



OPEN TABLE
Come as you are

The Open Table Network

Annual Report 2022

'Life saving &
life changing'

- Open Table member

Who we are

The Open Table Network (OTN) began as a single community of LGBTQIA+ people and allies in Liverpool in 2008, meeting monthly and growing steadily until 2015, when it began to multiply and become a network of communities around England and Wales. Now more than 30 communities meet regularly, led by LGBTQIA+ people, worshipping together, encouraging and supporting each other.

We are a charity, registered in England and Wales, and have ambitions to continue to grow so that every LGBTQIA+ person wishing to explore faith can do so in a welcoming, affirming and empowering community nearby.



OTN Coordinator Kieran Bohan and his husband Warren Hartley, co-facilitator of the Open Table Liverpool community, lead singing and blowing out candles at our 14th birthday celebration in June 2022.

What we do

OTN is balancing a glaring inequality:

At a time where most other public places welcome them equally, LGBTQIA+ people are still not always welcomed in UK churches. They are significantly more likely to experience mental distress, which research has shown relates explicitly to discriminatory pastoral practices of local churches, and the church's substantial contribution to negative attitudes toward LGBTQIA+ people in society (Oasis Foundation 2017). The communities that we help to establish, and support as they develop, are balancing that inequality, resulting in proven improved mental health and well-being for those who belong to them.

Read more about how we are answering a great need:

opentable.lgbt/answering-a-great-need



We support and affirm LGBTQIA+ people through pastoral care and worshipping together.



We promote understanding of sexual orientation and gender identity in churches by encouraging discussion, study and the sharing of stories.



We stand in solidarity with churches and organisations that include and affirm LGBTQIA+ Christians by sharing spiritual resources and networking.

Why we do it

Quotes from our members in 2022:

- 'Being a part of Open Table gives people the added protection and security of knowing what they are walking into. Being part of the network has also given us training opportunities, support and the chance to meet, and learn from each other, as different communities come together.'
- 'Open Table has welcomed me, and reignited my faith, and been a significant part of pandemic isolation to connect with others'
- 'The reconnection with God helps me with my mental health. I am a happier person.'
- 'Every single one of us is a delight to God (not 'a disgust' as I was taught in my teens).'

Read more about our impact:
opentable.lgbt/our-impact

We are growing

- In 2022, we launched ten new communities, bringing the total to 31.
- We hosted consultations with eight churches to explore hosting an Open Table community, and discussed the possibility with a further 25 churches.
- In 2023, two more communities have already joined our network, three more are preparing to launch, and we're working with more than ten other churches to explore whether they can host an Open Table community.
- The number of people engaging with Open Table has increased by more than 50% from 2021 to 2022.

To find out more about our simple requirements and recommendations for hosting an Open Table community in your church, please email Kieran, OTN Coordinator: network@opentable.lgbt

We are social

Through our [website](#), [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#), [YouTube](#), [email](#), [communities](#), consultations and events we had 600,000+ contacts in 2022! Each month, we had an average of 1,200 new contacts engaging with us.

We have had international enquiries from Australia, Bulgaria, China, India, Ireland, Jordan, Kenya, Liberia, Nigeria, Malta, Sudan, Switzerland, Thailand, Turkey, Uganda, USA, and Zimbabwe. Our focus is on the UK, but one of our trustees, who is experienced in international development, has responded to this rising trend by offering online support and signposting to local allies.



Come As You Are
You're more than welcome here

This church hosts a Christian worship community that genuinely welcomes and affirms LGBTQIA+ people, as part of the Open Table Network

OPEN TABLE

Our vision:

- **We know God loves us** and has given each of us precious lives, identities and relationships which God calls us to live out with integrity.
- **We're building a community** to witness that everyone belongs to God - just as you do.
- **We belong to the Open Table Network** - All the communities in our Network are hoping for and working towards these things.

Our mission:

To create safe and sacred spaces:

- where everyone can encounter the infinite, unconditional, intimate love of God.
- which warmly welcome and affirm people who are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, Intersex, Asexual (LGBTQIA), + our family and friends, and anyone who wants to belong in an accepting, loving worship community.

Our values:

- **Safe:** Welcoming, supportive, accountable and safeguarded. *
- **Sacred:** Meeting God and each other on holy ground through heartfelt words and music.
- **Sacramental:** Spiritual Communion - a sharing in worship and friendship.
- **Sustaining:** All year round, sharing and learning together.
- **Space:** Room to be yourself.

We have created posters for church notice-boards which we send to all Open Table communities as soon as they are fully on board. We want people - not just LGBTQIA+ people - to know that they are near to a warm, affirming welcome.

