



LGBTQIA+ Inclusion in Pentecostal Churches: A Theological-Cultural Analysis

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ABSTRACT: This study explores LGBTQIA+ inclusion within Pentecostal churches in the BLISTT region (Baguio City, La Trinidad, Itogon, Sablan, Tuba, and Tublay) of the Philippines. As societal views on gender and sexuality evolve, Pentecostal congregations face the challenge of balancing traditional beliefs with a more inclusive approach. Some churches have started adopting welcoming practices, while many still hold to conventional perspectives. Through a theological and cultural analysis, this paper examines how these churches navigate inclusion by integrating insights from queer theology, intersectionality, and Filipino cultural values like kapwa (shared identity) and bayanihan (communal cooperation). The study highlights both the challenges and opportunities faced by church communities, emphasizing the importance of leadership training, mentorship programs, and open conversations. Rather than seeing inclusivity as a departure from faith, the study encourages Pentecostal churches to embrace love, compassion, and community while remaining true to their core beliefs. Practical recommendations aim to support leaders and congregants in creating a more welcoming environment that reflects the transformative love central to the Christian faith.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The inclusion of LGBTQIA+ individuals within Pentecostal churches, especially in the BLISTT region (Baguio City, La Trinidad, Itogon, Sablan, Tuba, and Tublay), remains a complex and often contentious issue. Pentecostalism in the Philippines presents a unique interplay between traditional Christian teachings and contemporary societal shifts regarding gender and sexuality. While some congregations have begun adopting more inclusive practices, many still adhere strictly to heteronormative frameworks. This evolving dynamic highlights opportunities for growth and persistent challenges as the discourse surrounding LGBTQIA+ inclusion continues to shape the faith community.

Despite the emergence of inclusivity within particular congregations, significant gaps remain in research that explores explicitly the experiences and responses of LGBTQIA+ individuals within Pentecostal settings. While international and local studies have investigated LGBTQIA+ inclusion in religious spaces, there is limited focus on the context of Filipino Pentecostal churches, particularly in the BLISTT area. This study addresses this gap by examining the theological and cultural dynamics that shape the reception of LGBTQIA+ individuals within these communities. The research aims to move beyond mere description by providing a nuanced theological-cultural analysis that considers both traditional beliefs and modern perspectives on inclusion.

Rather than conducting primary interviews or fieldwork, this study synthesizes existing literature and cultural insights to analyze how inclusivity is framed and practiced within Pentecostal contexts. By integrating perspectives from queer theology, intersectionality, social inclusion frameworks, and servant leadership principles, this paper seeks to offer practical recommendations for fostering a more welcoming environment. These recommendations are grounded in recognizing shared Christian values such as love, service, and community building.

Through this analysis, the study seeks to contribute to the ongoing discourse on LGBTQIA+ inclusion by offering practical pathways for reconciling traditional Pentecostal beliefs with contemporary understandings of gender and sexuality. In doing so, it hopes to equip church leaders, congregants, and theologians with the tools necessary to navigate the challenges and embrace the opportunities for more inclusive practices within Pentecostal communities.

2. THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR INCLUSION

Pentecostal theology is rooted in the transformative power of the Holy Spirit, a dynamic force that empowers believers to experience spiritual renewal and growth. This transformative aspect holds the potential to serve as a catalyst for inclusivity within the church. One of the central tenets of Pentecostal belief is the restoration of early church practices, which emphasizes a commitment to spiritual growth, service, and the empowerment of all believers (Rice 2025). As Pentecostalism continues to evolve, theological perspectives within the movement have diversified. While some adherents maintain traditional views on gender and sexuality, others advocate for a more expansive understanding that aligns with compassion and inclusivity, recognizing the dynamic work of the Spirit in transforming lives and communities (Daniels 2022).

Central to this inclusive vision are biblical teachings that call believers to love and embrace all individuals, regardless of their identity. For instance, Matthew 22:37-39 highlights the greatest commandments: to love God with all one's heart, soul, and mind, and to love one's neighbor as oneself. This call to love is a fundamental principle that transcends social and cultural barriers. Similarly, Galatians 3:28 declares that all are one in Christ Jesus, dissolving distinctions based on ethnicity, social status, or gender. These passages reflect the inclusive essence of the Christian message, emphasizing unity and love as core values.

