



AMBASSADORS &  
BRIDGE BUILDERS  
INTERNATIONAL

# CEO ANNUAL REPORT 2022

*Ambassadors & Bridge Builders International (ABBI) is committed to ending the unnecessary suffering caused by ignorance and misinformation about sexual orientation and gender identity. Our mission is to create understanding, acceptance and a better world for LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer) people. We do this by empowering community members, providing education and resources, building bridges with Christian leaders, organisations and churches, and utilising media/social networking opportunities.*

# Contents

Preamble .....	3
The year in review .....	3
Consultations .....	3
Conferences and presentations.....	3
8th International Conference on Gender, Sexuality and Queer Theology .....	3
Included 2021 with affirming Salvation Army leaders and members .....	4
#WalkingBetweenWorlds Central Church Port Kembla .....	4
#WalkingBetweenWorlds Darwin Memorial Uniting Church .....	5
Shameless Sexuality: Life After Purity Culture Conference .....	6
Resources - Resources - Resources .....	7
Website .....	7
YouTube Channel .....	7
AVB - a non-academic academic? .....	8
A Life of Unlearning – still relevant .....	9
Submissions.....	10
News items – titbits.....	10
And now the BIG one .....	11
Bundeena House Christian Community becomes affirming and apologises for past conversion “therapy” practices.....	11
For those who like numbers .....	13
2023 What’s happening.....	13
Financial support.....	14
Thanks .....	14

# Preamble

As I've gone back over the last 18 months preparing this report, I'm reminded how much Covid influenced our lives with lockdowns, restrictions and limitations. It wasn't business-as-usual; it was 'how do we adapt'?

As a substantial amount of our work is online through email, website, creating resources and using social media the disruption wasn't huge. Working from home, whilst new for some, is what I have done for years. Zoom became our friend and enabled us to gather people together. We found creative ways to do things we previously had not considered.

One thing I could never get used to, was speaking at online conferences. Speaking to a computer screen is not really my idea of interaction. As a former Pentecostal preacher, I do my best work in front of a live audience.....lol.

## The year in review

Going back over the calendar, communications, and posts to see what has been achieved is always encouraging and sometimes surprising. Here are some highlights.

### Consultations

Having worked with thousands for LGBTQ people from Christian backgrounds over the years and particularly with conversion 'therapy' survivors, I'm often called upon to share my experience and insights with various organisations.

Here are some organisations I've worked with this year.

- LGBTIQ+ Health Australia
- The Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission
- The New Zealand Ministry of Justice in preliminary discussions regarding the banning of conversion therapy
- The Tasmanian Conversion Practices Survivor Support Group
- Improving Spiritual Health Care for LGBT Australians: Beyond Conversion Practices Research – Steering Committee Latrobe University
- Meeting with a variety of church leaders from Canberra and surrounding area
- Endeavour College – Adelaide

### Conferences and presentations

#### **8th International Conference on Gender, Sexuality and Queer Theology**

I was thrilled to be invited to give the **opening address** at the 8th International Conference on Gender, Sexuality and Queer Theology, hosted by the **Jakarta Theological Seminary (JTS)**.

Founded in 1934, JTS is the oldest ecumenical theological college in Indonesia and has a strong tradition of learning, transformative spirituality, and a creative community. The work they are doing amongst gender and sexually diverse people in Indonesia is unique and ground-breaking.

Because of sensitivities within Indonesia, the session was not recorded but a PDF of the presentation [“Normal is a cycle on a washing machine”](#) is available on our website.

### **Included2021 with affirming Salvation Army leaders and members**

Another exciting opportunity was to speak at the Included2021 conference. [Included2021](#) was a **global conference for Salvation Army leaders and members** who are committed to creating LGBTQ inclusion in the denomination.

I gave a presentation on Conversion Therapy, its history, evolution, and the impact on individual’s lives.

An edited version of that is now available on our YouTube channel. [What is conversion ‘therapy’ – a complete guide](#)

### **#WalkingBetweenWorlds Central Church Port Kembla**



After several stops and starts because of Covid, we finally got to do a #WalkingBetweenWorlds seminar for [Central Church](#) at Port Kembla.

