

Evangelism: Legal Guidelines

Social justice: Conversion practices*

Any evangelist preaching or communicating about gender and sexuality should be aware of the Conversion Practices Prohibition Legislation Act (CPPLA) which restricts how people may speak to individuals about these topics.

Practices carried out with the intention of changing or suppressing a person's sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression are prohibited conversion practices.

What should an evangelist know about conversion practices?

A conversion practice is a criminal offence where serious harm (physical, psychological or emotional) occurs, or where a conversion practice is carried out on a person under 18 years of age or on a person who lacks decision-making capacity. Consent is not a defence.

The criminal penalties for committing an offence include imprisonment, though prosecution can only happen if the Attorney-General gives permission. Any conversion practice may also result in a civil claim.

Examples of prohibited conversion practices include using shame or coercion, encouraging a person to believe their sexuality or gender expression needs changing, or carrying out a prayer-based practice or deliverance—if any of these are intended to change or suppress a person's sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression.

While the law focuses on actions directed at individuals, it is possible that speaking to groups may also be interpreted as harmful and in breach of the Act depending on the discussion. Evangelists likely to engage in this topic should consider seeking legal advice beforehand.

* Disclaimer: This information sheet is produced for general purposes only. It does not constitute legal advice or advice of any other kind and should not be relied on as such. The full guidelines are available at www.ethosalliance.nz.

How might the law against conversion practices apply to evangelists?



Scenario – conversation about gender identity

An evangelist street preaching on Queen Street in Auckland is approached by an 18-year-old young woman who is a sociology major studying at the University of Auckland. She wants to know what the Bible says about sexuality and gender because she has no knowledge of religion. During the conversation the 18-year-old discloses she is questioning her gender and is confused about whether her internal gender identity matches her biological sex.

In this scenario the young woman is not underage and has legal capacity to make her own decisions. It is not illegal to have a general conversation about gender and sexuality if it is not meant to change her. However, if the evangelist gives her advice or prays with her intending to change or suppress her gender identity or expression this is a conversion practice. If the practice causes her serious harm, it is an offence.

This information sheet summarises material in [Evangelism: Legal Guidelines](#), a resource to inform evangelists about the laws likely to affect public ministry. If this topic is relevant to your ministry, we recommend reading the relevant section in the full guidelines.

If you are involved in evangelism and have a question that our guidelines don't answer, feel free to get in touch by emailing contact@ethosalliance.nz.