have practiced in the past but are not currently practicing, as well as those who have never practiced. Using quotes from the interviews and surveys, this section aims to describe how each of these groups are confronted with religious-based homophobia and transphobia.



## SECTION 2

### Setting the Stage

This section outlines the inclusion to exclusion spectrum showing that there are many different shades and forms that exclusion takes. Many exclusionary places of worship are intentionally vague about their stance on homosexuality resulting in uncertainty, confusion and potentially placing 2SLGBTQ+ in a dangerous position where they cannot express their true selves and sexual identities.



## SECTION 4

### State of Affairs

This section describes the current state of affairs arguing that there is a long way to go for places of worship in Ontario to be inclusive spaces as many places of worship do not allow same sex marriage, ordination or welcome the 2SLGBTQ+ community.

Many places of worship engage in religious-based homophobia and are not extending the same liberties, privileges and experiences to the 2SLGBTQ+ community that are granted to heterosexual identifying congregants.



## SECTION 4

### Uncertainty

The survey revealed high levels of uncertainty around the inclusion of 2SLGBTQ+ folks in places of worship. This section dives deep into the topic of uncertainty exploring why it exists and where it is stemming from. High levels of uncertainty means lack of inclusion and makes it very challenging for queer folks and allies to assess whether a space is safe. There is a significant amount of work still left to do in order to decrease uncertainty. In order to increase awareness and ultimately make these spaces more inclusive for queer folks, places of worship need to provide clarity in their stance on LGBTQ+ issues.

# METHODOLOGY

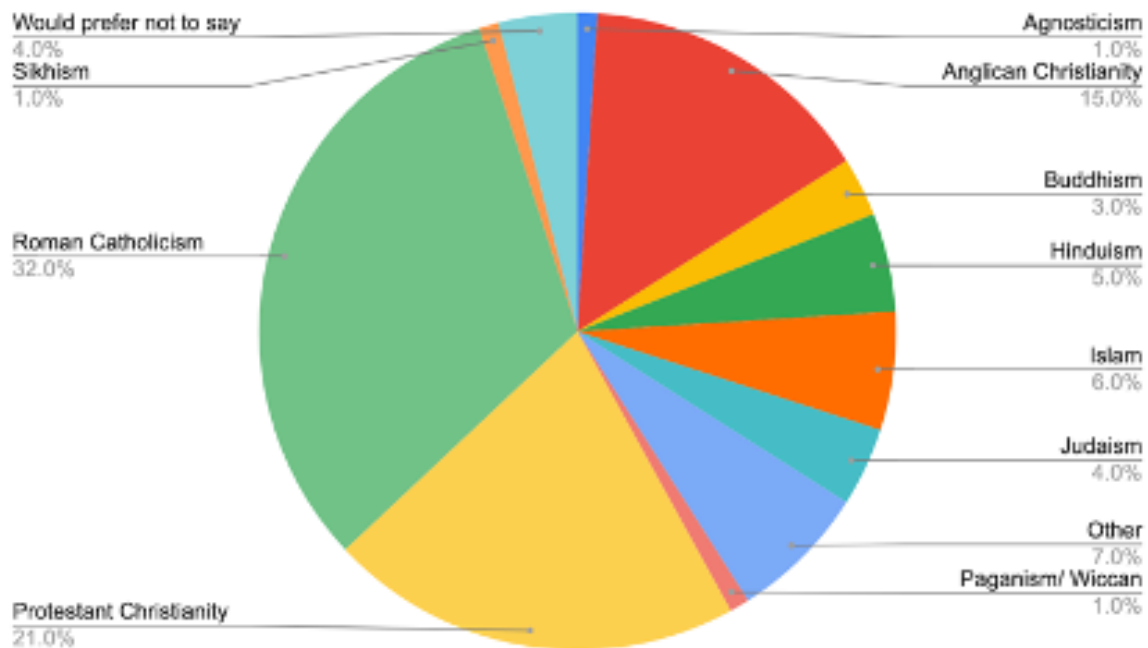
This is a 2-phased research project.

## PHASE

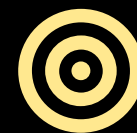
# 1

The survey questions ranged from asking about respondents about their demographic information to asking them about their experience with faith communities:

- Survey was sent out to **3,000 Ontarians** on October 7th, 2022 to November 1st 2022
- **16%** of the total respondents identify as 2SLGBTQ+
- **~1,500** respondents currently practice, **~1,000** do not currently but have in the past, **~500** have never practiced a faith
- Over **11 faiths** were represented



- ✓ Provide a foundational understanding of the faith-based landscape regarding treatment of the 2SLGBTQ+ community in Ontario
- ✓ Identify on how many 2SLGBTQ+ people have experienced harm from religious based homophobia and transphobia in Ontario
- ✓ Explore how many places of worship are currently not inclusive nor affirming of 2SLGBTQ+ people and their allies



## SURVEY GOALS





## PHASE 2

The interviews focused on the lived experience of the 2SLGBTQ+ folks and allies. Interviews were conducted with both congregants and leaders:

- 12 interviews were conducted between November 21st, 2022 and January 17, 2023
- Interviewees included congregants and leaders
- 10 interviews with 2SLGBTQ+ folks, 2 interviews with allies (heterosexual identifying folks)



## INTERVIEW GOALS

- ✓ Collect stories of hurt, disenfranchisement, and loss from those who have been harmed by religious-based homophobia and transphobia from within places of worship
- ✓ Collect information on best practices of places worship



## ANALYSIS

Each open-ended survey question and each interview was treated as a unit of analysis. Themes were identified across each response and each interview.