A church moving towards becoming affirming, the Pastor and leadership felt sponsoring a seminar like this was a good step forward. It was definitely one of the most successful seminars we've run.

Here's some feedback from participants:

- *I wish with all my heart this was given to me when I was a suicidal teenager praying God would make me a boy, so I didn't have to face this painful world. Thank you for changing the future of Australian churches.*
- *Excellent presentation. Easy to listen to. Engaging, relevant.*
- *I am very grateful for this experience. I was moved by the vulnerability and inclusivity of the presenter and church community.*
- *This was so helpful. All people from both worlds need to hear this.*
- *An excellent and refreshing seminar- very well done.*
- *This workshop exceeded my expectations. The humour was welcome as well.*

Read more feedback in the newsletter report [HERE](#).

### **#WalkingBetweenWorlds Darwin Memorial Uniting Church**

[Darwin Memorial Uniting Church](#) hosted the one-day training seminar as a contribution to the annual [Top End Pride](#).

“Wonderful, challenging, thought provoking” said one minister from the Salvation Army who attended. “Presenter – Brilliant. Content – Awesome,” said another.

Many commented that they were unaware of the depths of conflict many LGBTQ from church backgrounds experienced.

When asked what things they liked most about the training, common responses were, the personal stories, the strategies to help LGBTQ people of faith find resolution and the personal and engaging style of the presenter.

A minister's breakfast and evening public meeting were included in the program.

On the Saturday afternoon, I sat on a panel with the Northern Territory Chief Minister, Natasha Fyles, other politicians, and community leaders, talking about LGBTQ equality and ending discrimination.



### **Shameless Sexuality: Life After Purity Culture Conference**

Having worked with 1,000s of LGBTQ people from Christian backgrounds, I've had lots of experience with LGBTQ Religious Trauma.

I was invited to join a line-up of 15 speakers at the Shameless Sexuality: Life After Purity Culture conference in the United States.

In my presentation '*A Life of Unlearning - from Gay Shame to Gay Pride*', I covered four themes.

1. **Scripture resolution process.**
2. **Belief resolution options.**
3. **Sexuality resolution process.**
4. **14 strategies I've used to manage my PTSD.**

The above presentation is now available on our [YouTube Channel](#).

Other speaking opportunities included:

- [Rainbow Families](#) webinar on 'How can religious schools support LGBTQ kids?'
- [LGBTIQ Health Australia](#) - Pray Away documentary presentation and discussion
- [Conversion Therapy Drop Out Network](#) – a survivors network based in the US
- Tasmanian Conversion Practices Survivors Support Group
- [Bree Gorman Diversity and Inclusion Consultant](#)

## Resources - Resources - Resources

*“The enemy is not individuals, churches, conversion ‘therapy’ organisations or political parties; the enemy is ignorance. Change is created by focusing our energies on overcoming the latter instead of attacking the former.”*

- Anthony Venn-Brown

## Website

Our website continues to be a source of information for people searching for information and answers, especially those who wish to do this anonymously.

**The ABBI site has Australia’s largest collection of articles, information and research on conversion “therapy”** and has been a critical resource for academics, legislators, human rights advocates, journalists etc. We have [a page dedicated to the topic](#).

**Posts - 18 new posts have been added to our blog.**

**The top 5 posts have been:**

1. [Pray Away – Netflix documentary – Review](#)
2. [Gays and Lesbians in the Military – WWII](#)
3. [Sy Rogers misled me, and I tried to be straight for the next 27 years](#)
4. [World Suicide Prevention Day – a look at LGBTQ religious suicide](#)
5. [Citipointe Christian College stop it. Just stop it.](#)

**Our top 3 posts of all time have been:**

1. [When a married straight man falls in love with another man](#) - 39,908 views
2. [LGBTQ Welcoming, accepting, affirming – don’t get stuck](#) - 38,440 views
3. [Can a straight person become gay?](#) - 26,733 views

The number one post has been #1 since it was originally posted. It seems there are lot of gay men in straight marriages out there looking for answers.

