

To all General Synod Members

19th February 2024

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

I am taking the unusual step of writing to all Synod members ahead of our gathering this weekend. I'd like to set out my hopes for the LLF debate, aware that we are gathering in an atmosphere of uncertainty and anxiety.

Firstly, questions have been asked about why the LLF papers are in my name rather than that of the House of Bishops. The reason for this is very simple - we wanted to generate a different type of conversation at the meetings of the College and House of Bishops in January. The College and House have the same range of views as Synod and therefore we wanted to avoid a formal vote with the inevitable sense of winners and losers. The outcome was indeed a more considered and helpful conversation. However, as Bishop Helen-Ann has now stepped back from the process for reasons she has outlined separately, and while we do not yet have a replacement, we now have the situation where the papers are in my sole name. And some members of Synod, including members of the House of Bishops, have expressed their concern that these commitments represent a rowing back on previous decisions. This was absolutely not my intention. I have said elsewhere that even where I voted against Synod motions, I am committed to delivering the will of Synod. My concern is simply that we implement these decisions in a way which holds the Church together.

I had hoped that we might be able to find a similar way of generating a different sort of conversation at Synod. We explored multiple options, from group work to presentations to 'take note' debates, but have, on advice, concluded that none of these would be likely to command sufficient support from Synod. So I can do no more than issue a plea that we all speak with kindness and generosity. We are a broad church with a rich mix of traditions – Synod at its best displays to the world that it is possible to disagree and live in communion.

Secondly, I want to clarify the purpose of the motion that we will be debating. The papers set out a set of commitments – they are intended as an illustration of the sort of commitments that might form the basis of an agreement. I hope we can avoid picking apart the wording of the commitments at this stage – the precise wording will be explored in the coming weeks, alongside the ongoing work of preparing for the authorisation of the standalone Prayers of Love and Faith. So the debate is about whether a set of commitments is a good approach, rather than whether you agree with the details of these particular commitments. If the answer to this question is 'no' then it is my hope that you will put forward alternative approaches. Personally, I see an agreement, discerned by Synod, as a crucial step, without which the next phase will present significant challenges.

Finally, can I remind you that we have planned for an informal 'drop in' session on Saturday at 1pm in the Abbey Room at Church House. The LLF staff team and I will be present and ready to chat informally ahead of the debate.

I look forward to seeing you at Synod.

With warm greetings in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Martyn". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

The Rt Revd Martyn Snow
Bishop of Leicester

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