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Participants for both the survey and interviews must be:

- Over 18 years old
- Live in Ontario
- English speaking



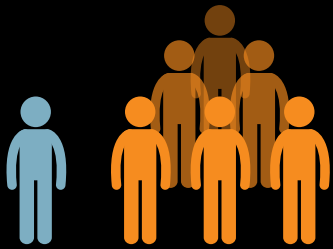
# Rainbow Faith and Freedom

## LIVED EXPERIENCE

### SECTION 1

**Religious-based homophobia  
and transphobia impacts those  
currently practicing and even  
reaches those who are not currently  
practicing.**

**FPO**



# LIVED EXPERIENCE

## SUMMARY

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54%

### CURRENTLY PRACTICING:

More than half (54%) of the practicing 2SLGBTQ+ community have witnessed transphobia and/or homophobia from their place of worship in the last 3 years. This is 2x that of heterosexual identifying respondents (22%)

39%

### NOT CURRENTLY PRACTICING, BUT HAVE IN THE PAST:

39% of 2SLGBTQ+ folks who do not currently practice but have in the past have personally experienced or witnessed homophobia from their former place of worship. This is 3x more than that of heterosexual identifying respondents (13% have personally experienced or witnessed homophobia). 2SLGBTQ+ folks have had negative experiences with formal faith institutions ranging from a lack of inclusion to traumatic experiences that have led them to abandon connecting with their faith in official places of worship or their faith altogether.

55%

### HAS NEVER PRACTICED:

55% of 2SLGBTQ+ respondents who have never practiced religion state that religion has been used as a justification for homophobia or transphobia directed at them or someone in their presence

- 29% of 2SLGBTQ+ say homophobia/ transphobia has been directed at someone in their presence
- This is nearly 2x that of heterosexual identifying respondents (15% say they religion has been used as a justification for homophobia or transphobia directed at someone in the presence)

51%

### HAS NEVER PRACTICED (Cont'd):

51% of 2SLGBTQ+ respondents do not think faith communities are safe spaces for queer folks, 17% higher than heterosexual identifying respondents

- 37% of 2SLGBTQ+ respondents are unsure. This means that a total of 88% of 2SLGBTQ+ respondents either do not think faith communities are safe space or are unsure
- Similarly, 83% of heterosexual respondents do not think faith communities are safe spaces or are unsure

Heterosexual identifying respondents are less in tune with the 2SLGBTQ+ experience and thereby less likely to identify homophobia or transphobia when they see it.

“

# IN THEIR WORDS

Those who currently practice

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Many Queer folks currently attending non-affirming places of worship discuss a culture of exclusion that is widely accepted and normalized by other congregants.

More than half (54%) of the practicing 2SLGBTQ+ respondents have witnessed transphobia and/or homophobia from their place of worship in the last 3 years. **This is 2x that of heterosexual identifying respondents (22%).** Examples range from the oppression of queer identity and expression to outlandish remarks comparing homosexuality to bestiality.

“It is a mosque, these issues are either considered forbidden or are simply not acknowledged.”

– Muslim, 2SLGBTQ+

“Marriage between same sex couples is not recognized, and dating is not encouraged either. They prefer that if you have feelings towards the same sex to not act on them”

– Didn't specify, 2SLGBTQ+


“Not participating in pride, not explicitly welcoming us, no rainbow flag, no marriages, debating our existence in the bane of ethics”

– Jew, 2SLGBTQ+

In this last quote, this individual was put into a situation where she had to **choose between the comfort of belonging (for both her and her family) in her faith community and defending the queer community.** As a younger female congregant she lacks the power that the Imam possesses and consequently chose not to make a scene, instead sitting quietly in complete shock.

“[The Imam] basically compared homosexuality to bestiality. That is probably why queer people stay out of the Masjid [mosque]. My reaction was, I want to say shock, but maybe like, numb shock, like, oh, no big surprise, kind of thing. Like I said, my main reaction was self doubt if like, I should get up and go, but I won't because I would embarrass my mother, I would make a scene, which would be the point of getting up and going, but then I do not want to make a scene. So I stayed on. I just sat there being shocked, being numb, numb, really shocked.”