## YouTube Channel

Since the beginning of the financial year in 2021, these videos have been added to our [YouTube channel](#) for people to view and share.

1. [Creating a space for change](#) – this concept is the very foundation of the work of ABBI. Recorded in the Open Door Church in Los Angeles.
2. [Christian parents misguided love and their gay son - the enemy is ignorance](#)  
A heart-wrenching story told by the parents themselves. Rob and Linda’s story of their son Ryan demonstrates how ignorance about sexual orientation and an ill-informed outdated Christian belief system can slowly destroy no matter how much we love. “Unintentionally we had taught Ryan to hate his sexuality. And since

sexuality cannot be separated from self, we had taught Ryan to hate himself.” Linda Mueller Robertson.

3. [Homosexuality and Christianity - a respectful dialogue](#) A 2006 interview with Dr Shane Clifton (Alphacrucis College), Ron Brookman (Living Waters) and myself. This interview continued to be played to students in the college for years afterwards, until Dr Clifton’s employment was terminated. When the video was released recently, several people said it was influential in their becoming LGBTQ affirming.
4. [Homosexuality and the Pentecostal Church](#) – a brief documentary project by some of Dr Shane Clifton’s students from Alphacrucis College.
5. [The Cure](#) – the only Australian documentary on conversion “therapy”.
6. [Dad’s coming out](#) – 60 Minutes segment on being gay and in a straight marriage.
7. [Here I am](#) – a documentary about coming out and Christian families.
8. [The Bedroom Commandments](#) – a documentary on the intersection of sexuality and religion. Various people interviewed, including myself and the Hon. Michael Kirby.
9. [LGBTQ Religious Trauma, Resolution Options and PTSD](#) – Presentation from the Religious Trauma Conference in the United States.
10. [Anthony Venn-Brown on John Hatfield’s Viewpoint](#) – it’s embarrassing. It was the morning after the huge book launch of A Life of Unlearning in 2004. It was my very first TV interview. I felt railroaded. “So, how many men have you slept with?” he asked. It was Sky News.
11. **Transgender Day of Remembrance - Dragonflies - Rev Josephine Inkpin.**
12. [Conversion ‘therapy’ - everything you wanted to know](#) – a presentation to a Salvation Army conference.

Our video, [Hillsong and the gay issue](#), has been viewed 150,000 times and the ABC show, [Conversion Therapy - does it work?](#) has been viewed 34,575 times.

### **AVB - a non-academic academic?**

When I finished High School in 1969, I missed out on university matriculation by one subject. I had planned to go to theological seminary, but the lack of a university entrance grade meant I took the path of attending a Bible College instead.

