

UK Pastor Calls for 'Ministry of Reconciliation,' Responds to Backlash for Church's Traditional Views on Sexuality

Pastor Agu Irukwu of Jesus House in northwest London meets the needs of his community in practical ways, most recently with a pop-up COVID-19 vaccination site on Good Friday, as he knows access to such resources are often limited for members of Black, Asian and other minority groups.

Unfortunately, Irukwu and his congregation were subjected to a "torrent of hate-filled, abusive and bullysome" messages following the visit of the leader of the Labour Party, Sir Keir Starmer, who tweeted his regret on visiting the church upon learning of its biblically-based stance on marriage and sexuality.

The Evangelical Alliance spoke with Irukwu to unpack what happened leading up to and following Starmer's visit—and what the backlash has meant for the faith community.

"It was a positive meeting," Irukwu said of the visit with Starmer, who made Jesus House a stop on his "Let's Vaccinate Britain" campaign at the Labour Party's request. During his visit, Starmer met with the workers and "spoke with young Black members of the church, listening to their views on the vaccine and its impact on our community."

Irukwu says Starmer commended the church's "work in responding to the needs of some of the more deprived areas of the community."

A member of the Labour Party recorded the pleasant exchange, posting it on social media for updates on the campaign. Members of the LGBTQ community within the Labour Party immediately condemned the visit, to which Starmer removed the video from his social media account. He also issued a public apology for visiting Jesus House:

“I completely disagree with Jesus House’s beliefs on LGBT+’s rights, which I was not aware of before my visit. I apologize for the hurt my visit caused and have taken down the video. It was a mistake and I accept that.”

Irukwu is no stranger to backlash from those who disagree with the biblical values upon which the church is based. The issue started in 2006 over Jesus House’s opposition to proposed sexual orientation equality laws, of which more than 150 other church leaders were also opposed.

And yet, Irukwu is confident that Christ’s message of love will reign through their response. What worries him, Irukwu says, is the indication that situations such as this reveal a “society sliding into intolerance of views and opinions that are different” than their own. As such, Irukwu believes Starmer’s response to the backlash proves to be a “missed opportunity to model strong leadership” in this area.

Continuing to stand up for his beliefs, Irukwu calls for believers to join him against cancel culture and “speak up in the characteristic loving and gracious manner of our model: our Savior, Jesus Christ.”

“The ministry of reconciliation is one which God commends to us as Christians,” Irukwu says. “We can certainly start by praying more for the Spirit of God to work in this ministry of reconciliation. We can also pray for more of the fruit of the Spirit to allow us to be more effective.”

For those who wish to pray for the ministry of reconciliation that Jesus House and Irukwu are striving for, he has a call to

petition:

“We would like to ask you, as our brothers and sisters, to pray for more grace for us. We would also like to ask you to pray for unity in the body of Christ. Please pray that we will not grow weary in doing good and that, despite all that has been thrown at us, we will continue to obey the injunction of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, to ‘bless them that curse you, pray for them that despitefully use you’ (Luke 6:28, ASV). We believe that God is working out His own plans and purposes and ultimately His name will be glorified.” {eoa}

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