– Muslim, 2SLGBTQ+



**Homophobic and transphobic remarks** flooded the data as some participants took the open text fields as an opportunity to exclaim their personal views on homosexuality. Some examples are included below.

**Others are too violent to include here.**

**"I have never witnessed this to be the case. If they are offended by the truth of the bible then that is not exclusion, it is the truth of what God intended for our thriving and to be in the right relationship with Him."**

*- Protestant, heterosexual*

**"Obviously there is no place for Pride in the congregation of those saved by grace."**

*- Protestant, heterosexual*

**"Take your woke garbage and go to HELL!!!"**

*- Roman Catholic, heterosexual*

**"God created them a man and woman and what they're [queer folks] doing now it is disgusting"**

*- Roman Catholic, heterosexual*

**“It didn’t make me feel included, that is why I left”**

– Roman Catholic, 2SLGBTQ+

Many 2SLGBTQ+ folks who do not currently practice but have in the past have had negative experiences with formal faith institutions.

**39%**

of 2SLGBTQ+ folks who do not currently practice but have in the past have personally experienced or witnessed homophobia from their former place of worship. **This is 3x more than that of heterosexual identifying respondents (13% of whom have personally experienced or witnessed homophobia).**

**Those who do not currently practice but have in the past:**

**These negative experiences range from a lack of inclusion to traumatic experiences that have led them to abandon connecting with their faith in official places of worship. Some find new religious practices and rituals in solitude while others abandon religion altogether.**

“There's a lot of prejudice towards our community and it is like, well, why would you want to go somewhere where people are telling you they're not okay with you as a person? And I just find that they're contradicting themselves, like, the Christian faith for example, if you look at the Bible, love one another, as I have loved you is a quote from the bible, but you're not practicing that, you're condemning people for the way they were born.” – Roman Catholic, 2SLGBTQ+

“While officially the church says it welcomes everyone, there are still members of the church who have either been discriminatory, unwelcoming, or made members of LGBTQ2+ community feel like they do not have a place in the church; there were some in the church who didn't want a gay minister who was being considered by the hiring committee” – Protestant, 2SLGBTQ+

“Not acknowledging existence of 2SLGBTQ+ people and seeing it as a sin and putting you in conversion therapy if they discover you identify as that” – Didn't specify which religion, 2SLGBTQ+

“I do not follow the religion because they do not accept lgbtq+ people and I left many years ago because of their views on sexuality. I'm the parent of 2lgbtq+ young people” – Didn't specify, heterosexual

“I do not follow the religion because they do not accept lgbtq+ people and I left many years ago because of their views on sexuality. I'm the parent of 2lgbtq+ young people” – Didn't specify, heterosexual

“The deacon or the priest, it was always “gay people are going to hell, queer people are going to hell” just rants about it, and I just eventually said to [my girlfriend], listen, I know you like me attending Mass with you, but I'm not interested. I do not feel comfortable going to a place like that where like, literally that is all this guy is talking about. You know, when I can go to other churches that like will preach about you know, acceptance and loving everybody” – Roman Catholic, 2SLGBTQ+

“

“They always told us that people in the LGBTQ community were going to hell.”

Even some folks who do not and have never practiced religion are subjected to religious-based homophobia or transphobia. In line with the findings above, heterosexual identifying respondents are less in tune with the 2SLGBTQ+ experience and thereby less likely to identify homophobia or transphobia when they see it. There is an opportunity here to increase awareness and education.

**36%** of 2SLGBTQ+ folks are unsure if faith communities are safe spaces meaning that 87% of 2SLGBTQ+ either feel that faith communities are unsafe or they are unsure

**84%** of heterosexual identifying respondents feel similarly (34% disagree and 50% are unsure)

Some **heterosexual-identifying respondents** have also bore witness to these experiences, but on a much smaller scale relative to the queer community. **There is an opportunity for education into the 2SLGBTQ+ experiences.**

“I think the Christian religion has been horrible to the gay community and the Indigenous people. I want nothing to do with it. I do not hate God. I just do not like organized religion” – *Anglican*

“They always told us that people in the LGBTQ community were going to hell. I actually knew a lady who made her 10 year old daughter cut ties with a friend whose mother was in a lesbian relationship.”  
– *Didn't specify*

“I actually knew a lady who made her 10 year old daughter cut ties with a friend whose mother was in a lesbian relationship.”  
– *Didn't specify*

#### THOSE WHO HAVE NEVER PRACTICED:

**26%** of 2SLGBTQ+ respondents who have never practiced state that religion has been used as a justification for homophobia or transphobia directed at them

**29%** of 2SLGBTQ+ respondents have witnessed homophobia or transphobia directed at someone in their presence

**This is nearly 2x that of heterosexual-identifying respondents (15% say their religion has been used as a justification for homophobia or transphobia directed at someone in the presence)**

**55%** of 2SLGBTQ+ respondents report that religion has been used as a justification for homophobia directed at them or someone in their presence

