

## **Meet our Summer 2024 Guest Preachers**

In June, the FBCH Congregation voted to request the CABF Credentials Committee convene Ordination Councils for Andrea King and Luke Dowding, ministers working in the UK and Albania. FBCH is growing our relationship with Andrea and Luke as we participate in their ordination and bless them for the ministry they are living in their contexts. This summer, we will get to know them better as they preach for us.

### **Andrea King (Preaching July 14 & 21)**

Andrea studied Theology at Oxford University as an openly LGBT+ person of faith, called to ministry in the Baptist Union, but not able to progress to ordination in this denomination. She was awarded a 1st Class Honours degree by Oxford in March 2023. In September 2023, Andrea was appointed to the role of Director of Safeguarding and Strategy for OneBodyOneFaith.

In response to the significant harm experienced by LGBT+ in churches that Andrea saw over many years, she designed and chaired the Creating Sanctuary resources, to enable churches and denominational leaders to understand the impact of harm on LGBT+ people and promote safer churches for all. This has rolled out across the UK, being the focus of Church in Wales and Methodist Synods, and is now used internationally by thousands of church leaders across the world. Creating Sanctuary calls church communities to a new reconciling conversation that provides a home for LGBT+ people and the safety of all. This approach has also benefited other marginalised groups who often find it hard to find a place to call home in communities of faith.

Andrea has worked in children's services for almost twenty years, starting in the voluntary sector, working for central government and providing leadership in Local Authorities, NHS England/Improvement and for an international charity. Andrea has overseen numerous Serious Case Reviews, Domestic Homicide Reviews, Adult Safeguarding Reviews and Complex Abuse investigations. This has included managing the media coverage and press conferences; and sitting in Gold Command with the Police following a series of child abductions. She has led new innovative services in response to unmet child need and in the context of inadequate service provision, which have been visited by Children's Commissioner, DfE and NHSE and then highlighted as national examples of best practice to UK Select Committee and at St James Palace.

Andrea is passionate about improving outcomes for those with little voice or power, who experience adversity, inequality or harm. She specialised in innovation and building sustainable improvement, by listening with care to the expertise and insight of local people. Her approach is primarily restorative. She seeks first to understand others, to understand their pressures, priorities, hopes and fears. She is often asked to facilitate difficult conversations using this approach and has provided safeguarding

consultancy in various parts of the country to partnership leaders, where leadership support is needed to improve safeguarding arrangements; or where learning is sought from complex, and often emotive, situations.

### **Luke Dowding (Preaching July 28 & August 4)**

Luke trained for Baptist ministry whilst earning his Bachelors in Theology from Spurgeon's College, London, and later completed his Masters in Biblical Studies at King's College London. He has been involved in Baptist church life since childhood, recently serving as a Deacon and Trustee at Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church for 6 years and is a pioneer of LGBT+ inclusion within the Baptist Union of Great Britain. He co-founded Soho Gathering, a fellowship and safe space for LGBT+ people disenfranchised from Christian communities, and previously served as Co-Director of Affirm: Baptists Together for LGBT+ Inclusion – now he is the Chair of Trustees. Luke supported the development of Creating Sanctuary, a unique resource helping to create safer spaces in churches. Since 2019, Luke has been working to build a network of global progressive Baptists, in large part thanks to first meeting Rusty in 2019. In May of that year, he was appointed the Executive Director for OneBodyOneFaith (CEO since 2023), the oldest Christian LGBT+ members network in the UK, who advocate for change in the church and seek to ensure that LGBT+ Christians thrive, not just survive.

Luke also carries a breadth business management experience from a decade of working within the advertising industry in London and is now transforming that learning into innovative Inclusion and Diversity training for corporate, charity and faith bodies alike. He is a trained yoga teacher and bridges the divide between the physical and spiritual selves through practice and prayer.

Luke is a fervent campaigner and fundraiser for LGBT+ rights in Albania, believing that at the core of Christian identity is the inclusion of the marginalised regardless of their beliefs or orientation; he served as a Patron for "Streha": the first shelter for LGBTQ+ homeless young people in the Balkans, until recently with his appointment to their Board of Directors.

In 2016 he married Steven, the first same-gender marriage to be held at Bloomsbury Central Baptist and the first within the wider Baptist Union of Great Britain. Luke is a Trekkie, a hiker, appreciates speciality coffee (even more so after giving it up for Lent this year), and an avid reader. Sooner or later, he'll get around to writing his own book, but when (or indeed, what about) is anyone's guess. He currently splits his time between the UK and Albania.