

A Public Letter on behalf of Inclusive Organisations to the Archbishops of Canterbury and York
and the Bishops of London and Truro as co-chairs of the LLF implementation process
11th July 2023

Dear Archbishops and Bishops,

We write in response to the growing campaign by some leaders and bishops in the Church of England to delay and obstruct the progress of the Living in Love & Faith journey by asking for the Prayers of Love and Faith to be approved under Canon B2, requiring two-thirds majorities in all three houses of the General Synod.

Resistance to LLF

We are saddened that this campaign indicates, above all, the failure of many in the Church to engage fully in the LLF journey in which we have participated together for the last six years, and into which so much valuable theological and pastoral reflection has been poured. This is not, of course, an accidental failure, when groups like the Church of England Evangelical Council have actively discouraged churches from making use of the LLF resources. However, it appears clear to us (and some have been told directly by conservative colleagues) that the conservative view of marriage and sex was very fully represented throughout the LLF process, and we have sought to engage with it in good faith.

The refusal to engage means that, inexplicably, some feel able to present the proposals offered by the House of Bishops to February Synod as in some way sudden or rushed, when in fact they are the fruit of decades of debate and six years of intense work, in which all bishops committed to engage. Those of us who have participated fully in LLF (and for many of us, the preceding Shared Conversations and other processes) have come to a realistic understanding of the deep and painful divisions in the Church between people who hold their differing views on the interpretation of Scripture in matters of marriage and sexuality in full integrity. It is because of this recognised division that, although the signatories of this letter would all seek a Church of England in which it is possible for same-sex couples to marry in church (with appropriate safeguards for conscience) we have come to accept, with a heavy heart, the modest offer of the Prayers of Love and Faith, commended or authorised by the bishops, as a practical step to a better welcome of LGBTQIA people. It is still remarkable that there has been little acknowledgement of the pain and sacrifice of faithful same-sex couples in the Church of England in accepting a continuing second-class status, compared to heterosexual couples with no practising faith or prior connection, who may claim marriage in their parish church as of right.

Misrepresentation of history

The campaign to place obstacles in the way of LLF (also evident in the variety of unusual procedural motions in February Synod, and the numerous wrecking amendments) also frequently shows evidence of a selective reading of the recent history of decision-making in the Church on this matter. The Canons and the marriage liturgies, of course, describe and commend marriage between one man and one woman, as practised for many centuries. They are however, entirely silent on same-sex relationships, and with many others, we cannot follow the logic that silence means prohibition, especially when the Church of England is governed by the law of England where whatever is not forbidden is allowed. Instead, an unsteady edifice of decisions have been made, almost all by the House of Bishops alone, on the basis of a particular reading of Scripture (now amply varied by the excellent exegetical material in the LLF book and resources) and a single Synod vote of 1987 which many of those present now regret. *Issues in Human Sexuality* did, however, offer a creative response which made pastoral space for lay same-sex couples to be accepted and welcomed in the life of the Church of England, as many have been since that time.

But the imposition of *Issues* as a test document in the discernment process, the direction to limit liturgical creativity in not blessing same-sex couples (when liturgies to bless everything from cats to church toilets are being written weekly), the decision to accept civil partnerships for clergy only on the basis of abstinence, and the refusal to ordain or license those in same-sex marriages, were all decisions of the House of Bishops alone, and it is quite legitimate for the House to revisit them according to its own processes. It is also especially painful to recall that when the Same-Sex Marriage Bill was before Parliament in 2012, the Church colluded with the Government's need to reassure traditionalist backbenchers by sending the Secretary-General and

legal officers to assist discreetly in drafting the quadruple lock against same-sex church weddings. The maintenance of principled discrimination by the Established Church remains a matter of widespread concern in Parliament and with the wider public.

The journey to the Prayers of Love and Faith

It has been apparent to us all, as we know it has to you, that this painful and contested situation cannot continue, for the sake of the proclamation of the Gospel in England and our own integrity and peace as a Church. We think of faithful LGBTQIA church members and officers engaged in ministry, playing the organ, welcoming and verging, arranging flowers and more, for the weddings of opposite-sex couples whom they rejoice to welcome even with no prior connection to church, whilst their own relationships are officially invisible and unacknowledged. In some churches, including those associated with some of the networks whose leaders have signed the letter of the 3rd July, same-sex couples are warmly welcomed to worship, and may participate joyfully for some time before a discreet word, often prompted by volunteering for a role, reveals that their 'lifestyle' sits under the disapproval of the church leadership and they may not play any active part. And the continuing use of *Issues* in the discernment process has created a state of dishonesty and hypocrisy in which bishops as well as candidates and those who administer the process are jointly complicit.

In this situation, therefore, the decisions of the House of Bishops ahead of February Synod to commend a set of prayers for same-sex couples which do not directly impact the doctrine of marriage, together with a fresh set of more realistic and humane pastoral guidance, especially for clergy, appeared to us a particularly creative and helpful response. It enabled a welcome for same-sex couples without allowing the Church to be drawn into the sort of sad and discreditable deadlock in Synod which characterised the move towards the ordination of women as priests and then bishops, and which did so much to damage the public standing of the Church in the nation. Because that history is so recent and so clear, we can only conclude that the call for a process requiring two-thirds majorities is simply a political manoeuvre in order to obstruct the authorisation of the *Prayers*. We also note that the legal advice accepted by the House of Bishops ahead of February Synod defined that the *Prayers* as drafted were not incompatible with the doctrine of the Church of England, and would encourage parishes to make free use of them now on the basis of that advice, supported by the clear majority in all three Houses of General Synod in their favour in February.

