



# The Costs of Keeping the Faith: Executive Summary



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A Report from Voice for Justice UK

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***Voice for Justice UK would like to give their thanks to all the people, who willingly gave of their time and of themselves to share their experiences with us. This report is dedicated to them.***

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## Executive Summary

The UK has been identified as having some of the highest levels of intolerance and discrimination against Christians in Europe. Our hate speech laws have had a particular role in perpetuating this. *Voice for Justice UK* carried out a survey to find out how this intolerance was impacting the Christian population. Our report, based on 1,562 responses, is the result.

The report begins by clarifying that there are significant legal safeguards in place to protect freedom of religion and belief. Our freedom of speech is significant. But despite legal guarantees, harassment, self-censorship, direct and indirect discrimination are all prevalent.

Fifty six percent of respondents had experienced hostility and ridicule. Bullying was also reported. Christians did not feel free to express their views at work. The younger generation appeared to have had more of these negative experiences than the older generation, suggesting that things were getting worse.

Chapter three explores discrimination. This affected 18 percent of respondents and, ominously, is rising among the younger age group. Direct discrimination could include being rejected for promotion or sidelined in interviews often expressly because of their Christian faith. Indirect discrimination occurred when forms of workplace participation required acting against one's conscience. Being made to work on a Sunday when it was not strictly necessary was a typical example given.

There were work environments in which Christians experienced more difficulties. Chapter Four explores the case of the NHS. Respondents reported that nurses were not allowed to wear crosses and that there was a particular hostility to prayer. This occurred even where the patients might have requested it. Some Christian nurses had been expected to participate in abortion or contraception even when this went against their conscience. As the desire to nurse and care for others can often be an expression of Christian faith, ignoring laws around freedom of conscience imposed a particular burden for Christian nurses.

Similarly in education, explored in Chapter Eight, we see examples of Christian teachers being required to teach things which went against their consciences. Teachers were regularly forced into positions where they either had to self-censor, be threatened with suspension, or lose their jobs.

Chapter Five explores how experiences of discrimination appeared to be linked to the social attitudes Christians held. Our research showed that when it comes to beliefs about marriage, sex, and gender, while the rest of society was swept along by progressive ideologies, most Christians appear to have remained steadfast to orthodox Christian faith. Counterintuitively, it was often the younger generation who had more traditional views than the older generation. This set Christians on a collision course with progressives.

Much of this hostility towards Christians emanates from the power of the LGBT movement, which Chapter Six tries to explain. On one hand, three out of nine of the protected characteristics deal with LGBT identities, compared to one protected identity for all the different groupings which come under religion and belief. Another weakness in the Equality Act is the understanding of harassment. This depends on the perception of the victim and on what is regarded as 'reasonable.' Both these criteria are highly subjective and susceptible to sponsorship and promotion by the LGBT movement. This is discussed.

When looked at closely it becomes apparent that the LGBT movement promotes an all-encompassing belief system and this should be subject to the same restrictions as other belief systems. Instead, the LGBT movement receives financial support from government and businesses, and also has widespread influence in schools and workplaces. Rather than being subject to restrictions, the LGBT belief system is widely promoted. This may be why Christians whose beliefs challenge those of the LGBT movement are also most likely to be attacked.

Chapter Seven shows one of the strongest findings emerging from the research: respondents did not feel that religion and belief, specifically *Christian* belief, were protected to the same extent as other protected characteristics. There was also a well evidenced suspicion that Islam was treated more favourably. This was because Muslims were also seen as having an ethnic identity and therefore associated with the protected characteristic of race. Christians on the other hand, were associated with 'the establishment' and therefore aligned with oppressors rather than victims.

In effect, the Equalities Act has set up a system where protected characteristics compete against each other, and the one with the most sponsorship dominates.

Part of the reason for discrimination and the decline in Christianity was a result of ignorance. The responsibility for this lay heavily with schools. Chapter Eight shows that although schools are supposed to take account of a parent's religious beliefs and consult with parents, this was not done. Schools were much more likely to teach Comprehensive Sexuality Education, based upon, and reflective of, LGBTQ+ ideology. This created conflicts between parents and children and undermined Christian faith. The result was Christian pupils were forced to either self-censor, or find themselves on the receiving end of hostility and ridicule from pupils and teachers alike. Christian teachers often felt they had to compromise their faith or else leave their job.

Chapter Nine explores how even some of the mainstream Churches are adopting progressive, secular ideologies, with the result that laity can feel discriminated against and are increasingly leaving them. The result is that the largest group of Christians in our survey were 'Christian no denomination', who were significantly more likely to hold to traditional, orthodox, biblical belief, but outside mainstream Churches. These Christians lack institutional structures in which to practice their faith. At the same time, the leaders within the establishment who should be defending the faith were not doing so. The leader of the Church of England came in for particular attack.

The final chapter pulls together many different explanations for the discrimination against Christians. The media and LGBT propaganda play a prominent role. If Churches want to retain their congregations, they need to pay more attention to biblical teaching than the beliefs of the secular world.

The report finishes on a positive note, drawing attention to the strength of the new grass roots form of Christianity which is emerging. It argues Christians should not feel disheartened by the discrimination and lack of understanding to which they are exposed. Rather, this should be seen as a reason for evangelisation and strengthening the faith in the public square.

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