

together

For the Church of England

A Response to Where LLF Is Now from Together

We write following February 2024 General Synod, the subsequent invitation from the Bishop of Leicester for members of Synod to volunteer for a series of groups to do further work on the detail required for the full implementation of the decisions taken by Synod in 2023, and today's announcement of the Project Board, chaired by the Archbishop of York. **We welcome Bishop Martyn's pragmatic acceptance that there was not widespread support for the detailed Commitments prepared for the most recent Synod, and his readiness to work with all parties to seek agreement on how to proceed. The leadership of Archbishop Stephen gives us confidence that there is a real will to make progress.** Many of us have volunteered to join the groups, and have encouraged others to do so, hopeful that the mixture of experienced and fresh voices who are to be convened will be able to make progress. We wish to build trust with the House of Bishops and those of varied views to sustain our part of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church to which we all belong in the Church of England.

We note that the House of Bishops remains committed to fulfilling those things sought in the Synod resolutions of 2023, namely to find a way, within the developing doctrine of marriage as understood by the Church of England, to welcome same-sex couples more fully and explicitly. This followed the strong indications in the *Listening with Love and Faith* report that a majority of respondents wished for clearer acceptance of same-sex relationships by the Church. **We rejoice that the initial suite of *Prayers of Love and Faith* have since December 2023 been Commended by the House of Bishops to use with same-sex couples in public worship, and warmly encourage their use as widely as possible.** We note that both the February and November 2023 Synods supported the provision of forms of service for standalone celebrations of same-sex relationships, and urge the House to enable this work, interpreting the Canons pastorally rather than legalistically, with all haste. **We know of many couples who wish to celebrate their love in the sight of God, and who are waiting.**

We also note that the February 2023 vote made clear the majority support for the withdrawal of *Issues in Human Sexuality*, with its purported restrictions on the clergy entering same-sex relationships. Although the motion did not specify what would replace it, **we have no doubt that a majority of those voting in favour supported greater freedom for clergy in this respect, and an end to the present hypocritical regime in which all are complicit.** The now public votes in the College and House of Bishops now also make clear the support for these changes. We are disappointed that progress in this area has proven so difficult, especially as it generally known that replacement draft Guidance was created last year, and we urge the House to adopt it as soon as possible.

We recognise that there are many within the Church of England whose reading of Scripture means that they cannot in conscience support any change to the position on sexuality adopted since the Highton Motion of 1987, and we accept this as a viewpoint based on honest study and prayer. **However, we are disappointed that some holding the conservative position seem to view the credal unity of the Church as only a contingent outcome of doctrinal agreement about matters which are not credal. We look forward to a continued dialogue in which only the minimum necessary separation is made between churches, clergy and bishops within the one Church of England to allow conscientious freedom.** In particular, we note that the wholly optional nature of the *Prayers of Love and Faith* means that their use in one parish imposes no restrictions or burdens on another.