The future before us

On the basis of the LLF Update presented to July Synod, we understand there to be a fairly clear journey ahead to implement the earlier decisions of the House, endorsed by Synod, to issue the *Prayers* and to issue the new Pastoral Guidance and Reassurance. We remain committed to a form of Reassurance which allows full freedom of conscience for those with a traditional view of marriage, parishes, clergy and other ministers, and have no desire to exclude anyone from the Church of England. It is clear that the House are only doing what they themselves have authority to do, as they have done in responding to the developing situation around sexuality and the Church for many years.

We recognise that the authorisation of the *Prayers* and new Guidance will move the Church into a new phase of reception, which will be difficult in some places and for some people. In particular, it has seemed to us for some time that this will be a difficult time for those churches where, as noted above, the deep engagement with the theological and personal questions raised by LLF has been deliberately resisted, and the real and legitimate diversity of convictions in congregations has been suppressed by their leadership. We believe that this is the beginning of a move to a more honest Church, which will also be a safer Church for all, especially LGBTQIA people. We remain committed to helping the Church discover its full diversity and beauty, in relationships of love where the faith we hold in common overcomes our difficulties in agreeing on the significance of occasional contact between certain body parts.

It is sad to note in the letter of the 3rd July a tone of threat around division and legal action. We recognise that although same-sex couples in intimate committed relationships, including marriage, have been a reality in the Church of England for many years, sadly official acknowledgment of this fact represents a significant moment which will make some question their place in the Church. Given the sacrifice which has been and will continue to be made by LGBTQIA people in order to participate in a church where their lived reality will still to be open to question and challenge, we do not see any way to avoid this crux if the Bishops, as we believe, wish to genuinely welcome LGBTQIA people. Whilst it is clear that the complex processes of the

Church of England are often open to some sort of legal challenge, we are reassured by the thought that those who place such store on the brief and ambiguous reference to homosexuality in 1 Corinthians 6.9 will fully respect the clear and detailed teaching of 1 Corinthians 6.1-8, and so such challenge seems only likely to come from marginal and eccentric sources.

Conclusion

We wish to thank the House of Bishops, and especially Bishops Sarah and Philip, for your creativity and persistence in working to enable the fuller welcome of LGBTQIA people in the Church of England, in the face of sustained and well-organised and well-funded opposition. As you know, we will continue to aspire to go further in the future, but remain in support of the valuable steps forward underway this year and urge you to stick to the course plotted for the health of the Church and the more joyful and honest proclamation of the Gospel of God's love in Christ to all people in England.

With our sincere prayers and best wishes,

Revd Neil Patterson	<i>Chair, General Synod Gender & Sexuality Group</i>
Prof. Helen King	<i>Vice-Chair, General Synod Gender & Sexuality Group</i>
Very Revd Joe Hawes	<i>Dean of St Edmundsbury</i>
Jacqueline Stamper	<i>Co-Chair Affirming Catholics in Synod</i>
Margaret Sheather	<i>Co-Chair Affirming Catholics in Synod</i>
The Ven Malcolm Chamberlain	<i>Co-Convenor of the Evangelical Forum for General Synod</i>
The Revd Canon Lisa Battye	<i>Co-Convenor of the Evangelical Forum for General Synod</i>
Simon Friend	<i>Co-Convenor of the Evangelical Forum for General Synod</i>
Canon Dr Felicity Cooke	<i>Convenor of Women and the Church on Synod</i>
Revd Nigel Pietroni	<i>Chair of The Campaign for Equal Marriage in the Church of England</i>
Fr Dan Barnes-Davies SCP	<i>Chair of Trustees of the Inclusive Church Network</i>
Fiona MacMillan	<i>Vice-Chair of Trustees of the Inclusive Church Network</i>
Jayne Ozanne	<i>The Ozanne Foundation</i>
Revd Trevor Wyatt	<i>Co-Chair of MoSAIC (Movement Supporting Anglicans for an Inclusive Church)</i>
Professor Elaine Graham	<i>Chair of Modern Church</i>
Alison Webster	<i>General Secretary of Modern Church</i>
The Revd Dr Hannah Cleugh	<i>Chair of Affirming Catholicism UK</i>
Matthew Parkes	<i>Director of Affirming Catholicism</i>
Revd David Runcorn	<i>Co-Convenor of Inclusive Evangelicals</i>
The Revd Colin Coward MBE	<i>Convenor of Changing Attitude England</i>
Jade Irwin	<i>Director of Diverse Church</i>
Verona Taylor-Blackford	<i>Trustee of Diverse Church</i>
Luke Dowding	<i>Executive Director of OneBodyOneFaith</i>
Fr Mund Cargill Thompson	<i>Provincial Council of Society of Catholic Priests</i>
Fr Danny Pegg	<i>Provincial Council of Society of Catholic Priests</i>
Revd Catherine Cleghorn	<i>Society of Catholic Priests Provincial Secretary</i>
Revd Naomi Nixon	<i>CEO Student Christian Movement</i>
Revd Dr K. Augustine Tanner-Ihm	<i>Co-ordinator for Church for Everyone</i>

Revd Dr Sam Wells

Vicar of St Martin-in-the-Fields