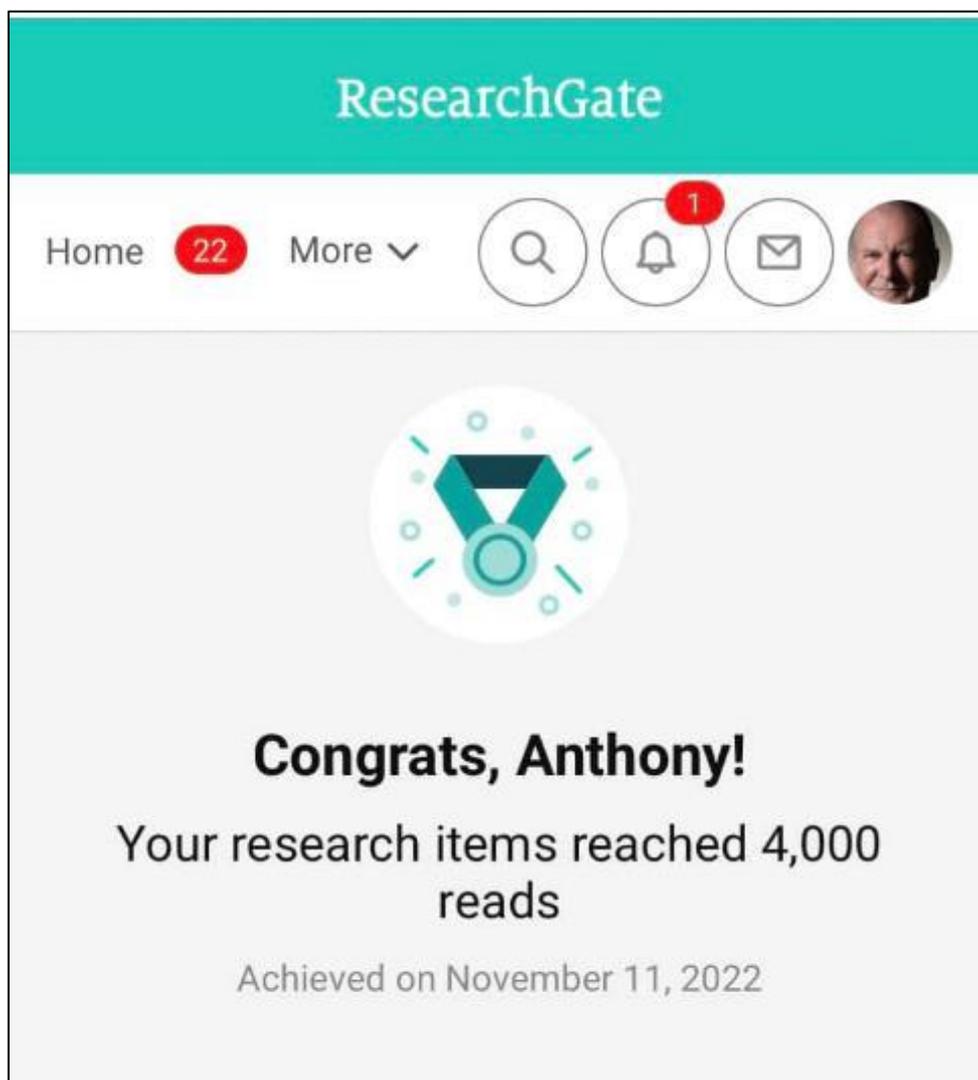
Looking back over the years, I’d call myself a self-learner. I never read fiction, always non-fiction. When I was in the ministry, I was always reading relevant books on apologetics, spiritual gifts, church growth, evangelism, and personal development.

**I remember when I walked away from everything, that left a learning void in my life.** I wasn’t motivated to learn anything.

That changed once I found reconciliation. **Suddenly, several new genres opened up to me.** The science sexual orientation, the six passages of the bible presumed to speak about homosexuality, religion and sexuality, LGBTQ history and of course conversion “therapy” have all been topics I’ve found intriguing.

I now upload my papers onto [Academia.edu](https://www.academia.edu/) and also [ResearchGate](https://www.researchgate.net/). Recently I discovered that my article, [HOW, WHEN AND WHY HILLSONG BANNED “EX-GAY” REFERRALS](#) was used and quoted extensively in the UK gay press, in the Pink News article, [Shameful history of anti-gay megachurch Hillsong as disgraced founder resigns amid misconduct claims](#).

Every now and then I receive encouraging messages like this one below.



### **A Life of Unlearning – still relevant**

A Life of Unlearning is now in its [third edition](#). Who would have thought, now 18 years since it was first published in 2004, that it would still be selling and impacting lives?

This Facebook message received recently is one of the many showing how profoundly people are often impacted.

