

Richmond upon Thames LGBT Forum

Position statement regarding the visit of Pope Benedict XVI to the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames on 17 September 2010

The Richmond upon Thames LGBT Forum believes that the present position of The Vatican and Pope Benedict XVI, as evidenced by publicly available documents and statements:

- Denies the application of universal Human Rights to *all* people, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity;
- Promotes discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people, and all women, in a number of different situations; and
- Spreads hatred, fear and misunderstanding of members of the LGBT community and thus, albeit indirectly, encourages homophobic and transphobic attacks, insults and abuse.

These issues, whilst of particular concern to us as members of the LGBT community, are not the only ones which merit challenge. Others include the defiant approach of the Catholic Church to the issue of child abuse by their priests, their position on the use of condoms and their denial of abortion to even the most vulnerable and abused women.

These views represent a hard-line approach to Catholic teachings and, seemingly, they are not shared by many Catholic people. We also note that they go against so much that is good about the Catholic faith and that there are similar issues which arise in relation to some other faiths too. We have no issue with the

Catholic faith as a whole, still less with individual Catholic people, and we entirely support their right to practice a religion of their choice.

But, as the views outlined previously appear to be the “official” views of both the Vatican and of Pope Benedict XVI himself, we believe that they should be publicised and challenged by members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans communities, and others, on the occasion of his State visit to the UK. We too have the absolute right to be who we are, to live as we choose to and to hold our own beliefs.

The Richmond upon Thames LGBT Forum will seek to publicise these issues more widely and to gather evidence of the level of support for the concerns we have raised within the LGBT and wider community. Whilst we do not plan to organise any physical protests ourselves, we absolutely support the rights of individual members of the community and other organisations to do so lawfully in accordance with their rights under Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights which protects freedom of expression.

Homophobia and transphobia have no place in an open, liberal democracy and no place in *any* organisation, let alone one so globally influential as the Catholic Church, in the 21st century. We call upon the Government and all other public authorities in the UK to challenge Pope Benedict XVI on his views and pronouncements at every opportunity during the State visit. The people of the UK are making a very significant contribution to the cost of the visit. The people of the UK have every right to expect their representatives to give voice to their views and concerns.

We do not believe that the present views of Pope Benedict XVI and The Vatican have any place in the UK and we will be dismayed if the State visit is allowed to pass without our Government challenging him on any of these issues which we and others have raised.