However, tension arises when traditional interpretations of other biblical texts, such as Leviticus 18:22 and Romans 1:26-27, are invoked to challenge LGBTQIA+ inclusion. These passages have historically been used to reinforce heteronormative values and exclude LGBTQIA+ individuals from full participation in the faith community. However, progressive scholars argue that these texts must be interpreted contextually, considering their historical and cultural settings, rather than applying them rigidly to contemporary contexts. Such contextual interpretations align with the broader Christian message of love, compassion, and acceptance, as demonstrated in the ministry of Jesus Christ (Shaasha 2024; Udnes 2023).

Queer theology further challenges rigid scriptural interpretations by advocating for the affirmation of LGBTQIA+ identities within faith communities. It calls for a hermeneutic that acknowledges and celebrates diversity as a reflection of God's creative intention. By emphasizing love as the core Christian value, queer theology reframes biblical interpretation to prioritize justice, compassion, and unconditional acceptance. This theological perspective encourages Pentecostal churches to reflect on how their teachings and practices can better embody God's inclusive love.

Promoting an environment where LGBTQIA+ individuals feel welcomed and supported requires a shift from exclusionary interpretations to affirming ones. By embracing the transformative work of the Holy Spirit and the foundational Christian call to love, Pentecostal communities can become safe spaces where all believers are valued and empowered to participate fully in the church's life (Golomski 2020). Through intentional theological reflection and practical inclusivity measures, Pentecostal churches can live out the message of Christ by promoting unity and acceptance within their congregations.

3. PENTECOSTAL AND FILIPINO CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES

3.1. Cultural values promoting inclusion

Filipino cultural values such as *kapwa* (shared identity) and *bayanihan* (communal cooperation) reflect a deeply rooted sense of interconnectedness and mutual support in society. These principles naturally align with the Pentecostal emphasis on fellowship, service, and collective worship. *Kapwa*, which highlights the interconnectedness of individuals, fosters an environment of solidarity and respect. In Filipino Pentecostal communities, this cultural norm complements the church's mission to create inclusive spaces where every individual is seen as valuable in the eyes of God.

Similarly, *bayanihan*—the spirit of communal cooperation and helping for the common good—resonates with Pentecostal values of social responsibility and active community participation. By embracing these cultural values, Pentecostal churches can cultivate environments where inclusivity is not just a theological concept but a lived reality. These shared values offer a practical pathway for integrating LGBTQIA+ members as respected and welcomed participants in various aspects of church life, including ministry, worship, and service (Shaasha 2024).

3.2. Challenges from traditional beliefs

Despite the natural synergy between Filipino cultural values and inclusivity, significant challenges arise due to deeply entrenched traditional beliefs about gender and sexuality. Many Pentecostal churches in the Philippines continue to adhere to conservative interpretations of biblical texts, emphasizing heteronormative values. These perspectives often portray LGBTQIA+ identities as incompatible with Christian teachings, creating barriers to their full acceptance within faith communities.

Cultural conservatism further amplifies this tension, as Filipino culture places a high value on respect for authority and adherence to traditional practices. This can discourage open dialogue on sensitive topics, such as LGBTQIA+ inclusion, and contribute to divisions within congregations. Conservative leaders who view theological fidelity as synonymous with upholding rigid interpretations of scripture often reinforce these barriers, marginalizing LGBTQIA+ individuals in the process (Benyah 2020). This creates a complex intersection of cultural and theological conservatism that hinders efforts to foster inclusive practices.

3.3. Balancing culture and theology

To bridge the gap between cultural openness and theological commitments, Pentecostal churches can draw upon shared values of love, service, and community. Filipino cultural principles such as *kapwa* and *bayanihan* can be reframed within a

theological context to highlight biblical teachings on inclusivity. For instance, Matthew 22:39 calls believers to love their neighbors as themselves, while Galatians 3:28 emphasizes the unity of all in Christ Jesus, regardless of social distinctions.