**51%** of 2SLGBTQ+ identifying respondents who have never practiced who are more likely to state that faith communities are not safe spaces for the 2SLGBTQ+ community, compared to heterosexual identifying respondents (34%)

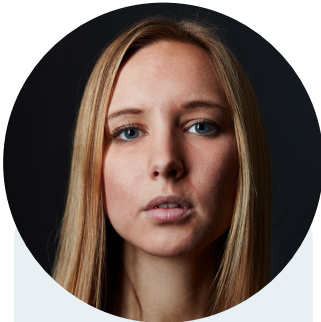
## SECTION 1: THE LIVED EXPERIENCE

# TAKEAWAYS

The lived experience for many 2SLGBTQ+ folks in Ontario is not one of inclusion. All faith communities have work to do to be more inclusive, some more than others. Further, religious based homophobia and transphobia transcends places of worship into other facets of life and negatively impacts 2SLBTQ+ queer folks and allies.



### Examples of homophobia and transphobia extending beyond places of worship:



"Online, all the time, in the comments section on social media sites, like Facebook. A family member who told me I was going to hell because I was gay. Friends of friends who were uncomfortable with me being there, because the bible says homosexuality is a sin. "It is Adam and Eve, not 'Adam & Steve'", from bullies in high school."  
– *Not practicing, 2SLGBTQ+*



"At the most recent pride event I attended, my friend group was one of many being talked to by people standing outside with signs saying that it is unnatural, we're going to Hell, etc."  
– *Pagan/ Wiccan, 2SLGBTQ+*



"A coworker was yelling at another coworker that their lifestyle was a sin. It was close to violence and myself and another person had to step in."  
– *Never practiced, heterosexual*



"I was working at a gym and a client came in. We got to talking, and a coworker of mine who is gay was brought up. The client essentially stated that he could not agree with his lifestyle due to his faith."  
– *Not currently practicing, Protestant, heterosexual*

**This research aims to change the landscape by increasing awareness of the 2SLGBTQ+ experience in places of worship and shedding light on the ways places of worship in Ontario are excluding the queer community and engaging in religious-based homophobia.**





Rainbow Faith  
and Freedom

**EXCLUSION TO  
INCLUSION  
SPECTRUM**

**SECTION 2**

# SUMMARY

● There are different ways that faith communities express their inclusion or exclusion of the 2SLGBTQ+ population. Some places of worship are explicitly exclusive while some are explicitly inclusive and many others take up space in between.

● Many faith communities are not inclusive and attempt to hide behind vague language about their stance on homosexuality making it extremely confusing for anyone to determine whether the space is safe or not.

● This section sheds light on this ambiguous space and the shades of exclusion many places of worship choose to operate within.

## TO BE AN AFFIRMING PLACE OF WORSHIP

There are minimum requirements that must be met, including:

- Same-sex marriage
- Ordination
- Zero tolerance policy for discrimination

On top of that, places of worship must create a safe and welcoming atmosphere for queer folks. Some ways to demonstrate this include representation (including queer folks in positions of power and high visibility like the choir), signs and symbols (pride flags), explicit and clear messaging about the inclusion of queer folks in the place of worship itself or on the website.

This study demonstrates there are few places of worship that demonstrate all of these qualities. Many “inclusive” places also have some work to do when it comes to more clearly articulating their inclusion of queer folks in their spaces. Conversely, many places of worship are not safe or inclusive spaces for the 2SLGBTQ+ community. Some of these places are explicit in their exclusion, while others take a more insidious route and attempt to confuse with unclear messaging about how they see homosexuality (as sinful).

“

**"A place of worship needs to be actively against transphobia and homophobia. If you are neutral on these issues, you are guilty by association. There are only two sides of this issue, there's no middle ground ideologically or practically."**

– Anonymous Christian Respondent

# THE SPECTRUM

The following spectrum maps this exclusion to inclusion landscape by demonstrating the different ways places of worship include or exclude the 2SLGBTQ+ community.



## ACTIVE EXCLUSION

Explicit & deliberate exclusion



## HOMOSEXUALITY AS A SIN

Love the sinner, hate the sin mentality



## LIMITATIONS

Limits opportunities for marriage and/or leadership



## ALL ARE WELCOME (FOR REAL)

Zero tolerance for discrimination, more muted in their inclusion



## ACTIVE INCLUSION

Explicit & deliberate inclusion

### EXCLUSIONARY

### INCLUSIONARY

On the left are spaces that are **actively exclusionary**. These spaces explicitly and deliberately exclude of 2SLGBTQ+ folks from places of worship. This manifests in zero tolerance policies, gossip and asking queer folks to leave the premise over expressions of homosexuality.

On the opposite side of the spectrum are those places of worship that are **inclusive and affirming**. There are two types identified here. On the far right are those that are actively inclusive. They explicitly and deliberately include the 2SLGBTQ+ community. This manifests in signs/ symbols (e.g. pride flags), queer representation in the place of worship, explicit/clear language that welcomes the community, same-sex marriages and ordination of 2SLGBTQ+ folks.

