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UK government criticised for handing furlough cash to 'homophobic' churches

Exclusive: Tens of thousands of pounds given to groups that describe homosexuality as 'repulsive' and 'evil'

[Martin Williams](#)

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Religious organisations with a history of anti-gay preaching have been given furlough cash by the government | Radharc Images / Alamy Stock Photo. All rights reserved

The UK government's furlough scheme has been condemned as "reckless and irresponsible", for handing tens of thousands of pounds to "homophobic" churches.

An openDemocracy investigation found that dozens of religious organisations with a track record of anti-gay preaching have been financially supported by the government during the COVID pandemic.

They include churches that have labelled homosexuality as "repulsive" and "demonic", as well as the group Jesus House, which was recently accused of "a history of supporting conversion therapy".

Leading human rights campaigner Peter Tatchell condemned the furlough payouts, describing them as “de facto state endorsement of homophobic institutions”.

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One church to have benefited from the furlough scheme is the Redeemed Christian Church of God, a Pentecostal megachurch founded in Nigeria, which runs a sizable network of organisations across the UK.

The ministry is led by Nigeria-based pastor Enoch Adeboye, who has called homosexuality “evil” and said that gay marriage could bring about the end of human civilisation. Sunday school materials published by the ministry have also previously taught that “homosexuality is a sin” that “needs to be laid at the cross and repented of”.

Adeboye has also suggested that no matter how many coronavirus vaccines are made, the pandemic will continue “until the high and mighty admit that safety is of the Lord”.

One of the ministry’s churches in London, Jesus House, came under the spotlight last month after it was visited by Labour leader Keir Starmer. He later apologised, saying: “I completely disagree with Jesus House’s beliefs on LGBT+ rights.”

In 2009, Jesus House was accused of carrying out “exorcisms” on gay people, while the church’s pastor has previously campaigned against LGBT equality legislation, designed to make it illegal to discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation.

The church has since claimed it “does not advocate exorcism for people with same-sex attraction”.

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Figures from HMRC show Jesus House received at least £10,000 a month in December 2020 and January 2021, while many other churches in the Redeemed Christian Church of God ministry have also received funding.

Another ministry, the Destiny Church Trust in Scotland, claimed furlough funding – even while one of its churches planned to sue Edinburgh Council for banning an event it planned to hold in a council-owned venue with American preacher Larry Stockstill, who has described homosexuality as “repulsive and deeply grievous”.

Another international Christian ministry to have received furlough payouts is the Church of God Ministry of Jesus Christ International. Led by Colombian preacher María Luisa Piraquive, the ministry has a branch in east London that has also benefited from government money during the pandemic.

The international ministry was investigated by authorities in South America over allegations of money laundering and drug trafficking in 2014.

Reports have also described it as “a cult that targets immigrants to fill its charismatic leaders’ coffers”, while Piraquive allegedly expelled her son for being gay.

Alongside churches themselves, the UK’s Evangelical Alliance lobby group also received money from the government's support scheme in January.

The group rejects same-sex partnerships as legitimate Christian relationships, and has been accused of having “a history of making anti-gay remarks”.

It still commends and encourages gay people who have “committed themselves to chastity by refraining from homoerotic sexual practice”, and has lobbied the government not to create new laws against gay conversion therapy.

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This is a form of de facto state endorsement of homophobic institutions

“This is a form of de facto state endorsement of homophobic institutions,” human rights campaigner Peter Tatchell said in response to openDemocracy’s findings. “Organisations that do not conform to the principles of the Equality Act should not receive public money.

“It looks like the government has been handing out furlough money like confetti, without any checks that the recipient bodies adhere to the minimum standards of equality and non-discrimination. It is reckless and irresponsible.”

Amie Bishop, senior research adviser at OutRight Action International, added that any organisation promoting conversion practices should have public funding revoked. “We urge the UK government to thoroughly vet the institutions it funds, and follow through on its promise to ban harmful conversion practices,” she said.

The news follows a recent investigation by openDemocracy, which revealed how companies that were awarded huge COVID contracts by the government went on to receive millions more in furlough payments. Foreign royals, billionaire tax exiles and dozens of Britain’s land-owning aristocrats have also managed to claim public money through the scheme.

A government spokesperson told openDemocracy: “Our furlough scheme has helped pay the wages of millions of workers across the UK during the pandemic – and it’s

right that we acted quickly to protect British jobs.”

Responding to openDemocracy’s report, Destiny Church Trust in Scotland said: “We embrace and welcome people of differing views and offer all our services, including food banks/hot food supplies (100,000+ meals given out through the pandemic), to all and any regardless of their faith, sexual orientation, identity or ethnicity.”

None of the other churches named responded to requests for comment. There is no suggestion that any of them broke furlough rules by claiming financial support.

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