By integrating cultural values with Pentecostal teachings on compassion and fellowship, churches can navigate the challenges of inclusivity while remaining faithful to their theological convictions. A community-driven approach that promotes open dialogue, education, and intentional pastoral care can help Pentecostal communities embrace inclusivity as an expression of Christ-like hospitality. This holistic strategy honors the cultural heritage of Filipino Pentecostalism while embodying the transformative love of Christ, ensuring that all members—regardless of gender or sexuality—feel valued, supported, and embraced as part of the body of Christ.

4. LITERATURE-BASED ANALYSIS OF INCLUSIVITY

Research on LGBTQIA+ inclusion within Pentecostal churches highlights a diverse and complex landscape of acceptance, revealing a spectrum that ranges from full inclusion to conditional participation and outright exclusion. This variation reflects the dynamic interplay between traditional theological convictions and emerging perspectives on gender and sexuality. In some congregations, church leaders advocate for unconditional love and spiritual growth, emphasizing that all individuals are valuable members of the body of Christ regardless of their identity. These leaders view inclusivity as expressing Christ-like compassion and hospitality, prioritizing mentorship, community engagement, and spiritual formation as pathways to holistic ministry (Shoko 2023).

Conversely, other Pentecostal leaders continue to uphold traditional gender norms, viewing them as foundational to faith practice and moral integrity. They interpret biblical passages through a conservative lens, emphasizing that maintaining doctrinal purity requires adherence to heteronormative standards. This perspective often leads to conditional acceptance, where LGBTQIA+ individuals may be welcomed but are expected to conform to traditional gender roles and norms. Such an approach can inadvertently perpetuate exclusion and marginalization, as it frames inclusion as contingent upon personal transformation rather than unconditional love (Isiko 2020).

Despite these challenges, progressive Pentecostal communities are increasingly recognizing the transformative power of mentorship and dialogue as essential components of fostering inclusivity. By creating safe spaces for open conversations about sexuality, identity, and faith, these churches are willing to bridge the gap between theological convictions and contemporary social realities. This approach aligns with a servant leadership model that prioritizes pastoral care and relational support, encouraging LGBTQIA+ individuals to feel seen, heard, and valued within their faith communities (Shaasha 2024).

Studies also reveal a generational divide within Pentecostal leadership, where younger pastors and church leaders exhibit a greater openness to discussing LGBTQIA+ issues. This shift reflects broader societal movements toward acceptance and human rights, as younger leaders are more likely to embrace dialogue and compassion over rigid doctrinal enforcement. This evolving perspective suggests that inclusive practices will likely expand as leadership attitudes shift, gradually transforming church culture into more welcoming and affirming (Udnes 2023).

Local studies further highlight how inclusive church environments positively impact spiritual growth and social well-being. When congregations intentionally foster inclusivity, LGBTQIA+ individuals experience a more profound sense of belonging and empowerment. This approach aligns with broader movements toward human rights and dignity, emphasizing that the church's mission should encompass spiritual transformation and social justice. By acknowledging diverse identities and affirming their worth, Pentecostal churches can more effectively live out the biblical mandate to love and serve one another (Mosley et al. 2021).

As perspectives evolve within Pentecostal communities, the challenge remains to balance theological integrity with compassion and inclusivity. Progressive leadership, informed by both biblical principles and contemporary social awareness, has the potential to reshape how churches engage with LGBTQIA+ individuals. By embracing mentorship, open dialogue, and a commitment to human dignity, Pentecostal churches can become places where all individuals are genuinely welcomed, affirmed, and nurtured in their faith journeys.

5. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The primary challenges to LGBTQIA+ inclusion within Pentecostal churches stem from a combination of theological resistance, cultural conservatism, and widespread misinformation. These factors create barriers that hinder the acceptance of diverse identities and limit the full participation of LGBTQIA+ individuals within faith communities. Traditional scriptural interpretations, often rooted in literal and conservative readings of biblical texts, frequently present obstacles to inclusion. Passages such as Leviticus 18:22 and Romans 1:26-27 are commonly cited to justify heteronormative values, while progressive interpretations that emphasize love and acceptance are often overlooked or dismissed. This reliance on traditional perspectives contributes to a theological climate resistant to change and inclusion (Potts 2021).