“My place of worship would outright reject and eject a person who is not heterosexual and Muslim. It is a very narrow-minded approach to the world, and a very judgmental approach which the place of worship would do well to reflect on and change.”  
– Muslim, heterosexual

“Preaching that LGBT people will not make it into Heaven. Preaching that the reason God destroyed the city of Sodom and Gomorrah is because of homosexuality. Preaching that being LGBT is a sin. People take these beliefs back home with them and into their family dynamics and parenting style, which creates a toxic, emotionally unhealthy, shaming, guilt, problematic or hostile household environment. It keeps LGBT family members or household members repressed, suppressed, and socially or culturally oppressed due to the religious shaming and religious guilt that conditions them to remain closeted due to fear of alienation, ostracization, disownment, emotional and verbal abuse, threats and intimidation, or worse.” – Protestant, heterosexual

**“Roman Catholic Church does not want gay people in its congregation”**

– Roman Catholic, 2SLGBTQ+

Also occupying space on the exclusionary side are places of worship that position “homosexuality as a sin” and place “limitations on the queer experience”.

Technically queer folks are “welcome” into the space, but these institutions do not allow same-sex marriage, and they welcome queer folk under the pretense of “love the sinner, hate the sin,” “do not ask, do not tell,” or “all are welcome, but we hope the holy spirit puts them on the right path”.

These spaces, however, aren’t being explicit about their stance, and because of that, they create uncertainty and confusion among congregants.

The insidious, not explicit territory is very dangerous for the 2SLGBTQ+ because it is not clear whether they are accepted into the space as their true selves. Not being clear and explicit about their position on same-sex marriage inclusion serves these places of worship well because they are not forced into the court of public opinion where they might receive backlash and be pushed towards greater inclusion.



“All people are welcome to attend my place of worship. The issue at present is what, if any, level of active ministry members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community could have.”

– Protestant, heterosexual

“Denominationally, Pastors that conduct gay marriage will be kicked out; gay marriage is not allowed; homosexuality is a sin (also a 'choice'). Gay/Trans people may not be ministers, elders, deacons or have any leadership role.”

– Protestant, heterosexual

“It hasn't done anything to make people feel included, they won't prevent any Jew from attending but they also won't allow same sex marriages in the synagogue.”

– Jew, heterosexual

“We welcome them, we are all sinners and their sin is just more visible”

– Protestant, heterosexual





FPO

**"I think that in this day and age, just being neutral is basically non-affirming."**

– Anonymous Islamic Respondent

To the left of the spectrum, there are places of worship that welcome the 2SLGBTQ+ community with zero tolerance for discrimination but are more muted in their expression of this inclusion compared to places of worship that are actively inclusionary.

Some of these spaces do not communicate their stance clearly which may unintentionally cause confusion.

These are the "All Are Welcome (For Real)". While many places say "all are welcome" including some of the spaces on the exclusionary side, places of worship on the inclusionary side actually mean it and show it through their actions.

"Everyone is welcome, nobody is turned away for any reason, race, sexual orientation, class, they are all treated equally"

– Anglican, heterosexual

"[We] welcome everyone, but especially the queer community. I found it very welcoming from that standpoint."

– Jew, 2SLGBTQ+

On the opposite side of the spectrum are those places of worship that are **inclusive and affirming**. There are two types identified here.

On the far right are those that are actively inclusive. They explicitly and deliberately include the 2SLGBTQ+ community. This manifests in signs/ symbols (e.g. pride flags), queer representation in the place of worship, explicit/clear language that welcomes the community, same sex marriages and ordination of 2SLGBTQ+ folks.



"Full inclusion and engagement in all events, boards and groups. Encourage and support participation into in house visits to engage in full and frank conversations about our church and our openness to all"

– Protestant, heterosexual

"Same-sex wedding, inclusive non-binary language most of the time in worship, externally facing signage such as progressive pride flags/banners flown, "God's Love Includes Everyone" stickers and welcome statement on a large plaque in the main entranceway." – Protestant, 2SLGBTQ+

"On the website and in every church bulletin and on the overhead screen before worship, there is an inclusion statement. That loosely states everyone regardless of income, education, ethnic, background, gender or sexual orientation are welcome to full participation in the life of the church."

– Hindu, 2SLGBTQ+



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SECTION 2: EXCLUSION TO INCLUSION SPECTRUM

# TAKEAWAYS

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**There is a long way to go to make these spaces more inclusive and safe for the queer community. Not only is work needed to make the exclusionary places of worship more inclusionary and upfront about their stance, but there is also some work to do on the inclusionary side to help these spaces be more clear that they are in fact safe spaces for the 2SLGBTQ+ community.**



 Rainbow Faith  
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# STATE OF AFFAIRS

SECTION 3

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## SECTION 3: SUMMARY

Many places of worship are not extending the same liberties, privileges and experiences to the 2SLGBTQ+ community that are granted to heterosexual identifying congregants:

36%

36% of all respondents report that their place of worship **does not** permit same-sex marriage. **33% allow** same-sex marriage.

