

On pilgrimage in the UK

An intrepid band of walkers set out from St Peter's Church in Navenby to get to Lincoln Cathedral

By Mark Taylor, Minister of Newark Congregational Church



What is an inclusive church?

In March 2024, following a lengthy period of discussion and reflection, Newark Congregational Church signed up to the Inclusive Church Statement which states:

“We believe in inclusive church – a church which celebrates and affirms every person and does not discriminate.

We will continue to challenge the church where it continues to discriminate against people on grounds of disability, economic power, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, learning disability, mental health, neurodiversity, or sexuality.

We believe in a Church which welcomes and serves all people in the name of Jesus Christ; which is scripturally faithful; which seeks to proclaim the Gospel afresh for each generation; and which, in the power of the Holy Spirit, allows all people to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Jesus Christ.”

We were the first church in Newark to adopt the statement and remain the only

one to do so. We would dearly like other churches to take the same stance.

On pilgrimage for Inclusive Church

On Thursday 11 September, a group of pilgrims from our church set out to walk the 11 miles from St. Peter's Church Navenby to Lincoln Cathedral. Following a route devised by the cathedral, our aims were to enjoy the countryside, to have a time for reflection, and to promote the Inclusive Church movement that the church is part of.

Six pilgrims walked the whole of the route, each wearing specially designed Inclusive Church t-shirts, while others joined for part of the route. The walk called in at seven other churches on the way and the guidebook provided historical information and gave ideas for things to ponder on the way. The group challenged itself (largely successfully) to remain in silent reflection during one 1.5 mile leg of the walk.

Just as we approached St Michael's Church, Waddington, I commented on what a beautiful autumn day it was for walking. Having looked around the modern church (the original building was destroyed by a war-time bomb), on leaving we opened the door to a thunderstorm. We carried on undaunted, albeit somewhat damp, the rest of the way.

We had told the cathedral of our plans and we received a great welcome from the staff as we joined in with a magnificent choral evensong at the end of the day, proudly wearing our t-shirts. If you wish to, you can view the service and play 'Spot the Pilgrims' on YouTube: www.youtube.com/watch?v=6pKjv5TbeE&t=3762s.



INCLUSIVE CHURCH

Media attention

In order to obtain some local publicity for our walk we issued a press release which was picked up by our local newspaper, The Newark Advertiser in a half page feature, including a photograph of us outside the cathedral at the end of our pilgrimage.

Everyone who took part in the walk said it was a wonderful experience. We are already planning another (longer) pilgrimage next year. Unfortunately, we will need new t-shirts as just after our pilgrimage Inclusive Church changed their logo!

What's next?

We plan to keep promoting our stance. We are working with the vicar of a group of three Church of England parishes in villages around Newark which are also Inclusive Churches. Our plans include:

- Holding a promotional event with a high-profile speaker – we are planning a day's seminar in church and online with author Dave Tomlinson on Saturday 10 October (please get in touch to reserve a place);

- Engaging with the local LGBT community in a local pub to let them know where they will find a welcome in churches in the area;
- Raising the issue regularly at Churches Together in Newark meetings;
- Supporting other local churches that have expressed an interest in the issue.

I'm not sure how many other Congregational Churches are members of Inclusive Church but if you are interested in exploring this issue I'd be very happy for you to contact me, Mark Taylor, at newarkcongregational@virginmedia.com. I can share with you the approach we took at Newark to prepare the ground for our unanimous decision at a church meeting in 2024. I'd also be happy to visit you to discuss the matter at a meeting, or to lead a service about my approach to inclusivity.

This is a cause whose time has come.

Find out more about Inclusive Church at www.inclusive-church.org.

Below:

At the start of the walk at St Peter's Church, Navenby.

St Michael's Church, Waddington. Just before the heavens opened.

The end of the Pilgrimage at the door of Lincoln Cathedral. From left to right: Deborah Taylor, Mark Taylor, Nigel Allen, Rich Gascoyne, Trevor Pailing, Lorraine Pailing and Julie Hill.