Cultural conservatism further compounds these challenges, as many Pentecostal congregations prioritize maintaining established norms and practices. Filipino cultural values, which often emphasize respect for authority and tradition, can reinforce resistance to LGBTQIA+ inclusion, mainly when church leadership adheres strictly to conservative teachings. This cultural context, combined with the influence of community expectations, results in an environment where inclusivity threatens theological purity

and moral integrity. Consequently, LGBTQIA+ individuals may experience marginalization and stigmatization, leading to a sense of isolation and discouragement within their spiritual communities (Hughes & Rouse 2023).

Misinformation about LGBTQIA+ identities also plays a significant role in perpetuating exclusion. Misinterpretations of biblical texts and a lack of awareness about gender diversity contribute to biased attitudes among congregants and leaders alike. These misconceptions can manifest as judgmental attitudes or discriminatory practices, making it challenging for LGBTQIA+ individuals to find acceptance and belonging within their faith communities. Addressing these misconceptions requires intentional education and a willingness to engage with contemporary theological scholarship that challenges traditional assumptions.

Despite these challenges, there are substantial opportunities for fostering inclusivity within Pentecostal churches. One key approach is leadership training that equips pastors and church leaders with a deeper understanding of queer theology and social inclusion. By providing educational programs that address misconceptions and promote compassionate engagement, church leaders can become advocates for a more inclusive and supportive environment. Integrating inclusive theological perspectives into sermons, teachings, and community discussions can help shift congregational attitudes toward greater acceptance.

Mentorship programs also offer a valuable avenue for fostering inclusivity. By pairing LGBTQIA+ individuals with supportive mentors within the church, these programs can help bridge generational and ideological divides. Mentorship fosters relationships built on empathy, understanding, and guidance, allowing LGBTQIA+ members to feel valued and affirmed. Additionally, mentorship can model inclusive practices that resonate with the core Christian principle of loving one's neighbor.

Furthermore, the generational shifts within church leadership present a unique opportunity to align theological practices with contemporary understandings of gender and sexuality. Younger pastors and leaders are often more open to dialogue and inclusive practices, reflecting broader societal shifts toward acceptance and human rights. By intentionally cultivating this openness and supporting emerging leaders who advocate for inclusion, Pentecostal churches can progressively transform their approach to LGBTQIA+ issues, fostering environments where everyone feels welcome and valued (Jennings 2023).

In summary, addressing the challenges to LGBTQIA+ inclusion within Pentecostal churches requires a multifaceted approach that combines education, mentorship, and progressive leadership. By challenging traditional interpretations and promoting compassionate, contextually informed theology, churches can better reflect the inclusive love central to the Christian faith. As leadership perspectives evolve, the potential for creating more welcoming and affirming communities becomes increasingly attainable.

6. PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Pentecostal churches in the BLISTT region can take proactive steps to foster inclusivity by adopting practical approaches that align with theological principles and contemporary social values. These strategies aim to create a welcoming environment where LGBTQIA+ individuals feel valued and supported while preserving the integrity of Pentecostal beliefs. Implementing these approaches can help bridge the gap between traditional teachings and the growing call for inclusivity within faith communities.

Leadership Training. One of the most impactful ways to foster inclusivity is through leadership training that educates pastors and church leaders on inclusive theology and compassionate pastoral care. This training should include modules on queer theology, social inclusion, and the biblical foundations for acceptance and love. Church leaders can more effectively guide their congregations toward compassion and understanding by deepening their understanding of how Scripture can be interpreted to affirm diverse identities. Additionally, practical training on conflict resolution and dialogue facilitation equips leaders to address resistance and promote open conversations within their communities (Golomski 2020).