32% of respondents report that 2SLGBTQ+ folks **can't be** ordained in their place of worship. **28% allow** ordination.

32%

18%

18% of respondents report that their place of worship **does not welcome** the queer community. **Less than half (47%) are welcoming.** The remaining respondents are unsure. This will be explored in the following section.



### NOTE:

Some respondents may be attending the same place of worship, meaning that these results can not be deduced to mean "33% of places of worship allow same-sex marriage".

### These are a few factors to consider which could be influencing the survey results:

1. Some respondents could be mistaken that their place of worship does not allow same sex marriage, ordination or welcome the queer community. This is known as the Ostrich effect, the tendency to avoid dangerous or negative information by simply closing oneself off from this information.
2. In some cases a place of worship may not advertise its inclusive stance to the general public for safety reasons in effort to protect the 2SLGBTQ+ community.
3. Some respondents may have misread the survey question.



## SAME-SEX MARRIAGE



"I have heard passive-aggressive comments made by other members of the church saying members of the LGBTQ+ community will never have children and don't have a purpose in life."

– Anonymous Catholic Respondent



**My place of worship allows same-sex marriage:**

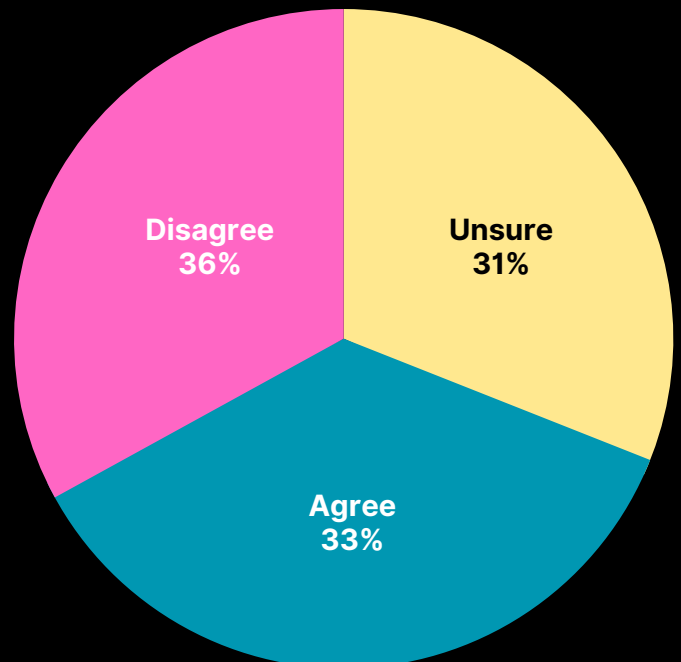
**THOSE WHO CURRENTLY PRACTICE**

Navigating this narrow landscape is extremely challenging for queer folks as they find a place of worship that would allow them to be married in that institution. As a result, less than half of queer-identifying respondents (42%) are currently attending places of worship that allow same-sex marriage in Ontario.

**2003** Same-sex marriage legalized in Ontario

**2005** Same-sex marriage legalized across all provinces

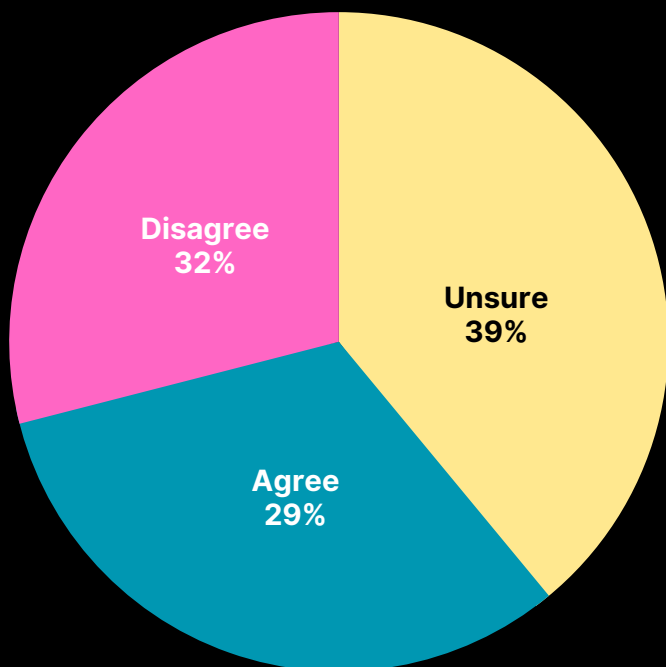
**2023** More than 1-in-3 places of worship refuse to allow same-sex marriages in Ontario (36%) [5]





Members of the 2LGBTQ+ can be ordained at my place of worship:

THOSE WHO CURRENTLY PRACTICE



## ORDINATION

Finding a place of worship that allows ordination is challenging and as a result, only 38% of 2SLGBTQ+ respondents are currently attending places allowing ordination. This is concerning because representation matters. Seeing queer folks in positions of power is important for other queer folks as it serves to build community and validation and can help reduce harmful stereotypes.

