

# Tolton Works to Bridge Gap in LGBTQ Faith Community through International Efforts

*Pan-Africanist, Christian, and Queer-Bishop Joseph Tolton shares thoughts about LGBTQ solidarity and the past, present, and future of Christianity in Africa.*



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10, 2021 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Diving into the contrasting beliefs of the conservative white Christian church and the LGBTQ community, Bishop Joseph W. Tolton is sharing his thoughts about the past, present, and future of Christianity in Africa. Highlighting his experience growing up as a “closeted gay,” Tolton is sounding the alarm regarding resistance, manipulation, failure, acceptance, resilience, culture, and progress within the church.

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*Bishop Tolton*

In a new essay, [“Pan Africanist, Christian, and Queer,”](#) Bishop Tolton shares that he was “raised in the cradle of the Pentecostal church.” He recalls that the windowsill of his childhood bedroom served as his first pulpit. Zeroing in on his educational foundation in predominantly Jewish schools, he says that community served to inspire his transnational work.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, the fact that his own fellow Christians isolated and condemned those who identified as gay led him to quietly live a lifestyle that was contrary to what was accepted. Tolton believed the disease was a curse from God given the church’s stance. In turn, he witnessed an exodus from the Black church in the late 1980s and early 1990s due to their response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic, which he called ugly, nasty, vindictive, and full of betrayal.

Eventually, this led the Harlem, NY native to join a reform movement of Black Pentecostals, Baptists, and Methodists rooted in acceptance. Tolton founded Rehoboth Temple in Harlem in 2006. While the “straight-friendly” church was welcoming to all, it was particularly focused on the LGBTQ population. With a frontline view of what was taking place domestically, Tolton was

prompted to explore the issue on an international scale. His research led to the transformative work he currently engages in.

In 2009, Uganda's anti-gay bill became a topic of interest globally. Thrust into the forefront was Bishop Dr.

Christopher Senyonjo, an Episcopal priest. While creating a safe space for young LGBTQ identifiers, he was the only clergy member to voice his disapproval of the bill once it passed.

After a chance meeting with Senyonjo, Tolton visited Uganda in September 2010. Stating that his "life completely changed ever since that trip," Tolton

began to see up close the damage done by conservative white evangelical Christians.



Bishop Joseph Tolton

"When I met my Queer brothers and sisters, I was not only connecting with them around our Queer reality but also as people of African descent who had been separated. We found ourselves having an incredible conversation about not just the future for Queer people, but the ways in which this relationship between the religious right and ecclesiastical leaders on the continent and relationships between America's aid and the ways in which that propped up autocratic regimes."

Prompted by the murder of a Ugandan activist, David Kato, Tolton began to witness an increase in African American clergy supporting rights for the LGBTQ community. Signaling an uprising and loosening of the stronghold the "religious right" had on the Black church, 47.5 percent of Blacks voted in favor of marriage equality in Maryland in 2012.

In Africa at the same time, Queer people were beginning to speak out for their rights. In April 2010, a manifesto issued in Nairobi declared: "As Africans, we all have infinite potential. We stand for an African revolution which encompasses the demand for a re-imagination of our lives outside neocolonial categories of identity and power."

Building upon his U.S. to Africa bridge, Tolton, as a part of the [Fellowship of Affirming Ministries](#) network, has helped build five congregations in East Africa for the LGBTQ community. They serve the people to provide spiritual support and also organize advocacy. Task forces are organized around civil society and include academia, government, media, and sectors driving cultural influence.

"I believe this path is the unpaved road of Pan-Africanism. And that we must connect the

movements that young people are building on the ground in Africa with movements in Brazil, Colombia, throughout the Caribbean, and certainly here in the United States. That is the work of Interconnected Justice: bringing together and building a unified web between nationally based Pan-African movements powered by young people.”

About Bishop Joseph W. Tolton: Bishop Joseph W. Tolton is the [Founder and President of Interconnected Justice](#). The strategic intent of the organization is to be a force uniting global racial justice movements in which the continent of Africa and its diaspora build an ecosystem of self-defined and determined advocacy. As an LGBT Global faith leader, Tolton continues to serve as the Bishop of Global Ministries for the Fellowship of Affirming Ministries.

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