We are trusted

We want to maintain the sense of trust and community that our members share.

Each community that is part of the Open Table Network commits to sharing our Vision, Mission & Values:

opentable.lgbt/our-vision-mission-values and to keeping everyone safe:

opentable.lgbt/keeping-everyone-safe

We support all our communities through opportunities to consult with our Coordinator and connect with others in communities across England & Wales, to share excitements, opportunities and challenges, be encouraged and inspired to grow. We are working on a 'members area' of our website where local community volunteers can share what works in their communities.

One of our community leaders wrote in 2022:

'Open Table is a quality mark. It says clearly that there are LGBTQIA+ people active and in leadership in the Church. It's shorthand for "yes, you really are welcome" for a whole range of questions that most LGBTQIA+ people would ask before they stepped over a threshold of a church... Open Table already has a trusted reputation that would take a church many years to build on its own. That means you are starting years ahead of what you could do by yourself to prove you are trustworthy.'

We influence

In 2022 we:

- encouraged churches to become more inclusive by affiliating with our partner charity Inclusive Church
- lobbied the UK Government for a complete ban on conversion therapy
- shared research on experiences of online and in-person church gatherings
- promoted an LGBT+ safeguarding survey
- hosted events against homophobia, transphobia and biphobia
- sponsored a theatre performance addressing LGBT+ themes and conversion therapy
- enabled inclusive Christmas celebrations
- publicised OTN within organisations supporting young people, students in higher education, and older people
- delivered presentations, sermons, training and retreats, at conferences, in schools and churches, for chaplains and spiritual directors, and a museum
- Participated in podcasts and media interviews.



We resource

In 2022 we published online:

- a glossary of LGBTQIA+ and Christian terms:
opentable.lgbt/words-we-use
- a guide to using inclusive language for churches:
opentable.lgbt/speaking-singing-to-god
- research about the experience of Open Table community members and volunteers:
opentable.lgbt/our-impact and the need for LGBTQIA+ people in church and wider society:
opentable.lgbt/answering-a-great-need
- how to invite a visiting speaker
opentable.lgbt/preacher-outreach



Examples of our influence in 2022.



Trustees

Our Trustees are responsible for thinking through and putting into practice plans to develop the Open Table Network.

At our 2022 AGM, our trustees were:

Revd Dr Augustine Tanner-Ihm,
Revd Anne Bennett,
Canon Julian Hollywell, Revd Lucy Berry,
Neil Rees, and our Co-Chairs:
Revd Dr Alex Clare-Young, and
Sarah Hobbs PLUS we were joined by
fundraising specialist Rebekah
Greenbank. Julian stepped down in June
2022 and Lucy in March 2023.

At our 2023 AGM we also welcomed:

Revd Andrew Howorth, Roo Stewart,
Peter Jones and Revd Rosemary Hill.

Meet our team:

opentable.lgbt/meet-our-team

If you're interested in finding out about
becoming a trustee, please contact our
Coordinator Kieran:

network@opentable.lgbt

Volunteers

Volunteering with and for marginalised communities is a real asset to our work. In 2022 we had 230 volunteers across 31 communities. Almost half were new to volunteering with OTN. OT volunteers gave around 2300 hours a month in 2022. We have begun to secure funding to equip our volunteers to better lead their communities and provide more informed pastoral support.

How we're funded

In 2022 our expenditure was just over £35,000. In the same year, our income was just over £27,000. The phenomenal growth we saw in 2022 is not yet matched by enough resources to sustain it long term. We are working hard to grow contributions from individuals, the communities we support, and a more diverse range of funders. We are so grateful for the regular and one-off donations given by Open Table community members and allies who are able to support us financially.

We now have [a charity page on the Crowdfunder website](#) (where people can make one-off donations, commit to monthly giving, or create a fundraiser) and [an account with PayPal Giving Fund](#).

We're also grateful for [FREE online shopping donations via easyfundraising](#).

Here's how you can support us:

opentable.lgbt/support-us

We depend on grants - these are often hard to come by in the space we inhabit, bridging the gap between LGBTQIA+ communities and Christian communities. So we are delighted to report that in March 2023, the United Reformed Church Legacy Fund awarded OTN £50,000 over 3 years to 2025.

Full accounts available on [the Charity Commission website](#), or on request by email to Kieran our Coordinator:
network@opentable.lgbt



We are here for you: opentable.lgbt/our-communities

The Open Table Network

Registered Charity Number: 1193868

URC Mersey Synod Office,

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opentable.lgbt



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