Additionally, research shows that greater engagement with people who are different from you has the ability to decrease prejudice[7]. This means that having queer folks in positions of power within the place of worship also has the potential to change the attitudes and behaviors of the rest of the congregation towards greater inclusivity.

To **ordain** someone is to empower them by conferring holy powers upon them, meaning that they are recognized by a religious body as having some authority over that body. Understanding how many respondents are attending places of worship that allow the ordination of the 2SLGBTQ+ community signals how many places of worship respect and see the value in empowering and elevating different voices and sexualities.

**29%** Less than one third (29%) of respondents attend places of worship that allow the ordination of the 2SLGBTQ+ folks

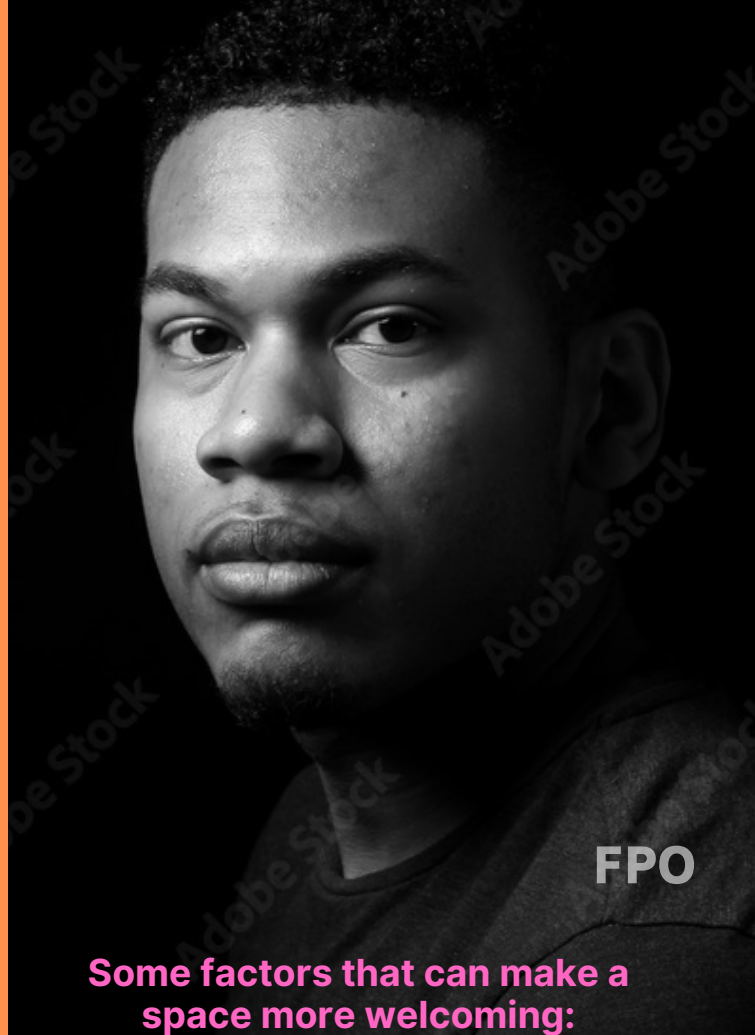
**32%** 32% of respondents attend places that do not allow ordination and the rest are unsure (uncertainty to be discussed in the next section). The remaining percentage are unsure which will be discussed in the next section.

**CLOSE TO LESS THAN 1-in-3** Places of worship that are not allowing queer folks to obtain positions of power. This is religious-based homophobia. These places are discriminating against people based on their sexual identity.

[7] Thomas F. Pettigrew, "Advancing Intergroup Contact Theory: Comments on the Issue's Articles," Journal of Social Issues 77, no. 1 (March 1, 2021): 258-73, <https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12423>

## WELCOMING

“**Welcoming**” is a vast term and can mean many different things. The experience of welcoming or not welcoming ranged from explicit comments asking visibly queer folks to leave: **“They have asked these people to leave most times I have been there”** (Anglican, heterosexual), to uncomfortable looks and stares from other unwelcoming congregants, **“there are still members of the church who have either been discriminatory, unwelcoming, or made members of LGBTQIA2S+ community feel like they do not have a place in the church”** (Protestant, 2SLGBTQ+) to sermon language that explicitly excludes the experience of queer folks **“[there are] comments during speeches/sermons, blatant homophobic remarks made on stage”** (Muslim, 2SLGBTQ+).



**Some factors that can make a space more welcoming:**

Many **heterosexual-identifying** respondents believe that the absence of exclusion makes the environment welcoming when in fact this is the absolute bare minimum and not actually welcoming: **“I do not think my church makes anyone from the 2SLGBTQ+ community feel excluded”** (Anglican, heterosexual).

