

## Living in Love and Faith - a message from Bishop Jonathan

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

The House of Bishops met on 9 October to consider the Living in Love and Faith materials that are to go forward to the General Synod in November.

You may have seen the announcement that was shared by the National Church following that meeting. It stated that:

The prayers and readings in Prayers of Love and Faith for use with same-sex couples will be commended by the House of Bishops for use in public worship.

Special standalone services set out in Prayers of Love and Faith will be brought to the General Synod to decide whether to authorise them under Canon B2, after consultation with dioceses.

There is more work underway to explore further forms of pastoral reassurance and formal structural pastoral provision to ensure everyone's conscience is respected.

It also suggested that there was agreement amongst the House of Bishops to these proposals.

Over the six years of the Living in Love and Faith process, it has been my hope and belief that under the guidance of the Holy Spirit the Church of England would in the end find a way of moving forward together.

I have always prayed that God would surprise us and open avenues that we have never conceived, in ways that would honour and affirm people with a wide diversity of views on these hugely important and sensitive issues, while remaining faithful to our inheritance of faith.

It is therefore with great sadness and reluctance that I have felt compelled to join with others in indicating that I cannot endorse the decisions taken at the meeting of the House of Bishops on Monday 9 October, or the press statement issued afterwards, which I believe does not adequately reflect the decisions made or the depth of disagreement within the House.

You can find our response here. This was published today and sent directly to our fellow bishops and others involved in overseeing the LLF process.

I cannot share the full details of the discussions that took place at the House of Bishops meeting or the decisions made; these remain confidential until the publication of the General Synod papers on 20 October.

I nevertheless believe that for the sake of the wider unity of the Church of England and bearing in mind the responsibility of the bishops individually and collectively to guard that unity, it is necessary that those of us who could not endorse the decisions made should make that clear from the outset and not just when the General Synod papers are published.

I deeply regret the hurt and disappointment my decision will cause among members of the LGBTQ+ communities and their supporters in our Diocese. I want to assure you that I remain as committed as ever to finding a way forward that honours and affirms you and your place within the family of the Church in the Diocese of Rochester.

However at this moment, in the light of the decisions that have been made, it seems to me essential that I should make clear my fundamental disagreement with what is to be proposed, as I do not believe it adequately honours and upholds the place of those who hold to the Church's traditional teaching on issues of sexuality, as the Church of England has received and affirmed that hitherto.

My decision to join in speaking out at this time is therefore first and foremost based on my commitment to the unity of the Church, as well as a concern for its faithfulness to the Scriptures and received teaching and doctrine on matters of human sexuality.

I am deeply concerned that what is to be proposed will create profound division within the Church of England, in ways that I believe could and should be avoided by further careful study, work and prayer on these deeply sensitive and important issues.

I feel very deeply my responsibility to you as your Bishop - as Bishop for all within our diocesan family - and as a Bishop within the Church of England, and I can assure you that I have not taken this decision lightly, mindful of the pain it will cause. But I feel I have to take a stand on this. To echo the words of Martin Luther, I can do no other.

Whatever transpires next, please be assured that I, Bishop Simon, the Archdeacons, and all of our senior team, are here to support you, whatever your perspectives, concerns, or convictions. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to be in contact with us.

Our acting LLF Chaplain, the Rev Stephen Padfield, who is holding this post while the Rev Joel Love is on sabbatical, ([llf.chaplain@rochester.anglican.org](mailto:llf.chaplain@rochester.anglican.org)), and our LLF advocate the Rev Canon Jane Winter ([jane.winter@rochester.anglican.org](mailto:jane.winter@rochester.anglican.org)), are also available to all for help, support and conversation.

I would ask that we all continue to speak well and respectfully to and of each other, mindful of the innate dignity given by God to each one of us.

Sisters and brothers, we remain in challenging times in our country and in the world. Thank you for all that you continue to do to share the love and goodness of God with those in your communities.

Please pray for me as I hold you all in my heart and in my prayers,

+Jonathan

Bishop of Rochester