*"Thank you for writing #ALifeOfUnlearning". It took me less than 48 hours to cry my way through it. It could have been my autobiography... up until the point where you were forced 'out'.*

*I totally broke down when you wrote about thinking about driving off the 'high way to end it all' - that is EXACTLY what happened to me just last year.*

*I have spoken to a few close friends (2 gay one not) about coming out. Two are wonderfully supportive, but bizarrely, one of the gay ones is telling me not to because of the pain it will cause my wife. So the next stage IS to talk to my wife and my denomination. I have written out what I am going to say and I'm thinking about when to do it. Probably after Christmas.*

*All of that is not the point of this PM - the point is that while you hit a raw nerve in me and unleashed deep emotions I've been burying, you also gave me hope. You made me feel that there were others out there and I am not alone. Probably even mo'e importantly though is that I can take these next steps knowing it doesn't have to be all bad. At times I've felt that I was going to walk into darkness. Strange, as I've been living in darkness way too long.*

*For your book, I cannot thank you enough."*

Discounts are available for bulk purchases and remember that all proceeds go to the work of ABBI. Details [HERE](#).

## Submissions

ABBI is often called upon to make [submissions](#) to government inquiries. In the past, this has included Marriage Equality, Religious Freedom and LGBTQ Conversion Practices (conversion 'therapy').

This year we have lodged two government submissions to protect LGBTQ people from harm and discrimination:

1. [Religious Discrimination Bill – Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee](#)
2. [New South Wales Equality Bill](#)

## News items – titbits

- In March 2022 **LinkedIn** named me one of Australia's Top 20 LGBTQIA+ Voices.
- In June 2022 I attended the second [Queer History Conference](#) at the San Francisco State Conference. Whilst in the US I also went to **Missouri** to do some research for my next book.
- In August 2022 we hosted a free viewing of the documentary **Cured**.

- **Hillsong.** As I knew Brian Houston from when he moved to Australia and preached regularly for him from his first meeting in a school hall, I had a number of filmmakers approaching me to be a part of their documentaries. After initial conversations, it was clear that being involved with these was not aligned with our mission and would have muddied the name of Ambassadors & Bridge Builders International. There was one documentary maker, however, who was different. After our initial communications, I felt our contribution was going to be important and respected. After 3 months back-and-forth negotiations, they agreed to give us complete editorial control over what content and how our contribution was used. This is generally unheard of. I feel confident that ABBI's contribution will be helpful to LGBTQ people not only in Hillsong Churches but also Evangelical and Pentecostal megachurches around the world. The documentary will be released in a few months. Subscribers to our [newsletter](#) will hear about this first.

## And now the BIG one

### **Bundeena House Christian Community becomes affirming and apologises for past conversion “therapy” practices.**



If you've read my [autobiography](#), you'll know that in 1972, I was in a [residential Christian program](#) operating out of a church in Sydney's south to rid myself of my homosexuality. Moombara and Bundeena House were properties owned and operated by the church.

Through a series of [amazing synchronistic events](#) that would boggle the mind of any mathematician, I reconnected with the church during the first COVID-19 lockdown and began [consulting](#) with the leadership and the church.

The final outcome was that on Sunday 27 March 2022, the church became officially affirming and apologised to me and others for the past harms.

**Statement of affirmation:**

“At Bundeena House Christian Community, we believe that every person is created in God’s image. All are equally worthy of respect, dignity and love, regardless of gender, gender expression, sexual orientation, age, ability, race or ethnicity. Everyone is welcomed, supported and affirmed to grow in their relationship with God, self and each other. Everyone is encouraged to use their gifts and abilities to serve God and others.”

**The apology:**

“Today we want to speak about wrongs in the past history of the Bundeena House Christian Community and to acknowledge the suffering which so many experienced as a result of the community’s stance on issues of sexuality.

We are sorry for our past belief that any person’s sexuality was unacceptable to God and needed to be changed, and for our attempts to do so.

We are sorry that we promoted the belief that anyone’s intrinsic sexuality would be condemned by God and by the church at large.

We are sorry for the harshness with which many were treated and the condemnation which was directed at LGBT people.

We are sorry for the spiritual and emotional suffering and damage which were direct consequences of the beliefs we espoused and the practices we undertook.

We are sorry that we were in these ways not channels of the love and mercy of God.”

Eventually a video will be put together of the event, but you can have a sneak peek at a special part of the proceedings [HERE](#).