Mentorship Programs. Structured mentorship programs are essential for supporting LGBTQIA+ members in their spiritual and personal growth. These programs pair experienced mentors with LGBTQIA+ individuals, fostering relationships grounded in empathy, guidance, and spiritual care. Mentorship helps bridge generational and ideological divides by modeling inclusive practices and offering personalized support. By empowering LGBTQIA+ members through mentorship, churches can nurture their leadership potential while affirming their value within the faith community. Such programs provide spiritual guidance and enhance resilience and belonging (Lolepo 2024).

Community-based initiatives. Creating safe and open spaces for dialogue and reflection is another vital approach to fostering inclusivity. Community-based initiatives, such as workshops, discussion groups, and forums, encourage congregants to express their perspectives openly and engage in respectful conversations about gender, sexuality, and faith. These initiatives serve as platforms for education, storytelling, and shared reflection, allowing diverse voices to be heard and understood. By fostering an active listening and empathy environment, churches can build trust and cultivate a culture of acceptance (Shaasha 2024).

Inclusive policies. To ensure long-term inclusivity, churches should develop and implement policies affirming diverse identities while maintaining theological integrity. These guidelines can address issues such as language use, ministry involvement, and leadership opportunities for LGBTQIA+ members. Inclusive policies demonstrate the church's commitment to welcoming all individuals and provide clear guidance for leaders and congregants alike. By formalizing inclusive practices, churches signal that diversity is tolerated and celebrated as part of their mission to embody Christ's love and grace (Shaasha & Benyah 2020).

Incorporating these practical approaches into church life reflects a commitment to inclusivity and aligns with core Pentecostal values of community, service, and spiritual growth. By equipping leaders with the necessary theological and pastoral skills, fostering supportive mentorship, promoting open dialogue, and establishing inclusive policies, Pentecostal churches in the BLISTT region can become spaces where all individuals feel valued and empowered to grow in their faith.

7. CONCLUSION

Inclusivity within Pentecostal churches is deeply rooted in theological principles of love, hospitality, and the transformative power of the Holy Spirit. Central to the Christian faith is the commandment to love one's neighbor as oneself, as emphasized by Jesus in Matthew 22:37-39. This foundational teaching calls for believers to extend compassion and grace to all individuals, regardless of their identity or background. By embracing this principle, Pentecostal churches can create welcoming environments that reflect Christ's inclusive love.

One of the most powerful aspects of Pentecostal theology is the belief in the Holy Spirit's transformative power. The Spirit empowers believers to grow in their faith, overcome personal struggles, and embody Christ-like love. Human distinctions do not limit this transformative work but transcends social, cultural, and gender boundaries. Therefore, emphasizing the Holy Spirit's role in fostering compassion and inclusion can bridge traditional beliefs and modern understandings of diversity. Instead of viewing inclusivity as a departure from doctrine, Pentecostal communities can see it as an extension of God's redemptive work in the world (Shaasha 2024).

To actualize this vision of inclusivity, open dialogue is essential. Creating safe spaces for honest conversations about faith, sexuality, and identity allows congregants to share their perspectives without fear of judgment. Such dialogues promote understanding and challenge misconceptions that rigid interpretations of Scripture may have shaped. By fostering a culture of openness and empathy, churches can encourage deeper spiritual connections and cultivate an environment where everyone feels valued.

Intentional leadership training is equally crucial in fostering inclusivity. Educating pastors and church leaders on inclusive theology and compassionate pastoral care equips them to navigate complex issues with grace and wisdom. Training should include exploring how biblical texts can be understood contextually and how to balance theological integrity with an affirming approach to ministry. Churches can model the love and hospitality central to the Pentecostal tradition by empowering leaders with the tools to advocate for inclusivity.

Welcoming LGBTQIA+ individuals authentically enriches the spiritual life of the faith community. It reflects the heart of the gospel message—love, acceptance, and transformation through Christ. As churches embrace both tradition and inclusivity, they demonstrate the power of the Holy Spirit to unite believers in faith and love, regardless of differences. This holistic approach fosters a stronger, more connected congregation and serves as a testament to God's boundless grace and compassion.

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