**This indicates a lack of awareness of what it means to actually “welcome” the 2SLGBTQ+ community.**

As such, there is an opportunity to here to educate folks on what a truly welcoming space and experience is like for the 2SLGBTQ+ community. **Places of worship must be actively welcoming, due to a long history of exclusion anything less is seen as unwelcoming.**



### REPRESENTATION

Having queer folks in positions of power in the place of worship



### SIGNS & SYMBOLS

in the place of worship and online (website, social media) to signal that this is a safe space



### ALLOWANCE

and celebration of same-sex marriage



### PARTICIPATION

in 2SLGBTQ+ related causes (e.g. participation in Pride month and related events, raising money for a 2SLGBTQ+ related charity, etc.)



### INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

in sermons (e.g. when discussion marriage, acknowledging that it is not always between a cis man and cis woman)

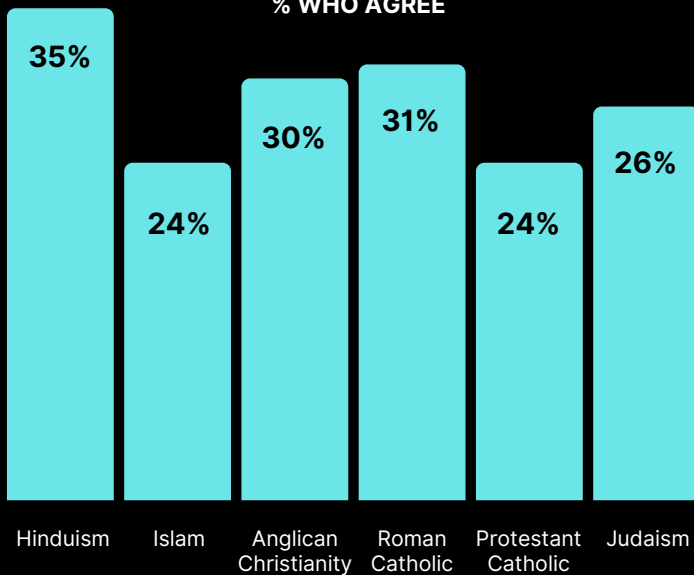


"In Canadian Mosques, being gay is seen as a morally wrong Western thing that kids learn about when they come here."

– Anonymous Islamic Respondent

**There is a conflict between my religious beliefs and homosexuality:**

THOSE WHO CURRENTLY PRACTICE  
% WHO AGREE



Respondents were asked if there is a conflict between their religious beliefs and homosexuality.

**44%** DO NOT see a conflict

**28%** DO see a conflict [5]

**28%** See their religious beliefs as **incompatible** with homosexuality

In line with the pattern identified above, **Muslim and Roman Catholic respondents are the most likely to see a conflict between their beliefs and homosexuality**. Only **25%** of Muslim respondents say there is no conflict, **-20% pts lower** than the average. Similarly, **38%** of Roman Catholic respondents say there is no conflict, **-6% pts lower** than the average.

The faiths which are most likely to not see a conflict, i.e. their religious beliefs are compatible with homosexuality are Jewish respondents (**64%** say no conflict), Anglican respondents (**55%**) and Hindu respondents (**53%**), and Buddhist respondents (**52%**).

[8] The remaining respondents are unsure.

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SECTION 3: STATE OF AFFAIRS

# TAKEAWAYS

Presently, 2SLGBTQ+ folks in Ontario are coming face to face with religious-based discrimination as most are attending a place of worship that doesn't grant them the same privileges and opportunities as heterosexual folks. attending a place of worship that doesn't grant them the same privileges and opportunities as heterosexual folks.

Uncertainty means that space is not doing enough to communicate its stance and based on historical and present context of exclusion can be assumed to be an unsafe space. This includes same sex marriage, ordination and simply being made to feel welcome in the space.

- 67%** of respondents attend places of worship that **they know** does not allow same-sex marriage
- 36%** of respondents attend places of worship that **they are sure** does not allow same-sex marriage
- 31%** of respondents attend places of worship that **they are unsure** of whether same-sex marriage is allowed
- 71%** of respondents attend places of worship **they know** does not allow the ordination of the 2SLGBTQ+ folks
- 32%** of respondents attend places of worship **they are sure** does not allow the ordination of the 2SLGBTQ+ folks
- 39%** of respondents attend places of worship **they are unsure** of whether ordination of 2SLGBTQ+ folks is allowed

For many congregants, it is clear where their place of worship stands in terms of the treatment and inclusion of queer folks, but for others this is a huge question mark, an area of uncertainty. Not only do efforts need to be made to create a greater awareness of religious-based homophobia in Ontario today, but greater awareness on the uncertainty - the complete lack of awareness and understanding of where 2SLGBTQ+ identifying folks sit in places of worship and which privileges are granted to them because as made evident by this research, it is a treacherously uneven landscape.