Gathering after the special service under the new church sign with board members Tony Rowe, Marguerite Foxon and ABBI president Anthony Barbara  
Ambassadors & Bridge Builders International 2022

## For those who like numbers

Our emphasis is always focusing on overcoming ignorance and misinformation with truth and facts. ABBI gets information out there through as many channels as possible. These include media, social networks, our website's resources and posts, training, etc.

Our social media profile continues to grow and is used regularly to distribute up to date and relevant information.

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
<a href="#">YouTube Channel</a>	150 subscribers 137,125 views	184 subscribers 179,481 views	202 subscribers 193,969 views	231 subscribers 208,920 views	277 subscribers 222,422 views	326 subscribers 221,903 views	362 subscribers 240,785 views
<a href="#">ABBI Facebook page</a>	1249 page likes	1,576 page likes 1,501 followers	1,960 page likes 1,891 followers	2,172 page likes 2,161 followers	2,300 page likes 2,319 followers	2,356 page likes 2,380 followers	2,407 page likes 2,422 followers
<a href="#">A Life of Unlearning Facebook page</a>	1632 page likes	1,660 page likes 1,575 followers	2,046 page likes 1,967 followers	2,399 page likes 2,351 followers	2,550 page likes 2,532 followers	2,600 followers	2,663 followers
<a href="#">LinkedIn</a>	1574 connections	1,733 connections 1,680 followers	1,848 connections 1,780 Followers	1,897 connections 1,837 followers	1978 connections 1897 followers	2032 connections 1,950 followers	2096 connections 2,113 followers
<a href="#">Instagram</a>	889 followers	997 followers	1,104 followers	1,224 followers	1,322 followers	1,474 followers	1587 followers

The actual impact of our work is often hard to measure. However, the visits to our website give some indication of our growing reach.

2016	31,058
2017	92,659
2018	160,611
2019	262,395
2020	316,954
2021	351,282
<b>2022</b>	<b>386,178 total</b>

## 2023 What's happening

This year Sydney is hosting [World Pride](#). It's going to be an incredible time like Sydney and Australia have never seen before. Imagine the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras on steroids.

ABBI will be involved in several events. Look out for us at Fair Day. In conjunction with World Pride is a 3 day [Human Rights Conference](#). ABBI is responsible for organising an Interfaith Caucus on the 28th February as a part of the conference.

All going well, a new book will be published in 2023 which **will lift the veil on a certain individual in the Christian world who wasn't what they appeared or proclaimed to be** ..... (you'll have to wait and see). It'll be controversial, but its purpose is to dispel myths and false narratives about sexuality and gender identity with facts and the truth.

Next year, we have an anniversary. **ABBI will have been in existence officially for 10 years.** I think we should have a party, or something, don't you?

## Financial support

There is only one way our organisation continues. We receive no government funding. **Where would be without our #ABBIfamily?** The #ABBIfamily comprises individuals who believe in the value of our work and either give on a monthly basis or with one-off donations.

We are grateful for every single one of you that generously and sacrificially give to this important and sometimes life-saving work.

If you are not a part of our #ABBIfamily and you'd like to join, just click on [this link](#). If you'd like to have a conversation about ways to help ABBI with fundraising, we'd love to talk to you. Please email me at [anthony@abbi.org.au](mailto:anthony@abbi.org.au)

A fully audited financial report is available. You can view that on the Australian Charities and Not for Profit Commission [website](#) or email [secretary@abbi.org.au](mailto:secretary@abbi.org.au) for a PDF copy. Our thanks to Martin Coxell, who donated his time to complete the audit.

## Thanks

Finally, I must thank the [board of ABBI](#). I am always grateful for their encouragement, support, feedback, expertise, and wisdom.

It takes a great deal of time to put this report together. I trust you found it informative.

Thank you for taking the time to read it.

We look forward to serving you, the LGBTQ community, and faith communities in 2023 and into the future.

Please....if you have any questions, feel free to call, text or email.

**Anthony Venn-Brown OAM**  
Founder and CEO  
Ambassadors & Bridge Builders International  
[anthony@abbi.org.au](mailto:anthony@abbi.org.au)  
+61 416 015 231